The Historical Journal, 33, 3 (1990), pp. 573–597

REVOLUTION AS VENDETTA: PATRIOTISM IN PIEDMONT, 1794–1821*

MICHAEL BROERS
University of Leeds

I

It is an irony that so much of the major historiography of the revolutionary era outside France has succeeded – often unintentionally – in reducing the role of the patriots to a marginal one, peripheral to the impact of the French revolution on western Europe and devoid of importance for the policies of successive French regimes.[1] There have been two main reasons for this, although many recent works have begun to dispel this image.[2] The first has been an exaggerated concentration on the ideology of the 'Jacobins', which inevitably reduces the study of patriotism to that of a handful of powerless intellectual cliques, most of whose adherents were, indeed, swept away by the advent of the Consulate in 1799 and were seldom taken seriously by the French before then. These men were far from central to the history of the period, and the undue attention they have received from ideologically motivated historians has been properly criticized. However, the critics themselves have often compounded the misconception surrounding the phenomenon of patriotism, exactly because they have adopted the narrow conception of patriotism inherited from their opponents, the shared acceptance of a definition of the patriots as an intellectual clique. By concentrating on the

* The author wishes to thank the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland, the Department of Education and Science, and the Amphlet-Martin fund of Worcester College, Oxford, for the generous financial support provided for this research.

[1] There is a vast corpus of literature on the Italian jacobins. Among the major works are: D. Cantimori and R. de Felice (eds.), *Giacobini italiani* (2 vols., Bari, 1956 and 1964); B. Croce, *La Rivoluzione napoletana del 1799* (Bari, 1948); R. de Felice, *Italia giacobina* (Naples, 1965); A. Galente-Garrone, *Buonarroti e Babeuf* (Turin, 1948); A. Saitta, *Filippo Buonarotti* (2 vols., Rome, 1950); G. Vaccarino, *I patrioti 'anarchistes' e l'idea dell' unità italiana, 1796–1799* (Turin, 1955). For southern Germany and the Rhineland, see H. Scheel, *Süddeutsche Jakobiner: Klassenkämpfe und republikanische Bestrebungen im deutschen Süden Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1962) and A. Kuhn, *Jakobiner im Rheinland: Der Kölner konstitutionelle Zirkel von 1798* (Stuttgart, 1976). On the Netherlands, see I. Leeb, *The ideological origins of the Batavian revolution* (The Hague, 1973). For a European compendium, see J. Godechot, *La grande nation* (2 vols., Paris, 1956).

[2] On Germany see J. M. Diefendorff, *Businessmen and politics in the Rhineland, 1789–1834* (Princeton, 1980); T. C. W. Blanning, *The French Revolution in Germany: Occupation and resistance in the Rhineland, 1792–1802* (Oxford, 1983); idem, 'German Jacobins and the French Revolution', *The Historical Journal*, XXIII (1980), 985–1002. On the Netherlands, see S. Schama, *Patriots and liberators: Revolution in the Netherlands* (New York, 1977). On Italy, see G. Cingari, *Brigantaggio, proprietari e contadini nel Sud* (Bari, 1976); idem, *Giacobini e Sanfedisti in Calabria nel 1799* (Messina-Florence, 1957); W. Angelini, 'Moderati Anconetani nel 1797–1799', *Critica storica*, V (1965), 745–80; R. Davico, *Peuple et notables (1750–1816), essais sur l'ancien régime et la révolution en Piedmont* (Paris, 1981). A pioneering work on Spain is M. Artola-Gallego, *Los Afrancesados* (Madrid, 1953).

ideas of a minority, this approach simply leaves out too many people, and fails to encompass the phenomenon of practical, political collaboration with the French, something quite different from an ideological commitment to the French revolution.

This important distinction was defined with clarity and precision by a leading historian of Napoleonic Spain, and deserves application to all areas of Napoleonic Europe. In his pioneering study *Los Afrancesados*, Miguel Artola-Gallego points directly to the difference between ideological *afrancesamiento* – or liberalism, and political allegiance – and collaboration.[3] The failure to make this distinction has not only led historians to ignore patriotism's wider social basis in collaboration with the French, but has divorced it from its local social and political context, virtually cutting the patriots adrift from the history of their own times and casting them into a void, as Gaetano Cingari – one of the sternest Italian critics of the narrowly intellectual approach – showed, when he pointed to the tendency of many studies to obscure the 'internal peculiarities of particular revolutionary expression'.[4]

The second major stumbling block to a fuller understanding of patriotism has stemmed from a failure by many historians to look beyond the 1790s, and consider the fate of patriots under the Napoleonic regime. As long as patriotism remains so narrowly defined, there is indeed little point in continuing its study beyond 1800, because the true ideologues were soon driven first to the margins of public life and often into underground resistance to their French liberators.[5] However, if the definition of a patriot is widened to embrace those committed to the French, as opposed to those committed to the ideals of the French revolution in any of its various stages, then the need to pursue its history into the Napoleonic period – and beyond – becomes essential. Unlike the ideologues, these men remained in public life under Napoleon to help the French rule their empire. In so doing they became, effectively, the dominant segment of their provincial elites. Accordingly, the regional emphasis of this study is deliberate, and directed by necessity rather than convenience.

It is also a decision that depends on the validity of a broader definition of patriotism, and on establishing first, the circumstances which widened it to embrace important segments of the propertied classes; then to examine the forces within the revolutionary process which made the patriots an identifiable political group; and finally to turn to the circumstances which perpetuated the existence of a distinctly 'patriot' faction, and which added to its numbers and importance. In a Piedmontese context, four clear phases of patriotism emerged – four different 'generations' of patriots, so to speak – each more or less corresponding to a particular stage of the revolutionary period. The first generation of Piedmontese patriots were the ideologues, who defined

[3] Artola, *Los Afrancasados*, pp. 3–4.

[4] Cingari, *Briggantaggio*, p. 25.

[5] In a Piedmontese context see: G. Vaccarino, 'La classe politica piemontese dopo Marengo, delle note segrete di Augusto Hus', *Bolletino Storico-Bibliografico Subalpinio*, LV (1953), 5–74 and idem, 'Crisi giacobini e cospirazione antifrancese nell'anno VII in Piemonte', *Occidente*, XIII (1952), 33–60, 126–48.

themselves in the period 1789–96, first for their general support for the ideas of the French revolution, then by their support for the invading French armies, and consequently, by their overt opposition to the continued rule of the House of Savoy. The second, and perhaps most numerous generation of patriots emerged as a direct result of the revolutionary process within Piedmont, between 1796 and 1802 – the period from Napoleon's first invasion of Italy until the annexation of Piedmont to France. This generation turned to collaboration with the French in the course of the complex and convulsed events of these years and, as such, represent the stage at which the need for a wider definition of the patriot faction begins. The third and fourth generations of patriots belong to the period of French rule proper, 1802–14, and are clearly intertwined, in that they were drawn into collaboration in circumstances very different from those of the 1790s. The third generation consists of those Piedmontese – mainly anti-French and aristocratic – who took office of one sort or another under Napoleon, having refused to do so in the late 1790s; that is, they chose to collaborate with the regime only when it was at its height and when it appeared almost indestructible. The fourth generation of Piedmontese patriots is defined by a literal use of the term 'generation', consisting of men who came of age and entered public life during the Napoleonic period, with no adult memory of either the *ancien régime* or the revolution; as such, they represent the most tangible link between the phenomenon of patriotism and the experience of French rule, with the Restoration period and the origins of the *Risorgimento*.[6] Their place in their own society and culture remains to be examined.

II

The Italian territories of the House of Savoy suffered and endured all the major problems facing the Hesperian peninsula at the end of the eighteenth century. These years saw the Piedmontese rural economy deeply disturbed by the assault on *mezzadria*, sharecropping broadly similar to *métayage* in France, by the introduction of new crops such as rice and maize into the lowlands, and the advance rack-renting and other fiscal pressures in the high valleys, all of which meant the expulsion of peasants from their holdings. Its rural bourgeois of *affitavoli* and seigneurial agents were as ruthless in their exploitation as the *galantuomini* of Calabria or Tuscany, while the municipalities witnessed the same struggles for power, and the same interminable wrangles over money between seigneurs and the municipalities as in the *Mezzogiorno*.[7]

[6] See especially: E. Passerin d'Entrèves, 'Dal Piemonte pre-rivoluzionario al Piemonte costituzionale', *Bolletino Storico- Bibliografico Subalpino*, LVII (1959), 170–91; idem, *La Giovinezza di Cesare Balbo* (Florence, 1940); R. Romeo, *Dal Piemonte Sabauda all'Italia liberale* (Turin, 1963).

[7] For the economic problems of the Piedmontese *mezzadri*: Davico, *Peuple et notables*; idem, 'Prix et conjoncture: la période napoleonienne en Piemont', *Revue Historique*, DIII (1972), 25–49. The classic account is: G. Prato, 'L'evoluzione agricola nel secolo xviii e le cause economiche dei moti del 1792–1799', *Memorie della Reale Accademia di Torino*, series II, vol. I (1910), 33–106. For Tuscany, see G. Turi, *Viva Maria: La reazione alle riforme Leopoldine*, 1790–1799 (Florence, 1969). For Calabria, see Cingari, *Giacobini*.

In these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that Piedmontese society descended into violence following war and invasion, yet this process did not follow a predictable pattern. In several important respects, the emergence of a significant faction of pro-French collaborators was particularly complex and the reason for this was the towering presence of the monarchy in all aspects of Piedmontese life. Dynastic loyalty is a subject neglected by historians of the revolutionary period; its existence is often overshadowed by the definitive expression given to modern nationalism, as embodied by revolutionary France, yet its vitality and strength are well attested to in much of the strong resistance to the advance of the revolution. In countries such as Naples, Spain, the Tyrol and the Netherlands it was one element among many in the mosaic that was the counter-revolution, but in Piedmont, loyalty to the House of Savoy has a unique, central place.

The Savoyard dynasty predated all its western and southern European contemporaries by centuries rather than generations. Of equal if not greater importance, its rule in the century before the revolution had been both active and successful.[8] During a century in which states measured their success in terms of war well waged and diplomacy skilfully conducted, the Savoyard kings had emerged as remarkably successful. In clear contrast to so many other powers of the second rank, like Sweden, Spain, or the Dutch Republic, all indisputably great powers in decline, Piedmont stands out as a rising – if limited – state.

This international success preserved a form of absolutism whose anachronistic character testified to its durability and an examination of its relationship to the society it ruled shows Savoyard absolutism to have had a deep and wide appeal. The *annona*, a nationwide system of price-fixing and control of grain supplies, bound the peasant and artisan to the monarchy on a practical level that became ever more central to their concerns during the period of intense inflation and determined price speculation by rural middlemen from the mid 1770s onwards.[9] However ineffective the *annona* was becoming in the late eighteenth century, its contrast with the conduct of the *speculuatori* at local level became increasingly striking.[10] Added to this was the extensive system of public charity established by Victor Amadeus II under tight central control,[11] which successfully enveloped not only its beneficiaries, but also its administrators, channelling by this means the energies of much of the regular clergy in the interest of the monarchy and so reducing the area of conflict between church and state so common with regard to the regular

[8] See especially: G. Symcox, *Victor Amadeus II* (London, 1983); G. Quazza, *Il problema italiano e l'equilibrio europeo, 1720–1738* (Turin, 1965); idem, *Le riforme in Piemonte nella prima metà del' 700* (2 vols., Modena, 1957); E. Pontieri, 'Carlo Emmanuele III', *Rivista Storica del Risorgimento*, XXII (1935), 681–700. R. Bergandini, *Vittorio Amadeo III* (Turin, 1939).

[9] Davico, 'Prix', is the most authoritative account of this process and the place of the *Annona* in it. For a fine local study see F. Bonelli, 'Mercato dei cereali e sviluppo agrario nella seconda metà del settecento: un sondaggio per il Cunesee', *Rivista Storica Italiana*, LXXX (1968), 784–819.

[10] Bonelli, 'Mercato', pp. 787–9. Davico, *Peuple et notables*, p. 15; Prato, 'L'evoluzione', p. 41.

[11] R. Davico, 'Pauperismo urbano e contadino in Piemonte sotto Vittorio Amadeo II' (unpublished dissertation, University of Turin, 1962–3).

clergy.[12] Perhaps most important in the context of dynastic loyalty, is that the monarchy stood by its system of paternal mercantilism under Victor Amadeus III (1773–97), resolutely ignoring the attempts to adopt free trade in grain taking place in Tuscany, Naples, France and Spain in these decades. However reviled the monarchy may have been by physiocratic intellectuals at home,[13] in political terms this steadfast mercantilism ensured that the local *monopolisti* were the targets of popular hatred, of the subsistence riots which swept the Astigiano in 1775, not the state or any of its higher officials.[14] Rural Piedmont was a seething labyrinth of animosities between peasant consumers and *monopolisti*, between *mezzadri* and their landlords, but none of this rebounded on the monarchy.

The dynasty's relationship with the vast majority of its propertied and political classes throughout the last decades of the eighteenth century is striking in its lack of tension,[15] when set beside the open rifts which were appearing within ruling elites elsewhere in western Europe. No 'enlightened' reforming cliques developed around the throne in these years and, therefore, there was no group of highly placed progressive ministers to be deposed and become embittered in the late 1790s, as was the pattern in Naples, Tuscany, Spain and Habsburg Lombardy. Of even greater significance, perhaps, is that no powerful or influential group of radical reformers developed outside the state apparatus.[16] Indeed, there is much to sustain the now traditional view that Alfieri, Denina and Muratori were isolated figures in their overt criticism of the monarchy.[17] The major controversies of the reign of Victor Amadeus III revolved around the rivalry between the younger military technocrats influenced by Prussian models of absolutism, and the statist bureaucrats who were the heirs of Victor Amadeus II's civil service, both of whom were dedicated to the system, if in different ways. In all of this there was no challenge to the dynasty or its absolutist character; court rivalries found no echo in the revolutionary period.[18] However divided among themselves, the Piedmontese stood united not only around the throne, but around the centralized, authoritarian system it had created and sustained for a century.[19]

[12] F. Venturi, *Settecento riformatori* (6 vols., Turin, 1969–82), I, 84.

[13] The reign of Victor Amadeus III opened with an exhortation to the new king to free the grain trade by a leading Piemontese *illuministo*: F. Vasco, *Saggio analitico sul commercio dei grani* (Mondovì, 1776). Denina had denounced the mismanagement of the *annona* in the previous reign: C. Denina, *Lettere di N. Daniel Caro al P. Atanasio de Passagna* (Lucca, 1761), p. 14, cited in Venturi, *Settecento*, II, 80.

[14] Davico, 'Prix', p. 31. M. Ruggiero, *La rivolta dei contadini piemontesi* (Turin, 1974), pp. 20–4.

[15] S. J. Woolf, *Studi sulla nobiltà piemontese nell'epoca dell' Assolutismo* (Turin, 1963). C. Calcaterra, *Il nostro imminente risorgimento* (Turin, 1935), is the classic statement of the nobility's loyalty to the monarchy. It receives more recent, if nuanced, vindication in: V. Ferrone, 'Tecnocrati militari e scienziati nel Piemonte dell' Antico Régime: alle origini della Reale Accademia delle Scienze di Torino', *Rivista Storica Italiana*, XLVI (1984), 414–509.

[16] Ferrone, 'Tecnocrati', pp. 420–5. [17] Calcaterra, *Il nostro*, pp. 11–20.

[18] Ferrone, 'Tecnocrati', pp. 508–9. Passerin, 'Dal Piemonte', pp. 171–2.

[19] It should be pointed out that despite the general consensus of loyalty to the dynasty, there were provinces like Mondovì where its acceptance had been hard won, and of recent origin, described as 'servants of the dynasty more by necessity than from natural devotion', G. Marocco, *Gianbattista Vico* (Turin, 1978), pp. 17–18.

This general acceptance of the Victorian system of government is reflected even in the writings of some of the monarchy's sternest critics and, seen in this perspective, the critique posed by Carlo Denina, in particular, becomes the exception that proves the rule. Denina's major work, most especially his *Dell' impiego delle persone*,[20] reflects a deeply conservative desire to see the monarchy reassert the essence – if not always the letter – of the Victorian system he felt to be eroded to the point of ruin.[21] Denina's criticisms were detailed, concerned with the particular rather than the theoretical, and in this they stand in sharp contrast to Alfieri's sustained, embittered and comprehensive assaults on the whole concept of absolutist rule and the culture and society he felt it produced;[22] nonetheless, Alfieri himself never tried to deny his own isolation in these views.[23]

The events of the late 1790s would show – up to a point at least – the criticisms made by both men to be prophetic, but it was only these events which conclusively exposed the weaknesses they had discerned in the Savoyard state. Until that point was reached, the dominant feature of the *ancien régime* was loyalty to the Victorian system of government and to the dynasty which had created it; the unspoken assumption of that political culture was a seemingly indissoluble link between the dynasty and the political system through which it ruled. The fact remains, nonetheless, that the Savoyard state had important weaknesses prior to the revolutionary cataclysm, no less real for being perceived as apolitical in character by contemporaries. Interpreted specifically in terms of the power and efficiency of the state, these weaknesses were twofold, one exemplified by Denina's insistent criticisms of the monarchy's unsteady grip on the factious political life of the municipalities,[24] and the other by Alfieri's ferocious exposition of the inherently arbitrary nature of absolutist rule with its potential for fostering political chaos and social disintegration.[25]

The provincial municipalities were, indeed, the Achilles heel of the Piedmontese body politic, and the crown's attitude to their internal affairs is indicative of a quite different – and often ignored – aspect of Savoyard absolutism: that it did not intervene regularly or forcefully in the public affairs of the provincial *notabili*.[26] This was the point at which Savoyard absolutism reached its limits, and it is also the one area of Piedmontese life where 'ideological' patriotism gained a foothold, however tenuous and short-lived. While it would be a distortion to equate the municipal factionalism of Piedmont with the gross violence of, for example, Calabria in this period,[27] it

[20] C. Denina, *Dell'impiego delle persone* (2 vols., Turin, 1803).

[21] Denina, *Dell'impiego*, pp. 148–79.

[22] This theme runs througout the *corpus* of Alfieri's work. For his personal experience: V. Alfieri, *La vita* (Rome, 1977 edition), parte prima. For a sustained theoretical work see V. Alfieri, 'Della Tirannide', *Scritti politici e morali* (3 vols., Asti, 1951), I, 5–110.

[23] A theme which runs throughout *La vita*, in particular see Alfieri, *La vita*, pp. 52–4, 256–7.

[24] Denina, *Dell'impiego*, pp. 97–9, 179–87.

[25] Alfieri, 'Della Tirannide', pp. 16–27.

[26] Quazza, *Le riforme*, I, 73–5. Symcox, *Victor Amadeus*, p. 207. A. Petracchi, *Le Origini dell' ordinamento communale e provinciale italiano* (1770–1861) (3 vols., Venice, 1962), I, 40–2.

[27] Cingari, *Giacobini*, p. 41.

is equally true that its potential for violence was fully realized during the *triennio*, and that this violence had discernible roots – if not quite direct precedents – in the local politics of the *ancien régime*. Indeed, a late eighteenth-century Piedmontese writer, Della Chiesa, described the provincial nobility as 'short of speech, haughty by nature and factious, especially those of Mondovi, who are – more than anyone else – quick to take offence and, once they conceive a loathing, are irreconcilable'.[28]

The two salient characteristics of conflict in municipal life were the specific disputes between the communes and the *signori* over seigneurial rights, and the more general traits of competition within the municipal councils. After the *perequazione*, an extensive and thorough enquiry by the government into titles for fiefs, the burden of seigneurialism had passed from the countryside to the communes, a process which had transformed the legal battles over feudal rights into a struggle within the elite, rather than one between peasant and lord.[29] Recent research has shown an intensification of disputes over feudal rights between *signori* and the municipalities after 1745, when the *catasto*, a register of all taxable landed property, was being reformed.[30] It was, in itself, an old quarrel, but one that flared with each revision of the *catasto*, when feudal titles were brought into dispute by communes anxious to lighten their tax quotas. These quarrels were but high points in a continuous series of litigations between *le monde allodial* and all those who exercised seigneurial rights,[31] including the cadet branches of the great families, and a considerable body of lesser nobles of modest means, compared by a recent historian to the *hidalgos*.[32] They were also tensions which were heightened consideraby during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, during the 'feudal offensive'.[33]

It was in the context of this traditional rivalry between *signori* and *podestà* that 'ideological' patriotism, as epitomized by Ranza's short-lived 'republic of Alba' and the risings in Asti, Fossano and Raconiggi in 1797,[34] should be placed. The ferociously anti-aristocratic opinions of men like Ranza[35] were not without historical roots, and it was through this appeal that they sought to win support for their own cause, and that of the French. It was no accident that

[28] F. A. Della Chiesa, *Relazione dello stato del Piemonte* (Turin, 1777), p. 39.

[29] Symcox, *Victor Amadeus*, pp. 197–8. For local examples: Woolf, *Studi*, p. 168. R. Davico, 'L'aristocrazia imperiale: i "citoyens" piemontesi tra rivoluzione e restaurazione', *Quaderni storici*, XXXVII (1979), 43–72.

[30] Davico, *Peuple et notables*, pp. 54–5. Idem, 'L'aristocrazia', p. 54–5.

[31] Davico, 'L'aristocrazia', p. 48. [32] Ibid. p. 61. [33] Ibid. p. 48.

[34] For the republic of Alba: G. Roberti, 'Il Cittadino Ranza', *Miscellanea di storia italiana*, XXIX (1892), 1–187, 81–8. For Asti see N. Gabiani (ed.), 'Rivoluzione e controrivoluzione di Asti nel 1797; diario sincrono di S. Incisa', *Biblioetca della Società Storica Subalpina*, XIX (1903), 17–140. C. Grandi, *La republica di Asti nel 1797* (Asti, 1851). On Fossano and Raconiggi see C. Turletti (ed.), 'La rivoluzione del 1797 in Fossano e Raconiggi', *Miscellanea di storia italiana*, XXXIV (1897), 33–52.

[35] Ranza's views achieved their most coherent form in the two journals he edited in Turin in 1800–1: *Il diario Torinese* and *L'Amico della Patria*. The best analysis of their influence and character is in G. Sforza, 'L'Indemnità ai giacobini piemontesi, 1800–1802', *Bibliografia di storia italiana recente*, II (1909), 187–243, 194, 196–7. A fine example of the fusion of traditionalist and 'enlightened' anti-seigneurialism during the *ancien régime* is Giambattista Vasco, *La felicità pubblica considerata nei lavoratori di terre proprie* (Milan, 1796).

this first generation of patriots sprang from the provincial towns and *borghi*, this common origin being one of the clearest elements in defining them as a group, as Giorgio Vaccarino has astutely observed.[36] Nonetheless, despite their place in deep-rooted local anti-seigneurial quarrels, the patriots could not transform their anti-aristocratic stance into an anti-monarchical one and hope to win any appreciable degree of support. In this respect, the monarchy's limitations can be seen to have saved it, for it was seldom a participant in these disputes: on the rare occasions it did try to intervene, it was usually in an attempt – however vain – to support the municipalities against the *signori*.[37]

There was another reason for the patriots' failure to carry even a small segment of the municipal elite with them, namely the existence of what might be termed a 'feudal bourgeoisie' within the municipalities. There was a social group composed of bailiffs, *affitavoli*, bourgeois sub-letters of the extensive allodial lands owned by vassals, the *giudici* of the fiefs, and the lawyers and *notarii* who fought their litigations: in sum, that whole section of the bourgeiosie, used in its most literal sense of propertied townsmen, directly dependent on seigneurialism itself, or on the *signori* in other ways.[38]

The first generation of patriots – the true *giacobini* – found themselves isolated and bereft of significant support. The ties of seigneurialism, together with the patronage intrinsic to the military bureaucracy of Victorian absolutism, isolated them within the elite, just as the *annona* and the atavistic fear of French invasion estranged them from the popular classes. Nonetheless, particularly in Asti and Fossano, the patriots provoked anti-French revolts by infiltrating grain riots and, in the case of Asti, by using the lay confraternities to which they belonged as springboard to revolt.[39]

The first generation were, indeed, what their greatest historian has termed them: 'a cultural entity, like a youthful impulse of non-conformity, with all the flawed and scandalous appearance of a crisis of conscience committed in the name of a society in ... expansion'.[40] They were part of the local elite, with strong family ties. Most of the *Astigiano* rebels were *fils de famille*, and although all but two of fourteen patriots executed there did not have enough property worth confiscating, their families were all of some account.[41] Thus, however ephemeral this first flowering of Piedmontese patriotism was, its suppression added another strand to the web of municipal rivalries, and at the same time prepared the way for future conflicts. While the importance of explicit anti-noble feeling in these conflicts is clear, it would be equally perverse to see the politics of municipal life purely in terms of a rivalry between *signori* and *podestà*.[42] It is just as important to examine municipal rivalries in the context

[36] G. Vaccarino, 'L'inchiesta del 1799 sui giacobini piemontesi', *Rivista Storica Italiana*, LXXVII (1965), 27–73, 38. [37] Symcox, *Victor Amadeus*, pp. 197–8.

[38] Quazza, *Le riforme*, II, 339. Most of his examples pertain to the 1720s.

[39] Gabiani, 'Rivoluzione in Asti', pp. 18–19.

[40] G. Vaccarino, 'Da Vittorio Amadeo III al Congresso di Vienna', *Storia del Piemonte* (Turin, 1960), pp. 245–71, 251. [41] Gabiani, 'Rivoluzione in Asti', p. 127.

[42] R. Davico emphasizes this aspect of the problem in several of her works, most directly in *Peuple et notables*, p. 55, where widespread anti-noble feeling is identified in Piedmont long before

of an intimate network of social relationships, principally those centred on the family and on the mutual dependence of patron and client.

There is little doubt about the central place of family ties and clientage in municipal life – or that family groups and kinship networks gave the rural municipalities their coherence and autonomy.[43] Rivalry, exclusiveness and corruption were intrinsic features of this structure; factional rivalries – 'the desire to replace one supremacy with another'[44] – were as much a driving force in municipal life as anti-seigneurialism. While the government of the larger provincial towns hinged on the rivalries of families and family consortiums, it was patronage and inter-family alliances that spread oligarchical influence into the countryside and down the social scale, epitomized by the tightly-knit networks among the provincial lawyers – 'networks which made impartial justice an illusion'.[45] The office of municipal secretary in the smaller rural communes offers a telling example of this system at its most highly developed. These offices were usually in the hands of a *notario*, who frequently held several secretaryships at once, and was often the only fully literate member of some councils, a set of circumstances which could give him disproportionate power in local affairs.[46]

There were subtler, less obvious, and probably more durable means by which patronage – both noble and non-noble – expressed itself and expanded its influence. *Padrinaggio*, the instutition of godparentage, would seem to be an important aspect of this, as a recent study of its use and structure in the village of Felizzano, near Alessandria, has revealed.[47] In the course of the second half of the eighteenth century, a constant pattern emerged among the ninety-six peasant families of moderate property, which divided into five groups, each of which shared the same godfather, always a member of a more prominent family. In several cases the godfathers were from bourgeois families in Alessandria, who owned land in the area. The peasant families united by a godfather married among themselves almost exclusively, thereby shaping an important sector of the local landmarket in a patron–client fashion.[48] In this particular instance, the influence of elite patronage emerges as a permanent, if somewhat indirect force in the life of part of the countryside, but its presence in rural affairs is indisputable.

All these elements constituted a political culture in which oligarchy was the norm, and where the abuse of public power for private ends was a fact of life.[49] This was the essence of the political and social *milieu* Alfieri denounced for its immorality and Denina for its inefficiency; it was the system the early patriots sought to uproot by a combination of French arms and popular fury, but it

---

the outbreak of the French Revolution, although she also notes the great nobles' strong control of many lesser offices in 'L'aristocrazia', p. 62. Prato, 'L'evoluzione', p. 36 also puts great stress on the specifically anti-noble aspects of these disputes in the late eighteenth century.

[43] Davico, 'L'aristocrazia', p. 63. [44] Quazza, *Le riforme*, II, 340.

[45] Ibid. II, 331. [46] Ibid. II, 331, 335–6.

[47] G. Levi, 'Terre e strutture familiari in una comunità piemontese del Settecento', *Quaderni storici*, XI (1976), 1095–121. [48] Ibid. 1111–15. [49] Quazza, *Le riforme*, II, 340.

both destroyed and survived them. These municipal rivalries of the *ancien régime* went on to form the basis of the civil war of the years from 1797 to 1799.

III

There were two quite distinct problems that bedevilled Piedmontese political culture in the 1790s, both of them old, if hitherto latent, which now emerged from the shadows. The first was the ill-defined nature of centralized, personal absolutism; the great, unanswered question concerning the nature of Savoyard absolutism assumed increased urgency in the new context of political revolution. The second was the intensification of municipal factionalism which followed the emergence of ideological patriotism and the military defeat of the monarchy in April 1796. Throughout the eighteenth century, a hallmark of Piedmontese political life had been the separateness of the central government from the municipalities; the major political change wrought as a consequence of the patriot revolts of 1794 and 1797, was to bring them together, indeed, to fuse them. For the first time in its history the monarchy had to intervene directly and forcefully in the political life of the municipalities. It was this confluence of arbitrary royal absolutism and municipal rivalries that produced the second generation of Piedmontese patriots.

If municipal factionalism provided the rank and file of the second phase of patriotism, and if the municipalities became the battlefield of patriot politics, it was the intervention of the monarchy – in its death throes – that defined it. This is what separates the first from the second generation of patriots, for whereas the early revolutionaries defined themselves by their voluntary support for the advancing French, the next generation was branded as collaborators by the royal government. The process by which a new patriot faction emerged is the essence of its difference from the cliques of ideologues which preceded it, the fact that the royal government chose to lump them together notwithstanding.

By the *Reale Patente* of 25 May, 1794, the king took personal charge of all cases involving 'political conspiracy', and created and empowered an *ad hoc* committee of royal councillors of his own choosing to deal with such crimes, giving the *Giunta* the same powers as the Senate.[50] This was a turning point in the history of the monarchy.

The crown's reaction to the revolt of 1794 in Asti was the first time this new machinery and its ferocious inclinations burst upon the life of the municipalities. In July 1794 the *Giunta* not only executed several conspirators, but also burnt their bodies and scattered their ashes; in short, it treated them as heretics, and struck directly at the future well-being of their families.[51] The arrests that followed the first executions struck at property, rather than life. The events of 1794 in Asti are a microcosm and a foretaste of how the crown would respond to the much more general and serious revolts of 1797. In the

[50] Grandi, *Asti*, p. 26.

[51] Ibid. pp. 30–5.

meantime, they presented the local elite with royal absolutism in its most ruthless and arbitrary guise. Ham-fisted repression had sown dragons' teeth in Asti and other municipalities, while the audacity of the conspiracy had shaken the confidence of members of several distinguished noble houses in the monarchy's ability to cope with the revolutionary crisis, the marchese di Cavour among them.[52]

Between 1796 and 1798, the revolutionary crisis did indeed overwhelm the monarchy and reveal its severe political and military limitations, something even as deeply absolutist an aristocrat as Thaon de Revel did not attempt to hide or excuse.[53] The armistice of Cherasco, in April, 1796, effectively partitioned the country into a French-occupied zone, south of the Stura–Tanaro line, and a Savoyard-run zone to the north of it. The dislocation of the recent campaigning, compounded by French rapaciousness, led to a massive peasant *jacquerie* in the high valleys of the southern Alps, and subsistence riots in the towns of Stura and Tanaro lowlands.[54] In both cases the monarchy showed itself incapable of protecting the local *notabili*, who largely saved themselves – often with marked brutality – from the popular tumult.[55] Saluzzo, which bore the brunt of the *montagnardi* assault, was successfully defended by 500 of its own men.[56]

Perhaps the clearest example of fear coupled with disillusionment with the monarchy can be found in the reaction of the *municipalisti* of the lowland town of Fossano, patriot and royalist alike, to the crisis of 1797. Three days after the patriots had installed themselves in power in the *municipio*, during the chaos of the grain riots, the patriot councillor, Mellano, became so alarmed by the continuing disorders in the town that he supported a call for help being sent to the royal government in Turin. When Turin replied that it could do nothing, Mellano's reported response was 'What king? Have they still not learned? He has sucked his subjects' blood long enough.'[57] In the same session the patriot municipality agreed to try to disarm the town, and such was their desperation that another plea was sent to Turin, together with one to the French garrison in Cuneo.[58] Clearly, a chance to rally these municipal revolutionaries back to the crown was being lost. It is also the first explicit sign that the government, having first lost its grip on the municipalities, was unable to regain it. It was this kind of attitude which would produce, if not commited patriots, then certainly an element within the elite prepared to look elsewhere for help if the monarchy failed them.

The peasant disturbances of 1797 were, in themselves, a transient phenomenon, and their lasting importance lies less in the disorder they created than in the manner in which they affected relations within the elite, and between the monarchy and the municipalities. Yet in the face of the loss of

[52] R. Romeo, *Cavour e il suo tempo* (3 vols., Turin, 1974), I, 18–19.
[53] Thaon de Revel, *Mémoires sur la guerre des Alpes* (Turin, 1871), pp. 1–2.
[54] For a purely descriptive account of these revolts: Ruggiero, *La rivolta*, pp. 43–86.
[55] C. F. Savio (ed.), *La vita Saluzzese, 1792–1804 nel diario di B. Poetti* (Saluzzo, 1921), pp. 82–5.
[56] Ibid. pp. 84–5. [57] Turletti, 'La rivoluzione', p. 35. [58] Ibid. p. 36.

central control manifest in this crisis, a sense of perspective is still very necessary, even within the narrow world of the elite. What is most evident in the attitudes of *municipalisti*, as in Fossano, is frustration with the monarchy, coupled with a desire to remain loyal to it. Beside the actions of a few patriots in the municipalities must be set the continued loyalty of the peasantry, and the great institutions of the state – the army, the church and the royal administration – all of which were dominated by the great noble houses. The Piedmontese aristocracy had not failed to respond to the military crisis, thus disproving the charge of decadence levelled at it by Denina and Alfieri.[59] However, the monarchy proceeded to damage itself – and further extend what is best termed 'the patriot tendency' – by a reversion to the 'witch-hunting' of 1794.

The comprehensive collapse of responsible government in Piedmont began in July, 1797 when the central *giunta* delegated its powers to try the rebels to local *giunte* appointed by itself. This was a remarkable devolution of power during a crisis, a striking aberration in the history of so determinedly centralized a state. It was a decision which provided vast possibilities for the exercise of municipal vendetta; Pandora's box was now open.

The *giunta* in Saluzzo executed four rebels on 9 August 1792, an action which drew a contemptuous response from a hypothecary of the town – who was a royalist – and who had been terrified by the revolt:

> Our Piedmont has never known a more barbarous time than the present... The risings in Piedmont were caused by the king taking away the nobles' seigneurial rights and... the power in the hands of the nobles has been used to enact the blackest of vendettas to which we are sacrificed... What a barbarous war this is, so scrupulously executed by the ferocity and barbarity of *i Grandi*.[60]

The members of the *giunta* were variously described as a 'superb butcher' (the military commandant, Count de Varax); 'barbarous and inhuman' (Ponsilone, the Intendant); and 'vile and mercenary' (the *prefetto*).[61] The vindictiveness of the *giunta* must have come as even more of a disillusion because the patriots and royalists of the town had buried their differences in the face of peasant revolt.

Racconigi, too, had seen great disorder, but its scale had worried even the patriots who, in the words of the town's tax collector:

> seeing... that, seduced by the ruffians, the populace got out of control and turned to pillage and violence, some of them began to waver, and the more prudent [among them] began to look for ways to alleviate the damage.[62]

An eleventh-hour consensus was achieved within the local elite, but it was soon broken by the arrival of troops and the trials that followed shook the royalists' confidence in the crown's justice. Cardellini, the *essattore del gabello*, the collector of the salt tax – himself a victim of the riots – said that the marchese

[59] Denina, *Dell' impiego*, pp. 148–54. Calcaterra, *Il nostro*, pp. 12–13 refers to Alfieri's frequent accusations of this kind. [60] Savio, *La vita*, p. 88. [61] Ibid. p. 88.
[62] Turletti, 'La rivoluzione', p. 47.

di Ceva, the soldier who headed the local *giunta*, relied on faulty and false information – and even hanged the wrong man in one case – while allowing the worst offenders to escape,[63] surely a recipe for the perpetuation of vendettas:

> This delegation had an unhappy duration and brought about ruinous consequences... The obvious and scandalous partiality used to favour some and the excessive rigour used against several others created the motives for those hatreds and estrangements which were, and are, the fount of so many wrongs and so many persecutions which – still present in 1802 – devastate and plunge many local families into ruin.[64]

Written in 1802, at the outset of direct French rule, Cardellini's words are poignant evidence of the endurance of the divisions sown – or sharpened – in this period. If further evidence of the enduring nature of these vendettas were needed, in the first weeks after Marengo in 1800, the republican municipality of Asti openly admitted that the 'best citizens' of the town were bitterly divided between those who had been arrested in 1797 and those who had connived at their arrests.[65]

The repression of the revolts of 1797 was an exercise in royal – not just royalist – revenge and in the eyes of many, it proved to be an arbitrary and often inaccurate form of revenge, as well as a brutal one. To a growing number of provincial *notabili*, it must have appeared that Denina's vision of an incompetent state, together with Alfieri's tyrannical vision, had somehow come to pass. As well as destroying the monarchy's credibility, the policy of repression initiated a cycle of vendetta in the municipalities which its collapse in December, 1798, would accelerate, rather than curb.

Following the flight of Charles-Albert IV, the French established a provisional government in Turin led by moderate patriots but, as R. Davico has asutely observed, the true centre of politics – and conflict – was within the provincial municipalities.[66] The demise of the monarchy's authority since at least 1796 had increased their scope for action, but its final collapse and replacement by a French-appointed executive committee heralded a more pressing need to make fundamental political choices which could not be delayed. Above all, they were now largely on their own, free from any effective interference by central government. The provisional government could sanction the changes in the municipalities, but its appointees would have to take and hold power by themselves. At times the municipal revolution swept aside local consensus achieved during the troubles of 1797. The town of Saluzzo provides an illuminating example of this. Despite an offer of co-operation by the royalist municipality to the provisional government in December 1798,[67] its entire membership was replaced by patriots chosen by the French *commissaires de guerre* within two weeks,[68] while the royal intendant

[63] Ibid. pp. 48–9. [64] Ibid. p. 50.

[65] Munip. of Asti to min. of int., 15 thermidor, year viii/3 Aug. 1800, Archivio di Stato, Turin (A.S.T.), epoca francese, serie 1, cart. 20 (prov. Alba).

[66] Davico, 'L'Aristocrazia', p. 60. [67] Savio, *La vita*, pp. 103–4. [68] Ibid. p. 105.

lost little time in fleeing the town after his post was abolished.[69] Throughout the early months of 1799, the new municipality tried to purge the local national guard, while individual patriots organized public dinners and made violent speeches against the ex-*municipalisti*.[70] Similar events took place all over Piedmont, as in Mondovì, where the new municipality took power on 20 December 1798 – and two days later was singling out many of its predecessors to the French as candidates for war taxes.[71]

A striking feature of the purges was how deep down they reached into the countryside, and underlines a wider point: it is obvious that the French and the provisional government in Turin should want to purge local government; what is striking is their dependence on the readiness of factions within so many municipalities, large and small, to do this for them, by turning on their local royalist rivals. It was in this way – and in this way only – that the provisional government became a reality in the provinces.

By early 1799, Piedmont was thoroughly in the grip of 'government by vendetta', and the results of this process were brought home with singular ferocity when the fortunes of the French armies in Italy suddenly changed, in the spring of 1799. At this point, coherent royalist factions emerged in the municipalities, as a direct challenge to the patriots, an event which both polarized and crystallized provincial politics. Turin fell to an Austro-Russian army under Suvorov in May 1799, and a royalist supreme council composed of Piedmontese aristocrats formed a regency and exercised administrative power, in so far as it could be exercised at all, in such convulsed circumstances. As with their patriot predecessors, they had little choice but to use municipal factionalism as their instrument of government. Predictably enough, 1799 saw another purge in the municipalities, this time in the royalists' favour, and was marked everywhere by ruthlessness and violence; the line between vendetta and rivalry seemed virtually to disappear.

The manner in which the revolutionary process became intrinsically – and almost indissolubly – linked to private vendetta is well illustrated by a series of events in the high valley of the Stura between 1798 and 1800. In 1798 Belmondo, a small landowner and municipal councillor in Pietrapozzio was deposed as militia commandant. In 1799 he led an attack on the town, felling its republican liberty tree, directed attacks on the retreating French, and went on to lead the attack on Demonte.[72] His main target in 1799 was not the French however, but the man who had taken his place as the militia – now national guard– captain of Demonte. Belmondo was alleged to have raided his rival's house in 1799, seizing twelve rifles from it, and to have raped his rival's wife. The animosity between these two men was said to go back at least as far as 1794, although it stayed on a purely personal basis; Demonte's police *commissaire* in 1812 suspected its origin to be jealousy over a woman.[73]

[69] Ibid. p. 109. [70] Ibid. p. 113.

[71] D. Occelli, *Il Monregalese nel periodo storico napoleonico* (Vignone, 1926), pp. 159–60.

[72] Maire of Pietrapozzio to prefect, dept. Stura, 1 Sept. 1812, Archivio di Stato, Cuneo (A.S.C.), epoca francese, mazzo 229 (polizia). [73] Ibid.

Belmondo's loss of office in 1798 presumably raised their rivalry to a higher plane; nonetheless, the see-saw of events between 1798 and 1800 provided both men with ample – and unprecedented – scope for revenge. In 1799, Belmondo regained his lost posts,[74] only to lose them again after Marengo. He withdrew from municipal government during the whole period of French rule; in 1812 he had held no office since 1800, living off his rents and properties.[75] Whatever the roots of Belmondo's hatreds, there is no doubt that between 1798 and 1799, this pillar of the community became something very close to a brigand – if only temporarily – and an effective one at that.

Belmondo's response was wholly representative of that of the *notabili* of the upper Stura valley. Writing in 1812, Demonte's police *commissaire* made direct reference to the bitter divisions within the local elite during these years:

> Les antipathies, haines et dissensions qui malheureusement en l'autre année troublaient le bon ordre, et compromettaient quasi [*sic*] la tranquillité publique, tandis qu'elles régnaient dans plusieurs de nos principales familles.[76]

In 1797 these animosities, however strong, had not prevented 'coalition' municipalities being formed to defend the towns along the Alpine line against the peasantry.[77] The contrast with 1799 could not have been more stark, for on 9 May 1799, when the peasants of the Stura Maria valley rose again, the gates of Demonte, Busca and Dronero were opened to them by the royalists – and the municipalities were among their first targets.[78]

Belmondo's activities in 1799 almost pale into insignificance when set beside events in Cherasco following its capture by the Narzolini,[79] or Mondovì, where the leading patriots were driven out of the town altogether. The course of events in Mondovì is an important illustration of the stark choice facing the elite: between partisan vendetta and creating a joint front against the peasantry. On 4 May 1799, faced with increasing unrest in the countryside, the patriots readmitted several prominent royalist nobles to the municipality and armed *la brava gente*, patriot and royalist alike, to patrol the town.[80] The nobles soon betrayed the patriots, however, and the royalist *guardia civica* was instrumental in letting the peasants into the town on 6 May. Even so, once in power, on 10 May the counts Frauzone and Vitale were 'buying-off' the peasants with free bread and wine and, with the help of the bishop, persuaded them to go home.[81] Like the patriots before him, the royalist captain of the *guardia civica*, conte Vitale, steadfastly refused to distribute arms to all but *i buoni cittadini*.[82]

The royalist *notabili* clearly had their reservations about using the peasantry against their local rivals, as testified by events in Mondovì, but in 1799 they overcame their natural fears, however briefly. It is instructive to note that the

[74] Ibid.
[75] A.S.C., mazzo 228 (polizia), Belmondo to prefect, dept. Stura, 22 Aug. 1812.
[76] A.S.C., mazzo 228 (polizia), police comm. Demonte to prefect, dept. Stura, 27 Jan. 1812.
[77] Savio, *La vita*, pp. 82–4. [78] Ruggiero, *La rivolta*, p. 147.
[79] A.S.T., seri 1, cart. 12, min. of int. to comm., 10 vend, year vi/2 Oct. 1800.
[80] Occelli, *Il Monregalese*, p. 201. [81] Ibid. pp. 206–7. [82] Ibid. p. 213.

impetus to form an anti-patriot alliance came from the *municipalisti* – that is, from the most independent and unruly political entities in the Savoyard state – rather than from the former officials of the royal government.

Clearly, by 1799 there had been an important development in the character of the civil war within the provincial elite. In the spring of that year, the royalist faction of the elite in Piedmont succeeded where the patriots had failed in 1797. They forged a common cause with the rural masses against the French and the patriots. The isolation of the patriots from the peasantry was clear well before 1799, as in Asti in 1797 when the town was retaken for the king by peasant militias led by their *signori*.[83] Their encirclement was complete by 1799 when their municipal rivals won the battle for the support of the masses and generations of municipal rivalries within the elite merged with a myriad of peasant grievances, all unleashed and intensified by the collapse of responsible central government.

In Narzole, where the republic had not been proclaimed, the rebels were led by their *notabili*, from the outset. The two Trona brothers were prominent, the elder of whom was a parish priest, the younger a cavalry officer whose regiment was disbanded after the armistice.[84] The 'architect' of the fall of Cherasco was Giovanni Batista Ciravenga,[85] a member of Narzole's most prominent family. His brother, who was *maire* for most of the French period, was bailiff of both the royal domain lands in the commune, and of those of the marchesse di Barolo, the largest landowner in the area.[86] Giovanni Batista was an ex-grenadier officer, who went into Austrian service after Marengo.[87] The Narzolini had a tradition of collective resistance to authority, and under the leadership of their *notabili*, they became a formidable force, within the confines of their own area. When an alliance between local *notabili* and the populace was formed – on however minor a scale – the results were striking. The events in Narzole and Belmondo's activities illustrate both this and the rural origins of the revolt itself. The alliance between the peasantry and the *notabili* of the smaller municipalities such as Narzole or Belmondo's Pietraporzio appears to have been forged at an early stage in 1799 and, as a result, the revolt achieved a very high level of coherence and organization.

The fury unleashed in the provinces marks out 1799 as the culmination of a process, but the sanction it received from the supreme council in Turin also made it the watershed for the Piedmontese patriots. Its actions served as a dire warning as to how the monarchy regarded all those who had served the French, epitomized by the massive proscription lists drawn up by the local authorities, but at the behest of the supreme council.[88] To have 'suffered for the fatherland' became almost a prerequisite for local office under the republic, 1800–01. The Albese patriot Bartolomeo Negro repeatedly stressed how much his family had lost for the patriot cause in 1799. Writing to the

[83] Grandi, *Asti*, p. 138. [84] Ruggerio, *La rivolta*, pp. 148–9. [85] Ibid. p. 148.
[86] List of 500 highest taxpayers, dept. Stura, 1812. Archives Nationales, Paris (A.N.P.), F^{1c}, III, Stura 1. [87] Ruggiero, *La rivolta*, p. 148.
[88] These lists, containing 3,157 individual names, are deposited in A.S.T., serie 1, cart. 9 (elenchi di sospetti durante il governo francese, 1799).

municipality of Bra, the Turin authorities said Negro had spoken of the serious persecutions and the very grave harm suffered as a result of his *civismo* under the former government.[89] Negro's insistance on his plight was typical of many patriots.

From proscription lists of 1799, it has been calculated that 297 of the 3,157 suspects were actually tried and condemned in the period before Marengo; eighty-three of them for their political opinions and 214 for possession of subversive materials.[90] The number gaoled or driven into exile was probably much larger, although exact figures are difficult to obtain. The threat of material ruin reached out to all of them, and these figures themselves represent only those whom the supreme council was able to catch; it does not take account of many victims of local harassment. Nonetheless, the lists still contain a substantial proportion of the provincial elite.

The true significance of the 'lists of suspects' of 1799 lies as much in the actual numbers involved as in the arbitrary and ruthless manner in which they were formed, continuing the pattern of behaviour discernible in 1794 and 1797. This time the purge involved much greater numbers and reached into every commune in Piedmont – in intent, if not always in fact. The persecutions of 1799 confirmed in their dependence on the French those who had served them – for whatever reason – before that date. In this respect especially, events in Piedmont correspond to those elsewhere. Everywhere, the legitimist reaction was marked by the vindictiveness of the restored central governments and their impotence in the face of anarchy in the provinces. Above all, what made the reaction so resoundingly effective was that it combined the interests of the supreme council with those of the *municipalisti*. However, political, military and geographical circumstances ensured that the Piedmontese patriots would be avenged quickly in 1800, and the continued French presence in Piedmont after Marengo soon returned them to power, unlike the *giacobini* of Tuscany and the *Mezzogiorno*.[91]

What is amply evident is the hatred felt by the patriots towards their royalist fellow-countrymen. Their desire for revenge was already plain, even before the French reconquest of Italy. During the retreat of 1799, the French took fifty-five Piedmontese who were known for their overt royalism as hostages with them into France, 'et parmi ceux qui possédaient le plus de moyens d'exercer une influence dangereuse.'[92] The fact that these hostages had been taken at all reveals how keenly the French felt 'pour préserver les Patriotes piémontais des persécutions des Royalistes.'[93] The exiled patriots appear to have had other plans for them. Members of both groups found themselves quartered in Dijon in the spring of 1800, and the local authorities reported the royalists to be in

[89] A.S.T., serie 1, cart. 5 (corresp' della comm. di governo), comm. di governo to munip. of Bra, 2 jour compl, year viii–ix/19 Sept. 1800. [90] Vaccarino, 'L'inchiesta', pp. 49–51.

[91] Cingari, *Giacobini*, pp. 273–82 on the failure of the amnesty to repair the feuds of 1799 in Calabria, and on the sapping of the power of patriot *municipalisti* after 1799. Drei, *Il Regno d'Etruria, 1801–1807* (Modena, 1935), p. 49, on the weakened position of the Tuscan patriots.

[92] A.N.P., F^7, 7538^A (affaires politiques, doss. Piémont, years vii–ix), undated note to min. police-gen.

[93] A.N.P., F^7, 7538^A, note to min. police-gen., fructidor, year vii/Aug.–Sept. 1799.

danger from the patriot exiles.[94] They were 'making inquiries' as to the whereabouts of the hostages and especially Castelanghe, the former Savoyard central police chief, 'exprimant en termes très vifs les sujets de mécontentement contre cet homme.'[95]

It is hardly surprising that the patriots carried their grudges back with them over the Alps. It was in the days immediately after Marengo that Piedmont seemed to come closest to having a 'red terror'. Restored to power, the patriots of Mondovì soon moved against the nobles who had formed the municipality under the allies. On 5 October they arrested and gaoled the counts di Santa Christiana, Fauzone di Germagnano, Cordero di San Quintino and Cordero di Belvedere; they remained in gaol until January 1801.[96] Patriot wrath was not always so restrained, however. The bloodiest incident was in Alba, where on 20 July 1800, nine known royalists were shot dead coming out of mass in the *duomo*.[97] An anonymous denunciation of Alba's administration, most probably written in 1805,[98] claimed the killers were all now national guard officers, 'la Garde Nationale – exclusivement composée d'hommes couverts de sang humain.'[99] The 'author' went on to claim that Vigna, the sub-prefect, had covered up the incident, even though he had been present at the time. Among the killers, he named two of the Negro brothers, both national guard officers, and Balbiano, secretary to the sub-prefect.

As Alba and Mondovì had been especially ravaged and brutalized in the years before Marengo, bitterness was only to be expected there. Saluzzo had known relatively less political and military upheaval, yet 1800 saw its patriots act with almost equal vindictiveness. In Saluzzo itself, in August 1800, the national guard confiscated the furnishings of the palaces of the counts Verzuolo and Monterosso for failing to pay the war taxes levied by the French.[100] It was in the countryside, however, that 1799 had left the deepest scars. In the late summer of 1800, the republican *commissario* for the province wrote to Turin to demand the arrest of 'the most obstinant "friends of the ex-government" so frequent were the attacks on the patriots'.[101] As proof of this bitterness, he enclosed an anonymous letter from a patriot of Moretta. In it, the author demanded the arrest of Conichetto, a local royalist accused of turning eighty French wounded over to the Allies in 1799 and of sacking the houses of patriots:

> Many people are insisting on the arrest of this rogue because it would account for goods stolen from the French, and because it would remove from the public eye a man infamous for his bad behaviour under the previous government.[102]

The mutual hatred within the propertied classes was felt with ferocious

[94] A.N.P., F^7 7538[A], central govt. dept. Côtes d'or to min. police-gen., 13 pluviose, year viii/28 Jan. 1800. [95] Ibid. [96] Occelli, *Il Monregalese*, p. 224.
[97] *Diario Torinese*, 23 July 1800.
[98] A.N.P., F^{1b} II (Tanaro), anon. to Menou, fructidor, year xi/Aug.–Sept. 1803.
[99] Ibid. [100] Savio, *La vita*, p. 144.
[101] A.S.T., serie 1, cart. 24 (doss. prov. Saluzzo), Borda to min. of int., 13 thermidor, year viii/1 Aug. 1800. [102] A.S.T., serie 1, cart. 24, anon. to Borda, undated.

intensity throughout the southern provinces. In Pagno, in the Alps, the Saluzzo national guard sacked the houses of two priests accused of informing on a patriot,[103] while in Sommariva di Perno, near Alba, twenty armed patriots rode into the town and threatened to kill the royalist vice-judge unless he resigned.[104] Even in Alessandria, where the evidence for a 'witch-hunt' in 1799 is remarkable for its relative scarcity,[105] there were signs of bitterness. As late as summer 1803, on the anniversary of the victory of Marengo, patriots paraded by torchlight through the town, singing revolutionary songs under the windows of known royalists.[106] There can be little doubt of the patriots' strong desire for revenge and of their willingness to use violence to get it. Jourdan, the French administrator-general in Piedmont after Marengo, tacitly admitted this, even while in the process of defending patriot requests for compensation:

> rétablis dans leurs foyers, les malheureux proscrits qui s'étaient réfugiés dans le sein de notre République... avaient éprouvé des pertes considérables; ils reclamèrent des indemnités et poursuivèrent les artisans de leurs maux.[107]

It appears to be the attempt to reach a compromise with the royalists that seriously split Alba's patriots, creating – or at least, greatly exacerbating – a rift that lasted well into the French period. During its first occupation by the French in 1796, the patriot municipality asked the invaders to re-establish their predecessors in power, saying they found their task impossible, so lacking was public support for them.[108] Whether this was bluff or not, it drew an angry response from Alba's national guard, especially when several royalists were subsequently added to the council.[109] The tensions seem to have increased by 1800, to the point where the republican *commissario* said he was afraid to hand over the town's policing from the French to the national guard.[110] The strains of the 'siege' on Alba's patriots was immense after Marengo:

> the majority of the townspeople shudder, because it is spread about daily that... other neighbouring communes have united to attack the city, intent on a massacre.[111]

Eight months later, in response to a peasant rising in Aosta, Alba's national guard petitioned its municipality with the following warning:

[103] Savio, *La vita*, p. 143.

[104] A.S.T., serie 1, cart. 19 (doss. prov. Alba), comm. Alba to min. of int., 22 fructidor, year viii/9 Sept. 1800.

[105] Vaccarino, 'L'inciesta', p. 48 for his comments on Alessandria's proscription lists. See also A.S.T., serie 1, cart. 20 (doss. prov. Alessandria).

[106] A.N.P., F^7, 4309, Jourdan to min. police-gen., 9 messidor, year x/30 June 1802.

[107] A.N.P., F^7, 4308, Jourdan's report to the consuls, undated (*c.* winter 1802–3).

[108] Munip. of Alba to Gen. Murro, undated (*c.* 1796), Archivio Comunale, Alba (A.C.A.), mazzo 362 (sezzioni municipali, 1796).

[109] A.C.A., mazzo 362, petition by the people of Alba, 4 May 1796.

[110] A.S.T., serie 1, cart. 19 (doss. prov. Alba), comm. to min. of int., 20 thermidor, year viii/8 Aug. 1800.

[111] A.S.T., serie 1, cart. 19 (doss. prov. Alba), comm. to min of int., 29 fructidor, year viii/16 Sept. 1800.

The atrocities recently committed in the Val d'Aosta, affected several anti-republican municipalities, like a few among yourselves, [and] could have been the victims of an unforeseen revolutionary outburst, [and] set us a great example.[112]

There were still nobles, the Veglio family in particular, who participated on the municipal council even after Marengo. This petition may or may not have been directed against them, but it certainly shows the national guard's distrust of the municipality – and its desire for a purge.

Alba's patriots remained bitterly divided against each other throughout the French period, despite the fact that they came to control its administration so completely. These divisions were always portrayed to Paris as essentially political – a rabidly 'Jacobin' national guard led by the Negros, against a moderate municipality, with the Braidese sub-prefect Vigna, supporting the radicals. A French official Laumond, concluded of Alba in his report of 1803 that, 'L'exagération en faveur du nouvel ordre des choses est ce qu'il y a de plus à craindre dans cet endroit.'[113] Trompeo, the sub-prefect appointed to replace Vigna in 1805, said the Negro faction consisted of Italian unitarists. There is little real evidence for this, but there does seem to be reason to believe that Alba's patriots were 'radicals' or 'moderates' in a local context, primarily defined by the stand they took over how to maintain law and order during the war years. That is, they had to choose between as 'apolitical' a policy as possible, seeking the help of non-patriot *notabili*, or inextricably to link patriotism with the maintenance of order.

The divergence of attitudes is perhaps most clearly expressed in Gian-Battista Negro's letter to the *maire* of Alba, written sometime in 1801,[114] referring to the problems he was having in finding enough men to do patrols:

It comes down to the daily duties falling on the smallest section of the residents, who are also the least well-off, when those citizens who are most opposed to the present republican government absent themselves. Their standing alone would be of no small use, above all because of the justification of their absence.[115]

Here is not only an expression of patriot isolation, but a feeling of being deserted by a large section of other, wealthier *propriétaires* in the defence of order. Negro concluded that, if it was to be kept up to strength, Alba's national guard must admit 'la classe dei più indigente'[116] to its ranks. This was indeed a radical proposal and perhaps best illustrates what the 'Jacobinism' of some patriots consisted of, and what inspired it. Political isolation within the elite drove them to seek help in protecting themselves wherever they could find it. Doubtless, to other Albese patriots, Negro's proposal was the very antithesis of what constituted the protection of law and order. Herin lay at least one clear difference between those styled 'democrats' and 'moderates'. Even after

[112] A.C.A., mazzo 363 (sezzioni municipali, epoca francese), Petition of the patriots of Alba to munip., 10 germinal, year ix/31 March 1801.

[113] A.N.P., AF IV, 1074, report of Laumond, year ix/1801–2.

[114] A.C.A., mazzo 416 (guardia nazionale), G B. Negro to maire of Alba, undated (*c.* March–April 1801).

[115] Ibid.

[116] Ibid.

Marengo, however, the patriots' capacity to inflict this revenge on their persecutors was still far below that of the royalist *notabili* and peasant masses to attack them; their alliance remained potent, even if it manifested itself less easily after 1800. The finality of the French victory was not immediately obvious to either side – and the patriots continued to live in fear and isolation.

Confidence in the royalists' willingness and ability to spark a new revolt was shared by the French and patriots alike in the years just after Marengo. Nowhere did this outlook seem more justified than in Alba. The republican *commissario* said he feared a massacre in the late summer of 1800, and painted a graphic picture of a town under siege:

> the most honest citizens do not dare go outside the walls. The patriots shudder, [and] I do not know if they will be able to contain their bile against any citizen who might come to be suspected by them of loyalty to the party of the so-called brigands.[117]

The Albese patriots went in fear in the months after Marengo, just as they had done before the Allied invasion; the Langhe hills ringing the town had a vicious, if inchoate rural army, ready to descend on them:

> Not a day passes that the fugitives from the events of 8 Thermidor are not seen on the outskirts of the town, now in groups, now dispersed, and always armed... [118]

A month previously, a small national guard patrol had been attacked by five such 'fugitives', who were, in turn, helped by the local peasantry, when French troops arrived to relieve the patriots.[119] Above all, the hallmark of this period remained that of the pre-Marengo years: a continued absence of strong, determined central government. Translated into harsh, contemporary reality, it meant that whoever was in power in the municipalities was largely on their own.

The conclusiveness of the French victories of 1800 in Italy brought Piedmont out of the forefront of the war until 1814, and thus the conditions evaporated for the massive revolts on the scale of 1799. However, this was by no means clear to the French or the patriots; it was not yet a fact they could rely on. The alliance between royalists and the peasantry may have been at an end, but this did not mean that the elite had made peace with itself, merely that it was now doing its own killing, within its own ranks.

In the spring of 1801, an attempt was made on the life of two patriot *municipalisti* of Sanfrè, only a few miles from Alba. The only way the *commissario* could prevent their resignation was to station ten men of Alba's national guard there. When the hunt for the *assassini* was taken into the countryside, however, 'in these circumstances, even though the bells might be rung for a long time, no one takes up arms.'[120] This incident is representative. Isolated murders and attempted murders against a background of peasant indifference or collaboration were to emerge as the most typical forms of political vendetta

[117] A.S.T., serie 1, cart. 19 (doss. prov. Alba), comm. to min. of int., 29 fructidor, year viii/16 Sept. 1800. [118] A.S.T., serie 1, cart. 19, comm. to min. of int., 16 Sept. 1800.
[119] A.S.T., seri 1, cart 19, comm. to min. of int., 4 fructidor, year viii/22 Aug. 1800.
[120] A.S.T., serie 1, cart 19, comm. to min. of int., 17 germinal, year ix/7 April 1801.

after the French presence began to make itself felt. The civil war in the south was far from over; it had merely changed its outward shape – that, at least, was how its potential victims saw it. In spring 1802, the prefect of the Stura reported a murder in Marene, in the open country between Savigliano and Bra, 'envers le Citoyen Castaldi, médecin, un des plus honnêtes et distingués republicains de cet arrondissement'.[121] The prefect had no doubts about the authors, nor about the political nature of their motives:

> Ces assassins, comme par tout le monde, sont les mêmes ... qui soudoyés en l'an sept par les ennemis de la France ont couvert de crimes et de sang ces malheureuses contrées.[122]

Nor was this an isolated incident:

> chaque jour est souillé d'un nouveau crime, et les républicains en sont presque toujours les victimes, ce qui fait qu'aucun d'eux n'osant plus demeurer dans leurs Communes se voient forcés d'abandonner ses biens, et de transporter ailleurs sa famille.[123]

Likewise, in Alba, following the 'bloody Sunday' of 20 July 1800, the royalist *fuggitivi* fled to their country houses and were still there in 1805, according to their anonymous advocate.[124]

There were hunters and hunted on both sides, living within only a few miles of each other and often subject to the same fate. Yet, even at the apogee of their power, the patriots found little respite from their adversaries. As is now clear, the civil war was fought by the local *notabili* – the *rentiers*, bailiffs, lawyers and priests – as well as by the aristocrats and 'salon émigré' patriots. The great nobles could easily be watched, either because, like Faletti di Barolo, they all but withdrew from public life and stayed in Turin, or because they could simply be gaoled, as befell the grandees of Mondovì. The local quarrels were harder to eradicate because their essence had been to consolidate a second, more influential and larger generation of patriots throughout Piedmont. Restored to power in Turin and the municipalities after Marengo, the patriots then attempted to perpetuate the cycle of official, centrally sanctioned persecution, to institutionalize vendetta, in their turn.

V

Perhaps the most hotly debated political issue in the brief life of the Piedmontese republic, 1800–1, was over the question of the proposed indemnity to patriots persecuted during the allied occupation. It was a debate among patriots and few of them disagreed with the principle of recompensing those who had *sofferto per la patria*, the controversy centred on how best to compensate the victims of royalist harassment without provoking another revolt. It became increasingly apparent to the French – and to the patriot government in Turin – that the hidden danger of an indemnity was that it

[121] A.N.P., F^{7}, 4308, prefect, Stura to Jourdan, 12 germinal, year ix/12 April 1801.
[122] Ibid.
[123] A.N.P., F^{7}, 4308, prefect, Stura to Jourdan, 12 germinal, year ix/2 April 1801.
[124] A.N.P., F^{1b}, II (Tanaro), anon. to Menou, fructidor, year xi/Aug.–Sept. 1803.

would virtually allow the patriot *municipalisti* to draw up proscription lists of their own, in the course of the necessary investigations.

These fears seem justified by the fact that the most prominent ideologues, the survivors of 'the first generation', were in the forefront of the campaign to get the patriots indemnified directly by their persecutors. In his journal *L'Amico della Patria* Ranza declared:

> the indemnity ... is the only way to prevent ... civil war ... The persecuted and injured patriots number many thousands, [and] if they are not appeased by an honest indemnity, they might band together and mutiny ... and then?[125]

Now both the central government – and then the French occupying forces – began to diverge from the *municipalisti*, over means, if not entirely over ends. The executive of the republic, the *commissione di governo*, had less confidence in Ranza's methods of indemnification and no desire to see his prophecy of an armed patriot revolt put to the test:

> The *Commissione di Governo* considered that to allow these individual rulings on the indemnity between private individuals could only, at the least, provoke or revive private hatreds, intestinal discords, rendering them unquenchable ... Already vendettas ... arbitrary acts ... are making themselves felt ... the blood of citizens has already stained its native soil.[126]

The executive proposed to grant a recompense from funds raised by the sale of *beni nazionali*, to any patriot who could prove he had been persecuted,[127] thereby avoiding penalizing the royalists. As long as the investigations were based on proof of personal innocence or guilt, however, the risk of exacerbating vendettas remained. It was further proposed simply to indemnify all those gaoled or forced into exile during the occupation, without recourse to private trials by the courts.[128]

It was at this point, and over this issue, that the first significant step was taken to arrest the cycle of persecution and reprisals, to break the vicious and ever decreasing circle of vendetta. The initiative came from the French rather than from any indigenous source of moderation. More precisely, it came from Jourdan, who was indeed sympathetic to the patriots, but his reputation as a 'Jacobin general' reached its limits over the indemnity. In his actions and statements during the indemnity controversy, Jourdan laid the foundations of future French policy in Piedmont. This major intervention by the French in Piedmontese politics was a foretaste of what was to come: their determination to prevent a worsening of the feud within the elite. The French saw any attempt to stir up private hatreds as not only dangerous for public order, but as in direct breach of the terms of the peace treaties of Marengo (article XIII), Campoformio (XVI) and Lunéville (XVII) all of which guaranteed the immunity of all government officials from prosecution for carrying out orders

[125] *L'Amico della Patria*, no. 6, 14 fructidor, year viii/1 Sept. 1800. Cited in Sforza, 'L'indennita', p. 188.

[126] A.S.T., serie 1, cart. 12 (Corresp' del comm. di governo con la consultà), 12 thermidor, year viii/31 Aug. 1800. [127] Sforza, 'L'indennita', pp. 191–192. [128] Ibid. pp. 208–210.

during hostilities. Jourdan left Jourde, the judicial commissaire, in no doubt about Paris's views on this:

où il n'est question que d'opinions politiques et d'injures personelles... [le] Senat... dois mettre dès à présent un terme a cette procedure... et de déterminer... une mesure générale d'après laquelle il sera enjoint à ce Tribunal et à tous autres de s'absentir désormais de toutes espèces sur des réclamations de ce genre.[129]

Indeed, Jourdan went further: on 6 fructidor Year VIII/22 August 1800, he suspended the debates of the legislature, the *Consultà*, until the indemnity project had been resolved.[130] Almost three weeks later, the government decreed that henceforth, all cases were in the hands of special courts and that although indemnities could be paid, the chief duty of the courts was to arbitrate between individuals rather than to pass judgement.[131] Essentially, this decree reduced the award of indemnities from a political to a personal level and tried them by routine legal procedure. Above all, it sought to avoid assigning innocence or guilt to either party. A further step in this direction was taken after the abolition of the republic, when Jourdan suppressed the special courts on 16 May 1801 and assigned these cases to the civil tribunals.[132]

Jourdain's doubts increased once the patriot-dominated tribunals actually began dealing with such cases. In September 1801, he confided to the *commissaire-général* of Police in Turin;

je pense qu'il serait impolitique et dangereux de rechercher le passé... on doit jetter un voile sur leur conduite passée... comme les coupables forment la majorité de la nation, nous nous exposerions à des inconveniens très graves.[133]

The *commissiore di governo* had shown itself ready to take a more cautious line than the patriot *municipalisti* to prevent overt violence, and to steer a course between the desire for revenge and the need to forestall rather than confront counter-revolution. However, as time progressed, the French came to believe this course was an impossible one. In a report to the Consuls, probably in the autumn of 1801, Fouché expressed displeasure at the tribunals' handling of indemnity cases:

Les persécutions sont d'autant plus actives, qu'elles deviennent désormais, un moyen de spéculation pour les accusateurs qui imposent les accusés, en raison de la terreur qu'ils leur inspirent.[134]

Fouché and Jourdan soon convinced themselves that, by instituting the indemnity, even in a moderate form, they were risking the creation of a legalised 'red terror'. In 1801, the French *commissaire general* of police in Piedmont accused his patriot predecessors of: 'ne connaissant d'autres bornes à ses prétentions que sa volonté même. Sa conduite était marquée au coin... de l'arbitraire.'[135]

[129] Ibid. p. 227. [130] Ibid. p. 211. [131] Ibid. p. 215. [132] Ibid. p. 223.
[133] A.S.T., serie 2, cart. 41, Jourdan to police comm. Turin, 27 Sept. 1801.
[134] A.N.P., F^7, 4308, min. police gen. to the consuls (undated).
[135] A.N.P., F^7, 4308, comm.-gen. Piedmont to the consuls, year ix/1801–2.

The culmination of this disenchantment with the work of the republican government was not a purge of the judiciary or of the police authorities, but the decree of a general amnesty by the First Consul in year X. This simply threw out of court any case based on violent offences committed before 1800.

VI

The indemnity project had failed because its administration could not be entrusted to the provincial patriots, so strong and persistent was their desire for revenge. It was considered safer to abandon the project altogether than to remove men who would, in all probability, pervert it. As is clear, vendetta and its attendant violence were still very much alive in the provinces in the years immediately following Marengo, and the decision to abandon the proposed indemnity did nothing to abate it. Nonetheless, French intervention had ended official sanctioning of and participation in local rivalries, and had also given a clear indication of the course their policy would take after annexation in 1802, namely a desire to extinguish the vendettas of the 1790s.

The existence of these vendettas would continue to shape and direct French policy throughout the whole period of their rule, but it also revealed how strong a grip the patriots now had on provincial government. The French found that they could not govern without them; the patriots were firmly in power and the French – and their rivals – would have to come to terms with it. Collaboration was a two way street.[136]

[136] A future article will continue this study into the period of Napoleonic rule in Piedmont, 1802–14.