



## Post-revolutionary France: The Ultimate Test Case?

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The history of France since the mid-eighteenth century has often been described in terms of repetitive discontinuities. The Revolution of 1789 obviously played, and still plays, a crucial role in the making of this myth of rupture. Not only did the revolutionaries destroy old-regime society and politics but they also created the foundation of our contemporary, capitalist and democratic world. Furthermore, numerous regime changes left their imprint on society and politics, and reshaped the daily lives of the French again and again. Historians of France find it difficult to think in terms of continuity across the Age of Revolutions. Most likely, the organisation of academic teaching and research plays a crucial role in this respect. It has customarily divided the past into clearly demarcated blocks: the Old Regime versus contemporary France, or *l'histoire moderne* versus *l'histoire contemporaine*.

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Only a few researchers use a periodisation that departs from the orthodox assumption that “1789” created a radically new world. Sometimes, they suggest that the Revolution was “over” by the 1880s and therefore cannot account for our own contemporary world. In his study about French citizenship and naturalisation, Peter Sahlins, for example, concludes that the 1750s and the 1880s, rather than 1789, constituted moments of rupture. The mid-eighteenth-century ‘citizenship revolution’, which, as he notes, was ‘a dual revolution of both “citizenship” and “nationality”’, ended the period of absolute citizenship of Louis XIV. Thus, it was in the early-modern era that the French, who had hitherto been legal subjects, increasingly came to be seen as rights-bearing political beings. More importantly, this development introduced an era of experimentation with political citizenship during which politicians, lawyers and citizens fought with one another about how to implement (and, for that matter, how to limit) what they believed to be the inalienable political rights of the inhabitants of the realm. The subsequent period of about 130–140 years, which ended with the introduction of the republican nationality law of 26 June 1889, was characterised by ‘experimentation’ as well as ‘constant ruptures and reconfigurations’.<sup>1</sup>

In the 1780s, the vast majority of the French lived in the countryside; their villages constituted a milieu quite unlike the faubourgs of Paris. Every rural historian is aware of Pierre Goubert’s remark that there were no less than twenty (sic!) “peasantries” in eighteenth-century France; consequently, it is problematic to generalise rural France.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the British historian Peter Jones has attempted to examine what the Revolution meant to anonymous, rural dwellers. Inspired by Alexis de Tocqueville, his work claims that change arose from the interaction of state policy and local practices. Yet, the political condition of the rural community by the 1780s was not as bad as Tocqueville suggested. Some village assemblies could make important decisions about taxation, debt, communal property, etc. Yet, villages were no bastions of democracy. They were oligarchies run by wealthy farmers, men of the law or master craftsmen. Between 1787 and 1799, the villagers were able to

<sup>1</sup> Peter Sahlins, *Unnaturally French. Foreign Citizens in the Old Regime and After* (Ithaca, 2004), 314.

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Goubert, ‘Sociétés rurales françaises au XVIIIe siècle: vingt paysanneries contrastées, quelques problèmes’, in Fernand Braudel ed., *Conjoncture économique, structures sociales: hommage à Ernest Labrousse* (Paris, 1974), 375–387.

break free of feudal dues and communal rights in particular. Few of them ignored how national politics had changed their lives. Regular elections from 1789 to 1804 created a democratic political culture at the village level. However, the elites usually succeeded in manoeuvring decisions to their advantage. They, for example, were the main beneficiaries of the national land sales. Jones concludes that the Revolution was at the origins of peasant politicisation, undermining claims that this process began when the Third Republic was well established. Nevertheless, two trends highlighted the limits of revolutionary change. The first is the rise and fall of village autonomy. Though villagers participated in the construction of a new local order from 1787 to 1793, a decline in village sovereignty occurred since the Directory. Besides, local elites continued to dominate village politics down to 1820, and even thereafter.<sup>3</sup>

The historiography about long-term political preferences for *la Droite* or *la Gauche*, finally, provides another well-known continuity thesis, which emphasises the relationship between religion and politics.<sup>4</sup> According to its proponents, older conflicts between Catholics and Protestants had a lasting impact on local and regional politics, from the revocation of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV in 1685 until well into the twentieth century. Persistent denominational tensions would thus account for the long-lasting *clivage* between the Right and the Left in regions such as the Cévennes and the Gard, where more than one-third of all Protestants in nineteenth-century France lived. In these areas, the vast majority of Catholics showed a lasting preference for the (far) Right.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Peter Jones, *Liberty and Locality in Revolutionary France. Six Villages Compared, 1760–1820* (Cambridge, 2003); and Jean-Pierre Jessenne, *Pouvoir au village et révolution: Artois, 1760–1848* (Lille, 1987) offers a similar portrayal of rural France.

<sup>4</sup> In many ways, this tradition originates in the classic *Tableau politique de la France de l'Ouest sous la Troisième République* (1913), written by André Siegfried, who examined correlations between the preference for different political forces in western France (the Vendée in particular), on the one hand, and social and geographical determinants, like settlement patterns, degrees of rurality or urbanity, large landowners versus small property owners and artisans, and Catholic fervour versus some degree of de-Christianisation, on the other.

<sup>5</sup> For example, Valérie Sottocasa, *Mémoires affrontées. Protestants et catholiques face à la Révolution dans les montagnes du Languedoc* (Rennes, 2004). For a critique of the assumptions underlying this argument, see Bernard Rulof, *Popular Legitimism and the Monarchy in France. Mass Democracy without Parties, 1830–1880* (Basingstoke, 2020), 20–27.

Nevertheless, such claims in favour of continuities across the Age of Revolutions tend to be rather rare, in the light of what is still the dominant narrative about the French past. In contrast, the contributors to this volume argue that ordinary people in Europe and the Americas experienced change and continuity at the same time.<sup>6</sup> In many ways, their arguments in favour of continuity call to mind the work of Alexis de Tocqueville, most particularly his *Democracy in America* (1835–1840) and *The Old Regime and The French Revolution* (1856). Dana Nelson, for example, argues that a vibrant social life, itself grounded in European traditions of commoning and neighbouring, had prepared settlers in the English colonies to engage with one another. Hence, ordinary people had become involved in politics on a local level, thereby creating a strong civil society. This vernacular tradition of democratic engagement survived into the 1830s, when the French aristocrat visited the new Republic. The other contributions discuss the impact of local traditions and older ways of doing things or getting things done. What is more, they show that real change was made acceptable, or domesticated, by presenting it as something that meant no break with the past. Ordinary people in the Americas and Europe thus could adapt the strategies that they had learned and used before to pursue their interests or defend their status in what was a new context. Put differently, they possessed enough residual power to use their traditional repertoire of collective action to defend what they valued most.<sup>7</sup>

According to Tocqueville, none of this was possible in his home country, where the 1789 Revolution would have wrested the power of central authority from the monarchy to transfer it to an even more powerful autocracy. The revolutionaries abolished the institutions, which had served as intermediaries between subjects and state. As a result, individual citizens could no longer be politically and socially active in an orderly manner. Thus, the class hostility, which expressed itself in the years 1848–1851, inevitably led to disorder, only to be stopped by despotism (i.e. the regime of Napoleon III). Tocqueville demonstrated what he

<sup>6</sup> Judith Pollmann and Henk te Velde, ‘Civic Continuities in an Age of Revolutionary Change. Political Practices in Europe and the Americas, c. 1750–1850’, this volume, 5 (‘[P]olitical change at the center of the old and new polities coexisted with, and was indeed enabled by, continuities at other levels, especially so in the localities’).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 8–17.

believed to be the Revolution's true meaning: the continuity of centralisation at state level as well as the destruction of the *corps intermédiaires*, which had organised social life on the local level in the past. Whereas local institutions in the United States would make it possible for ordinary males to develop a 'spirit of liberty', the all-powerful French state stifled civil society and controlled the "naked" citizens. The voluntary societies that did exist, therefore, were 'weapons of war' to suit their leaders' interests. Their members were 'soldiers', subject to 'a tyranny more unbearable still than the tyranny exerted over society by the government'. Under such circumstances, there could be neither a robust democracy nor a vibrant civil society in France.<sup>8</sup>

Tocqueville's supposition of a strong state, in combination with a weak civil society, implicitly seems to produce a view of the political domain limited to government and parliament. In this perspective, to study popular sovereignty means to turn one's attention to the national level. Accordingly, there was no place for the local level in politics, which may explain why historians could ignore local politics, suggesting that the local level constituted an unpolitical or pre-political realm.<sup>9</sup> However, we should not accept what was a critique of the Second Empire as an accurate description of nineteenth-century France. An examination that looks at the state level from the local level (rather than the other way around) reveals that some assumptions underlying Tocqueville's analysis are doubtful at least. In fact, research has shown that his portrayal hardly does justice to a complex reality. New interpretations of the early-modern state have challenged the orthodox model of boundless royal power. They suggest that the state had no grandiose plan to centralise or to subjugate *les provinces*. The exercise of its power was defined (and limited) by clientelism and patronage, as well as persuasion, cooperation and mutually beneficial deals, rather than arbitrary authority. In this context, local and provincial elites could defend and promote their interests rather well. Moreover, the nineteenth-century state apparatus was neither omnipresent nor omnipotent either. As a result, the local level

<sup>8</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York, 2004, c1835–1840), 593–594 and 220–222, respectively.

<sup>9</sup> Pollmann and Te Velde, 'Civic Continuities', 9–12.

continued to play a fundamental role in politics throughout the nineteenth century. However, it increasingly did so in close interaction with developments at the national level.

## LOCAL POLITICS

As representatives of the Ministry of the Interior, prefects have traditionally been portrayed as cogwheels in a well-oiled system of governance, who enjoyed near full control over their departments. In times of crises, such as the months following the coup of December 1851, they could impose decisions taken in Paris by force, if necessary. Yet, they negotiated with the local level far more often than what Tocqueville and others want us to think. Although the number of public functionaries, from policemen to prefects, rose from 477,000 to more than 700,000 during the Second Empire, they nevertheless relied on the cooperation of local and regional actors. Besides, lower-level officials, as well as deputies who had been elected with the often massive support of the prefecture, did their best to defend local and regional interests and concerns before “Paris”. Mayor-deputy of Montpellier, David Pagézy, for example, lobbied for the interests of his constituency’s winegrowing and affiliated industries. This practice continued well into the Third Republic, as the case of deputy Armand de Mackau from the Orne shows.<sup>10</sup>

One of the first measures of the Napoleonic regime was to re-introduce universal manhood suffrage, which conservatives had limited in May 1850. The regime sought legitimacy through controlled elections of officially designated candidates. Prefects, sub-prefects, mayors and civil servants (schoolmaster, postman, tax collector, etc.), as well as shopkeepers, innkeepers or tobacconists, should ensure that the electorate voted “well”. Therefore, the elections held between 1852 and 1870 were believed to be less interesting or revealing. Nevertheless, recent research emphasises ‘the general role of the Second Empire in the electoral apprenticeship of French adult males’, because the local, departmental and even national contests allowed for more activities by the political opposition

<sup>10</sup> Sudhir Hazareesingh, *From Subject to Citizen. The Second Empire and the Emergence of Modern French Democracy* (Princeton, 1998), 38–49; Éric Phélippeau, *L’Invention de l’homme politique moderne. Mackau, l’Orne et la République* (Paris, 2002) and Rulof, *Popular Legitimism*.

from the early 1860s onwards.<sup>11</sup> Besides, officials soon discovered that they had to seek a compromise between their favourite, on the one hand, and the realities of local and regional politics, on the other. In 1852, for example, the prefect of the Hérault understood that the ‘legitimist element [in Montpellier and its surroundings, BR] is too numerous and too important (...); it is essential (...) to give way to it to some degree’. His designated candidate, therefore, should be acceptable to “Paris”, as well as to legitimists and a considerable part of the district’s electorate.<sup>12</sup>

The regime did its best to control public life in what its agents (and, for that matter, some historians) commonly depicted as a realm devoid of *true* politics: the village. In these smaller communities where the vast majority of French people lived, the mayor was a pivotal figure. He should ideally not only administer the commune efficiently but also represent and defend the interests of the state rather than those of his fellow citizens. Nevertheless, the management of elections turned out to be increasingly problematic. The pool of loyal, competent and influential men who could be appointed to the mayoralty or another office was small. Thus, prefect and sub-prefect often had no choice but to select a candidate among landowning notables whose support for the Empire was conditional, particularly in departments like the Hérault, where legitimists had predominated political life before. Besides, rivalries between local networks of notables could complicate their job even more. The regime’s preference for a candidate from one faction could alienate the supporters of the opposing camp, and thus turn an appointment or election into an adversarial struggle, which involved the expression of different opinions

<sup>11</sup> Malcolm Crook, ‘Protest Voting: The Revolutionary Origins of Annotated Ballot Papers Cast in French Plebiscites, 1851–70’, *French History* 29: 3 (2015), 353. See also Hazareesingh, *From Subject*, 38–50 and ‘Bonapartism as the progenitor of democracy. The paradoxical case of the French Second Empire’, in P. Baehr and M. Richter, eds., *Dictatorship in History and Theory: Bonapartism, Caesarism and Totalitarianism* (Cambridge, 2004), 129–152; Roger Price, *The French Second Empire: An Anatomy of Political Power* (Cambridge, 2001), 97–109 and 260–262; and Christophe Voilliot, *La candidature officielle. Une pratique d’État de la Restauration à la Troisième République* (Rennes, 2005), 123–154.

<sup>12</sup> Archives Nationales (hereafter: AN), F1b II Hérault 25, 13 April 1852, prefect.

and preferences. In this respect, a conflict at the local level inadvertently went to the heart of the ideology and policy of the Second Empire.<sup>13</sup>

This is exactly what happened in Florensac, a winegrowing village in the Hérault, in June 1861, when the departmental councillor had to be elected. In the 1850s, the intervention of state officials had secured the election of Louis de Ricard, a great landowner, as departmental councillor. Although his candidacy was again endorsed in 1861, Ariste Fraisse, Florensac's ambitious mayor, ran for councillor, too. He even embarked upon a veritable campaign. Consequently, his opponents claimed that Fraisse disregarded the conditions under which the prefect had allowed him to run. The mayor consented to the opening of a café for women, and threatened shopkeepers and winegrowers with an increase in municipal taxes, if he were defeated. More importantly, they criticised him for reviving the republican and legitimist movements, which had dominated the village during the Second Republic. Realising his candidacy was at stake, the mayor denied that political considerations had inspired him to run. Rather, he was only concerned with the material interests of his fellow villagers. Although Ricard gained the majority of votes cast in the whole district, the turnout revealed Fraisse's popularity in Florensac itself. In this context, Ariste twice encouraged youth groups to mock his opponents and to show their loyalty to him. In a commune riven by factional struggles, being a mayor was 'a difficult balancing act'. Whereas village residents looked upon him as someone who could (or, should) secure access to subsidies, officials saw the mayor as an administrator who should defend state interests. When Fraisse contested the prefect's decisions and called on the Council of State to annul the election results, he failed in his adherence to the state. The prefect dismissed the municipality, and appointed a commission dominated by Louis de Ricard and his supporters.<sup>14</sup> Whereas the sub-prefect spoke of a struggle between a party of order, on the one hand, and the Socialists and Fraisse, on the other, the prefect looked upon local politics as a realm characterised by personal conflicts without political substance. He only took a firm stand once Fraisse acted in contradiction to his obligations as mayor. Yet,

<sup>13</sup> Malcolm Crook, 'Introduction: *La voix du peuple?* Voting from the *Ancien Régime* to the Present Day', *French History* 29: 3 (2015), 282-283; Hazareesingh, *From Subject*, 42-52; and Price, *The French Second Empire*, 89-123 and 258-262.

<sup>14</sup> Price, *The French Second Empire*, 92.



the new municipal commission failed to gain trust among the population, whereupon the prefect appointed Ariste's brother mayor in 1862. The election of the municipal council held shortly afterwards even led to Ariste's victory. When his brother resigned in 1865, the authorities, therefore, arranged the realities of village society and politics and reappointed Ariste as mayor. They convinced themselves that politics had played no role in the conflict. This framing of the events made it possible to disregard their failure to control local politics. Yet, the return of Ariste Fraisse and his faction shows that *la politique de clocher* mattered. Personal rivalries and local (intra-elite) disputes were no surprise in an era when popular political participation was limited. They offered ordinary people an opportunity to express their opinion, too.<sup>15</sup>

### SOCIABILITY

The local level mattered in other ways, too. Some French may have looked upon voluntary societies with suspicion, as they would threaten the sovereign nation and the pursuit of the common good.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, this did not prevent many others from engaging themselves wholeheartedly in all forms of sociability. As a result, France, like other countries, saw a rich associational life in the nineteenth century. It is estimated that about 45,000 associations existed in 1901 before a new law made it legal to organise oneself in voluntary societies. The patrons of some meeting places, in particular, looked for opportunities to enjoy each other's company and to foster friendships.<sup>17</sup> However, it is important to understand that the image of apolitical societies is problematic, since numerous associations helped their patrons cooperate with others,

<sup>15</sup> For a discussion of the events in Florensac, see Bernard Rulof, 'Popular Culture, Politics and the State in Florensac (Hérault) during the Second Empire', *French History* 5: 3 (1991), 299–324.

<sup>16</sup> Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le modèle politique français. La société civile contre le jacobinisme de 1789 à nos jours* (Paris, 2004); and Lucien Jaume, *Le discours jacobin et la démocratie* (Paris, 1989).

<sup>17</sup> Carol Harrison, *The Bourgeois Citizen in Nineteenth-Century France: Gender, Sociability, and the Uses of Emulation* (Oxford, 1999); S.-L. Hoffmann, *Geselligkeit und Demokratie: Vereine und zivile Gesellschaft im transnationalen Vergleich 1750–1914* (Göttingen, 2003); and C. Andrieu, G. Le Béguec and D. Tartakowsky, eds, *Associations et champ politique: la loi de 1901 à l'épreuve du siècle* (Paris, 2001).

while pursuing private or group interests, often against competing interests. In this respect, they were part of a political domain, which, as I have argued elsewhere, can best be studied in the context of local rather than national politics and society. This certainly holds for republican and socialist sociability in Mediterranean France, which has inspired much of the research so far. However, others, such as legitimists, had their vibrant meeting places, too. This is where popular partisans of the eldest branch learnt to exchange ideas and to position themselves in debates. The clubs prepared them to participate in political life and, in particular, they combined politics with pleasure.<sup>18</sup>

Actually, Montpellier and the department of the Hérault saw an increase in the number of voluntary societies in the early 1830s and the Second Republic, as well as during the Third Republic. The authorities lamented this ‘incessant need to get together’, which they described as ‘the evil of the region’. To them, societies not only emanated from but also intensified the antagonism between political forces, particularly after the 1830 and 1848 revolutions. Yet, they were unable to destroy republican and legitimist sociability. Sometimes, patrons recreated clubs under another name after the police had closed them down. Moreover, societies became more political in times of electoral contests, while they adopted the role of leisure gatherings in between elections. Divisive politics, therefore, went hand in hand with sociability.<sup>19</sup>

There is another, more fundamental reason why the local was important for political life during the long nineteenth century. In 1831, the July Monarchy lowered the *cens* required for the right to vote for municipal elections. By 1841, about 2.9 million male voters (approximately 8 per cent of the total population of France) could elect their local councillors.<sup>20</sup> By the stroke of a pen, the provisional government of the Republic introduced universal manhood suffrage for all local, departmental and national representative bodies on 6 March 1848. Tocqueville noted that,

<sup>18</sup> Raymond Huard, ‘Political Association’, in N. Bermeo and P. Nord, eds, *Civil Society Before Democracy: Lessons from Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Lanham, 2000), 136–145; and Bernard Rulof, ‘Wine, Friends, and Royalist Popular Politics: Legitimist Associations in Mid-Nineteenth-Century France’, *French History* 23: 3 (2009), 360–382.

<sup>19</sup> AN, BB30 391, 10 March 1851, prosecutor.

<sup>20</sup> William Fortescue, *France and 1848: The End of Monarchy* (London, 2005), 31–32; and Christine Guionnet, *L'apprentissage de la politique moderne. Les élections municipales sous la monarchie de Juillet* (Paris, 1997).

in some small communities, communitarian voting occurred. However, in larger communities like Florensac or Montpellier the widening of voting rights intensified the tensions between (partisans of) competing political movements.<sup>21</sup>

Be it as it may, it is important to emphasise that these reforms, which drew the adult males into politics, preceded the formation of national parties that were characterised by loyalty to a coherent set of ideas and a permanent form of organisation for several decades. Consequently, the accommodation of popular participation in politics took another form. It was above all grounded in local society and loose networks, which political scientists and historians with an interest in politicisation and party development in France have described as *familles politiques*. The parliamentarians of the Second Empire, for example, identified with five political families: legitimists, Orleanists, Bonapartists, independents and, finally, republicans. They were not subject to ‘a well-structured organisation, (...) spokesperson [or] voting discipline’. Yet, they shared ‘convergent opinions’ and a basic adherence to a political culture. What went for parliamentarians was also true for their political families, which vied for influence and power. They consisted of informal, ever-changing constellations of people. In such movements, participation in social networks, adherence to a political culture and a sentimental loyalty to a regime and its symbols counted for more than hierarchy and organisation. At the same time, their partisans could be ‘divided by memories, personal hostilities, and genuine differences of principle’.<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, a *famille politique*, such as Montpellier’s legitimist movement could exist for as long as a substantial group of individuals preserved the local settings that allowed them to sustain their interpersonal relationships. Besides, they shared loyalty to a political culture and its symbols and rituals, as well as a cult of devotion to the claimant, Comte de Chambord. Familial ties as well as neighbourhood or professional bonds brought monarchists together. Sites of popular sociability also forged contact and solidarity. Besides, those who participated in brawls and festivities or

<sup>21</sup> For example, Alain Garrigou, *Histoire sociale du suffrage universel en France 1848–2000* (Paris, 2002); and Raymond Huard, *Le suffrage universel en France 1848–1946* (Paris, 1991), 19–68.

<sup>22</sup> Éric Anceau, *Les députés du Second Empire. Prosopographie d’une élite du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 2000), 62–64; and Roger Price, *People and Politics in France, 1848–1870* (Cambridge, 2006), 67–68, respectively.

engaged in election campaigns developed the awareness of belonging to the same group. Moreover, their worldview was reconfirmed whenever they read (or listened to someone reading) legitimist newspapers. However, they also disagreed wholeheartedly about some serious matters. In this respect, it is important to understand that the movement consisted of individuals from different social backgrounds. Influential legitimists tried to reconfirm their ascendancy over those they considered their followers. However, their activities put the chances for survival of legitimism as a viable force at risk, even more so as popular partisans were not as docile as royalist notables wanted them to be. The monarchist *famille*, in the end, was as much marked by solidarity and loyalty as differences of opinion and contestation. Competing ways of reading society and politics, as well as claims about the preferred order of things, co-existed.<sup>23</sup>

It was at the local rather than national level that (popular) politics and citizenship, at first, obtained meaning and form. Thus, there is much that contradicts traditional assumptions about state primacy in shaping politics before the advent of party-based politics and a national public sphere. This, in turn, raises serious questions about the development of citizenship and democracy. The contributions to this volume show that the framing of the national level as *the* source of politics, by definition, depoliticized local society and politics. Sudhir Hazareesingh writes that officials often likened ‘the local polity’ ‘to a family, whose destiny was not troubled by any destructive passions and where the sentiments of respect and loyalty predominated’. To them, ‘local public life’ ideally involved ‘a distinct type of citizenship, which was concerned with technical means rather than ideological ends and thus administration rather than politics’.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Rulof, *Popular Legitimism*. For a discussion of similar movements elsewhere, see James Brophy, *Popular Culture and the Public Sphere in the Rhineland, 1800–1850* (Cambridge, 2007).

<sup>24</sup> Hazareesingh, *From Subject*, 39 and 42, respectively. See also Nicolas Roussellier, ‘Brilliant Failure: Political Parties Under the Republican Era in France (1870–1914)’, in Henk te Velde and Maartje Janse, eds., *Organizing Democracy. Reflections on the Rise of Political Organizations in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke, 2017), 145–163.

### PAYS. The Politics of Place

Despite the emphasis on what is called the Jacobin discourse, which suspected anything that could threaten the common good of the Nation, we should not ignore another discourse, whose proponents accepted diversity and difference. From the 1830s onwards, liberal, republican and legitimist political theorists called for decentralisation. Their work inspired public debates, which reached their zenith in parliamentary debates during the mid-1840s and the proclamation of the Nancy manifesto in 1865, which argued in favour of a lessening of administrative (i.e., prefectural) control of individual communes. Some authors limited themselves to calls for political changes. Yet others, many of whom were partisans of the eldest branch of the Bourbon family, proposed plans which involved a radical transformation of society, economy and government. They recreated France from bottom up; the *communes* should become core elements of a different country, where local notables, the “natural” leaders of society, would exercise a stern but benevolent rule over the *menu peuple*.<sup>25</sup>

True, the cooperation between these groupings came to an end after their common enemy, the Bonapartist regime, fell. Republicans seemed to forget their calls for decentralisation when they controlled the government by the late 1870s themselves. Besides, legitimist proposals could hardly be reconciled with the popular desire for participation in political life. Despite their disagreements, these authors nevertheless shared the idea that one’s local and regional *pays* defined one’s identity. From the early 1830s onwards, debates about decentralisation ran parallel to, or were even closely intertwined with, the emergence of a cult of localism. By 1880, the local had become a place for political engagement and citizenship; some even felt that it might have a benign impact on national politics. They felt that France was characterised by “diversity in unity”, which is similar to Diederik Smit’s views of the Low Countries.<sup>26</sup> Affection for *le pays* survived from the old-regime era into the nineteenth century, as a result of which the nation ultimately came to be seen as a composite whole of diverse components. One aspect of this development has been regionalism, a phenomenon that found support among

<sup>25</sup> Steven Kale, *Legitimism and the Reconstruction of French Society, 1852–1883* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1992), 89–153.

<sup>26</sup> See Smit’s contribution to this volume.

both conservatives and progressives and which historians have often underestimated.<sup>27</sup>

Frenchmen on both sides of the political spectrum were fascinated with the local past, as well as their *pays* and its sense of place. By 1880, they claimed that the local was compatible with modernity and the nation alike. Therefore, rather than to suppress it, state officials supported the cult of the local while trying to co-opt it for their own purposes. This cult drew on early-modern notions, such as those developed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who had argued that it is in the *pays* where one learnt to love fellow citizens of the *grande patrie*. Undeniably, men like Abbé Sieyès and Camille Desmoulins looked upon local and regional differences with suspicion. However, not all revolutionaries found local or regional specificity that problematic, as the 1790 Fête de la Fédération and the objectives of the *fédérés* in the Midi show. Moreover, regional diversity proved to be quite resilient. As a consequence, the early July Monarchy saw timid toleration of difference. Following the social and political turmoil of the years 1848–1851 and 1870–1871, the local even became a school of civic virtue. Indeed, many came to look upon the *commune* as ‘the optimal conduit toward community [and] civic participation’. The rural village in particular was believed to provide an excellent setting to help improve the morals of the French, create social harmony, and thus regenerate France. This change in appreciation convinced republicans that political conquest passed via local politics. Whereas their municipalism may have been inspired by what they wanted to be a top-down ‘vertical relationship between France and its *pays*’, it nevertheless made it possible for citizens to engage in democratic self-government and political debate.<sup>28</sup>

Whereas the distrust of diversity had implied that there was but one locus of politics (i.e. the national state), the local level thus became a ‘reference in discussions of citizenship and identity’, too. In fact, the *commune* remained the main locus of civic mobilisation and participation

<sup>27</sup> Julian Wright, *The Regionalist Movement in France, 1890–1914. Jean Charles-Brun and French Political Thought* (Oxford, 2003).

<sup>28</sup> Stéphane Gerson, *The Pride of Place: Local Memories and Political Culture in Modern France* (Ithaca, 2003), 141 and 230, respectively. See also Caroline Ford, *Creating the Nation in Provincial France: Religion and Political Identity* (Princeton, 1993); Hazareensingh, *From Subject*, 233–305; and Anne-Marie Thiesse, *Ils apprenaient la France: L'exaltation des régions dans le discours patriotique* (Paris, 2014).

throughout much of the nineteenth century.<sup>29</sup> As the other contributions to this volume, French developments hint at the fact that distance (i.e. the national) needed proximity (i.e. the local), and vice versa, for democratic politics to exist. It is true that nineteenth-century France was a centralising country. The state *did* intensify its influence upon society; the repetitive regime changes *did* matter. But, as I have tried to show, this is only half of the story. Politics was not made in Paris alone; rather, it was made at the juncture of state and civil society. Those who tried to re-imagine France understood this very well. Besides, their efforts benefited from the fact that the practice of politics was fundamentally local in kind, if only because national organisations, which could channel the political activities of citizens, did not exist until the end of the nineteenth century. Rather, citizens identified with, and engaged in, the activities of *familles politiques*, loose political constellations that were grounded in local networks in particular.

By the 1870s, republicans believed that the *commune* provided the perfect place for ordinary males to learn how to engage in politics. Good citizens should not be inspired by considerations of class and religion, rejections of violence, and the defence private property. Driven by feelings of patriotism, they should also be devoted to hard work. The republican citizenship, therefore, combined popular participation with orderly forms of political behaviour, under the leadership of secular elites, who were ‘politically liberal but socially conservative’.<sup>30</sup> As such, the republicans drew the frontiers between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour anew. This development draws our attention to the politicisation of the French and the history of their ‘repertoires of collective action’ (to borrow a term coined by Charles Tilly)). Historians and political scientists have spent much time and effort examining these topics. In the context of this paper, it is not possible to do justice to the subtleties of their analyses.<sup>31</sup> Suffice it to say that their research suggests that ordinary people were drawn into, or burst onto, the political scene in either 1789, 1848, or after 1871. Under these circumstances, they gradually adapted an informal repertoire

<sup>29</sup> Gerson, *The Pride of Place*, 2. See also *ibid.*, 6–7.

<sup>30</sup> Hazareesingh, *From Subject*, 318.

<sup>31</sup> Yves Déloye, *Sociologie historique du politique* (Paris, 2017), 76–103; Michel Offerlé, ‘Retour critique sur les répertoires de l’action collective (XVIIIe–XXIe siècles)’, *Politix* 1 (2008), 181–202; and Charles Tilly, ‘Charivaris, Repertoires and Urban Politics’, in John Merriman, ed., *French Cities in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1982), 73–91.

of contestation inherited from the Old Regime to the new context of formal, electoral politics.

## REPERTOIRES OF CONTENTION

Yet, the ways in which lower-class males (and women) participated in political life also accentuate another change in politics, which took place in the years 1789–1914. This was a period of transition from an era in which only the propertied possessed a mandate to discuss public issues, to mass politics, in the context of which parties and individuals, such as Georges Boulanger, appealed to popular sentiments and loyalty. Until 1848, the voting system was based on the poll tax. Ordinary people were passive citizens, subject to law which they played no formal role in making. Although more males were allowed to cast a vote for municipal councils from 1831 onwards, they nevertheless continued to resort to more informal, ritualised and symbolic forms of contestation. Such activities, which involved the occasional use of violence, offered lower-class partisans of competing movements, from legitimism to socialism, the possibility to express their concerns and pursue their interests.<sup>32</sup>

In March 1848, the provisional government introduced universal male suffrage. Expected to engender communitarian politics and social harmony, suffrage was to make the older forms of public engagement obsolete. However, the lower classes' unruly behaviour did not disappear. Rather, ordinary people vested their repertoire of small-scale actions borrowed from popular culture with a political dimension. They combined the ballot box with defiant activities in the public sphere. Like ordinary people elsewhere in Europe, this mixture of *l'urne et le fusil* helped them to join the political nation.<sup>33</sup> The coup of 1851 made it

<sup>32</sup> Emmanuel Fureix, 'La protestation rituelle: modernisation d'un répertoire politique (1815–1848)', in Laurent Bourquin and Philippe Hamon, eds., *La politisation. Conflits et construction du politique depuis le Moyen Âge* (Rennes, 2010), 171–189 and Michel Offerlé and Laurent Le Gall, 'Introduction. La politique informelle entre incertitudes et inconstances', in Laurent Le Gall, Michel Offerlé and François Ploux, eds., *La politique sans en avoir l'air. Aspects de la politique informelle, XIXe-XXIe siècle* (Rennes, 2012), 7–33.

<sup>33</sup> Brophy, *Popular Culture*, 11–12; Olivier Ihl, 'L'Urne et le fusil. Sur les violences électorales lors du scrutin du 23 avril 1848', *Revue française de science politique* 60: 1 (2010), 9–35; and Peter McPhee, *Les semailles de la République dans les Pyrénées-Orientales, 1846–1852. Classes sociales, culture et politique* (Perpignan, 1995).



nearly impossible for them to pursue their political objectives but they gradually acquired more freedoms from the mid-1860s onwards. In the following decades, an ambivalent balance between informal and formal ways of participating in politics continued to exist. Contrary to those who suggested that national, formal ways of participating in political life (electioneering in particular) replaced the more local ones, there actually was no linear process in the course of which the *modern* replaced the *traditional*. Rather, ‘continuity, rupture and re-inventions’ continued to coexist. By 1900, national elections passed by rather peacefully but municipal elections in villages such as Florensac sometimes produced heated contests and even violence (including the use of shotguns). Between August 1903 and June 1904, five elections had to be organised before a new municipal council could finally be installed. On 1 May 1904, supporters of one of two local political factions suspected that their opponents had committed fraud and they attacked the scrutineer and threw the ballot box out of the window from the *mairie*’s first floor.<sup>34</sup>

Elements of an older repertoire of collective contestation could also be found in popular protests during the revolutionary era. Ritual punishments, for example, remained rather common, as protesters mocked and criticised those who would have transgressed the unwritten rules of their community.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, residents of the Parisian faubourg Saint-Marcel, a district known for its revolutionary sympathies, saw their protests, such as the Sugar Revolt of January–February 1792, as older, familiar forms of contestation rather than as instances of a new repertoire.<sup>36</sup> In the years 1814–1815 and 1830–1833, which saw popular unrest across France, ordinary people also turned to familiar modes of contestation, such as charivaris, to sanction and denigrate the political Other. In Montpellier, for example, lower-class republicans and legitimists defied one another in public space. On some occasions, the violent acts targeted the homes of opponents. During the nineteenth century, violence also erupted over symbols—such as monuments and statues in commemoration of Henri IV and Louis XIV, objects like liberty trees, clothes or the display of colours,—all of which were identified with specific political

<sup>34</sup> Offerlé, ‘Retour critique’, 195. For elections in Florensac, see Archives Départementales de l’Hérault, 3M 2316/3 and 2357–2358.

<sup>35</sup> Tilly, ‘Charivaris’, 76.

<sup>36</sup> Haim Burstin, *Une révolution à l’oeuvre: Le Faubourg Saint-Marcel, 1789–1794* (Paris, 2005).

movements.<sup>37</sup> Yet, ordinary people also resorted to the mode of contestation that several contributors to this volume have discussed: the writing of petitions. Informed about the imminent visit of Marie, Duchesse d'Angoulême, daughter of Louis XVI, to Montpellier in 1823, approximately one hundred men and women sent her a letter, asking for support. One Benjamin Durand, who reminded the duchess that he had had 'the honour to be part of the *Volontaires Royaux* (...) under the command of Your August husband' in 1815, formulated his letter in such a way that it became difficult for the princess to reject the petition<sup>38</sup>:

If Your Highness is as good as to take a maternal look at my petition, I am morally convinced that she will not hesitate to ease my deplorable fate by awarding me some pension or other (...). Everything therefore makes me expect a propitious success for my complaint.

True, the Second Republic changed the repertoire of collective action, as Charles Tilly has argued. Universal manhood suffrage brought with it electoral meetings in which all adult males could participate, among other things. Besides, the economic crisis produced strikes. In Florensac, one of the first rural strikes ever to be held in the Hérault took place in the summer of 1848. Landless workers and small peasants successfully protested against the employment of labourers from elsewhere and the landowners' desire to lower wages for pruning and harvesting. Concocted by mayor Hippolyte Fraisse (Ariste's brother), an arrangement made it impossible, at least for a while, for large landowners, such as Louis de Ricard, to hire outsiders, who were willing to work for less money. Nevertheless, familiar forms of contestation did not disappear. Those that helped ordinary people, who believed that they had no or little access to political institutions, pursue their objectives and act upon their grievances,

<sup>37</sup> For example, Emmanuel Fureix, 'L'iconoclasm: une pratique politique? (1814–1848)', Le Gall et al., eds., *La politique sans en avoir l'air*, 117–131; James Leith, *Space and Revolution. Projects for Monuments, Squares, and Public Buildings in France, 1789–1799* (Montréal, 1991); Sheryl Kroen, *Politics and Theater. The Crisis of Legitimacy in Restoration France, 1815–1830* (Berkeley, 2000); Victoria Thompson, 'The Creation, Destruction and Recreation of Henri IV: Seeing Popular Sovereignty in the Statue of a King', *History & Memory* 24: 2 (2012), 5–40; and Pierre Triomphe, 'La symbolique à fleur de peau. Dessus de la politique et dessous de la politisation dans le Midi de la France, 1814–1851', *Annales du Midi* 124 (2012), 473–488.

<sup>38</sup> Rulof, *Popular Legitimism*, 231–233.

survived for a long time. As late as 22 November 2018, for example, a group of eighteen *gilets jaunes* held a charivari before the private home of Christophe Castaner, situated at Forcalquier (Alpes-de-Haute-Provence), in order to mock and protest against the Minister of the Interior and his government's policies. The reaction of the politician was at least as traditional as the form of contestation. The next day, Castaner claimed that the protesters had attacked his home, where his wife and children would have been at the time. This accusation sounds like a replica of what had happened 187 years earlier in Montpellier, when the legitimist pharmacist Pierre Bories accused the republicans of having attacked his home and his family.<sup>39</sup> Ordinary early nineteenth-century people resorted to the charivari, whose origins go back to the Old Regime, to express their political grievances and to exact retributive justice. While their target had usually been a local foe, the *gilets jaunes*, on the other hand, gathered to criticise a politician who, although a *local boy*, represented the state. A traditional repertoire allowed them to take sides in a national political dispute. In this sense, this incident throws light on how continuity and change interacted (once again).

<sup>39</sup> *Le Midi Libre*, 23 November 2018. On Bories, see Rulof, *Popular Legitimism*, 89.

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