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Street Politics and Collective Violence in Cisleithania in 1897

At the end of the 19th century, the Habsburg monarchy was experiencing a high grade of collective violence, which can be explained, with hindsight, by an increasing level of political mobilization and its strong link to nationality related issues. Collective violence often manifested itself during demonstrations and rallies that were important instruments for social movements to carry their political message into the public space at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century. One of the periods most apparently demonstrating the connection between political culture and street politics was the year 1897. Following the publication of Badeni's language ordinances, a parliamentary crisis began in Cisleithania. The unrest in the Imperial Council soon spilled over into the streets of the Austrian and Bohemian cities. During the summer of 1897, riots broke out in Czech and German towns, which intensified when the government of Prince Badeni fell in November. Demonstrations and riots had their center in Prague, where the largest outbreak of violence since 1848 occurred. Moreover, it was the most severe instance of anti-German and anti-Semitic collective violence during the whole "long 19th century" in Bohemia.

My project offers a more nuanced study of the so-called "Badeni-Krawalle", as it explores the streets politics connected of the year 1897 on three levels – a) causes, b) events, and c) consequences.

The first research question examines street violence in 1897 from the perspective of its causes and motivation, specifically: how and why did the riots and demonstrations mobilize so many participants for collective violence? One of the hypotheses to be examined is whether the above-mentioned obstructions in the parliament could have legitimized violence by social actors, and therefore stimulated the eruption of collective violence. To test this hypothesis, my project studies both the direct and indirect influence of the members of the Imperial Council and Bohemian Diet on the street, as well as politicians' immediate activities in their electoral districts. This part of my project relies on archival research, on the analysis of stenographic protocols of parliamentary sessions and the records of public activities of politicians.

Additionally, I will explore if and how was the street politics in Cisleithania instigated.

My second research question is: what was the composition of the groups responding to the political events and propaganda in the form of rioting/demonstrating? As there is no ready-made list of participants, I am compiling a database from multiple police and court reports as well as media materials. Then, using quantitative methods (descriptive statistics), I will be able to receive data on the composition of the groups of rioters of 1897, with regards to social class, age, and sex. I am convinced that this question is crucial for identifying those social groups that were the most prone to collective violence driven by national motives and most susceptible to political propaganda and campaigning.

Group composition is considered in my project as dynamic and changing in response to the developments in street politics. Therefore, I am tracing the changes in the composition of groups particularly during the demonstrations and riots in Prague, considering the longer time span and more visible changes in the street politics' character – from peaceful demonstrations to looting and plundering of German and Jewish property. In order to increase the analytical potential of this quantitative analysis, I am comparing Prague with smaller Czech and German cities. Differences between the group composition in the capital of Bohemia and its peripheries might indicate differences in the mobilization potential in smaller and larger Czech and German cities. Thus, my research is examining the role of the following historical processes in shaping the street unrests: formation and participation of the so-called national workers class, urbanization, and work migration in Czech and German cities of Cisleithania.

For the third dimension of my research project (which is not fully explored yet), I will focus on the consequences of street politics and collective violence in the form of the changes in press narratives. Press did not only mobilize towards the violence, but also reflected the changes in the sentiments – not necessarily directly in the content of the articles, but also in the discourse. During the year 1897, an increased rate of nationally motivated violence in the cities potentially changed the way that language was used when describing a conflict. I would like to study the influence of violence and riots of 1897 on media narratives and language style, applying a method of critical discourse analysis. Thus, my last research question is: how did the dialogue between the press and the street change the media discourses when

describing collective violence in different phases of the 1897 riots? To answer this question, I will study the press from 1897, focusing on the change of relevant words (e.g., riots, demonstrations, violence). My hypothesis deriving from this research question is that a specific language (“language of violence”) was created in the course of the riots, which did not only describe but also further shaped the conflictual conditions. Thus, the swift transformation of the media narrative or discourse could have brought about the perception of collective violence as one of the traditional punishments to be performed in further riots and demonstrations.

My research project is contributing to the studies of the year 1897 by presenting a new conceptualization of street politics, showing street and politics as one arena with interconnected actors, stressing close connection of the political and social questions. Additionally, this project studies influence of political authorities and the media on „ordinary“ people, as I consider street politics as closely related to local conditions – political, social, economic.

Moreover, this work provides a new set of primary data collected through archival research and quantitative analysis, which will not only address the gaps in the academic coverage of the topic but will also systematically engage with arguments from the secondary literature – for example, the depiction of national workers as the main participants. In addition, I emphasize the significance of urbanization and work migration for the rise of nationally motivated violence.

Last but not least, by showing how the language of violence was used and possibly developed over the course of 1897, my research will clarify how the important sociopolitical events influenced the discourses at the end of the 19th century, possibly creating a conflictual environment before World War I.

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