

# **NAPLES IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**

THE BIRTH AND DEATH OF A NATION STATE

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EDITED BY  
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## CHAPTER I

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# THE CAPITAL AND THE PROVINCES

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MARIA GRAZIA MAIORINI

### THE THEORETICAL AND HISTORIOGRAPHIC DEBATE

The events involving the capital and the provinces in the Kingdom of Naples in the eighteenth century cannot be fully understood without taking into account the complex relationship that had always linked these two realities. The awareness of this relationship is particularly strong in the juridical and political theory of the eighteenth century, which emphasised the distinctive aspects of contrast and – on the part of the provinces – of emulation and even of protest. It became evident in the controversy raised by Enlightenment intellectuals from the second half of the century onward. The interest of Neapolitan intellectuals in the provinces can be dated back to the second half of the seventeenth century, when Cartesian criticism and economic ideology began to weaken the certainties of the dominant élite regarding the validity of the existing order, which was based on the primacy of jurisprudence and on values deriving from the Aristotelian-scholastic system. The diffusion of the new ideas helped both to highlight the malfunctioning and imbalance of the existing political and social organisation, and to begin a critique of the very values upon which that organisation had been founded.

Benedetto Croce had already pointed to the renewed flourishing of Neapolitan culture beginning in the second half of the seventeenth century. Recent studies have further developed Croce's observations, highlighting the intellectual ferment which grew from that period through the first thirty years of the following century, giving life to a jurisprudential 'pre-Enlightenment' which had such exponents as Pietro Giannone, Pietro Contegna and Serafino Biscardi.<sup>1</sup> The comparison with other European models of development, especially in England and Holland, suggested to these thinkers the necessity for a deeper analysis of the situation in the Kingdom of Naples. Thus all the problems which

impeded the growth of the country were to be examined, from relations with the Holy See to the conflict among social groups or the maladministration of justice.

Raffaele Ajello has emphasised the importance of these jurists, who elaborated and diffused a true 'ideology of development', laying the basis for the formation of a 'productivist mentality' and thus for the economic and moral rebirth of the country. This group began to hypothesise innovative solutions to individual aspects; to submit the legal system to severe criticism; to readdress the problem of law and order, which was one of the most important obstacles to the development of the economy and of internal commerce; and to criticise ecclesiastical privileges and immunities. They denounced the distance of the Court as one of the causes of the weakness of the idea of authority, and consequently of the 'languor' of the judicial system. Its inadequacies, as Biscardi pointed out, were aggravated by the presence of a capital full of useless, lazy people, whose iniquity went unpunished because of the immunity and privileges which their citizenship guaranteed. The capital was indeed the seat of the most important lawcourts (the malfunctioning of which was reflected in the life of the city and the Kingdom), and because the ample privileges granted its administration were recognised and confirmed by all the sovereigns in turn, it was almost an autonomous power standing against the entire country. Paolo Mattia Doria, too, described the capital as the tyrant of the Kingdom; its privileges 'nullify almost all the authority of royalty.'<sup>2</sup>

These considerations belonged to the theoretical approach of the juridical tradition. But they produced the first awareness of a 'problem of the capital and of the provinces'. The results of these reflections passed into the thought of Genovesi via Intieri, Broggia and Doria, after the installation of the Bourbon régime, when economic ideology found new maturity. It was, in fact, criticism of the régime which offered the opportunity for proposing new theoretical starting points, in the light of various cultural conceptions ranging from Newtonianism to neo-mercantilism. Intieri, in spite of his criticism of 'dottorismo e . . . ministero' (the judiciary in the capital), expressed his faith in modern civilisation and its progress, 'blessed the century, the prince, the nation', and proclaimed his love for his chosen country (he came from Tuscany) and even for its capital, whose greatness was a check against tyranny. Broggia, on the other hand, showed himself to be sensitive to the social implications of the government's policies, and defended the rights of the 'industrious and hard-working poor', whom he defined as 'the best part of the state . . . the part that struggles and works hard'.<sup>3</sup>

All these elements can be found in a form which is more mature, filtered through a new sensitivity, in the writings of Genovesi, alongside the more specific influences which he derived from late mercantilist and proto-libertarian theories.

With Genovesi, the problems of the provinces gave rise to a genuine manifesto for the economic and moral reawakening of the country, and developed into a true social doctrine, cloaked in patriotic form. Genovesi's patriotism is indicated by the importance of the Kingdom in his thought and his perceptible attachment to it. It is indicated by the attention to an 'inch by inch' knowledge of the country, its history, its problems and needs, of the mentality of its people.<sup>4</sup> A 'national consciousness' is born from such knowledge, according to Galasso, and can be transmitted to his students. As Venturi had pointed out, Genovesi transformed his teachings into a school, and from a school into a party, which was spread by his students to every province in the Kingdom. A way of thinking was born, which was different from that of the jurists of the first half of the century: the problems of every individual province are seen as part of the global context of the nation by 'provincial' writers who define themselves primarily as such; one need only think of Michele Torcia and Domenico Grimaldi on Calabria, or Melchiorre Delfico on the Abruzzi.

It was this new characteristic which gave the discussions a xenophobic tone and incorporated a demand for redress on the part of the provinces, a note of opposition and protest against the capital, with clear ideological significance. This meant an attack on the determined centralism initiated by the Spanish rulers, and continued by the Bourbons, in spite of the many projects for decentralisation. It is in Galanti that we find the most powerful and embittered protest, which inspired his project of administrative reform, defined as 'polymunicipalism'.

The centrality of this protest against the 'monster' capital in the thought of the Neapolitan *philosophes* has attracted the attention of historians. Venturi had emphasised the European significance of the phenomenon in the eighteenth century, as a contrast between the outlying areas and the dominant cities, an economic and social reaction. Galasso has considered the importance of the real cultural supremacy which was a result of political and historical events which had increased both the privileges of the city and its prestige, and had confirmed it as the representative of the interests of the Kingdom with respect to Madrid and Rome, both of which threatened the 'liberties' of the Neapolitan nation. Ajello, while recognising the imbalance between the capital and the outlying regions, has emphasised the 'exchange' which sprang from it:

if for centuries the city of Naples had absorbed and used the material and intellectual resources of the provinces, it had thus started a process which did not move in just one direction. It severely impoverished the outlying areas of the Kingdom, but it worked to elevate the tone of the capital, which was for the south the seat and the undisputed sign of its civic life, and thus gave significance to the entire nation, since it achieved a specific and important presence in the Italian and international context.

Finally, 'the events of 1806-15 and of 1860 . . . let loose feelings of discontent which had long been repressed, and set off sterile mechanisms of accusation and demands for redress'.<sup>5</sup>

Similar sentiments can be found among the Enlightenment philosophers, stimulated by the tension of the political debate and by the urgency of the problems. These attitudes arise from emotional engagement with a concrete problem, the specific relationship between the capital and the provinces, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. My inquiries into the organisational structures of the phenomenon in the eighteenth century have indicated that a connection exists between the relationship between capital and provinces and the conflict among social groups in the Kingdom. This chapter sets forth some of the major results of these inquiries.

#### THE ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES OF THE CITY AND THE PROVINCES: THE TWO SYSTEMS OF THE KINGDOM

If we consider the organisational system in the Kingdom at the beginning of the eighteenth century, we can immediately verify its 'dualistic' character. On the one hand we have approximately two thousand local communities or *università*, a term which indicated the origin of the local autonomous authorities as private entities, a concept which remained valid. They carried out their social, economic and legal business autonomously, on the basis of regulations, statutes and customs which guided their internal relations and local administration. The *università* elected their local rulers autonomously, had their own parliaments and a whole series of municipal administrators. The principal function of these local rulers was to see to public needs, which included organising the *annona* (the food supplies for the city), using funds obtained from local taxes.

On the other hand, there was the system of royal lawcourts, central, provincial and local, which covered the entire country in a tight network whose function was to administer justice, and consequently to control all economic and social life in the provinces. This royal judicial system also included a 'subsystem' of entities which directed the



economic and financial life of the provinces, at the top of which was the *Regia Camera della Sommaria*. It exercised jurisdiction and control over all questions to which the royal financial administration was a party or in which it had an interest, and generally supervised all *università* which were classified as 'dedotte in patrimonio', i.e. in financial difficulty.<sup>6</sup>

Although it operated with full autonomy within the laws and customs of the Kingdom, the *università* used this court system as an intermediary with the top political and administrative bodies in the capital. The feudal system also had a role in this dualism, with an influence on both sides. After their conquest of Naples in 1503, the Spanish considered the barons to be *ufficiali regii*, royal officials, and the power of the barons continued to be exercised in various ways in local government, both political, economic and administrative, influencing the appointment and conduct of local officials.

The moment at which the south of Italy became a Spanish vice-regency has therefore been rightly judged decisive, occurring at the same time as the major European monarchies were initiating absolutism and forming modern states. England was then undergoing a similar kind of evolution, as has been demonstrated by recent research emphasising the importance for the foundation of the British Empire of the financial system and provincial organisation. It was at precisely this time that the Kingdom of Naples came under the Habsburg dynasty. Thus, the development of Naples was conditioned by the needs of the imperial policy of Spain, following very precise and tightly connected directives. In internal defence precedence was given to the security of Milan, the 'antemural del Reyno', rather than to guaranteeing the security of the 'unarmed border' of southern Italy. In economic and fiscal policy, the Neapolitan economy was colonised and trapped within the system of *arrendamenti* (tax-farming). Finally, in internal policy, there was a compromise with the dominating social and political forces (nobility, legal community, high local church authorities).

This compromise meant that 'ministerial' power (the judiciary and governmental élites) was promoted in the capital, whereas the provinces were abandoned to feudal power. The prestige of the central judiciary contributed to the growth of the capital, whose *ministero togato* (the judiciary) gained renown throughout Europe, above all for its attitude towards the Holy See and its resistance to the introduction of the Spanish Inquisition. The organisation of the provinces followed the model of the capital and was centred on the *Udienza* (literally 'hearing'), which was a court made up of three *uditori* ('hearers') and a *fiscale* (a lawyer expert in financial administration), headed by a *preside* (president). Strengthened by reforms introduced by Philip II, the *Udienza*

became the principal means of royal organisation of the provinces. It acted as intermediary between the local governing bodies and the top level of political and juridical power in the capital, represented by the highest courts: the *Sacro Regio Consiglio*, the *Consiglio Collaterale*, the *Gran Corte della Vicaria* and the *Regia Camera della Sommaria*.

The supremacy of the judiciary became the model for political and social organisation, founded on the values professed by the judges, who ranked in popular opinion as the *sanior pars* (best part) of the nation and the source of all knowledge, holders of power by consent. The power acquired by this judiciary resulted in an 'anomalous' development of Neapolitan society, as Raffaele Ajello has pointed out. Their supremacy went so far as to humiliate the nobility and push them aside from all the central points of command, and conditioned the subsequent development of southern Italian institutions, condemning them to bureaucracy and compromise. Hence, the 'dualism' previously mentioned: alongside and in opposition to the judicial system in the centre and in the provinces, we can set another 'system'. The nobility, excluded from central government, maintained its power in the provinces, exercising political and administrative control over the *università*. But even in the centre the nobility retained a very important instrument of control: it dominated the administration of the capital, and this constituted a mighty obstacle to the affirmation of absolute power. The government of the city was made up of seven elected members: six from the nobility, representing the five *Seggi della Capitale* (districts of the capital) into which the nobility was divided, and the *Eletto del Popolo*, elected from among the *dottori* (lawyers), merchants, rich men and shopkeepers who represented the 'people'.

Through the *Capitoli*, *grazie e privilegi* (concessions and privileges) that it managed to obtain from the Spanish monarchy in exchange for *donativi* (voluntary contributions of money to the king), the capital kept its autonomy and even reached the point of claiming the right to deal with the Spanish monarch as an equal. Especially after the abolition of the *Parlamento generale* (General Parliament) in 1642, the *Seggi* of the nobility claimed to represent the interests of the entire Kingdom vis-à-vis the Habsburg monarchy. As a consequence, the *Seggi della Capitale* became a model and were recognised by the local administrations as protectors and guarantors of their autonomy and privileges. In the provinces, too, the nobility organised itself into a defensive 'closed nobility' in order to maintain political and administrative control over local government.

The ideology of nobility, the ties of values and lineage, was the connecting factor between the centre and the province in this system,

which was based on these local, autonomous administrations dominated by the nobility. The nobility of the Kingdom affirmed its right to govern the country by virtue of birth and blood. The ideological supremacy of the Neapolitan nobility, which included the most important baronial families of the Kingdom, and the progressive aggregation of the major families of the provincial nobility into the *Seggi* of the capital, also gave economic primacy to the nobility of the Neapolitan *Seggi*. This supremacy influenced the economy of the provinces directly and indirectly, and impoverished them economically and financially. The drain caused by the ecclesiastical revenues held by numerous prelates, younger sons of the southern nobility, who lived in Rome, was added to this situation.

The opposition between these two social orders, the judiciary and the nobility, expressed two different models of life, culture and social organisation. Thus, in the more than two centuries of viceroyalty a juxtaposition was created between organisational systems operating at various levels, each of which used a different method of mediation and also a different point of reference at the highest level of the political system.

#### THE INDEPENDENT KINGDOM

The advent of the Bourbon monarchy in 1734 occurred in a contradictory context. The enthusiasm of the intellectuals regarding that event must be set alongside an international and domestic political situation based on an extremely precarious balance. The juridical pre-Enlightenment had shown the need for a direct point of reference at the top of the political system, as the determining factor for the beginning of an important process of reform. The expectations of the intellectuals came up against the dynasty's need to install itself firmly in the country by means of a régime which tended toward absolutism.

The problems faced by the new monarchy were immense.<sup>7</sup> The major political and social forces (the ecclesiastics, the nobility, and even the judiciary, although the latter at least provided a framework in the centre and the provinces) held such large amounts of power and were in such conflict among themselves as to constitute a serious impediment to the functioning of the new régime.

The first problem of the new government was how to adjust the delicately balanced international and domestic situation. To this end it pursued a policy of compromise with the major political and social forces. As a consequence, the programme of reform was put aside. The principle of continuity was given precedence, leaving unaltered the

traditional system based on the laws and customs of the Kingdom, except for a few corrective measures which allowed the monarch a certain measure of control. In the capital, a system of secretariats and the *Sovrintendenza di Azienda* were useful for this purpose, while in the provinces a new privileged relationship was instituted between the monarchy and the *presidi* (presidents of the *Udienze*) in their intermediary function.

In all other aspects, the dominance of the traditional political and social élites was reaffirmed. With respect to the nobility, the monarchy adopted a policy of progressive assimilation by distributing prestigious public offices so as to forge a closer ideological relationship between monarchy and nobility. Members of the nobility were given positions at Court, as diplomats, or in the armed forces. Careful attention was also given to the requests of the most important factions of the judiciary. In order to satisfy the moderate magistrates, a prestigious new central court was created, the *Real Camera di S. Chiara*, and the role of the *Udienze* in the provinces was reinforced; in order to satisfy the jurists known as *afrancesados* because of their attachment to French culture, a new *Supremo Magistrato del Commercio* (Supreme Ministry of Commerce) was instituted. It was to look into questions relating to commerce in order to encourage a sector which, as we have seen, these theorists considered essential. Finally, the financial needs of the monarchy were guaranteed by confirming the primary function of the *Camera della Sommatoria* in this area.

The programme of the Bourbon monarchy with respect to the provinces was therefore sidelined. This programme was analogous to that of the major European monarchies, and to that of Philip V of Spain, and was designed to establish a closer dialogue with the outlying regions through 'transmission belts' carrying the sovereign's will to the provinces, in order to circumvent the existing dualistic system and thus increase social integration. In the first months of the régime the Secretary of State, Montealegre, attempted to create such an instrument of communication by modifying the role of the *presidi*. But the attempt failed. The monarchy had to go back to the logic of compromise and keep to the dualistic system described above, albeit with slight modifications, principally the appointment of high-ranking military officers as *presidi*.

By the end of the 1740s, in spite of Genovesi's assertions (particularly in his *Del vero fine delle lettere e delle scienze*, 'On the True End of Letters and Science'), the intellectuals had already given an essentially negative judgement on the first twenty years of independence. A withdrawal on all fronts had put the Kingdom, both the centre and the provinces, back into the hands of the conservative forces, who imposed their own conditions for the survival of the monarchy.

This backlash in the provinces was very hard on the emerging social groups, who had seen the renewal begun by the monarchy as a hope for an opening or simply a point of reference. Instead their situation remained as it had been, or even worsened as a result of the failure to implement economic reform. This was also caused by corruption among the judges and by unscrupulous profiteers who had got rich by speculating in the shadow of the parasitic economy of the Court; a notorious example is the conduct of the officials responsible for obtaining supplies for the army (*partitari*). In addition, the military and fiscal needs of the new monarchy fell hardest on the weakest social groups.

The requests for new city statutes, the protests against cadastral surveys and social turmoil because of economic difficulties all reflect the situation in these years.<sup>8</sup> In Naples, in strident contrast, we find the needs of the Court, with its luxury, the cost of the royal workshops and of the construction of new royal buildings, the new pre-eminence of the capital itself, which, in an independent Kingdom, was now also the residence of foreign representatives and a centre for intellectual and cultural rebirth, furnished with taste and abundance. From the outlying districts the élites who wanted to escape from their closed provincial environment were drawn to the capital, but so were multitudes of the desperate, the indigent, and the 'new poor', also attracted by the opulence of the city. As early as the 1750s, criminal gangs began to appear in the vicinity of the capital alongside the vagrants and the poor. Brigandage, believed to have been eradicated at the end of the seventeenth century, arose again in Terra di Lavoro, Salerno, Montefusco – the neighbouring provinces which were tied to Naples by trade and by the economic currents radiating from the capital and the Court – 'disturbing the countryside and alarming innocent subjects of the king, who cannot freely attend to their rightful business'.<sup>9</sup>

In spite of this, the standard of living rose across the country. The sojourns of the Court in the various royal seats were themselves beneficial, though not wholly so, since the visits brought higher food and housing prices. The Bourbons' connections brought the Kingdom into the international circuit, albeit in a subordinate position. The archaeological excavations begun at Pompeii, Herculaneum and Resina brought the Kingdom renown among cultured foreigners.

The international economic situation was favourable. The diffusion of the economic ideologies and political needs of the European monarchies after the international reorganisation ratified at Aix-la-Chapelle (1748) encouraged governments and intellectuals to concentrate their attention on the domestic problems of their respective countries. The message of the *Encyclopédie* spread throughout Europe, and everywhere

debates flourished on such topics as the corn trade, taxes and currency. In Naples the European debate introduced by Genovesi focused attention on the provinces. At first this new interest was translated into an attempt to introduce a homogeneous and fixed system for the *Annona*, imposing *ratizzi* (graduated taxes) on all well-off citizens. More complex reform projects were later developed, and this was an expression of an extremely lively political and social debate.

It was after the departure of Charles of Bourbon for Spain, during the Regency created because of the minority of Ferdinand IV, that the debate came to a head, owing to increased political liberty over in a period of what has traditionally been described as 'weak' government. But it was also a particularly fertile moment, from a cultural point of view, throughout Europe, and even in Naples we find the signs of the maturing of the Enlightenment. The Regency was dominated by the personality of Bernardo Tanucci, Secretary of State and member of the Council of State and of the Regency. He had previously remained somewhat in the shadows, but now he emerged as the most faithful defender of sovereignty and guardian of the system that Charles of Bourbon wanted for Naples.

Seen from this point of view, these years are actually a 'strong' period, because of the ideological and theoretical consistency of Tanucci's reform programme, which was prudent but solid, intended above all to confirm the principles of sovereignty against all potential limitations: the church, certainly, but also the nobility, so prominent in local administration, and above all in the government of the capital.<sup>10</sup>

Tanucci was strongly influenced by the ideas of Genovesi, which he of course adapted to his own frame of reference, derived from his jurisprudential and humanistic outlook. He assimilated various economic and social elements which allowed him to develop a many-faceted and complex view of the relationship between capital and provinces. Unlike the Enlightenment reformers, who saw the contrast between capital and provinces only in terms of conflict, Tanucci considered the specific function of Naples as a capital, seat of the government, from an administrative perspective.

From the beginning of his ministry Tanucci had shown a clear suspicion of the capital, which he expressed in his famous *Memoria su Napoli* ('Memoir on Naples'). This attitude led him to reject a centralisation of the major lawcourts: instead he drew up a plan of decentralisation based on the creation of provincial sections of the Court of the Vicaria. After contact with the writings of Genovesi his position on this question, originally adopted for practical, juridical and organisational reasons, was enriched by human and social motivations

that later also characterised his study of the people of the provinces. In his *Letters*, in which he expresses his thoughts freely, Tanucci offers an extremely complex vision of Neapolitan society. First of all, he identifies society with the productive social groups, which he defines as the 'moltitudine delle braccia' (mass of workers); secondly, he shares the national and patriotic ideas and sentiments of the Neapolitan reformers. This represents a much deeper conception than the 'state patriotism' which historians find in the political thinking of the absolute monarchies of those years. Thirdly, he contrasts the provinces with the capital. This opposition between the parasitic capital and the depressed and exploited provinces is one of the recurring themes of Tanucci's controversial writings. His aversion to the capital also had political motivations. The capital represented a power that, with its autonomy and its privileges, limited the power of the sovereign. Tanucci could not conceive of the capital as constituting a 'power' and acting as if it were a parliament; he wanted to bring the city back to its role of *università* – capital.

More than this, Tanucci's aversion had roots in the 'kind' of power the city represented, that is, the power of the nobility. He considered the nobility to be one of the most important obstacles to the absolute power of the sovereign. The ideology of nobility was in his opinion an expression of selfish private interests, in contrast with the general interest and the true good of the people as pursued by the sovereign. Proof of this was the obstacles set up by the Neapolitan nobility to free trade in the provinces, not so as to safeguard food supplies in the capital, but in order to make a profit by speculating on the poverty of the population. The selfish attitude of the Neapolitan nobility was reflected in that of the provincial nobility, who made personal profits from the administration of the *università*, battenning on the misery of the population.

Tanucci was therefore convinced of the necessity for a reform which would bring order back to the administration and wealth back to the provinces. But he intended to begin from the centre, imposing the supremacy of royal authority and the control of the government over some fundamental aspects of the local administration, such as the formation of the *Annone* and the auditing of their accounts. These were limited actions in specific sectors which nonetheless had deep political meaning; and in fact, they met with vehement opposition from a coalition of vested political and social interests.

Tanucci's proposal was in conflict with that produced in 1760 by some factions of the judiciary and the nobility represented in the *Giunta dell'allivio per le università*, a temporary commission composed of *togati* and aristocrats who wanted to found new jurisdictional bodies, the *intendenze* (superintendencies) to control the economy and finances of

the *università*. The opposition of the king of Spain – and of Tanucci – blocked this project.

Tanucci's opportunity to launch a double attack on the two obstacles to absolutism, the nobility and the local administrations, came with the famine of 1763–4. The capital and all the other *università* in the Kingdom had difficulty obtaining food, mostly because of the failure of their administrators to set up the *Annone* as the law required. The cries for help to the king from the *università* greatly strengthened the minister's hand: such requests had a very high psychological and political value. They opened the door to state intervention in one of the most jealously guarded areas of autonomous local power. Tanucci called for direct and immediate control over the local administrations by a board called the *Giunta dell'annona*, the members of which were the presidents of the most important central lawcourts.

It was not an extreme measure with respect to the traditional system, but it was certainly a change from the absolute freedom of local administrators. The capital, claiming to represent the interests of all the *università* of the Kingdom, embarked on a difficult struggle with a very profound ideological significance. The claims of the nobility against the power of the sovereign were made explicit, and a theory was proposed by which the nobility, inspired by the theories of Montesquieu, set itself up as an honest broker, representing the interests of the Kingdom and defending the liberty of the 'Neapolitan nation' against the tyranny of sovereign power. The nobility took heart from the battles that the French and English parliaments were waging in those same years against the absolutist pretensions of their sovereigns.

It was the beginning of a long battle which, interrupted now and again by the emergence of various urgent problems, finally ended with the Masonic conspiracy which led to the fall of Tanucci. This plot confirmed the triumph of the nobility but also exposed its internal divisions, which were caused by the differences and even contradictions in its ideology. The idea of social utilitarianism justified the new nobility of the élites based on their social merits, not on their purity of lineage.

The *Giunta dell'annona*, pretext for that political conflict, was not dismantled, but its significance was soon overtaken by subsequent reform initiatives.

#### THE BREACH BETWEEN CENTRE AND OUTLYING AREAS

The 1770s were an important turning point throughout Europe. This was the decade of the first crisis of the *ancien régime* (as Venturi pointed



out), and it was characterised by rebellions, protests and turmoil at all social levels, which, according to some interpretations, constituted a 'bourgeois challenge'. The crisis was moral and spiritual, not just economic and social.<sup>11</sup>

The repercussions of this general European crisis were very intense in the Kingdom of Naples. The fall of Tanucci set off a serious political crisis, characterised by instability and conflict among the forces that competed for power, and a progressive loss of credibility and authority on the part of the Court, the government and the judiciary.

While the Neapolitan culture of the Enlightenment expressed its full maturity through profound theoretical reflections, in practice the consequences of this political void and the incapacity to organise and make plans were evident. A series of disconnected and contradictory reforms was introduced which brought no benefit to the country. At the centre, the reform of the secretariats and the armed forces, and the abolition of the *Sovrintendenza d'Azienda*, were a response to conflicts among factions and to the interests of individual groups. In the outlying regions the reform of the *Annona*, the inquiry into agriculture and the creation of patriotic societies and provincial schools, were emotional, rather than measured responses to the demands of the reformers. At one time Galiani, Caracciolo and Palmieri, three of the most brilliant exponents of the Enlightenment in southern Italy, were all to be found in the State administration; but their genius for reform envisaged no clear plan of structural reforms of any great importance.

The strongest signs of the crisis approaching the country came from the provinces. Public order deteriorated in many ways, with public and private violence, riots, armed conflict between *università*, and brigandage. This reflected the exasperation of ancient tensions and conflicts of various kinds: conflict between social orders and between city and country; the desperation caused by poverty; and the impatience of emerging groups who aspired to positions of power. The result was a fertile breeding ground for new ideas.

The famine which struck the Kingdom of Naples had other consequences besides the immediate ones described above. It accentuated existing structural imbalances: between the capital and the provinces; in individual areas, between the increasing wealth of profiteers and speculators without scruples, and the poverty of the starving peasants; finally, between aspirations for development and the absence of hope for the future. The population increase after the famine, and the economic recovery (which resulted partly from the repercussions of the Seven Years' War), were cancelled out by the depopulation of the countryside and the usual bureaucratic and fiscal obstacles to the

production and circulation of goods. But the worst obstacle was the emergence of a new mentality which, far from embracing the criterion of productivity, tended toward the immediate, selfish exploitation of resources and a sterile conception of property, which resulted in damage to the weakest social groups.

The Acts of the *Camera della Sommaria* describe the transformation of the countryside owing to the indiscriminate felling of woodlands, the changes in farming practices, the destruction or decay of public buildings, and the enclosure of common land. They also mention arson, slaughter of animals and other evils. Hence a feeling of delusion and impotence led to a widespread and growing climate of tension, so much so that it seemed to become a normal feature of both public and private relationships. Attacks on established authority were particularly frequent in those years and sometimes took the form of riots or even armed revolt.

This brief description is distilled from hundreds of episodes reported in the archives of the *Segreteria di Giustizia*, which bear witness to a climate of confusion and moral decay alongside a desire to throw off traditional limitations, now felt to be extraneous and oppressive. It was a society which no longer had any clear points of reference: it understood that the traditional ones had been left behind, but it had not yet attained the maturity necessary to develop the ideas and stimuli suggested by contemporary English and French political literature (which was available and avidly read) into models to fit its own needs.

Violence and the abuse of power characterised the narrow-minded and suffocating environment of the provinces, and so did exasperation caused by the threatened loss of traditions, usages and privileges that had been in force for centuries. In this regard, it is significant that in these same years local histories were written and aspects of provincial culture were rediscovered. Yet it remained impossible for the emerging and marginal social classes to break out of the existing mental, juridical, political and socio-economic framework and occupy a new or better position. The traditional social hierarchy was defended jealously by the old order.

The consequence was a resumption of brigandage. The government responded with a series of repressive measures, the execution of which was entrusted to the provincial *presidi* (presidents of the *Udienze*), with the support (if required) of the armed forces. My research shows that this decision was a consequence of the political debate at the top levels of government, in which the military were increasingly asserting themselves – for instance Prince di Iaci, the Captain General, and General Acton, the Secretary of State for War and for the Navy.

'Official' government intervention in questions of law and order was a new response to demands for security in society. The nature of the political and social conflict determined the type of response. The use of the army was imposed by the influence of the military and the monarchy's inability to develop new, more modern, ways to impose public order and, above all, to implement economic and social reform. This characteristic of Bourbon politics was to recur later.

After the 1783 earthquake, the government's interest in the provinces seemed to be reawakened, and many reform initiatives were made, culminating in the institution in Calabria of the *Cassa Sacra* (Sacred Fund), along with many projects for reconstruction. A far-off echo of Genovesi's teachings stimulated a desire to gain deeper knowledge of the country: as a result Galanti made some *visite generali* (tours) into the provinces. His 'interviews' with the provincial élites, described in the reports sent to the king on these occasions, reveal the anxieties, the proposals, the eagerness for renewal on the part of many younger members of the patrician order or the 'bourgeoisie', who had already been Masons for some time and would later become Jacobins.<sup>12</sup> The fundamental problem still seemed to be the administration of justice, just as we saw in the analysis of by the jurists sixty years earlier. This confirms the continuing centrality of the judiciary in the system and the inertia of administrative structures in both the centre and the provinces. But some interesting observations show the maturity of thought achieved by the collective consciousness within these structures. For example, there was severe criticism of the political constitution of the Kingdom, expressed in laws and customs which had been held sacred and untouchable until a few decades earlier, and of the political and social relationships that derived from them.

At first, the government seemed willing to satisfy these various demands and proposals. It showed interest in Galanti's suggestion regarding the creation of *ripartimenti* (districts), which later were actually created in Calabria. It also accepted a proposal to reform the judicial system in the provinces, for which the Secretary of Justice, Simonetti, prepared a special plan. Though he began with the same premises as the Enlightenment reformers regarding the characteristics and causes of the malfunctioning of the state, Simonetti's plan substantially reconfirmed the traditional scheme. The only significant differences were the imposition of curbs on the privileged courts, and the shifting of emphasis to the *Udienze*, the barons as royal officials, and the *università* in the administration of justice.<sup>13</sup>

One of the most severe symptoms of the troubled situation in the provinces was the problem of law and order. The already serious

situation of the 1770s was exacerbated by the indirect effect of military reforms in the subsequent period: in particular, the provincial militia created in 1782, at first greeted with enthusiasm by Enlightenment thinkers, later revealed itself to be a 'devastating scourge'.<sup>14</sup> Far from realising the ideal of the 'citizen soldier', the provincial militia recruited mostly desperate men with few scruples, attracted by the idea of obtaining advantages from their position, in particular substantial immunity for all kinds of crimes. This, as is easy to imagine, aggravated the already urgent problem of public order.

The climate grew worse when the government and the Court, impressed by the upheavals in France, became obsessed with the fear of Masonic conspiracies and plots, and so instituted various repressive measures of control, surveillance, even espionage, throughout the provinces. In spite of continual requests from the population (during the journey through Apulia by the king and queen in 1797, for the marriage of the heir to the throne to the archduchess Maria Clementina, letters, entreaties and petitions were presented to them, all seeking to draw their attention to the grave and troubled situation), the government's only response was to adopt still more repressive measures.

#### THE CAPITAL AND THE PROVINCES DURING THE FALL OF THE REGIME

The revolution of 1799 in the Kingdom has been explained by recent historians as the manifestation of a 'generation gap' between the Neapolitan *philosophes* and the more radical Jacobins, and as the maturing of the demands for democracy which took shape after the trials of 1794 and 1795, in which the contribution of exiles who had fled persecution was decisive.<sup>15</sup> The country's answer to the drama that was being played out again shows the contrast between the capital and the provinces. In the provincial towns the dominant élites, faced with the dilemma of supporting either the Neapolitan republic or the king, made their own decisions autonomously, determined to hold on to their political and social supremacy. Naples, after the royal family had left the city for Palermo, experienced the drama of two anarchies: first, the anarchy of the nobility at the end of 1798, in which the aristocratic factions, of traditional ideology, made a last attempt to take back the reins of command; and then the anarchy of the people in January 1799, before the republic was established by the 'patriots', who had returned along with the French (21 January 1799).

As regards the provinces, the documents show that in many places there were no big changes within the directing élite or in local

structures, but only a modification of the forms of organisation. The 'Neapolitan republic' pertained almost exclusively to the capital, where there actually was a transformation of society according to the new principles. In the provinces, in the places they actually reached, the *commissari* and *democratizzatori* (democratisers) sent by the republican government limited their actions to haranguing the people and electing new municipal governments; but they were not able to control the whole provincial territory directly, and various areas made their own autonomous decisions. Above all, from a political and social point of view, the revolution in the provinces had a profoundly different meaning, in spite of the adoption of revolutionary symbols. The local populations, especially the élites, took the initiative and decided their own destinies. The fact that this was a movement to protect specific (or even selfish) interests does not detract from its status as a new awareness of their 'right to happiness,' as Filangieri had proclaimed. In fact, events in the provinces show very clearly the errors of the central power with its absentee politics.

But even the representation of the events given by the subsequent anti-democratic reaction has some interesting elements. In some places, such as Matera, the lowest classes rebelled immediately, incited by patrician or bourgeois groups who had been excluded from power. In other places, such as the area around Teramo, the mountain population opposed the bourgeois and the patricians; and in still others, the *terre democratizzate* (democratised areas, meaning those loyal to the republic) stood against the *terre realizzate* (loyal to the king). There were reciprocal punitive expeditions which expressed centuries-old hatred, as happened in the province of Montefusco. But often the massacres, the looting, the fires which continued even later, show differences which further complicate the contrast between city and country revealed by historical research. For example, at Tropea and even at Teramo, there were new alliances between lower social groups in the city and inhabitants of the countryside. In the conflicts which characterised this period, therefore, the presence, alongside the agricultural petits bourgeois and landowners, of the mass of the peasantry emerged as a new element of social dynamics.<sup>16</sup>

The crisis of 1799 dramatically expresses the essence of the connection outlined at the beginning of this article, the special relationship between the capital and the provinces. A new characteristic emerged which was to have serious repercussions for subsequent developments: the social fragmentation of the southern provinces.

## NOTES

- 1 Croce, *Storia del regno di Napoli*, pp. 136ff.; Ajello, *Il problema della riforma giudiziaria*, vol. II: *Il preilluminismo giuridico*; idem, *Tra Spagna e Francia. Diritto, istituzioni, società a Napoli all'alba dell'illuminismo*.
- 2 See his ms. XXIA.7 in Società Napoletana di Storia Patria; Biscardi, 'Idea del governo politico ed economico del regno di Napoli', in Luongo, *Serafino Biscardi*; Doria, *Massime del governo spagnolo*.
- 3 Venturi, 'Alle origini dell'illuminismo napoletano'; idem, *Settecento riformatore*, vol. I, pp. 93, 97; Ajello, *Arcana juris*, pp. 425, 422.
- 4 Venturi, *Settecento riformatore*, vol. I, pp. 565ff.; G. Galasso, *La filosofia in soccorso de' governi*, p. 34; M. G. Maiorini, *La Reggenza borbonica*, pp. 186ff., with further bibliography.
- 5 Venturi, 'Napoli capitale'; Rudé, *Europe in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 70ff.; Galasso, *L'altra Europa*, pp. 337ff.; Ajello, 'Il governo delle province', pp. XVIII–XIX.
- 6 See Di Taranto, *L'economia amministrata*. There is no a full study of the Neapolitan judicial and administrative systems, but see Ajello's important *Una società anomala*. For a collection of contemporary laws see De Sarii, *Codice delle leggi del regno di Napoli*, Naples 1792–7.
- 7 See Schipa, *Il regno di Napoli sotto Carlo di Borbone*, vol. I; Venturi, *Settecento riformatore*, vol. I, pp. 29ff.; Ajello, 'La vita politica napoletana sotto Carlo di Borbone'; idem, 'Carlo di Borbone'.
- 8 On these proposed reforms, see Venturi, *Settecento riformatore*, vol. I, pp. 28–46; Rao, *Il regno di Napoli nel Settecento*; Chiosi, 'Il Regno dal 1734 al 1799'; Romano, *Prezzi, salari e servizi a Napoli*; idem, *Dal Vicereame al Regno. Storia economica*.
- 9 Tanucci, *Epistolario*, vol. II, p. 553, letter to Onofrio Scassa, June 1750.
- 10 See Tanucci, *Epistolario*, vol. XV.
- 11 Venturi, 'La première crise de l'ancien régime'; idem, *Settecento riformatore*, vol. III: *La prima crisi dell'Antico Regime, 1768–1776*, pp. XI–XVI. On the bourgeois challenge, see Rudé, *Europe in the Eighteenth Century*, ch. XII.
- 12 Placanica, Introduction to Galanti, *Calabria 1792*, pp. 24ff.
- 13 For Simonetti's plan see Rao, 'Galanti, Simonetti e la riforma della giustizia', pp. 281–341.
- 14 Rao, 'Esercito e società', p. 127; Chiosi, 'Il regno dal 1734 al 1799', pp. 71ff.
- 15 Rao, *Esuli*.
- 16 De Martino, *Antico regime e rivoluzione nel regno di Napoli*.