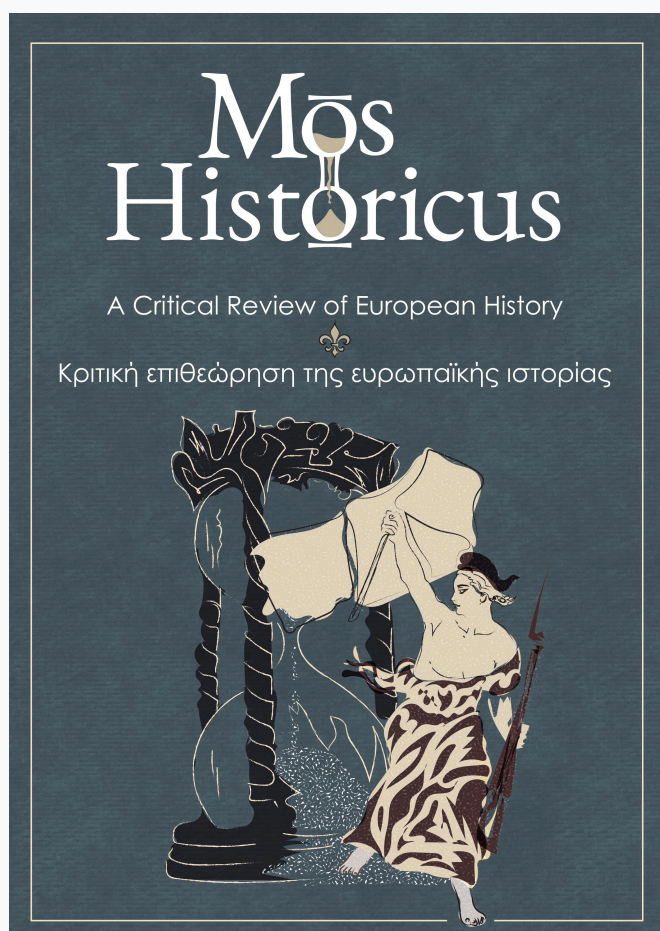


Mos Historicus: A Critical Review of European History

Vol 2, No 1 (2024)

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Introduction

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doi: [10.12681/mh.38751](https://doi.org/10.12681/mh.38751)

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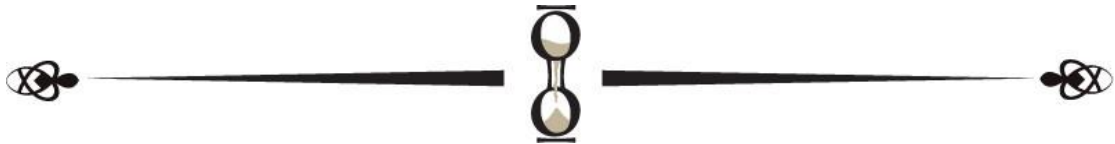
To cite this article:

Michalelli, M., & Papachristou, M. (2024). Introduction: Echoes of Revolutions, Uprisings, Social Movements, and Protests: Historiographical Trajectories and Interpretive Approaches. *Mos Historicus: A Critical Review of European History*, 2(1), 17-29. <https://doi.org/10.12681/mh.38751>

Introduction

Echoes of Revolutions, Uprisings, Social Movements, and Protests: Historiographical Trajectories and Interpretive Approaches

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In the process of interpreting the title of the journal's issue, one confronts the challenge of defining terms such as “revolution”, “revolt”, “social movement”, and “protest”. These terms may seem easily delineated to some readers as they are frequently invoked in media, political analyses, sociological studies and historical research. However, the challenge lies in distilling their complex and nuanced historical trajectories into precise definitions.

Historical Evolution of Resistance

Scholars discern a historical evolutionary process in forms of resistance, rebellion and opposition, differentiating pre-modern forms from modern ones. Pre-modern forms are perceived as particularistic in their interests, localised and segmented, varying from one region to another, and often stemming from metaphysical anxieties and fears and cultivating these concerns to an extent. In contrast, modern forms are frequently associated with national issues, demonstrating greater flexibility and variability in their expression, mobilising people from different localities, and not necessarily inciting

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direct and violent confrontations. Instead, they often transmute into prolonged intellectual conflicts.¹ This shift is accompanied by the emergence of new forms of organisation and coalition among oppositionists that enable them to act with a sense of agency. For example, these organizations often operate autonomously, selecting strategic moments and locations for protests and mobilizations, independent of broader societal disturbances, and maintaining a direct line of communication with authorities.²

The Concept of Revolution

What comprises a “revolution” is an attempt to overthrow the status quo and reform the existing state of affairs. This concept is historically grounded and deeply linked to the events of the French Revolution, particularly the Jacobin Reign of Terror (1793-1794). The reverberations of this seminal event have profoundly shaped the notion of revolution, which has been internalized and disseminated across subsequent generations. Intellectual movements, the aims of participants, and the specific contexts of different eras have continually reshaped revolutionary ideals. Karl Marx's theory of class struggle redefined the concept, emphasizing the pivotal role of the proletariat in future revolutionary movements. Consequently, the modern revolutionary myth has emerged as a seemingly autonomous, deterministic force, propagated by various social groups and institutions, although it remains susceptible to historical evolution.

Since the 1860s, Russian revolutionaries and advocates of revolutionary ideology have placed the intelligentsia at the centre of revolutionary activity. For instance, Vladimir Lenin utilized the Russian intelligentsia to establish the Communist Party and lead the revolution, aiming to create a “revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry”. Similarly, from the Russian Revolution of 1917 to the Chinese Revolution of 1949 and the Cuban Revolution of 1959, the revolutionary narrative increasingly incorporated militaristic tactics. In the Cold War era, the focus shifted towards supporting the independence of “Third World” countries from imperialist powers.

¹ Xabier Itçaina «Conclusion: Popular Culture, Folk Traditions and Protest—A Research Agenda» in Ilaria Favretto and Xabier Itçaina (eds.), *Popular Culture and Popular Protest in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2017, p. 230.

² Donatella della Porta, «Afterwords: Old and New Repertoires of Contention», in Favretto και Itçaina (eds.), *ibid.*, pp. 250-251; Marcel van der Linden, «European Social Protest, 1000-2000», in Stefan Berger and Holger Nehring (eds.), *The History of Social Movements in Global Perspective: A Survey*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2017, p. 177.

The post-1989 era, marked by the end of the Cold War and the revolutions in Eastern and Central Europe, along with the collapse of communist regimes, significantly broadened the concept of “revolution”, challenging prior definitions influenced by communist ideologies.³ As American sociologist and political scientist Jack Goldstone observes, “The study of revolution may be reaching an impasse, in which it is simply overwhelmed by the variety of cases and concepts it seeks to encompass”.⁴

Diverse Perspectives on Revolutions

Revolutions can be understood through various interpretative lenses. One prominent perspective is the heroic view, which portrays revolutions as the mobilization of oppressed masses aiming to overthrow an unjust ruler and secure their freedom. In this view, violence is often seen as a necessary component in achieving revolutionary objectives. Supporters of the American and French Revolutions, such as the political philosopher Thomas Paine in the 18th century and the historian Jules Michelet in the 19th century, exemplify this perspective. In contrast, another perspective views revolutions as expressions of anger that lead to chaos and destruction. According to this view, the pursuit of unattainable goals and the personal ambitions of revolutionary leaders can “contaminate” the civil populace, resulting in unnecessary death and devastation. This viewpoint was notably expressed by 19th-century English critics like philosopher Edmund Burke and essayist Thomas Carlyle, who were wary of the excesses of the French Revolution. Critics of the Russian and Chinese Revolutions, who emphasize the human costs imposed by Stalin and Mao, also align with this perspective.⁵

Thus, since the French Revolution, a new era has emerged, marked by a structural shift in understanding the nature and objectives of mobilizations and resistance.⁶ Historians have identified revolutionary examples prior to the French Revolution, with some arguing that the Dutch revolt against the Spanish Crown (1566-1609) represents

³ Saïd Amir Arjomand, *Revolution: Structure and Meaning in World History*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 2019, pp. 1-3.

⁴ Jack A. Goldstone, «Toward a Fourth Generation of Revolutionary Theory», *Annual Review of Political Science*, 4:1 (2001), p. 140.

⁵ Jack A. Goldstone, *Revolutions: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 22-23 (epub).

⁶ Charles Tilly, *Contentious Performances*, Cambridge University Press, Νέα Υόρκη 2008, p. 16.

the first “modern” revolution in Europe, due to its involvement of independent cities and the eventual establishment of the Dutch Republic. Nevertheless, the prevailing consensus designates the English Revolution (1642-1649) as the first modern European revolution.⁷

Social Movements and Modern Protests

In the context of the social, political, and economic transformations of the 19th century, the concept of the “social movement” emerged. This new form of protest mobilized groups or networks around specific social issues, with the British abolitionist movement of 1787 serving as an early example. Additionally, the term underwent semantic evolution over time. In the theory of Claude-Henri de Saint-Simon, it came to symbolize progressive social change. For German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, the term was associated with the dialectical development of history, while his student Bruno Bauer defined it as a rejection of existing social conditions. For Bauer, as well as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, the “social movement” became a vehicle for expressing the interests of the working class, aligning with the emerging proletarian movement.⁸

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, significant demonstrations organized by national labour movements were largely influenced by socialist, social liberal, and anarchist theories. As a result, social movements became increasingly intertwined with the development of the labour movement. Concurrently, the democratization of Western European societies led to greater variability in the nature of social movements, which began to display a wider range of goals, demands, durations, and scales.⁹ For example, some movements sought to improve existing political conditions¹⁰, while others advocated for women's rights, opposed militarism, or criticized competitive and military actions. Particularly after World War II, movements emerged in solidarity with “Third World” countries, including anti-colonial, anti-war, and environmental movements. From the 1970s onward, movements advocating for gay rights also began

⁷ van der Linden, «European Social», *ibid.*, pp. 192-193.

⁸ Stefan Berger and Holger Nehring, «Introduction: Towards a Global History of Social Movements», in Berger and Nehring (eds.), *The History of Social Movements*, *ibid.*, pp. 13-14; Dieter Rucht, «Studying Social Movement: Some Conceptual Challenges», in Berger and Nehring (eds.), *ibid.*, pp. 42-44.

⁹ Rucht, *ibid.*, p. 42-44.

¹⁰ Berger and Nehring, *ibid.*, p. 17-18.

to take shape. These movements were driven by the quest for social security, a commitment to social justice, and demands for justice and respect.¹¹

In contemporary discourse, sociologist Charles Tilly argues that the term “social issue” is frequently misapplied to encompass nearly all forms of reaction. He contends that, historically, “as it grew up in western countries the social movement actually brought together a very limited range of claim-making performances”.¹² In his work, *Social Movements, 1768-2004*, Tilly aims to define social movements as distinct political contentions, characterized by collective demands targeting specific policies and interests.¹³

In general, historiography underscores the importance of scrutinizing terminology, documenting applications, and distinguishing forms of resistance based on substantive content.¹⁴ According to Tilly, the context in which forms of resistance emerge significantly influences their content, as well as the manner and pace of their development. He conceptualizes forms of resistance as theatrical performances, each adhering to a specific “script” that participants may either follow faithfully or deviate from, driven by the prevailing emotions and circumstances.¹⁵

Medieval Revolts and Historical Nomenclature

In medieval forms of resistance, participants often employed established methods to advance their claims, such as petitioning authorities. However, these petitions frequently failed to resolve the issues, as authorities often regarded them as mere suggestions rather than actionable demands. In contrast, there were instances of more dynamic resistance where petitioners resorted to arms, raised banners, and organized unofficial assemblies. These movements typically saw cross-class participation¹⁶, involving individuals who were not excluded from the state apparatus. They maintained connections with institutional bodies and participated in the events or even led armed groups, and thus secured access to weapons. Drawing on their power and the medieval

¹¹ van der Linden, «European Social Protest», *ibid.*, pp. 197-203; Rucht, «Studying Social Movement», *ibid.*, p. 45.

¹² Tilly, *Contentious Performances*, *ibid.*, p. 7.

¹³ Charles Tilly, *Social Movements, 1768-2004*, Paradigm Publishers, Boulder 2004, p. 3.

¹⁴ Justine Firnhaber-Baker, «Introduction: Medieval revolt in context», in Justine Firnhaber-Baker and Dirk Schoenaers (eds.), *The Routledge History Handbook of Medieval Revolt*, Palgrave Macmillan, Abington and London 2017, pp. 1-2.

¹⁵ Tilly, *Contentious Performances*, *ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

¹⁶ Watts, John, «Conclusion», in Firnhaber-Baker and Schoenaers (eds.), *ibid.*, pp.372-373

concept of justified resistance to tyranny, these individuals legitimized their calls for uprising.¹⁷

Nowadays, such forms of resistance are categorized as “revolts”. However, both this term and the closely related term “rebellion” are seldom found in medieval sources. Medieval commentators typically used terms such as “assemblies”, “alliances”, and “oath-taking”, terms also descriptive of the initiatives of those involved in these events. Conversely, opponents of these movements often employed terms that highlighted the disorder they generated, such as “troubles”, “rumours”, “uproar”, “commotions”, “tumults”, and “terror”. Even participants themselves did not embrace the label “risers”, preferring instead to identify as “the commons” or “the people”.¹⁸

Overall, it appears that during the Middle Ages, there was no clear hierarchy or categorization of acts of resistance and calls for revolt based on their significance, nor was there a consistent use of terminology. For example, distinctions were not made between terms such as “skirmish” and “disturbance”, or among various forms of “uprisings”, such as “riots”, “revolts”, and “rebellions”.¹⁹

Historiographical Perspectives

Historiography often seeks to clarify these concepts to accurately portray the political, social, and cultural contexts of historical events. However, the boundaries between pre-modern and modern forms of resistance are not always distinctly defined. This lack of clarity is especially evident during transitional periods or when intergenerational participation in mobilizations occurs,²⁰ leading to a cultural osmosis of methods. Older practices may adapt to new political contexts, evolving to meet different needs and responses. These practices transcend generations and regions, spreading through migration, individuals belonging to specific subcultures, decentralized areas, or particular industries, and through advocacy for labor rights. For instance, anarchist ideas and the use of music and folk songs in protests were introduced to the United States by Italian immigrants and through the interaction of movements with shared origins. Occasionally, these “folk” practices were utilized to appeal emotionally to

¹⁷ Firmhaber-Baker, «Introduction», *ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁸ Samuel K. Cohn Jr, *Lust for Liberty: The Politics of Social Revolt in Medieval Europe, 1200–1425. Italy, France, and Flanders*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London 2006, p. 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ della Porta, «Afterwords», *ibid.*, p. 253.

potential supporters; at other times, they were rejected due to their association with violent events. Especially during periods of upper-class suspicion towards the working class, such movements could be easily labelled as violent outbursts from the “dangerous classes”, often driven by the spectre of past disturbances that had left deep marks on collective memory.²¹

Moreover, many such practices are underdocumented in contemporary sources, particularly those from the modern era, either because recorders deemed them insignificant or because certain details were considered self-evident. This lack of documentation complicates the historians’ work, who, influenced by their own temporal and socio-political context, may focus on elements familiar to their own perspectives, potentially overlooking other aspects perceived as less significant.²²

It is evident that researchers approach the study of revolutions, social movements, protests, and rebellions from varying perspectives, influenced by available data and their interpretative frameworks. Modern historiography, since the 1960s, has addressed these phenomena with greater methodological rigor. Prior to this period, rebellions were often perceived as emotionally driven mass upheavals, whereas contemporary scholarship frames them as organized efforts mobilizing large groups around a common cause. This shift also includes a closer examination of the political and social impacts of these events, as well as the methods employed to advance their agendas.²³ Influenced by the student movements of the 1960s and scholars such as Barrington Moore Jr., Eric Hobsbawm, Georges Rudé, and E.P. Thompson, the study of early modern, modern, and contemporary revolts has expanded significantly.²⁴

Initially, research on revolts did not encompass the medieval period, though this has changed over time. In the second half of the 20th century, historians delved into the study of Late Medieval revolts, understanding them as responses to prevailing conditions, such as growing social inequalities, the widening gap between rich and poor, the transition from feudalism to capitalism, food crises, and the Black Death. While historians acknowledge the role of new judicial and military institutions,

²¹ Itçaina, «Conclusion», *ibid.*, p. 238.

²² Favretto, «Introduction», *ibid.*, p. 6.

²³ van der Linden, «European Social», *ibid.*, pp. 175-176.

²⁴ Cohn, *Lust for Liberty*, *ibid.*, p. 1; Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* Beacon Press, Boston 1966; Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York 1965; Georges Rudé, *The Crowd in History, 1730–1848*, Wiley, New York 1964; Edward Thompson, «The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century», *Past & Present*, 50 (1971), pp. 76-136.

centralizing state power, and taxation in these developments, these aspects have not been the primary focus. This divergence reflects a traditional emphasis on the diplomatic, military, and factional movements of ruling elites within medieval political history.²⁵

Mid-20th-century historiography predominantly interpreted these events through a Marxist lens, emphasizing external factors that mobilized the populace and often neglecting internal factors such as individual agency and emotional responses.²⁶ As Eric Hobsbawm observed, Marxist historiography frequently centred on groups and forces perceived as progressive, possibly stemming from the belief that the history of movements and organisations representing and guiding workers could supplant or equate to the history of the ordinary people involved.²⁷

Subsequently, in the wake of earlier political upheavals, the historiographical landscape of the 1970s and 1980s was shaped by theoretical approaches such as “history from below”, social history, the linguistic turn, and post-modernism.²⁸ Researchers began to explore “political culture”, incorporating linguistic, visual and non-visual symbols into their analyses. This shift acknowledged that historical actors are motivated not solely by rational considerations but also by their interests, social bonds, habits, and the prevailing norms of their time. A prime example of this trend is Lynn Hunt's book, *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution* (1984).²⁹

From the 1990s onwards, feminist historians have been increasingly examining the roles of women, households, families, and the private sphere.³⁰ Scholars like Jennifer Heuer and Carla Hesse, for example, have explored the French Revolution's impact on gender roles, arguing that it redefined traditional roles and facilitated a

²⁵ Watts, «Conclusion», *ibid.*, p. 370.

²⁶ Sophia Rosenfeld, «Thinking about Feeling, 1789-1799», *French Historical Studies*, 32:4 (2009), p. 697.

²⁷ Favretto, «Introduction», *ibid.*, p. 8. Referring to Eric Hobsbawm, *On history*, Abacus, London 1998, p. 269.

²⁸ Firmhaber-Baker, «Introduction», *ibid.*, p. 5; Rosenfeld, «Thinking about Feeling», *ibid.*, p. 697; Jack R. Censer, «Social Twists and Linguistic Turns: Revolutionary Historiography a Decade after the Bicentennial», *French Historical Studies*, 22:1 (1999), p. 139.

²⁹ Sophia Rosenfeld, «The French Revolution in Cultural History», *Journal of Social History*, 52:3 (2019), p. 557.

³⁰ Suzanne Dessan, *Reclaiming the Sacred: Lay Religion and Popular Politics in Revolutionary France*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London 1990; Sara E. Meltzer and Leslie W. Rabine (eds.), *Rebel Daughters: Women and the French Revolution*, Oxford University Press, New York 1992; Shirley Elson Roessler, *Out of the Shadows: Women and Politics in the French Revolution, 1789-95*, P. Lang Publishing, 1996.

departure from the confines of female domesticity.³¹ In this light, Lynn Hunt's *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*³² simultaneously explores the era's political life and employs Freudian theories to investigate contemporary personal narratives. Hunt analyses the roles of the father, male children, and the oppression of women, arguing that the Revolution's emphasis on individual freedoms and democratic processes created new opportunities for women.³³ Scholars of masculinity have also scrutinized norms of masculinity and sexuality during this period.³⁴

Interest in political history resurged in the 21st century, driven by the post-Cold War political transformations. This renewed focus emphasizes the personalities and agency of historical actors, despite the limitations of primary sources, which are often autobiographical or reflect the judgments of external observers, including critics.³⁵ These “case narratives” are commended for their social inclusivity but sometimes criticized for insufficiently addressing the political significance of the events described.³⁶

Thus, the study of revolutions, uprisings, social movements, and protests must navigate diverse scholarly trends and continue evolving through engagement with other historical disciplines, such as the history of emotions. This interdisciplinary approach enriches historians' analytical tools and broadens the scope of inquiry.³⁷ It is within this framework that the new issue of *Mos Historicus* seeks to contribute to and enrich the historiographical discourse, offering articles that explore these themes from multiple perspectives.

Exploring the issue

In the article “Addressing New Aspects of Surveillance in Late Medieval England, 1350-1550”, Manos Hatzithanasiou examines the complex phenomenon of

³¹ Jennifer N. Heuer, *The family and the nation: gender and citizenship in revolutionary France, 1789-1830*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London 2005; Carla Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment: How French Women Became Modern*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford 2001.

³² Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1992.

³³ Suzanne Desan, «Recent Historiography on the French Revolution and Gender», *Journal of Social History*, 52:3 (2019), p. 567; Jack R. Censer, «Social Twists and Linguistic Turns: Revolutionary Historiography a Decade after the Bicentennial», *French Historical Studies*, 22:1 (1999), p. 160.

³⁴ Desan, *ibid.*, p. 570.

³⁵ Firnhaber-Baker, «Introduction», *ibid.*, p. 1 and 3.

³⁶ Desan, *ibid.*, pp. 567-568.

³⁷ Firnhaber-Baker, *ibid.*, p. 10.

surveillance in late medieval England. Hatzithanasiou offers a novel perspective by tracing the roots of surveillance back to the Late Middle Ages rather than the Early Modern period, thereby challenging the prevailing historiographical narrative. The author argues that surveillance was not merely a ubiquitous element of everyday life, generally accepted by the lower social strata, but also a complex dynamic in which the populace sometimes resisted this practice or leveraged it to their advantage. Notably, the article reconceptualizes surveillance, depicting it not just as an instrument wielded by the ruling classes to exert control over the lower echelons but also as an integral social, economic, and cultural aspect of daily life during the period under examination.

In “Il fier tiranno: Divine Right and *ragion di stato* in Girolamo Graziani’s *Il Cromuele*”, Fabio Battista analyzes the repercussions of the English Civil War, culminating in the execution of Charles I in 1649, and the subsequent political developments under Cromwell and the Parliamentarians on 17th-century Italian intellectual thought. Battista concentrates on Girolamo Graziani’s *Il Cromuele*, which, he argues, highlights the crisis of divine-right monarchy in England and, also, criticizes the emergent political regime influenced by post-Machiavellian theories of *ragion di stato*. Graziani, an active diplomat in Modena, strengthened ties with the French crown—dedicating the aforementioned work to Louis XIV—and facilitated the matrimonial alliance between Maria of Modena, daughter of Duke Alfonso IV, and James II of England, the future king of England. Though not directly addressing the English Revolution, Graziani’s tragedy engages with its reception and legacy, offering a nuanced critique. For instance, Battista cites Maiolino Bisaccioni’s *Historia della Guerra Civile d’Inghilterra*, which assigns partial responsibility for the turmoil to Charles I’s leniency towards Puritans, thereby allowing the spread of anti-monarchical sentiments.

Maria-Constantina (Maritina) Leontsini’s article, “Revolutions, Exile, Philanthropy, and universality in the Long 19th Century: The Cases of Marie Esperance von Schwartz and Cristina Trivulzio di Belgiojoso”, investigates the mid-19th century practices of voluntary and forced exile in post-1848 revolutions era. Focusing on the case-studies of Marie Esperance Brandt von Schwartz (better known by her pen name “Elpis Melena”) and Cristina Trivulzio di Belgiojoso, Leontsini situates these figures within a broader context of international volunteerism and patriotism. The study underscores these women’s defiance of conventional gender roles and their refusal to remain confined to the domestic sphere, as they actively participated in revolutionary

activities and political events. The article thus aims to contribute to the historiography of the intersections between travel, gender, identity, and radicalism.

Antonis Chiotellis, in “Uprisings in Southern Rhodesia 1896-1897”, examines the Ndebele and Shona rebellions against the British South Africa Company (BSAC). This study illuminates an early instance of resistance against British colonial administration, set against the backdrop of emerging national movements in sub-Saharan Africa. Through a meticulous analysis of memoirs and contemporary accounts from BSAC officials and stakeholders, Chiotellis elucidates the causes, nature, and ramifications of these uprisings, while critically assessing the construction of a legitimizing narrative that justified British imperial presence.

Dimitris Angelis-Dimakis's article, “The Land to Those who Cultivate It? Collective Claims and Social Conflicts in Rural Spain from the late 19th Century to 1936” transports the reader to the agrarian landscapes of Spain, exploring the evolution of collective mobilizations and social conflicts in the lead-up to the Spanish Civil War. Angelis-Dimakis employs primary sources from periodicals and publications of rural political groups, which had formed their own collective structures, to illuminate the evolving discourse on land redistribution and agrarian reform. The article investigates the formation and transformation of these collective positions, seeking to uncover the continuities and ruptures in rural agitation during this transformative period.

Andreas Bouroutis' article, “The Russian Revolution, the Famine of 1921-1923, and International Humanitarian Aid”, represents a component of an ongoing archival research endeavour. The work showcases a lesser-known dimension of the Russian Revolution, focusing particularly on American humanitarian aid to Soviet regions ravaged by the aftermath of the Great War, the Revolution, subsequent famines, and specifically the famine of 1921-1923. The author meticulously examines the policies and operations of the American Relief Administration (ARA) alongside other humanitarian organizations, which instituted targeted programs to provide essential sustenance and support to numerous Soviet families. Additionally, the article delves into the intricate relationships these organizations forged with Soviet authorities. Furthermore, Bouroutis investigates how the American international humanitarian mission has been memorialized within the framework of official Soviet historical narratives.

In her article, “Public Memory and Toponymy in Post-Socialist Formations”, Kyriaki Aloizou explores the profound impact of revolutions and subsequent political

and ideological shifts on the construction of public memory. Aloizou specifically investigates the role of toponymic changes in redefining the relationship between public spaces and historical narratives, positing that toponymy serves as a powerful medium for representing collective memory. The article provides a focused analysis on the cities of Budapest, Krakow, Warsaw, Bucharest, and Saint Petersburg, examining their transitions from socialist to post-socialist states. Through this lens, Aloizou illustrates how the renaming of these urban spaces reflects new political directions and contributes to the reconfiguration of public memory.

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