

# TAMING TRANSGRESSION AND VIOLENCE IN THE CARNIVALS OF EARLY MODERN NAPLES\*

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**ABSTRACT.** *The purpose of this article is to explore the political importance of Neapolitan Carnival and the government's involvement in steering and controlling the celebrations at various historical junctions during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is particularly important to note in this context the ritual pillages of cuccagne staged by the rulers. The sponsorship of such Carnavalesque entertainments quelled the rulers' fears from popular rebellion and disorder as much as they fed popular needs for bread and circuses; and it is in this context of maintaining intact the city's fragile social balances that we should interpret the ubiquity of these violent spectacles in early modern Naples.*

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## I

The enduring success of present Carnival celebrations in various part of the world has a very long tradition, which is enacted by revellers as a celebration of life and its pleasures. In medieval and early modern times, the celebrations traditionally began after Christmas and lasted about forty days until Lent. Indeed, many of the common features of these Carnivals can be attributed to the perceived antithetical opposition of Carnival and Lent.<sup>1</sup> As opposed to the penitentiary period of Lent, in which religious regulations ban the eating of meat together with sexual activity, Carnival was seen as a time for gluttony

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<sup>1</sup> Mock battles between Carnival and Lent were indeed a common feature of European Carnivals, as it clearly appears in Breughel's famous painting. See Joseph Leo Koerner, 'Unmasking the world: Bruegel's ethnography', *Common Knowledge*, 10 (2004), pp. 220–51.

and sexual indulgence, accompanied by instances of ritualized violence. What tied the various celebratory forms of excess together was the idea of Carnival as a season of unbridled freedom, in complete opposition to the normative societal constraints that typified the rest of the year. Therefore, the processions and street plays that characterized Carnival in the big European cities featured themes of the ‘world turned upside down’, including subversive challenges on the existing religious, political, and social hierarchies.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, then, Carnival celebrations are invariably political, and they reflect the struggle of power within the hierarchical order.

It is particularly this conflictive aspect that will be of interest here, as this study will tackle the relationship between Carnival and power in Naples during various turbulent and eventful junctures taking place in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In fact, the rule of Naples changed hands several times during this period. First, it was ruled by viceroys appointed by the Spanish monarchs (1503–1707), next, by the viceroys sent on behalf of the Austrian Habsburgs who conquered it in 1707 and ruled until 1734, and finally, from 1734 onwards by a cadet Spanish branch of the Bourbons, that reconquered it from the faltering hands of the Habsburgs. These various governments faced considerable challenges in establishing their authority in a city like Naples, which suffered from lingering forms of social malaise, such as overpopulation, unemployment, and delinquency.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, the Spanish viceregal court in Naples made great efforts in sponsoring and directing festivals during the seventeenth century in an attempt to create the illusion of social unity and appease an increasingly disgruntled urban population, which grew dissatisfied from the 1620s onwards following the rising fiscal demands coming from their Spanish masters as a result of the Thirty Years War (1618–48).<sup>4</sup> The Spaniards’

<sup>2</sup> Here are some general syntheses of early modern Carnivals: Peter Burke, *Popular culture in early modern Europe* (London, 1978), pp. 178–204; Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, ‘Carnivals in history’, *Thesis Eleven*, 3 (1981), pp. 52–9; and Edward Muir, *Ritual in early modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 89–123.

<sup>3</sup> For some general works regarding the social and political struggles in Naples during the Spanish domination, see Giovanni Muto, ‘Il Regno di Napoli sotto la dominazione spagnola’, in Giovanni Cherubini, Franco Della Peruta, and Ettore Lepore, eds., *Storia della società italiana*, xi: *La controriforma e il Seicento* (Milan, 1989), pp. 225–316; Giuseppe Galasso, *Alla periferia dell’impero: il Regno di Napoli nel periodo spagnolo (secoli XVI–XVII)* (Turin, 1994); and Aurelio Musi, *L’Italia dei viceré: integrazione e resistenza nel sistema imperiale spagnolo* (Cava de’ Tirreni, 2000). For the later period, see Raffaele Ajello, ‘La vita politica napoletana sotto Carlo di Borbone: “La fondazione ed il tempo eroico” della dinastia’, in Ernesto Pontieri, ed., *Storia di Napoli* (10 vols., Naples, 1971–8), vii, pp. 459–717 and pp. 961–84; Anna Maria Rao, *Il Regno di Napoli nel Settecento* (Naples, 1983); Giuseppe Galasso, *Il Regno di Napoli: il Mezzogiorno spagnolo ed austriaco (1622–1734)* (Turin, 2006), and idem, *Il Regno di Napoli: il Mezzogiorno borbonico e napoleonico (1734–1815)* (Turin, 2007). For a general synthesis, see Tommaso Astarita, *Between salt water and holy water: a history of southern Italy* (New York, NY, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> For general works on festivities in Naples, see Franco Mancini, *Feste ed apparati civili e religiosi in Napoli dal vicereame alla capitale* (Naples, 1968); Giuseppe Galasso, ‘La festa’, in his *L’altra Europa: per un antropologia storica del Mezzogiorno d’Italia* (Milan, 1982), pp. 121–42; Michele Rak, ‘A dismisura d’uomo: feste e spettacolo del barocco napoletano’, in Marcello Fagiolo,

successors in the eighteenth century followed the same line. According to McClung, the Bourbons' politics of festival management encompassed both nobles and commoners, aiming to establish 'harmonious relationships with one another and with the state, which, while carefully affirming their privileges and distinctions, would contain them within the visible framework of royal policy and the national interest'.<sup>5</sup>

The few scholars who have studied Carnival in Naples have acknowledged these interventionist policies of its rulers, but their analysis has focused too heavily on the eighteenth century, neglecting the seventeenth century. Furthermore, most attention has been given to the tumultuous Carnival of 1764, which followed a long period of drought and hunger in the city, in a way that hampers the understanding of the social and political importance of the festival in a broader historical context.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, the aim of this investigation is to offer a much-needed longitudinal study, tracing Carnival's developments within the framework of meaningful political shifts of power taking place in the city. The main emphasis will be on the taming of the transgressive elements of Carnival on behalf of the various governments that ruled the city in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, while taking into account Naples's social tensions and balances.

The study will be based on a vast array of documents, out of which the most prominent are local diaries, gazettes (*avvisi*), and travellers' reports.<sup>7</sup> The diaries, covering particularly well the second half of the seventeenth century, were usually intended for the consumption of family members or trusted friends rather than the censorious eyes of the authorities. They are particularly revealing of the daily gossips and rumours circulating in the city, as well as the authors' personal impressions of events, in a way that allows the readers to

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ed., *Gian Lorenzo Bernini e le arti visive* (Rome, 1987), pp. 259–312, and idem, 'Il sistema delle feste nella Napoli barocca', in Gaetana Cantone, ed., *Centri e periferie del Barocco: il Barocco napoletano* (Rome, 1992), pp. 304–6; Paolo Izzo, *Le feste negate: le feste napoletane tra paganesimo e cristianesimo, i loro fasti ed il loro declino* (Naples, 2006); Ida Mauro, 'Crónica festiva de la Nápoles virreinal: la *Notitia* de Andrea Rubino (1648–1669)', *Cuadernos de Historia Moderna*, 34 (2009), pp. 67–93; John A. Marino, *Becoming Neapolitan: citizen culture in Baroque Naples* (Baltimore, MD, 2010), pp. 64–116; and Gabriel Guarino, *Representing the king's splendour: communication and reception of symbolic forms of power in viceregal Naples* (Manchester, 2010), pp. 68–101.

<sup>5</sup> William McClung, 'The decor of power in Naples, 1747'. *Journal of Architectural Education*, 52 (1998), pp. 38–48, at p. 38.

<sup>6</sup> See especially Laura Barletta, *Il Carnevale del 1764 a Napoli* (Naples, 1981); idem, *Fra regola e licenza: chiesa e vita religiosa feste e beneficenza a Napoli e in Campania (secoli XVII–XX)* (Naples, 2003); and Domenico Scafoglio, *La maschera della Cuccagna: spreco, rivolta e sacrificio nel Carnevale napoletano del 1764* (Naples, 1994). Earlier works, pursued with less methodological rigour, include Gaetano Miranda, *Cronaca del Carnevale di Napoli nei secoli XVI, XVII, e XVIII* (Naples, 1893); and Vittorio Gleijeses, *Piccola storia del Carnevale* (Naples, 1971), pp. 153–78.

<sup>7</sup> Other sources that will be utilized here include various exchanges of correspondence between the courts of Spain and Naples, edicts proclaimed in order to regulate behaviour during Carnival, and ceremonial books of the Neapolitan court.

glimpse into their political opinions, social biases, interests, and aspirations. As non-noble intellectuals, the authors took pleasure in exposing excessive forms of behaviour displayed by the nobility during Carnival, while proving to be even more hyper-critical toward the city's plebeians. Despite these biases, many of the historical facts and the quantitative evidence delivered are corroborated by various archival documents.<sup>8</sup>

Unlike the diaries, the eighteenth-century Neapolitan gazettes were subjected to the strict control of the state. Thus, it is of no surprise that their printing rights usually changed hands with the arrival of new governments, as was the case with the accession of Philip V to the Spanish crown in 1700, and again when the Austrians took over Naples in 1707. Clearly, the gazettes' main objective was to portray an idyllic government, operating in a peaceful model state. Nevertheless, they are particularly apt for our purposes because very often much of the local news focused on the public appearances of the rulers and other important authorities in civic or religious festivals, including an extensive coverage of Carnivals.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, the travellers' guides of Naples, written by foreign Grand Tour aristocrats of preponderantly French, English, and German extraction, suffer from the common weaknesses of this genre: a tendency to render simplified and stereotypical impressions of the place and the people they visited, an inclination to plagiarize and repeat uncritically the opinions of previous travellers, and the misjudgement and misinterpretation of alien cultures. Some of these biases become particularly acute in the case of northern Europeans visiting Italy. The trend starts already in the middle of seventeenth century and keeps deteriorating further as Italy's political and economic power becomes more and more marginal in comparison to England, France, and Holland. Hence, as pointed out by Moe, French and English travellers in particular will tend to frame Italy throughout the eighteenth century within two contrasting structures: the glory of the Roman and Renaissance past as opposed to the decadent present, and the delights of the beautiful landscape and warm climate contrasted with the corrupt nature of its inhabitants.<sup>10</sup> The latter contrast won the greatest resonance with Naples and its inhabitants, as reflected by its notorious epithet 'a paradise inhabited by devils'. Moreover, as clarified by Calaresu, contemporary followers of Montesquieu's climatic determinism claimed that it was precisely the warm climate that determined the inhabitants' indolent

<sup>8</sup> For a positive assessment of the diaries, see Giuseppe Galasso, *Napoli spagnola dopo Masaniello: politica, cultura, società* (2 vols., Florence, 1982), I, p. xxxiii.

<sup>9</sup> An evaluation of gazettes can be found in Nino Cortese, 'Gazette Napoletane del Sei e Settecento', in his *Cultura e politica a Napoli dal Cinquecento al Settecento* (Naples, 1965), pp. 161–84.

<sup>10</sup> Nelson Moe, *The view from Vesuvius: Italian culture and the southern question* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 2002), p. 16.

nature, which was also linked to debauchery and immoderation.<sup>11</sup> Despite these shortcomings, some eighteenth-century travellers to Naples – a time when Enlightenment writers started displaying a keen interest in the simple folk and their behaviour – revealed indispensable information on Carnival practices that the local diaries and gazettes chose to ignore.<sup>12</sup>

## II

Owing to the aforementioned increase in viceregal efforts in promoting celebrations in the seventeenth century, the Carnivals of Naples received an unprecedented coverage by such contemporary diarists as Andrea Rubino, Vincenzo d'Onofrio (alias Innocenzo Fuidoro), Domenico Confuorto, and Antonio Bulifon.<sup>13</sup> Their minute descriptions of the events reveal much about the practices of the viceregal court, the nobility, and the commoners, as they were displayed in the city's ceremonial centre: the large open square outside the Royal Palace (*Largo di Palazzo*) and the surrounding streets, in particular the city's largest artery, Via Toledo. This space was flooded with carriages, festive floats, and masked revellers, either on horse or on foot, creating a raucous and joyous atmosphere. The idyllic harmony of the civic body was particularly evident on the first Sunday of Carnival when the viceregal court, the nobility, civic officials, and masked citizens of all ranks processed in close proximity through the crowded streets. At the same time, each social group had the opportunity of expressing its own messages and values, often in competition with others, including mocking and subversive displays.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, a separate glance at the practices of both nobles and commoners illustrate well the reasons why the authorities aimed to control Carnival celebrations.

<sup>11</sup> Melissa Calaresu, 'Looking for Virgil's tomb: the end of the Grand Tour and the cosmopolitan ideal in Europe', in Jaś Elsner and Joan-Pau Rubiés, eds., *Voyages and visions: towards a new cultural history of travel* (London, 1999), pp. 138–61, at p. 146. See also idem, 'From the street to stereotype: urban space, travel, and the picturesque in late eighteenth-century Naples', *Italian Studies*, 62 (2007), pp. 189–203.

<sup>12</sup> There is a rich literature on travel writing in Naples. Apart from the cited works by Calaresu and Moe, see also the following general studies, Atanasio Mozzillo, *Passaggio a mezzogiorno: Napoli e il sud nell'immaginario barocco e illuminista europeo* (Milan, 1993); Giuseppe Galasso, 'Lo stereotipo del napoletano', in his *L'altra Europa*, pp. 143–90; and Augusto Placanica, 'La capitale, il passato, il paesaggio: i viaggiatori come "fonte" della storia meridionale', *Meridiana*, 1 (1987), pp. 165–79.

<sup>13</sup> The diary of Andrea Rubino, which covers the years between 1648 and 1669, titled *Notitia di quanto è occorso in Napoli*, is preserved in manuscript form in the library of the Società Napoletana di Storia Patria (SNSP), MS XVIII. D. 14–17 (4 vols.); Innocenzo Fuidoro, *Giornali di Napoli dal 1660 al 1680* (4 vols., Naples, 1934–9); Domenico Confuorto, *Giornali di Napoli dal 1679 al 1699* (2 vols., Naples, 1930–1); Antonio Bulifon, *Giornali di Napoli dal 1547 al 1706* (Naples, 1932).

<sup>14</sup> See for example the three floats that moved along Toledo Avenue in February 1687 – the first representing the commoners with comestible gifts for the plebs, the second, displaying the temple of honour accompanied by five nobles dressed up as virtues, and the third, carrying a sculpture of the viceroy. Confuorto, *Giornali*, 1, pp. 172–3.

The nobility's participatory role in the official celebrations did not change much during the times of Spanish rule. Nobles often chose to ride together in orderly fashion in groups of four (*quadriglie*) displaying topical disguises, made of expensive and elegant fabrics. Rubino describes such examples as a quadrille of richly bejewelled Turks and one of fanciful Centaurs in the Carnival of 1653.<sup>15</sup> As with all public manifestations in which the nobility participated, these occasions were generally viewed as an obligation to display fidelity to the ruling dynasty by rallying to the viceregal call of celebration, as well as the flaunting of power and rank through conspicuous consumption of expensive attire, encouraged by the viceroys (and later the king) through the temporary suspension of sumptuary laws.<sup>16</sup> But nobles could also choose to join in the fun by wearing more farcical disguises, like the group of nobles described by Rubino, dressed up as madmen, imitating the inmates locked up at the Hospital of the Incurable.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, various studies of European Carnivals testify that nobles of both sexes, who were often subjected to the ever-judging eye of the court, used the anonymity of masks and disguises in order to go wild, curse, and do things that the restrictive etiquette at court could not tolerate.<sup>18</sup> This behaviour extended also to sexual transgressions, which were an integral part of the Carnival season.<sup>19</sup> For example, the Neapolitan nobility did not hesitate in inviting prostitutes to Carnival private parties taking place in their residences. One such instance is described by Confuorto, who tells us about some private parties taking place during the last three days of Carnival in 1696, which were conducted 'with every liberty, with open doors, to which arrived a great number of young nobles and civilians, as well as masked courtesans, and included music, dances and other things'.<sup>20</sup> Although these libertine parties have been routinely condemned by the authorities, only in 1734, with the beginning of the moralizing regime of the newly ascended king, Charles of Bourbon, and his minister, Bernardo Tanucci, they were officially banned, except in the case of special permits given to nobles who did not have a reputation for sexual scandals. This policy was later

<sup>15</sup> Rubino, *Notitia*, SNSP, MS xviii. D. 14, fos. 86–7.

<sup>16</sup> For sumptuary laws in Naples, see Silvana Musella Guida, 'Il Regno del lusso: leggi suntuarie e società: un percorso di lungo periodo nella Napoli medievale e moderna (1290–1784)', in *Proceedings of L'économie du luxe en France et en Italie. Journées d'étude organisées par le Comité franco-italien d'histoire économique (AFHE-SISE)*, Lille, Ifresi, 4–5 May 2007, pp. 1–23; and Gabriel Guarino, 'Spanish fashions and sumptuary legislation in Habsburg Italy', in José Luis Colomer and Amalia Descalzo, eds., *Spanish fashion at the courts of early modern Europe* (Madrid, 2014), pp. 233–50.

<sup>17</sup> Rubino, *Notitia*, SNSP, MS xviii. D. 14, fo. 87.

<sup>18</sup> For an Italian example, see Edward Muir, *Civic ritual in Renaissance Venice* (Princeton, NJ, 1981), p. 157. For Spain, see Maria José Del Río Barredo, 'Burlas y violencia en el Carnival madrileño de los siglos XVII y XVIII', *Revista de Filología Románica*, 3 (2002), pp. 111–29, at p. 120.

<sup>19</sup> For a discussion of these issues see Burke, *Popular culture*, pp. 186–7.

<sup>20</sup> Confuorto, *Giornali*, II, p. 202.

upheld by Charles's son, Ferdinand IV.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, from 1737 onwards, the Bourbons succeeded in attracting the attention of the city's social elites during Carnival by staging many comedies, operas, and balls (*festini*) in the San Carlo Theatre, thus imposing on them highly civilized and relatively tamed forms of entertainment at the expense of previous licentious practices.<sup>22</sup>

In the case of the commoners, the diarists made a clear differentiation between respectable citizens belonging to the various corporations that used to parade in orderly fashion with the topical dresses that distinguished their trade, and the lowly plebeians, who were regularly blamed for outrageous excesses. For example, the chronicler Fuidoro, with his usual prudishness, described a particularly offensive procession staged by what he calls 'plebeian dregs' in 1664. They carried a long and thick pole on top of which was a globe. Every time they approached women spectating from a balcony they pulled up the globe to expose a large wooden male organ, and enjoyed seeing the scandalized women running into their houses to avoid the outrageous view.<sup>23</sup> At times, bold individuals amused themselves by playing similar tricks of their own. According to Confuorto, one such masked person went about Toledo Avenue in the Carnival of 1694, exposing a prostatic member to the ladies sitting in their carriages and 'saying a thousand indecent things, which would have [even] scandalized public harlots'.<sup>24</sup> He obviously crossed the line of propriety if the policing forces were called to arrest him.

Indeed, much can be learned of the limits of tolerance towards Carnavalesque pranks from the various governmental regulations that were issued to limit a great variety of typical disturbances. The first recorded edict during Spanish rule was issued on 18 January 1590. It stipulated that 'in order to prevent scandals', it was prohibited, for both nobles and non-nobles, to wear 'illicit and dishonest costumes', saying offensive words, and committing such 'dishonest acts' as hitting passers-by with animal bladders, throwing of blood oranges, throwing of dirty and smelly liquids, and, finally, obscene groping. The penalties for infractions included hefty fines for all social groups, in addition to three years of forced rowing in the galleons for non-nobles, and three years of exile for nobles. Young children would be punished by flogging with a whip.<sup>25</sup> The reason for such disproportionate penalties vis-à-vis the gravity of the offences is made clearer in the preamble of the decree issued on 18 January 1693, by

<sup>21</sup> See the letter of Bernardo Tanucci to Charles III on this subject, written on 13 Feb. 1770, in Rosa Mincuzzi, ed., *Lettere di Bernardo Tanucci a Carlo III Borbone (1759–1776)* (Rome, 1969), p. 588.

<sup>22</sup> For these instances, see Anthony DelDonna, "'Rinfreschi e composizioni poetiche": the *fieste di ballo* tradition in late eighteenth-century Naples', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 44 (2011), pp. 157–88.

<sup>23</sup> Fuidoro, *Giornali*, I, p. 209.

<sup>24</sup> Confuorto, *Giornali*, II, p. 113.

<sup>25</sup> See 'Lex bacchanalium', in *Nuova collezione delle prammatiche del Regno di Napoli* (15 vols., Naples, 1803–8), VII, p. 21.

explaining that it intended to prevent the numerous deadly brawls occurring as a result of the Carnival pranks.<sup>26</sup> In other words, the pranks were viewed by the authorities as a trigger to the eruption of lethal forms of violence, and the harsh penalties were envisioned as apt deterrents. The rest of the 1693 decree is in tune with these motives: other than repeating the 1590 bans against throwing of various objects, it admonished coach drivers not to overtake other coaches in Via Toledo during the crowded and busy season, in order to allow the masked pedestrians to walk safely. Indeed, the accidents occurring from the careless behaviour of coach drivers during this season were well documented by the local diarists.<sup>27</sup> Finally, in a way that clearly hints at the way in which Carnival pranks could easily degenerate into violent disturbances, serious penalties would be incurred for those drawing swords in Via Toledo during the festive season: three years of exile for nobles, and three years of forced rowing in the galleons for non-nobles.<sup>28</sup>

Plenty of evidence of these disturbances, involving all social groups, is provided by the contemporary chroniclers.<sup>29</sup> For example, Bulifon comments in 1676 that ‘many killings took place in these days of Carnival, caused mainly by the damned custom that they have here of throwing blood oranges and water: which turns the city impracticable’.<sup>30</sup> In the Carnival of 1669, a man masked as Pulcinella – the typical stock character from the *commedia dell’arte* – started hitting an officer of the law<sup>31</sup> with a desiccated pumpkin, while the other, in good spirit, defended himself with a pig’s head. At some point, the masked man borrowed a handgun from another law enforcer, making him believe that he wanted to use it in jest, but in fact, he used it to shoot his challenger dead. After the deed, he managed to escape and found shelter in a nearby church.<sup>32</sup> The malevolent intent of the killer dumbfounded the law enforcers precisely because he was playing the role of Pulcinella. A quarrelsome, noisy, and obscene trickster, Pulcinella’s character supposedly portrayed the stereotype of Neapolitan plebeians, also known as *lazzaroni*, and therefore became the prototypical mask of Neapolitan Carnivals.<sup>33</sup>

Significantly, the Pulcinella costume was equally popular with nobles, who abused the anonymity of the mask to display the obnoxious behaviour

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>27</sup> See for example Confuorto, *Giornali*, I, p. 172.

<sup>28</sup> All of these appear in ‘Lex bacchanalium’, *Nuova collezione*, VII, p. 23.

<sup>29</sup> See for example Fuidoro, *Giornali*, I, p. 269, II, pp. 135, 228. Sixteenth-century testimonies of object throwing appear in Giovan Battista Del Tufo, *Ritratto o modello delle grandezze, delitie e meraviglie, della nobilissima Città di Napoli*, ed. Calogero Tagliareni (Naples, 1959), p. 163.

<sup>30</sup> Bulifon, *Giornali*, p. 212.

<sup>31</sup> The chronicler uses the pejorative Italian term *sbirro*, loosely translatable as cop.

<sup>32</sup> See Fuidoro, *Giornali*, II, pp. 107–8.

<sup>33</sup> For Pulcinella, see the following studies: Domenico Scafoglio and Luigi Lombardi Satriani, *Pulcinella: il mito e la storia* (Milan, 1992); and Domenico Scafoglio, *Pulcinella: il potere della parola* (Fisciano, 2003). See also Franco Carmelo Greco, ed., *Pulcinella, maschera del mondo: Pulcinella e le arti dal Cinquecento al Novecento* (Naples, 1998).



associated with it. One such example was provided in the Carnival of 1694. A young noble, Domenico Saluzzo, used the costume to settle scores with some of his aristocratic acquaintances. First, he outrageously offended a young noble widow by asking her how many bastard children she had given birth to, and thrown to the orphanage since the death of her husband. Next, he cursed another noble woman with such vehemence that she pulled out a stilletto, causing him to flee the scene. The reckless round of offences finally ended with a noble from the Caracciolo family, who repaid Saluzzo with three cuts to the head with a sword for accusing him of courting a nun.<sup>34</sup> It is because of such disorders caused by the riotous mask, when the royal theatre of San Carlo became the focus of the aristocratic celebrations of Carnival during the second half of the eighteenth century, that plebeian masks, like Pulcinella's, were disallowed.<sup>35</sup>

Following the amount of tension and violence which took place during the celebrations of Carnival, it is easy to understand the government's motivation for issuing explicit regulations to curb the festivities. Of course, the government's main motivation in maintaining the public order during Carnival, other than just the concern for the wellbeing of its citizens, was the fear of Carnavalesque disorders degenerating into comprehensive revolts. Clearly, during Carnival inhibitions were at their weakest. Thus, a Carnival season coupled with a bad harvest, a steep rise in taxes, or some other social or political crisis could easily cause the ritual 'turning of the world' to change into something more dangerous. In fact, these occurrences are well documented in various parts of early modern Europe.<sup>36</sup> Naples was no exception in this sense, as a few prominent revolts have erupted at different times, although not exclusively in the wake of a festivity. Yet it is indicative to note that the various governments took precautionary steps in the wake of these events. For example, after a popular riot in May 1585, the viceroy participated in the consecutive festivities of the Corpus Christi and St John the Baptist with a heavily armed entourage. Similarly, the viceroy cancelled altogether the St John the Baptist feast in 1647, being aware of the murmurs of discontent caused by the reduction of bread loaves.<sup>37</sup> He failed, however, to foresee the rebellion that ensued just a few weeks later, on 7 July, which coincidentally fell on the feast day of the Virgin of the Carmine.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Confuorto, *Giornali*, II, pp. 113–14.

<sup>35</sup> Salvatore di Giacomo, *Storia del Teatro San Carlino: contributo alla storia della scena dialettale napoletana, 1738–1884* (3rd edn, Naples, 1919), p. 217.

<sup>36</sup> See for example Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Carnival in Romans*, trans. Mary Feeny (New York, NY, 1979); and Edward Muir, *Mad blood stirring: vendetta in Renaissance Italy* (Baltimore, MD, and London, 1998).

<sup>37</sup> For these events, see Marino, *Becoming Neapolitan*, pp. 94–5.

<sup>38</sup> An influential socio-economic interpretation of the event is provided by Rosario Villari, *The revolt of Naples*, trans. James Newell and John A. Marino (Cambridge, 1993). A more recent contextual political analysis is provided by Aurelio Musi, *La rivolta di Masaniello nella scena politica barocca* (Naples, 1989). For an alternative interpretation, see Peter Burke, 'The

Most contemporary accounts attributed the causes of the revolt to the government's loss of control over 'wild masses' behaving irrationally following the umpteenth imposition of a new tax. This differs considerably from the interpretation of the contemporary Giuseppe Donzelli, who described it as an organization from below of a conspiracy, disguised as a festive manifestation that got out of hand. Among other things, the celebration constituted a mock battle, or rather the assault on a wooden castle which was usually constructed for that purpose. Masaniello, who commanded a youth group that regularly participated in the assault, known as 'the Arabs' because of their Turkish costumes, thought of using that occasion to launch the revolt.<sup>39</sup> According to Donzelli, the young fisherman gathered eight of his friends, and together they agreed to manipulate all the youths who used to participate at the festivity in order to start a riot. Thus, they succeeded in gathering 400 of these adolescents, in advance, and they armed them with sticks, which would normally serve them for the regular mock-battle, only this time they were directed towards the authorities.<sup>40</sup> This interpretation certainly reinforces governmental fears of the potential threat of festive occasions and the pre-emptive attempts to control them.

Not coincidentally, when the Spaniards were able to suppress the revolt, they made sure to avoid similar occurrences in the future. Accordingly, Viceroy Oñate, who was entrusted with the complicated task of restoring the Spanish regime after the revolutionary parenthesis, implemented a policy of repressing certain festive forms at the expense of the commoners who had been the decisive element in the revolt. The same was true for Carnival, which was drastically undermined by the viceroy's intolerance towards any manifestation of social disorder. But it was not all perceived as bad by Neapolitans. The chronicler Andrea Rubino claims that during Oñate's times Neapolitans were able to enjoy Carnival because the laws against throwing water and eggs were severely enforced.<sup>41</sup> Oñate's regulation of Carnival must have had a profound impact, if more than twenty years later, the chronicler Innocenzo Fuidoro, complaining about the 'insolences of plebeians' during the Carnival season, claimed that 'everyone misses Oñate's government, because during these times the city of Naples looked like a composed religious congregation; so strongly rooted is the [favourable] opinion of an excellent prince in the mind of the subjects'.<sup>42</sup>

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virgin of the Carmine and the revolt of Masaniello', *Past and Present*, 99 (1983), pp. 3–21; for two recent monographs on the topic, see Silvana d'Alessio, *Contagi: la rivolta napoletana del 1647–1648: linguaggio e potere politico* (Florence, 2003); and idem, *Masaniello: la sua vita e il mito in Europa* (Rome and Salerno, 2007).

<sup>39</sup> For the roles of youth groups in riotous rituals, see Natalie Zemon Davis, 'The reasons of misrule: youth groups and charivaris in sixteenth century France', *Past and Present*, 50 (1970), pp. 41–75.

<sup>40</sup> See the modern edition of Giuseppe Donzelli, *Partenope liberata* (Naples, 1970).

<sup>41</sup> See Rubino, *Notitia*, BSNSP, MS xxiii. D. 14, fos. 82–3.

<sup>42</sup> Fuidoro, *Giornali*, II, p. 135.

The next implementation of strong prohibitions against Carnavalesque manifestations took place towards the end of the Habsburg Austrian rule that extended from 1707 to 1734. On 15 January 1733, just before the commencing of the celebrations, a decree was issued, prohibiting ‘for the imminent Carnival, all public and private comedies, masks, and festivities’.<sup>43</sup> The official reason given was the need for penance, following the earthquake that took place earlier on that year. Similarly, on 12 January 1734, just six months before the repossession of the kingdom by the Bourbons, the same prohibitions were reissued, in the interest of maintaining public order by avoiding ‘the brawls, injuries, homicides, and other crimes’ perpetrated by Carnival participants.<sup>44</sup> Despite the official motivations given in these two cases, there is little doubt that the main aim was to abolish potentially subversive festivities during a time of social turbulence and military threat.

Significantly, regardless of the rulers’ attempts to regulate behaviour, some testimonies show that they indulged in the celebrations as well. This was in direct contrast with the religious authorities that sternly opposed Carnival.<sup>45</sup> For starters, on the first Sunday of Carnival, the viceroys and their spouses regularly paraded in a carriage, accompanied by a retinue of court officials, as is meticulously indicated by a contemporary ceremonial book.<sup>46</sup> Viceroys who were particularly inclined to merriment chose to parade in fanciful garb. Thus, in the Carnival of 1617, Viceroy Osuna dressed up as a Turk – a clear categorical subversion since Turks represented the greatest menace faced by the Spanish government in defending the southern Italian shores.<sup>47</sup> Sometimes, viceroys even embraced the Carnavalesque culture of pranking selected victims. Take the example of a young noble who was hopelessly and foolishly infatuated with the married daughter of the viceroy, the count of Santisteban. The noble disguised himself during the Carnival of 1690 as a simple man, and delivered, several times, amorous notes to the lady declaring his love. The viceroy learned of these acts and gave the captain of his guard an order, after explaining the signs of the disguise, to catch the man when attempting to approach his daughter. Then he ordered to unmask him and, in a clear Carnavalesque form of punishment, to take off his trousers, strap him backwards to an ass and parade him all the way to the Hospital of the Incurable, where he should be delivered to the hands of the madmen’s keeper.<sup>48</sup> Apparently, the vicereine,

<sup>43</sup> ‘Lex bacchanalium’, in *Nuova collezione*, vii, p. 24.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24–5.

<sup>45</sup> Barletta, *Il Carnevale del 1764*, pp. 25–7.

<sup>46</sup> Archivio di Stato Napoli, Maggiorodoma Maggiore e Sopraintendenza Generale di Casa Reale, Archivio Amministrativo, Inventario iv, vol. 1483, *Avanzi di libro in lingua spagnola con molte mancanze contenenti fatti del secolo XVII e principio del XVIII*, fo. 50 r.

<sup>47</sup> Francesco Zazzera, ‘Narrazioni tratte dai giornali del governo di Don Pietro Girone duca d’Ossuna vicerè di Napoli, scritti da F. Z.’, Francesco Palermo, ed., *Archivio Storico Italiano*, 9 (1846), pp. 471–618, at pp. 501–2.

<sup>48</sup> Confuorto, *Giornali*, ii, p. 83.

the countess of Santisteban, shared the same proclivities as her husband. In the Carnival of 1695, she took her fun at the expense of a Neapolitan lady reputed to be insane, as she fancied herself to be called and treated as ‘the queen of the world’. Accordingly, ‘she was invited to the palace by the vicereine, who in order to amuse herself, treated her as royalty by sending to bring her from her home with a carriage and an entourage of servants; and she entertained her as a queen until five in the morning’.<sup>49</sup> The Bourbon monarchs also enjoyed themselves in court masks and balls. Ferdinand IV was particularly known for his playfulness, which sometimes transcended courtly environments.<sup>50</sup> This is evident in the testimony of the English traveller Thomas Watkins, visiting Naples in 1788, who had a chance to witness a common Carnival pastime in which Neapolitans went in open carriages, throwing bags of sugar plums at passers-by. At one such occasion, Watkins observed that one of those throwing the bags accidentally dropped the mask hiding his identity, ‘which he hastily replaced, but not so soon as to prevent us seeing the face of his *Neapolitan Majesty*’.<sup>51</sup> These examples conform to similar entertainments at the Spanish court in Madrid in the seventeenth century, where the royal family enjoyed pelting courtiers with eggs filled with perfume. Del Río also explains that although similar practices were performed in both the streets and the court, their perception was very different: unlike the street-pelting of strangers which was often interpreted as offences that could lead to violence, the object-throwing at court was seen as playful and innocuous fun.<sup>52</sup> It is clear that the Neapolitan rulers made the same differentiation between what they perceived as their own harmless transgressions and some of those made by their subjects, which required policing and control.

### III

Mobile floats, locally known as *carri-cuccagna*, were heavily loaded with such expensive victuals as delicate meats, cheeses, cakes, and sweets, featuring the epitome of Carnival’s excitement for the large crowds of Neapolitan plebeians. The floats were inspired by the medieval utopia, the Land of Cockaigne, a fantastic land of endless plenty, where no one needed to work. The houses, like in the derivative story of Hansel and Gretel, were made of delicacies such as candies and sweets; the rivers were flowing with milk, honey, wine, and sometimes gold; the trees carried expensive cheese and meats, and roasted pigs ran about with knives conveniently stacked on their backs, ready to be carved up and eaten. People, like in a perpetual state of Carnival, ate, drank, and had frequent sexual relationships. Significantly, the fable clarified that only

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, II, pp. 150–1.

<sup>50</sup> See Franco Strazzullo, ‘Ferdinando si diverte’, in his *Napoli: i luoghi e le storie* (Naples, 1992), pp. 231–44.

<sup>51</sup> Thomas Watkins, *Travels through Switzerland, Italy, Sicily, the Greek islands to Constantinople; through part of Greece, Ragusa, and the Dalmatian isles...* (London, 1794), p. 427.

<sup>52</sup> Del Río Barredo, ‘Burlas y violencia’, p. 120.

poor people could reach this fantastic place.<sup>53</sup> Obviously, only people lacking these things on a daily basis were attracted by this utopia, which the *carri-cuccagna* aimed to recreate. Other Italian governments also offered similar gifts of food to the population: in Venice, pigs ritually beheaded on Fat Thursday were donated to the nobility, whereas Bologna staged a mass scramble over a roasted pig thrown from the balcony of the civic hall.<sup>54</sup> What distinguished the Neapolitan *cuccagna* from these are the constant changes in the delivery and presentation of the edible gifts, with every alteration aiming further to control the occasion from above.

The *carri-cuccagna* were an ‘invented tradition’ introduced by the Spanish viceroys as a grand gift of largesse for the masses, with the first documented example dating back to 1617 during the times of Viceroy Osuna. On that particular occasion, twelve massive carts, each pulled by six horses, were prepared in Piazza Mercato, the throbbing heart of the popular districts. Each of the twelve carts contained a barrel of wine, mutton, veal, ham, sausages, cheeses, chickens, capons, turkeys, and, finally, the *pièce de résistance*, a pig still alive. One can only speculate that the living pig was meant to achieve a crude comic effect by squealing for dear life when the brawlers would start hacking it to pieces. As soon as Viceroy Osuna arrived as the star of the show, accompanied by 200 nobles on horse, he signalled the beginning of the plebeians’ brawl over the floats.<sup>55</sup>

Some meaningful changes took place after the quelling of the popular revolt of 1647–8, under the direction of the new viceroy, the duke of Oñate. First, the cost and arrangement of the *carri-cuccagna* formally befell on the guilds of food producers, while their co-ordination was entrusted to the *Eletto del Popolo* (the commoners’ representative in the city’s government). The diarists indicate that this forced contribution led to resentment: food corporations unable to produce a float were required to pay a fine to the *Eletto* – a practice that led to all kinds of abuses remonstrated by the guilds.<sup>56</sup> In addition, instead of having the floats sacked in a single evening, the entertainment was stretched throughout the Carnival season. This was achieved by commissioning four

<sup>53</sup> For some valuable syntheses of the subject, see Giuseppe Cocchiara, ‘Il paese di Cuccagna: l’evasione della realtà nella fantasia popolare’, in his *Il paese di Cuccagna ed altri studi di folklore* (Turin, 1956), pp. 159–87; Piero Camporesi, ‘Carnevale, Cuccagna e giuochi di villa’, *Studi e problemi di critica testuale*, 10 (1975), pp. 57–97; and Hilário Franco Júnior, *Cocanha: a história de um país imaginário* (São Paulo, 1998). See also Vita Fortunati and Giampaolo Zucchini, eds., *Paesi di Cuccagna e mondi alla rovescia* (Florence, 1989).

<sup>54</sup> For each of these, see respectively Muir, *Civic ritual*, pp. 156–82, and Lorena Bianconi, *Alle origini della festa bolognese della porchetta: ovvero San Bartolomeo e il cambio di stagione* (Bologna, 2005).

<sup>55</sup> See Zazzera, ‘Narrazioni’, pp. 501–2.

<sup>56</sup> See for example Fuidoro, *Giornali*, 1, pp. 268, 271. This resentment originates from the original event of 1617, as the chronicler implies that the viceroy did not honour the expectations of being paid by the commoners’ corporations who prepared the floats. See Zazzera, ‘Narrazioni’, p. 501.

separate floats to each of the following guilds: bakers, butchers, grocers, and fishmongers, to be gifted on one of the four Sundays of Carnival. Another significant alteration was the change of venue. With the exception of the bakers' float, the sacking of the floats was removed from the popular quarters as they now had to be pulled along Via Toledo towards their final destination at the *Largo di Palazzo*, where they were sacked under the viceroy's balcony at his given sign, while being carefully watched by Spanish troops.<sup>57</sup> Such security measures are only understandable for a viceroy who had only just restored order in a rebellious city.

One also needs to take into account the artistic aspects related to the *carri-cuccagna*. On their ceremonial route to the palace, they were accompanied by a parade of the respective food producers, dressed up and masked for the occasion, singing songs, carrying posters in Neapolitan vernacular, and performing humorous pantomimes related to their profession.<sup>58</sup> In addition, these popular representations dedicated part of their routine to the rulers' praise and adulation. This was particularly manifest by the throwing of leaflets to passers-by containing verses of sycophantic allusions to the wellbeing generated by the Spanish government, which was later ascribed to the Austrian viceroys and the Bourbon monarchs.<sup>59</sup>

From the descriptions of the floats themselves, it is clear that with time they become more sophisticated and entertaining. For example, one float in 1656 was in the shape of a mountain, covered with golden trees. When it reached the place of the sack, the top of the mountain suddenly sprang open, setting free a swarm of birds.<sup>60</sup> On another occasion, the float of the fishmongers appeared particularly disappointing, displaying a meagre quantity of fish, but once it reached the customary place under the viceroy's balcony, the fishmongers started gifting great quantities of various fish that were surreptitiously stored inside the float, well hidden from the spectators' view.<sup>61</sup>

The *cuccagne* became particularly refined during the times of the Austrian viceroys, who were eager to communicate the legitimacy of their government to their new subjects. Although the *carri-cuccagna* continued to be prepared by the food guilds for Carnival, the Austrian viceroys began producing a

<sup>57</sup> The sacking of the first float continued to take place in the popular quarters until 1688. See for example Bulifon, *Giornali*, p. 182.

<sup>58</sup> Among the Neapolitan diarists, Rubino is particularly descriptive of these pantomimes. See for example the rich descriptions of Carnival in 1653, Rubino, *Notitia*, BSNSP, MS xviii. D. 14, fos. 82–94.

<sup>59</sup> Scafoglio, *La maschera*, pp. 24–7.

<sup>60</sup> Rubino, *Notitia*, SNSP, MS xviii. D. 14, fos. 207–10.

<sup>61</sup> See Confuorto, *Giornali*, 1, p. 62. Other curious pantomimes involved the Roman God Bacchus. For example, in the Carnival of 1654, a cart pulled by six horses carried a man representing Bacchus sitting on a golden barrel of wine. The whole time, Bacchus made the impression of drinking red wine, but instead of swallowing he would spray it at the faces of passers-by. See Rubino, *Notitia*, BSNSP, MS xviii. D. 14, fo. 114. For another similar description of a float in the Carnival of 1681, see Confuorto, *Giornali*, 1, pp. 61–2.

non-movable sort of *cuccagne* to commemorate dynastic festive occasions, such as the birthdays of the Austrian rulers. These were commissioned to the best architects of the time, among others: Filippo and Cristoforo Schor, Filippo Farinelli, and Bartolomeo Granucci. The new monumental set pieces, based on constructions of wood decorated with cardboard and other ephemeral materials, reached the massive size of multi-storey buildings, and could take such shapes as mountains, pyramids, classical temples, and fortified cities.<sup>62</sup>

When the Bourbons came to power in 1734, sharing with their predecessors the burden of affirming their rule to their new subjects, they took a leaf from the Austrian Habsburgs by making an increased use of the stable *cuccagne*, which eventually also replaced the *carri-cuccagna* during Carnival by 1759. These were built in the same place as where the floats used to be pillaged.<sup>63</sup> This meant that the guilds lost their role of preparing the floats and showing off their products via the spectacular gifts of food. Nevertheless, they were still obliged to supply the same funds they used to invest on the *carri-cuccagna*. The new constructions were staged by the architects and their plans were approved by the king himself who also partially financed the increasing costs of the *cuccagne*, over half of which now went to cover the fantastic ephemeral scenography rather than to the food supplies.<sup>64</sup> This change testifies to the aforementioned centralizing policies of the Bourbon kings who aspired to assume full control of the event. In this respect, the *cuccagne* played a greater propagandistic role than before, as the festive artistic designs regularly conveyed a message of affinity between the idyllic Golden Age, represented by the myth of Cockaigne as a land of endless plenty, and the very rule of the Bourbons.<sup>65</sup>

The artistic displays and the rulers' propagandistic agenda pose little interpretative problems, but the pillage itself requires a closer look. The existent documentation is very uneven in this respect. The seventeenth-century diarists and the eighteenth-century gazettes provide rich descriptions of the floats and their later reincarnations, and report on the enjoyment taken by the viceroys, later replaced by royal persons, and the large retinue of nobles that spectated from the balconies of the palace. However, they almost invariably remain silent with regard to the modalities of the sack.<sup>66</sup> Comparatively, travellers' reports from the eighteenth century describe in detail what appears to be a

<sup>62</sup> On the involvement of architects in these constructions, see Alba Capellieri, 'Filippo e Cristoforo Schor: "regi architetti e ingegneri" alla Corte di Napoli', in *Capolavori in festa: effimero barocco a Largo di Palazzo* (Naples, 1997), pp. 75–89. See also Gabriel Guarino, 'Cerimoniali e feste durante il vicereame austriaco a Napoli', in Attilio Antonelli, ed., *Cerimoniale del vicereame austriaco di Napoli, 1707–1734* (Naples, 2014), pp. 69–85.

<sup>63</sup> This change is first documented in *Avvisi di Napoli*, 6 Feb. 1759, no. 6.

<sup>64</sup> Barletta, *Il Carnevale del 1764*, p. 34.

<sup>65</sup> Scafoglio, *La maschera*, p. 26.

<sup>66</sup> A notable exception is the report of a slave being imprisoned for gravely wounding two other contenders with a knife, in the pillage of a *carro-cuccagna* in 1698. Confuorto, *Giornali*, II, p. 291.

highly agonistic, tumultuous, and cruel occasion.<sup>67</sup> For starters, travellers show their displeasure at blatant signs of animal torture. According to the Marquis De Sade, witnessing a Carnival in 1776, ‘ducks, chickens, turkeys, and pigs are barbarically crucified, fixed while still alive with two or three nails, therefore still bleeding, as they amuse the people with their convulsions’.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, the English traveller Anna Riggs Miller, visiting Naples in 1770, marvelled at the plebs’ ferocity towards the fowl on display, as they ‘tear them away unfeelingly from their fastenings so as often to leave their wings behind’.<sup>69</sup> Moving on to the sack itself, according to Sade, at a given signal ‘the hungry mob attacks and in a blink of an eye everything is pillaged’. He estimates the number of the assailants to be ‘not less than 5000–7000’, who in ‘eight minutes’ destroy the entire construction.<sup>70</sup> Most disturbingly, knives are used not only to slaughter the animals but also to fight off other contenders, leaving ‘not less than twenty dead and dozens of gravely wounded who frequently do not survive’. Hence, he deems this to be ‘the most barbarous spectacle of this world’, more of a ‘school of thievery than a proper feast’.<sup>71</sup> Using a similar tone, Miller claimed that after seeing the slaughter of animals and the way in which people casually killed each other – ‘as such events are common upon this occasion, no notice was taken of it’ – she was left ‘sick in the stomach’. Accordingly, she concluded: ‘This amusement was so far from proving such to us, that I believe our curiosity will never again induce us to partake of it.’<sup>72</sup> These testimonies are representative of other foreign and Italian visitors to Naples who expressed themselves in very similar terms.<sup>73</sup>

The travellers’ harsh judgements indicate that Naples lagged behind the rest of the continent during the Age of the Enlightenment in terms of the new sensibilities shared by the elites against violent forms of spectacle. It is comparable to the findings of Ferrari, who examines the ritualized public dissections in Bologna which used to take place during the Carnival season from the sixteenth century onwards. These spectacles ceased to exist in the eighteenth century following the new Enlightenment attitudes towards dead bodies, and more generally a repulsion for everything having to do with death. Accordingly, ‘such manifestations may be taken to cover also the festive approach to public

<sup>67</sup> Although seventeenth-century travellers’ guides of Naples abound, to the best of my knowledge, none of them provide *cuccagne* descriptions.

<sup>68</sup> Marquis de Sade, *Voyage d’Italie, ou Dissertations critiques, historiques, politiques et philosophiques sur les villes de Florence, Rome et Naples, 1775–1776*, in Gilbert Lely and George Daumas, eds., *Oeuvres complètes de marquis de Sade* (16 vols., Paris, 1967), xvi, p. 441.

<sup>69</sup> Anna Riggs Miller, *Letters from Italy: describing the manners, customs, antiquities, paintings, &c. of that country, in the years 1770 and 1771: to a friend residing in France* (London, 1777), p. 61.

<sup>70</sup> The numbers differ from one author to the next, but they all agree that the eighteenth-century pillages attracted thousands of assailants.

<sup>71</sup> Sade, *Voyage d’Italie*, p. 441.

<sup>72</sup> Miller, *Letters from Italy*, p. 62.

<sup>73</sup> See Mozzillo, *Passaggio a mezzogiorno*, pp. 202–9.



dissections and executions, which later became “macabre” and “barbaric”.<sup>74</sup> The existence of these shared attitudes also explains why such official publications as the gazettes preferred to gloss over the uncomfortable truths exposed by the travellers.

The violent aspect of the sack also explains why the various regimes tried to assume greater control over the years, and tightened the security measures around it. Indeed, it has been suggested that the *cuccagne* were meant to exorcise two related fears: the dread of hunger haunting the plebs, and the resulting fear of popular rebellion that hung over the heads of the privileged classes.<sup>75</sup> Paradoxically, though, owing to the violent nature of the sack, the authorities ran the risk that the revellers’ knives would turn against them during volatile Carnival seasons – a case not uncommon in a festive celebration, as the rebellion of Masaniello has clearly shown. In this respect, it is revealing to highlight the events that took place during the Carnival of 1764, which marked a turning point in the relationship between aristocratic sponsors and plebeian beneficiaries. That year, a severe drought had dramatically reduced the regular supply of food to the city. As the crisis mounted in the months preceding Carnival, hunger and discontent were rife, as the authorities were blamed for mismanagement of food provisions. Accordingly, this was one of those times in which one would have expected the authorities to abolish Carnival celebrations, including the troublesome *cuccagne*, for fear of revolt. The Neapolitan government had indeed debated the issue, eventually deciding that not staging the four customary *cuccagne* would have made things worse. Significantly, though, unlike other years, the *cuccagne* did not feature wine fountains in order to prevent the intoxication of already irritated hotheads. The sack of the first *cuccagna* did indeed meet the pessimist expectations, as the Neapolitan plebs displayed an unprecedented amount of irreverence to the sponsors. Not only was the *cuccagna* pillaged a whole day before the due date, but also the plebs dismantled and stole the wood that comprised the edifice on which the comestibles were placed, thus desecrating and rejecting the government’s peace offering. Eventually, as testified by the king’s chief minister, Tanucci, the government reacted to this ‘excessive contempt’ by ordering the guards to shoot a few salvos that resulted in the dispersal of the crowd.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Giovanna Ferrari, ‘Public anatomy lessons and the Carnival: the anatomy theatre of Bologna’, *Past and Present*, 117 (1987), pp. 50–106, at p. 105. See also Rebecca Messbarger, *The lady anatomist: the life and work of Anna Morandi Manzolini* (Chicago, IL, 2010).

<sup>75</sup> Lucia Valenzi, ‘Immagini della plebe napoletana tra XVIII e XIX secolo’, in Laura Guidi et al., eds., *Storia e paure: immaginario collettivo, riti e rappresentazioni della paura in età moderna* (Naples, 1992), p. 350. The Marquis de Sade suggested that the king kept the *cuccagne* in place precisely because he feared ‘this feral mob, knowing well that his Libra is not in balance between the rebellious and homicidal nature of his subjects and the weakness of his rule’, thus believing that abolishing the *cuccagne* would lead to revolt. Sade, *Voyage d’Italie*, p. 441.

<sup>76</sup> Letter of Tanucci to Losada, 14 Feb. 1764, in M. Barrio, ed., *Epistolario* (18 vols., Naples and Rome, 1980–2007), XIII, p. 81.

However, despite this display of force, in lieu of the negative popular reaction, the government caved in and supplied the remaining three *cuccagne* as originally planned.<sup>77</sup>

Nevertheless, following the events of 1764, when the rules of the game had been broken in such a blatant way, showing a distinct lack of respect towards the sponsors, some of the government officials expressed the need to suppress them altogether. As a sort of a compromise, King Ferdinand IV agreed that the *cuccagne* should be removed from the Royal Palace, to preserve royal dignity, but instead of abolishing them, he ordered their move to the *Largo di Castello*, the square surrounding the Maschio Angioino Castle in 1774. Instead of the king's waving of the handkerchief, the commencement of the brawl was now marked by firing a cannon ball. At last, the disorderly sacks that took place in 1778, echoing those of 1764, were to be the last straw. In that year, three of the four customary *cuccagne* were assaulted before the sound of the cannon: the first just a few instances too early, the second sacked two hours in advance, and the third on the eve of the due date.<sup>78</sup> The following Carnival, a local chronicler laconically stated that the *cuccagne* were not staged 'in order to avoid the usual disorders'.<sup>79</sup> In fact, those of 1778 were to be the last.

Finally, some of the ocular testimonies allow for a rare glimpse into the plebeian internal logic of the sack, attesting to the plebeians' quest for both personal and group prestige. For example, according to Madame Goudar, since the *cuccagna* is displayed well in advance, the assailants can plan well ahead on the prizes they are interested in. Hence, 'at the moment of the sack the most ambitious one neglects the bread and the ducks and chases straight for glory; he flies to the banner [at the very top of the construction] and tries to take possession of it; it is a trophy that he later displays at his home'.<sup>80</sup> More significantly, according to Saint-Non, rather than being a disorganized assault, where each contender seeks personal gain, the plebeians 'of each neighbourhood come together' in a shared effort to fetch the best provisions. Once it is over, 'the more successful are carried in triumph by their comrades'.<sup>81</sup> We also learn from rivalry between factions partaking in the sack from local sources, not coincidentally, during extreme situations like in 1764. For example, Tanucci identified the unceremonious sackers as a 'mob, living around San Francesco Saverio'.<sup>82</sup> Stressing their occupational allegiance instead, the local gazette

<sup>77</sup> For the descriptions of *cuccagne* that year, see *Avvisi di Napoli*, 14 Feb. 1764, n. 7, and 6 Mar. 1764, n. 9.

<sup>78</sup> Jean Claude Richard de Saint-Non, *Voyage pittoresque ou description des royaumes de Naples et de Sicile* (5 vols., Paris, 1781–5), 1, p. 251.

<sup>79</sup> Vincenzo Florio, 'Memorie storiche, ossia annali napoletani dal 1759 in avanti', *Archivio Storico per le Province Napoletane*, 31 (1906), pp. 28–124, at p. 53.

<sup>80</sup> Sara Goudar, *Relation historique des divertissemens du Carnaval de Naples ou lettre de Madame Goudar sur se sujet à Monsieur le Général Alexis Orlow* (Lucques, 1774), p. 14.

<sup>81</sup> Saint-Non, *Voyage pittoresque*, 1, p. 250.

<sup>82</sup> Letter of Tanucci to Charles III, 14 Feb. 1764, in Barrio, ed., *Epistolario*, XIII, p. 85. Plebeian rivalries in the *cuccagna* are reminiscent of parallel occurrences in Venice, where

described them as being ‘plebeian rabble’ (*plebagia*) working as ‘carriers of sedan chairs and porters’.<sup>83</sup> These descriptions of plebeian rites of transgression and their role in enhancing group identity fit well to what Mikhail Bakhtin calls the grotesque dimensions of Carnival, in which destruction and desecration, dismemberment and mutilation, degradation, and coarse laughter, among others, combine into a distilled version of the irreverent laughter of the folk, in stark opposition to the agenda and cultural values of the civilized elites.<sup>84</sup> They also prove right Zemon Davis’s assessment, according to which, ‘rather than being a mere “safety-valve”, deflecting attention from social reality, festive life can on the one hand perpetuate certain values of the community, even guarantee its survival, and on the other hand, criticize political order’.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, the *cuccagne* finally cease to exist precisely when the plebeian criticism of the authorities via the rejection of the official gift condemns them as ultimately unsustainable and obsolete.

#### IV

Summing up, early modern authorities in Naples were threatened by a considerable number of unruly elements present during the Carnival season: the throwing of objects or the infliction of other offensive actions and words, causing numerous bodily injuries and homicides; the pervasiveness of such quarrelsome masks as Pulcinella, and the resulting behaviour of their wearers; morally objectionable behaviour triggered by the sexual freedoms allowed during the festive season; the tumultuous pillages of the *cuccagne*, and their connection to the general threat of social revolt that Carnivals carried during unstable historical junctures. Indeed, out of all of these elements, the *cuccagne* are the most outstanding because of their uninterrupted use by three consecutive governments for more than 150 years. Moreover, it is remarkable that they increased in scale, opulence, and artistic sophistication as the eighteenth century progressed. Indeed, when they are placed in a larger

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Davis shows clearly how factional rivalries were behind such events as the wars of the fists, or bull baiting. Venice was split between two great factions known as the Nicolotti and the Castellani, built in their turn on several dozen neighbourhoods and occupational groups. Moreover, speaking of bull baiting, Davis claims that ‘the Council of Ten also sought to defuse the factional nature of the event by forcibly moving it to “those special days of Carnival, [when it is] according to ancient custom usually permitted”, the better to ensure that inversion and buffoonery might become the predominant themes of the festival, rather than conflict and rivalry’, Robert Davis, ‘The trouble with bulls: how to stage a *caccia dei tori* in early modern Venice’, *Histoire Social/Social History*, 29 (1996), pp. 275–90, at p. 290. See also idem, *The war of the fists: popular culture and public violence in late Renaissance Venice* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 39–44, 117–27.

<sup>83</sup> *Avvisi di Napoli*, 14 Feb. 1764, n. 7.

<sup>84</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his world*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN, 1984), especially, pp. 302–67.

<sup>85</sup> Zemon Davis, ‘The reasons of misrule’, p. 41.

European context, the survival of Neapolitan *cuccagne* until 1778 marks them as idiosyncratic and anachronistic. They contradict such cherished Enlightenment ideals which forcefully criticized grand displays of conspicuous consumption, and more importantly condemned violent sports and animal torture, as it was clearly displayed in the criticisms of foreign travellers spectating the Neapolitan brawls. In other words, the fact that the Austrian Habsburgs and the Bourbons kept in place the chaotic and savage *cuccagne* at a time when the rest of Europe underwent a ‘civilizing process’ – to use Norbert Elias’s term – sets Naples aside in this respect.<sup>86</sup> This is probably a result of the political anxieties shared by both regimes as new rulers to Naples. In the case of the Habsburgs, the Emperor Charles VI was constantly engaged in expansionist wars, following the Wars of the Spanish Succession, and his related need of legitimization could be provided through propagandistic displays of merry making. It is in this context that we should appreciate the Austrian viceroys’ introduction of the stable and grander *cuccagne*. Similarly, the Bourbons’ instalment as a new cadet dynasty in 1734 placed the new rulers under pressure, a situation exacerbated in 1759 when the government was placed in the hands of an infant king, guided by a regency, as a result of his father’s assumption of the Spanish crown. The fragility of the Bourbons’ position is best reflected by their recoiling to plebian intimidation, as they kept supplying the *cuccagne* from 1764 onwards, long after it became clear that the plebs were unwilling to keep the minimum degree of orderliness expected by the sponsors.

<sup>86</sup> Norbert Elias, *The civilizing process*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (2 vols., Oxford, 1978–82).