

**Life in the Nuclear Archipelago:
Cold War Technopolitics and U.S. Nuclear Submarines in Italy**

by

Davide Orsini

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Doctoral Committee:

**Professor Gabrielle Hecht, Co-Chair
Professor Stuart A. Kirsch, Co-Chair
Professor Paul N. Edwards
Professor Dario Gaggio**

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANSA – Agenzia Nazionale Stampa Associata
APAT - Agenzia per la Protezione dell’Ambiente e del Territorio
CAMEN - Centro Applicazioni Militari Energia Nucleare
CISAM - Centro Interforze Studi per le Applicazioni Militari
CNEN - Comitato Nazionale Energia Nucleare
CNR - Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche
CoCiS - Comitato Civico Spontaneo
CO.MI.PA. – Comitato Misto Paritetico della Regione Sardegna sulle Servitù Militari
CoRiSMa - Comitato per le Ricerche Storiche Maddalenine
CRIIRAD - Commission de Recherche et d’Information Indépendantes sur la RADioactivité
DC – Democrazia Cristiana
DISP – Dipartimento Sicurezza e Protezione
ENEA – Ente Nazionale Energia e Ambiente
ISPRA – Istituto Superiore per la Protezione e la Ricerca Ambientale
PCI – Partito Comunista Italiano
PLI – Partito Liberale Italiano
PSDI – Partito Social Democratico Italiano
PSI – Partito Socialista Italiano
WWF – World Wildlife Foundation

Introduction: Life in the Nuclear Archipelago

The 35th meeting of the G8 group scheduled for July 2009, was originally planned to be held in the Archipelago of La Maddalena, located offshore the northeastern corner of Sardinia, Italy. For two years, hundreds of construction workers labored to restore the vast area of a decommissioned Italian Navy arsenal for the meeting. The massive restoration project was part of a larger re-conversion plan through which the Region of Sardinia and the Italian government intended to revitalize the economy of the archipelago after the decommissioning of the Italian Navy arsenal and then a U.S. Navy submarine base. Today La Maddalena is host to one of Italy's largest marine preservation parks and is marketed as a prime tourist destination in a "pristine" and "wild" corner of the Mediterranean Sea. This marketing narrative, however, belies the archipelago's historical role as a strategic platform for military-industrial projects.

The Italian Navy, who transformed the islands into a military fortress in the nineteenth century, employed over 30% of the local labor force until it massively downsized in the mid-1990s. In 1972, the Italian Navy agreed to share the archipelago with the U.S. Navy, who installed a nuclear submarine base there under an executive provision of a secret agreement between the American and the Italian government. The official mission of the U.S. Navy was to monitor the activities of Soviet submarines in the area. In February 2008, following a major reassessment of its global basing strategy, the Bush Administration decided to close the submarine base.

This dissertation tells the untold story of the Cold War in Italy from the perspective of scientists and soldiers, citizens and workers, politicians and religious leaders who converged on the archipelago of La Maddalena from the 1970s until the present. In its broadest sense, it charts the history of rumor and fear of nuclear contamination, scientific expertise and activism, and the military and compromised sovereignties in postwar Italy "from below." It follows debates at local, national, and international scales, over the presence of nuclear submarines in Italy, and documents how local residents, journalists, and administrators navigated and challenged the rapidly evolving legal apparatuses designed to regulate the new threats and possibilities introduced through nuclear, and allied, technologies in the context of the global Cold War.

Life in the Nuclear Archipelago is the first study of expert and public understandings of nuclear risk to analyze Italy's geo-political place in the U.S. global Cold War. Contrary to historical analyses focused solely on the diplomatic and ideological valence of nuclear power, this dissertation also examines the material dimensions of the construction, deployment, and reception of military nuclear technologies in La Maddalena.

In so doing, it joins recent scholarship on U.S. Empire, which focuses on the deployment of U.S. military bases overseas to study empirically the effects (social, economic, environmental, and political) of the American military hegemony on foreign populations around the world.¹ Partially in response to historiographical and political interpretations of U.S. hegemony after WWII in terms of "soft power," "empire by invitation," and "benevolent empire," comparative studies and case studies of U.S. military outposts overseas have used ethnographic and historical methods to: 1) document the localized "imperial effects" of U.S. global military, geo-political, and economic strategies; 2) to introduce themes and actors usually excluded from prevalently top-down diplomatic histories of the Cold War.²

The abundant literature on U.S. overseas military bases, especially after 9/11, has rightly emphasized the importance of islands as strategic nodes for the formation of the "U.S. networked empire."³ Several scholars, including Ruth Oldenziel, John Kelly, and George Steinmetz, agree that U.S. overseas basing strategies during the Cold War and before it responded to two related needs. On the one hand, islands allowed for the deployment of armaments, troops, communication networks, and surveillance systems, and provided necessary refueling spots for global intervention. On the other hand, islands were strategic because they enabled the

¹ For a clear example of this approach see Catherine Lutz, "Empire is in the details," *American Ethnologist* 33 (4), November 2006: 593-611.

² For the concept of "soft power" see Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means To Success In World Politics*, (PublicAffairs, 2004). Geir Lundestad coined the expression "empire by invitation" to describe European attitudes (but not only) towards American international hegemony since WWI: "'Empire by Invitation' in the American Century," *Diplomatic History* 23 (2), Spring 1999: 189-217. See also Robert Kagan, "Benevolent Empire," *Foreign Policy* 111, Summer 1998: 24-35. Fernando Coronil uses the concept of *imperial effects* "to develop a subalternist perspective to tackle the consequences of domination for those who are subjected to it. My attention to effects is at once conceptual and practical; the aim is to recognize systems of domination by their significance for the subjected populations rather than solely by their institutional forms or self-definitions." See Fernando Coronil, "After Empire: Reflections on Imperialism from the Americas," in Ann Laura Stoler, Carole McGranham, and Peter Perdue (Eds.), *Imperial Formations*, (School for Advanced Research Press, 2007): 241-271, cit. p. 243.

³ Ruth Oldenziel, "Islands: The United States as a Networked Empire," in Gabrielle Hecht (Ed.), *Entangled Geographies: Empire and Technopolitics in the Global Cold War*, (The MIT Press, 2011): 13-41. See also an interesting RAND Corporation analysis of the use of overseas bases as strategic military platforms for launching aerial attacks towards the USSR: A. J. Wohlstetter, F. S. Hoffman, R. J. Lutz, and H. S. Rowen, *Selection and Use of Strategic Air Bases*, Report R-266, (The Rand Corporation, April 1954).

constitution of an invisible infrastructure, a de-territorialized network that appeared far removed from colonial practices of territorial annexation.⁴ This literature has revealed military islands as crucial *loci* for understanding the flexible modes of operation and the legal and extra-legal arrangements that allowed America to build its global military outreach and protect its economic and commercial interests, while claiming for itself the status of an anti-colonial power.⁵

While making important analytical and methodological contributions, these studies have explored U.S. hegemony, and local responses to it, mostly outside of Europe, where, instead, American domination remains overwhelmingly (and partially) interpreted in terms of “Americanization,” intended as cultural colonization, and economic and military dependence during the interwar period and, especially, after WWII.⁶ The rare analyses of the “imperial effects” of the U.S. military presence in Europe present only cursory descriptions of the social, cultural, and environmental problems that local communities often experienced in relation to the deployment and operation of U.S. military personnel and infrastructures.⁷

⁴ John Kelly, “U.S. Power, after 9/11 and before It: If not an Empire, Then What?” *Public Culture* 15 (2), 2003: 347-369; George Steinmetz, “Return to Empire: The New U.S. Imperialism in Comparative Historical Perspective,” *Sociological Theory* 23 (4), December 2005: 339-367; David Vine, *Island of Shame: The Secret History of the U.S. Military Base on Diego Garcia*, (Princeton University Press, 2009). See especially Chapters 2 and 3. Broader analyses of U.S. military basing strategies can be found in the following works: Joseph Gerson and Bruce Birchard (Eds.), *The Sun Never Sets. Confronting the Network of Foreign US Military Bases*, (South End Press, 1991). For an illustration of the basing strategy of the U.S. pre and post WWII, see Christopher T. Sandars, *America’s Overseas Garrisons*, (Oxford University Press, 2000), in particular chapters 1-5, and Robert Harkavy, *Great Power Competition for Overseas Bases: The Geopolitics of Access Diplomacy*, (Pergamon Press, 1982). A more recent collection of case studies on the impacts of overseas U.S. military bases on local communities is the volume edited by Catherine Lutz (Ed.), *The Bases of Empire: The Global Struggle against U.S. Military Posts*, (New York University Press, 2009). Also by Catherine Lutz is an interesting analysis of U.S. domestic militarism through a historical-ethnographic study of the military complex at Fayetteville, NC: *Homefront: A Military City and the American Twentieth Century*, (Beacon Press, 2000).

⁵ As an example of this analytical perspective, see Amy Kaplan’s argument in “Where is Guantanamo?” *American Quarterly* 57 (3), September 2005: 831-858. An interesting article by Christina Duffy Burnett also analyzes the historical continuity of U.S. expansionist strategies and legal-diplomatic arrangements: “The Edges of Empire and the Limits of Sovereignty: American Guano Islands”, *American Quarterly* 57 (3), September 2005: 779-803. Here it is worth mentioning Neil Smith’s important analysis of the connections between the U.S. internal expansion and colonial geographical order and their rise as global power: *American Empire: Roosevelt’s Geographer and the Prelude to Globalization*, (University of California Press, 2003).

⁶ See for example Mary Nolan’s discussion of the use and the analytical currency of *Americanism* has concept for the historiographical interpretation of the American presence in Europe, and especially in Germany: “Anti-Americanism and Americanization in Germany,” *Politics & Society* 33 (1), March 2005: 88-122. See also Mary Nolan, *Visions of Modernity: American Business and the Modernization of Germany*, (Oxford University Press, 1994). For an analysis of the cultural and economic impact of Americanization in Western Europe, including Italy, see Victoria De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America’s Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe*, (Belknap Press, 2006). For a comparative study of Americanization in Western Europe see Alexander Stephan (Ed.), *The Americanization of Europe: Culture, Diplomacy, and Anti-Americanism After 1945*, (Berghahn Books, 2007).

⁷ For example, see Diana Johnstone and Ben Cramer, “The Burdens of the Glory: U.S. Bases in Europe,” in Joseph Gerson and Bruce Birchard (Eds.), *The Sun Never Sets: Confronting the Network of Foreign U.S. Military Bases*,

Life in the Nuclear Archipelago fills this gap by looking historically and ethnographically at how the challenges of radiological risk connected to the presence of U.S. nuclear submarines mediated and contributed to shape the interactions between long-term residents of La Maddalena, local administrators, U.S. military personnel, and Italian experts over thirty-five years. This study adopts a trans-regional perspective to examine the political, ecological, and public health controversies surrounding the installation of a U.S. Navy military base in northern Sardinia. It sheds light on how Italian expert and military institutions, individual actors, and social movements shaped and contested the technopolitical arrangements that allowed for the installation of a nuclear submarine base on this periphery of the Italian state.

I situate the making of La Maddalena's environmental monitoring system within the broader impact of the global Cold War on scientific knowledge production and technological development. My argument, however, runs against the assumption that the Cold War was a uniformly global phenomenon.⁸ Geography and history mattered tremendously. This study does not analyze the top-down, unidirectional effects of the Cold War on local politics, science, and technology, and their related power dynamics. Instead, it focuses on how the specific features of Italian nuclear regulatory regimes, bureaucracy, and scientific traditions materialized and co-shaped the development of postwar U.S. military bases and the development (and reception) of nuclear technologies in Italy. By unpacking the sociotechnical processes through which La Maddalena became actively incorporated into the network of U.S. military bases overseas, *Life in the Nuclear Archipelago* explains how material and legal infrastructures, technologies, institutions, ecosystems, and epistemic traditions converged to co-construct a system of radiosurveillance that embodied and enacted Italy's compromised sovereignty in the postwar period and a series of profound compromises between elite political and military visions, and the resistance and concerns of Italian scientists and citizens.

(South End Press, 1991): 199-223; David Heller and Hans Lammerant, "U.S. Nuclear Weapons Bases in Europe," in Catherine Lutz (Ed.). *The Bases of Empire: The Global Struggle against U.S. Military Posts*, (New York University Press, 2009): 96-130. For a study of the impact of U.S. military bases on Italian local communities, see Laura Simich's article on Comiso: "The Corruption of a Community's Economic and Political Life: The Cruise Missile Base in Comiso," in Joseph Gerson and Bruce Bichard (Eds.). *The Sun Never Sets: Confronting the Network of Foreign U.S. Military Bases*, (South End Press, 1991): 77-94. Simich's article is a synthesis of her doctoral dissertation titled *Comiso: The Politics of Peace in a Sicilian Town*, (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 1988).

⁸ Jeffrey A. Engel and Katherine Carté Engel, "Introduction: On Writing the Local, within Diplomatic History—Trends, Historiography, Purpose," in Jeffrey A. Engel (Ed.), *Local Consequences of the Global Cold War* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Stanford University Press, 2007), cit. p. 20.

Since 1987, Italy is no longer a nuclear state and, apart from the occasional aspirations of sectors of the military establishment, has never acquired military nuclear capabilities. After the accident at Chernobyl, a national referendum took place in which the majority of Italians voted to shut down the nuclear program. Since then, the four nuclear plants of Trino Vercellese (Piedmont), Caorso (Lombardy), Latina (Latium), and Garigliano (Basilicata), underwent a slow process of decommissioning. At the beginning of the 1960s, the Italian nuclear program was at the frontline of nuclear development, with three nuclear power plants completed and two more already planned. Unlike the United States, France, and Great Britain, where the government had direct control over the development of nuclear technology and established early on detailed regulatory regimes, Italy's nuclear program was uneven, fragmented, and highly controversial. The debate over the nationalization of electric companies revealed the existence of conflicting political and economic interests in the strategic choices that the government had to make about the industrial future of the nation.⁹ The scarcity of domestic energy sources pushed Italian oil diplomacy, led by Enrico Mattei, to find partners in the Middle East. In this scenario, Italian elites became convinced that nuclear energy could be a valid alternative to sustain the post-war industrial expansion. Since the end of the 1950s, though, the conflicts that animated the debate over the nationalization of electric utilities reverberated their effects also on the articulation of the nuclear program. Advocates of the public intervention in the national economy, like CNEN's first president Felice Ippolito, favored centralized decision-making processes guided primarily by cadres of state experts and saw nuclear technology as an answer to the energy needs of the nation and as a possibility of socio-economic development of depressed areas of the country. Private electric companies and other industrial groups, in contrast, opposed the idea that the government should determine the technological and economic choices in the nuclear field. This conflict put in stand-by the approval of the general law on civilian nuclear applications. Only in 1964, almost fifteen years after the Italian activities in the nuclear field officially started, the presidential decree n. 185 provided the regulatory frame auspicated by the *statalisti* (the advocates of state control over nuclear power).

⁹ On November 1962 the Italian Parliament approved the law on the nationalization of electric power and instituted ENEL (Ente Nazionale per Energia Elettrica), a state owned company, which absorbed more than one thousands private electric companies, including Edison and other industrial groups. For a brief introduction to the nationalization of electric power production and distribution in Italy see Fabio Silari, "La nazionalizzazione elettrica in Italia. Conflitti di interessi e progetti legislativi (1945-1962)", *Italia Contemporanea* 177, 1989:49-68.

In the meantime different groups interested in investing in nuclear technology had already moved important steps towards the realization of their alternative visions of nuclear development. In 1959, the state-financed company SENN (Società Elettro-Nucleare Nazionale) started the construction of the nuclear plant of Garigliano, Basilicata, with the economic assistance of the World Bank and the supply of a boiling water reactor by General Electric.¹⁰ Project ENSI (Energia Nucleare per il Sud d'Italia—Nuclear Energy for Southern Italy) embodied the spirit with which the *statalisti* conceived of nuclear power in Italy and was a response to the already advanced design of the nuclear plant of Trino Vercellese, Piedmont, financed by the industrial group Edison. The Enrico Fermi installation of Trino Vercellese started its activity in 1964, when the Westinghouse Pressurized Water Reactor became critical.¹¹ In the meantime the company AGIP-Nucleare (Agenzia Italiana Petrolii), created by ENI's leader Enrico Mattei, commissioned a third nuclear plant in the vicinity of Latina (sixty miles south of Rome) with the assistance of the UKAEC (United Kingdom Atomic Energy Commission).¹² The nuclear reactor this time was designed and produced by the English Nuclear Power Plant Company, which used graphite as moderator. A fourth plant was built in 1977 in the Po valley, near the town of Caorso.¹³

In the mid-1970s the Ministry of Industry proposed an ambitious plan for the construction of 12 new nuclear power plants. The oil crisis of 1973 had a decisive role in the

¹⁰ See Barbara Curli, "Energia Nucleare per il Mezzogiorno. L'Italia e la Banca Mondiale (1955-1959)," *Studi Storici* 37 (1), Jan-Mar. 1996: 317-351.

¹¹ See Barbara Curli, *ibidem*; Giovanni Paoloni, *Energia, ambiente, innovazione: dal Cnrn all'Enea*, (Laterza, 1992). The nuclear plant of Trino Vercellese was designed and built by Edison, the biggest electric utility in Italy and expression of the private interests in nuclear development. Together with other private companies, such as FIAT, Montecatini, and Pirelli, Edison contributed to the establishment of the first Italian research center on nuclear technology. CISE (Centro Informazioni Studi Esperienze) was founded in Milan in 1946 with the goal of starting a series of experimental studies for the industrial applications of nuclear energy. With the establishment of CNRN (National Committee for Nuclear Research) under the supervision of a group of physicists and scientists (including nuclear physicist Edoardo Amaldi), two conflicting visions (public – private) of the Italian nuclear development emerged. For a detailed historical account of the institutional and political conflicts that shaped the beginnings of the Italian nuclear program see Giovanni Paoloni, *Energia, ambiente, innovazione* and "Gli esordi del nucleare," in Valerio Castronovo (Ed.), *Storia dell'industria elettrica in Italia. Vol. 4: Dal dopoguerra alla nazionalizzazione*, (Laterza, 1994): 383-408. For a more concise version of Paoloni's study in English, see *Il Nucleare in Italia/Nuclear Power in Italy*, (Archivio Storico ENEL, 2009), also available at: https://www.enel.com/en-GB/doc/sustainability/nucleare_in_italia.pdf. An interesting discussion of the conflicts that limited the Italian nuclear program, see the polemical account by Mario Silvestri, *Il costo della menzogna. Italia nucleare (1945-1968)*, (Einaudi, 1968).

¹² For the history of the Latina nuclear power plant see Mauro Elli, *Atomi per l'Italia. La vicenda politica, industriale e tecnologica della centrale nucleare ENI di Latina 1956-1972*, (Unicopli, 2011). A synthetic version of Elli's book in English is "British First Nuclear Export: ENI's Atomic Power Station at Latina and Anglo-Italian Nuclear Cooperation," *Annales historiques de l'électricité* 1 (9), 2011: 27-42.

¹³ Also with a boiling water reactor produced by General Electric.

orientation of Italian political elites to invest in nuclear power to match the national energy needs. But the resistance of some sectors of the Italian expert agencies (especially the National Health Institute) and the political opposition to siting policies that, like elsewhere in Europe, emerged among local communities thwarted the ambition of the nuclearists.¹⁴ After Caorso, only one more nuclear plant was built near the coastal town of Montalto di Castro (near Rome), but the strong local opposition and the national referendum of 1987 impeded the completion of the project.¹⁵

According to historian Leopoldo Nuti, while renouncing the development of military nuclear technologies, during the Cold War pro-NATO political elites perceived the deployment of American nuclear weapons on Italian territory as a guarantee for national defense and a diplomatic shortcut for reaching higher international status.¹⁶ For this reason, in the mid-1950s, when the Eisenhower administration proposed *nuclear sharing* to its European allies, Italy actively pursued a special partnership with the United States by offering logistic support and collaboration—such as the installation of nuclear submarine bases on Italian soil and seas. This is in marked contrast to other European countries, such as France, which were reluctant to enter such agreements.¹⁷

As early as 1955, Italy and the United States started an exchange of secret executive notes concerning the storage of nuclear weapons in Italy and in 1962 they formalized a more

¹⁴ Throughout the 1970s a strong theme in anti-nuclear protests in the U.S. and in Western Europe has been the excessive centralization of power that nuclear technology required in order to guarantee safety and security. An example of typical anti-nuclear arguments during the 1970s is Robert Jungk, *The Nuclear State*, (John Calder, 1979). His critique of the “nuclear state” as a new political entity based on a permanent state of exception represented a more general attack on the technocratic vision of nuclear development associated with security apparatuses established and justified by governments and the nuclear industry in light of the exceptional nature of nuclear power. Anti-nuclear protests became catalysts for broader democratic movements opposed to state authority and repression. Nuclear sites became local stages where protestors could voice their opposition to the centralization of decision-making processes and the exclusion of the public. In Italy, for example, the construction site of the nuclear plant of Caorso became a hot spot of anti-nuclear protest. In 1977, an important conference on local communities and nuclear plants (“Comunità locali e Centrali nucleari”) was held in the city of Piacenza, near Caorso. See AA.VV. *Il controllo sociale dell’energia nucleare in Italia*, (Franco Angeli Editore, 1978). At the international level, a good example is the German anti-nuclear protest at Wyhl (in the southwest part of the country). See Dorothy Nelkin and Michael Pollack, *The Atom Besieged: Antinuclear Movements in France and Germany*, (The MIT Press, 1981); Alain Touraine et al., *Anti-nuclear Protest: The Opposition to Nuclear Technology in France*, (Cambridge University Press, 1982).

¹⁵ The installation was converted later into a coal energy plant.

¹⁶ Leopoldo Nuti, *La Sfida Nucleare: La Political Estera Italiana e le Armi Atomiche 1945-1991* (Il Mulino, 2007).

¹⁷ For an overview of U.S. overseas basing agreements see Alexander Cooley, *Base Politics: Democratic Change and the U.S. Military Overseas*, (Cornell University Press, 2008), especially Chapter 2.

detailed “Atomic Stockpile Agreement.”¹⁸ The deployment of the Jupiter missiles in Gioia del Colle, Puglia, in 1961-62 and of the Pershing II missiles in Comiso, Sicily, between 1983-7 are well-known examples of the strategic importance that Italian political elites assigned to military collaboration with the United States.¹⁹ Given their visibility and the internal and international opposition they triggered, governmental decisions to welcome the installation of U.S. missile ramps could not bypass public scrutiny. But less visible infrastructures—many of them still operational and repurposed after the end of the Cold War for the “War on Terror”—guaranteed the implementation of NATO strategies in Italy. Like the small airbase of Ghedi, in Lombardy, used since 1963 as a storage facility for nuclear warheads, a myriad of “technical facilities” were disseminated across the Italian Peninsula for radar interception and communication, submarine surveillance, radio communications, and satellite tracking.²⁰

As was the case with other U.S. military bases during the Cold War, Italian pro-NATO elites delegated technical decision-making about the installation of the U.S. Navy station in La Maddalena to restricted circles of military and diplomatic personnel.²¹ Not even the radioecology experts in charge of the environmental monitoring of La Maddalena could directly access sensitive information about the U.S. nuclear submarines. In this respect, the case of La Maddalena was not strictly unique. During the Cold War, the U.S. Navy installed many

¹⁸ William Burr, “How Many and Where Were the Nukes? What the U.S. Government No Longer Wants You to Know about Nuclear Weapons During the Cold War,” *The National Security Archive*, 2006. Available at www.nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB197/index.htm#18 See in particular “Document 13” *Letter from Secretary of State John Foster Dulles to Secretary of Defense Charles E. Wilson, 12 April 1956, Top Secret* and “Document 14” *U.S. Embassy Rome Dispatch 525 to Department of State, “Transmitting Documents Constituting Military Atomic Stockpile and ‘Consent’ Agreements,” 17 January 1962, Secret*. The latter is also cited in Nuti, *La Sfida nucleare*, pp. 209-239.

¹⁹ See Leopoldo Nuti, *La Sfida nucleare*, especially Chapters 5 and 8, and Laura L. Simich, *Comiso: The Politics of Peace in a Sicilian Town* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1988).

²⁰ At the beginning of 2014 a ceremony took place at the Ghedi airbase to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the installation, where since 1963 the U.S. Air Force and the Italian Military Aviation jointly guarded and maintained several nuclear warheads. The original article reporting on the ceremony is available at: <http://www.spangdahlem.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123379096> See also the comment of Dr. Hans Kristensen of the Federation of American Scientists: <http://fas.org/blogs/security/2014/06/ghedi/> For a detailed discussion of the presence, origins, goals, and legal status of U.S. and NATO military bases in Italy see Alfonso Desiderio, “Viaggio nelle basi USA in Italia,” *Limes* 3, 2007: 59-72, and “La fatal Vicenza,” *Limes* 4, 2007: 397-406. For a more general discussion of the bilateral agreements between U.S.A. and Italy with the NATO SOFA (Status of Forces Agreement) infrastructure in Western Europe, see Alfonso Desiderio, “Paghiamo con le basi la nostra sicurezza,” *Limes* 4, 1999: 27-42, and Leopoldo Nuti, “U.S. forces in Italy, 1945-63,” in Duke, Simon and Wolfgang Krieger (Eds.). *U.S. military forces in Europe: the early years, 1945-1970* (Westview Press, 1993): 249-272.

²¹ See Alexander Cooley, *Base Politics: Democratic Change and the U.S. Military Overseas*, (Cornell University Press, 2008), especially Chapter 6 “Italy and Japan: The Politics of Clientelism and One-Party Democratic Rule,” pp. 175-216.

submarine bases overseas through the legal sanction of bilateral agreements with allied governments.²² In Holy Loch, Scotland, for example, a base for Polaris submarines was installed in 1961.²³ There, similarly to La Maddalena, Cold War military security obstructed the application of standard radiosurveillance protocols usually implemented around civilian nuclear sites. I argue that the global pressures that the U.S. military outreach posed on places like La Maddalena and Holy Loch, among many others, should not lead to the conclusion that its effects were homogeneous everywhere. In fact, I look at the technopolitical arrangements that made possible the deployment of U.S. military bases in Italy by considering how national and local political institutions, epistemic traditions, and scientific organization both adapted to and actively inflected global processes in unique, but analytically comparable, ways.

Recent studies of the role of nuclear power in Cold War Italy focus almost exclusively on diplomatic debates and institutional histories of nuclear development, expert agencies, and the deployment of U.S. nuclear weapons on national soil. They pay minimal attention to how science and technology contributed to shape national and regional identities, socio-technical hierarchies, and culture in the global Cold War.²⁴ Further, diplomatic histories of Cold War Italy typify or overlook the important political actions of nuclear scientists, focusing only on their anti-military positions in reaction to Enrico Fermi's decisive contribution to the Manhattan Project. By contrast, this study examines the participation of Italian nuclear scientists in international, national, and local debates over military and civilian uses of nuclear power as well as their involvement in sociotechnical controversies, both as experts and political activists.

The relevance of science and technology in Cold War Italy, and more generally in Europe, was not only visible through the work of national experts around civilian nuclear plants, laboratories, and U.S. nuclear installations, nor was it limited to the more or less active role of

²² For an overview of the number, location, and political conflicts around U.S. military installations in Western Europe during the Cold War see Diana Johnstone and Ben Cramer, "The Burdens of the Glory: U.S. Bases in Europe," in Joseph Gerson and Bruce Bichard (Eds.). *The Sun Never Sets: Confronting the Network of Foreign U.S. Military Bases*, (South End Press, 1991): 199-223; David Heller and Hans Lammerant, "U.S. Nuclear Weapons Bases in Europe," in Catherine Lutz (Ed.). *The Bases of Empire: The Global Struggle against U.S. Military Posts*, (New York University Press, 2009): 96-130.

²³ Alan P. Dobson and Charlie Whitman, "Project Lamachus: The Cold War Comes to Scotland—The Holy Loch U.S. Nuclear Base and Its Impact on Scotland 1959-1974," in Engel, Jeffrey A. (Ed.). *Local Consequences of the Global Cold War*, (Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Stanford University Press, 2007): 169-192.

²⁴ See Leopoldo Nuti, *La Sfida Nucleare*, especially chapters 1-2. For a review of Cold War studies in Italy, see Antonio Varsori, "Cold War History in Italy," *Cold War History* 8 (2), May 2008: 157-187. For an overview of recent historiographical approaches to Cold War Italy, see Mark Kramer (Ed.), *Italy and the Cold War*, special issue of the *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4 (3), 2002.

Italian scientists in public debates. As this study documents, Italian radioecologists formed their expertise and curricula through the assessment of radiation fallout contamination following atmospheric explosions in nuclear experiments. Thus, in Italy, as was the case with U.S. ecologists such as the Odum brothers and marine radio-biologists such as Gennady Polikarpov in the Soviet Union, the discipline of radioecology emerged as both a response to the threats of global atmospheric contamination and as an opportunity to exploit the potential of radiocontaminants as ecological tracers for the study of complex ecosystems and of global atmospheric circulation. In Italy the formation of radioecological expertise during the Cold War—joined with specific national geo-morphologies and technological developments in the nuclear field—had concrete effects on the design and implementation of national radiosurveillance programs. Based on interviews with retired Italian nuclear scientists and radioecologists, coupled with private and public archival material I collected during the course of research, my analysis considers this broader technopolitical context in order to explain the epistemic cultures of Italian expert institutions and the practical work of radioecologists around the U.S. Navy base of La Maddalena.

Drawing on archival sources and interviews with Italian nuclear experts and local administrators in La Maddalena, I reveal that military secrecy around the U.S. nuclear installation forced Italian expert institutions—charged with monitoring radioactivity around the base—to work without crucial information usually available for civilian nuclear plants. The radiosurveillance system in La Maddalena materialized a controversial compromise between military security and national public safety, which epitomized the limits of Italian state sovereignty in the context of the U.S. military empire. While the U.S. Navy concealed technical and military details to maintain secrecy around its strategic activities, it also produced and circulated other sources of information to foster local acquiescence with the base. Selective concealment and disclosure of scientific data, my study reveals, were used as complementary techniques to stabilize the image of the U.S. Navy as a reliable source of technical information and of nuclear technology as safe.

By landing on a specific place, I demonstrate that we can only understand scientific protocols and practices by taking into account their interaction with the physical environment, as well as the historical, political, and cultural institutions of local populations. This study reveals the importance, both methodologically and theoretically, of adopting simultaneously different

scales of analysis: local, national, and global. Focusing on radiological risk connected to the presence of U.S. nuclear submarines in Italy allows me to keep into account the mutual effects and interactions of international and national nuclear regulatory regimes and scientific debates, the contributions of technology in embodying and enacting political goals, and in shaping power relations between Italy and the United States, and (within Italy) between center and periphery. This more inclusive and agile analytical perspective avoids the perils of technological determinism, that is the argument that technology determines political choices and strategies, and overcomes the limits of diplomatic histories, which see nuclear weapons and technology as mere instruments that national political elites used to reach their goals.

I have divided this dissertation into three parts—each consisting of two chapters preceded by a thematic introduction. While the overarching narrative of the dissertation is largely chronological, each section treats a specific claim and operationalizes a distinctive theoretical framework.

0.1. Local History, U.S. Empire, and Nuclear Power

In the first part of the dissertation I examine how the Italian State incorporated the archipelago of La Maddalena into its strategic military-industrial plans since the nineteenth century and how this process of assimilation produced a marked sense of local identity as one tied to military institutions. Local identification with the military, I argue, shaped attitudes toward the installation of the U.S. Navy in 1972. La Maddalena was not a typical “fleet town.” My interviews with long-term residents of the archipelago, anti-base protestors, and former U.S. Navy officers stationed in La Maddalena suggest a far more ambivalent “local” reception of the U.S. military presence than that described in the most recent literature on U.S. Empire and overseas military outposts.²⁵

Chapter 1 explores the political relevance of historical production in La Maddalena as a process of cultural reproduction of the local sense of identification with military institutions. This analysis reveals why anti-base movements never deployed an anti-militaristic rhetoric to oppose the U.S. Navy installation and why large strata of the local community received the submarine base as a natural historical development of the military legacy of the archipelago. Local

²⁵ For example, see Katherine T. McCaffrey, *Military Power and Popular Protest: The U.S. Navy in Vieques, Puerto Rico*, (Rutgers University Press, 2002); and David Vine, *Island of Shame: The Secret History of the U.S. Military Base on Diego Garcia*, (Princeton University Press, 2009).

historical narratives about the military ethos of the community are also central for explaining why the archipelago became a base for nuclear submarines during the Cold War. In addition to the advantageous position of the archipelago, it was the traditional acquiescence of the local community to the military presence to convince both the U.S. Navy and the Italian government that La Maddalena was the perfect place to install such a strategic base.

I first offer a brief historical account of La Maddalena's military legacy represented in traditional historiographies of the archipelago composed during the last century. Then I show, through some textual examples, how these traditional accounts have shaped historiographical interpretations of the archipelago as a place predestined to be a military outpost. Further, I illustrate the relevance and the influence of the military historiography of La Maddalena on current historical production by an organized group of local historians. They see their activity of history makers as a tool to re-establish a sense of cultural unity for their community in a moment of economic and political crisis associated with the decommissioning of the Italian Navy arsenal in 2004, and of the U.S. Navy base in 2008. With their mission in mind, local historians make selective choices about their future research agenda, which usually excludes controversial phases of La Maddalena's past, such as the presence of the U.S. Navy base. Other historians from La Maddalena, instead, have written about the nuclear submarines and the U.S. Navy personnel and the problems associated with their presence in the archipelago. I conclude the chapter by providing a brief overview of the process of integration of the U.S. Navy personnel into the social life of La Maddalena and underline some important differences with more typical U.S. overseas "fleet towns," which the literature on U.S. military bases more frequently focuses on.

In Chapter 2 I argue that in the context of La Maddalena's historic acquiescence to military culture and its positive economic benefits, debates over the U.S. military presence took the form of socio-technical controversies over episodes of birth defects and malformations, two accidents involving nuclear submarines, and delays in the implementation of a plan for public safety and environmental monitoring. The recognition that La Maddalena was exposed to the risks of nuclear contamination was the result of a long political struggle, but was only the first step in making nuclear risk visible. Drawing on Gabrielle Hecht's concept of *nuclearity*, I argue that the ontological dispute over the nuclear status of the U.S. base, and therefore of La Maddalena, sheds light on the political power of nuclear things.²⁶ Defining something as nuclear

²⁶ Gabrielle Hecht, *Being Nuclear: Africans and the Global Uranium Trade*, (The MIT Press, 2012).

carries important political consequences: in this case the application, or absence, of safety measures that could conflict with Cold War military security imperatives.

In this context, expert knowledge became particularly relevant as each side involved in the dispute mobilized technical arguments to buttress their positions about radiological safety in the archipelago as objective—that is, not influenced by political considerations. I show how experts and political authorities simultaneously constructed their narratives and deconstructed those of their political adversaries.

In the 1970s, concerns of possible nuclear contamination became a pressing political issue among local elites who asked Rome for reassurance about their community's safety. Given the strategic importance of the installation, the Italian government and the U.S. Navy tried to quell public alarms of the risks of radiocontamination due to the presence of the nuclear submarines in the archipelago. Instead of closing the controversy, however, the government's attempts to silence the opposition triggered a polemical reaction from important sectors of the Italian scientific community—namely expert radioecologists and radioprotectionists.

La Maddalena only “became nuclear” in 1974—after two years of technopolitical disputes—when a strong media campaign led by environmental activists pushed the Italian Ministry of Health to commission to CNEN and ISS a set of radioecological studies of the archipelago and the installation of a permanent radiosurveillance system. The recognition that La Maddalena was exposed to the risks of nuclear contamination was the result of a long political struggle, but was only the first step in making nuclear risk visible.

0.2 Cold War Technopolitics: Secrecy and the Production of Ignorance

In Part II I detail how Italian expert institutions adapted national radiosurveillance protocols and practices to the political and ecological context of the archipelago. I will show that the regime of military secrecy surrounding the U.S. Navy submarines' reactors and their modes of operation impeded the acquisition of crucial technical information normatively available to Italian radioecologists at other nuclear sites and facilities. Radioecologists compensated for the lack of access to that technical information by gathering extensive data about the environmental characteristics of the archipelago. In the short-term, restricted access generated innovative data collection strategies, resulting in the assemblage of a distinctive radiosurveillance system that would remain in place for the following thirty years.

La Maddalena's radiosurveillance system, thus, was not just a technical solution to the problem of radiological safety. It was the material instantiation of a technopolitical compromise between military security and public safety. Here I use the term "technopolitical," defined by Gabrielle Hecht as, "the strategic practice of designing or using technology to constitute, embody, or enact political goals."²⁷ I interpret the radiosurveillance system of La Maddalena as a technopolitical *compromise* in the sense that it was neither the result of a strategic political design to conceal military secrets, nor a strictly technical solution—but combined elements of both. For one, Italian radioecologists working in La Maddalena did not implement superior designs or enact their own strategies, but adapted routine radiosurveillance protocols to an unusual situation in which information was limited because of external constraints. Furthermore, the design of the radiosurveillance system, as Chapters 3 and 4 detail, resulted from the institutional arrangements of the Italian nuclear program and the epistemological approaches of Italian radioecologists during the Cold War. In sum, the radiosurveillance system of La Maddalena was the assemblage of radioecological protocols and practices, instruments, centers of calculation, legal and bureaucratic infrastructures, which concurred to shape what Michelle Murphy calls a "regime of perceptibility" and related objectifications of radiological risk.²⁸

Chapter 3 begins with an overview of radioecology, and how it emerged as a global scientific study of the ecological and biological consequences of radiocontamination during the nuclear age. I then document how Italian experts applied and developed radiosurveillance protocols within the Italian nuclear regulatory regime. Next, I zoom into La Maddalena to show how Italian radioecologists adapted their routine protocols to build the local network of radiosurveillance according to the program established by the Ministry of Health in 1974. I analyze documentation regarding public interventions and internal communications of the Italian expert agencies involved in the scientific campaigns to demonstrate, in particular, how military secrecy impacted the program of radioecological studies in La Maddalena.

²⁷ Gabrielle Hecht, *The Radiance of France*, cit. p. 15.

²⁸ Michelle Murphy defines *regimes of perceptibility* as "the way a discipline or epistemological tradition perceives and does not perceive the world." As such regimes of perceptibility established by particular disciplines and epistemological traditions emerge as assemblages of knowledge, instruments, settings, and methods. They are historical phenomena. Michelle Murphy openly relies on the *historical ontology tradition* established by Hacking, Daston, and others, to analyze the historical processes through which phenomena emergence of scientific objects of study, as established entities. Michelle Murphy, *Sick Building Syndrome and the Problem of Uncertainty*, (Duke University Press, 2006), cit. p. 10.

I then examine two features of the Italian nuclear regulatory regime in light of the evidence provided by the case of La Maddalena. I argue that a *dual system of radiosurveillance* was put in place in Italy: one managed by civilian expert agencies, which was public knowledge and openly regulated by the law; and one managed by military authorities, which was partially concealed and operated outside the regulatory frame of Italian nuclear legislation. This anomic area of the Italian nuclear legislation allowed military authorities to run their radiosurveillance programs around nuclear military ports without interference from civilian agencies. Using Giorgio Agamben's "state of exception," I show how Italian regulatory provisions (and their strategic lack under certain circumstances) conferred an exceptional status to military applications of nuclear technology, which led to the establishment of a shadow bureaucracy and its exclusion from the supervision of civilian agencies. At the end of the chapter I discuss another example of the exceptional status of the U.S. Navy base in relation to its military-diplomatic importance. In 1987 Italy phased out its nuclear power plants. After the Chernobyl accident, a national referendum was held in which the majority of Italians voted for their closure. A few months later, anti-nuclearists and various Sardinian political forces promoted a regional consultative referendum concerning the presence of the U.S. Navy base for nuclear submarines. The Italian government appealed to the Constitutional Court against the celebration of the referendum, arguing that a regional constituency could not express its will on a base installed after a legitimate bilateral agreement. The Court ruled in favor of the government, establishing that regions do not have the authority to express their preferences on matters of national security and defense.

The limits to the organization and implementation of radioecological campaigns in La Maddalena were not only the result of military secrecy. Framed within a larger national historical context, La Maddalena points to some of the organizational and institutional complexities and contradictions that shaped the Italian nuclear program at large. As Scott Frickel recently observed, scholars working on agnotology—or the production of ignorance—have explored the active removal of existing knowledge, or "knowledge sequestration," while leaving aside why certain areas of scientific investigation become chronically excluded from epistemic approaches

and regulatory regimes in the first place.²⁹ Frickel, instead, proposes a “new sociology of scientific knowledge” focusing on the “structural” analysis of the production of ignorance.³⁰ Chapter 4 adopts just such an institutional level of analysis, examining how the Italian nuclear bureaucracy and regulatory institutions created and maintained knowledge gaps about La Maddalena.

First, using personal interviews and unexplored documentation from Italian expert agencies, I give some examples of the typical problems that Italian radioecologists faced when performing their ecological surveys both in La Maddalena and around civilian nuclear installations. Second, I establish the multilayered system of governance of the Italian radiosurveillance and radioprotection programs and will show their complex implementation in the Sardinian archipelago. In particular, I will focus on the history of the laboratory for radiometric analyses, installed at the close of the 1970s. I argue that the implementation of the radiosurveillance system reflects more generally the disorganization of the Italian nuclear bureaucracy and its technocratic nature. The transmission of the radiometric data produced by the local lab was restricted to expert agencies and political authorities only with the assumption that the public would not understand their meaning and therefore would be less alarmed by not knowing at all. I show that this technocratic vision of the radiosurveillance program instead provoked more anxiety and other unintended side effects. With time, it structured a “voluntary” delegation of responsibility to expert institutions by local political authorities and favored the proliferation of rumors and conspiracy theories, which ultimately undermined the credibility of the radiosurveillance program. To describe this diffuse sense of induced hopelessness, I draw on Peter Benson and Stuart Kirsch’s “politics of resignation.”³¹

0.3 Risk, Accidents, and Political Mobilization

The final third of the dissertation examines how different actors in La Maddalena—U.S. Navy personnel, experts, local administrators, and long-term residents—engaged in public

²⁹ See Scott Frickel, “Not Here and Everywhere: The non-production of scientific knowledge,” in Kleinman, Daniel Lee and Kelly Moore (Eds.) *Routledge Handbook of Science, Technology, and Society*, (Routledge, 2014): 263-276.

³⁰ David J. Hess, *Alternative Pathways in Science and Industry: Activism, Innovation, and the Environment in an Era of Globalization*, (The MIT Press, 2007).

³¹ I use this concept in analogy with Benson and Kirsch’s analysis of corporate mining and its strategies for responding to activists and indigenous populations affected by the environmental effects of their operations. See Peter Benson and Stuart Kirsch, “Capitalism and the Politics of Resignation,” *Current Anthropology* 51 (4), August 2010: 459-486.

debates about the environmental consequences and the possible health effects of the presence of the U.S. base. They constructed and deployed competing representations of radiological risks tied to the presence of nuclear submarines.

Over the past thirty years, analyses of risk perception have focused overwhelmingly on lay/expert epistemic divides and the politics of knowledge. Citizen science, lay expertise, street science, popular epidemiology, and many studies on environmental justice take for granted what Ulrich Beck calls “relations of definitions.” This scholarship assumes that there is an inherent epistemic divide between experts and non-experts in modern societies characterized by the production of invisible yet ubiquitous risks. However, this framework can become teleological, obscuring contradictions and ambiguities in the formation of activist discourses of risk.

The central problem of Chapter 5 is to understand how people make visible what is not sensorially perceivable and how they objectify radiological risk—that is, the possibility that something harmful may or may not happen in the future. Recent STS studies of risk have drawn on phenomenology to demonstrate the material basis of risk perception and the need for sensorial training in order to interpret signs of danger. While I agree with this general approach, I argue that phenomenological studies of risk and explanations that rely on theories of embodiment go only so far in explaining how citizens who have never directly experienced a phenomenon—such as radiation—go about making invisible risks visible.

For this reason I propose a semiotic approach to risk by illustrating some examples of how local residents in La Maddalena made hypotheses and drew conclusions about the presence or absence of radioactive contamination in the archipelago based on observations of the environment and the behavior of U.S. servicemen around the base.

From these illustrations I draw two preliminary conclusions. First, even when they lack basic knowledge about radioactivity, non-experts use a repertoire of experiences and images that allow them to objectify—albeit indirectly—nuclear risk. They do so by assigning meanings to material signs without which objectifications of risk are not possible.

To explain how citizens, sailors, and political authorities interpreted signs of risk and contamination, I draw on anthropologist Webb Keane’s concept of *semiotic ideologies*—that is, “basic assumptions about what signs are and how they function in the world.”³² Chapter 5 argues

³² Webb Keane, “Semiotics and the Social Analysis of Things,” *Language and Communication* 23, 2003: 409-425, cit. p. 419.

that in the archipelago the representational economy of risk was unevenly shaped by established definitions of expert agencies and the U.S. Navy. In this context local residents tried to make sense of radiological risk (of which they lacked specialized knowledge and direct experiences) through the interpretation of changes in the material environment and in public health. People relied upon these observations to assess the environmental status of the archipelago and to make hypotheses about the causes of unprecedented events, such as birth defects and malformations occurring after the arrival of the U.S. Navy. In sum, they took material signs as indexes of either cleanness or contamination. Their conclusions, however, were often contradictory and lacked the strength of scientific explanations. For this reason, local anti-base activists refrained from using episodes of malformations in their arguments and policed the spread of rumors about their possible connection with the presence of U.S. submarines.

My argument is also historical. Unprecedented events, such as malformations, could provide new material signs interpretable as indexes of radiocontamination. But in order to make their meaning stable (that is commonly accepted and agreed upon) they needed to be regimented (restricted) through metasemiotic operations, which involved the construction of—or the deployment of already available—higher forms of explanation. To explain how local anti-base activists controlled the circulation of information about radiological risk, I rely upon Gramsci’s theory of ideology and his argument about the role of intellectual and political elites in the construction of “upper conceptions of life” and their transformation into “common sense.”

The semiotic approach to risk offers several advantages. By attending to the material processes of signification among experts and non-experts the semiotic approach to radiological risk demystifies the exceptional status of nuclear risk as an invisible force that deprives human beings of their sensorial orientation. Looking closely at the ways in which meanings of risk are shaped, challenged, and stabilized over time I also avoid making assumptions about the existence of radically different forms of knowledge between experts and non-experts, and about these two groups as internally homogeneous categories. I use Peirce’s theory of abduction to provide a unifying method of analysis for how non-experts formulate plausible hypotheses about the presence of radiocontamination in the environment and look at the assemblage and deployment of technopolitical arguments in socio-technical controversies by keeping together their material, ideological, and political bases. Thus, I take Ulrich Beck’s thesis of “relations of definition” as a

starting point for further historical and ethnographic observations rather than as a *fait accompli*.

In Chapter 5 I use personal interviews with retired U.S. Navy personnel and official documentation to analyze the practices of risk control on board of submarines and around the submarine base. The illustration of radioprotection practices inside the U.S. Navy provides examples of how training programs and the culture of risk control provided radiological workers with opportunities to acquire material understandings of risk. Next, I give concrete examples of the misunderstandings generated by expert definitions of risk and the frustrations that these provoked among the local administrators asking for clear answers from the scientific community. The transcripts of a conference on nuclear contamination held in La Maddalena on February 1975 provide insights on how decontextualized and abstract objectifications of nuclear risk by Italian experts did not allow local administrators to grasp the immediate problems of radioprotection in the archipelago. Finally I focus on non-experts strategies for making invisible risks visible and the organizational work that local activists did to construct coherent and credible arguments against the U.S. Navy base.

Chapter 6 explores the complex relationship between accidents and understandings of risk. A U.S. nuclear submarine accident near La Maddalena in 2003 generated a heuristic for studying how the intervention of independent experts challenged the established radiosurveillance protocols of Italian state agencies. The epistemic bases of these controversies, I argue, were formed in the context of the Cold War and in the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster. Thus, I propose to move beyond deterministic and all encompassing explanations of public opposition to particular technologies and industrial activities as reactions to accidental “events.” Rather, to understand expert and public reactions to risk after accidents, I analyze the historical formation of scientific epistemic approaches to risk as well as the socio-cultural conditions in which public interpretations of the accident were forged.

Expert debates generated uncertainty in the local population, but also created a unique opportunity for local activists to openly question the efficacy of La Maddalena’s radiosurveillance system. Rather than embracing a particular scientific argument, local activists (who were faced with accusations of bias due to their broader anti-base politics) organized public forums in which they invited experts with competing views to debate their positions.

0.4. Sources and Methodology

This dissertation is based on two years of multi-sited ethnographic and archival research in Italy and the U.S. In La Maddalena, I conducted dozens of interviews with local residents, including former mayors and city councilors, Italian workers and employees of the U.S. Navy base, anti-base activists, religious authorities, and retired U.S. Navy personnel. Many anti-base activists, local historians, and journalists shared their stories and personal archives, including films produced by local directors, photographic material, newspapers, and pamphlets and fliers used for political propaganda by parties and protest groups in the 1970s and 1980s.

I approached archival research in Sardinia, and in other parts of Italy, from an ethnographic perspective. With the assistance of Italian nuclear experts I reconstructed the history of La Maddalena's radiosurveillance system within the institutional ecology of the Italian nuclear program. Most of the archives of the Italian National Agency on Alternative Energies (ENEA, but previously denominated CNEN, National Committee on Nuclear Energy) and the National Health Institute (ISS) are dispersed and not systematically organized. But several retired radioecologists and health physicists shared personal copies of their work with me.

In particular, due to the generous support of director Dr. Roberta Delfanti and radioecologist Carlo Papucci, I accessed the archive of the Center for the Study of Marine Environments of ENEA (near La Spezia, in the region of Liguria), whose personnel have five decades of collective experience in radioecological campaigns throughout the world, from the Mediterranean Sea, including La Maddalena, to Cienfuegos, Cuba, and the Arctic Pole. Since the winter of 2012, Dr. Delfanti and Dr. Papucci shepherded me through the rich archival material of the center, from collections of bio-samples to logbooks of data entry and notes taken during radioecological campaigns in La Maddalena, internal correspondence and preparatory research designs, and illustrations of laboratory practice and final reports. During multiple visits to the center and in extended interviews with Dr. Arrigo Cigna, one of the founders of Italian radioecology and former president of the International Union of Radioecology, I acquired detailed knowledge of the theoretical and practical steps taken by nuclear experts to assemble their knowledge of La Maddalena and of other sites across Italy. These collaborations enhanced my ethnographic work in La Maddalena and allowed me to develop a more complex understanding of connections among environmental, cultural, and political dynamics that shaped both expert and non-expert knowledge and perceptions of nuclear risk around the U.S. base.

Over the past three years, I also retrieved and assembled archival and other documentary material scattered across Italy. In Rome I consulted the libraries of ENEA and ISS. At the National Institute for Environmental Protection (ISPRA) I located the former archive of the Division for Safety of Protection of the Italian National Committee on Nuclear Energy (CNEN-DISP). Until the 1980s, the Division was responsible for the elaboration of the emergency plans of nuclear installations, including nuclear ports like La Maddalena. Follow-up interviews enabled me to further detailed how military secrecy forced Italian expert institutions, in charge of monitoring radioactivity levels in the Archipelago, to conduct science with incomplete data.

In La Maddalena I accessed municipal archives, which included detailed transcripts of the debates in the city council, official administrative documentation about the U.S. Navy base, and the correspondence between U.S. military authorities and the local administration. At the library of the Italian Navy, I could access national and local newspapers articles that the local Intelligence Office had collected over the course of 35 years. The collection covers every reported event directly or indirectly related to the U.S. Navy in La Maddalena, including local and national debates from 1976 to 2008. To reconstruct debates from 1972-76, I conducted archival research at the Public Library of Sassari, the capital of northern Sardinia. I also collected national newspapers and accessed transcripts of parliamentary debates concerning the base at the Library of the Senate in Rome. During the final months of fieldwork in La Maddalena, I found rare documentary evidence about the organization and monthly operations of the local laboratory for the measurement of environmental radioactivity. From the archives of the Province of Sassari I also retrieved allegedly lost radiometric reports, internal correspondence, and expert debates about the technical and bureaucratic deficiencies of the radiosurveillance system.

Part I

The Military-Industrial Legacy of La Maddalena

“The reason why it was possible for these various industrial establishments to be built without obvious opposition on this rocky promontory lashed by the fury of the sea is that in a sense their places had been marked out in advance.”³³

In this way anthropologist Françoise Zonabend explained why the residents of the northern tip of the Cotentin peninsula in Normandy (France) have never openly contested the presence of three nuclear-industrial installations that the government established there decades ago. The French nuclear and military-industrial complex found favorable conditions in La Hague, where at the beginning of the 1960s the officers of the *Commissariat à l'énergie atomique* (C.E.A.) decided to build one of the larger nuclear fuel reprocessing plants in Europe. Not far from La Hague, on the eastern vertex of the “nuclear triangle” was already active the Cherbourg arsenal. Built at the end of the 18th century under the aegis of the military, in 1960 the highly surveilled installation started producing nuclear submarines for the French Navy. On the west coast, just in front of a decommissioned underwater iron mine is currently active the Flamanville nuclear power station, housing two pressurized water reactors since the mid-1980s.³⁴ According to Zonabend, the establishment of military-industrial installations, even those considered more risky for the health of the local residents and the environment, encounter less opposition in places that have already been “marked” by the presence of industrial activities and do not offer economic alternatives. The French anthropologist describes the nuclear installations in Normandy as extraneous presences to the local landscape. And yet local residents deploy “a whole set of stratagems [...] with the single aim of creating opacity and ambiguity,” which allow them to cope with unspeakable anxieties and distress related to the risks associated with the nuclear industry.³⁵ The economic benefits have significantly reduced the sources of local

³³ Françoise Zonabend, *The Nuclear Peninsula*, (Cambridge University Press, 1993), cit. p. 25.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 19-25.

³⁵ Françoise Zonabend, *The Nuclear Peninsula*, cit. p. 3.

opposition, but the Hagar society, according to Zonabend, remains fundamentally divided. In that context, the nuclear industry has not become a unifying element. Instead it has created new social cleavages between the locals and the external personnel employed at the nuclear plants. From this point of view, the archipelago of La Maddalena presents some analogies with the French nuclear peninsula but also considerable differences.

During my preliminary fieldwork I debarked on the archipelago expecting to hear stories of local opposition to the U.S. Navy presence. Instead I found a widespread sense of recrimination for its recent departure. My initial research problem immediately changed, as I was now trying to make sense of an absence—local opposition—while figuring out the effects (social, economic, and environmental) of the U.S. Navy base on the local community.

La Maddalena—as I discovered throughout repeated research trips and interactions with long-term residents of the archipelago—was not like more typical fleet towns described in studies of U.S. overseas military bases. The local community maintained its sense of identity connected with the presence of the Italian Navy since the nineteenth century.

Similarly to the Cotentin peninsula, La Maddalena has been marked by the presence of the Italian Navy establishment since the military occupation of 1767 and throughout two centuries of increasing assimilation into the military-industrial complex of the Italian state. Unlike the case of the Cotentin, this long process of incorporation, to which local residents have actively contributed, has shaped a common sense of identification with the military institutions, which *are* a unifying factor for an otherwise diversified population. Local historical narratives about the birth of the community as a consequence of the Italian military presence are deep-seated and widespread, signaling the importance of the military legacy as the central element of self-identification and the continuous work of cultural reproduction, performed by important groups of local intellectuals and military institutions.

Long-term residents of the Cotentin peninsula have accepted the establishment of the nuclear plants for their economic benefits and, according to Zonabend, have coped with risk by elaborating narrative and cognitive mechanisms to make it opaque and rarefied. In La Maddalena, instead, the installation of the U.S. Navy base for nuclear submarines did not automatically confer to the archipelago the status of a nuclear site. For reasons of military security, the Italian government and the U.S. Navy pushed back against the requests of local and national activists and expert to install a system of radiosurveillance in analogy with inland

nuclear plants. Making La Maddalena nuclear entailed two years of technopolitical debates. In the next two chapters I show how this happened and discuss the relevance of this case study to current scholarly debates on “nuclear exceptionalism” and the “politics of nuclearity.”

One of the reasons why CNEN and ISS experts found it difficult to convey the gravity of the U.S. Navy base’s safety implications was that nuclear submarines are mobile sources of risk. Unlike big, visible nuclear plants with their reactor domes dominating the landscape and conditioning in many concrete ways the everyday life of entire communities around them, nuclear submarines can be quickly and quietly removed from the local context. As subsequent chapters will detail, mobility and invisibility differentiate nuclear submarines from inland nuclear plants. In La Maddalena, as elsewhere, they gave the illusion that nuclear risks were controllable precisely because they were removable: “If they start creating problems we can push them away,” said La Maddalena’s mayor Giuseppe Deligia during a conference on the U.S. base organized on February 1975. Therefore, at least initially, the ontological status of the submarines as “nuclear things” needed to be demonstrated and objectified through comparisons and analogies with more stereotypically nuclear artifacts like nuclear plants or, in more alarming tones, nuclear bombs. Given that until 1979 Italy did not have any formal regulation of the transit and mooring of nuclear military boats in national waters, Italian experts treated the case of the U.S. base in La Maddalena in analogy with civilian nuclear plants.

Speaking of uranium mines in Africa, Gabrielle Hecht describes the ontological instability of nuclear things in terms of the qualities that are variably and contingently associated with and attributed to them.³⁶ She calls the contested technopolitical category of being nuclear *nuclearity*, to point out the geographically contingent and historically shifting attribution of radiological risks and consequences to objects and practices.

Nuclear submarines are not only technological artifacts for conducting war. In La Maddalena, the meanings of nuclear submarines were constituted through the daily practices of the various groups that lived and worked around and inside them.³⁷ Mayors and other members

³⁶ Gabrielle Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, cit. pp. 3-6.

³⁷ My argument here is influenced by the reading of Annemarie Mol, *The Body Multiple: Ontology in Medical Practice*, (Duke University Press, 2003), and by Webb Keane’s concept of *bundling*, that is the co-presence of various qualities as they are simultaneously embodied in material objects. Keane uses Peircean semiotics to analyze how the potential significance of general qualities gets instantiated through their embodiment in material objects. The important point here is that “Bundling is of the conditions of possibility for what Kopytoff (1986) and Appadurai (1986) called the ‘biography’ of things, as qualisigns bundled together in any object will shift their value,

of the local elites were occasionally invited on board for short trips underwater. As I was told during interviews, it was on those occasions that the U.S. Navy used nuclear submarines as diplomatic tools to demonstrate the innocuousness of the most advanced war machines in the world. Additionally, the belief that all U.S. Navy personnel working on the base were aware of their occupational risks circulated among the Maddalenini since the base was installed. This was reassuring to civilian workers and long-term residents, who repeatedly told me: “If U.S. Navy servicemen were at ease with their job, why should we have worried? They brought their families with them. Do you think they would do that if there were a real danger?” However, interviews with retired U.S. Navy servicemen reveal a different story: only select personnel knew the technical details of submarines' equipment and were authorized to access specific sectors of the base. Only partially visible to the rest of the population, safety measures against radiation exposure defined socio-technical and professional hierarchies through thresholds of accessibility and areas of exclusion inside the base.³⁸ As dosimeters, gloves, clothes, shielding procedures, and time of exposure defined the daily encounters of specialized U.S. Navy personnel with nuclear risk, local residents coped with their anxieties by constructing a reassuring image of the competent and self-aware American sailor.

Of course, nuclear things acquire also different meanings (dangerousness, security, development) according to who uses them. Building on Edward Said's notion of *orientalism*, Hugh Gusterson aptly demonstrates how racialized discourses of nuclear security in the western imagination reproduce mirror images of “other” countries as unreliable because they are irrational, politically unstable, technologically primitive, and aggressive. He calls this set of Western prejudices about the use of nuclear technology by non-western states “nuclear orientalism.”³⁹ In La Maddalena, like in the rest of Europe, images of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well other public notions of the potentially disruptive power of nuclear technologies, were in circulation well before the installation of the U.S. Navy base. Local residents' opinions of the

utility, and relevance across contexts.” See Webb Keane, “Semiotics and the social analysis of material things,” *Language & Communication* 23 (2003): 409-425, cit. p. 414.

³⁸ The literature on compartmentalized knowledge in cold war science, especially in the nuclear sector, is vast. See for example Joseph Masco, *The Nuclear Borderlands: The Manhattan Project in Post-Cold War New Mexico*, (Princeton University Press, 2006); Gabrielle Hecht, *Being Nuclear*; Kate Brown, *Plutopia: Nuclear Families, Atomic Cities, and the Great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters*, (Oxford University Press, 2013); Joseph Masco, *The Theater of Operations: National Security Affect from the Cold War to the War on Terror*, (Duke University Press, 2014).

³⁹ Hugh Gusterson, “Nuclear Weapons and the Other in the Western Imagination,” *Cultural Anthropology* 14 (1), February 1999: 111-143.

risks generated by the presence of nuclear submarines were mediated by their political affiliations and by the daily confrontations between pro-NATO positions, popular among Christian democrats and other pro-Atlantic parties, and an inherent distrust towards America's intentions within the Communist Party and still present in large sectors of the Socialist Party. Thus, controversial questions about risk in La Maddalena were filtered through political and ideological affiliations that made technical assessments of nuclear risk hardly separable from other considerations, such as trust in U.S. technology and intentions, and political identity.

Consider again the common trope circulating among the Maddalenini that interpreted anti-base campaigns and concerns of the leftist parties as alarmist propaganda: "If the Americans were here with all their families it means that they knew they were safe, otherwise they would not expose themselves to the risk of contamination. So, this means that we were safe too!"⁴⁰ Consolidating this sense of safety and protection was the lionization of American technological prowess and competence—the idea that nuclear submarines represented the apex of technological sophistication, the symbol of technical mastery associated with individual and collective training and technical knowledge. Images of the competent American soldier and military organization made the issue of radioprotection ultimately one of trust. After all, the U.S. Navy experienced only two major nuclear submarine accidents (the Thresher in 1963 and the Scorpion in 1968), which did not linger in public debate, also because the causes, consequences, and physical evidence are still buried in inaccessible archives and at the bottom of the ocean.⁴¹

As I will explain further, these narratives about American technological competence were not simply the result of false consciousness or of materialistic calculation of the costs and benefits of the U.S. Navy presence. Meanings of nuclear risk in La Maddalena emerged through daily interactions between different groups who lived and worked in the archipelago, where observations of environmental changes and continuities and bodily experiences of illness, for example, could index either cleanliness or pollution. The very concrete experiences of the

⁴⁰ These are common tropes that I collected during many informal conversations and interviews I had with friends and local residents over the past 4 years of fieldwork in La Maddalena. Some of the same tropes are also present in newspaper accounts of life in La Maddalena after the arrival of the U.S. Navy. Among many examples, see: "L'Ombra dell'Atomica su La Maddalena," *Rivista Italiana di Ecologia* (February 1973), Pp. 37-61; "Ecco La Maddalena: I Nostri Inviati dall'Isola Radioattiva," *L'Europeo*, May 1974, pp. 30-37; "A Bordo del 'Mostro' Nucleare," *Il Settimanale*, February 1978, Pp. 26-29.

⁴¹ The two major known accidents involving U.S. nuclear submarines are those happened to the USS Thresher in 1963, and to the USS Scorpion in 1968. The accidents are considered tragic turning points in the history of the U.S. Navy to which the Nuclear Propulsion Program responded with the implementation of even stricter safety regulation, from design to sea trials.

surrounding environment and their different interpretations were part of a wider field of interactions between actors (experts, U.S. personnel, local residents, political authorities), things (submarines, the environment, radiosurveillance instruments), and ideologies (scientific knowledge, radiological training, local knowledge) which carried and produced more or less coherent objectifications and representations of nuclear risk.

The political relevance and power of nuclearity—the quality of being nuclear—as a technopolitical category, is directly tied to *nuclear exceptionalism*, that is, the idea that nuclear things are essentially different from ordinary ones.⁴² Gabrielle Hecht suggests that after WWII nuclear exceptionalism has been a recurrent theme in public discourses. The ability to exploit the power of fission and radioactivity became the material demarcation of a historical rupture with the world, as it existed before the nuclear era. Utopias of limitless progress, made possible by infinite sources of energy, coexisted with dystopias of apocalyptic scenarios, nightmares of annihilation, and thermonuclear wars. Nuclear exceptionalism, thus, “transcended political divisions” and was filled with contradictions. It could be manipulated for opposite political purposes: to either create a sense of collective empowerment and futuristic enthusiasm or to warn the public that nuclear threats required special safety measures and more nukes to dissuade the enemy from launching an attack. Joseph Masco concurs with Gabrielle Hecht in addressing nuclear exceptionalism as a recurrent theme in Cold War public discourse. He argues that more than anything else, nuclear power is a “social technology” through which the U.S. national security state could be established as a permanent state of total mobilization, the national security affect, triggered and maintained through the *secrecy/threat matrix*.⁴³ The deployment of terrifying images of nuclear annihilation needed to be counterbalanced by reassuring demonstrations of the normality—even banality—of nuclear power and its potential benefits. During the 1950s, the development of commercial nuclear plants involved an elaborate strategy to distance the peaceful use of atomic energy from its original destructive deployment in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Whereas anti-nuclear movements, almost two decades later, mobilized to demonstrate that nuclear power was inherently fraught with dangers to the environment and society, convinced nuclearists (both among industrialists and scientists) tried to demonstrate the banality or radioactivity, its ubiquitous, natural presence. After the accidents of Three Mile

⁴² Gabrielle Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, cit. p. 6.

⁴³ Joseph Masco, *The Theater of Operations*, cit. p. 45-47, 113.

Island, Chernobyl, and Fukushima the emphasis on extraordinary safety measures placed the nuclear industry again in the position to demonstrate that only human errors or natural disasters can provoke malfunctions in otherwise completely reliable technological systems.

The apparent contradictions of nuclear exceptionalism also coexisted in La Maddalena, where the Italian government and the U.S. Navy justified the maintenance of secrecy as a necessary limitation to scientific inquiry in the name of superior security imperatives. On the other hand they had to represent nuclear technology as safe, benign to the local population, and tightly controlled by the technological mastery of the U.S. Navy. The attempts of the Italian government and the U.S. Navy to assuage public anxieties by naturalizing nuclear technology and making it appear innocuous, harmless, and safe, is an example of what Hilgartner et others call “nukespeak,” the language of sterile words that the nuclear establishment (military, industrial, and scientific) uses to make the potential negative effects of nuclear technology invisible.⁴⁴ Thus in La Maddalena different registers of *nuclearity* shaped the initial controversy over the presence of the U.S. submarine base. The irony is now clear. According to the Italian government nuclear submarines were to protect Maddalena from the Soviet enemy, yet the archipelago did not need radiosurveillance measures, as nuclear submarines were apparently less nuclear than nuclear plants. On the other hand, Italian radioecologists and radioprotectionists, supported by a variegated anti-base front (mostly from outside La Maddalena), did see nuclear submarines as nuclear objects—and demanded acknowledgement of their dangers. As a consequence, they argued, the archipelago should have been treated as any other nuclear site and radiosurveilled to guarantee the safety of the local population.

⁴⁴ Hilgartner, Stephen, Richard Bell, and Rory O’Connor, *Nukespeak: The Selling of Nuclear Technology in America*, (Penguin Books, 1993).

Chapter 1

La Maddalena: Making a military-industrial periphery

1.1. Welcome

In 1979 the theatrical collective *L'Elicriso* of La Maddalena produced a film titled *Benvenuti!* (Welcome, in Sardinian) by local screenwriters and directors Adriano Tovo and Giorgio Acciaro.⁴⁵ The movie gives a satirical account of the facts leading to the installation of the U.S. Navy base on September 1972. The opening scene takes place on a golf course in Sardinia where the American ambassador in Rome, the Italian minister of foreign affairs, and the Italian undersecretary of defense, presumably Christian Democrat Francesco Cossiga, make an agreement about the concession of La Maddalena to the U.S. Navy. The film describes how the obsequious mayor Giuseppe Deligia, and the greedy, assertive priest of the archipelago, Monsignor Salvatore Capula, plotted with the Italian government to welcome the Americans and to assuage the local opposition. The story contains a self-reflexive and particularly critical analysis of La Maddalena's historical acquiescence towards military and political authorities. The main political argument is that, besides its strategic position, the Italian government and the U.S. Navy selected the archipelago because of its bicentennial military tradition, which had infused a strong sense of national identity and predisposed the local residents to accept every decision made by the central authorities. With its hyperbolic representation of local and American characters, and of the circumstances leading to the installation of the U.S. Navy base, *Benvenuti!* offers an accurate and polemical, albeit minoritarian, reading of traditional histories of La Maddalena, which describe the local community as naturally predisposed to live in symbiosis with military installations.

My initial interviews with long-term residents of the archipelago, anti-base protestors, and former U.S. Navy officers stationed in La Maddalena suggest a far more ambivalent “local”

⁴⁵ A selection of scenes from the original movie is available here:
<http://www.veoh.com/watch/v18220342h9qsPzX9?h1=benvenuti>

reception of the U.S. military presence than that described in the most recent literature on U.S. Empire and overseas military outposts.⁴⁶ My interlocutors explained the lack of a strong popular opposition by referring to the identification of their fellow citizens with the Italian military presence since the late eighteenth century, when the Sabaudian Navy occupied their archipelago. In the words of one local historian: “We have always lived with the military in this place. This community was born with the military occupation in 1767. So, people here did not have problems with the Americans either.”⁴⁷ Even those who opposed the U.S. Navy base always underline that their position was not due to anti-military sentiments. According to Salvatore Sanna, one of the leaders of the local anti-base front, member of the former Communist Party, and a historian of La Maddalena, anti-militarism has never been part of the local struggle against the U.S. installation. Those who interpreted the case of La Maddalena in the context of the Sardinian movement against the oppressive presence of Italian military testing grounds and infrastructures, he argued, “have failed to recognize that we had quite a different experience with the Italian Navy. If we developed economically, while the rest of northern Sardinia remained a rural, impoverished place until the 1970s, it is because La Maddalena was a military fortress and the Navy guaranteed public services and secure stipends.”⁴⁸

The “naturalization” of the military presence in locally produced accounts of the islands’ history prompted me to reframe my research to attend to the ways local historical production contributes to local attitudes towards the U.S. military base.

Sedimented representations of La Maddalena as a place predestined to be a naval base continue to shape local discourses about identity, cultural predispositions, and economic futures, and have strongly influenced the ways in which the majority of local residents encountered the U.S. Navy presence. Despite the installation of the submarine base and the deployment of more than 2,000 American personnel, La Maddalena was not transformed into a typical “fleet town.” Rather, local residents interpreted the U.S. Navy as but the latest chapter in a deep historical engagement with the military.

Analyzing La Maddalena’s past through the lenses of local historical production is relevant for two reasons. First, it allows for a parsing of similarities and differences with other

⁴⁶ For example, see Katherine T. McCaffrey, *Military Power and Popular Protest: The U.S. Navy in Vieques, Puerto Rico* and David Vine, *Island of Shame: The Secret History of the U.S. Military Base on Diego Garcia*.

⁴⁷ Antonio (Tonino) Conti, personal interview with the author, La Maddalena, June 2009.

⁴⁸ Salvatore Sanna, personal interview with the author, La Maddalena, June 2009.

U.S. military bases overseas and to de-emphasize accounts that pay almost exclusive attention to the “U.S. arrival” as source of historical change. Second, attention to local history production helps explain the reasons of the dearth of autochthonous mobilization against the U.S. Navy base.

The process of de-militarization initiated at the beginning of the 1990s by the Italian Navy—which culminated with the closure of the U.S. Navy installation in 2008—inspired a proliferation of locally written histories of the archipelago. In the context of the structural crisis of the islands’ economy, a group of non-academic historians from La Maddalena formally organized and promoted research activities that led to the publication of more than fifty books in addition to dozens of articles. The subjects vary and include local events, the formation of the local community through its different phases of economic and social development, local personages and great figures who frequented the archipelago, such as Napoleon, Lord Nelson, and the national hero Giuseppe Garibaldi.

In La Maddalena, like elsewhere, historical production is a terrain of political struggle for the affirmation of sometimes radically divergent moral projects. History making in La Maddalena is probably the primary field where different normative views of the local community appear and confront each other, sometimes openly, and in conjunction with political events and economic changes, and other times in a more subtle way, under the surface of methodological disputes. My analysis focuses on a specific aspect of local history making, which seems directly relevant for interpreting local attitudes towards the U.S. military presence. I argue that current history makers of La Maddalena have incorporated into their historical production deep-seated and widespread narratives about the military origins of the archipelago, and have reproduced them with different degrees of critical analysis. The representation of La Maddalena’s birth (as a community) as a direct consequence of the Italian Navy’s defensive strategies is neither an object of exclusive intellectual debates nor a trivial common place that local residents use in performative narrations of the islands’ past. It is a lively and organic cultural element of local identity.

Occupied by the Sabaudian troops in 1767, La Maddalena became integral to the Italian military-industrial complex towards the end of the nineteenth century, when the Italian Navy established there one of the most strategic naval bases of the country (the other three being at La Spezia, Livorno, and Taranto). The military presence in the archipelago introduced major

sociological transformations, which were initiated after the occupation of the Sabaudian Army. This strong military influence not only created a heavy economic dependence on the military-industrial sector but also allowed linguistically, culturally, and economically divided groups, who arrived through several waves of migration, to generate a unifying sense of collective identity, which still holds today. The local dialect, the *isulanu*, reflects the blending of different identities (Corsican, Genovese, Gallurese, and Pontina), all amalgamated through Italian, the official language imposed by the Navy both on board its ships and inside the military arsenal.⁴⁹

1.2. Colonizing a Periphery

Before the occupation of the Piedmontese army on October 1767, the islands between Sardinia and Corsica were populated by small nuclei of families clustered in two communities living in the internal areas of La Maddalena and Caprera.⁵⁰ The families were originally from the inland areas around the town of Bonifacio, on the southwestern coast of Corsica.

They were shepherds who took care of the cattle of rich families from Bonifacio, in particular the powerful Doria, of Genovese origins like most of the ruling elites of Corsica.⁵¹ The Corsican shepherds stationed for about ten months a year on the islands and in the summer went back to Bonifacio to manage business with their lords and for religious functions. Until the second half of the eighteenth century, there was no church on the island and both baptisms and weddings were celebrated in Bonifacio.⁵²

⁴⁹ This is the thesis of local historian and linguist Antonio (Tonino) Conti, who recently published a book on this subject: *Sbirizzendi pe l'Isula: appunti di etnologia e dialettologia isolana*, (Paolo Sorba Editore, 2014). Conti's thesis about the prevalence of Italian in the linguistic structure of the local dialect contrasts with a previous interpretation of La Maddalena's linguistic identity as prevalently derived from the Gallurese, the language of northern Sardinia, by local linguist Renzo De Martino: *Il dialetto maddalenino. Storia, grammatica, genovesismi. Il dialetto corso*, (Edizioni Della Torre, 1996). Conti's account is more convincing because it gives a more robust explanation of the socio-historical development of the local population, demonstrated with concrete examples from familial life, labor relations, and material interactions with the environment. De Martino's account instead reflects a more static interpretation of La Maddalena's history as a slow process of incorporation into northern Sardinia and southern Corsica.

⁵⁰ La Maddalena and Caprera are the major islands among a group of seven that composes the Archipelago of La Maddalena. The other five islands are: Spargi, Santo Stefano, Budelli, Razzoli, and Santa Maria (See Figure 1.2.).

⁵¹ After several conquests by the Republic of Pisa and other maritime powers of the time, the Republic of Genova stably colonized Corsica in the fourteenth century and ruled over the island until 1729. From 1729 to 1768 the Republic of Genova maintained control over Corsica, but the struggle of the Corsicans for their self-determination granted them the status of semi-independent possession under General Pasquale Paoli. In 1768 Genova sold Corsica to France.

⁵² Aristide Garelli, *L'Isola della Maddalena - Documenti ed appunti storici*, (Venezia, 1907). Reprinted in 1987 by Atesa Editrice, Bologna; Raffaele Ciasca, "Corsi colonizzatori di terre sarde nel sec. XVIII," *Archivio Storico di Corsica*, Vol. 4, Anno 4, 1928: 294-334; Ersilio Michel, "L'occupazione sarda della Maddalena e delle altre isole



Figure 1.1. Map of the Tyrrhenian Sea

Early historiographers of La Maddalena begin their accounts with the narration of the events leading to the military occupation of 1767 by a small Sabaudian contingent. On 14 October 1767, a military expedition organized by the viceroy of Sardinia Count Des Hayes, upon the approval of the royal minister, Count Bogino, approached La Maddalena and Santo Stefano and took possession of the Islands in the name of the king of Sardinia, Carlo Emanuele III.⁵³

The expedition for the occupation of the Intermediate Islands was planned much earlier, but it took many years for the Sabaudian officers to actually implement their political and

intermedie (1767),” *Annali del Regio Istituto Storico Italiano per la Storia Moderna e Contemporanea*, Vol. I, Zanichelli, Bologna, 1936: 28-64; Osvaldo Baldacci, et Al., *Ricerche sull’Arcipelago de La Maddalena. Memorie della Società Geografica Italiana*, (Società Geografica Italiana, Roma, 1961), especially chapters 9-11. A more detailed study of the pre-Sabaudian history of the Archipelago of La Maddalena, enriched with new archival evidence, is the recent volume by Salvatore Sanna, *Il popolamento dell’Arcipelago Maddalenino prima dei Savoia (1650-1767)*, (Paolo Sorba Editore, 2014).

⁵³ In 1720, Sardinia became part of the Reign of Savoy (Piedmont). With the Treaty of London of 1718 the House of Savoy left Sicily to the Habsburgs and took possession of Sardinia. Since then, the House of Savoy acquired the status of kingdom and was named Reign of Sardinia, although Sardinia was administered as a separate possession from the continental territories. In Cagliari, already capital of Sardinia, the viceroy administered the new territory for the King. Only in 1847, under Carlo Alberto of Savoy, Sardinia was completely assimilated into the Reign. With the abolition of the (formally) autonomous Sardinian parliament, the administrative unification of all the territories under the authority of the king was accomplished and a “perfect state” created, just before the concession of the constitution in 1848, the so-called *Statuto Albertino* (named after the King Carlo Alberto). After the unification of Italy in 1861, Sardinia became part of the Reign of Italy.

military designs.⁵⁴ Various explorations of the islands took place prior to the occupation. The hesitation demonstrated by the Sabaudian authorities was primarily due to the uncertain political status of the archipelago. In fact its possession was at the center of a diplomatic contest with the Republic of Genova, whose territory included the adjacent island of Corsica.



Figure 1.2. Map of the Archipelago of La Maddalena

The dispute about the rights over the Intermediate Islands arose not only because of its contested geo-political position, but also because the archipelago was sparsely populated.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ The denomination of *Isole Intermedie* was in use in the 18th century. The Islands composing the little archipelago between Sardinia and Corsica were named after the major island, La Maddalena, where the Sabaudian contingent installed several fortifications and eventually developed the urban center called *Cala Gavetta*, which is still the major urban conglomeration of the archipelago. For a detailed account of the Sabaudian plans for the occupation of the archipelago see Ersilio Michel, “L’occupazione sarda della Maddalena e delle altre isole intermedie,” cit, and Aristide Garelli, *L’Isola della Maddalena - Documenti ed appunti storici*, cit.

⁵⁵ Carlino Sole, “Sovranità e Giurisdizione sulle Isole Intermedie (1767-1793)”, *Archivio Storico Sardo*, Vol. XXVI, CEDAM, Padova, 1959: 255-479. An earlier account of the dispute between the Republic of Genova and the Reign of Sardinia over the possession of the Intermediate Islands is by Henri Marmonier, “La question de La Maddalena,” *Revue Historique* 62 (1), September-October 1896: 1-41. The thesis of Marmonier is that the French attempts to gain control over the archipelago, both in 1793 and again during the Napoleonic wars, were inspired by the juridical argument that the islands belonged to the Republic of Genova and that by virtue of the French acquisition of Corsica in 1768, also the archipelago should have entered French jurisdiction. Italian historians, especially during the Fascist

Several archival documents report that the shepherds used to live in an internal area of La Maddalena called *collo piano*, far from the sight of pirates and other potential conquerors that had “infested” the Mediterranean since the Middle Ages.⁵⁶ The area selected by the navy officers for the construction of the first military barracks was the Island of Santo Stefano, where the cove of Villamarina offered secure anchorage for the ships of the Sabaudian fleet.⁵⁷ After a few years, though, Cala Gavetta, on the southern coast of the Island of La Maddalena, became the major urban settlement of the forming community. The Corsican shepherds were “convinced,” so recount the historical narratives produced by the early historiographies of the archipelago, to abandon their *stazzi* on the hill and to move towards the coast.⁵⁸ The arrival of the Sabaudian soldiers entailed both material and cultural changes. The shepherds abandoned their traditional activities to become sailors themselves. In fact, one of the stereotypes about the Maddalenini is that, unlike other Sardinians, they have never been afraid of voyaging at sea. After all, they were used to traveling on their locally crafted ships at least twice a year, when they needed to go back to Bonifacio, but more often to reach the neighboring coastal towns of northern Sardinia for their commerce and social obligations.⁵⁹

regime, have always opposed Marmonier’s thesis by suggesting that the juridical argument was just put forward to justify a purely strategic interest for the archipelago as a strategic outpost to control the maritime traffic in the Tyrrhenian Sea. See Baldacci et al., *Ricerche sull’Arcipelago de La Maddalena*, cit., p. 293.

⁵⁶ Information about the inhabitants of the Archipelago is scarce, but early historiographies, on the basis of archival documentation, agree that the shepherds were of Corsican origins and took shelter on the two major islands of La Maddalena and Caprera. See Raffaele Ciasca, “Corsi colonizzatori di terre sarde nel sec. XVIII,” *Archivio Storico di Corsica*, Vol. 4, Anno 4, 1928: 294-334; Aristide Garelli, *L’Isola della Maddalena – Documenti ed Appunti Storici*; Carlino Sole, “Contributo alla Storia di La Maddalena (1720-1767),” *Ichnusa*, Vol. 4, Anno V – 1957: 35-62.

⁵⁷ Salvatore Sanna, “La torre di Villamarina a S. Stefano. La casamatta della pietra dura,” *Almanacco Maddalenino*, Vol. 5, January 2007: 57-73.

⁵⁸ Simple houses erected with drywalls and covered by thatched roofs where entire families lived.

⁵⁹ More recently local historians determined that the families living in the archipelago started to bury their defunct members near the estuary of the river Liscia, close to where the agricultural colony of Palau (on the coast of northern Sardinia just in front of the archipelago) would be established in the first half of the nineteenth century. See Giovanna Sotgiu, *La Maddalena e i suoi traffici marittimi*, (Paolo Sorba Editore, 2014).



Figure 1.3. Flag of the Glorious Battle of 1793: According to the tradition, the flag was fabricated before the battle. It represents the crucifix with Santa Maria Maddalena, matron of the Island, at the bottom, embracing the cross. The inscription reads: “For God, and for the King. Win or die.”

Thus, the Maddalenini are traditionally considered exemplar sailors and many of them appear on the list of heroes of the Italian Navy, in which they often occupied important positions. Domenico Millelire epitomizes the archipelago’s heroic sea tradition, as he received the first gold medal assigned by the Sabaudian Navy for the courage demonstrated during the Gallo-Corsican assault of 1793. The heroism of Millelire, son of Pietro, one of the leaders of the Corsican inhabitants of the archipelago, was glorified during the Fascist Regime as an example of Italian strength vis-à-vis the French enemy.⁶⁰ One of the details that make the “Glorious battle of 1793” so crucial in the memories of the archipelago and in national chronicles is the fact that Napoleon Bonaparte, a young lieutenant at the time, participated in the expedition that revolutionary France launched to take possession of Sardinia. While most of the French fleet was attacking Cagliari, a smaller fleet was strategically directed at La Maddalena. By successfully defending the archipelago against the invaders, Corsican shepherds had the occasion to demonstrate their loyalty to the King of Sardinia.

⁶⁰ See, for example, Myriam Riccio, “La Vittoria de La Maddalena nel 1793,” *Rassegna Storica del Risorgimento*, Vol. 1 (8), June 1935: 885-900.

A few years later, another Millelire was appointed commander of the port La Maddalena, responsible for defending the outpost.⁶¹ The commander of the port, though, was not a delegate of the Sardinian Court. Since 1767 the Sabaudian occupants included La Maddalena within the administrative system of Sardinia, which replaced the feudal tradition maintained by the Spanish until 1720. La Maddalena had its peculiarities. Next to the military commander, the court appointed a *bailo*, an administrative figure whose original functions were similar to that of an accountant or diplomatic emissary. Given the small dimensions of the archipelago and its fluid reality as an incipient community, the *bailo* had competence over a larger spectrum of administrative matters, including public health and public order.⁶² Also the local community formed a small council, initially composed by three or four local leaders, who elected a mayor. When La Maddalena became the major hub of the Sabaudian Navy at the end of the eighteenth century the commander of the fleet assumed direct control of the archipelago.

After the French Revolution, intensified attacks on the Sabaudian state brought the French army to invade Piedmont and the Republic of Genova. In 1799 the Sabaudian court moved from Turin to Cagliari, and Sardinia remained its only possession until the end of the Napoleonic wars. It is in this period that the court decided to reorganize what remained of its Navy and put the command of the exiguous fleet in the hands of Baron Andrea Des Geneys.⁶³ Instead of establishing the fleet in Cagliari, Des Geneys relocated it to La Maddalena, which became the main naval base of the reign until 1815, when it was transferred to Genova, after the reacquisition of Piedmont and the annexation of the former Republic of Genova. While the war between France and Britain raged, the small kingdom of Sardinia decided to maintain a neutral position, but despite its efforts it was hit by the wave of the conflict. France banned from its ports any vessel under the British flag, and therefore for British ships maritime traffics across the

⁶¹ It was Agostino Millelire, Domenico's older brother.

⁶² On this specific topic see Salvatore Sanna, "La Maddalena del bailo Paolo Maria Foassa (1781-1786): da colonia militare a comunità," *Almanacco Maddalenino*, Vol. 4, May 2006: 44-50.

⁶³ Baron Des Geneys is considered one of the fathers of the modern Italian Navy for his important activity during the Napoleonic wars and the first attempt to unify the various naval traditions that composed the pre-unitary naval force of the Kingdom of Sardinia. After the fall of Napoleon, for example, the Republic of Genova and its fleet became part of the Sabaudian Kingdom of Sardinia. The absorption of different codes and traditions entailed a relevant effort of standardization, which reached completion after the unification of Italy under the House of Savoy. One of the first biographies of Des Geneys is the book by Count and Counter Admiral Emilio Prasca, *L'Ammiraglio Giorgio Des Geneys e i suoi tempi: Memorie storico-marinaresche*, (Tipografia Già Chiantore-Mascarelli, 1926). A more recent biographical study of Des Geneys, especially about his relationship with the community of La Maddalena is the book by Giovanna Sotgiu and Alberto Segà, *Un'Isola ed il suo Ammiraglio: Giorgio Andrea Des Geneys e La Maddalena*, (Paolo Sorba Editore, 2008).

Tyrrhenian Sea to North Africa became particularly difficult. The fact that France controlled Corsica exacerbated the problem. Given its strategic position, Lord Nelson advocated the purchase of the archipelago of La Maddalena by the Royal Court.⁶⁴ From the archipelago the British fleet could control the French maritime traffic originating from the naval base of Toulon. When the Reign of Sardinia refused the offer, Nelson asked to anchor its fleet in La Maddalena, where he was stationed between 1803 and 1804, before the fateful battle of Trafalgar.

During the sixteen years during which Des Geneys's fleet was anchored in La Maddalena the ties between the original community of shepherds and the Sabaudian Navy strengthened. The number of Maddalenini enrolled in the naval service of the Sardinian Kingdom also expanded. Serving at sea became the most common career path for the young men from the archipelago.⁶⁵ Also, the local population increased thanks to the developing commerce and the influx of other groups of inhabitants, such as fishermen and coral hunters from different parts of the Italian peninsula, in addition of course to the military personnel.

When Des Geneys and its fleet left La Maddalena for Genova the economy of the archipelago worsened and population growth plateaued. Many Maddalenini continued to serve for the Sabaudian Navy and were absent from their homes for most of the year. In the meantime a small fleet of commercial ships formed for the initiative of local entrepreneurs, who became naval patrons with a discreet success.⁶⁶ After the decree of partitions of 1820, they could invest their gains in purchasing land in the archipelago, which allowed the distribution of agricultural plots and their delimitation for private ownership.⁶⁷ In La Maddalena the distribution of land for the cultivation of vineyards and gardens was practiced already at the end of the 18th century, when the *bailo* established official rules for assigning plots that local residents requested to the

⁶⁴ Marchese, C., "L'Ammiraglio Nelson alla Maddalena e la Marina Sarda di quei tempi", *Rivista Marittima* 35 (4), October 1902: 5-38. For a more detailed historical account of Lord Nelson's presence in Sardinia, see Lucio Artizzu, *Lord Nelson e la Sardegna. Da La Maddalena a Capo Trafalgar: vittoria e morte*, (Edizioni La Torre, 2008). The first author to document the interest of Lord Nelson for the Archipelago of La Maddalena was the English traveller John Warre Tyndale in his three volume diary, *The Island of Sardinia including pictures of the manners and customs of the Sardinians and notes on the antiquities and modern objects*, (Richard Bentley, 1849).

⁶⁵ See in particular Giovanna Sotgiu and Alberto Segà, *Un'Isola ed il suo Ammiraglio: Giorgio Andrea Des Geneys e La Maddalena*, cit., especially chapters 2-3.

⁶⁶ See Giovanna Sotgiu, *La Maddalena e i suoi traffici marittimi*, cit. pp. 37-38.

⁶⁷ The decree emitted by the Sabaudian Court is known as *Editto delle Chiudende* of October 6, 1820. The edict established that the land used for agricultural purposes could be fenced and protected, establishing a regime of private property, which de facto substituted the communal use of agricultural plots. The traditional system of soil use in Sardinia consisted in the alternation of land use for pastoral and agricultural activities, the so-called *viddazzone-paberile*. Also in La Maddalena the system allowed the local community to alternate the use of land for different purposes and the soil available for the cultivation of gardens and vineyards was subdivided and assigned to the families that submitted a request to the community council.

community council.⁶⁸ With the establishment of a regime of private property, Maddalenini with disposable income began purchasing and exchanging land, consolidating their economic position. It is at this point that a local bourgeoisie started to form and became the dominant political force of the archipelago at least until WWII.⁶⁹

Playing on its remote and isolated geographic position, the Sabaudian state also turned La Maddalena into a penal colony and a place of confinement for common outlaws and political prisoners, especially revolutionary leaders who professed constitutional or liberal political ideas. Among the exiled was Vincenzo Sulis, the Sardinian insurrectionist who remained in La Maddalena for fourteen years.⁷⁰ The captives were imprisoned in subterranean cells inside the various forts constructed after the Sabaudian occupation. Condemned for non-political crimes, many were kept under custody inside barracks and forced to construct forts, roads, and embankments. Given the insufficient funds the community could dispose of, prisoners' labor was for many years the main workforce employed for public works in the archipelago. Captives and common criminals were also employed on board of ships as rowers and subordinate laborers. Some of them were given the choice to serve for the army and formed a special battalion called *corpo franco*. La Maddalena hosted these inmates for decades, but not without problems, as testified to by episodes of violence between them and the locals reported in local histories.⁷¹ Local historians who focused on La Maddalena's past as a penal colony give somewhat contradictory accounts. Some assert that the penal colony was officially established and operated for about fifty years, from the end of the 18th century to 1850. Others, citing documents from the historical section of the municipal archive, report that a penal colony was established again in 1864 and counted two hundred convicts in 1881.⁷² What is certain is that forced labor was still employed at the end of the 19th century, when the Navy decided to establish the naval fortress and the arsenal.⁷³ For these expensive and massive constructions external workforce came also

⁶⁸ Giovanna Sotgiu, *Arcipelago di La Maddalena (1839-1843): La divisione delle terre*, (Lo Scoglio Editrice, 2002).

⁶⁹ Giovanna Sotgiu, *La Maddalena e i suoi traffici marittimi*, cit.

⁷⁰ See Giovanna Sotgiu, "Gli ultimi anni di Vincenzo Sulis: L'esilio alla Maddalena," *Almanacco Maddalenino* Vol. 4, May 2006: 51-61.

⁷¹ See, for example, Giovanna Sotgiu, "La Maddalena luogo di prigionia ed esilio," *Almanacco Maddalenino* Vol. 3, November 2004: 77-86. Some of the episodes concerning the violence perpetrated by the *corpo franco* stationed between 1811 and 1813 in La Maddalena was originally reported by Aristide Garelli in his book: 167-174.

⁷² Giovanna Sotgiu, "La Maddalena luogo di prigionia ed esilio," cit. p. 77; Giovanna Sotgiu, *Moneta: Contributo alla studio della comunità maddalenina*, (Tipografia Rossi, 1993), cit. p. 4.

⁷³ Giovanna Sotgiu, *Moneta. Contributo allo studio della comunità maddalenina*, pp. 4, 24.

from the interior of Sardinia and specialized workers arrived from other Italian regions, especially from La Spezia (Liguria), at the time the major Italian naval arsenal.

Throughout the first half of the 19th century the economy stagnated and the population hovered around 2,000 permanent residents. But after 1887 the archipelago underwent a second renaissance. If in 1881 local residents totaled 1,895, by 1901 there were as many as 8,000 residents.⁷⁴ The construction of the naval fortress for the defense of the Tyrrhenian sector and the installation of the military arsenal constituted the most spectacular and massive change to the archipelago since its annexation to the Kingdom of Sardinia. This economic, social, and environmental transformation—which included the erection of large forts and batteries capable of controlling the entire perimeter of the archipelago—transformed La Maddalena into “little Paris,” a phrase used by local residents to compare the favorable living conditions of their ancestors compared to those of the rest of northern Sardinia. Of course, the epithet, frequently used to describe the enviable development experienced on the archipelago until WWII, was relative to the extremely poor conditions of the rest of Sardinia at that time.⁷⁵

After the unification of Italy in 1861, and with the end of the wars of independence against Austria at the beginning of 1870s, the Sardinian archipelago once again became highly strategic. Given the impossibility of reconquering the territories inhabited by Italian speaking majorities under Austrian authority, the Italian government reoriented its foreign policy and in 1882 decided to enter the so-called Triple Alliance with its traditional enemy, Austria-Hungary, as well as Germany. With its continental position stabilized, Italy launched its first colonial ventures into North Africa (especially Tunisia), entering into conflict with French interests. La Maddalena was once again a strategic asset for the containment of French strategies in the Mediterranean. In 1883 a commission appointed by the Ministry of Naval Affairs was sent to La Maddalena to select a location for new fortifications, which would be focused on blocking possible attacks from the Tyrrhenian flank and controlling the maritime traffic from southern France to northern Africa. In addition, a military arsenal would be established for the erection

⁷⁴ The data come from the censuses of the Reign of Italy, reported in Osvaldo Baldacci et Al., *Ricerche sull'arcipelago de La Maddalena*, pp. 302-312.

⁷⁵ After all when the works for the construction of the fortress and the arsenal were underway, La Maddalena was still considered a remote and insalubrious outpost, as testified by an 1889 royal decree, which established a special indemnity for the maritime personnel deployed in the archipelago. A royal decree in 1889 established that: “To the other insalubrious and remote localities indicated in the cited decree, another will be added: La Maddalena (island in the province of Sassari), site of the maritime compartment [of the Italian Navy].” Article 1, *Regio Decreto 15 Gennaio 1889*, published in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia*, February 9, 1889, n. 32.

and maintenance of the defensive structures and for the repair of ships and military equipment.⁷⁶

Construction was completed in about two decades but the organization of military structures was repeatedly changed to match new strategic needs and technological updates. The military arsenal began its activity in 1891 with a small contingent of specialized workers coming from the arsenal of La Spezia. They instructed and directed a large number of forced laborers from the penal colony. The local community complained that such a massive use of convicted men deprived the Maddalenini of their opportunities of employment. Already in 1893 a group of 48 locals undersigned a letter to the King lamenting that: “For the construction works, instead of [employing] the sons of this community, who have fought for the Italian independence, and the honest workers, employment is given to those who are excluded from society and condemned to a life sentence.”⁷⁷

1.3. The Arsenal: Forging Local Identity

In 1910 more than 300 workers were employed in the arsenal: 117 were civilian and 200 were forced laborers. With the closure of the penal colony in the same year, local laborers were employed along with other specialized workers from the mainland. Work conditions were harsh. Many locals were hired on a daily basis, but the typical contract was for six months or one year. In part, this was due to the fact that the activities of the arsenal were discontinuous and followed the work cycles of constructions and repairs. With the involvement of Fascist Italy in the Spanish Civil War, the importance of the arsenal increased, especially for its assistance to submarines. In 1935 there were 10 permanent workers and employees, all from La Maddalena, 110 temporary workers, and 126 workers hired on a daily basis.⁷⁸ With the expansion of the arsenal’s activities and the construction of new barracks for the sailors, the southeastern part of La Maddalena was completely transformed. The plots of land once used for the cultivation of local gardens were almost all expropriated. The new military citadel became the house of hundreds of workers coming from different regions of Italy. They spoke different languages, and their interactions with long-term residents were infrequent. Although La Maddalena is a small island, the new quarter of “Moneta” was quite isolated from the urban center of Cala Gavetta.

⁷⁶ See Salvatore Sanna, “Il centenario di Marisardegna,” *Rivista Marittima*, Vol. 76, October 1993: 101-108.

⁷⁷ Cited in Giovanna Sotgiu, *Moneta. Contributo allo studio della comunità maddalenina*, p. 5.

⁷⁸ In 1935 there were 10 permanent workers and employees, all from La Maddalena, 110 temporary workers, and 126 hired on a daily basis Giovanna Sotgiu, *Moneta*, cit. p. 26-27.



Figure 1.4. Map of the Island of La Maddalena

The entrance of the military citadel was guarded. Only military personnel and workers could access the arsenal and the barracks. Two or more *carabinieri* (military policemen) presided over the arsenal, and each worker had to present a document of identification. Sometimes, workers were randomly selected at the exit for a supplementary inspection to make sure that they did not steal equipment or material. The children of the Maddalenini referred to the sons and daughters of the *arsenalotti* from Liguria with the derogatory term *mighelò*, because of their “funny accent.”⁷⁹

⁷⁹ *Arsenalotto* is the term commonly used in La Maddalena for “worker of the arsenal.” Tonino Conti told me that the term *mighelò* identified the workers from Liguria because of their accent. “Mi gh’è l’ho” literally means “I have it.” Personal interview with the author, La Maddalena, July 2010. Tonino (Antonio) Conti is a very popular figure in La Maddalena. He started to work on the Military Arsenal when he was 15. During the WWII he served on board of submarines as a specialized technician. After the end of the war, the military arsenal continued its activity, although with severe restrictions imposed by the Peace treaties: weapons were banished from production. From then on, the *arsenalotti* (workers of the arsenal) spent their expertise on restoring military boats and on other mercantile ships. Conti retired from the arsenal in the mid 1980s after thirty years spent as director of the arsenal’s school for workers. He is not only one of the living memories of La Maddalena. Conti spends his free time writing books on the dialect of the island and poetry, and is an active member of CoRiSMa (see 1.4.).



Figure 1.5. Aerial view of the military arsenal ⁸⁰

The sanitary conditions at Moneta were not good. Only a few houses, those constructed adjacent to the walls of the arsenal, were equipped with sanitary services, electricity, or running water. The precarious conditions of the arsenal workers and their families led them to build networks of solidarity, which sometimes helped to overcome linguistic and cultural differences. A mutual aid society was founded already in 1896, which provided workers with discounted food and organized evening recreational activities for the families.

The precarious and discontinuous work conditions inside the arsenal were not appealing to local residents with alternative opportunities. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, on the opposite, southwestern side of La Maddalena, in an area called Cala Francese, granite extraction offered a source of income to a few hundred men, including professional *scalpellini* (stone cutters) from other regions of Sardinia and Italy.⁸¹ During the 1930s, when the export of granite reached its peak, the quarry of Cava Francese served companies with big commissions

⁸⁰ Reproduced from Giovanna Sotgiu, *Moneta*, cit. p 25. Courtesy of Francesco Sanna and Giovanna Sotgiu.

⁸¹ The toponym “Cala Francese” (literally, French Cove) changed with time into “Cava Francese” (literally French mine) because of the extractive industry. See Giovanna Sotgiu, *A memoria d’a pietra: l’arcipelago e il suo granito*, (J. Webber Editore, 2006).

for international public works, such as the Dam of Aswan in Egypt.”⁸² When the granite business declined during WWII, the arsenal became the only source of formal employment on the island outside of government, but many *scalpellini* were reluctant to seek work there. Some of them, especially those from Tuscany, were anarchist or socialist and did not want to work for the military.

During the war, the activity of the arsenal increased, and so did its personnel. The number of warships stationed in the archipelago was always between 15 and 30. Some of them were there for routine repair and refit; others were ready to be deployed in war scenarios. On March 1941 the first course for apprentice arsenal workers started, followed by more classes in 1942, 1943, and 1945 for a total of 243 new workers. These were definitely important numbers for the archipelago. Because of its strategic importance, the allies targeted and bombed the arsenal in 1942, partially destroying the installation, which was forced to reduce its activities by 1943.



Figure 1.6. First Class of the School for Arsenal Apprentice Workers (1941)⁸³

After the war, the peace treaties of 1947 thwarted Italy’s international status (as cobelligerent with Germany until 1943). France, in particular, insisted that all Italian military

⁸² Tonino Conti, personal interview with the author, La Maddalena, July 2010. Tonino Conti’s father, Domenico, was a *scalpellino* at Cava Francese until the mid 1930s, when the Fascists took his passport and prohibited him to go abroad. Conti was an anarchist, like many *scalpellini*, especially those coming from Tuscany when radical political traditions were stronger.

⁸³ Reproduced from Giovanna Sotgiu, *Moneta*, cit. p. 38. Courtesy of Giovanna Sotgiu.

infrastructures be removed and relocated at least at a distance of 30 kilometers from its borders. This provision penalized La Maddalena in particular, given its immediate proximity to Corsica. The end of the military fortress seemed near. But when Italy was admitted to NATO in 1949, the destiny of the archipelago took a fresh course. The arsenal was not decommissioned but without an industrial plan it barely survived. Its personnel were employed in the works for the removal of big artillery posts built during WWII and for the disarmament of the numerous mines installed to protect the access of the archipelago.⁸⁴ Only in 1956 the school for the arsenal apprentice workers reopened. Between 1956 and 1990, the year of its definitive closure, the school formed 780 apprentices, a strong reservoir of specialized technical knowledge and craftsmanship.⁸⁵ Each apprentice attended practical and theoretical courses for three years, before being hired inside the different workshops of the arsenal. There were electricians, blacksmiths, turners, designers, smelters, and mechanics. The number of local personnel employed inside the military plant went back to the level of the war period. In 1970 it amounted to a thousand units, including military personnel and civilians. The Italian Navy School also expanded. In 1951 an important contingent of the *Scuole C.E.M.M.* (Corpi Equipaggi Militari Marittimi)—the equivalent of the U.S. Navy boot camp—was transferred to La Maddalena, which each year hosted between 200 and 300 new recruits. With the closure of the granite quarries and the expansion of the military-industrial sector, the arsenal became the center of La Maddalena's economy, and politics.

The presence of a larger contingent of workers in the archipelago favored the organization of unions and political parties after the war. Even inside the highly regulated military arsenal, socialists and communists found ways to organize and express their political ideas. During the 1950s both *arsenalotti* and employees became active members of political organizations and elected municipal councilors. The ascendance of this new political class diminished the centrality of the local bourgeoisie and harshened the conflict between leftist parties and Christian Democrats. Similar to the rest of Italy, the Cold War conditioned local political dynamics and the ideological divide between East and West reverberated through the archipelago. In 1952 a coalition between the Italian Communist Party (PCI), the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), and an independent list supported by the local freemasons (particularly strong in the archipelago because of the legacy of Giuseppe Garibaldi) conquered the majority of the votes in

⁸⁴ Francesco Nardini, "C'era una volta l'arsenale," *Almanacco Gallurese 2005/06*, pp. 239-243.

⁸⁵ Giovanna Sotgiu, *Moneta*, cit. p. 40.

the municipal elections.⁸⁶ United by common anti-clerical and secular positions, the unusual coalition represented a menace for the political control of the Italian Navy. The Christian Democrats, excluded from the local administration after the victorious elections of 1947 and 1948, started to reorganize with the help of the local Catholic Church. Between 1952 and 1956 the Italian Navy command gave its decisive contribution to reestablish the desired order. Anti-Communism was also strong in Italy, where big companies like FIAT began to expel “the reds” from their factories. Similar expulsions took place inside public industries, especially those connected with the Ministry of Defense. The arsenal of La Maddalena did not escape the purges. The strategy was clear: it was necessary to decapitate the leftist organizations and undermine their political appeal to ensure acquiescence.

The representation of workers and employees inside the arsenal was delegated to an elected internal committee, which reflected the different union affiliations of the personnel. The first action of the military hierarchies was to thwart the political representation of socialist and communists inside the workshops. Twelve workers were fired in 1952 without a formal explanation, but they were all leftist political activists.⁸⁷ In the meantime, the newly elected municipal administration became unstable because the moderate component started to take more and more distance from its leftist allies. In 1953 new elections were held. This time the Christian Democrats won with a large majority and established their long-lasting political supremacy on the archipelago.⁸⁸ The work of the conservative sectors of La Maddalena was not yet finished. In 1956 a new wave of purges decapitated the leadership of the local Communist Party and the CGIL (Confederazione Generale Italiana dei Lavoratori—the union close to the Communist Party) including important elected municipal councilors, such as Pietro Balzano.⁸⁹

These episodes of discrimination against socialists and communists inside the arsenal epitomized a coordinated political strategy to regain control over a militarized place like La Maddalena. Inspired by the McCarthyist “red scare” the Ministry of Defense and the Italian Navy enacted their political goals thanks to the collaboration of a capillary security network,

⁸⁶ Salvatore Abate and Francesco Nardini, *Il pane del governo: La Maddalena 1946-1956*, (Paolo Sorba Editore, 2010), p. 80.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 93-130.

⁸⁸ La Maddalena elected a leftist administration again only in 1997, when former Senator Mario Birardi became mayor.

⁸⁹ Another important figure of the local Communist Party and elected city councilor, Augusto Morelli, had already been fired in 1952. *Ibidem*, pp. 189-210.

involving the military police, the local *carabinieri*, the Catholic church, and internal informers. The Cold War was underway in La Maddalena well before the arrival of the U.S. Navy.

1.4. The Production of History and the Military Ethos of the Archipelago

Maddalena Rossi, “Signora Nena,” owns a copy shop and a typography inherited from her father. The quaint shop is located near the church of Santa Maria Maddalena, in one of the central squares of Cala Gavetta. Inside that shop I spent several hours a day making copies of archival material. My interactions with Signora Nena and her family became constant and more informal, to the point that she was introducing me to each client who entered her shop’s door. Everybody around the square became aware of my research interest and of the reasons for my presence in the archipelago. It became common and natural for her clients and family members to ask me what I thought of La Maddalena. But I realized that their preliminary inquiry was often a polite way to engage in a conversation that allowed them to express their views on the U.S. military presence and about the Italian Navy installations on the island. What struck me at first was the frequency of the following statement: “La Maddalena was built by the Navy. We have family members and friends who work for the Italian Navy or worked for the Americans in the last thirty-five years. We do not have anything against them. How can we be against ourselves? The only ones who complain are those who did not have any economic advantage from the presence of the Americans. But there are also those who rented their houses to Americans and still complain, only for political reasons.”

I herd this narrative—which connects positive attitudes towards the U.S. Navy base with the long military history of La Maddalena—was present in every conversation I had with local residents, even those who clearly disliked it. In what follows I argue that this robust sense of identification with the military past of the archipelago is reproduced in local historiographies, which play an important role in public debates about the future of La Maddalena. To show how this process of cultural reproduction works I will illustrate some examples of the connections between current and past historiographies of La Maddalena and will draw some conclusions based on a round table with local historians I organized during one of my research trips.

Until the massive study conducted by Osvaldo Baldacci and his team for the Geographic Society of Italy in 1961, the historiography of La Maddalena crystallized around a stable set of

interpretations about the development of the archipelago as a strategic naval fortress.⁹⁰ Thus, even Baldacci et al., when reconstructing the development of La Maddalena in the past two centuries, relied upon a core set of histories written prior to World War II. Dominant authors of histories concerning the archipelago include Aristide Garelli, Emilio Prasca, Raffaele Ciasca, and Ersilio Michel. In particular, they focused their archival research on the occupation of 1767 and on the “glorious” battle against “Napoleon’s assault” in 1793. Their books and articles have been highly influential and amply cited in later works, such as the work of Carlino Sole, and more recently in numerous publications by professional and local historians from La Maddalena.

Although the authors of these historiographies had different purposes in mind and wrote for different audiences, their projects became part of a body of literature whose features cohere around three main axes: the military occupation of 1767 and the following fortification of the archipelago; the “glorious defense” of the inhabitants of La Maddalena, with the help of the Sardinian troops, against the assault of the “Gallo-Corsicans” guided by Napoleon in 1793; and the development of the urban center of La Maddalena and its transformation into one of the most important maritime fortresses of the Mediterranean during the nineteenth century.

Another relevant feature of this historiographical tradition is the lack of investigation into events preceding the military occupation of 1767.⁹¹ Exceptions to this rule were made only when accounts of the previous history of the place served to underline the benefits of the Sabaudian occupation. In the most cited history of La Maddalena, published in 1907, Admiral Aristide Garelli, who at the time was commander of the fortress of La Maddalena, describes the first military expeditions planned by the Sabaudian court between 1729 and 1765. Garelli underlines the importance of these explorations: “With these provisions, whose impact had important effects in the following years, the history of our maritime outpost in La Maddalena starts.”⁹² With this statement Garelli carves in stone the birthday of La Maddalena as coinciding with the military occupation of the Piedmontese troops. In this way, he not only establishes a hierarchy of events and narratives for the history making of La Maddalena, but also incorporates the history of La Maddalena within the history of the colonial administration of Sardinia. According to his account, La Maddalena began its life only with military occupation.

⁹⁰ Osvaldo Baldacci et al, *Ricerche sull’arcipelago de La Maddalena*, 1961, cit.

⁹¹ This gap has been addressed by a recent study of Salvatore Sanna, *Il popolamento dell’Arcipelago Maddalenino prima dei Savoia (1650-1767)*, (Paolo Sorba Editore, 2014).

⁹² Aristide Garelli, *La Maddalena*, 1907, cit. p. 10.

But how was life before the military conquest? All the authors I consider here mention the conditions of the archipelago before the arrival of the Sabaudian army, but their assessments are scarcely documented and serve only as a relief for magnifying the virtues of military conquest. In an article published in 1928 in the journal *Archivio Storico di Corsica*, Raffaele Ciasca, summarized his intervention in the following way: “[A few years after the military occupation of the Sabaudian troops], the population was flourishing on that island [La Maddalena], that a few years earlier offered scarce living conditions and only a few Corsican shepherds.”⁹³ Consider another example from Garelli’s text:

In a few years, the descent [of the shepherds] to the coast was accomplished; on August 1779 the inhabitants of La Maddalena, [in] the burgh [built] on the coast [called] in Cala Gavetta, start a petition to the King of Sardinia for obtaining the construction of a new church at the center of the village and a few month later the civilian administration of La Maddalena was at work. The administrative committee comprised Antonio Ornano, Pietro Coliolo, Antonio Variano (first major of the village), and two more counselors, of which one was Ignazio Serra from the island of Caprera.⁹⁴

Throughout this passage, Garelli describes the transformation of a small group of Corsican shepherds, now worthy of being called by name, into civilized citizens as a *fait accompli*. But how was it possible that only after thirteen years of military occupation, the Sabaudian troops were able to build a small urban center, uproot the Corsican shepherds’ habits, and change their way of life in such a visible way, without any form of extreme coercion? What is missing in Garelli’s account is the point of view of those who were submitted to the Sabaudian domination. Their voices are erased from history or reported as irrelevant in these texts.

The narrative holes concerning the reactions of the Corsican shepherds to the Sabaudian authorities establish a temporal hierarchy. In these historical accounts only one temporality exists: it coincides with the plans and deeds of the Sabaudian officers. Through his narrative Garelli represents the conquest of La Maddalena as part and parcel of Sabaudian state-building, a teleological progression toward the achievement of a better future for the conquered, who are justly incorporated into the civilizing project of the colonizers. In Garelli’s narration nothing exists outside of Sabaudian rationality, which brings order into a place previously inhabited by semi-nomadic, uncivilized groups of shepherds. Their opposition to the military occupation, dismissed as a form of political infancy, is described as an irrelevant detail in light of the

⁹³ Raffaele Ciasca, “Corsi colonizzatori,” 1928, cit. p. 231.

⁹⁴ Aristide Garelli, 1907, cit. p. 102.

powerful advent of the history that matters. Overall, these narratives establish a historical relationship between the military presence and the improvement of the living conditions of La Maddalena. In other words, militarization is equated to civilization.

This historical interpretation has had an important influence on local historiographical production. Moreover, the texts produced by Admiral Garelli and others are commonly cited as reliable sources for the reconstruction of the archipelago's past. This does not mean that every professional and local historian interested in the history of La Maddalena simply incorporates or accepts this body of historiography uncritically. It would be inaccurate and unfair to argue that local historians reproduce the narratives of Garelli and colleagues. For one, recent historical production has finally given voice to local protagonists and has focused more on the civilian community and its everyday life. Local historiographies examine episodes of violence, the conditions of the convicted in the penal colony and the forced laborers, and the economic strains and uncertainties related to the military strategies of the central government, which could have changed and drastically impacted the living conditions of the community (what happened during the 1990s). Local historians also underline that La Maddalena's economy, although deeply influenced by the military presence, was not completely dependent on it. For example, Giovanna Sotgiu's study of the local granite mines and the social organization of the *scalpellini* complements in important ways previous labor histories of the archipelago.⁹⁵ Salvatore Abate and Francesco Nardini's book on the political struggles inside the military arsenal during the first half of the 1950s opened an important debate about the impact of the Cold War on local politics in a militarized place like La Maddalena.⁹⁶ Finally, it is worth mentioning two recent books on the history of the U.S. Navy base. The first, *La base atomica di La Maddalena-Santo Stefano dall'inizio alla fine*, by Salvatore Sanna, presents the perspective of the anti-base activist on the negative impacts of the American presence on the archipelago, including the political struggles against the risks of radiocontamination and the more recent polemics about the project for the doubling of the base, before the announcement of its decommissioning.⁹⁷ On the opposite side of the political spectrum, Francesco Nardini's book, *L'imbroglione nucleare*, argues that the risk of

⁹⁵ Giovanna Sotgiu, *A Mimoria d'a Petra*, cit.

⁹⁶ Salvatore Abate and Francesco Nardini, *Il pane del governo*, cit.

⁹⁷ Salvatore Sanna, *La base atomica di La Maddalena-Santo Stefano dall'inizio alla fine*, (Paolo Sorba Editore, 2008).

radiocontamination was not a real problem but has been used instrumentally by a vast anti-base front to evict the submarine installation.⁹⁸

The complexity of these complementary and conflicting political and intellectual projects should not be underestimated. Also highly relevant are the dissenting voices of the archipelago's citizens, which denounce the economic limits and the social and environmental distortions of the military presence.⁹⁹ Nonetheless, we cannot overlook the deep influence that traditional narratives about the military legacy of the archipelago continue to have both on current local history production and the common sense of the long-term residents of La Maddalena. I will illustrate this through an example and a long interview with some local historians.

On December 2, 2009 the Italian Navy School (Mariscuola) of La Maddalena, with the support of other local and national institutions, organized a conference to celebrate the 60th anniversary of its foundation.¹⁰⁰ The topic chosen for the occasion was “The Archipelago of La Maddalena and the Italian Navy.” According to the conference abstract, the event was intended to discuss the reasons for, and the consequences of, the military presence in the archipelago since the late eighteenth century. This is the conference abstract published in the regional newspapers reporting on the event:

History says that the Navy has established its presence on the Archipelago for several centuries and that the history of these islands is linked to the history of the military presence (first the Sabaudian Navy, then the Royal Navy, and last the Italian Navy). With the help of qualified experts, this conference aims to illustrate the historical, cultural, economic, and social reasons for this close relationship. When on October 14th 1767 the first Sardinian-Piedmontese soldiers disembarked to take possession of the “Isole

⁹⁸ Francesco Nardini, *L'imbroglione nucleare. La Maddalena 1972-2005*, J. Webber Editore, Sassari, 2010.

⁹⁹ One example is the locally produced film *Benvenuti!* (see above). “Other histories” of La Maddalena exist, but they do not necessarily appear in the form of historiographies. Another example is *La canzona dell'isolanu*, a satirical poem written by Adriano Tovo, screenwriter and co-director of *Benvenuti!* It describes the history of La Maddalena starting before the occupation of the Piedmontese army of 1767. The poem presents an alternative narrative of the events as recounted by the official historiographies of the archipelago. In particular, the author offers a critical reading of the military presence on the island, interpreted as an act of conquest rather than a civilizing moment. The main theme of the poem, as it unfolds through the description of crucial events, is the power relations between the weak and innocent Corsican shepherds and the forces of domination embodied by the Republic of Genova, the Turkish pirates, the Piedmontese state, Giuseppe Garibaldi, Benito Mussolini, the Christian Democrats, and the U.S. Tovo represents the Maddaleni as victims of political and military machinations orchestrated by powerful entities and historical figures and unable to make their own destiny, both for incapacity and for the fact that the powerful finds always a way to impose his will on the weak. Other examples of critical views and alternative interpretations of the military past of the archipelago will appear in later chapters (See Chapter 6).

¹⁰⁰ “La Maddalena e la Marina, storia secolare”, *La Nuova Sardegna*, December 1, 2009 (http://ricerca.gelocal.it/lanuovasardegna/archivio/lanuovasardegna/2009/12/01/SGGPO_SGG06.html); “Oggi al Longobardo Convegno sulla Maddalena e la Marina Militare”, *Gallura Informazione*, December 2, 2009 (<http://www.gallurainformazione.it/index.php/domani-al-longobardo-convegno-su-la-maddalena-e-la-marina-militare/>).

Intermedie” in the name of the King of Sardinia, they found only a few families living here. They could not even imagine that, after a few decades, figures like Napoleon Bonaparte, Horatio Nelson, and Giuseppe Garibaldi would navigate the waters of the Archipelago. At the beginning of the 19th century, the population of the small village reached 2000 persons. A further increase happened at the end of the 19th century, when the number of inhabitants rose from 2,000 to 10,000 in only thirty years. What happened in the meantime to justify this extraordinary demographic development? And what role did the state, and in particular the Navy play? The conference will try to answer these and other questions.¹⁰¹

Conference speakers included Giovanna Sotgiu, a retired schoolteacher at the local classic lyceum, and Alberto Segà, a retired Navy Captain living in La Maddalena.¹⁰² They are both members of an organized group of historians called CoRiSMa (Comitato per le Ricerche Storiche Maddalenine).¹⁰³ Since the mid-1990s the historians of CoRiSMa have written more than fifty books and numerous articles in local magazines and annual reviews, all published by Paolo Sorba, also from La Maddalena. Mr. Sorba owns two bookshops in the archipelago and several more in Olbia and Palau. His activity has expanded almost in parallel with the formation of CoRiSMa. Their collaboration is now stable and frequent, also thanks to the publication of a yearly historical bulletin called *Almanacco Maddalenino*. The topics of the books can be regrouped into conventional historical genres. Usually they are examples of political, labor, and military history, which aim at reconstructing the past of the archipelago through the use of primary archival sources. These local historians do not investigate “their past” in isolation from national and international history, though. La Maddalena has been at the center of strategic struggles between imperial powers, such as France and Great Britain, for the control of the Mediterranean Sea. Moreover, the 1767 military occupation by the Sabaudian Navy and the presence of Giuseppe Garibaldi (the Italian national hero who ‘conquered’ Southern Italy in 1860) starting in the mid 19th century, make local history relevant to national and European history.

¹⁰¹ *La Nuova Sardegna*, December 1, 2009, p. 7 (my translation).

¹⁰² Attached to the ad was also the schedule of the conference. These are the themes and the speakers: 1) “La Maddalena and the Sabaudian Navy,” Navy Captain Andrea Liorsi, Director of graduate studies, Institute of Maritime Military Studies, Venice. 2) “The Strategic importance of La Maddalena in the second half of the 19th century,” Doctor Francesco Zampieri, associate researcher, Institute of Maritime Military Studies, Venice. 3) “La Maddalena, its inhabitants and the Navy from 1767 to 1848,” Navy Captain Alberto Segà, citizen of La Maddalena, Cultore di studi storici (lay historian). 4) “La Maddalena, its inhabitants and the Navy from 1887 to WWI,” Prof. Giovanna Sotgiu, citizen of La Maddalena, Cultrice di studi storici (lay historian). Giovanna Sotgiu is retired schoolteacher and Alberto Segà is a retired Navy Captain. They both live in La Maddalena and are active members of the local Committee for the Historical Studies of La Maddalena.

¹⁰³ CoRiSMa can be translated as Committee for Historical Researches on La Maddalena.

Prof. Sotgiu and Captain Sega participate in public conferences on the history of the archipelago and do so in a professional-like form. Despite their lack of formal historical training, they acquired the status of “qualified experts” and are recognized as public intellectuals and authoritative history-makers. Moreover they have institutionalized their research activities and public interventions, publishing their works frequently and with the same publisher. CoRiSMa members assist each other with archival research, and plan future activities, assessing how to address historiographical gaps or to analyze new archival material they come across.

During my fieldwork I organized a round table with some of these historians in order to better understand the scope of their activity and the meaning they attached to their research.¹⁰⁴ Professor Giovanna Sotgiu is one of the most productive and renowned members of CoRiSMa. During our roundtable she was the spoke person of the group:

The committee was founded in the mid-1990s by a group of Maddalenini with a strong interest in the history of their land. We wanted to change the way in which the history of La Maddalena had been written for many years before the birth of CoRiSMa. In particular we did not like that certain local historians tended to prefigure the results of their research before actually going to the archives. In sum, certain people wanted to write history with the idea of finding confirmations about their preconceptions. Sometimes, I would say, they twisted the documents and altered them in order to make them conform to their theses. And this we found inappropriate and methodologically wrong. Our first goal, thus, was to write about small things, events, historical figures, but always on the basis of solid evidence provided by documents. We wanted to work seriously and go to the archives. From that moment on, we produced quite a lot and covered almost all the fundamental areas of the history of our community.¹⁰⁵

A few elements emerging from the improvised roundtable bear underlining here. First, the local community of “lay historians”—as they like to define themselves—working under the auspices of the CoRiSMa strongly emphasize that they are not professional historians. They work outside academia, but are fully aware of the main historiographical currents that dealt with the history of their archipelago and more broadly with Sardinia. Their critical approach to previous historiographies touches also the production of established national scholars when they “write in a superficial way about what happened in this place and do not make an effort to consult the archives.” The members of the CoRiSMa establish their authority by emphasizing that they do history on the basis of documented archival evidence. According to them, sound and reliable historical knowledge can be produced primarily through the consultation of authentic documents.

¹⁰⁴ It may be literally translated as “Committee for the Historical Researches on La Maddalena.”

¹⁰⁵ Interview with the author, La Maddalena, July 2009. By that date CoRiSMa was composed by twelve members.

They strongly contrapose their research of the “authentic past” to the “heterodox practices” of some other historians in La Maddalena whom Professor Sotgiu clearly accuses of having misinterpreted the documents in order to sustain pre-conceived theses.¹⁰⁶ In so doing, CoRiSMa not only establishes a canon for history writing, but also assumes the role of guardian of the correct historical methodology, which only assures the veracity of historical work. From this point of view, it is clear that the activity of CoRiSMa takes place in a contested arena where different narratives and ways of producing historical knowledge are present.

Because of their focus on archival research, CoRiSMa historians travelled a lot, also outside of Italy. Time and resources are necessary for their research activities. Travels from La Maddalena to Sassari, Cagliari, Torino, Paris trace the visible routes of their historical investigations, which allow them to incorporate the ‘micro-histories’ of La Maddalena into the broader scope of national historical events and cross-national historiographies. Historians of CoRiSMa have some common characteristics. This nucleus of history-makers includes mostly retired teachers, former navy servicemen, a former senator, and other local intellectuals. Some have been involved in the local administration, serving as mayors, *assessori*, municipal councilors, and high-rank bureaucrats. Historical research is only one of their many activities and should not be analyzed in isolation from the totality of their social commitments within and outside their community. CoRiSMa members like Giovanna Sotgiu and Alberto Segà, who have written several books together, participate to public events and conferences as “qualified experts.” Being a teacher in the local lyceum, as in the case with Giovanna Sotgiu, or a well-respected Navy Captain, as with Alberto Segà, or a former senator of the Republic, as with Mario Birardi (another member of the CoRiSMa), is a source of social capital. By observing their interactions with other members of their community, I realized that local historians are respected public intellectuals, regardless of their research activity. When they walk inside public places or private shops they are regarded with deference. It is in this multiplicity of social relations that they are able to establish their authority as public figures performing a pedagogical function: “We do history mostly for our community. In many ways we think that understanding our past may help us envision the solutions for the problems we have ahead of us. Knowing ourselves is important in order to understand who we were, who we want to be, and what we

¹⁰⁶ I omitted their names upon Prof. Sotgiu’s request.

want to do in the future.” CoRiSMa historians produce research on La Maddalena, from La Maddalena, and for La Maddalena:

We do history for reclaiming with pride our own identity. Especially in this period of crisis, with an extremely important part of our history that has been dismantled [the military arsenal], we need to rediscover our dignity and our value. Our ancestors did important things, both for the local community and for the nation. We want to remind ourselves of this, especially in a moment where everything looks negative and almost impossible to overcome.¹⁰⁷

Making history, thus, is a way to retrieve energies for facing an uncertain future and to reiterate a sense of identity that is eroded by the disappearance of important constitutive elements of the local identity. Since the early 1990s the Italian Navy has started a process of relocation of its strategic positions in the Tyrrhenian Sea. Many offices and the Admiral Head Quarter of Marisardegna (the Sardinian branch of the Italian Navy) have been moved from La Maddalena to Cagliari, the capitol of Sardinia. At the end of the 1990s, after a century of activity characterized by booms and busts, the military arsenal of La Maddalena eventually shut down. At the peak of this process, in 2008, the U.S. Navy also left La Maddalena. In the last twenty years, the military presence in the archipelago was drastically reduced, which altered not only the economic situation but also provoked a sense of loss for a population whose life has always revolved around the military industry. For CoRiSMa historians writing about the past of their community is a way to make an intervention on the ongoing debate about the future of La Maddalena. CoRiSMa historians collectively set their research agenda. They make choices about the areas of La Maddalena’s history that need to be further explored. This is not only an organizational practice; it involves political assessments of the importance of events that are worth investigating and those that can be left aside.

Giovanna Sotgiu argues that the committee aims to produce more complex accounts, which add texture to the histories that Garelli and others re-constructed. The limits of Garelli’s work, according to her, do not concern the erasures that I underlined above. Rather, they reside in the fact that Garelli and colleagues did not consider other archival sources: “These authors, especially Garelli, are fundamental because they allowed the Maddalenini to know their history. Garelli devoted his energies to research the past of a place that he loved. He became honorary citizen of La Maddalena. The work of these historians is also very important because it is based

¹⁰⁷ Ibidem.

on archival documents. This makes it solid and reliable. Maybe, the only limit we can find in their work is that they did not have the possibility to look at other archival resources. We are trying to add more evidence and complexity to the historiographical work of Garelli and others.”

When explaining their attitudes towards the U.S. base several Maddalenini made an explicit reference to the island’s past, to the strong connection between the identity of the place and the military influence upon it. The military element, from this point of view, is a natural and integral part of the daily life of the place. At the same time, this hegemonic narrative implies an automatic dismissal of any alternative point of view as ideological—that is, political or derogatory—or based upon personal exclusions from the economic benefits of the military presence, as illustrated by these kinds of statements: “Only those who did not have any advantage from the military presence complain” or “They rented their apartments to the Americans and still complained for political reasons,” which is a way of accusing the protestors of being hypocritical.

During my roundtable with CoRiSMa historians I posed a question concerning the U.S. Navy base. I could not miss the opportunity to inquire into the attitudes of that composite group of local intellectuals. Very different positions emerged: former Italian Navy servicemen were in general more sympathetic towards the Americans than other members of the CoRiSMa like, for example, former senator Mario Birardi:

During the early seventies, when the Americans came to La Maddalena, I was the secretary of the Communist Party of Sardinia. Of course I opposed that presence like my own party and we organized several protests here in La Maddalena. The Maddalenini were not easy to involve. They showed a certain apathy. Most of the protestors came from outside. At that time, the U.S. base became the symbol of the U.S. imperialism.

The discussion became heated. Giovanna Sotgiu brought some order, interrupting the flow of overlapping statements about the meaning of the U.S. arrival. She admitted that the U.S. military presence is still a controversial event in the history of La Maddalena, and it is so recent that the committee decided to exclude this topic from its research agenda:

We decided that our researches would not deal with the U.S. military presence. This point of our recent past is still too controversial to be explored with the necessary detachment. Only one of us, Salvatore Sanna, wrote two books on this topic, but we prefer to leave it to the single individuals, if they want to pursue this research interest. As a collective institution we prefer not to engage with such a controversial topic. We recently decided to work on a commented chronology of the archipelago, but we are going to do it until 1972, the date of the arrival of the Americans.

This episode shows that within the group of historians there exist different attitudes about more controversial historical events. In order to avoid the emergence of fractures, CoRiSMa members collectively decided to leave out of their research activity those topics that may be divisive. But what kind of consequences does this approach have on the production of local history? It is clear that, by selecting their research agenda, CoRiSMa historians make a political judgment about which events are going to be narrated and which are not. This, of course, does not prevent anybody else from writing about the U.S. military base. Indeed, one of the members of the CoRiSMa, Salvatore Sanna, wrote two books on this topic. What is clear, though, is that for this group of local historians controversial matters should be treated outside the institutional mission of the committee. The exclusion of the U.S. Navy base from CoRiSMa's institutional activity, however, should not be interpreted—in a functionalist way—as an attempt to preserve the integrity of the group, but rather as a choice that reflect the pedagogical mission of CoRiSMa historians: history-making is oriented towards the re-discovery of the community's identity. In a moment of socio-economic crisis in which important symbols of that identity are fading away, CoRiSMa members privilege the unifying elements of the archipelago's past.

1.5. Not a Fleet Town: The U.S. Navy in La Maddalena

While La Maddalena shares features with other cases explored by this literature, there are important differences as well. Like other military outposts, La Maddalena had a colonial history, which started after the occupation by the Kingdom of Sardinia in the second half of the 18th century. But the local community has incorporated its colonial background and military legacy by metabolizing and transforming it into a salient aspect of communal identity. In 1972 the U.S. Navy was inserted into a socio-economic context forged by a century of Italian military presence.

Those familiar with more typical American fleet towns—such as Okinawa (Japan), Rota (Spain), or the Portuguese Azores—with fast-food chain restaurants and a self-contained military structure, guarded and secured from the external environment, would find these features lacking in La Maddalena.¹⁰⁸ The submarine base located on the eastern coast of the Island of Santo Stefano faced the Italian military arsenal and was only accessible to authorized military or

¹⁰⁸ An interesting term of comparison with U.S. military basing strategies and practices overseas is the book by Mark L. Gillen, *America Town: Building the Outpost of Empire*, (University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

civilian personnel. But the social life of the U.S. personnel and the headquarters of the Naval Support Activity (NSA) command were deeply integrated into the local community. Because the major island of La Maddalena did not offer enough housing options, the U.S. Navy established an office through which locals could list their offers across the northern coast of Sardinia, from the towns of Palau and Arzachena to Santa Teresa di Gallura. The end result was that the military personnel working on the base lived throughout the archipelago and northern Sardinia—rather than in barracks. As a result, they were more integrated into local life than in other US military base settings abroad. The U.S. Navy’s command of La Maddalena established its headquarters inside a central compound on La Maddalena, named “the Mordini compound” after the family who owned it (Figure 1.7.).



Figure 1.7. Map of the U.S. Navy structures and compounds in La Maddalena and Santo Stefano¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Source: NSA La Maddalena - U.S. NAVY, 2008.

The building is right next to the Italian Navy Admiral Command, the “Ammiragliato,” in Piazza Umberto I. Several U.S. Navy personnel I interviewed told me that it was quite an unusual arrangement: “Nowhere like in La Maddalena we could leave our kids playing in the central square while drinking a beer or a coffee. We spent a lot of time in Cala Gavetta because we became in some sense part of the local community.”¹¹⁰

The central square virtually separates the civilian part of the island from military citadel constructed at the end of the nineteenth century. Piazza Umberto I with the tall residences of the Italian military officers and the Ammiragliato symbolically represent the centrality of the Italian Navy in the life of the local community. The presence of the official headquarters of Marisardegna, the Sardinian command of the Italian Navy, in La Maddalena provided a formal counterbalance to U.S. military authorities in charge of the submarine base. As I will detail throughout this dissertation, the co-habitation of the two navies was characterized mostly by institutional collaboration and confidential complicity (especially in governing and controlling the archipelago). Under certain circumstances, though, the Italian government could exercise its authority through Navy operations, although most problems concerning the operations of the U.S. installation were usually discussed at higher levels, between governmental officials and the U.S. Embassy in Rome. In sum, the cohabitation with the Italian Navy and the sober life of the archipelago did not offer the U.S. personnel the same options and attractions of a classic “fleet town.”

The first U.S. Navy arrivals debarked from the USS Howard Gilmore, a tender ship commissioned in 1944 and deployed in the Pacific during WWII. Early cohabitation on the archipelago was not always easy. In local memory, cultural idiosyncrasies between American sailors and local residents emerged. The drinking excesses of American troops spurred some nocturnal confrontations on the streets of Cala Gavetta.¹¹¹ Housing was a sore issue.¹¹² Convinced that the stipends of U.S. Navy personnel were phenomenal, local landlords evicted locals from apartments to make room for richer tenants.¹¹³ In order to restore the local equilibrium between housing demand and supply at reasonable prices, the U.S. Navy command publicly announced that American sailors were not actually earning much money and that they

¹¹⁰ Personal interview with the author.

¹¹¹ “Marinai USA all’assalto della macchina del peccato,” *La Nuova Sardegna*, April 4, 1973.

¹¹² “A La Maddalena I marina USA fuori dell’isola le loro famiglie?” *La Nuova Sardegna*, February 1, 1973.

¹¹³ “Piovono le ingiunzioni di sfratto. Alle stelle i canoni di affitto,” *La Nuova Sardegna*, March 28, 1973.

could not afford to pay the rents proposed by Maddalenini.¹¹⁴ But the housing crisis generated new opportunities for the construction industry. Brand new houses, actually an entire village for American families, were constructed in an inland community of La Maddalena and arrangements were made with renters to make available some 200 more apartments.¹¹⁵ But some adjustments were necessary: Americans found local houses too small and lacking the comforts of TV, washing machines, and dishwashers. Monsignor Capula appeared in all the meetings. He was a cultural broker, a spiritual guide, and the guarantor of the diplomatic relations between the U.S. Navy, the local entrepreneurs, and the municipal administration.¹¹⁶ Capula preached friendship and economic development from his pulpit while the U.S. Navy command started a “program of inter-cultural relations” to acquaint its personnel with local habits.¹¹⁷ All sailors and their families had to attend a mandatory crash course on Italian life and culture. To avoid surprises or unwelcomed reactions spurred by cultural misunderstandings, the Human Resources Department of the U.S. Navy gave concrete examples of how Italians might differ from Americans:

Another point we might keep in mind is that Italy has practiced Democracy [capital D] for only about 30 years, while the United States has about 200 years of experience. Therefore, our attitudes towards individual freedom may be somewhat different (and more experienced) than the Italians. Don't be surprised to see Italians breaking into lines (i.e. at the bank or ticket office) or crowding each other (and you) in public spaces [...] Local girls are virtually non-existent as far as personnel of visiting ships are concerned. Due to their society's rules, the local residents prefer that their daughters go out with other residents. This is not the case as far as tourist girls are concerned. The tourist girls regard visiting Americans as being in the same category as themselves. There are, however, no 'B' girls of the type normally found in the so-called 'Fleet Towns.' The very simple explanation for this is that La Maddalena is not, and has no intention of ever becoming a 'Fleet Town'.¹¹⁸

Orientations guides for incoming American sailors were explicit about the uniqueness of La Maddalena: not being a “fleet town” implied a lack of prostitutes, but also a place that wanted to maintain its cultural identity. According to local rumors, in exchange for his collaboration with

¹¹⁴ “Nessun americano è in grado di pagare gli altissimi fitti,” *La Nuova Sardegna*, April 7, 1973.

¹¹⁵ “Island Life: An isle off Sardinia to become modern home for Navy families,” *The Stars and Stripes*, July 4, 1973, p. 10.

¹¹⁶ “La Maddalena: si sblocca il problema degli alloggi per le famiglie americane” *La Nuova Sardegna*, January 16, 1973; “In febbraio gara d'appalto per I primi 43 'allo La Nuova Sardegna, January 16ggi USA',” *La Nuova Sardegna*, January 27, 1973.

¹¹⁷ *Benvenuti a La Maddalena*, (Human Resources Management Department, Naval Support Activity La Maddalena, Revised May 1976).

¹¹⁸ *Ibidem*, cit. p. 7.

Italian and American authorities, the local priest monsignor Salvatore Capula imposed specific rules. He wanted economic development for his people without moral corruption.

BENVENUTI A LA MADDALENA!

Welcome to La Maddalena, and congratulations on your new assignment. Whether you are reporting for duty with Commander Submarine Refit and Training Group, the U.S. Navy Support Office, or the homeported submarine tender, U.S.S. Howard W. Gillmore (AS-16), you are facing the opportunity for one of the most challenging and personally rewarding tours offered by our Navy today.

This orientation guide is provided to enumerate some of the facets of duty in La Maddalena which make it unique among overseas homeports, to describe the facilities now available and those planned in the near future, and, most importantly, to help you to prepare in advance for your assignment here. This booklet, coupled with your own correspondence with your sponsor, will help you to take all the early actions necessary to allow full enjoyment of your stay in La Maddalena.

The enjoyment can begin in the form of anticipation and planning before you leave the States for Sardinia. Break out the atlas and review the travel opportunities; buy an Italian language phrase book and dictionary and try out your best "buon giorno" and "per favore" or "grazie" on your friends and relatives. The best advice to offer you is to READ THIS GUIDE -- ALL of it! While reading, jot down questions that come to mind that may be unique to you or your family situation. Then, as soon as possible, ask these questions of your sponsor.

While La Maddalena and the surrounding area represent a well-established summer resort area for many Europeans, few outsiders have the opportunity to live here as year-round residents of the local community. You'll find the host Italians friendly, hospitable, and truly interested in Americans and the United States. You'll also find them receptive to welcoming you into their community if you show a sincere interest in learning about their culture, language and heritage.

Again, congratulations on your new assignment!



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Figure 1.8. *Welcome to La Maddalena*, the orientation guide distributed by the Human Resources Management Department of the U.S. Navy support Office of La Maddalena to the new personnel (updated version, May 1979).¹¹⁹

While La Maddalena had always been a welcoming port, the U.S. Navy introduced unprecedented racial and ethnic diversity to the island. Some of the elderly residents I exchanged daily conversations with remember fearing African-Americans soldiers, and recount retiring to

¹¹⁹ Source: Salvatore Sanna, *Private Archive*.

their houses early because of the “drunken” sailors lingering outside of local bars. On the other hand, U.S. personnel, especially young single men, did not find the kind of entertainment they had at other ports, like Naples, or Rota, Spain.¹²⁰ In 1976 the firebombing of 9 AFI cars (American Forces in Italy) and an anti-militarist march organized by the Radical Party seemed to announce hard years to come for the U.S. Navy in La Maddalena.¹²¹ But an escalation in anti-base sentiments remained only in the realm of fear.

For American wives who followed their husbands on duty in the 1970s, conditions were considerably more difficult. Until the close of the decade, there were no jobs available for American women and there was little social life. Families often lived far from the urban center, which was difficult to reach without a car. While the archipelago was striking in the summer months, the winter was desolate—and menacing winds blew through empty squares and the narrow lanes of Cala Gavetta. The U.S. Navy exchange shop, initially located inside the base on the island of Santo Stefano, carried few items. Liberty boats—small towboats adapted for the transportation service of U.S. personnel and families from La Maddalena to the Santo Stefano base ran twice daily, in the morning and in the early afternoon. Medical assistance was available but for more serious procedures the closest U.S. Navy hospital was in Naples. Letters of complaint listed the reasons why “La Madd” or “Madd Rock,” as some Americans called it, was considered a remote duty.¹²² They often invited U.S. Navy officers in Washington to visit La Maddalena to see directly what life looked like over there: “Come see us—it’s just a 1 ½ hour plane ride—an hour bus ride—a 20 minute ferry ride from Naples and here you are.”¹²³

“Yes, life in La Maddalena is different, remote, and, at times, very difficult,” admitted Capt. R. M. Hughes, Commander of the Submarine Refit and Training Group of La Maddalena. But with time, things improved.¹²⁴ Employment opportunities on the base became available also

¹²⁰ “U.S. Sailors on Italian Isle Find Amity but No Social Life,” *The New York Times*, February 12, 1977, p. 2.

¹²¹ “9 Yank Cars Firebombed,” *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, August 17, 1976, p. 8; “March protests Navy presence,” *The Stars and Stripes*, August 20, 1976; “Un unico commando alla Maddalena ha incendiato le auto americane,” *Corriere della Sera*, August 18, 1976; Incidenti alla Maddalena alla Marcia antimilitarista,” *Tutto Quotidiano*, August 20, 1976; “Scontri alla Maddalena tra polizia e dimostranti,” *La Nuova Sardegna*, August 20, 1976; “Gli antimilitaristi caricati dalla polizia,” *La Nuova Sardegna*, August 21, 1976; “La Maddalena: il muretto che ha fatto tremare il mondo,” *Avanti!*, August 28, 1976.

¹²² “Just possibly it could be worse,” *The Stars and Stripes*, Letters to the Editor, September 10, 1977, signed by Frances K. Porter. La Maddalena, Sardinia, Italy.

¹²³ “Invitation to visit La Maddalena,” *The Stars and Stripes*, Letters to the Editor, November 27, 1978, signed Frances K. Porter.

¹²⁴ “More on life in La Maddalena,” *The Stars and Stripes*, Letters to the Editor, December 16, 1978, signed Capt. R. M. Hughes, Commander Submarine Refit and Training Group, La Maddalena, Italy.

to the dependents of U.S. sailors. The U.S. Navy command established a recreational activities department for its personnel and organized social events to promote cultural integration with the local population. During the annual *Festa dell'Amicizia* (Friendship Party) and for the Fourth of July, U.S. personnel opened the gates of headquarters and invited Maddalenini to join the celebrations.¹²⁵ To the young Maddalenini, even those who did not support the U.S. Navy presence, America became available at home. Cassette recorders, electric guitars, and sneakers were featured at social gatherings, fueled in part by the black market. Friendships were formed, and U.S. sailors and local women begun to marry.

The U.S. base was undoubtedly an important source of income for the local community. At the day of decommissioning, Italian employees and workers directly hired by the U.S. Navy totaled 175. In addition, subcontractors inside the base employed 40 to 50 locals.

The housing office of the U.S. Naval Support Facility was one of the most crowded. It managed rentals and accommodation for hundreds of families and made sure that local housing matched, as much as possible, the living standards of U.S. personnel at home. Second was the Morale, Welfare, and Recreation office. The hiring system was pretty much open, at least formally. Position openings were announced and interviews organized after candidates filled application forms and provided information of their criminal records. As I said above, the hiring process was open and transparent, at least in comparison with stereotypical Italian standards, nonetheless the U.S. Navy tended to reward fidelity. It was not uncommon for two to four members of the same family (or close relatives) to obtain jobs inside the base or in the other offices of NSA (accounting, logistics, transportation, secretarial positions, and so forth).

¹²⁵ Every retired U.S. Navy sailor I interviewed remembered those parties fondly. Sometimes the parties, which U.S. Navy Support Office started to organize in 1975, hosted more than 5,000 Italians, as reported by one article: "Navy's Friendship Day on Sardinia: 'It went great,'" *The Stars and Stripes*, November 2, 1980, p. 8.

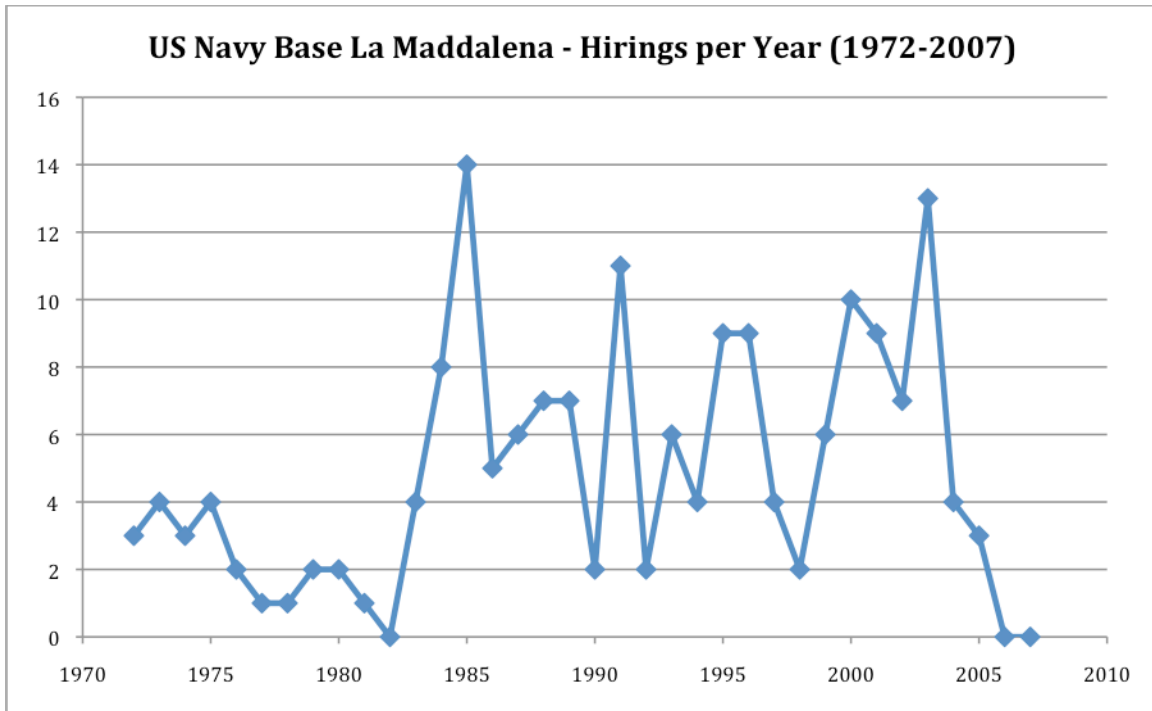


Figure 1.9. Number of local employees and workers for the U.S. Navy Base in La Maddalena: hirings per year.¹²⁶

Sometimes offers were made informally: “I was working inside the restaurant of my parents. One day they came [U.S. Navy personnel] and asked me if I wanted to work for them,” admitted a former U.S. Navy Italian employee.¹²⁷ Americans did not disdain to coopt potential adversaries if that was going to change their dispositions towards their presence. Some employees with leftist political ideas and union activists were hired too. But there were limits. Only friendly unions were admitted to consultation and collective negotiations inside the base. CGIL, for example, was officially excluded from all the U.S. installations of Italy, in clear violation of the national law on labor. Discriminations and exclusions happened, but those who worked for the base proudly claim to have experienced first hand the advantages of American meritocracy: “If you worked hard and demonstrated your desire to learn, they would give you all the

¹²⁶ Data include only the Italian personnel directly hired by the U.S. Naval Support Office and does not take into account the personnel working for subcontractors. Source: *Municipal Archive of La Maddalena* – My elaboration based on data provided by the U.S. Navy Naval Support Activity Office and the Union organizations represented inside the base.

¹²⁷ Former U.S. Navy employee, interview with the author, La Maddalena, July 2010. Anonymity is maintained to protect the informant.

opportunities you wanted. I started as a kitchen assistant at one of their restaurants and ended my career as a supply supervisor.”¹²⁸

Stories of professional success, efficiency, and personal improvements peppered interviews I conducted with former Italian employees on the base: “They paid all the courses I attended in Germany and in the U.S. They invested in me and I could get better and better positions. Isn’t it gratifying? You study in the U.S., so you know what I am talking about,” told me Carlo, a former employed in the accounting office.¹²⁹ The sense of attachment and nostalgia for the U.S. Navy presence amongst former employees on the base is not surprising if we take into account the working conditions of fellow citizens working for the Italian public administration. The “Americans,” as they were sometimes called, were a privileged and enviable group within the local community. Their salaries were higher, as well as rewards and professional opportunities. Some of them described to me their sense of satisfaction with extreme excitement: “I feel like I had the luxury of being at home while going to work abroad each morning, switching language, and knowing people from which I learned a lot. What a fantastic experience!”

There were also negative sides: “After 9/11 the base was on high security levels. Also our daily life and work routines changed. Security checks were intensified. Armed soldiers guarded the buildings where we had our offices. The atmosphere was very different from when I started to work for the base.” More than ever, trust was essential to security in such a sensitive workplace. Some Italians worked for the security department as well. Long-term employees were hired to assist the Navy patrol’s activities in Palau and La Maddalena. If conflicts between locals and Americans occurred—it was likely especially on weekend nights around bars and discos—Italian patrol assistants could intervene only as interpreters and cultural mediators. With time they became more integrated with the Navy organization and were employed also as security personnel devoted to criminal background checks, and permit authorization for Italian workers on the base: “You know, because of our job we knew a lot about other people of the community.

¹²⁸ Former U.S. Navy employee, interview with the author, La Maddalena, August 2009. Anonymity is maintained to protect the informant.

¹²⁹ Carlo is not the real name of the former U.S. Navy employee.

Being the gatekeeper is exciting but also uncomfortable sometimes. You know things but cannot say anything to anybody. I guess after a while you learn how to live with that.”¹³⁰

In 2005, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld announced that his department decided to close the Navy installation in La Maddalena. After the news spread the NSA command gathered all the Italian employees inside the movie theater next to the Mordini compound and officially announced that the decommissioning process would start soon and end in January 2008. Everybody was shocked. Long-term employees could not imagine La Maddalena without the base, but they were close to retirement and the closure would not affect them economically. For younger generations, the closure was more devastating. After a few months they started to mobilize. More than 150 families would have been left without a source of income: “I mean, they paid us until February 2008 even if some of us was already not working. They kept their word and assisted us in all possible ways. I was even offered a position in another base in Italy, but preferred not to move.”¹³¹ Even the mayor of La Maddalena, Angelo Comiti—a former Communist Party member with no particular sympathies for the U.S. Navy—mobilized the local administration to assist the future unemployed.

Only in 2009, after years of mobilization, the Berlusconi government signed a decree establishing that the former Italian employees on the U.S. Navy base would be re-employed by local administrations (municipal, provincial, regional).

¹³⁰ Former U.S. Navy employee, interview with the author, La Maddalena, October 2012. Anonymity is maintained to protect the informant.

¹³¹ Former U.S. Navy employee, interview with the author, La Maddalena, May 2012. Anonymity is maintained to protect the informant.