

CatherineSorba

LOOKING FOR PAOLI

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A Documentary in two parts

Part I: Deconstructing

Part II: On the Road

Synopsis

Pasquale Paoli (1725-1807), the father of the Corsican constitution, and Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), the father of the American constitution, were brought up on the same republican and humanist ideals. Combining reflection and action is also one of their common characteristics. Paoli, the promoter in Corsica of the first modern republic as early as 1755, was a heroic model for the Insurgents of Philadelphia on the verge of Independence. A certain number of towns in the USA have probably been named "Paoli" on behalf of that ideal.

We are neither historians, nor journalists, but playwrights. This documentary originated in the co-writing of a play called "*Paoli City*". Its first purpose was to question the obvious facts and paradoxes linked to the likely interactions between Corsican and American constitutions. Two centuries later, by immersing ourselves in the heart of Western democracy we question the present times in order to trace the founding utopias: beyond the tutelary figures of Paoli and Jefferson, we follow the progress of the humanist ideals. What is left of them nowadays? This documentary is also the diary of the personal quest of two authors of Corsican ancestry who interlace their itineraries: one lives and work in Corsica, the other one on the continent. Corsica and the USA are the victims of the same type of disinformation and obsolete Manichean approach. This systematic bias started in France and in the USA as soon as the Corsican and American constitutions emerged. From then on it became the only prism through which we are supposed to consider Corsica and the USA. Questioning the present times naturally brought us to follow Paoli's steps.

A quest filmed in real time, this travel in two parts, like an offbeat road-movie, shakes our certainties and the references we thought we had are gradually undone as we go along, and leave us facing new questionings: a look at strange lands which often seem familiar to us, a perplexed look in known and familiar countries, which make us feel strangers; the feeling of recovered anonymity which sometimes gives birth to the feeling of belonging to the same intellectual community in spite of our different origins. A Corsican or an American in Paris are the objects of curiosity and are often regarded as the figures of the "good savage". Can we claim to be anything else than our own caricature?

If we look more closely, the Paoli/Corsica/Cities follow the itinerary of the road to the American West by the "Lewis and Clark Expedition", an expedition dreamed and enacted by Thomas Jefferson the 3rd President of the USA. This tends to confirm an hypothesis which goes against the official historical tenets about Pasquale Paoli's influence on the other side to the Atlantic. According to this hypothesis "the Father of the Corsican Nation" was a man acting beyond the notion of Nations to follow the trend of universal humanism, in order to give birth to a new system in the rough draft of the democracy of the emerging American nation. Was Paoli a traitor to France, to England, or, like the American Insurgents, a true Republican and democrat looking away from "the Old Continent" and its Enlightenment which had become too dazzling?

Corsican, American and French histories, from reality or fantasy: is it a door open to a new reading or a rewriting of History...or the underground universal history of the quest for humanism, a golden age and/or a Promised Land?

In this visual wandering, we invite Nicole Bacharan, a specialist of political sciences and history concerning the USA and Francis Beretti, Professor at the University of Corsica, who has studied the links between Pasquale Paoli and Great Britain, in order to exchange points of view.

As we go along, we meet other people: Barbara Mangos and Ed Auble, who live in Paoli, Pennsylvania; they are members of the *Paoli Business and Professional Association*, and duly keep alive the memory of the Corsican general's achievements. Their statements structure each of the two parts of this documentary.

In addition to these witnesses, we have chance meetings with anonymous people, which provide emotional and dramatic impact rebounding on our playwriting in the making.

This documentary is made up in two parts with distinct tones and styles.

Part I: Deconstructing: follows our immersion from continent to continent, from one reality to another reality. Neither the chronology nor the geography are straightforward. The only landmarks from one sequence to another are subtitles indicating the places and time as clichés referring to the numerous standardized US detective serials. In quest of “caricatured” identities - Corsica/USA/ France - , we become actors and spectators of our own investigation, and play on the situation in the treatment of images, soundtrack and music of that first part. So, the dialogues, - mainly shot in New York City- often have an offbeat, hectic and analytical tone.

Part II: On the Road: We “Go West “, symbolically and physically . We gradually lay aside History and underscore its errors deliberately maintained as regards the search for new founding myths, its approximations and the confusion of memories in Corsica, the USA and France.

On the Road gives the tempo of Part II: it reflects the scenario of the play “*Paoli City*” * while we gradually shed our certainties. Leaving behind the big cities in the East Coast , we drive into the wilderness, we “take to the bush”. We are no longer involved in a hectic breathless analytical dialogue of New York City, but more in the epic atmosphere of a road-movie.

Looking for Paoli has been shot with a digital film camera. We chose to travel with no professional team, except a cameraman who is the objective witness of our wandering. Catherine Sorba uses the deliberately subjective second film camera. Two sizes have been used: the 16/9 objective camera gives us a standard “movie” image. The subjective camera – 4/3-, is meant to be the continuation of the human eye. Other images are made up of photographs, sequences shot with a cell-phone...

*The scenario of the play *Paoli City*: three men, who are now about forty years old, have dreamt the dreams of the last two decades in Corsica. One of them, inspired by his ideals, starts for a pilgrimage in the footsteps of Boswell and Paoli in the Anglo-Saxon world. For years, his two friends do not hear from him, and some day, he lets them know that he has settled in Paoli, Colorado. Then a blank again, until a young American girl comes to Corsica, and tells them she is his widow, eager to meet them and discover the land where her late

husband was born and grew up. An encounter between different worlds, different cultures, different utopias; the third man, who brought about this meeting will never be seen on the stage...