



PALGRAVE STUDIES IN POLITICAL HISTORY

# Popular Agency and Politicisation in Nineteenth-Century Europe

Beyond the Vote

*Edited by*  
Diego Palacios Cerezales  
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# Palgrave Studies in Political History

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The contested nature of legitimacy lies at the heart of modern politics. A continuous tension can be found between the public, demanding to be properly represented, and their representatives, who have their own responsibilities along with their own rules and culture. Political history needs to address this contestation by looking at politics as a broad and yet entangled field rather than as something confined to institutions and politicians only. As political history thus widens into a more integrated study of politics in general, historians are investigating democracy, ideology, civil society, the welfare state, the diverse expressions of opposition, and many other key elements of modern political legitimacy from fresh perspectives. Parliamentary history has begun to study the way rhetoric, culture and media shape representation, while a new social history of politics is uncovering the strategies of popular meetings and political organizations to influence the political system.

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Diego Palacios Cerezales · Oriol Luján  
Editors

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# Introduction: Perspectives on Agency and Citizenship

*Diego Palacios Cerezales*<sup>✉</sup> and *Oriol Luján*<sup>✉</sup>

‘A thinker that publishes a widely read treatise’, wrote Joaquim Lopes Praça, one of the foremost Portuguese law professors of the nineteenth century ‘is an active citizen of all the civilised nations’.<sup>1</sup> This optimist follower of Benjamin Constant played with the idea of citizenship not being a status bound by law and national belonging, but as a type of agency, as a practice producing political effects and reverberating in the workings of society. Although Lopes Praça limited his musings to the

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transnational citizenship of influential thinkers, including female writers such as Madame de Staël, the idea called for further exploration.

The relationship between agency and status underpins political life. Studies on political citizenship in the shadow of T. H. Marshall focus more on status than on agency, as he identified political citizenship with the right to vote.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the nineteenth-century struggles of the non-enfranchised groups have been understood, under Marshall's umbrella, as quests for inclusion, in a double loop that would encompass access to the status of citizenship and emancipation from different forms of tutelage: servitude, patronage, wage-system, imperialism and male domination.<sup>3</sup> From this perspective, the history of politics presumes a narrative of modernisation in which successive waves of inclusion, mainly through the expansion of suffrage rights, build up democracy.<sup>4</sup> This is a powerful theme that serves to make sense of some aspects of our collective history, but at the same time, it projects a shadow over many political experiences of conflict and participation in the recent past which cannot be understood as struggles for inclusion or emancipation. The teleological narrative projects a retrospective agenda over history that obscures the many potential futures that were at play in the conflicts and struggles of the past. It also puts at the centre of the narrative a selection of supposedly forward-looking actors and political projects—the bourgeoisie, the working class, liberalism and nationalism—and tends to disregard the weight and potential influence of groups and individuals that are cast, often without due care, as mere relics of the past.

From different starting points, during the past decades many lines of research have been challenging those narratives and putting agency and experience at the centre of the political life of the nineteenth century, thus somehow developing Lopes Praça's intuition. Historiography has been *en miettes* for a long time, fragmented by geography, scale, interdisciplinary dialogues and schools.<sup>5</sup> Yet the saliency of a rethinking of citizenship and politicisation over the past decade invited us to gather and systematise some threads, and to move forward with a common discussion. Since the spring of 2019, the editors of this volume have addressed this need in different forums and networks, reaching out to colleagues in various countries.<sup>6</sup> The process culminated in a lively two-day conference in January 2021 at Madrid's Complutense University, which Covid-19 forced us to hold online. The contributors presented draft versions of their chapters and exchanged views and interpretations, in a discussion that also developed the initial points of the call for papers and helped

to sketch the main traits of the current historiographical moment, as outlined below.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, several colleagues joined us in the conversation. Maurizio Isabella and Gregorio Alonso, among others, generously contributed to connecting themes and highlighting gaps, thus becoming, by their agency, if not by their status, honorary citizens of this collective book.

\* \* \*

The rise of the norm of national sovereignty as the main referent of legitimacy in the nineteenth century has drawn historians' and social scientists' attention to the political role of the multiplicity of individuals and groups, elites and non-elites, men and women, that could claim a share in the body of the nation. How did people engage in politics? How did they conceive of their agency and status? What drove the changes in political cultures, practices and identities? Was there a politics of the people? How did an issue, area of activity or identity become political?

These questions have had a variety of answers over the years. The crisis of modernity, however, allowed historians and other social scientists to identify that many of the problems and analytical categories that had hitherto defined their work had been inherited from those elaborated by the modernising elites that dominated the intellectual field in the aftermath of the Age of Revolution. In the twentieth century, historians of the previous century were often prolonging debates anchored in very specific fields of experience of the recent past, standing on the shoulders of one small and peculiar set of actors, namely the leading intellectual and political elites who drove post-revolutionary societies. On the one hand, this problem explains some of the difficulties in the dialogue between historians of early modernity and those working in the nineteenth century, as the latter often saw the past through narrow lenses calibrated by nineteenth-century polemical projects. Even the notion that politics is a separate realm of activity, differentiated from family, religion or economy, for example, is more a component of a particular discourse on social order attached to a set of power relations, and thus a contested issue, than a transhistorical element of reality that historians should take at face value.

Even when the narrower understandings of politics were called into question, the autonomy of political agency was often neglected. For instance, according to the Marxist version of modernisation, the structural changes in society had an identifiable logical dynamic that explained new

practices and identities. In other words, elites performed coherently as a stable unity to face possible tensions and attempted to dominate society.<sup>8</sup> The working class, in turn, became political by maturation, by discovering a transcendent class interest already inscribed in the economic structure of society.

In contrast, other approaches were more sensitive to the autonomy of political agency. However, the latter often focussed on the leading role of the elites, either cultural, political or bureaucratic, who would be the agents transmitting knowledge and framing opportunities to a hitherto passive population. Sociological accounts linked modernisation and politicisation and understood the latter as the transformation of the ‘traditional’ and ‘parochial’ life-dispositions of the majority of the (mostly rural) lower classes which would cease to be ‘peasants’ and become ‘citizens’. The shift was fostered by socio-economic change and shaped by the cultural and educative hegemony of central elites, who developed policies aimed at integrating the population of the peripheries in a national community.<sup>9</sup> These schemas were echoed by historians such as Maurice Agulhon and Eugen Weber, who were interested in how politics ‘descended’ to the masses, even if they disagreed with the chronology.<sup>10</sup> In other words, politics had to be learned and the ability to transmit this expertise resided in the elites, as the other actors in society either did not care or were insufficiently prepared.

The same schemas resonated in the work of historians of nationalism and nation-building, who channelled Massimo d’Azeglio’s dictum about the making of Italy having to be followed by the making of Italians.<sup>11</sup> As recent critical analyses have highlighted, these approaches, notwithstanding their diversity, shared two problems. First, historians tended to see politicisation as a top-down process, leaving little space for bottom-up agency and autonomous crafting of political identities by means, for example, of the experiences of resistance by communities, trades and other social collectives and identities to the reach of the market or the state. And second, they selected a narrow array of elites, such as liberals, republicans, reformers and the state, which they associated with modernity, thus leaving aside the effects of the action and mobilisation associated with other political points of reference, such as legitimism, Bonapartism or Catholicism.<sup>12</sup>

In response to the elite-focussed conceptions of politics, historians of social conflict addressed popular protest and working-class organisation, with the aim of identifying the faces in the crowd.<sup>13</sup> These studies

refreshed the understanding of the role of ordinary people in political events while opening the field to the integration of women into the political history of the past. Movements and events, however, were often measured against a preconceived perspective regarding their contribution to the emancipation of the lower classes. Sometimes, thus, the focus on politicisation from below and the quest for class or popular autonomy tended to disregard the interaction between ordinary people and elite and institutional processes in the framing of the political experience. Moreover, it was not uncommon to select the relevant study-objects from a future-oriented and ideologically biased perspective.<sup>14</sup>

The interest in popular participation, however, widened the range of actors that were politically consequential and allowed the practices of people without voting rights to be taken into account. This also made it possible to broaden the debate on the forms political action could take. Within this dialogue, Charles Tilly coined the concept of a ‘repertoire of contention’ and analysed systematically the set of types of collective action a given population might make use of to claim and protect what they perceived as their rights. These repertoires changed with the transformations of society at large, but they also demonstrated their own cultural consistency.<sup>15</sup> Despite his methodological awareness, however, Tilly’s comparative narratives were heavily conditioned by the ‘exemplary’ experiences of Great Britain and France. Moreover, his penchant for identifying the ‘modern’ elements of political mobilisation made him overlook, for example, the peculiarities and effects of the religious underpinning of many of the social and political movements of the nineteenth century, which he associated with legacies of the past.<sup>16</sup>

The original notion of repertoire, moreover, was also heavily impressed by a dualism pitting a traditional repertoire against a modern one. The interest in identifying shifts from traditional to modern forms of action, or pioneers, moreover, had a perverse effect. Mimicking the dead ends of the history of technology, by highlighting singular innovations that could be presented as harbingers of the future, an ocean of actual non-modern practices and experiences was relegated to the background.<sup>17</sup>

In fact, recent contributions to the social and cultural history of politics show that most accounts of the history of popular participation and democracy in the nineteenth century have been normative and future-oriented, overlooking the meanings shared by the people engaging in mobilisation.<sup>18</sup> Even when launching new forms of mobilisation through

the press, associations, meetings or petitions, the people were not discovering and perfecting twentieth-century understandings of citizenship or ‘party democracy’. The latter was instead the ‘unexpected outcome of the trial and error with different modes of political expression [and] popular participation’.<sup>19</sup> This important point opens up the scope of the experiences to be analysed as part of the European-wide experimentation with modes of interpreting the rule of the people.

For the past two decades or so, from different settings and national historiographies, new trends in political history have been trying to overcome the above-mentioned blind spots by adopting an all-encompassing and relational conception of politics. They also open up the analysis to a broader scope of actors and highlight politicisation as an activity, as an experience of agency that gave new political meaning to religious, trade or legal spheres of action. Politicisation rearranged the relationship between ordinary people and elites, between institutional and non-institutional practices and between participation and representation.<sup>20</sup>

According to this, instead of reducing the interpretation of politicisation to a binary perspective (top-down or bottom-up directions), social interactions within society have gained relevance in understanding politics and the shaping of political and administrative institutions. That is, most current approaches propose that institutions have not been established by the activity of rulers, authorities and states only but were the outcome of multidirectional social relations within society.<sup>21</sup> Social interactions shaped the state and its institutions, often empowering groups and individuals in different social spaces.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, politicisation can no longer be understood either as a change in the psychological dispositions of the population transmitted by elites or as a one-sided practice, but as a fluid exchange in which meanings are negotiated. Politics happened, and happens, in social interaction, intermingling institutional and non-institutional dimensions.

Despite the common themes and approaches that surface in many works, the crisis of the modernity-oriented historiography on the nineteenth century has not produced a shared research agenda. Yet historians have liberated the exploration of the experiences of politics and politicisation of the past from many of the inherited inertias. This book moves forward with such exploration by tackling different dimensions of politicisation.



The chapters in this volume put the agency of individuals in Western Europe at the core of politics throughout the Age of Revolution. Full political citizenship as status, crowned by the right to vote, was cherished by many but was far from being the fulcrum of the collective political experience of nineteenth-century Europeans. That is, male and female individuals, by mobilising, expressing themselves, protesting, getting involved in campaigns, petitions or associations or acting in their everyday lives, were behaving politically regardless of their formal status of citizenship. They contributed to defining both the contours of the political arena and many of the issues at stake.

The book thus deals with politics in the broader sense, inviting us to explore the imbrication between institutional settings—administration, the vote, formal representation—and the non-institutional practices of political agency, contestation and participation. The first two chapters, by Theo Jung and Emmanuel Fureix, highlight the consistency, direction and political weight of popular demonstrations, in which the collective action, and inaction, of popular actors was an integral part of the process of political legitimisation and contestation. Theo Jung considers acclamations in early nineteenth-century Europe as elements of the symbolic legitimisation of the established order but also as meaningful forms of expressing disaffection. Given the scarcity of other means of aggregating preferences, these public performative events were politically consequential, contributed to public debate and helped to articulate public opinion. The weight of this thesis may be further emphasised if we realise that even a paragon of constitutional politics like Alexis de Tocqueville agonised in July 1849 when serving as French foreign minister, because his agents in Rome could not gather a crowd big enough to cheer the French troops that had defeated the Roman Republic of Mazzini and Garibaldi.<sup>23</sup> In his nuanced chapter, in turn, Emmanuel Fureix analyses iconoclasm in France, stressing the popular intervention in placing, modifying or destroying political symbology and monuments. Fureix argues that those popular demonstrations contributed to a definition of informal citizenship, by means of the self-assertion of political beliefs and identities. Both Fureix and Jung highlight that the manifestations they analyse peaked during the first half of the nineteenth century and explain their subsequent relative decline by the development of electoral politics.

Chapters 2 and 3 focus on female involvement in politics. Alvaro París analyses the political behaviour of market women in Madrid and Marseille, highlighting their capacity to frame models of political agency.

Even when they sided with organised political currents, such as counter-revolutionary royalism, female market vendors did so on their own terms, not as passive pawns of a powerful patron. From this point of view, they adopted royalism as a point of reference on which their own understanding of the causes of their troubles and penuries pivoted. In turn, the chapter by Florencia Peyrou examines a wide array of instances of women's involvement in politics in Spain between 1808 and 1874. By recounting the myriad experiences of fighting, publishing, educating, conspiring or taking to the streets, Peyrou challenges the consistency of the separation of the two spheres, as women repeatedly played an active part in public politics, exercising a sort of political citizenship without formal political rights.

The role of the interaction between individuals and administration in the crafting of political identities comes to the forefront in Chapter 5. Volker Köhler follows a Tocquevillian approach to the trends in administrative reform that antedated the French Revolution, focussing on the experience of the principality of Mainz. Before the French wars brought the revolutionary themes and slogans to this German principality, and well before the city of Mainz became the capital of the French department of Mont-Tonnerre (1798–1814), the administrative officials were already counting its inhabitants as equal subjects regarding recruitment and taxes. The French years were far from being inconsequential, and the new language of citizenship may have shaped the experience of the inhabitants of Mainz to some extent. Still, Köhler argues that the main elements of the interaction between the individuals and the State that shaped the self-understandings of the inhabitants belong to a longer trend of administrative change that predated the revolutionary upheavals and survived them.

While counting inhabitants for military recruitment purposes was key to both enlightened governments and post-revolutionary ones, and soldiers were subordinated to a rigidly hierarchical and obedient organisation separated from civil society, another tradition linked the bearing of arms to citizenship status. This tradition achieved institutional recognition in a myriad of citizen militias or national-guard-like organisations across Europe, which became the hubs of a *sui generis* experience of citizenship. In Chapter 6, Jordi Roca analyses the militia of Barcelona, stressing the involvement of factory labourers. The various revolutionary and social crises experienced by the city between the 1820s and the 1870s meant that the militia assumed contrasting compositions and played

very different roles, according to the changing contextual circumstances, leadership and social struggles of the moment. He finds, moreover, a sophisticated world of plebeian activist engagement in which urban workers treated as separate their political militancy, for which the militia was one of their main tools, and their labour concerns, for which they used dedicated trade associations.

In Chapter 7, Oriol Luján dwells on the tension between different interpretations of legislation and compares Spanish and French electoral protests. Engaging in these protests represented an additional layer of political activity. Electoral protests conveyed multiple functionalities not necessarily previously foreseen by the law. Voters and non-voters tried to change or nullify electoral results, expressed a political opinion and took an active part in their self-definition as citizens. The chapter argues as well that individuals crafted their own interpretations of the law to define themselves as political actors, whether or not they were legally considered political citizens.

The role of non-voters during elections analysed by Luján connects with Malcolm Crook and Tom Crook's chapter, dedicated to the participation in events connected to the election by non-voters in France and Great Britain. The authors consider public occasions such as the nomination of candidates, the processions supporting them, the celebration of the results and the disturbances around elections. These instances of popular participation did not challenge the existing power relations and formal exclusions. Yet the involvement of non-electors was vital in both countries, as elections were considered a communal expression. These forms of involvement implied a sense of public accountability to the whole community. Despite not voting, non-electors were crucial political actors that legitimised the electoral process.

Chapters 9–11 focus on mass political campaigning. Voters and non-voters, including women, learned by trial and error, and by imitation, that they could enhance their political agency by their involvement in voluntary associations or by engaging in specific campaigns. In Chapter 9, Maartje Janse surveys the Irish Catholic Association, the British female and radical anti-slavery societies, and the Dutch temperance movement, proposing that associational life not only broadened popular participation but also played a key part in the reconfiguration of the realm of politics itself. Activism moved the boundaries of what was considered political and was crucial for politicising local grievances and crafting political identities.

In Chapter 10, Henry Miller considers mass petitioning in Britain. Miller finds that radicals and reformers were not the only groups taking part in transforming the forms of mass political participation witnessed in the nineteenth century. British conservatives also made consistent use of mass petitions throughout the century, even if their campaigns were usually reactive. Their campaigning played an essential role in the configuration of conservative political identities, including, for example, female loyalism in Northern Ireland.

The last chapter, by Diego Palacios Cerezales, also focusses on mass subscriptions, but this time of transnational scope: the six main campaigns of Catholics across the world in support of the temporal power of Pope Pius IX (1846–1878). Catholics heavily relied upon the example set by the Irish Catholic Association, analysed by Maartje Janse in her contribution, but the modes of engaging in the campaign relied on the local traditions of activism. By contrasting examples from Portugal, Spain, France, Belgium and Italy, this chapter highlights, first, the diversity of modes of collecting signatures between countries and campaigns, and then, the growing role of the activist newspaper as a tool for mass mobilisation, thus joining Henry Miller in highlighting the importance of conservatives and reactionaries in the expansion of the forms of political identification and participation associated with modernity.

This book thus deals with different temporal and spatial scales, following problems and developments across borders. Furthermore, it provides insight into the state of the field across a variety of national historiographies. Moreover, all the chapters show that there were common trends and connections in the political experiences of the Western Europeans of the nineteenth century. Ordinary men and women became political while confronting problems, reacting to crises, interacting with administrators and elites and joining movements and campaigns.

Politicisation emerges from different chapters as a change in people's sense of self. A transformation in their understanding of the significance of their own actions and the formation of the belief—or hope—that they could make a difference by taking part in politics, an arena that, by the same process, acquired new boundaries. People crafted their political agency by drawing on traditions and new methods, imitating and inventing, colouring with their own perspective the general discourses and the legislation proposed to them, and both by following and refusing to follow leaders and elites. In any case, they were active producers of their

political experience. Their mode of politicisation should hence be understood on its own terms and not against any ideal model of citizenship. Historical forms of citizenship thus emerge in the grey area between the actual and potential status that grants rights and the effective agency of those that engage in (and define the boundaries of) politics.

All the contributors to this book deal with the political experiences prospectively, in the making, and not as underdeveloped or imperfect essays of future practices or as by-products of modernisation. The experience of modernity, however, still casts a strong shadow over the book as a whole, even if it is a ‘disenchanted modernity’, as Fureix puts it in his important book on nineteenth-century French historiography.<sup>24</sup> It is worthwhile, therefore, to sketch some reflections around what this difficulty in getting rid of the idea of modernisation reveals.

The concluding remarks of many chapters imply that some of the political experiences they analyse lost centrality during the second half of the nineteenth century, albeit may be temporarily. Many practices lost weight in the face of the growth of political machines and the reinforcement of the institutionalised procedures of political competition, justice and administration. This may suggest that the narrative of modernisation is still relevant. But it may also signal that research on subsequent periods should be revised as well. A reconsideration of the political life of the following decades may uncover the survival and revival of unconventional forms of politics—an inspiration here could be Fravretto and Itçaina’s take on the pervasiveness of ‘traditional’ forms of action and expression in twentieth and even twenty-first-century politics.<sup>25</sup> Another gap in our criticism of the modernisation paradigm may be detected in the study of the politicisation of presumed conservative and Catholic groups, as analysed by Paris, Miller and Palacios Cerezales. We demonstrate that the scope of actors that engage with mass communication and mobilisation at a national and transnational scale in the nineteenth century encompasses groups well beyond the modernising elites traditionally understood as such. The result of the operation, however, may risk bringing back a reframed version of the modernisation narrative.

Given the current state of research and conceptualisation, no definite solution can be provided to the gaps identified above. One potential way forward could be to recognise that the rejection of the storyline of modernity as an overarching explicative narrative does not imply discarding the same modernity as a historically determined cultural form. That is, as a cultural form that, once it crystallised, nested into the cognitive

toolkit of many actors, providing schemas to organise their experience and colouring the patterns of politicisation. From a methodological approach coherent with the agenda of this book, however, it is important to highlight that the functioning of this cultural form in each site of social interaction, on the one hand, and its eventual correspondence with effective lines of change at a macro-societal level, on the other, cannot be determined a priori. Only future empirical research will be able to resolve it.

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# Plebiscites on the Streets: The Politics of Public Acclamation in Early Nineteenth-Century Europe

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In an anonymous 1831 contribution entitled ‘What is public opinion worth?’, the *Neue Monatsschrift für Deutschland* posed a question that was on many contemporaries’ minds. While a growing number of public commentators had come to understand public opinion as the ultimate foundation of any legitimate government, the article warned that its precise nature was still little understood. Too often, it remained a ‘*vis obscura*’ expressed in ‘mere ejaculations’: *long live X!* on the one hand, *down with Y!* on the other.<sup>1</sup>

To underscore his argument, the author quoted a satirical historical account that had recently appeared in the *Gazette de France*.<sup>2</sup> It consisted of a long list of the most popular ‘cries of Paris’ from 1788

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to the present. The resulting juxtaposition of the varying exclamations that had resounded in Parisian streets throughout the years, the author explained, demonstrated the capriciousness of public opinion. The cries of 1788—‘Long live the good Louis XVI! Long live the queen! Long live the notables!’—had turned into ‘Down with the notables! Long live the Estates General!’ by the next year, only to change again the year after: ‘Down with the Estates General! Long live the Constituent Assembly! Long live Necker!’ While Louis XVIII had been cheered by Parisians as ‘the Legislator King’ and Napoleon taunted as ‘the Tyrant’ in early 1815, by March Napoleon was cheered alongside cries of ‘Down with the Bourbons!’. In July, after the Battle of Waterloo, public opinion again changed its tone, expressing itself in the cries of ‘Down with the Corsican!’ and ‘Long Live Louis the Desired!’. The same politicians and principles that had been hailed after the July Revolution of 1830 had recently turned into objects of scorn: ‘Down with Lafitte! Down with Lupin! [...] Down with the Republicans!...’ The article ended with an ominous: ‘More to follow soon’.

Of course, the reduction of French political history in this eventful period to a mere sequence of acclamations was the stuff of satire. Yet for all their exaggeration, these German and French newspaper articles reflect the significance contemporaries ascribed to public acclamations. In this, they go against the grain of much of current historical scholarship. Since acclamations are a pervasive phenomenon throughout the ages, historiographical studies often mention them in passing. Yet as they are mostly thought of as an atmospheric, rather than a functional, element of political events, they are seldom put at the centre of analysis in their own right. While this is understandable against the background of current political systems, the situation before the mid-nineteenth century was fundamentally different. As other opportunities for political articulation and participation remained sharply constrained, for large parts of the population cheering, jeering, and other collective public vocalisations represented one of the few available modes of political engagement. As a vocal crowd, they could be an integral part of political processes and events, as well as a potential catalyst for moments of politicisation. By focussing on selected case studies from various European nations during the Age of Revolutions, the following essay aims to identify some entry points for a historical reconsideration of this ephemeral, but momentous mode of popular politics. It proceeds in three steps. First, we address the current state of research on acclamations, outlining the theoretical

and empirical hurdles that have hitherto hampered its systematic historical consideration. The second section traces the typical forms, functions, and situations of public acclamations in (post-)revolutionary Europe. Focussing on the structural tensions between the practice's symbolic holism—suggesting the expression of the communities' undivided will—and its underlying complexities as a mode of collective action, it explains why acclamations became such a highly charged medium of political interaction. The third and final section considers the difficult question of the political impact and significance of acclamations. In addition to the differentiation of their many direct and indirect effects, this leads to the contributions' central claim: although acclamations are a phenomenon of all times and places, they gained a historically unique significance during the Age of Revolutions.

### HISTORICAL RESEARCH ON ACCLAMATIONS: CURRENT STATE AND FUTURE AVENUES

At first glance, acclamations might seem to be just one of those phenomena that are so ubiquitous that they effectively become invisible, inhibiting their critical examination. Yet there are more specific reasons for the relative dearth of historical research on the topic as well. One of these lies in the concept itself, which has seen a branching off between its everyday understanding and a more technical usage in academic discourse. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Max Weber put forward an influential theoretical account of acclamations as a mode of public recognition of legitimacy. Contrasting them to the vote, he argued that acclamations differed, first, in that they are not a matter of choice between alternatives but of the 'acceptance of the reality of a qualification that does not originate in the election, but precedes it',<sup>3</sup> and second, that they are ultimately not about majorities, but about unanimity: on a symbolic level, at least, acclamations do not allow for the continued existence of a plurality of opinions and interests but purport to express the community's unified will.

Following Weber, political scientists and historians alike have continued to flesh out the role of acclamations in the legitimisation of power.<sup>4</sup> A variety of regimes—from the nineteenth-century French Second Empire to twentieth-century dictatorships—are habitually labelled as 'acclamatory' in nature.<sup>5</sup> Yet in such contexts, a very specific understanding of the concept has taken hold. In an effort to distinguish between different

regime types, acclamations are all but equated with the plebiscite, while in normative terms, they are reduced to the purely ornamental legitimisation of the existing order by a submissive and more or less passive populace. While this point of view has proven fruitful in many respects, it has also tended to shift scholarly focus away from the more concrete—situational, corporeal, symbolic, visual, auditive, and emotional—aspects of a well-known practice of vociferous street politics.

This does not mean that there is no basis from which to proceed at all. While a systematic historical analysis of acclamations in modern European politics is still in its infancy, its development can hope to build on at least three well-established areas of research. In stark contrast to experts on the modern era, historians of ancient politics have long had a strong interest in the collective practices of acclamation, tracing the variety of its modes and functions, as well as their historical development against the background of changing political circumstances.<sup>6</sup> Applying this approach to modern regimes lets us rediscover an important element of the repertoire of political action that is too often overlooked. Secondly, we can also draw on recent developments in the historical study of theatrical, musical, and rhetorical performances, which have stressed the interactive nature of the relation between performers and their audiences.<sup>7</sup> Examining moments of acclamation shows how our understanding of the presence of figures of authority in public spaces can profit from a similar perspective, since ‘the people’ were never just a passive audience of power: through their corporeal and vocal responses, they contributed to its symbolic constitution. Finally, the study of acclamations ties into historical scholarship on other aspects of street politics, from parades, military reviews, and protests, to banquets, meetings, festivals, and funerals, which have attracted much interest in recent decades. Focussing on a political practice that constitutes a crucial element in many such situations promises to shed new light on their inner dynamics and historical development.

Even so, it cannot be denied that we are still very much at the beginning of this effort. The highly situational nature of acclamations makes this a fascinating but also difficult field of study. In principle, there is an enormous wealth of evidence available, ranging from innumerable press reports, through private observations in diaries, correspondence, travel writing, and memoirs, to visual depictions. Fictional narratives, theoretical reflections, and satirical accounts are of interest too, as they reflect contemporaries’ understandings and assessments of the phenomenon and its significance. Yet at the same time, the sheer number of cases also poses

a challenge. A large-scale, statistically founded comparative analysis, in the manner of Charles Tilly's unsurpassed work on the repertoires of contentious politics, would undoubtedly be a rewarding path to pursue.<sup>8</sup> Yet in view of the piecemeal and scattered character of the available evidence and the fragmented state of current research, its implementation may remain beyond our grasp for the foreseeable future. In the meantime, however, a qualitative analysis of some selected cases may help to understand the nature of political acclamations, their impact, the conflicts they (re)produced, and their historical development. While such a preliminary step cannot hope to be exhaustive, it can nonetheless be useful to identify some potentially fruitful avenues for future research.

Besides terminological issues and the nature of the available material, a final challenge to the study of acclamations lies in the question of where to begin and end such an endeavour. In many respects, acclamations seem to be a transhistorical phenomenon. As mentioned, public encounters between the powerful and their subjects were habitually accompanied by signs of homage at least since antiquity; and even today, reports on political events still commonly involve observations about the content, volume, emotional tone, and length of audiences' displays of consent and dissent.<sup>9</sup> While the forms of acclamations vary across different countries and regions, there seem to be no obvious limits to their general occurrence around the globe.

The lack of natural boundaries to an object of study opens its investigation to a wide variety of case studies. But it also puts pressure on every one of them to justify their particular focus. In considering the practices of and discourses on acclamations in various European nations between the revolutions of 1789 and 1848, the following essay seeks to put forward such arguments on two levels: historical and geographical. In the final section, it will be argued that the political significance ascribed to public acclamations reached a high point in the (post-)revolutionary era, when the question of the articulation of the nation's voice came into focus in new ways, while many means of its expression were still highly circumscribed. In spatial terms, the cases studied show that, despite their essentially situational nature, acclamations in this period constituted a fundamentally European phenomenon, not just because its incidences were scattered across the continent (as they were elsewhere) but also in a more encompassing and transnational sense.

According to its introduction, the *Gazette de France's* 1831 historical account of the cries of Paris was taken from 'an English journal'. I have

been unable to identify its source, and it must be mentioned that such purported references in this era often constituted a purposeful misdirection of the censors. But whatever the case may be, the fact that the text pointed to a British origin, was printed in a French paper, and subsequently translated into German illustrates how the subject of acclamations crossed national borders.

Contemporary newspapers habitually contained detailed reports on current events in other nations, while travellers often commented on what they had witnessed abroad in published or unpublished correspondence, diaries, or travelogues. In some respects, the accounts of acclamations contained in such sources were one more step removed from immediate events. Yet this distance could also be an advantage, especially in the case of negative acclamations, which local press reports often underplayed or omitted with the censors in mind. Besides, the comparative perspectives such foreign observations invariably entailed are significant in other respects too, as they reflect contemporaries' understandings of the peculiarities of acclamatory behaviour in different countries.

From the outbreak of the Revolution of 1789 onwards, the French became the primary point of reference for such comparative classifications. According to one typical description, the ardour with which British Prime Minister William Pitt was welcomed in the South-West of England in August 1789 'could not have been exceeded by the *French*, in the reception of that popular idol M. Necker.—They were vociferous in praise, and vied with each other in expressions of approbation, affection, and gratitude'.<sup>10</sup> But the same stereotypes could also lead to disappointment. When the Prussian historian Friedrich von Raumer attended a review of the troops by Charles X in Paris on the eve of the July Revolution of 1830, he was amazed that the French, 'who otherwise shout more than necessary, and give more applause than other peoples (if only to make themselves more important)', now remained completely 'silent and immobile'.<sup>11</sup> He was embarrassed to discover that he was the only spectator who had taken off his hat, and 'as not a single *Vive le Roi* resounded, I didn't want to start myself'.<sup>12</sup> A few weeks later, when the king attended mass at Notre-Dame de Paris in celebration of the conquest of Algiers, Raumer found the silence on the streets not quite as oppressive as before, but still added: 'it was not as it should be!' The few isolated cries of *Vive le Roi* remained weak and soon died away: 'The supposedly more phlegmatic Germans would have shown their sympathy with full force, with a deeper conviction and purer joy (to other kings of course)'.<sup>13</sup>

Observations about noticeable acclamations in other countries often prompted detailed explanatory excursions. Besides references to national stereotypes, such explanations often entailed potentially controversial claims about the political climate in the state in question. During the Carlist Wars of the 1830s and 1840s, regent queen Cristina and her daughter, crown princess Isabella, were regularly received with less than universal enthusiasm by their subjects. While some German-language newspapers interpreted the Madrilenians' attitude towards Isabella as 'serious proof of the common aversion to the Princess',<sup>14</sup> a Dutch newspaper described the same behaviour as 'calm and respectful', explaining that 'the silence of the population, both on the passage of the queen and that of the princess, is habitual among the Spanish people. Cheering has long been abolished, and one would not have dared to cheer at the passing of the princess, when one does not do it for the queen, as she might consider it an insult to herself'.<sup>15</sup>

The German text quoted at the start of this essay shows how such interpretations could serve as a medium for addressing wider political questions. In conclusion, its translator commented: 'There can really be no shortage of material for this [kind of history writing] as long as public opinion, this alleged queen of the world, retains the power that she has hitherto exercised in France'.<sup>16</sup> While German interest in political developments across the Rhine was pronounced after the 1830 July Revolution, such observations were not just about France. In the translator's eyes, they held valuable lessons for German readers as well. They pointed to general insights about the nature of public opinion: about its inherently fickle nature, but also about how political leaders should deal with it. Referring to examples like Alexander the Great, Charlemagne, and Frederick II, the translator argued that as long as leaders acted in accordance with the spirit of the age, they would be able to guide public opinion, rather than be ruled by it.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to such general lessons, the author linked the particular significance of the cries of Paris to the specific nature of France's political regime. The country's departmental structure tended to weaken the central government, he argued, putting it at the mercy of the alternating cries of the capital's mobs. By contrast, he claimed that in Britain's centralised system, the London crowds had never developed such immediate influence over governmental policy. Again, for all their apparent abstraction, such comparisons between different political systems had