

ITALIAN LECTURE

The Napoleonic Era in Southern Italy: An Ambiguous Legacy?

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WHAT ITALIAN HISTORIANS refer to as the *decennio* of French administration in the Mezzogiorno lasted slightly less than ten years (1806–15) and began when Napoleon declared from the Schonbrunn Palace in December 1805 that the Bourbon dynasty of Naples had ceased to rule. In January 1806 the Neapolitan rulers, Ferdinand IV and Maria Carolina, took refuge on British warships and fled to Sicily, where they were to remain under British protection until the collapse of the Empire. In February a French army led by Maréchal Massena entered Naples and installed Napoleon's brother Joseph as king. Joseph had accepted the Neapolitan throne with reluctance, and was to rule in Naples for barely two years before being translated—with equal lack of enthusiasm—to the throne of Spain. In March 1808 he was succeeded in Naples by his brother-in-law, Joachim Murat, the husband of Caroline Bonaparte, commander of the Imperial cavalry, Grand Constable of France, and for a brief season ruler of the Napoleonic Grand Duchy of Berg. Despite growing tensions with Napoleon, Murat ruled Naples until he became entangled in the dramatic events surrounding the collapse of the Empire—first defecting to the Allies in 1814, then rallying belatedly to Napoleon, and finally meeting his death before a firing squad in the Calabrian village of Pizzo in 1815 after a desperate last attempt to regain his Kingdom.¹

The short but intense experience of French rule in the Mezzogiorno

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¹ See S.J. Woolf *The Napoleonic Integration of Europe* (London 1991), and J. Tulard *Le Grand Empire* (Paris 1983).

(but not Sicily)² was to prove a fascinating episode in the development of the Empire, and the tensions that developed between the Emperor and the rulers of Naples—in particular. Murat—revealed in often dramatic microcosm the deeper personal and structural contradictions embedded in the imperial system. But while the political and diplomatic relations between Paris and Naples and the role of the Neapolitan satellite Kingdom in the French imperial system have been closely studied by historians of the Empire, the impact of French rule on the longer-run development of the Italian Mezzogiorno has until recently received less attention. This paper will attempt to outline an assessment of the Napoleonic legacy in southern Italy.³

Writing shortly after the collapse of the Empire, the Neapolitan soldier and historian. Pietro Colletta, wrote simply:

Never has a society been subject to greater convulsions than of Naples in the first years of the 19th century⁴

The most recent historian of the Napoleonic Kingdom of Naples. Pasquale Villani, reaches very similar conclusions:

. . . the years between 1806 and 1815, the so-called 'French decade', were amongst the most dramatic and revolutionary in the entire history of the Kingdom of Naples.⁵

For all its brevity, the decade of French rule was one of intensive administrative and juridical reforms and the speed with which the French administrators set about dismantling the *Ancien Régime* state was remarkable. Within a short space of time they laid the foundations of a centralized, bureaucratic and autocratic monarchy, fashioned on the model that had finally emerged under Napoleon from the long experience of the revolution in France. The central clutch of reforms—the abolition of feudalism, the reorganization of the central and peripheral administrative institutions of the state, the restructuring of financial administration and of taxation—was pushed through in the first months of the occupation. During the summer and autumn of 1806 the massive task of redeeming and converting the

² For Sicily in this period see J. Rosselli *Lord William Bentinck and the British Occupation of Sicily* (Cambridge 1956), and R.M. Johnston *The Napoleonic Empire in southern Italy and the rise of the Secret Societies* (London 1904), 2 Vols.

³ For the most complete recent appraisal see P. Villani 'Il decennio francese' in *Storia del Mezzogiorno* (Roma 1986), Vol. 4. The older account by J. Rambaud *Naples Sous Joseph Bonaparte* (Paris 1911) is still the most detailed account of Joseph's administration and less dated in many respects than A. Valente *Gioacchino Murat e l'Italia Meridionale* (Turin 1941).

⁴ P. Colletta *Storia del Reame di Napoli* ed. G. Capponi (Firenze 1848), Vol. 2, p. 11

⁵ Villani (1986), p. 577

huge debt inherited from the former Bourbon rulers was begun, and preparations were made for the sale of former crown and church lands to fund the new debt. At the same time, French officials were also busy collecting data on every aspect of the southern economy, on the state of agriculture, on the potential for commercial development and on the types of industry established in the Kingdom.⁶

The legislative framework and much of the preparatory groundwork for the reform programme was laid by Joseph, while the more difficult task of implementing the reforms fell mainly to Murat. But the formulation and implementation of the reform programme has to be set against two different contexts. The first was that of the administrative and political models that had emerged from the Revolution. The second, and in many respects the more immediate, was determined by the situation which the French administrators inherited from their Bourbon predecessors. Leaving aside the problems posed by relations with France—which were laid down first by the terms on which Napoleon conceded the throne of Naples to Joseph, and then more stringently by the Treaty of Bayonne which governed the transfer of the crown to Murat in 1808—the most pressing problems facing the new rulers were those that had brought the Bourbon monarchy into crisis in the closing decades of the 18th century.

One clear indication of the extent of the crisis of the *Ancien Régime* monarchy was the vast debt of over 100 million Ducats inherited by the French rulers, against annual revenues of about 12 million Ducats.⁷ But this was no more than a symptom of a deeper crisis that was facing many other European *Ancien Régime* monarchies in the second half of the 18th century.

At one level the crisis was essentially political. The Kingdom of Naples had become an independent dynastic state in 1734, and in attempting to transform the limited powers of their feudal monarchy the Spanish Bourbon rulers of Naples soon came into conflict with the most powerful forces in southern society—the feudal nobility and the Church. Similar struggles were being played out elsewhere in Europe, but nowhere else in western Europe were feudal jurisdictions as extensive. The struggles between the monarchy and the privileged orders were a consequence of the attempts to reorganize the administrative institutions of the Kingdom and above all to achieve adequate sources of revenues for the monarchy.

⁶ See Rambaud (1911) pp. 309–412, and A. De Martino *La Nascita delle Intendenze: Problemi dell'amministrazione periferica nel Regno di Napoli (1806–1815)* (Napoli 1984), pp. 7–111.

⁷ The figures are based on the data collected by Roederer. See *Archives Nationales*, Paris (ANP), 29 AP 25, 31–2, and Rambaud (1911), pp. 309–42. The correspondence on the reorganization of the debt is in *Archivio di Stato*, Napoli (ASN), Min. Finanze f 2711, 2717, 2735 5581–95.

The bankruptcy of the Bourbon state was indicative of the failure of those efforts.

To make matters worse, the institutional and financial crisis of the *Ancien Régime* monarchy was paralleled by other changes that were beginning to erode the economic and social fabric of the *Ancien Régime* in ways that engendered fierce social conflicts throughout the Mezzogiorno. Growing demand for the staple products of southern agriculture—especially grain, olive oil, citrus fruits and spices—was one element of change, and in response to commercial demand, incentives to enclose land increased.⁸ The expansion of private properties inevitably came into collision with two fundamental institutions of the agrarian economy: the feudal regime and the collective forms of land usage that focused around the common lands of the rural communities.

The critical juridical feature of land held in feudal tenure in the 18th-century Mezzogiorno was that it was subject to multiple use-rights. Since the largest properties were held mainly under feudal title in the 18th century (although feudal tenures were interspersed with allodial lands, known as *burgensatici*), it is not surprising that feudal landowners were often amongst the most enthusiastic enclosers. A second and often softer target was the common lands of the rural communities. In the 18th century feudal and non-feudal landowners joined in the onslaught on the village commons, and as these were enclosed the subsistence economies of many rural communities became endangered. Expansion of enclosed properties caused other conflicts too, especially where settled farming threatened the seasonal migrations on which transhumant sheep grazing depended.⁹

The agrarian tensions caused by these changes were exacerbated by unprecedented demographic expansion and also by the economic subordination of the rural areas to the towns and cities—and especially to the capital, Naples. Combined with the political struggles that had set the monarchy at odds with the most powerful social forces in the Mezzogiorno, these conflicts made for an explosive mix which found expression in the violent struggles that engulfed much of the Kingdom following the establishment of a Jacobin Republic in Naples 1799.¹⁰

⁸ See P. Villani *Mezzogiorno tra Riforme e Rivoluzione* (Bari 1962), and P. Chorley *Oil, Silk and Enlightenment; Economic Problems in 18th-Century Naples* (Naples 1965).

⁹ G. Tocci *Terra e Riforma nel Mezzogiorno Moderno* (Bologna 1971); R. Trifone *Feudi e Demani: Eversione della Feodalità nelle Provincie Napoletane* (Milano 1909); D. Winspeare *Storia degli Abusi Feudali* (Napoli 1811).

¹⁰ J. A. Davis '1799: The Crisis of the Ancien Regime in southern Italy' in J. A. Davis & P. Ginsborg (eds) *Society and Politics in the Age of the Risorgimento* (Cambridge 1991).

To what extent did the reforms and innovations introduced by the French rulers remedy the structural crisis of the Bourbon monarchy or alleviate the tensions had brought increasing levels of social conflict and instability to the Mezzogiorno in the closing years of the *Ancien Régime*? Fortunately the strategies adopted by the French administrators were nothing if not explicit. The principal advisers and administrators who accompanied Joseph Bonaparte to Naples—Miot de Melito, Cristoforo Saliceti and above all Pierre-Louis Roederer—were men of immense political and administrative experience who had survived the different phases of the Revolution in France to become well-seasoned imperial administrators. The administrative models on which they relied had been honed through the experience of the Revolution, and these were applied to the newly-won territories of the Empire with a missionary zeal that brooked no questioning of the validity or the appropriateness of the panaceas proposed.

The French reform programme was premised on the fundamental redefinition of the juridical character of the state itself which was achieved through the law of 2nd August 1806 that declared 'feudalism and all its appurtenances henceforth abolished'. The starting point for the broader operation of institutional and administrative reform was the abolition of the private jurisdictions and devolutions of power that typified the *Ancien Régime* state, combined with the assertion of the absolute authority of the state. This then opened the way for the reorganization of public administration in line with the French model of centralized and hierarchical bureaucracies. By abolishing feudal tenures, the law also asserted the exclusively private and absolute nature of property rights and the juridical premise for the introduction of a universal land tax (the *fondiarìa*).¹¹

These juridical and administrative changes were seen to be the essential prerequisites for any broader process of economic and social progress. By abolishing the unnatural and irrational restrictions and constraints imposed by feudalism, private enterprise would be able to flourish and what were believed to be the immense natural resources of the Mezzogiorno would be emancipated. Rational administration was a pre-condition for free enterprise and would establish a partnership that would unlock the path towards economic and social progress. This in turn could be expected to bring about significant changes in the relationship between state and society, and once public administration

¹¹ R.De Lorenzo *Proprietà fondiaria e fisco nel Mezzogiorno; La riforma della tassazione nel decennio francese (1806–15)* (Salerno 1984); Winspeare (1811), pp.86–95; L.Bianchini *Storia delle Finanze del Regno di Napoli* (Napoli 1859), Vol.7, pp.399–405; Trifone (1909), pp.181–203; Rambaud (1911), pp.402–12.

had been established on sound and rational principles, private and public interests would increasingly converge. This idea of a new partnership of public and private interests was a key *leitmotif* of French administrative and political strategy, and was readily endorsed by Neapolitan sympathizers like Vincenzo Cuoco—a former member of the Jacobin government of 1799 and later an ardent supporter of the Bonapartist regime:

Facciamo che l'interesse privato cospiri col pubblico – Let us endeavour to ensure that public and private interests come into ever closer unison.¹²

To what extent were these expectations realized in the Mezzogiorno? In the short as well as in the longer term, the institutional and administrative reforms on which they were predicated proved far from easy to implement. By 1814 the administrative reorganization of the state was far from complete, while the social and economic consequences of the reforms that were implemented were often quite different to what had been intended.

Taking the issue of landownership first, the principal purpose of the law of 2nd August 1806 had been to establish the juridical premise for an autocratic and bureaucratic state. As a result it was concerned exclusively with the juridical aspects of feudalism, and so had little direct influence on the ownership of land. Those lands formerly held under feudal title were at a stroke transformed into private property, as were most feudal and seigniorial taxes. Although the law aroused great expectations, once it became clear that it had nothing to say on these complex and delicate issues, it soon gave rise to new tensions and disorder in the countryside.¹³

It was not the abolition of feudalism but the operations connected with the conversion of the Public Debt that had the most immediate implications for the distribution of landownership in the Mezzogiorno. The redemption of the huge debt inherited from the Bourbon monarchy was effected through a massive but well-trying and relatively simple operation. Credits against the old monarchy were transferred to new Debt, on which the government continued to pay interest at 5%. The operation was financed and consolidated through the sale of vast quantities of land belonging either to the Crown or to religious houses. Between 1806 and 1814 over 1,300 monasteries, convents and religious houses were suppressed, and

¹² Cf. P. Bevilacqua 'Acque e bonifiche nel Mezzogiorno nella prima metà dell'Ottocento' in A. Massafra (ed.) *Il Mezzogiorno Pre-Unitario: Economia, Società e Istituzioni* (Bari 1988), p.351: but the theme is omnipresent in the correspondence of the French administrators.

¹³ Bianchini (1859), Vol.7, pp.400–1.

the land sales amortized about half of the original debt of 100,000,000 Ducats.¹⁴

Despite the scale of these sales, Pasquale Villani's research shows that they did not bring about a significant redistribution of land-ownership. Of the lands auctioned before 1808, some 66% of the total purchases were accounted for by only 7% of the total number of purchasers: mainly people with close contacts with the French administration in Naples. In this first phase, the beneficiaries were amongst the wealthiest groups in the Kingdom. After 1808 the sales were extended to the provinces and the profiles of the purchasers began to open out, especially in regions like Apulia where there was some relatively higher degree of prosperity. In these cases the sales of *beni nazionali* did strengthen the development of middling and smaller properties: yet there is no indication that small purchasers were anywhere able to acquire land.¹⁵

What about the creditors of the *Ancien Régime*? As yet there is insufficient evidence to reach firm conclusions, but it seems that while they certainly suffered losses, the French administrators did their best to protect their interests and with success. The worst damage occurred before the French arrived as a result of the collapse in value of the *arrendamenti* in the 1790s and the inflationary pressures at work in the second half of the 18th century. Considerable losses were sustained during the crisis of the *Ancien Régime*, but credits which were worthless at the time of the French occupation quickly recovered in value thereafter. These were transferred to the new Debt and although the titles initially circulated at 20% of face value or less, they did carry interest at 5% of nominal value. But providing that holders of titles on the new Debt were not obliged to realize their capital, they could then watch their market value rise steadily. There was no repetition in Naples of the disastrous inflation that had followed the issue of the *assignats* in France—thanks in part to the lessons which that experience had taught—and by 1808 the market value of the certificates had risen to 60%.¹⁶ The difficulty of finding purchasers for the *beni nazionali* also caused the government to accept certificates in the Public Debt at nominal value in part-payment for purchases. In this way a substantial tranche of the old debt was liquidated and annuities were transferred into land, and since this was in any case being sold at extremely low prices

¹⁴ Villani (1986), 614–16; L.deRosa 'Property rights, institutional change and economic growth in southern Italy in the 18th and 19th centuries', *Journal of European Economic History* Vol. 8, Pt.3 (1979).

¹⁵ Villani (1986), 614–15; P.Villani *La Vendita dei Beni dello Stato* (Milano 1964), p.156; Rambaud (1911) pp. 357–60.

¹⁶ O. Connelly *Napoleon's Satellite Kingdoms* (New York 1965), p82; on the *arrendamenti* see L.de Rosa *Studi sugli Arrendamenti del Regno di Napoli* (Napoli 1958).

the operation worked very much to the advantage of the creditors of the Ancien Regime.¹⁷

It would be wrong, therefore, simply to assume that the crisis of the *Ancien Régime* monarchy and the economic reforms introduced in the early stages of the French administration favoured the emergence of new social forces in the Mezzogiorno. If some new opportunities did emerge, the principal beneficiaries of the French reforms—in economic terms—were those who were already wealthy.

In terms of the wider economic impact of the new legislation, it has also to be remembered that the land sales in this period absorbed great quantities of capital in ways that made productive investment in agriculture more rather than less difficult. While the number of properties in the Mezzogiorno grew, so too did levels of mortgage debt.¹⁸ One consequence was the formation in this period of the vast new *latifundia* in Calabria which would become one of the characteristic features of the southern agrarian economy in the 19th century. By no means a survival from the feudal past, the southern *latifondo* was a product of the land sales of the French period, and functioned on an economic logic which looked to extensive production and the exploitation of natural factors of production, including cheap and subordinate labour, to avoid the increased capital investment in production which more intensive methods of farming would have required.¹⁹ The high mortgage debts incurred by middling and smaller purchasers also served to inhibit investment on the smaller properties that were formed in this period, so that in both cases the land sales probably perpetuated the low levels of agricultural productivity that had attracted the attention of the writers of the Neapolitan Enlightenment.

The sales of the *beni nazionali* did not bring about a significant redistribution of landownership, nor did they encourage changes in methods of farming. But the sales did substantially extend and consolidate the private ownership of land. In that sense, the French reforms gave juridical recognition to the dominant trends of the previous century and increased the precariousness of substantial sections of the rural population. Although there are no precise figures, there can be no doubt that sales of church

¹⁷ Although the value of the Debt certificates was initially threatened by the impossibility of settling former credits in land; see *ANP Fonds Joseph Bonaparte (FJB) 381 AP 3*, Memo 15.3.1807, Roederer to Joseph

¹⁸ See G.Della Valle *Della Miseria Pubblica. Sue Cause ed Indizi* (Naples 1833), p.35, and De Rosa, (1979) p.549; see also *ASN, Min. Interni (1)*, f 183—Consigli Generali delle Provincie 1807–8.

¹⁹ On the 19th-century origins of the *latifondo* see esp. P.Bevilacqua 'Uomini, Terra. Economie' in P.Bevilacqua & A.Placanicca *La Calabria* (Turin 1985), pp. 205–17; M.Petrusewicz *Il Latifondo: economia morale e cita materiale in una periferia dell'Ottocento* (Venezia 1989), pp.34–57.

lands threatened the tenancies of thousands of peasant families, while the privatization of former feudal estates jeopardized the livelihood of many rural communities. One clear symptom was an increase in measures to combat vagrancy.²⁰

Fear of serious rural disorder was one motive for the creation of the *Feudal Commission*, by Joseph shortly before his departure for Spain. Its task was to investigate the rival claims arising from use-rights exercised on former feudal estates. The *Commission* was empowered to adjudicate on all claims and to divide the estates proportionally amongst the previous users on the principle that the former feudatory would retain two-thirds of the land. The *Commission*—whose work was to be completed within two years—was charged with a further task: the recovery of the common lands belonging to village communities and their subsequent division amongst the inhabitants of the relevant villages and communities in the form of quit-rent (emphyteut) tenancies.

This was an immense task, but it was not until after the arrival of Murat that the *Commission* set to work. The first part of its brief proved to be more complex than expected and although judgements had been delivered on every single case relating to claims on former-feudal estates by 1811, the implementation of those judgements was to take very much longer. Appeals and litigation dragged on through the 19th century, and many were still outstanding in the 1920s when they were finally wound up by Mussolini's government.²¹

The reasons were partly technical, but they stemmed above all from the concerted opposition of the former feudal landowners. Whereas the ex-feudatories had warmly welcomed the abolition of feudalism in 1806 which deprived them of nothing and converted their limited titles into full property rights, they were much less enthusiastic about the partial dismemberment of their estates. Faced with that opposition, Murat's government—which by 1811 was increasingly at odds with the Emperor and therefore reliant on domestic support—backed off.

The second task, the planned division of the common lands, had hardly begun when the *Commission* was discharged in 1811. The project to reintegrate and divide the common lands was a massive undertaking, and one that was without precedent in the administrative experience of the Napoleonic Empire. For that reason even though it is generally recognized that its objectives were rarely achieved, it has often been seen as evidence of a radical reforming intent on the part of Murat's government—and above

²⁰ *ASN*, Archivio Tommasi, B.IV.

²¹ Trifone (1909), pp.486–90; Tocci (1971), pp.146–57.

all as a fruit of the agrarian reform programme that had its roots in the Neapolitan Enlightenment.²²

Such a view is strengthened by the presence on the *Commission* of Giuseppe Zurlo and other representative of the late-Enlightenment reform movement in Naples. There can be no doubt that Zurlo saw the *Commission* as a vital corollary to the abolition of feudalism and the attack on ecclesiastical mortmain. Through the re-integration of the village commons and their subsequent division into small farms Zurlo believed that a stratum on new small properties could be created which would complement the larger properties arising from the sale of the *beni nazionali*, bring elements of prosperity to the rural poor and so help stabilise the dangerous conflicts present in rural society.²³

It is important to ask why Murat's government decided to support this ambitious and long-term project at a time when it was beset with pressing financial and diplomatic problems. The answer is that whatever the longer-term expectations of Zurlo and his Neapolitan colleagues, the government's expectations were more short-term and more explicitly fiscal. In fact, the projected restoration of the village commons cannot be separated from the problems posed by the reorganization of local administration, and the chronic indebtedness the local communities. The restoration of the common lands which historically were the principal source of local revenues was therefore an essential prerequisite for the reorganization of local administration. The creation of peasant emphyteut tenancies also offered the means to monetarize local revenues, while offering the Treasury an additional gain, since the tenant farmers would also become liable to pay the *fondiarìa*.²⁴

The scheme had a neat fiscal logic, but one that almost certainly undermined its practical success. In those cases where the divisions were actually carried out, the peasant farmers quickly fell victim to the combined weight of mortgage debts, payments of leases and the *fondiarìa*. At that point the land was bought up by wealthier landowners, so that a measure intended to widen access to the land in fact had quite the opposite effect. In this case too, the French reforms gave new force to processes already under way and by increasing the precariousness of the rural population undoubtedly exacerbated tensions and conflicts in rural society in the decades that followed.

²² See Bianchini (1859), pp.401–5; Trifone (1909), pp.319–73; Villani (1986), pp.608–10. On Zurlo, see P.Villani 'G.Zurlo e la crisi dell'antico regime nel Regno di Napoli' in P.Villani *Mezzogiorno tra Riforme e Rivoluzione* (Bari 1962).

²³ See especially Zurlo's correspondence with the commissioners in *ASN, Affari Demaniali, Carte Winspeare*, f 81 & 89.

²⁴ *ASN, Affari Demaniali, Carte Winspeare*, f.89.

A balance sheet of the economic and social consequences of the liquidation of the feudal regime in the Mezzogiorno still contains many uncertainties. But it is not difficult to identify the losers—the greater part of the rural population, whose hopes of attaining some secure access to land were reduced. On the other hand, the principal beneficiaries of the removal of feudal constraints were the largest and wealthiest of the former feudal landowners, although those heavily encumbered with debts went to the wall. There was also some space for the formation of new properties, although these probably came into existence at the expense of the common lands rather than feudal properties and it was here that the southern gentry—the *galantuomini*—found their corner.

To what extent, therefore, did the French reforms mark a change in the outlook of the southern propertied classes? Despite the introduction of new administrative and juridical institutions, there is much evidence of continuity. For example, former feudal and seigneurial monopolies—over mills, baking ovens, rights to hunting, fishing or wood gathering—were in most cases simply carried forward as rents or private property. So too indeed was the vocabulary of feudalism, and throughout much of the Mezzogiorno large estates continued to be referred to as '*feudi*' down to the 20th century—including many that were formed during the French period.

This did not mean that the propertied classes of the Mezzogiorno remained unaffected by the new juridical order introduced by the French. It was generally agreed that the abolition of feudal entails (*maggioraschi*) seriously threatened the principles on which the marriage strategies and inheritance systems of the nobility operated. This had clearly been the Emperor's intention when he pressed on Joseph the need to abolish *maggioraschi*

. . . bring the *Code Civil* into force: it will consolidate your power, and once in force all wealth dependent on entails will vanish, with the result that there will be no powerful families except those whom you chose to create as your vassals. That is why I have myself always argued the need for the *Code Civil* and why I have gone to such lengths to carry it through²⁵

Whether the aim of abolishing entails was political rather than economic, the prohibition was widely circumvented. The practice quickly developed by which cadet sons voluntarily gave up their right to an equal share in the inheritance 'in the interest of the family', and received in turn an informal guarantee of a life interest.²⁶ The recourse to practices which effectively

²⁵ P. Umgari *Storia del Diritto della Famiglia* (Bologna 1974), p.103.

²⁶ See esp. P. Macry *Ottocento Famiglia, elites e patrimoni a Napoli* (Turin 1988), pp.29–35.

reinstated the mechanism of the entail in the interest of preserving the integrity of family partimonies is especially significant since entails had been one of the principal targets of the Neapolitan anti-feudal reform movement, in which were represented—not surprisingly—a disproportionate number of cadet noblemen. But not all families succeeded in finding voluntary solutions, and in the Restoration period contemporary observers agreed that the abolition of entails had dealt a fatal blow to the great aristocratic *casate* of the previous century.²⁷

Similar resistance to social engineering by legislative fiat was evident in the powerful opposition to divorce. Indeed, so sensitive was the issue that both Joseph and Joachim Murat succeeded for this reason in deferring the introduction of the *Code Civil* until 1810, despite the Emperor's constant insistence on its immediate introduction.²⁸

Neapolitan hostility to divorce has generally been put down to the clergy and the religious sensibilities of the propertied classes. The French rulers in Naples had certainly no wish to give gratuitous offence to the clergy, and in general the relations between the new regime and the secular clergy (at least until the kidnapping of Pius VII in 1808) were excellent. But the opposition came also from the landed classes since divorce would have added a further and deeply unwelcome element of uncertainty to the complex mechanisms that regulated the reciprocation of dowries and marriage portions between propertied families over successive generations

As Croce noted, even when divorce became available there was only one application before 1814, and at the Restoration the legislation was immediately abrogated. A similar fate befell another key stipulation of the *Code Civil*: the obligation of partible inheritance, which was universally ignored both by wealthy propertied families and by the poor.²⁹

Such elements of continuity in the behaviour and practices of the Neapolitan propertied classes should not be taken as evidence of the absence of change in southern society, but as indications of the ways in which southern agrarian capitalism developed from within the *Ancien Régime*, rather than from its ashes. They do indicate, however, the limits

²⁷ M. Barbagli *Sotto lo stesso tetto: Mutamenti della famiglia in Italia dal XV al XX secolo* (Bologna 1984) p.514.

²⁸ eg. Napoleon to Murat 27.12.1808 in P. Le Brethon *Lettres et documents pour servir à l'histoire de Joachim Murat* (Paris 1911–14), Vol. 6, p.470; on divorce see B. Croce 'Il divorzio nelle provincie napoletane' in id. *Aneddoti di varia letteratura* (Napoli 1942), Vol.3, pp.67–85, and L. Parente 'Dibattito sul divorzio; Una battaglia politica nel Mezzogiorno napoleonico' *Studi Beneventani* (Benevento 1990).

²⁹ This is evident from recent studies on marriage strategies and inheritance customs in the 19th-century Mezzogiorno—but the reorganization of civil law remains one of the least studied aspects of the *decennio*.

to the capacity or the will of the French rulers in Naples to put into effect the more radical aspects of imperial civil law. This might seem to contrast with a more radical stance on agrarian reform, but, as we have seen, the motives for the more radical measures of agrarian reform—the division of the common lands—were largely fiscal. When faced with sustained resistance from the landed classes, it is also clear that the French rulers were quick to abandon their projected reforms—to the anger of their Neapolitan administrators.

The reasons were quite simple. Although their political fate was always and directly dependent on the Emperor, both Joseph and Murat understood that the support of the Neapolitan propertied classes was critical if they were to achieve a degree of autonomy from Paris, and if they were to have any dynastic expectations for themselves and their families. From the moment that Joseph arrived in Naples there had been a clearly defined policy of *ralliement* with the propertied classes and with the great landowners. Joseph had hardly entered Naples in February 1806 when he wrote to the Emperor that ‘all the great landowners have rallied to us’.³⁰

Did the French rulers succeed in overcoming the rift between the monarchy and the most powerful forces in southern society which had brought chaos to the *Ancien Régime*? In looking to ally themselves with the Neapolitan propertied classes and to find a solution to the political crisis of the *Ancien Régime* monarchy, the French rulers in Naples sought to adopt and adapt the political formula of the Napoleonic regime in France—the ‘regime of notables’, in which autocratic government looked to involve the propertied classes in the business of government (through provincial assemblies and parliaments, through service in the state bureaucracy) without, however, conceding any real elements of power sharing.

Even in France this formula was pregnant with dangerous ambiguities, but in an occupied country like the Kingdom of Naples the prospects were even more difficult. Both Joseph and Murat did bring Neapolitans into the highest spheres of administration, and replicated the provincial assemblies of Napoleonic France. But such measures did more to reveal than conceal the absence of any real participation in government, and whetted rather than dampened expectations. The propertied classes resented the burdens imposed by administrative duties and obligations, which in general they avoided—thereby making it more difficult to implement the reorganization of local government.³¹ At the same time, demands for some form of

³⁰ eg. Joseph to Napoleon, 22.2.1806, ANP AF IV 1714^c.

³¹ See esp. De Martino (1984); A. Spagnoletti ‘Il controllo degli Intendenti sulle amministrazioni locali nel Regno di Napoli’ in *L’Amministrazione nella Storia d’Italia* (Milan 1985), Vol. 1; A. Scirocco ‘I corpi rappresentativi nel Mezzogiorno dal *decennio* alla Restaurazione: il personale dei consigli provinciali’, *Quaderni Storici* 37 (1978).

constitutional solution began to grow. These were strengthened first by the commitment to the creation of a national parliament made in the Treaty of Bayonne, and then by Bentinck's granting of a constitution in Sicily.³²

Despite the serious deterioration of relations with the Emperor, Murat refused to concede constitutional government despite his growing political dependence on the Neapolitan propertied classes. His position was precarious, the more so because the new monarchy had failed to establish alternative political bases in either public administration or the army.

Both Joseph and Murat had received the enthusiastic support of the Neapolitan intellectual and professional classes, but the formation of an effective and cohesive new bureaucratic class proved extremely difficult. Many of the most outstanding figures in Neapolitan administration in the first half of the 19th century received their training in these years, but the development of a substantial class of public servants that might act as a *trait d'union* between the regime and the professional classes as a whole was limited. There were any number of constraints, not the least being Napoleon's insistence that the satellite bureaucracies existed primarily to provide work for French citizens. It was also, in practical terms and for political reasons, very difficult to carry out systematic purges of the *Ancien Régime* administrations without creating widespread professional unemployment. As a result, their employees moved to new branches of administration, without necessarily adopting new practices or mentalities. This meant that key sections of public administration, such as the magistracy, whose support would be critical for the success of an administrative revolution, were in practice more likely to blunt than sharpen its impact.³³

The most serious obstacles to the formation of new bureaucratic cadres ideologically and materially committed to the new regime were financial and fiscal, however. The whole programme of administrative reform, indeed the whole concept of an 'administrative state', depended on the formation of a large, professional and technically proficient state bureaucracy. But this could only be achieved by increasing taxation, and in a relatively poor society this imposed severe constraints. The French innovations in this area proved extremely dangerous; taxation was increased, in many cases quite dramatically and in ways that provoked

³² These developments are discussed in J.A.Davis 'La fin du royaume de Murat à Naples' in Y-M Bercé (ed.) *La Fin de l'Europe Napoléonienne; 1814, La Vacance de Pouvoir* (Paris 1990), pp. 219–34; on the Sicilian constitution see Rosselli (1956) and R.Romeo *Il Risorgimento in Sicilia* (1950).

³³ See A.Valente *Gioacchino Murat e l'Italia Meridionale* (Turin 1941), pp. 231–312, and the more recent appraisal in De Martino (1984).

growing popular protest and unrest, yet without yielding sufficient funds to enable new bureaucratic institutions to function.³⁴

An alternative political base might have been created in the army, and this was something that Murat in particular had tried to achieve. But it was a policy fraught with ambiguities and above all dangers. First, because it attracted the suspicions of the Emperor and secondly because in so far as it succeeded it risked making Murat a prisoner of his own officers. Indeed, this was what happened in the closing days of the Kingdom when in the aftermath of the defeat at Tolentino in 1814 it was Murat's generals—Filangieri, Carrascosa, Colletta and Florestano Pepe—who demanded the immediate concession of a constitution as the condition for their continuing support. It was also in the army that the demand for constitutional government gave rise to the formation of the first Carbonarist cells.³⁵ The army proved to be, therefore, an extremely dangerous instrument by which to achieve the political and dynastic autonomy to which Murat undoubtedly aspired. Nothing revealed more clearly the persistence of those tensions between the propertied classes and the monarchy which pre-dated the arrival of the French rulers and would also be carried forward into the era of the Restoration.

If the administrative and juridical reforms introduced by the French rulers in southern Italy in this period consolidated and accelerated processes of economic and social change that had been evident for some time, the political reorganization of the state was to be the most ambiguous legacy of French rule in the Mezzogiorno. The terms of the political tensions that had brought the interests of the propertied classes and the monarchy into conflict in the last years of the *Ancien Régime* had changed, but their interests had not come into closer harmony during the period of French rule and reform.

The failure to find a political solution that would heal the conflict was to have important political repercussions which would be played out after the Restoration, when the demands for constitutional representation for the propertied classes quickly came to the fore. The failure of the Napoleonic *ralliement* between the monarchy and the propertied classes in the Mezzogiorno inhibited the development of a new 'administrative state'. Since the monarchy failed to win effective support from the propertied classes, especially at the periphery, the new administrative institutions remained weak and ineffective. Although the power of the state had in theory been immeasurably enhanced by the juridical and administrative

³⁴ See De Martino (1984), and A. Spagnoletti (1985), Vol. 1; for complaints about taxation, see *ASN*, Min. Int. (1), f 183.

³⁵ J.A. Davis 'The political role of the Neapolitan army during the *decennio francese*' in A-M Rao (ed.) *Esercito e società nell'età rivoluzionaria* (Napoli 1990).

reforms of the French period (which was why none of the legitimist dynasties in Italy after 1814 sought to reverse those changes), in practice it remained weak in the Mezzogiorno. Lacking the means to coerce, the powers of the state easily passed back into private hands. This of course was quite the opposite of what the French administrators had intended: indeed the central thrust of their reforms had been to bring to an end the devolutions of power that had been characteristic of the *Ancien Régime*. It was also the reverse of that new partnership between public and private interests which the French administrators had hoped to encourage. Where public and private interests did converge, it was too frequently on terms that were weighted heavily towards those who appropriated public institution for private ends. These were tendencies that pre-dated the experience of the French *decennio* but they were not resolved by the French reforms and thereafter the private exercise of public power was to remain one of the most distinctive features of political and social development in the Mezzogiorno.