INTRODUCTION

Two great parties are forming in all nations. For one, there is a right to government, to be exercised by one or several persons over the mass of the people, of divine origin and to be supported by the church, which is protected by it. These principles are expressed in the formula, Church and State.

To this is opposed the new system, which admits no right of government except that arising from the free consent of those who submit to it, and which maintains that all persons who take part in government are accountable for their actions. These principles go under the formula, Sovereignty of the People, or Democracy. G.K. Van Hogendorp, Rotterdam, 1791[1].

Van Hogendorp's comment captures something about the spirit of his age, but it also expresses a more general view that many modern historians have widely adopted. 1750-1850 is understood as the coming of age of democracy. It may be incompletely realised in many states, but the dividing lines between monarchical and aristocratic privilege and the sovereignty of the people are clear, and states are thereafter under consistent pressure to respond to their demos, and to concede to their demands through a gradual extension of the franchise. There is, of course, a complex and interesting story of the struggles for universal suffrage, and against arbitrary power, but we think we know what the story is about. Moreover, that story is still being told when the West responds to the Arab spring and the struggles for democratic institutions in less developed parts of the world. The master narrative is there, we need only to fill in the details.

In the course of the past ten years a number of historians have begun to raise questions about this master narrative[2]. An attention

[1] Used as the prefatory quotation by R.R. PALMER in his *The Age of Democratic Revolutions*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1959, Vol. I, p. 2.

[2] Including many people linked under the auspices of the 'Re-Imagining Democracy

to what people were *saying* about democracy at the beginning of the period shows that the term clearly has a very powerful *negative* connotation for most, arising from the ancient Greek experience of factious city states, and even where there is some cautious endorsement, the suggestion is that it can be applied only to small city states. One positive set of uses for the term, particularly prominent in Britain, and among Anglophiles in France and America, involves a partnership with kingship and aristocracy (rather than an opposition to them) through the model of mixed government. But, in that model, extremes of democracy are as much to be feared as are tyranny and oligarchy. It is also clear that there are dramatic national differences in the development of political conflict in the period and that the language of democracy and popular sovereignty is far from being universally acknowledged or employed. The European maelstrom stirred up by the French Revolution has some effect in distributing a new lexicon of politics, but it is a mistake to think that other nations passively receive that lexicon or the institutions and practices that are associated with it in France. Indeed, while the term democracy flourishes briefly in Paris, mainly at the height of Jacobin power, the way it is used tells us a lot about how unstable its reference was:

> A democracy is not a state in which the people continually assembled, manages all business for itself, still less one in which a hundred thousand fractions of the people through isolated, precipitate and contradictory measures, would decide the fate of the whole society… Democracy is a state in which the sovereign people, guided by laws which are its own work, does or itself all that it can do properly, and through delegates all that it cannot do for itself[3].

The statement has an assertive tone – to insist on one view against a multitude of contenders, to delimit and tame its scope, and to master it for Robespierre's own purposes. When Burke denounced the French Revolution in his Reflections in 1790, he sneered at its 'demo-

1750-1850' network run from the University of Oxford by Joanna Innes and Mark Philp. The first volume of essays from the project on Britain, France, America and Ireland will be published as *Re-Imagining Democracy in the Age of Revolutions: America, France, Britain and Ireland 1750-1850* by Oxford University Press in 2013.

[3] MAXIMILIEN ROBESPIERRE, 5 February 1794/18 Pluvôise Year II, in SLAVOJ ZIZEK *Robespierre and Terror*, London, Verso, 2007, pp. 108-9.

cratic' character – 'a perfect democracy is the most shameless thing in the world' – tarring France and its aspirations with a brush of ancient and respectable lineage. But Burke was imagining that 'democratic ambition' since it is impossible to find anyone advocating it in France in 1789. And between Burke and Robespierre, the term had little positive salience in the revolutionaries' lexicon[4]. Yet, there is no doubt that both the negative sense of democracy, and positive uses, over the thirty year period after 1789 owe something to France, with the legacy of the Terror and Jacobin rule ensuring that for decades after upsurges of popular politics and the use of the democratic idiom are accused of bringing with them the scent of blood.

It is becoming increasingly clear, then, that a positive language of democracy is rather slow to take hold, that it remains deeply contested throughout the whole of the period 1750-1850, and that only occasionally does it play a central and determinate part in the lexicons of those who agitate for reform. For many 'republic' and 'republican' are preferred, and even among those whom we think of as quintessential democrats, such as Thomas Paine, the emphasis is on representation, rather than democracy, and it is not a term that he makes central to his work. Indeed, he comes to universal manhood suffrage rather late (in the summer of 1792), and in demanding it he does not see himself as demanding 'democracy'[5]. Representative government appears, and more rarely 'representative democracy', but the latter is not a mobilising commitment for most of our period.

The rise of democracy is not, however, simply a matter of the rise of a word or a broader vocabulary. If we focus on the use of the word we see extensive national variation, coupled with an uneven pattern of use, with peaks and troughs often associated with key moments of popular activism. But the reference of that term would also show very considerable variation – from the merely popular, through anti-aristocracy and privilege, to claims about the constituent power of the people or calls for universal suffrage and

[4] See PIERRE ROSANVALLON, *The History of the Word 'Democracy' in France*, «Journal of Democracy» VI (1995), n. 4, pp. 140-154 and R.R. PALMER, *Notes on the Use of the Word 'Democracy' 1789-1799*, «Political Science Quarterly» LXVIII (1953), n. 2, pp. 203-226.

[5] M. PHILP (ed.), *Thomas Paine: Rights of Man, Common Sense and other Political Writings*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995, pp. 232-233.

annual parliaments. And the variation is both between points of time and between different national experiences. At the same time, however, in many countries, we also see changing practices, institutions and procedures that are not necessarily explicitly linked to democracy, but that play a part in developing institutions in which people's voices are represented or expressed in ways that empower them, even if they also simultaneously integrate them into the political order. In Britain, for example, in response to a rising tide of metropolitan and provincial popular reform societies in 1792, John Reeves launches the Association for the Protection of Liberty and Property Against Republicans and Levellers, which leads to the emergence of a range of loyalist societies and loyalist activities, which, although anti-democratic, nonetheless involve dramatically increased participation for many people in many areas of the country – epitomised in lesser members of society intimidating members of the Whig aristocracy into signing loyal addresses to the Crown. The balance of local power is changed by such practices in ways which will have implications for municipal and church reform, and which will lead to more accountability for local elites. If the driving force is, in many cases, loyalism, not democracy, the outcome was often something we now think of as part of a democratising process.

Words stand for things, but often in a confused or contested manner; and they stand alongside other words, such as republic, sovereignty, popular, constituent power, and so on, in such a way that meaning and reference slide between terms, leading to different discursive strategies at different times, which may have very similar goals and practices, acting under different signs. Moreover, other dimensions of terms, commitments and practices emerge. For example, we find democratic language emerging alongside a concern with citizenship – for some, as a set of claims; for others, as a way of disciplining populist impulses. In Britain, in contrast to France, the idea of citizenship is hardly developed. There are few systematic expectations of 'citizens' – indeed little recognition that such a category or class is relevant to Britain. The 'free-born Englishman' and his liberties is a conception of a certain legal standing – but it is far from a conception of equality of claims – and while a certain amount of radical rhetoric is directed against usurpation, the petty tyranny of aristocracy and the squire-archy, the protected status claimed is a relatively passive one – free from certain incursions,

rather than positively active claims to participation. There are idealised models drawing on Rome and the commonwealth – but those idealisations are often both restricted to more educated and intellectual circles, and are rarely fully 'meant' (that is, as commitments to their full realisation).

For the educated public there is a partial construction of citizenship – of meeting, petitioning, speechifying, and a certain amount of posturing in relation to power and the established elite. And this is relatively continuous with earlier urban movements of protest, and with the association movement of the 1780s. But in these movements the role of the less respectable and the labouring classes is less clear. There is less sense of any right to continuous involvement in a political process, less sense that the system that demands their deference can offer statuses other than 'subject' and 'subordinate' – that is, as clients, with responsibilities that might take political forms, but not as originating political agents who have a right to recognition and to some standing in the public domain. That is something that has to be created – indeed invented – and it is not an overnight process. In France, the Revolution, and the rise of societies and the 'sections' mean that claims to standing seem to have taken effect to a greater degree and for a longer period. The term 'citoyen' came to trump other terms – cheap to use, expensive for those who could not deny the validity of the claim it made on them. So much so that those in power seek ways to discipline the people through their education to citizenship. That does not seem to have happened to the same extent in Britain. There are not shared terms that those who are normally excluded can operationalize against those who exclude them (such as 'citoyen'). And in other countries there are other ways in which people's experiences and their senses of their own agency and claims are framed – some more from below, others more firmly directed and disciplined from above.

These comments hardly exhaust the multiple dimensions associated with the rise of democracy. They do, however, suggest a number of points that dramatically limit the validity of the opening quotation from Van Hogendorp. The suggestion of a single binary cleavage between democracy and the old order is simply too overgeneralising, as is the suggestion that this was a process that affected every nation. What is clear is that the meaning of democracy takes considerably longer to consolidate than we tend to assume, and that

a range of meanings (such as Tocqueville's 'equalisation of condition') emerge and gain ascendency, and then become marginalised in public debates, as new and challenging conceptions evolve. If there is a point at which 'democracy' becomes a major key term and a mobilising one it is probably in 1848 – certainly much more so than in the 1790s. But 1848 is by no means salient for every country. At the same time, different national traditions respond to the events in France, in the light of their local traditions and their own sense of their history. Although there is some renewed interest in the English Civil War in Britain, with the re-publication of some civil war tracts, there is more of a sense that what is happening in the 1790s or the 1820s or subsequently, is different – a new modernity, to which different expectations can be attached. In Italy, in contrast, it is clear that the traditions of republican city states provides a powerful exemplar, which inflects people's understandings, and makes them considerably less resistant to democratic and republican terminology, and provides a series of exemplars and models to which they can refer. And Italy's sense of modernity might be more closely linked to its ambition for unification.

The papers brought together for this collection provide ample evidence within a single country of the complex and fluctuating patterns of emergence for the language of democracy, and for types of thinking and types of practice and institution that we now think of as intimating aspects of a democratic society – although in Italy's case, as will be seen, the aspirations for democracy and republicanism become fused with a nationalist project. In both Britain and France this period of transformation is one in which 'nation- building' projects can be recognised, not least as both engaged in the mass mobilisation of their populations for armed struggle on an unprecedented scale. But both could take the unity of the nation for granted in a way that was simply not true for Italy. Similarly, while Britain and France defined themselves in part against each other, entangling these emerging political words and their often inchoate content in a web of rhetorical assertion and counter-assertion, Italy both caught the inflection of French revolutionary fervour, and had to struggle with occupation and conquest by the French, uncertain as to whether to greet the French as enemies or liberators. Moreover, as events moved on, Italy comes under the influence of events in Spain and Latin America, in a way that is true neither for France

or England, and it contributes extensively to an international community of exiles who, when thrown together, generate new conceptions of their struggles and ambitions, that both respond to and talk past their exiled confreres. What emerges is a very different path for those challenging the political status quo, with the consequence that a very different set of claims, ambitions and content come to be attached to this emerging lexicon. Rather than following Van Hogendorp in collapsing all national stories into one essential conflict, the Italian case and its discussion in these papers provides a much deeper, richer and more complex story that is clearly distinctive, even if it is linked to and influenced by other national paths.

This collection of essays derives from a meeting organised by the Department of Political and Social Science at the University of Pisa, in collaboration with the Domus Mazziniana in Pisa and the Oxford University Re-Imagining Democracy Project, held in Pisa in April 2010. The collection brings together developed versions of many of the papers together with additional papers by scholars of the period. The collection centres around the term 'democracy' and its interpretations in Italian history of the last three centuries, a noun which even in the recent *Atlante culturale del Risorgimento*[6] is almost entirely missing. Alongside entries to the people, constitution, liberty, nation, public opinion, liberalism, the only reference to democracy is the adjective, cautiously used, married to another adjective, moderate.

Mauro Lenci's introductory essay, in one sense, functions as a backdrop to the other contributions and analyses the semantic mutations of the word democracy over the lengthy reference period of 1750-1861 which saw the term come to prominence as a key word of the Italian Risorgimento. In this process were brought together a recognition of the people as the basis of the legitimacy of political power, the ungainly heritage of the classical tradition, and a series of tensions and contradictions that came out of the French Revolution and are linked to the birth of the socialist movements and those of nationalism.

Following Lenci we can see 1750 to 1799 as a period in which the

[6] A.M. Banti *et alii* (eds), *Atlante culturale del Risorgimento. Lessico del linguaggio politico dal Settecento all'Unità*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2011.

word democracy becomes closely linked to that of republicanism and becomes gradually transformed into a more modern and individualistic concept, based on the rights of man. This evolution is discussed in the chapters dedicated to Pasquale Paoli, Gaetano Filangieri, Mario Pagano and the three year revolutionary *triennio*.

In the paper on Paoli, Marco Cini illustrates the career of a statesman whose democratic reforms of the independent Corsican government brought him renown in European and American public opinion and established him as a major symbol of the rapidly changing and developing Republican galaxy, on the eve of the revolt of the English colonies.

Francesco Berti demonstrates the importance of Filangieri in this process, stripping him of his image as the upholder of 'enlightened despotism' and fully integrating him in the ranks of modern republicans, as is evidenced by his contributions to the definition of a new democratic and representative republic. Filangieri, authoritatively intervened in the ideological debate between the two revolutions, preparing a fertile field, particularly in the Kingdom of Naples, upon which the Italian revolutionary events subsequently flowered.

The peculiarity of the revolutionary three years period emerges clearly in the essay by Silvia Rosa, She sees the moment as a real political and linguistic workshop, capable of producing an anthology of 'imagined' democracies. For Rosa, the representations of republicanism were suspended between rhetorical references to the ancients and a set of holistic-organicistic impulses, but were also marked by some unusual and modern themes, such as those penned by some lady authors who openly condemned the family as an institution saying that it was a relic of a monarchical and patriarchal era.

A large segment of historiography dedicated to revolutionary events sees Mario Pagano's revision of the project for the constitution of the Neapolitan Republic as the ripest fruit of the *triennio* - the true accomplishment of the Neapolitan enlightenment. Dario Ippolito in his contribution reflects on the differences between Pagano's project (who before becoming a martyr of the revolution was an internationally renowned jurist) and other Italian constitutions, but he also includes a comparison with those of France in 1791, and '93 and '95. Pagano's project was, for example, the only one to propose the setting up of a supreme court and the only one, even if only as an adverb, which actually used the word 'democracy'.

The period between 1799 and 1835 witnesses considerable diffidence in the Italian panorama in the use of the word 'democracy' as it was inseparably linked to the period of terror and Jacobinism. It was demonised by conservatives and reactionaries alike, and moderates preferred to use terms such as representative government, representative monarchy or constitution rather than invoke its name. Before 1835 as has been correctly observed, one can speak more of a liberal international[7] rather than a democratic one, and the paper by Gonzalo Butròn Prida demonstrates the significant role that the Spanish constitution of 1812 played in the formation of a new model of reference in the strategies of Italian patriots and particularly in the Piedmontese revolution of 1821.

It was therefore only after 1835 that the word democracy began slowly to conquer the scene, in part thanks to Tocqueville's masterpiece, and this conquest was not only upheld by its most devoted supporters, but also by liberals and moderates who, especially after the 1848-1849 period, began to see it as a principle for the legitimation of power that could not be renounced. These changes can be seen in the political affairs of Vincenzo Gioberti and Camillo Benso, count of Cavour, and also in the work of Antonio Rosmini whose constitutional project of 1848, analysed in Cristina Cassina's essay, represented an attempt of coming to terms with the democratic legacy of the French revolution. This legacy was considered by Rosmini to be insufficient to prolong the life of the state, and was seen as constantly threatened by the despotism of popular power. As a result, this form of society needed to be supported by the reform of civic society and by maintaining the dual bulwarks of property and liberty, anchoring them in two distinct houses.

The Roman republican experience of 1848 and 1849, with its introduction of universal male suffrage, gave new life to the democratic movement and boosted Giuseppe Mazzini to the height of his international acclaim. Mazzini's role, and the development of the affairs of which he was at the head, are analysed in Michele Finelli's article. 'La macchina democratica' (The democratic machine), which was now cranked up, and which produced the most

[7] M. Isabella, *Risorgimento in Exile. Italian Émigrés and the Liberal International in the Post-Napoleonic Era*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009.

advanced constitution from the point of view of rights and duties in the Risorgimento period, ensuring that, through the pen of the founder of 'Giovine Italia', the example was felt throughout all Europe.

Marco Barducci's essay, in the wake of Salvo Mastellone's work, shows us the effort made by Mazzini to widen the extension of representative democracy and the popular republic from Italy towards the rest of Europe. He was already at work in this regard in 1845 in England, in a society that still bore the scars of the Chartist experience and its contradictions. He helped to support the writings of William J. Linton and a series of magazines linked to this latter figure. However, Mazzini, in English public opinion, found strong opponents in the supporters of a social, proletarian democracy, founded on the right to work, who had Marx and Engels as their point of reference.

Mazzini defended the Roman republic both in France and in England so as to highlight the despotic character of Bonaparte's rule, and the tensions in the relationship between democratic and liberal principles. This latter aspect, and the problem of power (power in the Machiavellian sense, that of the conquest of power and the maintaining of the same), was an aspect that plagued both the republican and democratic movements equally. Paolo Benvenuto addresses this aspect in his work on Filippo Buonarroti, Mazzini and Giuseppe Montanelli. If Buonarroti theorised the necessity of a revolutionary dictatorship with a strong class bias as in the Jacobin tradition, Mazzini on the other hand sought to get out from under this yoke, presenting a vision of a constituent power which could unite all Italians, but in the name of an equally ambiguous 'Risorgimento dictatorship', while Montanelli comforted himself with a Utopian illusion in which political leaders would hand over their power to the people in the name of their constitutive sovereignty.

The word 'democracy' handed down from the Risorgimento, maintained a degree of ambiguity and had some clearly illiberal implications, thanks to the influence of the Saint-Simonians, and several varieties of socialism. The diffidence displayed by the liberals and the new ideas of nation and of people, also contributed to this result. On one hand the Risorgimento was dominated by the moderates and was not particularly popular, on the other, Mazzini's judgement, united to a vision of a democracy which should have moulded the

birth of the nation, became the origin of the myth of the 'betrayed revolution'. These are the themes discussed in the group of essays dedicated to the twentieth century interpretations of the Risorgimento. These readings have had a fundamental role in renedering the ideological basis of the Italian liberal state somewhat fragile.

The essay on the philosopher Giovanni Gentile, by Nico de Federicis, shows us how Gentile extracted from Mazzini (and from certain aspects of Gioberti) an ethical idea on nation and state which was seen as a source of duties rather than as a guarantee of individual rights, an idea to which fascism would have link itself, leaving out the experience of Giolitti's liberal 'little Italy' and finally uniting the democratic tradition with the totalitarian state.

Paolo Buchignani underlines that the fundamental role of Gentile is linked to that of Alfredo Oriani, both serving as filters of the Mazzini experience. He deals with the revolutionary fascist galaxy formed of the authors Giuseppe Bottai, Camillo Pellizzi, Curzio Malaparte, Mino Maccari, Berto Ricci, Romano Bilenchi and others. Revolutionary fascism sustained an internal struggle within the regime, looking to the creation of a popular mobilised Italy, such as that envisaged by Mazzini and Garibaldi, with Mazzini contrasting the people to a parliament dominated by hypocrisy and shifting alliances which meant that the project of creating a new nation was stymied by the liberal ruling class. Thus 'liberal democracy' became, for these authors, 'a false democracy' which needed to be suppressed so that a true regime could emerge from the people. At bottom the risk that the fascist revolution ran was the same and was hidden within their ecumenical claims.

The overcoming of the liberal democratic bourgeois was also the communist theoretician, Antonio Gramsci's, main aim. This is the subject of Carmelo Calabrò's essay. Gramsci's ideas were caught between the fascination with the soviet democratic model and his research on a Western socialist path: between the resorting to coercion on one hand and seeking consensus on the other; between the concept of hegemony meant as dominion as one option and as direction as another. In Gramsci's vision, Giolitti's Italy, a hybrid of authoritarianism and compromise, still carried the burden of a Risorgimento conceived as a 'passive revolution', a Risorgimento in which the liberal ruling classes had excluded the masses from the participation of power, thus impeding the formation of the neces-

sary conditions for the creation of a modern state and of a real democracy. Between Mazzini and Cavour, it was this latter who had the last word.

These essays offer English speaking audiences an extended introduction to the distinctive path of Italian democracy, and an indication of the wealth of its ideas and ambitions, as well as the fragility of its achievements. There are different national stories to be told in Europe, but there is no doubt that the Italian story is one that deserves a central place in the complex task of understanding the ways in which democracy becomes re-interpreted, contested and instantiated in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in ways which have lasting implications for the modern world.

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