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How to build a dissident public order. Actors and strategies of the Neapolitan folks' political mobilization during the 1848 revolution

Pierre-Marie Delpu

When revolution broke out in Palermo on January 12 1848 and then spread throughout the whole Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, it constituted the first experience of massive political mobilization in the state. It followed from a long tradition of riots and revolutions since the Early Modern period¹, and very quickly became part of a wider revolutionary wave, both Italian and European, and mainly characterised by the delegitimation of the Bourbon monarchy as an institution and as a means of government. The Meridional political propaganda, which was widespread at the European scale – the most famous examples being the well-known caricatures by French illustrator Honoré Daumier² – highlighted the main target of the revolution: the king-tyrant Ferdinand II, targeted mainly because he carried out atrocities against civilians, most notably the struggles of 15 May 1848.³ Such events gave a decisive impulse to mobilizations of opposition to the King, and led to a new evolution, opposing to the royal malgoverno, a Meridional society traditionally faithful to monarchy, as since the Early Modern period it had constituted one of the main elements of the social contract underlying the 'Neapolitan Nation' as a collective identity. This trend explained the weakness of republicanism and the limited capacity of mobilization of the Parthenopean Republic of 1799 to which the popular Sanfedist insorgenze put a stop.⁴

The popular participation in revolution is linked to the building of a public sphere of opposition, which constituted an underlying trend of the 1840s and reached a peak in Summer 1848, chiefly in the peripheral provinces of the kingdom. The actors of revolution very quickly sought to contain it by establishing revolutionary institutions of maintenance of order, such as the National Guard, but this quickly reached its limits when revolutionary counterpowers emerged in the face of the moral discredit surrounding the monarchy, particularly in the provinces of Salerno and Calabria where the insurrection

¹ Lerra, Musi, *Rivolte e rivoluzione*

² From August 1848, Honoré Daumier began to publish a series of political caricatures devoted to the « Neapolitan case » in the French satirical newspaper *Le Charivari*. Like the most famous cartoons in the series (« À Naples, le meilleur des rois fait régner l'ordre dans ses États », 27 août 1848), those devoted to the Neapolitan case stage the political abuses of King Ferdinand's monarchy through his politics of maintaining order, relying on coercive tools which were unfavourable to the people. The idea was taken up widely in the European liberal propaganda of the 1850s (Moe, *The View from Vesuvius*).

³ Recent historical works on the Mezzogiorno have shown the extent of that turn, linked with the monarchy's politics of maintaining order (Mellone, 'Dopo i fatti napoletani del 15 maggio 1848').

⁴ Davis, 'Rivolte popolari e controrivoluzione'.

was at its most radical.⁵ In order to fight against a regime considered to be a tyranny, the revolutionaries had to make the ordinary folk participate in police and justice practices within the framework of a dissident public order, based on the appropriation of the competences and practices of sovereignty. This appeared as a complex process which involved the establishment of normativities alternative to the ones the monarchy was relying on, the use of the traditional tools of revolutionary public policing, including the National Guard, and the display of new features of massive mobilization of the people against the monarchy.

I. DISSIDENT NORMATIVITIES

Since it was established in the first months of 1848, the revolutionary public order was dependent on specific normativities. These included the inversion of policing practices, making the people actors in a process against the monarchical order which was considered to be illegitimate. The repertory of collective actions of radical mobilizations showed it: although the sources here are very scarce, the judiciary sources linked with the political processes which took place between 1849 and 1854 still allow us to comprehend these actions. The systematical target of the mobilisations was the king and his representatives: there were frequent trials of the royal couple's statutes, put on in the public arena, and ending in death sentences being given to effigies of the sovereign. The use of iconoclasm, which was frequent during the 1848 revolutions, particularly in the Italian States⁶, consisted of ritualized destructions of symbols of the monarchical authority, destined to cleanse the public space from representations of kingship. This practice was most prominent in Citerior Calabria, around Cosenza, where 575 subjects were given various sentences after the trials which put a stop to the revolution. These were both spontaneous expressions of the ordinary hatred against the Bourbon monarchy, fuelled by political emotions, and also conscious acts designed to eliminate from the public space the king's emblems, portraits and statutes, in order to mark an inversion of the norms and the appropriation of authority.⁷ In the absence of being able to directly attack the king who didn't leave the kingdom's capital during the whole period of the insurrection, the attackers instead directed their attentions towards the symbols which embodied his power. Other one-off attacks were aimed at representatives of authority, particularly the gendarmerie, but they were very scarce in comparison to other European states at the same time, such as France. In the province of Cosenza, only 110 cases were judged during the political processes that followed the revolution, equal to hardly more than 3% of the subjects submitted to a sentence.⁸

⁵ Buttiglione, *La Rivoluzione in "periferia"*.

⁶ See Fureix, *Iconoclasme et révolutions*. In the Italian states, the 1848 revolutions saw a significant increase in iconoclastic practises as one of the most common forms of contesting the established order (Arisi Rota, '„Cosi brutale insulto“').

⁷ I have already studied this point elsewhere in relation to the Calabrian provinces (Delpu, 'Les acteurs populaires face aux images de la monarchie').

⁸ This figure comes from the political trials held in the province of Cosenza at the end of the revolution

These practices throw light on the concurrent representations of authority which opposed around the gestion of public order. Here again, the turning point of 15 May 1848 was significant, and the initiatives first came from private individuals as distinct from the institutions established by the monarchy to contain the revolution in its four first months. For most of the provincial revolutionaries, particularly those linked with the radical movement, the struggles were a sign that the king had breached his political contract with Neapolitan society. In that respect, the monarchy appeared as disloyal, and so needed to be replaced by other forms of authority, considered more valuable, even though these other forms were uncertain as they were not precisely defined. Rather than normative redefinings, the actors' social practises highlighted the substitution of one form of legitimacy for an other one, supported by people who were well-known at the local scale of the village communities. In Castelveteve, a little town of the Reggio province, on 16 May 1848, one of the local landowners, Ilario Scutari, publically called for the execution of the subjects who refused to remove the royal proclamations put up on the walls of the town chancellery.⁹

The speed with which events happened, just the very next day after the slaughter, can be explained by the circulation of information which was facilitated by the telegraph, a device to which some specialists attribute the success of the revolution.¹⁰ The initiative was part of a complex plan of action which included destruction, substitution of objects, and simulated tyrannicides, and which were all directed towards a monarchy regarded as failed. Much more than subversion of the monarchical order, such rituals built on practices of popular and spontaneous justice and they highlight how the revolutions' stakeholders, particularly the most radical of them, used to plan moral constructions in the public space of the insurrection: if the alternative order had never been defined nor named but was left to the initiative of provisional organizations formed by the revolutionaries themselves, it has an implicit moral objective, which consisted in substituting a more acceptable system of power in place of a perjurious monarchy.

Within this process of inverting norms, the role played by the population was decisive. This did not constitute a truly new phenomenon, as the last decades of the Early Modern era already saw an important increase in the participation of the population in political mobilization, particularly around local stakes and in the opposition to the power abuses of the lords during the « wars against tyrants », of which the Calabrian provinces included numerous examples.¹¹ But the mobilizations of 1848 stand out, both for their number and for their stronger democratic orientation, in continuation of the Meridional liberals' efforts to open the political field to the masses by the 1830s. Those efforts lead in particular to a wide network of secret societies which used to give more interest to lo-

and until the 1850s (Archivio di Stato di Cosenza [then ASCS], Intendenza, Processi politici). It appears very low in comparison with the French situation, where altercations with the police were one of the most common practises of the mobilisation of insurgents (Lignereux, *La France rébellonnaire*).

⁹ Archivio di Stato di Reggio Calabria (then ASRC), Atti di Polizia, I, 1, ad nomen.

¹⁰ That aspect of circulation of ideas and practises has already been studied for the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies (De Lorenzo, 'Il 1848-1849').

¹¹ Cecere, *Le armi del popolo*.

cal problems than to the wider independence of Italy.¹² Such instances of democratic resistance, which did not start in 1848, were part of a double evolution: first, the population resisted the centralized politics of the kingdom and its land and tax circumsequences, second, they refused Bourbon absolutism, reduced to its coercive practises and the abuses in its administration and army. The combination of these two motives was the principal source of the popular mobilizations which relied on the economic and social protests in the 1840s which contemporaries used to call *rivindiche*.¹³ However, the people's participation in such mobilizations had been neither autonomous nor systematic: it was always framed by local elites who were well-known to local folks, as they were part of the same community. The mayors and intendants were part of that framing as many of them supported the dissidence movement, for example in Cosenza where the mayor Tommaso Ortale and even more so the intendant Tommaso Cosentini played an essential role at the insurgents' side.¹⁴ More frequently, priests used to encourage those mobilizations to a wider extent, using their authority linked with their social and religious function and delivering politicized sermons, a privileged means to spread if not liberal or democratic ideas, at least revolutionary exhortations to which populations were at first scarcely receptive.¹⁵

In this respect, the integration of ordinary people into the alternative order which the revolutionaries wanted to construct appeared as a top-down politicization process, drawing on local elites and depending on the local political stakes. The involvement of the traditional authorities, particularly the *borghesia rossa* which was mostly found in the Southern part of the kingdom, contributed to the movement and linked the Mezzogiorno to a Mediterranean scheme of the 'birth of modern politics'.¹⁶ But it was not built in an uniform way, and had to face some opposition: during a riot in September 1847, in Bovalino, a village close to Gerace, there were two priests who appealed to the people to make and defend the revolution, Francesco Jelasi and Giuseppe Zappia. They were hounded by the people of the village and beaten until they bled.¹⁷ Such tensions, which resulted in outbreaks of popular violence, were a symptom of a political fight which seemed like a generalized civil war. They reflected a territorial crisis which linked the kingdom

¹² On the construction of the Southern Italian liberal movement, see Delpu, *Un autre Risorgimento*.

¹³ This word, used in the stakeholders' vocabulary as *revindica* or *rivindica*, depending on local variants, refers to the protest movements linked with popular demands about ownership of the common lands. Antonio Buttiglione has suggested that they have been one of the main dynamics of the rural masses' support for the 1848 revolution in the whole Southern part of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies (Buttiglione, *La Rivoluzione in "periferia"*, pp. 38-62).

¹⁴ Andreotti, vol. III, p. 334.

¹⁵ On that practice, see Delpu, 'La parole des prêtres'.

¹⁶ That scheme had first been brought out for nineteenth century Spain by Jean-Philippe Luis, who then wondered about its validity for other States having comparable social and political structures (Southern France and Italian states, see Luis, 'Réflexions autour de la naissance de la politique moderne'). It is based on converging data which enlighten the modernization of the political frame after the revolutionary era (emerging from national political space, birth of parliamentary sovereignty, broadening of the public space through press).

¹⁷ Messina, *Il clero calabrese* p. 45.

with other territories affected by the deligitimation of the Bourbon monarchies.¹⁸ While the revolutionaries constituted one of the parties in that conflict, they planned to arm the people to defend the revolution and so maintain the public order they wanted to establish.

II. THE NEAPOLITAN NATIONAL GUARD, A LIMITED TOOL OF POPULAR MOBILIZATION

As in many European States which took part in the revolutions in the first half of the nineteenth century, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies was equipped with a tool to control public order, the National Guard, starting from the first institutional forms of revolution in February 1848. As an armed corps formed from the bourgeoisie, and relying on elected representatives, the National Guard was a legal way to defend revolution, and which had existed on and off in the Meridional political landscape during the earlier two revolutions in the Kingdom in 1799 and in 1820-1821. Consisting of local battalions established at the level of the municipalities, the guard was characterised by its wide geographical and strategical reach.¹⁹ It had not been the only form of armed mobilization of ordinary citizens. There were also popular militia which arose in a more spontaneous and informal way, which had been one of the more efficient methods of mobilization the legitimists wanted to oppose to the revolution, particularly during the *inzorgenze* of 1799.²⁰

The National Guard's main aim was, as in the other countries where it existed, to integrate people into the defence of the revolution and also the maintenance of law and order, seeing as initially there was some reluctance to get involved in revolution. However, as the revolution's stakeholders were divided between moderates who were in favour of a reformist path which would support the monarchy, and radicals who supported a more accomplished revolution, the initiatives for integrating people into the maintenance of public order quickly expanded beyond the National Guard, which was seen to be weak in mobilizing people, essentially as it was a tool in the service of the kingdom's elites. The radical press of the Kingdom used to express this argument: the democratic newspaper *Mondo vecchio e mondo nuovo*, for instance, denounced the National Guard as an opportunist institution, devoted only to satisfying the ambitions of several local elites and unable to really provide for the defense of liberties in the kingdom's provinces.²¹ It was precisely the grabbing of the positions by a small number of people, mostly provincial notabilities, that was the main reason for that argument. Others denounced the Guard as a coercitive institution which, instead of integrating the people into revolution, would

¹⁸ Pinto, 'Una prima guerra globale'.

¹⁹ See De Angelis, *Difendere la Rivoluzione*, and, on the province of Salerno, Ferrari, *La guardia nazionale a Salerno*. The role of those institutions in post-revolutionary European societies is well-known: see for instance and on the French case, Bianchi and Dupuy, *La Garde Nationale*, and for the Italian one, Francia, *Le baionette intelligenti*.

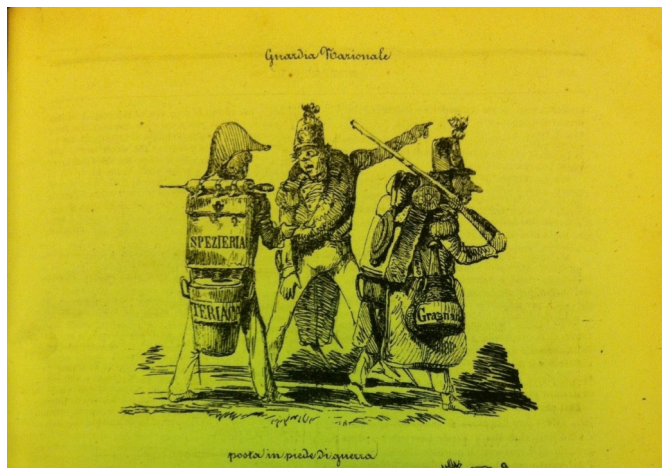
²⁰ The role of ordinary Neapolitan folks in the monarchical militias of 1799 has been studied by Paris Martín, 'Le peuple royaliste en armes'.

²¹ *Mondo vecchio e mondo nuovo*, I, 40, April 12 1848, p. 157.

submit it to constant repression by suppressing all subversive activities, as suggested, after the failure of the revolution, by the democrat Ferdinando Petruccelli della Gattina:

*The moral misery of Naples' common people (popolo basso) has no measure. As it is gifted by nature of a svelt and prolific intelligence, the necessity to silence it appears all the more dangerous and regrettable. [...] The turbulent movements of the Neapolitan plebe [...] force us to arm ourselves with the resentment of having maybe to rise up against our brothers. [...] The Neapolitan plebe, we can't ignore this, is a pious, ignorant, greedy, talkative one, full of curiosity and awkwardly religious. Gifted with such features, it ponders only weakly the hand ruling it, so long as it has means of subsistence, freedom of speech and freedom to take part in celebrations and religion. In that respect, not only its needs are not opposed to a constitutional government, but can favor it.*²²

Such a portrait of Neapolitan folks made them a collective stakeholder in the revolution, compatible with it on the condition of wanting to arm these folks with appropriate tools. Here Petruccelli voiced one of the most frequent arguments used by the democrats, namely the fact that the National Guard was unsuited to the precise situation of the Neapolitan people as it was a foreign and imported force. This unsuitability for the local conditions of the Mezzogiorno explained why the institution was considered to be inefficient, while it would actually have rather been the support of political revolutionary sociability than of a real support of revolution.



Picture 1 : The National Guard on a war footing (taken from the satirical newspaper L'Arcicchino, May 1848)

²² Petruccelli della Gattina, La rivoluzione di Napoli nel 1848, pp. 148-149.



Picture 2 : The café of the National Guard in Naples (*ibid.*)

This accounts for the various attitudes to moving forward past the first aims of the National Guard, either by disarming it as it was no longer useful, or by adapting it as it would otherwise only be a tool to reproduce the traditional social and political order which would prevent the further spreading of revolution. These attitudes developed essentially after 15 May 1848, when the monarchy dissolved the National Guard as the government grew anxious about the democratic election of officers. However, even if the institution was outlawed, it went on existing in the provinces and areas which the central monarchy could only control with difficulty, being often informal and weak to meet the needs of defending the revolution. Some of the local revolutionaries were looking to master its working within the framework of isolated initiatives. In the last days of May 1848, Antonio Montagnese and Giuseppe Villone, two landowners of Iatrinoli near Reggio Calabria, were hoping to prevent the municipality's National Guard from obeying General Nunziante's orders.²³ Some others were hoping to develop the mobilizing function of the National Guard by making it a tool of the dissidence native to the kingdom's southern provinces. The province of Reggio offered the most significant cases: one of Castelveter's landowners, Ilario Scutari, forced the municipal administration to enrol the names he indicated amongst their recruits.²⁴

Such alternative uses revealed the limits of the National Guard as a tool for massive popular mobilization and for the collective defence of the revolution. Other tools appeared more effective in a political and social context which was overdetermined by traditional moral economies. From that point of view the circulation of information appeared more efficient, with the recurrence of false rumours reporting the king's death. In Calabria, these rumours lead to the destruction of statues of the emblems of monarchy in an attempt to turn an established fact, the vacancy of power, into a much more systematic political opposition to the monarchy. Such a practise became rooted in the fragmen-

²³ ASRC, Atti di Polizia, I, 1, ad nomen.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

tation of the political communities built at the local scale of the village or the valley, often self-structured. The connections with other political spaces were thereby reduced to few people, essentially local elites or state employees who used to subvert the information they were spreading.²⁵ Other practices were part of that repertory of collective actions, as political speeches by the democratic priests were used to incite the people to defend the revolution against the forces that could threaten it, particularly the Bourbon monarchy. This practice was however depending on personal initiatives which, even if they were often converging, were sometimes criticised by the most radical element amongst the democrats. In the newspaper *Mondo vecchio e mondo nuovo*, in the last days of March 1848, Petrucci denounced, for example, the inefficiency of these political speeches, both because they were not regular and also because unknown political notions were not always clearly explained to people.²⁶ That is why the practices of political mobilization diversified, relying on initiatives which aimed to integrate the people into efforts to maintain revolutionary order. They revealed the agency of the Meridional revolutionaries and their strategies to include the people in the insurgent order.

III. INTEGRATING ORDINARY PEOPLE INTO EFFORTS TO MAINTAIN ORDER

The failure of the most frequent practices of political mobilization pushed the insurrection's stakeholders to consider other strategies. The most specific consisted in delivering money to the general population to incite them to take part to the defence of the revolutionary order. In the light of the National Guard's inefficiency, and while several people regretted the census requirement which limited the number of men authorized to involve, democrats such as Aurelio Saliceti proposed including common men from the central neighbourhoods of Naples, while most of them had supported the Bourbon monarchy and had taken part in the suppression of former revolutions.²⁷ Popular resistance to the revolution were the main issue at stake in these debates. Despite the liberals' increased efforts to integrate people in the revolution, this only resulted in very little popular support, while the economic and social demands linked with the question of ownership, constituted one of the most relevant arguments.

In such conditions, the financial mobilization had been a decisive tool in rallying people to join the insurgent order. The economic crisis of 1847, whose repercussions were perceptible in the Mezzogiorno until the 1850s, contributed to the success of these initiatives. From that point of view, the raising of armed voluntaries was first organized by individual and isolated people, who promised a daily compensation of three carlines to anyone who would take up arms to defend revolution. The distribution of money, which was the main way of raising up of men, relied on local networks at the level of the neighbourhood or the village, and these were most numerous in the province of Reggio

²⁵ Caglioti, 'False notizie, complotti e vociferazioni'.

²⁶ *Mondo vecchio e mondo nuovo*, I, 25, March 25th 1848, p. 99.

²⁷ Di Ciommo, *La nazione possibile*, p. 257.

Calabria. In that region which gave rise to conflicting political mobilizations, that practice would have facilitated the stabilization of the revolutionary order. In Spring 1848, Giuseppe Idone, a landowner from the Calanna village, recruited men to defend the revolution. He hoped to place these men in the *campi rivoltosi*, informal structures created from June 1848 to defend the local positions of the insurgents against a possible incursion of the Bourbonian army. Idone's action relied on a family-based network: his brother Pasquale, a landowner, asked the communal cashier (*cassiere comunale*) for the necessary funds, withdrawn from the taxes collected by the municipality, while their cousin Rocco, a farmer, took care of educating the new recruits in the arms drill.²⁸ This familial and local centering reveals the strategies of politicization according to which the revolutionary public order should be constructed in informal ways. However, these did not prevent initiatives of coordination being taken to harmonize the raising of men, such as those of the post inspector Achille Parise in the province of Cosenza. Here, during Spring 1848, Cosenza took care of recruiting emissaries in order to raise armed groups, which were one of the most frequent models of military formations in nineteenth century Italy. The revolutionary committees from the province had endorsed this role by naming Parise as a war commissary.²⁹ The funds given to the revolution's defenders were also a decisive factor in the increase of popular participation, and most often involved people who already had an experience of arms drill. The sources available give very little information on military learning; we only know that the connections with Sicily, facilitated by geographical closeness, facilitated the circulation of arms among the Calabrian revolutionaries. One landowner in Bagnara (province of Reggio), Giuseppe Veneziano, provided insurgents with arms and hid in the village church several cannons given by Sicilian insurgents.³⁰

Due to the lack of a coordinated public subscription, the recruitment of men was taken care by local elites and took place through several ways, ranging from criminal to lawful methods. The province of Reggio offers an example where we can observe the diversity of cases. The first consisted of stealing public funds, and was a continuation of numerous revendications against the abusive taxes asked of the kingdom's subjects since the reform of the French occupying monarchy during the Napoleonic era. The people's demands dealt with the most contested tax as it was considered the heaviest, the *fondiaria*, while some insurgents considered the possibility of replacing this with a direct contribution to the *campi rivoltosi*. From that point of view, some employees of the supply office who sustained the revolution played a decisive role. These included men such as Lorenzo Pitti, municipal cashier in Laureana, who in July 1848 embezzled the amounts collected in the municipality in order to give funds to the insurgents. Others managed to raise popular support by spreading false rumours: for example, the priest Giuseppe Galloro, from Ga-

²⁸ ASRC, Atti di Polizia, I, 1, ad nomen.

²⁹ Archivio di Stato di Napoli (then ASNA), Archivio privato Borbone, 1044, 38, ad nomen. On *guerra per bande*, the main form of popular armed mobilization in nineteenth century Italy where it has been particularly promoted by Giuseppe Mazzini, see Della Peruta, 'La guerra di liberazione spagnola'.

³⁰ ASRC, Atti di Polizia, I, 1, ad nomen.

latro, pretended during mass that he had stolen a huge suitcase full of money belonging to the main stakeholder of the repression, the general Alessandro Nunziante, appointed by the Bourbon monarchy in June 1848.³¹ These developments sometimes came with pressure from revolutionaries on tax administration employees: one of the landowners of Casoleto, Luigi Longo, forced the municipal cashier Angelo Calvo to give funds to the insurgents, threatening that he would capture the village landowners' oxes, and this allowed him to extort 100 ducates which he then divided between the revolutionaries.

More legal ways also contributed to financing the revolution, drawing on donors' individual initiatives. One example occurred in Santo Stefano, one of the villages of the province of Reggio where the insurrection was particularly developed around the Romeo family who had been involved in the liberal movement since the 1820-1821 revolution. There, a craftman, Stefano Surace, gave money to the insurgents to accelerate the mobilization and support his brother Demetrio's action. He was one of the priests of the village and since May 1848 had preached against the king's tyranny. Some others proposed coordinating their efforts to give the insurgents from the province a common fund allowing them to finance their activities. For this reason, in July 1848 three landowners from Bova, Concetto Malgeri, Pasquale Parragia and Saverio Polimeni, who were themselves donors, organized a subscription list on a provincial scale; the list was devoted to covering the needs of revolutionary public order. Even if it was essentially a case of proposals, the appropriation of some prerogatives by dissident revolutionaries explained that the raising of funds could have been more prescriptive. The involvement of some employees of tax or justice administration also contributed to it: in Seminara, the local judge Antonio Foti sought to impose by force a tax in order to give the proceeds to the insurgents and to encourage the revolution.³² Such practices reflect the major social structure of the insurrection, at first focused on the local elites, then spreading according to a top-down model of politicization, which was common with other Southern European countries. They enlist popular participation to maintain order. During this period in a wide part of the Mezzogiorno, a democratic movement had been spreading since the 1830s, and the involvement of ordinary people in maintaining revolutionary order was a particularly efficient means of appropriating the competences of sovereignty.

IV. FROM PARTICIPATION, TO MAINTAINING ORDER, TO THE APPROPRIATION OF SOVEREIGNTY

While the revolution wanted to invert some of the kingdom's political and social hierarchies by establishing an alternative order, the maintaining of order appears to have been a global process in the service of this political ambition. Revolutionary leaders adopted practices of control and normalization which took place in a wider process of the appropriation of sovereignty, when local communities were demanding autonomy from a centralized monarchy which was considered abusive. The capacity to maintain order is one

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

of the regalian competences whose appropriation, even if sporadic and progressive, went hand in hand with the controlling of places of power. Most of these cases were found in Reggio: after 15 May 1848, the lawyer Domenico Muratore, former republican of 1799, installed the direction of the local revolutionary committee in the premises of the provincial intendancy, and gave his tacit agreement to several seditious demonstrations organized against the king, to sustain the Sicilian insurgents.³³ A comparable situation took place in the province of Cosenza where the intendant Tommaso Cosentini, although moderate, at the same time installed the revolutionary Ricciardi Committee in the premises of the administration of which he was in charge.³⁴ Far from being limited to ordinary seditious practices, such appropriations were an answer to a project, linked to the political learning of the Meridional provinces and to the transfer of monarchical sovereignty to the people. This relied on the idea that the political contract between the king and the people had been broken, which was a central point in Neapolitan revolutionary propaganda, and concentrated the political debate on the theme of tyrannicide. The spreading of false rumours was a particularly efficient means of mobilization, and it corroborates that idea: in the province of Cosenza, one of the members of the revolutionary committees of Spring 1848, Stanislao La Mensa, spread the rumour King Ferdinand II had been destituted and taken prisoner.³⁵

Such rumours were numerous, and fed another aspect of the revolutionary maintaining of order: ruling on the king-tyrant's fate by means of popular justice practices which were common in Mediterranean Europe at that time. The informal trials of the king and his representatives used political charivaris, a privileged way of integrating the popular masses into politics during the European revolutions of 1848.³⁶ As they wanted to avenge the ordinary folks who they believed had been sacrificed by the Bourbon monarchy and erected them as martyrs of the liberal cause, they wanted to execute the torturers at whose mercy they found themselves. This was a continuation of a widespread symbolical plan, using ritualized destructions of monarchical emblems. But the acts of expiation were transferred into the figured representations of monarchy, most of which involved stoneware statues placed in the public buildings. In Postiglione, in the province of Salerno, in Winter 1848 the pharmacist Nicola Cafaro slashed a portrait of King Ferdinand I who had already died in 1840.³⁷ Such objects were targeted as they were the only ones of the monarchy to stand in the living spaces of subjects in peripheral provinces. Other sacrilegious practices pertaining to spontaneous justice were also staged by local populations as mock courts: in Cosenza, the judiciary sources mention – without naming him – a priest who in Summer 1848 baptized a ram and a cow with the royal couple's first names,

³³ Ibid. The provincial police sources remind us that such supports had appeared starting from May 16 1848 when, thanks to the quicker circulation of information via the telegraph, the news of the slaughters from Naples had become known in Calabria, where locals revived the radical political mobilization (De Lorenzo, 'Il 1848-1849').

³⁴ ASCS, Processi politici, 47, 273.

³⁵ ASNA, Archivio privato Borbone, 1044, 38, ad nomen.

³⁶ Delivré.

³⁷ Archivio di Stato di Salerno (then ASSA), Processi politici, 279, 15.

giving them a sentence of execution, making them burn publically, serving them dinner at an opposition banquet and then throwing their bones in the common grave.³⁸ The public staging of such trials confirm they are practices of spontaneous justice, aiming to be a spectacle for local people. These used to rely on common practices revealing ordinary hatred for the Bourbons, but these also enlighten the way dissidence supported popular justice as it was enacted in the construction of autonomous political communities.

While from April 1848 onwards, the Bourbon monarchy started a progressive conservative evolution which became more precise after the slaughters of 15 May, the maintaining of revolutionary order by ordinary people reveals the scale of the protest, which gained a new focus on local space. Slaughters were indeed perceived as a breach of oath against the political community, which had been regarded since the Early Modern Era as *nazione napoletana* according to a tacit agreement between the people and the king.³⁹ From then on, since the very days after 15 May 1848, the maintaining of order had been assumed by revolutionary committees which were equipped with regalian practises. The Ricciardi committee demonstrates this. It was established in order to federate the radical opposition on the provincial scale in Calabria. It developed police, justice and tax prerogatives, and especially focused on building municipal committees at the scale of the villages, through the decisive involvement of local elites. The Cassano committee, in the province of Cosenza, was built around the priest Nicola Minervini.⁴⁰ In Majera, the local committee was created in June 1848 on the initiative of a landowner, Francesco Brani, who was a regular correspondent of revolutionaries linked to regional elites such as Tommaso Ortale, former mayor of Cosenza, and Domenico Mauro, main figure of the Calabrian rural protests of 1848, or national political stakeholders like Giuseppe Ricciardi.⁴¹

During Summer 1848, those dissident powers became rooted in new political spaces which were equipped with regalian prerogatives, according to which they organized the defense of the Southern provinces against the Bourbonian armies. Established from June 1848 onwards, these groups constituted tools of massive mobilization, such as in Spezzano Albanese where streamed about 3 000 members. Their prerogatives of sovereignty particularly consisted of fiscal ones, through the appropriation of government practices with the support of competent personnel, while some employees of the administration were sustaining the liberal movement. In Cosenza, in July 1848, the Ricciardi Committee charged one of its members, Bruno Rongelli, to raise funds as a controller of the provincial taxes.⁴² In these alternative spaces of sovereignty, the defence of popular fiscality was a central focus, and explained the setting of popular governments. The camp of

³⁸ ASNA, Alta Polizia, 640, 2563.

³⁹ For more on this, see Musi, *Mito e realtà della nazione napoletana*: the late eighteenth century saw the birth of a difficult coexistence between the Neapolitan nation, still considered as pre-eminent, and the Italian one.

⁴⁰ ASNA, Archivio privato Borbone, 1044, 38, ad nomen.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

Santa Eufemia, in the north of the province of Reggio, was one of the most revealing cases. Established starting from June 1848, it was helped by widespread popular mobilization supported by local elites. One month later it got a provisory government, lead by a lawyer from Bova, Giuseppe Tripepi, who was awarded the statute of president although no legal text prescribed this.⁴³ At the same time, considering the involvement of local administrative employees such as Benedetto Accorinti, some go-betweens of that dissident government settled in the district of Gerace, which had been the scene of a relevant protest movement since September 1847, which saw the execution of five young local insurgents and their immediate edification as political martyrs.⁴⁴ Accorinti established a Comitato Distrettuale which was charged with the task of fund-raising in order to ensure the maintaining of order. The appropriation and defence of the tax competences was also expressed in other ways, because the 1848 revolution had resulted in alternative tax systems in the central neighbourhoods of Naples, lead by ordinary folks linked to the camorra and wanting to finance the resistance against monarchical authority.⁴⁵

Despite the great diversity in local situations, the progressive integration of ordinary people into the defense of the new powers as established by the insurgents took place in the wider context of the translation of authority, which awarded self-proclaimed counterpowers who were pretending to be democratic. The rural spaces of the Southern part of the kingdom saw the emergence of ‘plebeian kings’ (re del popolo basso) who appeared as liberators, or were considered as substitutes for the king’s authority. In the Italo-Albanese village of San Lucido, Carlo Manes, a landowner and captain of the local National Guard, had been considered that way by the municipality’s inhabitants, and in Summer 1848 was acclaimed to the cries of *viva la libertà, morte al Tiranno, viva il capitano Carlo Manes*.⁴⁶ Such substitutions of authority gave legitimacy to revolutionary leaders: in December 1848 in San Cosmo, a client of the Mauro family, Gervasio Protasio Bua, announced the king’s forthcoming destitution suggesting that the throne would get given back to Domenico Mauro.⁴⁷ However, there was no consensus on the form which these dissident powers should take: some of them, as in Santa Eufemia, appeared as insurrectional governments, revealing their provisory aspect, while the republican proclamations remained occasional and isolated, and more often used to express spontaneous protests rather than real political projects. In Paola, on the western coast of the province of Cosenza, Luigi La Costa proclaimed a republic by destroying the statues of the king with other villagers, but he neither wanted to settle a government nor to appropriate the regalian prerogatives, nor to build a defence system destined to ensure its continued existence.⁴⁸

⁴³ ASRC, Atti di Polizia, I, 1, ad nomen.

⁴⁴ The district of Gerace, in the northern-eastern part of the province of Reggio, was for a long time immune to the insurrections in the rest of the province, due to its geographical isolation (Cataldo, *Cospirazioni, economia e società*).

⁴⁵ Fiore, *La strutturazione del fenomeno camorrista*, p. 369.

⁴⁶ ASNA, Archivio privato Borbone, 1044, 38, ad nomen.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

In conclusion, the 1848 Neapolitan revolution reveals the real participation of ordinary people in the process of maintaining the dissident public order. This was part of a double process of politicization of the masses, at first directed towards the 'people', understood as civil society at whole, and especially towards the popular masses in a descending politicization scheme, relying on local stakeholders who identified as revolutionary elites. The question remains whether this evolution, which can be observed at the same time in other European Mediterranean states,⁴⁹ led to a real popular appropriation of politics. The reinvestment of a part of the regalian competences it carried out including security and taxes, reveals a political transition to the advantage of dissident and informal political communities. However, the process in general had been widely controlled and gathered by local elites and it contributed to their social and political promotion. The municipal or regional sovereign governments they formed did not have any real political foundations, and the initiatives they supported rather came from protest practices than from political projects destined to continue to exist. Such political education had thus occurred in the context of systems doomed to be provisory, without a real awareness of the sense of the movement. It shows that the shift of the Southern Italian masses to political modernity, even if this noticeably increased in 1848, still remained unequal and incomplete.

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⁴⁹ See Luis, 'Réflexions autour de la naissance de la politique moderne'. More recent works have shown that such situations were frequent in the Italian states around 1848 (Francia, 1848. *La rivoluzione del Risorgimento*).

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