

## **From Counter-Revolution as a Project to Counter-Revolution as a Network**

The counter-revolution has traditionally been interpreted in relation to the glorious histories of the past, namely through the discourses and narratives produced by the contemporary liberal state. The conceptual core that supports this approach is that which dictates that a line of development always corresponds to a line of opposition. It follows, therefore, that the counter-revolution is a sort of reaction – the opposite of the revolution or, in other words, a revolution in reverse. However, to paraphrase the Savoyard Joseph De Maistre, the counter-revolution was not “a revolution in reverse, but the opposite of the revolution”.<sup>i</sup> It was, indeed, another way of looking at things and facing the present, but without linking its existence to the changes proposed by the revolution; instead, it rested on its own intrinsic logic, entrenched long before the revolution was a fact. Essentially, the counter-revolution did not draw its meaning from the opposition, but from the defense of a logic that existed before the revolution’s appearance on the scene.

This defense did not represent, however, a mere retreat into the past. In order to understand the true nature of the counter-revolution, we must pay attention to all of the alternative ways of conceiving the future that did not include liberalism and, indeed, that opposed it. This means not merely considering the counter-revolution either as an armed conflict or as an explicitly ideological form of opposition, arising dialectically as a direct response to liberal transformations. It is important, rather, to consider all those orientations that distrusted change itself, regardless of its liberal nature. Change, particularly in its revolutionary forms, could be a tool that altered the balances, principles, institutions and social relations inherited from the past. It indicated a fear of the unknown, but also a fear of losing what one possessed and had learned directly, a fear of not recovering those points of reference – such as religion, the king, hierarchies, corporate relations – that helped people navigate the uncertainties of nineteenth-century life. This did not imply a complete rejection of change, as the counter-revolutionary forces had to confront a historical context that was necessarily transformed through significant processes of adaptation and metamorphosis. It relied on the same tools arising from this emergent political modernity that the revolutionary front employed – from media propaganda to social mobilisation.

The narratives produced to make sense of the past in historical terms have too often been confused with reality itself. Making recourse to such a useful and well-established category as that of “counter-revolution” carries a number of logical implications that we need to consider. It implies that we accept a historical narrative based on the idea of a reaction, of an opposition between progress and regression.<sup>ii</sup> It suggests that its core beliefs and strategies did not pre-exist the revolution but, rather, that the movement was born only as a result of the revolution, chasing its evolution. Put in these terms, the field of the counter-revolution contracts and becomes excessively limited, marginalized and concrete.

The study of the counter-revolution – or of the resistance to the revolution, if we use Roger Dupuy’s fortunate expression<sup>iii</sup> – needs to begin with an effort to “re-temporize” the way we look at nineteenth-century European society. It is important to restore to the protagonists of the past their own horizon of expectations so that we might understand the reasons they mobilized and their larger strategies and objectives.<sup>iv</sup> We cannot continue to think that the masses driving those political movements, and the supporters of ideologies that were destined to become dead ends or to be defeated in their struggles to seize the future, were doomed from the start to see their causes fail.

On the contrary, it is important to accept that counter-revolutionary combatants and defenders felt part of broader movements that they firmly believed in. Neither the Vendéens of 1793, nor the Miguelists of 1828, nor the Brigands of 1860 or the Carlists of 1833, 1849 and 1873, ever thought about taking up arms or risking their lives and property for a cause doomed to fail from the start. Not even the Bourbons of Naples, when they led each new restoration; or their relatives on the thrones of France or Spain, when they tried to stop the advance of the revolution; or Metternich, when he sent his troops to Italy; or the Holy See, when it mobilized the armies of international Catholic volunteers, did so without firmly believing that their counter-revolutionary strategies were destined to succeed.

By delving into the accounts of contemporaries about the counterrevolution, it is possible to outline new patterns of analysis and insight, along with further possibilities to construct alternative historical narratives to counteract that of a univocal and teleological modernity, which has for long been widely accepted as the explanatory model for the transition from the *ancien régime* to the contemporary world marked by the revolution.<sup>v</sup> Indeed, we must bear in mind that supporters of the “old regime” never used this expression themselves, because they never believed themselves to be defending a defeated world or one anchored to the past. On the contrary, the idea of the *ancien régime* was a purely ideological construct conceived of and used by revolutionaries to remove those in power.<sup>vi</sup> Our ability to part with an understanding of the counter-revolution based on political models conceived in another time and for other uses would indeed make it possible to shift from interpreting to explaining this process. This would mean that we accept the plurality and diversity of the components and realities that constituted the counter-revolutionary universe.

From this point of view, the counter-revolution presents itself as a systemic – but not systematic – reality. It was systemic because, as it reacted to the changes proposed by the revolution, it anchored its responses in the dominant worldviews of the *ancien régime* that were widely diffused and internalized both by population and institutions; on the other hand, it was not systematic because it was a reaction without a global plan, where actors were experimenting with different defense mechanisms depending on their positions and the possibilities in the moment.

This is the reason we have titled this monographic issue “The Counter-Revolutionary Response”: a substantial part of Europe raised an active resistance to revolutionary progress, articulating its defense of

the social-political order in terms of its ability to adapt to the new scenario and incorporate innovative strategies to advance a pre-existing and alternative worldview, in competition with the revolutionary one. Of course, this response should be understood neither as having been a purely oppositional line, nor as a coherent and programmatic response.

New institutional options and popular reactions, intellectual battles and forms of armed opposition, maneuvers of international diplomacy and rural conflicts – all of these configured a complex framework of possible responses that were variable and differentiated, often lacking a homogeneous or pre-established plan of action and a precise identity among their supporters.<sup>vii</sup> However, the subsequent revolutionary waves that swept across the European continent, crossing national borders from the end of the eighteenth to much of the nineteenth century, would eventually transform the counter-revolutionary response into a transnational phenomenon.<sup>viii</sup>

This monographic issue seeks to overcome the idea that the counter-revolution was a project – a politically articulated intellectual response with its own ideology, strategy and objective – by interpreting it as a network instead. This means that we look at the counter-revolution not as a structured, pyramidal and hierarchical movement, but as a network that opposed the advance of the revolutionary “arrow”.<sup>ix</sup>

If it is plausible to imagine the revolution - at least in our understanding of it in terms of progress and modernity - as an arrow or a battering ram disrupting society and the institutions of the *ancien régime*, we cannot picture the counter-revolution simply as an arrow moving in the opposite direction. Rather, the counter-revolution was a set of relations, experiences and principles that struggled with the changes that the revolution had introduced and that sought to oppose its progress. This very fact sheds light on how deeply-rooted the counter-revolutionary mentality was at the time, highlighting its resilience and its willingness to adapt and wager on the future.

The latter is a particularly significant feature of the counter-revolution, as it reveals how its exponents never fought for the past, but indeed for the future, and this is what explains its survival through the nineteenth century. Accordingly, when we come across counter-revolutionary movements – such as Vendée, Carlism, Portuguese Miguelism, the Viva Maria insurrections or *Sanfendismo* in Italy, Bourbon legitimism in France or in Southern Italy during the nineteenth century – we are seeing the most mature results of this broader network of resistance to the revolution that came to be politically articulated with concrete strategies, and all due to certain favorable circumstances. They were not the counter-revolution itself, but just its most visible and dynamic expressions.

The essays and sections included in this issue offer insight on some elements of the variegated counter-revolutionary universe of nineteenth-century Europe, as well as on the plurality of responses that were

deployed and that contributed to weaving the complex network of active resistance mobilized in several waves in competition with and against the tide of revolution. Some *files rouges* run throughout the issue.

The first concerns the more strictly institutional dimension, relating to the response that the monarchies of the time gave in the face of the pressures that threatened their traditional power structure. A recent trend in historiography has proposed that we rethink the rhetoric surrounding the restoration of the Congress of Vienna, highlighting the elements of renewal that invested state apparatuses.<sup>x</sup> These changes were functional to an idea of Europe that diverged from that of the revolutionary season, one that was surely conservative, but nevertheless oriented to the future, a sort of vision conjured by “anti-revolutionary revolutionaries”.<sup>xi</sup> Similarly, several studies have shown how, in the aftermath of the revolutionary wave of 1848-1849, European states began to modernize their structures significantly,<sup>xii</sup> rather than limiting themselves to implementing repressive mechanisms. This allows to ascribe to this chronology a further phase of the modern state’s development.<sup>xiii</sup> Alongside the renewal of their institutional apparatuses, nineteenth-century European monarchies also adapted their exercise of power to the new context, looking to channel the new forms of political participation into their ranks and to gain popular support for their cause.

Social mobilization, new forms of politicization and the political participation of different social actors – in particular of the lower classes – along with the mass armed support of the legitimist project are all further central articulations of the reflection developed here. The new forms of political action brought about by revolutionary events found a significant but understudied expression in the realist and counter-revolutionary arenas too. These proved extremely active in appropriating the strategies, communication tools and models of belonging offered by the new paradigm of modern politics.

Another thread that runs through all the contributions here concerns the transnational contexts in which this multifaceted European counter-revolutionary response emerged. Both the strategies of institutional containment and the forms of mobilization deployed in defense of counter-revolutionary structures and values developed in a space – both real and imagined – that fully transcended national borders. Recent studies shed light on the development of cooperation between different European states in the surveillance of subversives, a mechanism that testifies to the construction of a trans-state institutional network committed, through the modernization of its control apparatuses, to the pursuit of a common conservative political project.<sup>xiv</sup> The counter-revolutionary international experienced a strong thrust for political renewal, also through a redefinition of the global Catholic alliance that had its essential point of reference in the papacy. The European, Atlantic and global scope of the forms of mobilization, solidarities and international fraternities put in play by the “liberal counter-world”<sup>xv</sup> also characterized the alternative political horizon that, despite its fragmentation, witnessed collaboration and exchange on the transnational level.

Furthermore, the construction of a discourse and language of the counter-revolution also emerged from these processes and from the need for an *ad hoc* corpus of thought, formulated through the dynamic circulation and exchange of ideas in the international arena. The formation of a counter-revolutionary discourse was also characterized by the use of particular languages to convey concepts and semantic formations that, where political communication was concerned, were in many respects novel.

In this monographic issue our interpretive frame is articulated around these key arguments that underpin all of the essays that follow, in different ways. The first two essays share a trans-Atlantic perspective, but approach it through different lenses. Joseph Escrig Rosa examines the notion of “Atlantic counter-revolutionary identity” in order to analyze an understudied aspect of Mexico’s independence process. The essay focuses in particular on the discourses of the counter-revolution in New Spain/Mexico between 1810 and 1823, reconstructing the diffusion and exchange of ideas, books, doctrines and imaginaries in the Euro-Atlantic space. Within this arena, ideas from the European matrix were adapted to the American context, giving rise to an original interpretative paradigm in which anti-liberals – even from different political orientations – identified, thereby providing significant support to Mexican independence. Álvaro París Martín, on the other hand, undertakes a comparative analysis of the popular realist mobilization across the Atlantic, in Spain and in Spanish-America (New Spain and New Granada) between 1808 and 1833, by analyzing different variations of the category of “realism”. He examines “monarchical patriotism” and, more generally, popular realism, through enlistments in the ranks of the Royalist militias, highlighting the role played by the Civil War in the processes of political apprenticeship for members of the lower strata of society, who were involved on both sides of the conflict.

Moving forward chronologically, Arthur Hérisson’s essay tackles the theme of the “Roman Question” in the years from 1859 to 1870, highlighting the ways in which the Catholic Church, in order to support its cause, leveraged a global mobilization of the faithful. Given the awareness of the rising importance of public opinion and the role of the masses on the political scene, this mobilization materialized in terms of volunteers-in-arms, resources collected through subscriptions, and consensus. The article highlights various aspects of the phenomenon in question, from the popular involvement – evident in the centrality of the working class – to the role of “modern” tools that were in other respects condemned by the Church.

Carlo Verri’s essay stays within this chronology, focusing on the years between 1869 and 1871. He investigates the variations of Carlist mobilization from an original perspective, that of the opposition carried out not through armed mobilization but within the constituent assembly of the democratic monarchy. The author highlights the Catholic-monarchists’ ability to adapt to the liberal context. Their strategy allowed them to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the constitutional framework to fight against liberal principles and values, as an opposition parliamentary minority that could be traced back to the political category of the anti-system party.

The Carlist mobilization, this time considered as external to the institutional framework and situated in the second half of the 1870s, also lies at the core of Alexandre Dupont's essay, which reconstructs its action within the framework of a clandestine European network that had one of its key centers in Great Britain. With an actor-centered approach aimed at highlighting the crucial role of global agents – very often professionals of illegality – Dupont reveals a transnational smuggling network based in technological expertise and complex financial transactions, which shed light on the “paradoxical modernity” of the counter-revolution.

Finally, the essay by Simon Sarlin and Dan Rouyer is dedicated to the International Anti-Masonic Congress that was held in Trento in 1896 and that symbolically closes the century at the center of our monographic issue. The event took place under the aegis of Pope Leo XIII and Emperor Franz Joseph and saw the participation of more than 1,500 adherents from different corners of the globe. Its reconstruction highlights the dynamism of this component of the international counter-revolution and its ability to adapt to cultural modernity, which led it to adopt a strategy of media communication and mobilization that it shared widely with its opponents.

With regard to the columns that complement this monographic issue, “Tracce” by Maddalena Carli and Nadia Pugliese introduces to the scene the brigands of Southern Italy, protagonists of insurgencies and of the resistance to the unitary liberal project. The contribution brings to light unpublished charcoal drawings from Cesare Lombroso's laboratory that include portraits of brigands. The authors compare these drawings with photographs of the brigands themselves, as well as with the illustrations published in *L'uomo delinquente (The Criminal Man)*, highlighting a process of visual manipulation aimed at accentuating the traits that could be traced to the criminal aspects of brigand women and men.

Besides the original interpretative hypothesis that it proposes, the essay has the merit of framing post-unification brigandage in the counter-revolutionary context. This “political-criminal”<sup>xvi</sup> phenomenon was often flattened – beginning from contemporary liberal interpretations – onto the purely criminal dimension, probably because of the difficulty of tracing their legitimist claims back to a coherent political project. This, however, from the point of view proposed here, does not *a priori* exclude an experience such as that of Italian brigandage from the counter-revolutionary network.

Finally, the review essay (“Laboratorio”) by Marco Meriggi offers an original reflection based on an appraisal of studies that in recent years have focused on the nineteenth-century institution of the monarchy. Thus, within the framework of the processes of transformation of the post-revolutionary European monarchies outlined in the recent historiography, the author parades the different masks of the “populist” sovereign, from the “entrepreneur” king inclined to support progress and economic modernization, to that of the “soldier-king”, to that of the “bourgeois-king”, all worn with the awareness of the centrality of

emotive communication in dominating and structuring the distinct features of political modernity, which are now unavoidable in post-revolutionary Europe.

---

<sup>i</sup> J. de Maistre, *Considerations sur la France*, Louis Bauche-Borel, London, 1797, p. 210.

<sup>ii</sup> J. Starobinski, *Action et réaction. Vie et aventures d'un couple*, Seuil, Paris, 1999, p. 308.

<sup>iii</sup> R. Dupuy, "Introduction", in F. Lebrun and R. Dupuy, *Les résistances à la Révolution*, Imago, Paris, 1987, p. 15.

<sup>iv</sup> M. Ternavasio proposes to hide behind a "hypothetical veil of nescience". *Los juegos de la política. Las independencias hispanoamericanas y frente a la contrarrevolución*, Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza – Siglo XXI Argentina, Zaragoza, 2021, p. 10.

<sup>v</sup> P. Rújula and J. Ramón, "Paradojas de la reacción. Continuidades, vías muertas y procesos de modernización en el universo reaccionario del siglo XIX", in id., *El desafío de la Revolución. Reaccionarios, antiliberales y contrarrevolucionarios (siglos XVIII y XIX)*, Comares, Granada, 2016, pp. 1-6.

<sup>vi</sup> Cfr. "Antiguo Régimen", F. Furet and M. Ozouf, *Diccionario de la Revolución francesa*, Alianza Editorial, Madrid, 1989, p. 520; and "Antiguo Régimen", J. Fernández Sebastián and J. Francisco Fuentes (eds.), *Diccionario político y social del siglo XIX español*, Alianza Editorial, Madrid, 2002, p. 92.

<sup>vii</sup> R. Halevy, "La contre Révolution", in *Histoire, économie et société*, 10/1 (1991), p. 29.

<sup>viii</sup> J. Canal, *Il carlismo. Storia di una tradizione controrivoluzionaria nella Spagna contemporanea*, Guerini e associati, Milano, 2011, p. 12.

<sup>ix</sup> Similar considerations about liberalism can be found in W. Bruyère-Ostells, "Internationales libérale ou contremonde libéral? Des degrés et des espaces d'opposition aux Restaurations", in J.C. Caron and J.P. Luis, *Rien appris, rien oublié? Les Restaurations dans l'Europe postnapoléonienne (1814-1830)*, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, Rennes, 2015, p. 369.

<sup>x</sup> B. de Graaf, I. De Haan, B. Vick (eds.), *Securing Europe after Napoleon. 1815 and the New European Security Culture*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge-New York, 2019. Michael Broers and Ambrogio A. Caiani, *A History of the European Restorations*, Bloomsbury Academic, London, 2020, 2 t.

<sup>xi</sup> M. Lok, *The Congress of Vienna as a missed opportunity. Conservative visions of a new European order after Napoleon*, in B. de Graaf, I. De Haan, B. Vick (eds.), *Securing Europe after Napoleon. 1815 and the New European Security Culture*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge-New York, 2019, pp. 56-71, p. 58.

<sup>xii</sup> C. Clark, "After 1848: The European Revolution in Government" in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 22, 2012, pp. 171-197. A. Ross, *Beyond the Barricades: Government and State-Building in Post-Revolutionary Prussia, 1848-58*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2019.

<sup>xiii</sup> Cfr. anche C. Maier, *Leviatano 2.0*, Einaudi, Torino, 2018 (ed. orig. 2014).

<sup>xiv</sup> L. Di Fiore, C. Lucrezio Monticelli, "Sorvegliare oltre i confini. Il controllo delle polizie napoletana e pontificia dopo il '48", in *Passato e presente*, 101/2017, pp. 47-70; C. Aliprantis, "Transnational policing after the 1848-49 revolutions: the Habsburg Empire in the Mediterranean", in *European History Quarterly*, 3/2020, pp. 412-437; L. Di Fiore, "Una storia globale nel Mediterraneo politico del primo Ottocento. La legazione napoletana a Costantinopoli" in *Annali dell'istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento*, Forthcoming.

<sup>xv</sup> A. Dupont, *Une internationale blanche. Histoire d'une mobilisation royaliste entre France et Espagne dans les années 1870*, Editions de la Sorbonne, Paris, 2020.

<sup>xvi</sup> C. Pinto, *La guerra per il Mezzogiorno. Italiani, borbonici, briganti*, Laterza, Bari, 2019.