# Sidestepping a historical wave: a cancelled revolution in northern Italy. 1796-1797

Doina Pasca Harsanyi

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# SIDESTEPPING A HISTORICAL WAVE: A CANCELLED REVOLUTION IN NORTHERN ITALY. 1796-1797

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**ABSTRACT**

In the spring of 1796, the Army of Italy under the leadership of Bonaparte invaded the Italian peninsula, entered major cities, occupied Northern and Central Italy, and gradually reorganised old units into sister republics – satellite states under strict French control. Everywhere in Italy, pro-French republican militants, called *giacobini,* helped set up new institutions and worked on aligning public opinion with French-inspired revolutionary goals. The Duchies of Parma and Piacenza stood out as the only exception to this course of action. Bonaparte and his representatives made every effort to thwart the enthusiasm of their own supporters there and allowed the Duke of Parma to repress a burgeoning pro-French republican movement. It was an exercise in *Real Politik* motivated by diplomatic necessities: Spain exercised political custody over the duchies, and the Directory wished to secure Spain's neutrality. The atypical decision of suppressing pro-French activities resulted in a cancelled revolution that hindered France's long-term political objectives in the area.

**RATER UNE VAGUE HISTORIQUE : UNE RÉVOLUTION AVORTÉE DANS LE NORD DE L'ITALIE (1796-1797)**

**RÉSUMÉ**

Au printemps de l'année 1796, l'armée d'Italie sous la direction de Bonaparte envahit la péninsule italienne, pénétra dans les grandes villes, occupa le nord et le centre de l'Italie et réorganisa progressivement les anciennes unités en républiques sœurs, des États satellites sous strict contrôle français. Partout en Italie, des militants républicains pro-français, appelés *giacobini*, contribuèrent à l'établissement de nouvelles institutions et travaillèrent à influencer l'opinion publique sur des objectifs révolutionnaires d'inspiration française. Les duchés de Parme et de Plaisance se distinguèrent en faisant exception à cette ligne de conduite. Bonaparte et ses représentants mirent tout en œuvre pour contrecarrer l'enthousiasme de leurs propres partisans et laissèrent le duc de Parme réprimer un mouvement républicain pro-français en plein essor. C'était un exercice de *Real Politik* motivé par des nécessités diplomatiques : l'Espagne exerçait la garde politique des duchés et le Directoire souhaitait s'assurer la neutralité de l'Espagne. La décision atypique de supprimer les activités pro-françaises aboutit à l'avortement d'une révolution qui entravait les objectifs politiques à long terme de la France dans la région.

# SIDESTEPPING A HISTORICAL WAVE: A CANCELLED REVOLUTION IN NORTHERN ITALY. 1796-1797

by Doina Pasca HARSANYI

Doina Pasca Harsanyi received her Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2001. Her BA is from the University of Timisoara, Romania, in French Language and Literature. She joined the Central Michigan University in 2002. Her research interests include topics in French revolutionary and Napoleonic history, French-American relations.



## I. Introduction

In April 1796, when the French army led by General Bonaparte moved into the Italian peninsula, the Duchies of Parma, Piacenza, and Guastalla (commonly designated as either Parma – Piacenza or the States of Parma) fully expected to escape the ensuing turmoil. Transferred back and forth between the Hapsburgs and the Bourbons since 1731, when the Farnese line (rulers by papal decree since the 16th century) died out, the duchies eventually settled for Spanish guardianship at the Treaty of Basel (22 July, 1795).[1] During this treaty's negotiations, Spain's Prime Minister Manuel Godoy, the Prince of Peace, traded Parma – Piacenza's neutrality in exchange for its autonomy. Parma was forced to outsource its entire foreign policy to Spain, while France's Directory government promised to allow the Bourbons to sit on the duchies' throne.[2] The arrangement suited Ferdinand, the current duke, a stubborn conservative whose chief preoccupation, since his coming to power in 1770, had been to unravel the Enlightenment-inspired reforms enacted by his father.[3] Yet, in violation of neutrality, French troops marched into the States of Parma on 7 May, 1796: Austria's General Beaulieu expected the French armies to attempt crossing the river Po at Valenza; consequently, Bonaparte decided to

1 This reversed the delicate balance achieved through three Bourbon Family Pacts (1733, 1743, 1761) but was consistent with new political realities. Still, Duke Ferdinand tried a small independent move that he considered both prudent and shrewd: he entered into a secret arrangement with Austria, whereby he allowed Austrian generals to recruit in his lands and march their troops through Parma-Piacenza, with the caveat that all promises became null and void, and neutrality prevailed, should the French 'irrupt' in the duchies. The French government invoked this manoeuvre as rationalization for the very harsh terms of the armistice of 10 May, 1796.

2 All communications between Parma's Prime Minister Cesare Ventura and the French authorities were mediated either by Count Valdeparaiso, Spain's ambassador to Parma, or, more often, by the Spain's ambassador to Paris, Marquis Del Campo. In 1801 Jeronimo La Grua replaced Valdeparaiso and remained in Parma until Duke Ferdinand's death (1802), after which the duchies were gradually integrated within the French empire.

3 The country went through a period of accelerated reforms led by Minister Du Tillot, a French national entrusted with complete control by Duke Ferdinand's father, Philip (r.1748-1770). Religious to the point of bigotry despite his *philosophe* teachers' best efforts (Condillac and Kéralio had been his main private tutors) Ferdinand undid nearly all reforms when he took over in 1770. Out of step with development in the Northern Italy, the duchies were experiencing a conservative restoration while in neighbouring Lombardy and Tuscany the Habsburg rulers endeavoured to liberalize legal systems and state institutions. For quick reference: Giovanni Tocci, 'Il Ducato di Parma e Piacenza. Dai Borboni al'Unità' in *Storia d'Italia*. Diretta da Giuseppe Galasso (Torino : UTET, 1979), 291-335; Henri Bédarida, *Parme et la France de 1748 à 1789* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1928. Reprinted 1977); Elizabeth Badinter, *L'Infant de Parme* (Paris: Fayard, 2008).

ignore diplomatic niceties and surprise the enemy by crossing at Piacenza.[4] As soon as he stepped over the border, Bonaparte dictated the terms of an armistice which formalized the French occupation and obliged the city of Piacenza to host, indefinitely, a military contingent commanded by General Béranger'.[5] Under duress, the duke and his executives struggled to comply with the armistice's heavy demands. Some of their subjects though welcomed wholeheartedly the town's transformation into a French military outpost. Like similar groups throughout Italy, local French supporters bonded on a common political vision inspired by the French Revolution that amounted to, in the words of Stuart Woolf: 'the political idea of Italian independence considered as a necessary step for the realization, in Italy and in the entire world, of a completely new society.'[6] In Parma – Piacenza as elsewhere, ideological adversaries called these groupings *giacobini*, with a disdain those so mocked turned into a badge of pride.[7]



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4 It was, in Bonaparte's words: 'one of the most essential operations' as he reported to the Directory, adding: 'bets were made that we would not be able to do this.' *Au Directoire Exécutif,* 20 Floréal An IV (9 May, 1796), *Correspondance Générale de Napoléon. Publiée par la Fondation Napoléon* (Paris : Editions Fayard, 2004), I, #583. Bonaparte went on to obtain another legendary victory at Lodi (10 May, 1796)

5 The text of the armistice in reproduced in *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier. Publié par l'ordre de l'empereur Napoléon III* (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1858), I, #368. Within 15 days the duchies had to disburse the equivalent of 2 million francs, 10,000 quintals of grain, 5,000 bushels of oats, 5,000 pairs of shoes, the same number of pairs of boots, 1,200 working horses, 500 horses outfitted for cavalry, and 2,000 heads of beef. Three days later General Cervoni went to Parma to supervise the orderly 'entry of contributions.' *Au Général Cervoni,* 24 Floréal An IV (13 May, 1796), *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier cit.,* I, # 413. The armistice was elevated to Peace Treaty on 6 November, 1796.

6 Stuart Woolf, *Storia d'Italia* (Torino: Einaudi, 1973) III, 167. The historiography of *giacobinismo* is vast and quite contentious; its discussion exceeds the limits of this essay. A few relevant characteristics help contextualize the political situation in Parma at the end of the 18th century. The major axis of debate concerns the degree to which the revolutionary changes of the *triennio* – the period between 1796 and 1799, which saw the establishment of the Italian sister republics at the behest of French armies - have been imposed by a *Patriot* enlightened minority to a largely passive, if not outright hostile, population. A number of popular counter-revolutionary movements, from protests against French economic impositions in the North to the religiously inflected *San Fedista* insurgency in the South provided ample proof that, in the words of historian Antonino de Francesco: 'the revolutionaries were not able to make the people love the revolution.' (Antonino de Francesco, 'Aux origines du mouvement démocratique italien: quelques perspectives de recherche d'après l'exemple de la période révolutionnaire 1796-1801' *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 308 (1997): 333-348. The article also provides an informative historiography review). As early as 1801, Vincenzo Cuoco formulated the notion of a 'passive revolution' in a famous landmark essay that explained the failure of the Neapolitan revolution through the mutual distrust between well-meaning but patronizing elites and popular classes guided by ancient cultural and religious values untouched by the new ideas. This particular interpretation was later embraced by conservative historians and raised to the level of Italian historical distinctive trait, a matter of national character which in due time helped blunt the revolutionary force of the *Risorgimento* and allowed centrist politics to dominate the second half of the nineteenth century. The same train of thought eventually rationalized the Italian fascist system as a closure mechanism, the only movement capable to end revolutionary convulsions by means of rallying the masses rather than by forcing an alien political order upon them. Marxist historians, beginning with Antonio Gramsci, vigorously refuted this thesis and pointed instead to evidence of active interest for the French revolution among large segments of the population well before Bonaparte's invasions: see especially Renzo de Felice, *Italia giacobina* (Napoli : Edizione Scientifiche Italiane, 1965). The preface reviews the attitudes Italians in all regions held towards the French Revolution and later towards Bonaparte and his armies. De Felice points to the slogan 'let us do as the French have done' recorded after 1789 during sporadic popular revolts throughout the Italian peninsula. However, de Felice too acknowledges that republican intellectuals were unable to overcome their distrust of the people whom they idealized and patronized at the same time. Aloofness prevented revolutionary leaders from capitalizing on popular discontent and from mobilizing the masses, who gravitated instead towards the eager leadership of the Church. *Italia giacobina*, Preface, 9-58, pp. 14-17 especially. See further elaborations on this theme in Renzo de Felice*, Il giacobinismo italiano. Note e ricerche con un saggio introduttivo di Franceso Perfetti* (Roma: Bonacci, 1990). After WWII, major studies underlined the commonalities between Italian and French republican thought and advanced a more nuanced analysis of the lower classes' reluctance to welcome democratic movements championed, for the most part, by intellectuals and enlightened aristocrats. Beginning with the 1980's, the shift in emphasis from social movements to political practices in the historiography of the French Revolution stimulated reappraisals of the Italian revolutionary experience, tying it more closely to French politics over the Thermidor/Directory period. Armando Saita offered a subtle analysis of the 'passive revolution' thesis centered on the Enlightenment notion of an immature but persuadable people in 'Notes pour l'étude des attitudes politiques et des groupes sociaux dans l'Ítalie jacobine et Napoléonienne' *Annales historiques de la Révolution française***,** 312 **(**1997): 503-527, pp. 522-527 especially. See the analytical survey of the historiography of the *triennio*, with special emphasis on French-Italian connections in Anna Maria Rao, 'Introduction: L'expérience révolutionnaire italienne' *Annales historiques de la Révolution française,* Numéro spécial sur le Triennio Révolutionnaire, 313 (1998):387-407. *The Political Culture of the Sister Republics, 1794-1806: France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Italy*. Edited by Joris Oddens, Mart Rutjes, and Erik Jacobs (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015) is a more recent contribution to this line of research.

7 A concise summary of *giacobini*'s political agenda in Anna Maria-Rao's entry 'Giacobinismo' in *Italia Napoleonica. Dizionario Critico*. A cura di Luigi Mascilli Migliorini (Torino : UTET, 2011), 461-463. Rao observes that revolutionaries' enemies used the term *giacobini*, the revolutionaries themselves preferring to call themselves *patrioti*; eventually these terms became interchangeable. I will follow established practice and equate the terms *giacobini*, patriots and revolutionaries.

*Giacobinismo* resulted from a mix of cosmopolitan Enlightenment thought and French revolutionary influences. In Alessandro Galante Garrone's more detailed definition: '(*giacobini*) are… all those Italians who, towards the end of the eighteenth century, before and after Thermidor, sided with French ideas and with the great transalpine revolution to fulfil, in all or in part, its postulates; the aim was to defy old despotic regimes with the image of a free and united Italy.'[8] The 1796 French invasion opened the door to putting words into action. With the army led by Bonaparte conquering one stronghold after the other, from Milan to Venice, *giacobini* teamed up with French military officers and civilian *commissaires* to overthrow existing political arrangements and install republican governments. With money and resources flowing from Italy to Paris, General Bonaparte compelled the Directory to place Italy at the centre of its foreign policy. The constellation of sister republics emerged under strict French supervision meant to ensure changes would stay on a manageable course, i.e. less radical than many local revolutionaries wished.[9]

The relationship between Italian revolutionaries and French authorities was complicated, often tense and differed from one place to another.[10] Still, at minimum, French commanders and Italian revolutionaries set their sights on similar goals: the formation of republican governments on the ruins of what already accounted as Old Regime states. This was not the case in Parma – Piacenza. Reason of state, i.e. maintaining the alliance with Spain, compelled French officials there, including General Bonaparte and otherwise fiery *commissaires* Christophe Saliceti and Pierre-Anselme Garrau, to dissuade their sympathizers from contemplating, let alone carry out, revolutionary plans.[11] In stark opposition to their counterparts elsewhere in Italy, would-be revolutionaries in Parma – Piacenza found themselves in the dreadful position of listening to lectures on moderation and restraint delivered by the very people who inspired their fervour for radical change; the disappointment was so much the greater, with long-term consequences for the political situation in that part of Italy. All over Italy, wrote Carlo Zaghi: 'the

8 A. Galante Garrone, 'La Rivoluzione francese e il Risorgimento italiano', in *L'eredità della Rivoluzione francese,* a cura di François Furet (Roma-Bari:Laterza, 1989) 169-179, as quoted in *Giacobini e pubblica opinione nel ducato di Piacenza* (Convengo di Studio Piacenza, Palazzo Farnese, 27-28 settembre 1996). A cura di Carlo Capra (Piacenza: Tip.Le.Co., 1998).

9 Antonino De Francesco has drawn attention to the crucial role of the French army in producing effective political change in occupied Italian territories**,** effectively shifting the central government's policies. Antonino De Francesco, 'An unwelcome Sister Republic' in *The Political Culture of the Sister Republics, 1794-1806: France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Italy*, 211 – 218. The army's tight control guaranteed that the model to follow remained the Directory not the radical period 1789-1794, an issue discussed at length in Carlo Zaghi, *Il Direttorio Francese e la Repubblica Cisalpina* (Roma: Istituto Storico Italiano per l'Età Moderna e Contemporanea, 1992). Initial frictions between the army and the Directory were quickly overcome: the government in Paris was delighted to avail itself without restraint of the economic resources of its satellites. The raw exploitation predictably caused anger and dismay even among the most committed allies on the ground. A few testimonies relevant to this subject in Alain Pillepich, *Napoléon et les Italiens* (Paris: Nouveau Monde Editions/Fondation Napoléon, 2004), 46-47.

10 The tension between initial enthusiasm and gradual disillusionment, the splintering of *giacobini* groups, the efforts at emancipation from French tutelage are masterfully analysed in a case-study for the Piedmont by Giorgio Vaccarino, *I Giacobini Piemontesi (1794 – 1814)* (Roma: Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali, 2 vol, 1989).

11 Jacques Godechot, *Les commissaires aux armées sous le Directoire* (Paris: Fustier, 1937) I, 538-539. This is still the most comprehensive examination of the role civilian *commissaires* played in guiding political changes in Italy. Saliceti was exceptionally active in Lombardy while Garrau was especially instrumental in the actions that led to the demise of the house of Este in Modena. Both visited Parma and Piacenza several times in 1796 and 1797.

Napoleonic invasion triggered, at all levels, reflections, perplexity, rethinking, hopes, and ferments.'[12] The same was true for Parma – Piacenza. What was different was the determination of French officials in these territories to thwart the 'rethinking, hopes, and ferments' their very presence kindled. This story of expediency over stated principles on the French side and of frustration, dejection and ultimately loss of faith on the Parmese side is the subject of this article.

## II. Who were the *giacobini* in Parma and Piacenza?

Parma and Piacenza were cities with long cultural traditions and sophisticated intellectual life. Despite the cultural conservatism prescribed by Duke Ferdinand's unadventurous rule, small liberal circles formed in both cities. In Parma, the owners of French bookstores Faure (Guillaume & fils Antoine) and Jacques Blanchon defied the duke's censorship and kept interested readers acquainted with the movement of ideas in Europe.[13] In Piacenza, the *Società Letteraria* was bold enough to admit notorious sympathizers of the French Revolution like Melchiorre Gioia and Gian Domenico Romagnosi, the latter a prominent jurist who read there his first essays.[14] As of 7 May, 1796, self-described *patriots* or *giacobini* from all over the duchies flocked to Piacenza, where they socialized with French soldiers and freely shared their hopes for radical change in the duchies.[15] Prominent frequent visitors from Parma included lawyer Leonardo Loschi, recently returned from exile in France, medical doctor Mamiani and Pietro Casapini, a student in theology who volunteered to serve in the Lombard Legion in October 1796.[16] All caught the eye of Piacenza's police, who designated them, generically, as

12 Carlo Zaghi, 'L'Italia di Napoleone dalla Cisaplina al Regno', *Storia d'Italia* diretta da G. Galasso. Vol. 18 (Torino: UTET, 1968), 100.

13 As if to seal off the danger, from 1789 on, the *Gazzetta di Parma* never so much as mentioned the name of the country where people were rising up in revolt and executing a fellow Bourbon king. The first issue after the French invasion of 7 May, printed on 13 May, 1796, cheerily announced the birth of Duke Ferdinand's granddaughter and reported on the visit of a few Spanish royals. *1796. Napoleone a Parma. Ristampa Anastatica dell'annata 1796 della Gazzetta di Parma.* A cura di Maristella Carpi (Parma: PPS Editirice, 1977), 37 – 41. Little wonder then that the duke decided to suppress the *Gazzetta* entirely: the last issue came out on 29 July, 1796. Only after Parma –Piacenza were turned into a department of the French Empire in 1811 did the *Gazzetta* resume publication under the name *Giornale di Taro.*

14 Alessandro Levi, 'G. D. Romagnosi e la Società Letteraria di Piacenza: spigolature romagnosiane' *Bollettino Storico Piacentino,* 3-4 (1934) and 1 (1935). Romagnosi was a Piacenza native and alumnus of the University of Parma. He left the duchies in 1791 for a magistrate position in Trento. In addition to legal essays, he started writing short, popular pro-revolutionary articles such as 'What is equality' (1792) and 'What is liberty?' (1793) which caused some friction with his employer, the bishop-prince of Trento. Romagnosi went on to become a celebrated legal mind and prominent political theorist; he also developed a deep interest in physics later in life. On Romagnosi's political thinking see Ettore Albertoni, *La vita degli Stati e l'incivilimento dei popoli nel pensiero politico di Gian Domenico Romagnosi* (Milano : Giuffrè, 1979). On the intellectual climate and the timid engagement with new political ideas in Parma – Piacenza see : Franco Catalano, *Illuministi e giacobini del 700 italiano* (Milano: Istituto Editoriale Cisalpino, 1959), 144-170; Giuseppe Berti. *Atteggiamenti del pensiero italiano nei Ducati di Parma e Piacenza dal 1750 al 1850* (Padova: Cedam, 1962), 197-287; Robertino Ghiringhelli, Idee, società ed istituzioni nel Ducato di Parma e Piacenza durante l'età illuministica (Milan: Giuffrè, 1988). A concise overview of the political climate in Parma-Piacenza in 1796-1799 in Pierluigi Feliciati, 'Arrivano i Francesi! Gli stati parmensi dal 1795 al 1814' in *L'Ossessione della memoria. Parma settecentesca nei disegni del conte Alessandro Sanseverini.* A cura di Marzio Dall'Acqua (Parma: Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Parma, 1997), 24-32.

15 Changes in Piacenza mirrored developments in most military outposts around Italy: 'The *Armée d'Italie* stimulated the circulation of patriotic newspapers, promoted the openings of constitutional societies and favoured a cultural system legitimating the new constitutional order.' De Francesco, *art. cit.*, 212

16 Loschi owed his exile to writing a brief funeral eulogy for Joseph II where he praised the deceased emperor's anti-clerical reforms (1790). That Joseph II was Don Ferdinand's brother in law counted less than the thoughts he may have inspired in the duke's subjects. General Bonaparte created the Lombard Legion on 8 October, 1796, part of the political and administrative restructuring of Northern Italy. The Legion admitted volunteers from all over the peninsula

*male intenzionati* (ill-intentioned individuals) and followed their every move. Several individuals stand out from surveillance reports.

Melchiorre Gioia's newly awakened interest in political journalism caused much anxiety within the ranks of both government and Church authorities (he had been recently invested with the clerical title 'abate'). In between friendly meetings with the French, Gioia traveled to Milan where he fraternized with Piacentine exiles.[17] His articles, published throughout the summer of 1796 in the Milanese journal *Giornale degli amici della libertà et dell'ugulianza* vehemently argued for a united, free, secular Italy held together by republican institutions. In October 1796, the French supervised Administration of Lombardy organized an essay competition on the theme: *Quale dei governi liberi meglio convenga alla felicità d'Italia* ('Which type of free government is most appropriate for Italy's happiness?') Gioia's entry won the first prize, which at once greatly raised his own profile and helped disseminate the idea of a united, republican Italy.[18] It also showed the futility of efforts to keep citizens uninformed and unengaged during a political hurricane. Thus, Giuseppe Bruno Poggi La Cecilia, scion of a noble Piacentine family and a man of scientific education, took to calling himself Brutus and became the recognized leader of all *giacobini* in the duchies. He presided over a small coterie whose regular members, in addition to those mentioned above, included Captain Antonio Boccia, an officer of the Ducal Guard and amateur geographer; bookstore owner Gaetano Del Maino; medical doctors Belcini and Buccella; a postal employee named Salveto; tin-maker Giacomo Bolla. Twenty-year old Fabio Calamini, a volunteer in the Lombard Legion since its formation in October 1796, often joined them. His participation added a touch of melodrama, for it did not escape police agents that Calamini combined ardent revolutionary ideals with sentimental impulses: rumours had him romantically involved with Gaetano Del Maino's wife, a fact Del Maino himself ignored, police believed, as he was too busy stocking his shelves with revolutionary literature.

After a brief interlude of illusory freedom during the summer of 1796 when the duke took a wait-and-see approach, all the individuals named here landed in Piacenza's prison on charges of sedition and disturbing the peace. Piacenza's watchful governor, Dionigio Crescini, launched investigations against all suspects, visiting residents of Parma included. They were questioned between December 1796 and

17 Gioia's most important contact in Milan was Giovanni Rasori, a former medical student. Rasori started his studies in Pavia on a ducal scholarship, but, soon attracted by politics more than medicine, Rasori repaid this kindness by denouncing the duke's despotism every chance he got. Forced into exile in May 1796, just days after Bonaparte's entry into the duchies, Rasori moved to Milan, the celebrated sanctuary of revolutionary minds, and started publishing the *Giornale degli amici della libertà et dell'uguaglianza,* a radical publication even for the most radicalized city of Northern Italy, and Gioia's favorite platform. On the importance and reach of this journal see the excellent article by Vittorio Criscuolo, 'Il Giornale degli amici della libertà et dell'uguaglianza' in *Giacobini e pubblica opinione nel ducato di Piacenza,* 101-140. For quick reference on Gioia's important place in the history of political and economic thought in Italy see Pietro Barucci, *Il Pensiero economico di Melchiorre Gioia* (Milano: Giuffrè, 1965) and Nicola Pionetti, *Melchiorre Gioia: il progetto politico del 1796 per un'Italia unita e repubblicana* (Piacenza: Edizioni Lir, 2015).

18 All the entries of this essay competition are collected in Armando Saita, *Alle origini del Risorgimento italiano: i testi di un celebro concorso (1796)* (Rome: Istituto storico italiano per l'età moderna e contemporanea, 1964). By the time the prize was announced, in June 1797, Gioia was already under arrest.

April 1797; the governor expected to recreate the unfolding of this groups' movements from the arrival of the French in May 1796 to the end of the year. Official police interviews, often in the presence of a judge, followed a strict routine: brief biographical reports submitted by the arresting officer introduced each suspect, after which each stated his name, age, domicile, and occupation. Most went through multiple sessions of cross-examination; some of them solicited an additional hearing after the official interview was over; a few offered extra voluntary depositions. Taken together, these documents formed a person's *costituito*. The *Manoscritti Parmensi 1579* at the Biblioteca Palatina Parma contains *costituiti* for the following individuals: Giaccomo Bolla, Gaetano Del Maino, Pietro Casapini, Filippo Buccela, Fabio Calamini, and Antonio Boccia. In the same file are included the minutes of an interview with Captain Antonio Casanova, an officer of the Ducal Guard tasked by Piacenza's governor to observe possible subversive activities, and a lengthy report on Melchiorre Gioia's writings. The defendants' answers, and therefore the information therein, are driven by the mechanics of law enforcement style of interview: who was the suspect socializing with; where were meetings taking place; to what extent did friendly discussions turn to political plots; in what ways was the suspect involved in revolutionary activities and so on. With the exception of Melchiorre Gioia's case, whose reputation prompted investigators to pore over his writings, ideas seldom came under scrutiny; the interrogators concentrated on the logistics of putative rebellions. Yet, motivating philosophical reasons transpired through the monotonous routine where all those interviewed talked about the same circles of friends and evoked the same, never realized, insurrectionary schemes. Close analysis of the contents of police records is key to recreating Parma's peculiar political dynamics during the revolutionary *triennio.*[19]

## III. The French catalyst through the eyes of the police

During the night when French troops entered Piacenza (7 May, 1796) an anonymous pamphlet exhorted the population to welcome them as liberators, in the mould of Bonaparte's previous grand declarations announcing that French soldiers only wished to break he Italians' chains. It read:

> *Citizens of Piacenza!*
> *Wake up, this instant! A prince unworthy to govern you has betrayed and assassinated you! Liberate yourselves now! The occasion is here! Rejoice at the guidance and protection of the French Republic! If you do not seize this moment, the yoke of tyranny will weigh ever more heavily on*

19 All police documents pertaining to *giacobini* activities are collected in aforementioned file: Biblioteca Palatina Parma *Manoscritti Parmensi 1579*, henceforth *Mss. Parm. 1579.*

*you. Listen to the voice of one of your fellow citizens who speaks to you for your own good and the happiness of the entire community.*[20]

Citizens of Piacenza must have puzzled over the fact that well-meaning fellow citizens chose to address them in French; those who needed no persuasion welcomed the French armies and struck up an instant friendship with General Béranger. Béranger's duties included supervising the passage of French troops through Piacenza and monitoring the two hospitals put at the disposal of the French army according to the terms of the armistice. In keeping with France's diplomatic commitments, Béranger was supposed to avoid fraternizing with the local population, an obligation he neglected entirely; on the contrary, he kept open house for pro-French sympathizers whose enthusiasm he fuelled by means of generously offered French journals. Reporting on his initial surveillance efforts, Count Casanova declared that it was impossible to monitor reunions at Béranger's house where he was never invited. What he could state unambiguously was that some of the most notorious *male intenzionati* were also gathering at Del Maino's bookstore and, less conspicuously, at the Church of San Pietro in Piacenza whose librarian was not averse to new ideas.[21] Younger members of this group, notably Pietro Casapini from Parma and Fabio Calamini from Piacenza, joined the Lombard Legion. All worrisome signs, Casanova concluded, that indicated that some of the duke's subjects were putting their heads together and hatching plans for taking their ideas further. How far? The police, the governor of Piacenza, and the duke himself feared the worst. Yet, unsure of the dispositions of the Directory, Ferdinand sought the intercession of his Spanish protectors who only obtained lukewarm promises of French non-interference.[22] For the time being, the duke avoided taking any action, despite his irritation with the manifest support rebellious subjects enjoyed from the most powerful French military figure in his states, in flagrant disregard of his sovereignty. No wonder then that, as Giacomo Bolla declared wistfully during one of his interrogatories, a feeling of impunity made him and his friends believe that everything was possible: 'until the alliance between France and Spain, the patriots were talking with so much freedom as if this was a country in revolution, so much so that even the French were scandalized.'[23]

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20 Reproduced in Emilio Ottolenghi, *Storia di Piacenza* (Piacenza: Tip.LE.CO, 1969), II, 56. A copy having belonged to Crescini is preserved at Archivio di Stato, Parma.

21 *Interrogatorio* Antonio Casanova, *Mss. Parm. 1579*, ff. 259-260. Casanova declared he could not tell what people were talking about, but he saw the candle burning all night.

22 On 5 September, 1796 Spanish prime minister Godoy, the Prince of Peace called for inquiries into the behaviour of French agents in the states of *Senor Infante*. Upon reception of this letter, French minister of foreign affairs Charles Delacroix wrote to Minister Del Campo, ambassador of His Catholic Majesty in Paris. Delacroix assured the ambassador that he had put under the eyes of the Directory: 'the complaints of the Duke of Parma against several individuals of the French army, as you expose them in your letter of 5 September, 1796.' Respectively, letter dated 5 September, 1796, signed *El Principe de la Paz* and letter dated 30 Fructidor An 4 (16 September, 1796), signed Delacroix. Archivio di Stato Parma (henceforth ASP) 'Truppe francesi negli stati' busta 24. The armistice of 10 May, 1796 gave the French Army the prerogatives of a de facto sovereign, which left the duke little room to manoeuvre.

23 *Costituito* Bolla, 3 April, 1796, *Mss. Parm. 1579*, ff. 145-158. Bolla was referring to the peace treaty signed in Paris on 6 November, 1796 and then in Parma on 24 November. Spain's ambassador Del Campo co-signed as guarantor of Parma's obedience, but also of Parma's sovereignty and freedom from revolutionary intervention.

Talk was indeed the principal occupation of the *giacobini* of Parma-Piacenza during the summer of 1796. Animated by vague democratization objectives, they passed the time soaking up French revolutionary literature and following from afar the French exploits in Italy.[24] All those interrogated spoke fondly of the warm welcome they found in Béranger's house, where they could freely rejoice in the French military victories and consult an abundance of French writings. They also read French newspapers at several cafés (a favourite place, named by all, was one chocolate shop in Piacenza called *Marianna*) and, corroborating Casanova's report, mentioned Del Maino's bookstore where French books were constantly on display. Actual revolutionary activities did not seem to go further than trying, with variable success, to plant liberty trees.[25] Yet, all kept eagerly abreast of the changes in their immediate neighbourhood and learned that since the arrival of the French, Lombardy was undergoing thorough political and institutional changes led by the General Administration of Lombardy, a provisional government staffed by patriots with the support – or rather under the supervision – of *commissaire* Saliceti.[26] They were aware that in Reggio pro-reform political activists had recently decided, amidst celebratory planting of liberty trees, to take matters in their own hands, break their ties with the historical house of Este in Modena, and constitute themselves in a republic (26 August 1796). This in turn prompted the French authorities to help topple the duke of Modena (4 October 1796), opening the way to the formation of the Cispadane republic (16 October) comprising Reggio, Modena, Bologna, and Ferrara; the previous day, in Milan, Bonaparte had proclaimed the Transpadane Republic. How could revolutionaries in Parma and Piacenza be content with sitting on the side line?

## IV. Hopes for revolution

Opportunities for action arose when a column of Austrian prisoners passed through Piacenza on 5 October 1796, under the escort of newly formed republican guards from Reggio. Fearing that local *giacobini* might seek to avail themselves of this event to sermonize the crowds gathered along the road, Governor Crescini's men diverted the trajectory outside the city centre; however, as soldiers and prisoners entered the main gates, the intrepid Fabio Calamini jumped ahead and redirected the convoy

24 Reading a number of articles most probably written by Poggi in *Giornale degli amici della libertà et dell'uguaglianza* in August 1796, Victor Criscuolo concluded that: 'first objective of the patriots …was the democratization of Parma and Piacenza and their union to the territories already liberated by Bonaparte's army, where they hoped that a republic would be soon organized.' Victor Criscuolo, 'I Democratici e la Rivoluzione Oscurata (1796 – 1797)' in *Storia di Parma (V) : I Borbone : fra illuminismo e rivoluzioni*. A cura di Alba Mora (Parma: MUP, 2015), 289 – 305 (298).

25 Casapini confessed that he tried several times to plant trees of liberty in the large square of the Pilotta Palace in Parma, but various accidents prevented him from completing the task.

26 After crossing the river Po at Piacenza and after the victory at Lodi (10 May, 1796) Bonaparte made his triumphal entry in Milan on 15 May, the Hapsburg rulers having fled the city and the country. The General Administration, set up on 26 August, proceeded to transform Lombardy along French republican lines, in addition to supplying the French army in Italy with all necessities. This body organized the competition on the subject 'Which type of free government best benefits the happiness of Italy' mentioned above.

through the most populous streets. There, doctor Belcini, sporting the tricolour cockade, did his best to encourage his fellow citizens to take up the example of Reggio, overthrow the tyranny, and declare a republic in the states of the duke of Parma. Talking to an impromptu audience of peasants from the nearby village of San Lazzaro, Belcini started by lamenting the hardships and injustices of a life where the many were forced to work, sustained by nothing but 'black bread,' for the sole purpose of providing the 'white bread' of the few; but there was hope! In republics such as France, peasants worked for themselves, and then only 6 hours days, and could even aspire to govern themselves: all good reasons for peasants to lend a hand to, rather than obstruct, revolutionary activities (should such occur in their town, that is).[27] Almost simultaneously, in Parma Pietro Casapini exhorted his fellow citizens to rebellion during several well-attended religious celebrations. A friend of his, named Penedos, a member of the Ducal Guard, was prepared to use the opportunity of his scheduled patrol to give his friends all the time they needed to persuade the people in the streets; should Casapini's appeals prove forceful enough, Penedos would move instantly to lead an attack on the ducal palace.[28]

It was at this point that Duke Ferdinand lost his nerve and called for concrete measures. On 22 October 1796, police detained Doctor Belcini on charges of sedition. This arrest proved to be a defining moment for the fate of the pro-revolutionary group in Parma-Piacenza: Belcini's friends ran at once to General Béranger who promptly ordered the doctor's liberation, causing scenes of great euphoria and further nourishing revolutionary hopes. Governor Crescini cautiously increased nightly patrols and placed two cannons at the city gates.[29] To his relief, the siren songs of revolution failed to reach the citizenry; no movement of any kind stirred Piacenza's tranquillity. Observing, in their turn, the failure of efforts to spark an uprising induced a painful moment of clarity in the minds of Belcini, Casapini, and their friends: the revolution would never succeed if it depended solely on local revolutionaries. France and Cisalpine assistance was of the essence. Bolla, an eyewitness though not an active participant to these schemes, acknowledged that: 'They were saying, in their discussions, that by themselves they could achieve nothing. They were hoping and expecting that the revolution would be made by the French or by the Milanese.'[30]

Bursting with confidence after his liberation, Belcini set off for Milan armed with a manifesto to the attention of the Milan municipality. Signed by the most prominent *giacobini* in Parma-Piacenza,

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27 These details, provided by Giacomo Bolla during his interrogatories, confirmed the police's previous assessment of the events. Bolla was arrested in March 1797; his *costituito*, made up of four lengthy interrogatories, is a very rich source on the *giacobini's* actions and state of mind. *Costituito* Giacomo Bolla, 3 April, 1797. *Mss. Parm.* 1579, ff. 145-158. From the interrogator's notes on the margins, it appears that the facts were known, but police sought to put order in the events and assign responsibility.

28 All details provided by Casapini in his first interrogatory, *costituito* Casapini, *Mss. Parm. 1579*, ff. 2-30. According to Casapini, Penedos also declared having made plans to set the Ducal Theatre on fire.

29 According to Captain Casanova, in charge of patrolling the city. *Mss. Parm. 1579*, *Interrogatorio* Casanova, ff. 259-260.

30 *Costituito* Bolla, 3 April, 1796, *Mss. Parm. 1579*, ff. 145-158.

it called for brotherly help in the task of ousting Duke Ferdinand and declaring a republic in Parma, Piacenza, and Guastalla.[31] Leonardo Loschi accompanied Belcini in Milan, not before flooding Piacenza with posters containing a one-paragraph pamphlet meant to re-direct popular discontent with French fiscal impositions from the occupiers to the duke. Addressed to the People of Parma and Piacenza, it declared that Bonaparte's intention was to charge only the duke for the needs of his armies, and it was Duke Ferdinand alone who decided to place the burden on the population.[32]

Soon after Belcini's and Loschi's departure, Pietro Casapini and his friend Pietro Rossena left Parma for Milan. Their plan was to call on the General Administration of Lombardy to help enlist 500 men willing to come to Parma and kick off the revolution even in the absence of anti-government rebellion. Along the way, Poggi, the Brutus of Piacenza, warmly welcomed them and accompanied them to General Béranger's house where they had the pleasure of greeting Casapini's former French teacher Alexandre Mangot, now employed as Béranger's secretary.[33] Sadly, once the accolades ended, the first blow fell. Béranger had a special guest that day: *commissaire* Garrau, a reliable ally of Italian *giacobini* everywhere.[34] To the consternation of all those present, Garrau announced that the French government was not in favour of a revolution in Parma – Piacenza; counselling restraint and patience, he bluntly asked them to desist until further notice.[35] Revolutionary combatants, he advised, should delay all action until the fall of Mantua, or until the general peace, when the French Republic might decide to revolutionize the Duchies of Parma and Piacenza as well.[36]



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31 Reproduced in Umberto Benassi, *Il Generale Bonaparte ed il Duca e i Giacobini di Parma e Piacenza* (Parma : Deputazione di Storia Patria, 1912**.** (Some of the original documents reproduced in Benassi's study are no longer available because of damages to the Archives building (Palazzo Pilotta) during WWII). Belcini left sometime at the end of October 1796, while the duke of Parma was seeking Bonaparte's permission to deal with domestic rebellions. He never returned so he escaped the wave of arrests set off in December 1796.

32 Police investigators initially attributed this short pamphlet to Poggi. Loschi's authorship was established during Del Maino's and Bolla's interrogatories. During a special voluntary deposition on 1 March, 1797, Del Maino admitted that: 'in the spirit of sedition, the manifesto intended to demonstrate to the people that their Sovereign had unjustly burdened them with contributions.' *Costituito* Del Maino, *Mss. Parm* 1579, second part, ff. 104-115. Del Maino also pointed to Béranger's influence. Indeed, this was a line of argument entirely in step with official discourse in all French conquered regions. French authorities and their *giacobini* allies clearly recognized the difficulties of promoting revolutionary change in the face of a harsh, and at times grasping, French occupation. General Clarke's early report to the Directory shortly after the triumphal entry into Milan shows just how lucidly commanders on the ground assessed the situation: 'We are still loved in Milan and people here still hate the Austrians, but this will change as soon as we will be forced to vex the Lombard people in order to survive.' Archives Nationales (henceforth AN) AF/ III/ 72. Pre-emptively, *The Proclamation to the People of Lombardy,* issued by General Bonaparte and *commissaire* Saliceti on 19 May, 1796 assured that the 20 million pounds contribution would be levied 'on the rich, the truly wealthy, and on the clergy.' *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier,* I, #453. The *Bulletin d'Italie* reporting on the events of 9 and 10 May, 1796 clarifies that after the victory: 'very little is asked from peasants … the wealthy and the priests are strongly made to contribute.' AN AF/III/71 #288. Saliceti reiterated this point after the harsh repressions at Binasco and Pavia, which risked alienating the population even more. Another *Grand Proclamation to the Lombard people* assured that contributions would only be raised by taxing the rich (without specifications) while at the same time calling attention to the restraint showed by the armies which could have invaded every territory but chose not to, thus giving people another chance at seeing the light. In Bologna, municipal officials chose a different tactic and sought to placate growing popular grumbling by exalting the virtues of thrift while pointing to 'the vices of abundance which have never produced heroes.' Angelo Varni, *Bologna Napoleonica. Potere e società dalla Repubblica cisalpina al Regno d'Italia*. Preface di Luigi Lotti (Bologna: Massimiliano Boni editore, 1973), 31.

33 According to police files, Mangot was 'a hunchbacked Frenchman, already arrested in Parma several times; he had moved to Piacenza at the arrival of the French and there he taught private lessons of his language and made political propaganda.' *Mss. Parm. 1579*, ff. 66 and 108.

34 Details on Garrau's activities in Godechot, *Les commissaires aux armées sous le Directoire*, I, 538-539.

35 Casapini's final interrogatory on 11 May, 1797, *Mss. Parm. 1579*, ff. 278-290.

36 Details provided by Casapini: *costituito* Casapini, 23 December, 1796, *Mss. Parm. 1579* ff. 2-33.

Unlike General Béranger, who was listening to his heart rather than to his instructions, Garrau did not forget that Spain's good will came at the price of non-intervention into the Duke Ferdinand's states. Indeed, ulcerated by Belcini's liberation in defiance of his own orders, Ferdinand complained – again – to his protector the Prince of Peace, who – again – alerted the Directory.[37] Bonaparte's response was unambiguous:

> *The intention of the French government is to do all that is in its power to be agreeable to Your Royal Highness. You will find me, in all circumstances, ready to offer all needed assistance. Should employees of the army behave badly, I engage Your Highness to have them arrested; while they are in your States, they must behave with all the decency and respect due to the prince's authority.*

To clarify the point even further, Bonaparte assured the duke that French authorities were prepared to take appropriate measure against French nationals and equally against all those tempted to 'disregard (the duke's) authority and transgress established law in his states.'[38] Accordingly, he called on commander Béranger to fall into line: 'the Government's intention, Citizen, is not only to preserve the existent neutrality between the Republic and the States of Parma, but even to ensure that the prince is protected by the French army every time he might need such protection. You will act accordingly and punish severely any French person departing from this line of conduct.'[39] Bonaparte's actions aligned perfectly with General Clarke's unsentimental conclusions in his overview of the situation in Italy dated 16 Brumaire an 5 (6 November, 1796), which all but sealed the fate of Parma's revolutionaries:

> *The Duke of Parma hopes everything from us, including domestic tranquillity, currently under assault from rather numerous individuals who wish to bring about a revolution, which we cannot afford to obtain because of our interests and of our alliance with Spain. The Infant of Parma is, so to speak, at the feet of French generals. It is good policy to let him enjoy all the advantages that depend on us."*[40]

While letters went back and forth, the local *giacobini*, although disheartened by Garrau's disapproval, pressed on and rushed to Milan.[41] There they decided the time had come to carry out their biggest, most audacious plan: together with other exiles sheltered by Rasori, they devised a strategy to kidnap Duke Ferdinand, bring him forcibly to Milan, and thereafter proclaim a republic in Parma – Piacenza. From Milan, Casapini travelled to Reggio to recruit volunteers for the kidnapping operation. Various

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37 In a brief, undated letter, surely the end of October 1796, the Prince of Peace himself wrote to Count Ventura with the information that he had transmitted the Infant's extreme displeasure regarding the liberation of Dr. Belcini. ASP, 'Truppe francesi negli stati', busta 24.

38 A Son Altesse Royale le Duc de Parme (réponse à la lettre du 24 Octobre), Verona, 11 Brumaire An V (1 November, 1796*). Correspondance Générale,* I, #1036.

39 *Au commandant de Plaisance*, Verona 11 Brumaire An V (1 November, 1796), *Correspondance Générale,* I, #1034.

40 *Lettre du Général Clarke au Directoire. Aperçu de toute la situation en Italie.* ANP AF/ III/ 72. By coincidence, this letter was mailed the very day the Peace Treaty with Parma was being signed in Paris.

41 In Milan, there was no assistance coming their way from *commissaire* Saliceti either; Saliceti's interest in Parma did not go one inch beyond seizing the valuables deposited at Parma and Piacenza's *Monte di Pietà.* Godechot, *Les commissaires aux armées sous le Directoire,* I, 284-294.

personal difficulties (such as Rossena suffering a mental breakdown that caused him to hallucinate) in addition to the chaotic nature of their demands, complicated the task. Still, the coup de grace came not from their amateurish ways, but from General Bonaparte's eagerness to soothe Ferdinand's frayed nerves: on 14 December, the French authorities in Reggio arrested and extradited Casapini while he was making rounds to seek brotherly help.[42] The arrest came after the dismissal of General Béranger from the position of place commander in Piacenza. His replacement, General Martin showed proper deference to the duke's authority and kept pro-French enthusiasts at arm's length.[43]

The ducal government interpreted these actions as a green light. Arrests of *male intenzionati* started immediately after Martin's appointment and Casapini's extradition. The first person taken into custody was indeed Casapini, on 16 December, 1796, two days after his extradition. Giacomo Bolla, Antonio Boccia, Filippo Buccela, Gaetano Del Maino, and Fabio Calamini soon followed, all of them arrested in connection with Casapini's alleged plot to bring revolution to Parma. Melchiorre Gioia, already detained by Piacenza's bishop for dereliction of clerical duties, was transferred to the Castle of Piacenza for further interrogations. Details obtained through questioning helped Governor Crescini's office reconstruct the activities of the summer and autumn of 1796 summarized above. The duke and his government saw their worst fears and fondest hopes confirmed at the same time: yes, there have been plans – methodical, in-depth plans for a revolution in the States of Parma; and yes, the French republican government stopped them in their tracks. Still, the mood at Duke Ferdinand's court was hardly celebratory: the worst may not have occurred, but dangers were still circling the duchies. So surely reasoned the authorities of Parma-Piacenza as they eagerly dissected Gioia's writings while Gioia himself sat in a cell in Piacenza's castle. The police could not establish his direct participation to Casapini's or Belcini's conspiracies, but it was clear that in his case, ideas mattered at least as much as deeds.

On 4 May 1797 an anonymous investigator filed a 12-page report which amounted to a critical digest of 50 issues (23 May to 23 October 1796) of the *Giornale degli amici della libertà e ugualianza* and of several other issues of the *Giornale de' Patrioti d'Italia.* This is the only document found in police files that focuses on thoughts rather than actions – having such a high-calibre writer on their

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42 The act of accusation alleged that he was carrying a false French passport on the name Berot, a charge he staunchly disputed in his interrogatory. *Costituito* Casapini, *Mss. Parm. 1579*, ff. 2 -33. It seems that Berot was the officer who recruited him for the Lombard Legion during one of the soirées at Béranger's house. Bonaparte himself informed Don Ferdinand of Casapini's arrest and added: 'I have written to the commander of Piacenza that he has the obligation, under all circumstances, to behave in accordance with the principles of friendship binding Your Royal Highness and the French Republic.' *Au Duc de Parme*, 24 Frimaire An V (14 December, 1796), *Correspondance Générale,* I, #1162.

43 Bolla and Boccia testified that Béranger's successor Martin did all he could to discourage them and also instructed French soldiers 'not to disturb public tranquillity" *Costituito* Bolla, interrogatory of 28 March, 1797 and *Costituito* Boccia, 23 March, 1797, *Mss. Parm. 1579,* ff. 123-134 and 93-94 respectively. Crescini assured the duke that Martin exceeded all expectations and could be counted upon to support any measure the government saw fit to adopt 'against enraged rabble-rousers.' The duke rewarded Martin with the gift, graciously accepted, of a beautiful horse. Letter from Crescini to the duke of Parma, Piacenza, December 1796 (no exact date) reproduced in Benassi, *Il Generale Bonaparte ed il Duca e i Giacobini di Parma e Piacenza*, 43.

hands must have exhausted the analytical capacities of the duchies' investigators. Each of the journal's copies under examination contained articles where Gioia extolled the principles of democracy and civic equality, prompting the police analyst to issue a dire warning:

> *Such maxims and all the maxims of a spirit of independence, appear to have been fomented, spread, and divulged freely and with impunity after the coming of the French in Italy, through writings [now] legally seized in the house of Gioia at his arrest. The constant contempt for any sovereignty, in particular the scorn (disprezzo), the insult, the calumny against our legitimate Sovereign, against the High Pontiff and the court of Rome, against his own bishop, against nobility, against all the ecclesiastic and political orders; also irreligion, satire, smear (maldicenza) against private persons transpire from all parts of the above-mentioned writings.*

Much as it pained him to do so, the police analyst thought it his duty to offer a selection of offensive quotations from Gioia's articles, all of them copied by hand for the use of his superiors. Endorsing the point of view of his demoralized sovereign, the writer detected threats and perils in each of Gioia's articles and by extension in the very availability of the *Giornale* in the duchies. To begin with, the *Giornale* delighted in printing pitiless caricatures of the ducal family, Parma's Bourbons embodying the decrepitude of the old regime in Italy: 'a family who, especially in this half of the century, shows the most obvious symptoms of imbecility growing worse from generation to generation' is a typical sample[44]**.** Discarding this revolting remnant of the past was a patriotic duty of national relevance, beyond changing the political order in Parma. Concerned about the larger dimension of such aggressive attacks, the police examiner denounced as a dangerous 'height of insolence' Gioia's open letter to Bonaparte, where he dared instruct the Commander-in-chief that: 'the peace conceded to tyrants is a war declared against Peoples, who can only break the chains of slavery by destroying the Monarchy.' The report concluded with an even stronger alarm signal over Gioia's famous winning essay, complete with promises that the *'opuscule'* in question would never see the light of day in Piacenza. It was especially aggravating, the loyal servant wrote, that the person deemed to articulate most forcefully what revolutionary Italy needed was a clergyman from the one state in Northern Italy supposedly sheltered from revolutionary waves.[45]

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44 As quoted in Criscuolo, *Il Giornale degli amici della libertà et dell'uguaglianza*, 130. The graphic imagery and animal metaphors correspond with the grotesque depictions of aristocrats in French revolutionary discourse. On this topic, see especially Antoine de Baecque, *Le Corps de l'histoire: Métaphores et politique (1779–1800).* (Paris: Calmann Lévi, 1993). The quotation is from a long essay arguing in favour of the revolutionary potential of the French presence in Italy, published in seven instalments in the *Giornale degli amici della libertà e uguaglianza*, between May and October 1796. Criscuolo has attributed authorship to Poggi, although the police analyst seemed quite convinced it had come from Gioia's pen. Criscuolo further noted that the many articles advocating for revolution in Parma made the point that allowing the monarchy to survive there was a historical anomaly profoundly at odds with the journal's political platform. Criscuolo, *Il Giornale degli amici della libertà et dell'uguaglianza* (pp.130-134).

45 *Mss. Parm. 1579*, ff. 264-278. The analyst opined that Gioia seemed to be aware of the political calculations – the very ones on which the duke counted to maintain his sovereignty and take legal action against people like Gioia.

## V. French ambivalence

Aware that his ability to prosecute domestic opponents hinged on the French government's greater or lesser interest in maintaining good relations with Spain, Duke Ferdinand proceeded to secure formal recognition for his policies. First, he sought to obtain the Spanish king's approval for the recent wave of arrests.[46] Soon afterwards, on 5 May, 1797, Ferdinand dispatched a special emissary, count Pier Luigi Politi, to Montebello, where Commander-in-chief Bonaparte had just elected domicile after signing the Treaty of Leoben.[47] Politi sought Bonaparte's signature on a 7-point document drafted in Parma, stipulating that: 'Individuals of the two republics, Traspadana and Cispadana, will not seek to revolutionize or to incite uprisings in the states of the duke of Parma.' In a laconic letter that did not address any of the issues raised by Politi, Bonaparte notified Ferdinand that he intended to preserve the status-quo.[48] The mission went from setback to disaster when the French Minister of Foreign Affairs alerted Bonaparte of intelligence suggesting that the Duke of Parma's ministers might be tempted to fish in troubled waters and try to enlarge the duchies' territories. Bonaparte flew into one of his legendary rages and chased Politi, empty-handed, away from his headquarters.[49] The rage may have been more theatre than real anger, a ruse to dispose of Parma's requests without disrupting the alliance with Spain. Bonaparte understood real-Politick, but was not prepared to act as Duke Ferdinand's law enforcer. No extraditions were permitted after Casapini's arrest, so Belcini, Loschi, and Poggi, who had left the duchies before the wave of persecution started, remained free to expose the duke, again and again, as a hypocritical tyrant in Milanese journals.

Walking the same fine line, other French officials tried to soothe the blow diplomatic stipulations inflicted on their supporters in Parma-Piacenza. *Commissaire* Faipoult and General Cervoni, formerly in charge of removing art to Paris under the harsh terms of the 10 May 1796 armistice, put pressure on Prime-minister Ventura to release bookstore owner Del Maino. Failpout wrote to Ventura twice in support of Del Maino, who was only guilty of friendship with French soldiers, artists and scientists, as the *commissaire* saw the matter. Ventura replied each time that Del Maino ended up in jail not for his

46 A Letter addressed to the *Principe della Pace* (Godoy, the Prince of Peace) dated Parma 14 March, 1797, probably written by Ventura explained that Duke Ferdinand decided the arrest and interrogation of the following militants: Boccia, G. Del Maino, Filippo Buccella e Giacomo Bolla; trials for sedition were to start shortly. The duke, however, sought assurances that: 'His Majesty will not disapprove this measure of security which meant to sustain his sovereignty and to maintain public tranquility.' ASP, *Francesi negli stati,* busta 24.

47 17 April, 1797. It was the preliminary accord to the final Peace Treaty of Campoformio, 17 October, 1797.

48 A short letter to the duke of Parma informs him that a recently issued order, shared with Politi, was addressing the status-quo as well as new orders concerning goods confiscated from several convents. A S.A.R. le Duc de Parme, Mombello, 22 Prairial An V (10 June, 1797) *Correspondance Générale,* I, #1658. That order has not been recovered.

49 On July 11, 1797 (23 Messidor An V) Bonaparte wrote to the duke of Parma to express displeasure for the constant complaints to Spanish ambassador Del Campo and to demand that Politi, whom he called *un intriguant,* be recalled. A letter sent to the Directory the same day disparages the duke for his foolishness *('…le duc de Parme, qui ne fait que des bêtises; depuis que je suis en Italie je suis constamment occupé à en réparer les effets.') Correspondance Générale,* I, #1775 and #1774, respectively.

friendship with French artists but for his efforts to subvert good order and public peace; nonetheless, the duke would of course show indulgence.[50]

The duke had no choice but to show indulgence. Just as he permitted no extraditions after Casapini's dramatic capture, Bonaparte sought to extricate Parma's remaining *giacobini* from the clutches of the ducal police. He intervened personally in favour of Melchiorre Gioia's liberation, at which occasion he demanded the release of the remaining 'prisoners of conscience.'[51] Ferdinand complied, not before reiterating Ventura's tireless line of argument, that it was not these citizens' conscience, but their attempts to overthrow his government that motivated the arrests. By late November 1797, Gioia was in Milan together with Boccia and a few other like-minded compatriots; soon afterwards, Del Maino, Casapini, and Giacomo Bolla were set free as well.

## VI. Impact of *giacobini's* prosecution

The most fortunate were those who had the ability, or the foresight, to leave the duchies before the wave of arrests. They were also the ones who kept their heads high and their ideals quasi intact. Poggi, the Brutus of Piacenza, had the additional chance – owed, ironically, to his privileged birth – of enjoying a timely warning that allowed him to leave behind a political testament of sorts. Local police commander count Francesco Maruffi, in a friendly gesture towards a fellow nobleman, notified him that his name headed the list of revolutionaries. Poggi responded with a dignified letter that summarized the sentiments of his fellow *giacobini*:

> *I am, and always will be, an unwavering friend of the brave Frenchmen and of that respectable Republic, which I am proud to serve, and I am well known by the wise commanders of the Army of Italy. (…) The fierce Piacentino country has seen me fraternizing with the philosopher-soldiers of that Nation. Persons who pretended to serve public tranquillity, but who never followed the course nor examined the spirit of the French Revolution, have sounded revolutionary alarms in this city for several weeks. … I think and I reason like a man who has no need of enlightenment from another. The right to freedom of opinion is sacred, inviolable and not subjected to any penal law. This is who I am: here are my accusations and this is my defence….*[52]

50 Ventura appealed to Spanish ambassador Del Campo to support Ferdinand's policy of repressing *male intenzionati*, at which Del Campo coldly advised to avoid aggravating the French. Faipoult to Count Ventura, Genova 29 Germinal An V (18 April, 1797); Ventura to *Commissaire* Faipoult, Parma 25 April, 1797; Ambassador Del Campo to Count Ventura, Parma 22 May, 1797; Faipoult to Count Ventura Genova 11 Messidor An V (29 June, 1797); Count Ventura to *Commissaire* Faipoult, Parma 1 July, 1797. All letters in ASP *Truppe Francesi negli stati,* busta 24.

51 A brief letter to the duke of Parma, Milan 22 Brumaire An VI (12 November, 1797), listed Gioia, Boccia, Bucella, and Casapini and let the duke know that: 'I would be delighted if your highness gave orders for their liberation.' *Correspondance Générale,* I, #2235.

52 'Al sig. Francesco Maruffi il cittadino avvocato Poggi' dated Piacenza, 16 November, 1796. Reproduced in Bennassi, *Il Generale Bonaparte ed il duca e i giacobini*, 45 - 47. See also Criscuolo, 'I Democratici e la Rivoluzione Oscurata', 298 – 299.

This was a clear-cut declaration of principles that put Poggi firmly within the ranks of those who worked towards radical change in Italy, which implied – although he did not specifically name Parma's dynasty – abolishing the current order of things in the duchies.[53] His straightforwardness had the merit of confirming the government's judgment. Maruffi promptly sent the letter to his superiors, but by the time the authorities moved to make arrests, Poggi was already in Milan. News of his exploits reached General Bonaparte who called on Poggi to institute a Society for public instruction, the lynchpin of his future career.[54] This assignment, like Gioia's appointment as secretary of the Cisalpine Republic, was part of the ambivalent strategy of keeping France's promises to Spain while also shielding Parma's revolutionary minded French supporters. Early escapees like Belcini and Loschi echoed Poggi's sentiments. Under the transparent pseudonym Citizen L.C.L., Loschi penned a pamphlet where he poured all his outrage and contempt for Parma's government. 'Because I endeavoured to enlighten my equals, because I raised the *Montagnoli* (inhabitants of the mountain districts) against the injustices of their feudal lords, because I unmasked a priestly class conceited and ignorant…here I am, cast out from my homeland, hounded down in other countries as well, thrown in the wretched jails…! But thanks, eternal thanks, to the French Republic, to the valour of her armies and to the magnanimity of her leaders.'[55] Strong words – but then Loschi was in Milan, safe from the increasingly aggressive ducal police. Those left behind showed much less sanguine fighting spirit.

Back in Piacenza, the rump band of true believers left to fend for themselves, eventually tired of a revolution that eluded them. Buried in the police archives there are many less than heart-warming episodes of hitherto fiery revolutionaries repenting, promising to return to lives of tranquillity and deference to proper authorities, even implicating others in exchange for personal freedom. Squeezed between French inconsistency and government harassment, they saw their window of opportunity closing. It is unlikely that Casapini, Del Maino, or Bolla were aware of interventions on their behalf; no sources indicate that they knew about Faipoult's letters to Prime-minister Ventura and surely, they never dreamt that Bonaparte himself would remember their names. How could they, when General Martin replaced their protector Béranger and did all he could to deter any revolutionary, French inspired

53 The paean to the French republic and her soldiers reads like an abbreviated version of a seven-part article, published in the *Giornale degli amici della libertà e dell'ugualianza*, during the summer of 1796 (issues 21 – 28). The exposé listed the advantages Italy could obtain from the French republican occupation, and, conversely the benefits France could derive from Italy's democratization. This series of articles is masterfully analysed by Armando Saita in the article cited above, where Saita attributed authorship to Poggi.

54 Poggi was the main interlocutor of the General Administration of Lombardy in the duchies. In October 1796 a copy of the call for the essay competition was sent to him, asking him make this event public. He took this opportunity to make his political and scholarly pursuits better known, which certainly contributed to his appointment a year later. Many interesting details on Poggi's later career in Milan and on his impact on the political climate of the Cisalpine republic in Claudio Tosi, 'Un Patriota gradualista. Giuseppe Bruno Giunio Poggi nel Triennio Giacobino' in *Giacobini e pubblica opinione,* 191 – 253. For a succinct summary of Poggi's political thinking, see Antonino de Francesco, 'Giuseppe Poggi La Cecilia' in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, v. 84 (2015) http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/poggi-la-cecilia-giuseppe_(Dizionario-Biografico)/ accessed 10 August, 2019.

55 From a pamphlet hand-copied by the police analyst who also identified the author as Leonardo Loschi. *Mss. Parm. 1579,* ff. 293-294.

pursuit? Or when the French Republic signed a peace treaty with Parma, supported by Spain? 'This' – the signing of the peace treaty in Paris and then in Parma – 'was the blow that most discouraged our patriots and made them see that it was impossible to put their hopes into practice' Bolla told interrogators.[56] Feeling abandoned, they abandoned hope in their turn: there are hardly any profiles in courage emerging from the records of police interviews. Casapini, who in November 1796 was still trying to put together a commando to kidnap the duke and proclaim a republic in Parma, turned into a meek and compliant lost soul less than a month later, ready to abjure all previous commitments. To his jailer, he described his own saga as a foolish adventure for which he was now sorry and implored the court's compassion for his extreme youth, not to mention being an orphan, alone in the world except for an old servant. Moreover, he swore that while in Milan he had refused to join the chorus claiming to be ashamed of Parma's 'tyrant' and that, in any event , he was now 'repenting for such chimera and for the expenses incurred while [he was] away from the homeland.' He finished his first interview obligingly letting the authorities know that, as he spoke, plans were being hatched in Milan to bring together all Italian patriots and form a force that would depose all remaining sovereigns in Italia, the duke of Parma included.[57] Another two weeks in jail and he requested to be heard again. Throwing himself on the duke's mercy, Casapini asked or forgiveness, divulged all he knew about anti-government schemes, and, as a bonus turned in all former associates, even those who, to his mind, may still be plotting revolutions.[58]

Casapini's comrade in arms Gaetano Del Maino, oblivious to the high-powered efforts to save him, went out of his way to mollify his judges. Yes, he admitted, he enticed his customers with radical literature such as the French Constitution of 1793; and yes, French officers and their sympathizers frequented his book-store; and yes again, talk of revolution might have been heard there – at which point Del Maino eagerly corroborated all the information police already knew and added a few details, for good measure. In his defence, he stressed, quite comically, that he was but a shopkeeper: if the French happened to enjoy patronizing his store, could he turn customers away? 'It is the quality of my profession that caused my present disgrace' Del Maino sighed as he requested, like Casapini, a special hearing. There, he gave away all the names he knew (Poggi, Gioia, Loschi, Boccia), the 'brains' of the group, to whom he added Fabio Calamini, 'a hot head full of republican ideas' which he, a sober citizen, never shared.[59] Calamini, in his turn, admitted he took part in revolutionary activities and joined the

56 *Costituito* Bolla, interrogatory of 27 March, 1797, *Mss. Parm. 1579*, ff. 115-123.

57 *Costituito* Casapini, interrogatory of 23 December, 1796, *Mss. Parm. 1579*, ff. 2-30.

58 *Costituito* Casapini, deposition of 7 January, 1797, *Mss. Parm. 157,* ff. 32-4. He named Giambattista Benitvoglio, Grondoni, a certain M. Furiot 'cook in Casa Spagna', a hairdresser in the same house and other people he had known about through Rossena. I could not find any records of the police following up on this information.

59 *Costituito* Del Maino, interrogatory of 21 March and deposition of 24 March, 1797, *Mss. Parm. 1579*, ff. 89-92 and 104-114, respectively.

Lombard Legion, but blamed it all on other, older acquaintances (like Del Maino, Poggi, and Buccela) with whom he happened to have a drink now and then. These individuals deceived him with assurances that 'the number of patriots was growing everyday' while nothing could have been further from the truth.[60] And this was, in the end, the most heart-breaking aspect of their story: not only did these would-be revolutionaries feel forsaken by the French; they felt no love coming their way from their own countrymen either.

Giacomo Bolla, who underwent four long interrogatories, said it all when he confessed that while he and his friends were mortified by General Martin's so-called wise conduct, they were even more distraught by the obvious glee with which the public greeted news of Boccia's, Bucella's and Del Maino's arrests. Moreover, aware of his friendships and opinions, Bolla's neighbours routinely shouted abuse at him, wondering aloud why he was not yet in jail, so much so that he barely dared leave his house! And, Bolla added bitterly, the public opprobrium had not been in vain for here he was, under arrest and talking to the police.[61] Indeed, he concluded, Belcini's famous call to arms against the ducal order remained unanswered, which is why he suffered so much from the label *giacobini* the public opinion (*la voce pubblica*) attached to him and to his circle of friends.[62]

At a humbler personal level, revolutionary fervour meant no more than hoping to bring a little excitement to predictable provincial lives. Both Bolla and Boccia declared, poignantly, that they never quite dared presume that revolution would come to their part of the world, but very much enjoyed the flurry of activity generated by the French presence in town. What a pleasure it was to have the opportunity to speak French, to socialize with French soldiers, to discuss the military exploits of the time, to go to cafés and book-stores where people would, in Boccia's words: 'discuss the news each knew or invented.' Furthermore, Boccia candidly admitted having harbored some hopes to join the French army and pursue a military career worthy of the name, should the duke's government eventually fall.[63] Acquaintance with the French also provided unexpected employment opportunities – Bolla found a job as warehouse supervisor in Piacenza.[64] At the question how many *male intenzionati o partitanti* ('ill-intentioned people or collaborators') there were in Piacenza, Bolla reckoned that: 'If one considers the numbers of those who enjoyed the talks and papers favourable to the French, their class would be

60 *Costituito* Fabio Calamini, interrogatory of 20 April, 1797, *Mss. Parm. 1579*, ff. 204-230. The interrogatory includes a rather hilarious exchange in which Calamini tries to deflect, without entirely denying them, rumours that he was involved with Del Maino's wife.

61 *Costituito* Bolla, interrogatories of 16 and 28 March, 1797, *Mss. Parm. 1579,* ff. 123-134.

62 *Costituito* Bolla, interrogatory of 3 April, 1797, *Mss. Parm. 1579*, ff. 145 -146.

63 *Costituito* Boccia, interrogatory of 23 March, 1797, *Mss. Parm.* 1579, ff. 93-104. General Béranger's departure made it impossible for Boccia to chase this personal dream.

64 According to his testimony, he worked for 40 days, for daily wages of 20 'soldi di Francia" plus food rations, then followed the French army, in the same capacity, to Piave, Salò and Cremona. After several encounters with the *tedeschi* – engagements between the French and Austrian armies - he asked to be let go: his zeal did not go as far as risking his life in battle.

infinite. But limiting the count to those who truly nourished and fomented hopes for revolution… their numbers were very few.'[65] Support was scarce among the upper classes as well. None of the known liberal aristocrats in the country volunteered to help the revolutionary cause and the faculty at the prestigious learning establishments in Parma and Piacenza remained equally silent. Members of Parma's *Anzianato* (the Elders or local council) were probably more in tune with the general sentiment in the country when they crafted a diplomatic response to the letter sent by Vincenzo Frigeri, the president of the new republican Senate of Reggio who informed them that Reggio was now under the protection of the French Republic (September 1796). The Elders responded soberly that friendship with the Reggio neighbours was as unshakeable as their loyalty to the duke and hoped therefore that the friendship in question would remain clearly separated from politics.[66]

Under the circumstances, the question arises whether *giacobini* in the states of Parma left any mark at all on the future development of their country. Attilio Finetti summarized the historical consensus: 'Our *giacobini* expatriated in Lombardy for their own safety, or because, in any event, the climate there was more conducive to cultural activities, efficiently impacted the Cisalpine Republic but had only marginal influence within the duchies.'[67] It did not have to be so. The group included Melchiorre Gioia, one of Italy's most eloquent and influential political theorists, a few lesser-known, but effective advocates for revolutionary change such as Poggi and Loschi, and a good number of dedicated men of action. What is known of their thoughts and activities indicates that the duchies' aspiring revolutionaries were no different from successful like-minded coalitions elsewhere in Italy, rooted in republican ideals. The sullen conservatism of the ducal court was hardly an insurmountable impediment, for all revolutionaries were mindful of their historical task of breaking with the past regardless of previous reforms or lack thereof.[68] Similarly, the absence of noticeable revolutionary fervour among the population was not exceptional and surely not an obstacle: more often than not, it was with determined French backing that a handful of committed local revolutionaries transformed the political landscape wherever revolutionary changes occurred. What was possible on a radius of 30-60 miles around the duchies could have been possible in Parma – Piacenza as well. In terms of concrete actions, the farfetched stratagem of turning Parma into a republic by means of kidnapping the duke, endearing in its naiveté, points to the dare-devil quality of *'illuministi che entrano in azione'*

65 *Costituito* Bolla, interrogatory of 3 April, 1797, *Mss. Parm.* 1579, ff. 145 -146.

66 Copies of the two letters in Biblioteca Palatina, *Manoscritti Parmensi 1185*, f. 122.

67 Attilio Finetti*, Piacenza nel Risorgimento. Dal prodromi all'Unità.* www.archiviodistatopiacenza.beniculturali.it Consulted 08/02/2016/

68 See on this point Armando Saita's insightful observation: 'no Italian *giacobino* understood his own actions as a continuation of the ideals of the reformist period.' Saita, "La Questione del giacobinismo italiano," 662. Duke Ferdinand was, therefore, not wrong to fear that, should the diplomatic climate change, there were enough local revolutionaries willing and able to depose him, take the reins of a revolutionary government, and align Parma with the general political situation in Northern Italy.

to use Delio Cantimori's one-time brilliant characterization of Italian *giacobini*.[69] This particular group failed so dismally, however, not because of their recklessness, but because French officials energetically assisted ducal authorities in suppressing all pro-French revolutionary activities. The difference was not on the ground but in France. Bonaparte's and the Directory's decision, from which the General-in-chief never wavered, to keep this territory safe from revolution eventually sapped the energies of pro-French militants, no matter how eager and committed.

At its core, this unusual episode is a raw power play that brings under crude light the importance of sheer force in bringing about structural change *and* in preventing change. A rich and sophisticated body of work has long established that while the French invasions triggered revolutions in Northern Italy, it would be a gross simplification to reduce the political developments of the 1796-1799 *triennio* to orders from France. 'It is not by orders that the revolution has been made' wrote the Piedmontese ambassador Prospero Balbo in 1798.[70] All the same, the debacle in Parma – Piacenza stands as proof that a revolution could be effectively thwarted by orders from France, in spite of conditions being no less amenable there than elsewhere. The calculated death of *giacobinismo* in the states of Parma and Piacenza also validates the thesis that the Directory had no definite policies for Italy; and whatever plans the Directors might have conceived came apart during the military operations, Bonaparte improvising as he was marching through the peninsula. Even civilian *commissaires* whose first impulse – and duty – was to fraternize with local revolutionaries had to bow to the political or military realities of the moment.[71]

We can only speculate what the Parmese experience of the *triennio* would have been, had diplomatic necessities not kept Ferdinand's duchies out of the reach of revolutionary waves enveloping neighbouring regions. Would Piacenza have become a second Milan, with Gioia and Rasori and Poggi and their friends invigorating public discourse and launching political debates? Would the States of Parma have served as an example of successful revolutionary transformation? Would there be any basis in referring to theses territories as a deeply conservative backwater, steeped in superstition and resistant to change, as they regularly come across in historical monographs? Jeremy Popkin recently reflected on historical

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69 As quoted in Alessandro Galante Garrone, *L'Albero della Libertà. Da Giacobini a Garibaldi* (Firenze: Felice Le Monnier, 1987), 56.

70 Prospero Balbo in a letter dated Paris, 10 March, 1798 to minister Priocca, as quoted in Zaghi, *Bonaparte e il Direttorio dopo Campoformio,* 69. Malcom Crook pointed out that: 'Despite frequent interventions from the French, a genuine exchange of individuals, ideas, and practices took place during this period. French political culture was not simply imposed, and considerable experimentation occurred in which local patriots played a significant role.' 'Parliamentary practices in the Sister Republics in the light of the French experience' in *The Political Culture of Sister Republics*, 109 -113 (112). Anna Maria Rao offered a concise presentation of the *triennio's* major developments in 'Triennio Repubblicano', *Italia Napoleonica. Dizionario Critico*, 449-469.

71 After Campo-Formio, diplomats took it for granted that France had no plans to 'republicanise' the states of Parma, an important element during the discussions leading to the Treaty of Rastadt. See the diplomatic correspondence discussed in Zaghi, *Bonaparte e il Direttorio dopo Campoformio. Il problema italiano nella diplomazia europea* (Napoli : Edizione Scientifiche Italiane, 1956), 214-215. In the same volume, Zaghi's brief excellent summation sheds much light on the Directory's dilemma, caught between 'conquest and revolution' 'L'Italia e la propaganda rivoluzionaria' in *Bonaparte e il Direttorio dopo Campoformio.* 58-100. Still informative are Raymond Guyot, *Le Directoire et la paix de l'Europe des traités de Bâle à la deuxième coalition* (1795-1799) (Paris : Alcan, 1911) and Guglielmo Ferrero, *Aventure. Bonaparte en Italie* (Paris: Plon, 1956).

instances that may call upon historians to dispute causal explanations centred on: 'large impersonal forces – social structures, cultural paradigms, intellectual discourses.' Such instances point instead to the need to re-evaluate – to quote Popkin further –'the dynamics of political conflict' in conjunction with human psychology.[72] The cancelled revolution in the States of Parma is one such example when abrupt political decisions combined with human frailty effectively shaped a territory's history and diverted its trajectory away from the path potentially foreshadowed by larger historical forces.

The first revolutionary wave passed over Parma - Piacenza, not without significant consequences for the future of the French administration in the region. Local *giacobini*, although eventually protected from persecution, were left with no means of building a network of cultural associations to help spread republican ideas and engage the population in political debates.[73] With scarce opportunities to imagine realistically a future without the duke, public opinion was slow to call into question the merits of Ferdinand's paternalism. Citizens of the duchies never faced the prospect of breaking with the past, never experienced the novelty of republican rule, and never witnessed a change of political personnel. Neither did they get a chance to ponder the reasons for the increasingly vocal criticism, coming from pro-revolutionary ranks, of heavy-handed French methods in Italy.[74] In this atmosphere of general apathy, Bonaparte decided to include the States of Parma within the French space in 1802, upon Duke Ferdinand's death. Consequently, he appointed Moreau de Saint-Méry Administrator General with the assignment of remaking Parma – Piacenza in the French mould, a process that by necessity started with reversing all previous French policies. It was not an easy task. Having missed the sister republic experience, the country lacked an institutional infrastructure that Moreau de Saint-Méry could have recalled to life. Likely sympathizers capable of influencing public opinion and of staffing new positions in the French administration were either in exile or too demoralized to lend a hand; local elites wavered between aloofness and opportunism while the general population harboured nothing but distrust towards any foreign intervention.[75] In the absence of an immediate French precedent on

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72 Jeremy D. Popkin, Preface to *You are All Free. The Haitian Revolution and the Abolition of Slavery* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), x.

73 On the political effectiveness of such networks of cultural institutions in Milan see Beatrice Maschietto, 'Cultura e politica nell'Italia giacobina. Spunti dall'esperienza cisalpina' in *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome. Italie et Méditerranée* T. 108 (N°2) 1996: 731-740.

74 In Gioia's articles, the discourse of disappointment and betrayed hope gradually replaced the initial euphoria. Rasori's deeply held political beliefs also turned critical towards the French when he could no longer ignore the gap between rhetoric and actual policy. His outbursts even caused some French officials to worry that he may play a double game: a report of an agent to the Directory, dated 3 Vendémiaire An 5, wondered whether Rasori was not in fact intent on *aigrir la population* against the French. AN AF III 71/289.

75 Very few of the initial group of *giacobini* came forward during Moreau de Saint-Méry's administration: Romagnosi returned briefly from Milan to teach law at the University of Parma; a few minor figures who appear in police records resurfaced as officers of the National Guard. The closest collaborator from the group of 1796 was Antonio Boccia who produced, at Moreau de Saint-Méry's request, an analytical description of the mountainous part of the duchies. Gianfranco Scognamiglio, 'Il Viaggio del capitano Boccia in alta Val di Nure (1804-1805)*' Archivio Storico per le Province Parmensi,* LXXXIV (1974), 315-322. The work has been reprinted in a beautiful edition: Antonio Boccia*, Viaggio ai monti di Parma (1804)* (Parma: Libreria *Aurea Parma*. Series Quaderni Parmigiani 2, 1970). Del Maino held onto his shop and maybe felt vindicated when asked to publish pro-French, pro-Napoleonic literature once the French took over in 1802, but steered clear of any further political involvement. Stefano Fermi & Giovani Forlini, *La Bottega del Maino* (Piacenza: A. del Maino, 1954)

which to pin his reforms, Moreau reached more than half a century in the past to Du Tillot's agenda, with mixed results.[76] In a vicious circle that proved very hard to break, the French uneven engagement with the duchies generated a climate of sullen wariness, which turned every reform initiative into an exhaustingly long slog. In December 1805, four years after Moreau's appointment and only two weeks after the spectacular victory at Austerlitz, the mountain area around Piacenza exploded in revolt. The movement had many causes, the core one being exasperation with policies that served France's shifting interests with no regard to the disruptions they produced on the ground.[77]



76 See Carla Corradi Martini, 'L'Epoca di Du Tillot nel giudizio di Moreau de Saint-Méry', *Aurea Parma*, anno LXXXIII, fasc. III (settembre-dicembre 1999): 409-428.

77 Michael Broers has aptly called this movement 'the last stand of the Old Regime.' *The Napoleonic Empire in Italy 1796 – 1814. Cultural Imperialism in an European Context?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 80.