

Conflicts in conflict: Disagreements and ruptures in protest movements from medieval to contemporary times

University of Salamanca, 29th April 2025

Protests galvanize collective action and shared identities but are also fraught with tensions that can undermine the social movements involved. In such contexts, social groups and their leaderships present themselves, or else are represented as cohesive, as if they were the expression of pre-constituted harmonious entities, but this cannot be taken at face value. Shared goals and unity of action sometimes result from painstaking negotiations—even plain threat and enforcement—to overcome disagreements and tensions that can ultimately lead to ruptures and exclusions.

The aim of *Conflicts in conflict* is to problematise the building of collective action in contexts of social and political conflict by delving into the tensions and cleavages experienced by people engaging in protest through history. The idea is not to highlight factional struggles but rather to better understand the conditions in which shared aims and strategies were constructed and the processes that led to it. The potential issues we will address include, but are not limited to:

- Can disagreements be identified? How do they relate to the social contexts in which the protest movements emerged?
- How were they expressed and how, if at all, were they dealt with?
- Did they contribute to foster different alignments within the groups in conflict? Did they result in the exclusion of individuals and groups?
- How did they affect the building of leaderships?
- Did the groups in conflict managed to uphold their shared goals and strategies over time? How did they do so, or if they fail to, what may explain it?
- How did disagreements and tensions affect how protests unfolded and their outcome?
- What were the consequences for the people involved beyond protest?
- How did disagreements and tensions affect the memories built in the aftermath of protests and in later times?

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Place: Departamento de Historia Medieval, Moderna y Contemporánea, Facultad de Geografía e Historia, Universidad de Salamanca, Salamanca, Spain

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To attend online: The sessions will be transmitted via Zoom. Please contact the organisers at carvajal@usal.es to obtain an invitation.

Speakers and abstracts

1. Justine Firnhaber-Baker (University of St Andrews)

Rebels against Themselves: Internal Conflicts in the Jacquerie Revolt of 1358

Although historians now agree that medieval revolts were characterized by heterogeneity, sources for the Jacquerie revolt of 1358 cast the rebels and their opponents in simple, binary terms. The rebels were 'non-nobles' who were against 'nobles', a formulation that both erases any commonalities between each group and elides a host of differences within them. Such differences were more pronounced for the 'non-nobles'. While France's nobility possessed a self-consciously articulated identity expressed and affirmed through social and cultural practices and enjoyed certain specifically noble legal privileges, 'non-nobility' was defined by the absence of those characteristics, leaving undefined wide disparities not just of economic and social background but also of culture and identity. While that heterogeneity did not prevent a wide range of 'non-nobles' from finding common cause, it did create opportunities for conflict during the uprising that ultimately led to its downfall.

2. Eliza Hartrich (University of York)

Manifestos, Mobilisation, and the Myth of Cohesion: Local and National Aims in Late Medieval English Revolts

Recent scholarly efforts to legitimate medieval rebellions by stressing their clarity of political message and strategic co-ordination perhaps neglect to consider that the diffuse nature of medieval political movements was part of their strength. This paper, drawing principally from the Jack Cade Rebellion of 1450 and the Robin of Redesdale/Robin of Holderness Rebellions of 1469-70, argues that late medieval revolts created a flashpoint or 'moment' of protest--a period of time in which those with both local and more 'national' grievances were mobilised to action. The shadowy figures with fictive names at the head of these rebellions and the manifestos they issued--often composite or amalgamated lists of grievances, or highly generic complaints--illustrate that the revolts were not designed to be especially cohesive, but rather to be a flexible rallying cry adaptable to the interests of a variety of discontented individuals or groups. Affiliation to the 'cause' was therefore very often temporary and contingent.

3. Eva Guillorel (Université Rennes 2)

Songs, history and memories of conflicts in conflict: the use of oral sources to document early modern rebellions in France

Songs are a privileged way of expressing social and political protest, easily accessible even for illiterate people. When they are interpreted collectively, they can unite a group around shared ideas, but they can also be a vehicle for divergent points of views. How to

access these forms of vernacular culture is a methodological challenge for historians interested in early modern revolts, since they very rarely left written traces. Taking into account ethnographic sources based on oral traditions collected at a later period invites to consider conflicts in conflict not only during the episodes of protest but also through the various memories resulting from some rebellions. This paper will address these questions in the context of social protests and revolts in 16th-18th century France.

4. Mauro Hernández Benítez (UNED)

Forced Rebels: Internal Fractures in Rural Uprisings (Castile, 18th Century)

Riots in rural Castile constitute a significant aspect of the repertoire of protest actions, yet they have not received the level of scholarly attention one might expect. More so in the case of the fairly common short-lived, rural disturbances that burst from very diverse motives. Research has primarily focused on urban revolts, often neglecting minor rural uprisings, except for a fair number of isolated case studies. Regional or national syntheses are extremely rare, despite the striking similarities observed in these episodes. As a result, we lack a comprehensive catalogue of shared features, one of which concerns the participants in these riots.

It is often assumed that participants belonged to a broad category of *vecinos* (neighbors) or the lower classes (*el pueblo*, the people, or the plebeians). However, detailed examinations of the individuals involved are seldom provided. This paper focuses on one particular aspect: the coercion and group pressure experienced by certain members of the community who either did not wish to participate or feared involvement in the protest. Some rioters claimed they were compelled to join the protest or that they merely showed up out of curiosity. Naturally, this poses a reliability issue, as such statements are primarily found in criminal proceedings, which constitute the core of our archival sources.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that rural communities—whether in 18th-century Castile or elsewhere—were not monolithic ‘traditional’ entities. Far from it, they were dynamic groups of women and men with diverse ideas, emotions, and fears. By examining allegations of forced participation in rural riots in Castile, we can begin to challenge the notion of rural communities as unified blocs and instead delve into the complex social relationships that characterized these groups in both times of peace and upheaval.

5. Katrina Navickas (University of Hertfordshire)

Conflicts of movement: the contested routes of democratic and trades’ marches in England in the long 19th century

The protest march was an integral part of popular politics during the long nineteenth century. As England urbanised and industrialised, the rise of democratic and trades’ movements resulted in mass demonstrations and marches. The politics of the street was enacted in contested routes and destinations for protests. This paper examines the

development of political procession routes in English cities, showing the conflicts over the right to march between protesters and police, and between different social movements. Critics of the Chartist democratic movement of the 1840s and the women's suffrage movement in the 1900s have often pointed to the internal divisions as reasons for their initial failure, but this paper will argue that the debates over tactics and organisation were integral to the development of the movement in the popular sphere as the politics of the street.

6. Álvaro París (Universidad de Salamanca)

Fractured communities: popular politics and civil war in Southern Europe during the Age of Revolutions (1789-1830)

The traditional narrative of popular politics during the Age of Revolution often depicts a linear progression from the ancien régime towards individual and collective emancipation. However, the growing interest in the study of popular counterrevolution has demonstrated how ordinary people actively participated in royalist, loyalist, and conservative politics in pursuit of what they perceived to be their own interests. Those who resisted the revolution and the rise of liberalism were neither passive instruments of the elites nor victims of false consciousness.

The Age of Revolution led to civil war, creating a political landscape divided between two irreconcilable worldviews. Violence tore apart local communities and pitted neighbours against one another. Working people took up arms in rival militias, engaged in cycles of revenge, and sought to exclude (even physically) their peers from the community. How were these new political divisions rooted in everyday experiences and practices? Was political violence primarily an expression of pre-existing cleavages that erupted openly during the crisis? Why did artisans, day labourers, and working women become politically engaged, and how did they take sides? Drawing on examples from southern France, Spain, and the Kingdom of Naples (1789–1830), this paper explores how politics fractured communities “from below”, both accelerating existing conflicts and creating new ones.