

Conflicts in *Bretagnes*: Identity Politics and Literary Networks in the Postwar Breton Movement(s)

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In 1970, Breton journalist and author Morvan Lebesque published an essay whose title, a reference to Montesquieu's *Les Lettres persanes* (*Persian Letters*), articulated a key question at the heart of the postwar Breton movement. *Comment peut-on être Breton: essai sur la démocratie française* (*How Can One Be Breton? : An essay on French Democracy*) crystalizes some of the major concerns of the postwar Breton movement during its key period of redefinition in the 1960s and 1970s.¹ The title refers to Montesquieu's parody of eighteenth century Parisian society, bewildered by the "otherness" of their Persian visitors and rendered nearly speechless while marveling at the very existence of difference, asking—"But how can one *be* Persian?"² Lebesque mocks this persistent perplexity in the face of cultural difference, and, through the analogy, implies that this closed minded arrogance remains palpable, even centuries after Montesquieu, in twentieth-century France. Furthermore, Lebesque's title expresses, though perhaps unintentionally, the Breton movement's crisis of identity during the postwar years. Two world wars and the modernization of rural France that followed profoundly impacted traditional Breton communities, culture and, most significantly, the Breton language which, in most households, abruptly ceased to be transmitted to younger generations.³ Given the drastic transformations within Breton society in so short a period, what, indeed, did it

¹ Morvan Lebesque, *Comment peut-on être Breton: Essai sur la démocratie française* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1970), 239.

² Baron de Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, trans. Margaret Mauldon (Oxford ; New York : Oxford University Press, 2008), 270.

³ Fañch Broudig, *La Pratique du breton de l'Ancien Régime à nos jours* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 1995), 303-345.

mean to be “Breton” and how could one continue to affirm and uphold such an identity?

The Breton movement, also known by the Breton neologism *Emsav*, from the verb “*sav*,” meaning “to rise” or “to defend / promote oneself,” has been defined in its most general sense as a somewhat nebulous grouping of energies and activities inspired by a common favorable feeling towards Brittany which unites the movement, despite its polymorphous expression.⁴ Scholarship has emphasized the left-leaning political orientation of the 1960s and 1970s Breton cultural revival, led by poets, activists, musicians, artists, and language advocates, all inspired by May 1968 and the era of decolonization, who saw in the counter-cultural Breton movement an alternative to French, bourgeois cultural dominance.⁵ Even the most sympathetic studies of the Breton movement, however, have pointed to a fundamental, and, perhaps, inevitable paradox at the movement’s core. The movement’s preoccupation with defining and defending an abstract Breton identity, a Pan-Bretonness, was, in fact, at odds with how the majority of the Breton population viewed itself, identifying predominately as members of a local community rather than with region as a whole.⁶ In promoting this militant Pan-Bretonness, the Breton movement often alienated those members of the Breton community for whom it sought to speak, and, some have argued, even reproduced the same French centralist logic that it claimed to combat.⁷

This article will examine one response to the identity question as it is problematized in one specific literary journal that has, up until now, been largely

⁴ Michel Nicolas, *Histoire du mouvement Breton: Emsav* (Paris: Editions SYROS, 1982), 26.

⁵ William Calin, “Postmodern: Breizh” in *Minority Literatures and Modernism: Scots, Breton, and Occitan 1920-1990* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 273-281. Maryon McDonald, *“We are not French!”: Language, Culture and Identity in Brittany* (London; New York: Routledge, 1989). Heather Williams. *Postcolonial Brittany: Literature between Languages* (Oxford [England]; New York: Peter Lang, 2007).

⁶ Mari C. Jones, “Death of a Language, Birth of an Identity: Brittany and the Bretons,” *Language Problems & Language Planning* 22, n. 2 (1998): 129-142. David Maynard, “Rurality, Rusticity, and Contested Identity Politics in Brittany” in *Knowing Your Place: Rural Identity and Cultural Hierarchy*, eds. Barbara Ching and Gerald W. Creed (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997): viii, 195-218. Michel Nicolas, *Histoire du mouvement Breton: Emsav*[...] *op. cit.* p. 31-32.

⁷ “In many ways, however, [the Breton militants] ‘Brittany’ is a metaphorical reality, anterior to the innocent social and geographical object that is Brittany, and this metaphorical reality, and the image and persuasive values it gives to ‘Breton’ and ‘Brittany’ are a product of wider French debates, rather than a natural growth from Breton soil. It is a ‘Breton’ world created in the nineteenth century and politically re-created, with the greatest metaphorical force, after 1968, that the modern militant now inhabits.” Maryon McDonald, *“We are not French!”*[...] *op. cit.*, p. 89.

ignored by scholarship: =*Bretagnes* (*Brittanies*), published from 1975 to 1979. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate that, despite rather vocal militant rhetoric, there was no unifying definition of Breton identity during the 1960s-1970s *per se*, nor even any general consensus regarding the heart of the Breton cause. Some scholarship has suggested otherwise by highlighting the network of solidarity and, at times, friendship which connected *Bretagnes*' contributors, especially those who were also members of the Democratic Breton Union (known by its French acronym as the UDB), the left-wing Breton Autonomist Party, founded in 1964.⁸ Though this research has argued that editorial practices such as prefaces and dedications further confirmed an interconnected network of support, I would like to suggest that this reading provides an incomplete picture of the literary networks at work within the postwar Breton movement.

Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of the antagonism inherent in the literary field and his argument that conflict itself is the constitutional principle of a literary network, whose various actors—authors, publishers, editors, readers, etc.—constantly position themselves in opposition with one another, I would like to suggest that the conflicts expressed in *Bretagnes* can help us better understand the postwar Breton movement.⁹ At the heart of these conflicts, I will argue, are fundamental linguistic and generational tensions which express themselves in the journal in three major ways: first, through the journal's assertion and definition of the new concept of "Breton Francophone Literature"; second, through its indictment of Breton nationalism's collaborationist history; and, finally, in its opposition to members of the previous generation who did not necessarily partake in their form of militancy. Through an analysis of these tensions, I hope to demonstrate that conflict, far more prominent than cohesion, presents itself as a central principle in the journal *Bretagnes* and that this opposition functions as a source of both definition and dynamism for the publication and the movement as a whole.

The Politics of Language: *Bretagnes*, between French and Breton

The journal *Bretagnes* was founded in 1975 by a group of five young men, born in Brittany, who met either before or during their twenties: Paol Keineg, a well-known Breton poet; Michel Kerninon and Yvon Béguivin, both journalists at the Morlaix-based Breton newspaper, still in circulation today, *Le Télégramme* (*The Telegram*); and Henri Roudot and Kristian Keginer, two university students.

⁸ Mannaïg Thomas. "La Poésie engagée-enragée des écrivains de l'UDB (1967-1974)," in *L'Union Démocratique Bretonne. Un parti autonomiste unitaire*, eds. Romain Pasquier and Tudi Kernalegenn (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2014), 187-202.

⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, "Le Champ littéraire." in: *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 89 (1991), 3-46.

Though these men were the journal's primary staff, *Bretagnes* may not have come into existence without the help of Yves Le Gall (1922-2001), a priest in the Côtes-d'Armor who owned a manual printing press in his presbytery which he used to print a number of independent and alternative Breton newspapers, journals and other texts. *Bretagnes* was ultimately a short-lived publication. After just nine volumes, the publishers could not keep up with the cost of production, a fact that becomes increasingly visible with the journal's repeated pleas for reader subscriptions and support. The first few volumes of the review, nevertheless, were relatively successful, with somewhere between 1,500 and 2,000 copies printed, all by hand. Following the publication of the first volume, the review's official "headquarters"—housed, in fact, at the residence of Henri Roudot—received letters of congratulations, anonymous financial donations, and subscription requests from individuals, libraries and bookstores across the Breton region, throughout France and even internationally.¹⁰

The success of the review relative to other contemporary Breton publications can be explained by the fact that its emergence created a buzz of controversy amongst the Breton intellectual community in the 1970s. The tone of the review is intentionally provocative, even irreverent, expressing both the audacity and the optimism of the young minds behind it. Its pages promote many of the causes of the Breton pro-autonomist party, the UDB, founded by a group of students, including Paol Keineg, over a decade prior. The journal calls for an "intellectual decolonization" to liberate the Breton people from the French centralized state which was draining the regions of their natural resources while leaving rural France decades behind the country's urban centers in terms of development and modernization.¹¹ Class struggle, decentralization and socialism were at the heart of both *Bretagnes* and the UDB's political agenda, outlined in its 1972 manifesto provocatively entitled "Brittany = colony."¹²

Despite its politicized discourse, the focus of *Bretagnes* was on language and literature, rather than politics. "*Bretagnes* exists," writes Keineg in his

¹⁰ Michel Kerninon and Kristian Keginer, in discussion with the authors, June 2015. I would like to express my immense gratitude to Paol Keineg, Kristian Keginer and Michel Kerninon for graciously answering my questions and for speaking with me about their lives during these years.

¹¹ Historian Jack E. Reece presented a sociological and historical argument for identifying Brittany as an internal colony in 1979. See Jack E. Reece, "Internal Colonialism: The Case of Brittany," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2:3 (1979), 275-292.

¹² "*Bretagne = colonie, avec l'UDB pour que ça cesse !* (1973) (second edition), <http://www.udb-bzh.net/index.php/fr/blog-histoire-de-l-udb/3401-bretagne-colonie-avec-l-udb-pour-que-ca-cesse-1973#.UlO4OKuKfK.facebook>. All translations are my own. For more on this manifesto, see Heather Williams, "Revolution in Language," in *Postcolonial Brittany: Literature Between Languages* (Oxford [England]; New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 129.

inaugural editorial, “in order to break with the colonization of literature.”¹³ Here, the editors of *Bretagnes* applied the colonial comparison, which the UDB had used to describe the Breton-French relationship in the political arena, to language. The journal was the first to name and advocate for a “Breton Francophone” literature.¹⁴ As such, its authors drew a fine line between literature written “in French” and “French literature.” Keginer’s definition of Breton Francophone literature, elaborated in one of his articles, asserts that a literary language can be Breton, even if written with French words, so long as it fights against the domination of the French language.

[...] “Frenchness” and “Bretonness” operate on two radically different planes: what is French is the language, and what is Breton is the creation. It is, therefore, a Breton creation of the French language [...] or using French words. [...] True (Breton) literary creation lies precisely in the fight against the dominant language (French).¹⁵

By this logic, the very publication of a Breton Francophone literary journal was an act of militancy against French cultural and literary hegemony. This was achieved both by divorcing the French language from “Frenchness,” and, by the same token, distinguishing between the Breton language and “Bretonness.”

As abstract as these notions may sound today, they proved rather controversial at the time, and specifically among members of the Breton movement for whom the Breton language was an integral and inseparable component of Breton militancy. The journal’s call for solidarity and identification with the Postcolonial, Francophone world created significant division with the larger Breton movement, opposing this younger, native French-speaking generation to a small, yet vocal, minority of staunch Breton-language advocates from the previous generation. The authors of *Bretagnes* address this ideological conflict in the inaugural issue, expressing their explicit agenda to separate the “Breton language” (*langage*), as a form of militant discourse, from “Breton,” the language (*langue*) of Brittany: “The Breton language, whatever its words may be, is the international code by which we decipher the world and by which we

¹³ *Bretagnes*, ed. Paol Keineg (1975) no. 1, p. 7.

¹⁴ Marc Gontard, “Pour une littérature bretonne de langue française,” in *Ecrire la Bretagne 1960-1995*, ed. Bernard Hue, Marc Gontard (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 1995), 17-31.

¹⁵ Keginer, K. “La prochaine scission dans la littérature bretonne francophone,” in *Bretagnes* n. 6, p. 19.

decipher ourselves.”¹⁶ Though they were not in fact speakers of Breton, they claimed the “Breton language” for themselves, as the language of the expression their political beliefs and as an alternative mode of being. *Bretagnes* and its authors sought to separate Breton literary and political life from the exclusive sphere of native Breton speakers, a sphere from which their generation was excluded. The journal’s position as a Francophone Breton literary publication was, therefore, a stance against exclusionary language politics, both from the French and the Breton sides of the spectrum.

Conflicts with the Past: *Bretagnes* and *Breiz Atao*

One of the most powerful ways, however, in which the editors of *Bretagnes* demonstrated their rift with the Breton movement of the previous generation, was by addressing a taboo moment in Breton history—the collaboration of nationalist groups, specifically the separatist *Parti National Breton* (Nationalist Breton Party, or the PNB), with Nazi Germany during World War II. In the first issue of *Bretagnes*, the editors published an interview with one of the two main leaders of the PNB, Olier Mordrel, who had returned to Brittany only a few years previously in 1971 after having spent over thirty years in forced exile in Argentina. Upon his return, Mordrel published his autobiography, titled after an early twentieth century Breton nationalist newspaper, *Breiz Atao* (*Brittany Forever*).¹⁷ The pretense for the *Bretagnes* interview was to question Mordrel about his recent publication, though its true purpose was to indict those members of the Breton movement that this younger generation felt had been complicit with collaboration, either by their silence or, far worse, through ideological affinity.

It is important to note, however, that ethnic nationalist collaboration with the Nazi occupation was far from unique to Brittany. Nationalists in French Flanders, Alsace-Lorraine, and in the Pays Basque were implicated in varying levels of collaboration along with Brittany, operating under the logic that “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.”¹⁸ Beginning in the 1930s and continuing on through the 1940s, ethnic nationalist groups throughout France were fairly interconnected. Basque nationalist Eugène Goyheneche (1915-1989) and Breton

¹⁶ *Bretagnes*, ed. Paul Keineg (1975) no. 1, p. 7.

¹⁷ Olier Mordrel, *Breiz Atao; ou, Histoire et actualité du nationalisme breton* (Paris : A. Moreau, 1973).

¹⁸ James E. Jacob, *Hills of Conflict: Basque Nationalism in France* (Reno; London: University of Nevada Press, 1994), p. 88-91 ; 117-120. Timothy, Baycroft. *Culture, identity and nationalism: French Flanders in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (London ; Woodbridge ; Rochester, N.Y. : Royal Historical Society ; Boydell Press, 2004), p. 233.

nationalist Yann Fouéré (1910-2011), for example, both of whom were accused of collaboration and, later, exonerated, met in Paris during the 1930s where the two were “in exile” for their studies.¹⁹ This network of ethnic nationalism was reinforced by regional newspapers, like the Basque newspaper *Aintzina* where leaders Goyheneche and Pierre Lafitte transmitted information from their meetings and communications with Breton, Flemish, Catalan and Alsatian militants. Though, as historian James E. Jacob has demonstrated, Goyheneche wrote favorably of the PNB’s newspaper, *Breiz Atao*, and referred to the leaders of the PNB as “our brothers,” the Basque nationalist movement and newspaper *Aintzina* reflected a regionalist and federalist mentality, very different from the radical separatism of *Breiz Atao*.²⁰ The Basque movement had more in common with the Breton federalists and their newspaper *La Bretagne fédérale* (*Federal Brittany*) 1931-1935, which accused Mordrel and the PNB of “intolerance, fascism, militarism and imperialism.”²¹ The PNB, however, radicalized even further to the extreme right and created in 1940, during the German occupation, an overtly pro-Nazi, fascist weekly bulletin, *L’Heure Bretonne* (*The Breton Hour*).²² Relative to the Basque movement and other regional movements within France, the Breton nationalist movement of the 1940s is considered to have created the strongest ties with the Nazis and to represent, in the words of Jacob, “the most serious case of collaboration by an ethnic movement with the Nazi occupation.”²³

By confronting Mordrel directly on his fascist ideology, the editors of *Bretagnes* broke the silence regarding Breton collaboration that had gone unaddressed since the war. In publishing Mordrel’s arguments, the editors of *Bretagnes* were, in a sense, providing the former PNB leader with a means to justify his collaborationist past, which is precisely what he attempted to do. During the interview, Mordrel explains that, in the 1930s, the Nazi party was, at heart, a socialist party which attracted left-wing Bretons. In the same breath, Mordrel suggests that the genocide of the Jews by the Nazis had been exaggerated and remained unsubstantiated by a formal investigation:

In many ways, the Nazi party was a socialist party. And some left-wing Bretons sympathized with this socialist side of Nazism, turning a blind eye to the rest... by the way, we didn’t know much about the rest. Today, we make a big deal, don’t we, about the gas

¹⁹ James E. Jacob, *Hills of Conflict* [...] *op. cit.* p. 88-90.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 90.

²¹ *La Bretagne fédérale*, 22 July 1933. Cited in Georges Cadiou, *L’Hermine et la Croix Gammée: Le mouvement breton et la collaboration* (Paris: Mango, 2001), 36.

²² Georges Cadiou, *L’Hermine et la Croix Gammée* [...] *op. cit.* 79-84.

²³ *Ibid*, 110.

chambers and all those things... Regarding the massacre of the 6 millions Jews, by the way, I say this in passing, there has never been an international investigation. There have been articles in the press, but that's it. Personally, I would have liked to see an international investigation.²⁴

Ramblings such as these echo some of Mordrel's earlier writings in the review *Stur* (*The Rudder*), 1934-1943, in which he argues for a Breton racism to preserve the purity of the Breton people: "We consider it therefore to be very important to avoid interbreeding in Brittany [...]. We consciously choose to obey the profound Desire of creation to search for purity and esthetic unity."²⁵

The real controversy of the Mordrel interview, however, came not from the fact that the editors had dared to print the fascist ravings of the former PNB leader, but that they directly associated Mordrel's beliefs with the right wing faction of the Breton postwar movement and, specifically, with the defenders of a "unified" Breton language. Keginer makes this comparison in his review of Mordrel's 1975 publication *La Voie Bretonne* (*The Breton Way*), in which Mordrel argued that "antiracism was merely a pretence," masking a political agenda that sought to "melt the Breton ethnicity into the undifferentiated masses."²⁶ Attacking Mordrel for his poor literary style, tortured language and delirious ideas, Keginer writes:

It would be easy to boundlessly rejoice at this burlesque intellectual degeneration of Breton fascism, but the very tone of Mordrel's book invites us to be vigilant yet again: today the ugly beast hides behind a more appealing mask, painted over by the colors of the defense of the "unity" of the Breton language and of some "autonomist" reformism of the radical right.²⁷

Linguistic and generational conflicts are at the forefront of the debate yet again. In the 1930s and 1940s, the *Breiz Atao* movement had campaigned to "strengthen" the Breton language by unifying its grammar, a debate that was contemporaneous to *Bretagnes* and still exists today, in some circles. Olier Mordrel, along with Breton linguist Ropraz Hemon, founded the literary journal *Gwalarn* (a Breton term for the cardinal direction North-West) in 1925 for the

²⁴ *Bretagnes*, ed. Paol Keineg (1975) no. 1, p. 42.

²⁵ Quoted in Georges Cadiou, *L'Hermine et la Croix Gammée* [...] *op. cit.* 42-43.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

²⁷ Kristian Keginer, "La Voie Bretonne d'Olier Mordrel," *Bretagnes*, ed. Paol Keineg (1975) no. 1, p. 46.

purpose of promoting a “purer,” “literary” Breton language, unlike the everyday use of the language, spoken primarily by peasants. Proponents of a monolingual Brittany—having proclaimed, “Between Breton and French, we must choose!”—the founders of *Gwalarn* aimed to make Breton an elite, literary language belonging to the upper class and the educated:

Our goal is to discover if a sufficiently educated readership exists in Brittany that would be able to understand a literary language, just distant from the language of Breton peasants as the language of Mr. Anatole France is from that of French peasants.²⁸

Keginer and his contemporaries saw in the exclusionary, Breton language protectionism of their time the persisting spirit of *Breiz Atao*.²⁹ By interviewing Mordrel and attacking the Breton-language defense movement, the editors of *Bretagnes* were claiming their space as the voice of a new generation of Breton intellectuals and authors whose native French language was far from an impediment from participating in the Breton movement, but, rather, for them, opened Brittany to the Francophone world.

Generational and Political Conflicts:

***Bretagnes* and Pierre-Jakez Hélias**

Generational and linguistic conflicts yet again converge in the 1970s polemics surrounding Pierre-Jakez Hélias, an author who has been referred to as “the best Breton writer of all time.”³⁰ Born in 1914 in Pouldreuzic, a small town in the southern Bigouden region of the Finistère, Hélias was the most well known Breton author of the twentieth century. His autobiography, or “autoethnography,” *Le Cheval d'Orgueil* (*The Horse of Pride*) was published in 1975 and quickly became a national bestseller, translated from the original Breton into 18 languages and even adapted into a feature-length film.³¹ He was extremely well received in the mainstream French media, applauded for his nostalgic and

²⁸ Georges Cadiou, *L'Hermine et la Croix Gammée* [...] *op. cit.* p. 136.

²⁹ The question of the unification of Breton language spelling, which varies between the regions of Brittany, is still a contentious issue today. Fañch Broudig makes a brief reference to these debates, stating that the association of the Breton Language Council, “Kuzul ar Brezhoneg,” “remains faithful to the nationalist positions defended by Roparz Hemon, and in particular to the fight for a “unified” spelling which began in 1941 [...]” *La Pratique du breton de l'Ancien Régime à nos jours* [...] *op. cit.* p. 327.

³⁰ William Calin, “The Pierre-Jackes Hélias Controversy, and Why It Is Important,” in *Littératures de Bretagnes: Mélanges offerts à Yann-Per Piriou*, eds. Francis Favereau and Hervé Le Bihan (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2006), 157.

³¹ *Ibid.*

moving personal narrative of a childhood spent in the Bigouden civilization, as Hélias called it, which, by the end of the twentieth century, had all but vanished.³²

Despite—or perhaps *because*—of his public appeal, Hélias became a highly contentious figure in the Breton world. He was attacked publically in two major essays: Xavier Grall's *Le Cheval couché* (*The Horse Lying Down*) and Pascal Rannou's *Inventaire d'un héritage* (*Inventory of a Heritage*).³³ Grall's scathing criticism of Hélias attracted public attention, though only rather briefly. For Grall, Hélias's autobiography affirmed the Parisian reader's fantasy of an exotic, "othered" Brittany, commodified by tourism and consumer capitalism. A copy of *Le Cheval d'Orgueil*, Grall argued, was as inoffensive and quaint as a porcelain plate from Quimper—both decorative motifs destined for the coffee tables of the Parisian bourgeoisie. In short, Hélias was accused of rendering the resurgence and revival of Breton culture impossible by writing its elegy, by being complicit in its commodification, by rendering it palatable to the French. Hélias was, furthermore, considered to be a traitor by the Breton left for expressing his appreciation for the French Republican school system, a system to which he was grateful for sparing him from what he described as the harshness of agricultural labor into which his father and grandfather had been born.

Scholars have not hesitated to attack Grall's credibility, pointing to the hypocrisy of this younger journalist who, born in Paris himself, realized he was "Breton" at age forty, moved his wife and children to the Finistère, and, without speaking Breton, claimed to know Brittany better than Hélias.³⁴ Nevertheless, William Calin has argued persuasively that "Pierre-Jakez Hélias was wrong" by conforming his personal narrative to a vision of Brittany created by Paris, the "dominant Self":

From a postcolonial perspective, the rural, poetic, traditionalist, and Christian local traditions and local identity—Hélias's world—can be considered the dominant Self's (Paris's) vision of the Other, and a vision that the Other willingly becomes vis-à-vis that Self. Hence the Parisian acceptance of a century of clichés concerning Brittany, and the Parisian acclaim for Hélias himself, was all welcomed in Paris as a charming, eccentric, marginal other that

³² Pierre-Jakez Hélias. *Le Cheval d'orgueil* (Paris: Plon, 1975).

³³ Xavier Grall, *Le Cheval couché* (Paris: Hachette, 1977); Pascal Rannou, *Inventaire d'un héritage: Essai sur l'oeuvre littéraire de Pierre-Jakez Hélias* (Relecq-Kerhuon: An Here, 1997).

³⁴ William Calin, "The Pierre-Jakes Hélias Controversy, and Why It Is Important," [...] *op. cit.* 162.

offers no threat and no promise of a serious movement for political autonomy or cultural renewal.³⁵

Seen in this light, Hélias's work, while significant, may indeed have supported, albeit unintentionally, a reductive, marginalized version of Brittany.

The editors of *Bretagnes* and Xavier Grall were far from allies, and indeed, harsh exchanges between Paol Keineg and Grall, in which the former accused the latter of admiring Mordrel's fascist nationalism, were published in a later issue of the journal.³⁶ Nevertheless, this group of young Bretons echoes many of Grall's criticisms in an interview published in *Bretagnes* with Pierre-Jakez Hélias and Eugène Guillevic (1907-1997). The interviewers' main contention is that Hélias's childhood poverty was indicative of a discriminatory class structure, a fact which the author of the *Le Cheval d'Orgueil* failed to address in his work. Like in Grall's critique of Hélias's "*Bigoudenie*," the editors accused Hélias of failing to make the point that his individual, familial story was indicative a larger, systematic one. Hélias, apparently feeling outnumbered in the interview, launches on a tirade explaining how he had been misunderstood in the Breton movement. He defends his right to freedom of expression, saying that he can very well be politically "committed" (*engagé*) without being "encaged" (*encagé*).³⁷ He explains that he did not convey a childhood story of misery and oppression because, as a child, he did not see himself as miserable and oppressed. "Me, I was a happy guy. I had a truly remarkable family. We were poor, we lived at the brink of misery, but I had absolutely no inferiority complex."³⁸ Eventually, interviewers and interviewee reach an impasse. The editors, on the one hand, would not concede their point that Hélias's book, which had won him such popularity in the Parisian literary world, did not address a cause that they consider to be one of the backbones of the Breton movement: "But still, we are left waiting, in your book, for this class conflict that doesn't really appear, page after page, we are waiting..."³⁹ During the five-page interview, this is the only real question, asked in different ways, that the *Bretagnes* interviewers address to the author. Hélias, defending himself, attempts to draw attention away from his controversial autobiography and argues that a large part of his life's work was done while he was the director of the only Breton-language radio program permitted in France after the war, a program that was limited, for nearly twelve

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Paol Keineg, "Mise au point" *Bretagnes*, ed. Paol Keineg (1976) no. 8, p. 48.

³⁷ *Bretagnes*, ed. Paol Keineg (1976) no. 3, p. 17.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

years, to just thirty minutes per week.⁴⁰ Directing this Breton language program was, for Hélias, an act of militancy in and of itself, before being a Breton militant post-*Breiz Atao* was even thinkable:

But if I hadn't been there, I'm telling you outright – some might say that I'm pretentious for it – but if I hadn't been there to take up the radio programs in the Breton language, on the request of the general council of three Breton departments, I don't know where we would be today. For twenty-five years, we pulled the cart, and others too came and helped...⁴¹

One of Hélias's last statements, before the interview shifts its focus abruptly to Eugène Guillevic and his involvement with the Communist Party, is a denunciation of what he sees as Breton sectarianism which, he laments, has repeated itself throughout history: "There's something that bothers me, okay, and I'll say it, I'll proclaim it, the thing that killed the Celts in the past was sectarianism, and now, the Breton movement is a movement of sects."⁴²

The interview comes to a stalemate, but the nature of the impasse makes it interesting. The Hélias polemic demonstrates the degree to which conflicts in the Breton movement derive from generational divides. Indeed, if we focus on the life span of the various factions of the Breton movement throughout history, adopting Franco Moretti's quantitative approach to the history of the book, or what he calls "distant reading," the rhythmic trends of Breton militancy appear to trace themselves along generational lines.⁴³ Building on Moretti's argument that one possible explanation for the rise and fall of British novelistic genres from 1740-1900 might have been a function of what he called, referencing Karl Mannheim, "generational style," I would like to suggest that the succession of Breton sub-movements and their networks—including journals, newspapers, manifestos, and short-lived political parties—might similarly be function of generational experiences and ideas. This follows Mannheim's concept of "*generation as an actuality*," where a "generation" is born from "a concrete bond [that] is created between members of a generation by their being exposed to the social and intellectual symptoms of a process of dynamic destabilization."⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Ronan Calvez, *La Radio en langue bretonne, Roparz Hemon et Pierre-Jakez Hélias: deux rêves de la Bretagnes* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2000), 211.

⁴¹ *Bretagnes*, ed. Paul Keineg (1976) no. 3, p. 17.

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 18.

⁴³ Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (London: Verso, 2005), 1.

⁴⁴ Karl Mannheim, 'The Problem of Generations', in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, London 1952, 279, quoted Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees*[...] *op. cit.* 21.

Moretti says it best: “A bond due to a process of destabilization; and one who was eighteen in 1968 understands.”⁴⁵ Indeed, between occupation, collaboration and resistance during World War II, the events and aftermaths of May 1968, the Algerian War and decolonization, rapid economic development and modernization in a previously underdeveloped Brittany, and the near extinction and, then, attempted revival of the Breton language in just fifty years, there is enough dynamic destabilization to understand that the postwar Breton generation developed a strong bond of identification.

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The cores of conflict in the journal *Bretagnes*—the Hélias polemic, the Mordrel interview and the novel concept of Francophone Breton literature—have much to teach us. *Bretagnes* is a rather exceptional source in that it provides us with a window into the ideological debates of the Breton movement during the 1970s. The journal and its editors do more than just assert their opinions, they lay bare the debates and, at times, bitter exchanges in which they were involved. Through these debates, oppositions and conflicts, *Bretagnes* demonstrates, perhaps in response Lebesque’s question, that there is not, in fact, one way to be “Breton,” nor has there ever been one “Breton movement,” but many different movements, dynamically engaged in a complex, mobile and, as Bourdieu argued, inherently antagonistic literary field.

The evasiveness of Breton identity, however, may have been present in *Bretagnes* all along. Indeed, the authors’ affirmation of the Breton self was as ephemeral as it was divisive. After leaving Brittany in 1973 to live in the United States for what would be nearly thirty years, Paol Keineg abandoned writing about Breton identity *per se* while still ever exploring his Breton subjectivity. In a 2013 essay entitled “*Il n’y a pas de terre promise*” (“There is no promised land”), Keineg writes that during his time living in the United States, tempted to assimilate into American culture but never fully embracing it, he attempted to defy the very notion of identity: “I learned to challenge all identities, and I’m sorry that we speak so often about Breton identity, without ever defining what it might really be. Probably because it is impossible to give it a coherent definition. And yet, Brittany exists.”⁴⁶

Though conflicts in *Bretagne(s)*, both the journal and the region, were central, even inevitable, aspects of the late twentieth century Breton cultural revival, they did not remain, for all authors, a permanent impasse. Keineg’s example demonstrates how Breton literary debates of the 1970s ultimately were

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴⁶ Paol Keineg. “Il n’y a pas de terre promise”, *Rencontres Bretagne / Monde Anglophone* (10 December 2013), <http://www.univ-brest.fr/BMA/>.

concerned with self-exploration and subjective self-expression. In this way, Breton self-writing after the 1970s largely shifts the central question from, “How can one be *Breton*?” asking instead—in the tradition of Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters*, where the question, “How can one be Persian?” is turned to confront the French reader—“How can we be who we are?”