

# Introduction

His eyes are laughing; his face is glowing; he is carrying almost without any effort a huge timber, throwing it across the street; and as if in triumph he straightens his body. He is truly beautiful at that moment. In his posture, happiness can be read; it can be seen that he has lived to experience something for which he had been waiting for a long time. He was killed on the barricade, and he died happy.

And finally a man of gigantic height and weight approached the podium. His sullen, red face had only one expression: that of dull stupidity. He was ushered onto the podium by a young Jew [żydek—diminutive from żyd, a derogatory expression used among casual antisemites], who introduced him as the one who was supposed to speak in the name of the hungry workers. The fat scoundrel hooted: “Down with Poland, down with the white eagle.” . . . The Jew flounced onto the podium in convulsions of wild fury or happiness.

**I**n 1905 new groups of people entered the sparse political scene of Russian Poland. Urban workers came out into the streets in protest, which from striking and picketing led to an urban uprising and the construction of barricades. They also embarked on various forms of public debate such as mass meetings and rallies. The above descriptions are reactions triggered by this unprecedented situation. They are memoirs written by eyewitnesses perceiving the new political practice of workers. Vivid creations of memory in both cases, they reveal important elements of political imagination and emotion. However diametrically opposed, they demonstrate the impact of insurgent democratization on the social imaginary equally well.

The first depiction is about the “politics of the street.” Regardless of whether it is an inscription of memory or mere literary imagination, it

captures an excitement with the new. It refers to politics forcefully challenging the existing order and the revolutionary zeal of barricade building in June 1905 in Lodz. It is about politics of the street, used to stake claims otherwise illegitimate in palace courtrooms and factory offices. It also registers a pivotal change in the lives of revolutionized workers. It does not stress death but the self-assertion of a person embarking on a struggle bigger than personal involvement, and by this act gaining a form of agency and dignity he had been deprived of for all his previous life.

The second epigraph is a rejection yet refers to a more moderate form of participation—a mass meeting organized by liberals in the building of the Warsaw Philharmonic Concert Hall in November 1905. It describes a semiauthorized rally in a public building with a podium and seats for the participants, where speakers took turns sharing their political ideas, close to even the most moderate idea of what it meant to practice politics. Nevertheless, the picture presented by a noble woman supporting the liberals is a dense composition of all the means usually mobilized to reinforce political difference and exclusion. An anthropological or physiognomic difference separates the rabble and those deemed legitimate to voice their political statements. The orator she depicts is alien not only in respect to class; he also sticks out as a proxy of an ethnic community carefully policed out of the legitimate polity of the Poles. Every detail of his performance renders his claims usurpatory—after all, a “fat scoundrel” cannot righteously represent “hungry workers.” It is a “Jew” who ushers in the claimant, ultimately testifying to the foreign and hostile origin of the claim. In a paroxysm of the rabble excited with its own self-acclaimed greatness, even basic emotions, let alone claims, cannot be properly detected. It is not an argument that is uttered but instead “convulsions of wild fury or happiness.” It cannot be recognized whether it is this or that, nor does it matter at all amid noise that never does become a voice.

Both depictions touch on the heart of the problem investigated in this study. The invisible limits of participation are made flesh in a vision of heroic self-assertion and a discourse of class contempt embroidered with ethnic accusation. The bearded oldster from the first quote (incidentally, also a Jew) forcefully questions his assigned place, and the popular classes storming the liberal salon from the second quote are doing exactly the same. They demonstrate that politics is a realm with carefully policed limits. They also expose, however, the fact that those limits might be questioned, and sometimes

moved. Political action is no less than a redrawing of these limits. This is what happened during the crisis of 1904–1907 in Russian Poland, which is usually called the 1905 Revolution, and indeed might be dubbed “the long 1905.” Correspondingly, in undertaking this study I wanted to understand the contentious renegotiation concerning the presence of workers within the public sphere, a communicative space composed of words and practices. Moreover, a large proportion of the urban working class was already female, thus the redrawing of the political also included the gender dimension. All in all, the political sphere was overhauled during the revolution.

The 1905 Revolution in the Russian-controlled Kingdom of Poland was one of the few bottom-up political transformations and general democratizations in Polish history, probably paralleled only by the “first” Solidarity movement in the early 1980s. As the political upsurge ultimately brought about defeat of the popular classes rising for political recognition and economic alleviation, it is not in direct political or social outcomes where one should look for its major significance. The 1905 Revolution introduced a plethora of new issues into the public debate and reconfigured the political field. This insurgent democratization and its corollaries were part and parcel of the broader yet asynchronous transformation of societies and political regimes in modernity. At the same time, it was also an instance of the discontinuous history of plebeian political experience. Therefore, its analysis also addresses broader questions within the historical sociology of the political.

The insurgent democratization set the stage for modern politics in the area and was a tipping point for ongoing developments in the public sphere. It was a change within the conditions that governed the practice of politics; new stakes, new measures, and new lines of division emerged that circumscribed any further actions. Modern mass parties were born, and new political languages appeared, which set the stage for later debates and struggles.<sup>1</sup> Basic divisions, unbridgeable rifts, and mutual perceptions forged in 1905 between parties, ideologies, and social groupings set the tone for the politics of interwar Poland.<sup>2</sup> With the birth of protest culture, labor militancy continued without abating for years afterward.<sup>3</sup> The particular social structure of Polish society and its discursive representation traced the contours of the political sphere in respect to presence and presentation of class.<sup>4</sup> For instance, decades later, the dissident intellectuals in the period of state socialism acknowledged their intellectual indebtedness to and self-conscious imitation of intelligentsia

from the turn of the century. They also mimicked earlier tacit assumptions about, and attitudes to, “the people.”<sup>5</sup> This was an afterimage of the initial political experience of the Polish twentieth century.

Bearing in mind the significance of this moment, this study explores the change of the public sphere in Russian Poland during the 1905 Revolution. I am interested in how spaces and representations of the political have changed through continuous processes of redefinition and reenactment. I want to understand the circumstances that shaped the nascent modern political practice in respect to the presence of the working class—or for that matter, simply the workers—as a social entity, as a political claimant, and as a discursive construction. To do this, the problem must be disentangled into several interrelated threads, such as those concerning public participation, political discourses, subjective identities and self-definitions, or the relationship between social groups. To ascertain the constellation that precipitated further developments of the Polish political space, I look at the workers’ public sphere, the uses of political language, the entanglement of biography and politics, and the image of “the workers” in the press.

Correspondingly, in the first part of this study I scrutinize nascent forms of political education within party milieus, which finally came to the fore in 1905. Strikes, factory constituencies, political street performances, and new forms of public participation constituted nascent forms of the working-class public sphere. Subsequently, I examine the changing regime of political speech (language in action materialized in political proclamations; leaflets and party newspapers distributed among workers). I also ask about new uses and abuses of language, taking political antisemitism as an example of a political device assisting the construction of new political identities and an infrastructure of political exclusion. Afterward, I investigate workers’ intellectual pursuits and the relationship between a work-centered life context, militant biography, and political claims. The last section focuses on the political visibility of workers in the press. Here I focus on the interplay of, on the one hand, the acceptance of workers’ new “place” and agency and, on the other, pushback from the industrial bourgeoisie, fearful liberals, and nationalists opposing the insurgent democratization.

## **Insurgent Democratization**

“Bloody Sunday” in January 1905, when tsarist soldiers opened fire in St. Petersburg on a crowd carrying icons and portraits of the then-praised tsar,

was not only an event triggering the revolutionary process in Russia proper; it also instantly catalyzed outbursts of rioting in the areas at the fringes of the Russian Empire. In Russian Poland, it built on unrest that had been germinating for at least a year, during which dissatisfaction with the economic crisis and conscription for the Russo-Japanese War had already caused people to flock to the squares and confront Russian troops.<sup>6</sup> A complex process consisting of waves of contention and state repression began. It led to uncountable political and economic strikes, to electoral campaigns to the State Duma (a form of advisory parliamentary body introduced in Russia in those days), to street demonstrations that ended in bloodshed. Its pinnacle was a quasi-uprising with street barricades, but on the downside came “fratricidal” struggles between workers.

While the events of 1904–1907 are best known as the Russian Revolution of 1905, a large part of the militant actions, strikes, street fights, and other forms of social unrest actually happened in the urban centers of Russian Poland. Over one-third of strikes in the entire empire happened there, and they were generally more massive than elsewhere, with up to 90 percent of workers striking at least once in 1905. These were not only sporadic outbursts; by 1906 one-fifth of Polish workers had joined a labor union, and a similar proportion had joined a political party.<sup>7</sup> Women accounted for up to one-fifth of those involved.<sup>8</sup> Though the turmoil had a different dynamic outside the cities, the skirmishes also affected the rural population, radicalizing landless peasants and farm workers.<sup>9</sup>

The mass rioting expressed accumulated tensions and dissatisfaction. In the first phase it was a general resistance and refusal of further participation in a system of oppression. Right after the initial general strike of January 1905, the Warsaw governor-general admitted that “workers, having ceased to work, did not make any demands.”<sup>10</sup> However, an amorphous refusal gradually changed its character, a certain structure of revolt began to crystallize, and various, alternating sets of demands emerged, along with symbolic points organizing the struggle. Without a doubt, there were social grievances present among peasants-turned-workers migrating to the cities and the impoverished petty craftsmen. The tsarist state was not a liberal dreamland and did not offer much welfare support or political freedoms. What it delivered in abundance, however, was harsh military policing and an ineffective administration, which was widely perceived as foreign and occupational by the local population. Adding insult to injury, factory officials and foremen were

often German, and owners were often German or Jewish, while the working population was Polish or Jewish. Such an intersectional regime of domination facilitated an equally complex solidarity of resistance. In an imperial situation characterized by a multiethnic population and unequal access to power, the cultural cauldron was a fertile hotbed for social struggle tightly interwoven with national liberation and ethnic animosities.

When those emotions erupted, every political organization was one step behind. “None of the political parties that would later claim to have organized or initiated the events of 1905 really deserve the credit (or blame) for doing so. It would be better to say that they were poised to take advantage of events that they could neither fully predict nor control,” as Brian Porter-Szűcs comments.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, membership in all types of political organizations rose rapidly, a process even more striking considering that they were not authorized by the autocratic regime. In fact, any illegal, but for a while hardly clandestine, activity may have led—and often did—to harsh police repression and imprisonment. Nevertheless, political parties grew from tiny cadre organizations run chiefly by the intelligentsia, to mass membership parties, reaching approximately every fifth worker in the Polish Kingdom.<sup>12</sup> Parties and newly emerging labor unions directly mobilized at least 150,000 people, most of them for the very first time.<sup>13</sup> By any definition, it was a unidirectional mobilization. Class-based, internationalist Social Democracy in the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPiL) competed with the more nationally oriented Polish Socialist Party (PPS) and among Jewish workers with the Bund, which aimed to organize Jewish workers throughout the empire. They were soon rivaled by the sheer Polish nationalism of the National Democracy party and its labor branch, the National Workers’ Association (NZR).<sup>14</sup> A fierce political struggle between parties competing to build new political identities—be they class, nation, or various combinations of the two—wreaked havoc.

The bid for the new political claimants made real what had been only disputed before.<sup>15</sup> Possible futures for the Polish people had been imagined by party ideologues and writers from intelligentsia milieus. The intelligentsia—with its specific characteristics of an intermediary social position, educational resources, blocked upward mobility, and vocational ethos—played an important role in radical politics and in the elite’s response to it. The “masses,” however, didn’t want to wait for the intelligentsia to lead and educate them, and they went out into the streets. The assumed political community could

no longer be postponed or deferred; there was no time left for any visions of a future reconciliation of tensions within it. Political constituencies had to be mobilized and disciplined in the here and now.

Thus the 1905 Revolution is perhaps best understood not as a party bid for power but as a transformation of politics as practice. It was the democratic dimension of mass politics, and not elite party gatherings or even conspiratorial agitation led by the intelligentsia, that circumscribed the contours of the broader social experience of the revolution.<sup>16</sup> Beyond the very top of the political elite, there was a vast group of rank-and-file activists who were at once the producers, the dealers, and the consumers of the era's ideological churn. When the workers spoke and acted, they did so with a conceptual vocabulary inherited from earlier generations of political activists (mostly the intelligentsia). If the distinction between intelligentsia and workers was a crucial nexus of contemporary polemics and action, it may not be reified on the analytical level today. Intellectual history, especially the popular one I embark on, is always produced in the space where the ideas of theorists and full-time activists contact those who are searching for words and phrases that capture their experiences and feelings. Then a feedback loop circles back to the theorists and activists.<sup>17</sup> How precisely that process is characterized is a more difficult question, which I will try address as my arguments unfold.

Even a brief look at the existing historical research overwhelms the reader with the multiplicity of political organizations, labor committees and unions, and associational life that established the cornerstone for modern civil society. The tsarist Manifesto of October 1905, which introduced constitutional reform and abolished preventive censorship, heralded a new era in the kingdom's public sphere. The liberalized law on associations from March 1906 spurred on the development of all types of voluntary organizations, including trade unions. The authorized and underground press flourished, and the number of both commercial and political titles mushroomed. They addressed the unprecedented growth of interest in public matters.<sup>18</sup> The revolution encouraged new social groups, in particular the urban working class, to actively participate in the public sphere. The events, for better and for worse, ushered the Polish Kingdom into the age of modern politics.<sup>19</sup> It was not allowed, however, to remain there.

The revolution failed and was bloodily suppressed, leading to a vast array of social disintegration processes and political repression measures. Elusive political gains on the tsarist state level, such as those gained in the October

Manifesto, were soon canceled after the tsarist regime regained some vigor. In his seminal depiction, Robert Blobaum bemoans the demise of the nascent civil society in these words: "Martial law . . . did much to arrest, if not reverse, the development of civil society. That society . . . perhaps had been brought to a premature blossom by the revolution. Like a warm, early, but also stormy spring, the revolution fostered the sudden budding out of a multitude of associations, societies, and organizations. . . . These bodies, intermediate between state and society . . . were strained, sometimes violently, by their too-rapid growth and by the pressures of popular participation, in unprecedented numbers, by many whose only experience had been that of subjects and not that of citizens."<sup>20</sup>

Inasmuch as tsarist repression was certainly the case, one may wonder what was hidden under the wording of the phrase "pressures of popular participation." Whereas parties and organizations undoubtedly had a lot of trouble managing the sky-rocketing growth in participation, it could hardly have been a key factor in their dispersal and ultimate failure. Similarly, another important voice on the topic, Scott Ury, concludes his outline of the theory of "democracy and its discontents" (the title of his book chapter) with the conclusion that "while democracy may have brought many blessings, it also came with at least one curse that would scar Polish society for generations: political antisemitism."<sup>21</sup> Both authors suggest that the democratic surge imploded under its own weight, as if too heavy to be carried by political newcomers. What remains unnoticed, however, is that it was not the tragedy of popular participation but rather the elite's reaction to it that prevented civil society from "blossoming" and fostered popular anger against "the Jews."<sup>22</sup>

The postrevolutionary regression in civil activities can be explained neither by the unambiguously repressive nature of the tsarist regime, which relentlessly suppressed any emerging civic institutions, nor by the inherent incapacities of the Polish people. The tsarist administration was not the only agent frightened by the emerging self-determination of the people and the democratic surge. A reluctant and later hostile reaction to it was also harbored among propertied strata, growing nationalist milieus, and a significant part of the intelligentsia. The nationalists feared the revolution was carrying a Trojan horse, capable of destroying the true nation. It also questioned the procession of progress as envisioned by the liberal intelligentsia, which was ready to educate the masses but reluctant to accept their political agency. These dual effects triggered by the revolution, democratization and

contraction, are important to note when tackling the conundrum of the changing and conflictual public sphere investigated here.

## The Conflict Within

The modern transformation of European polities concerned democratization, citizenship, and legitimacy of class-based claims. The expansion of these trends was, however, often followed by contraction, grounded in reaction among particular political agents but also in a broader social countertendency to seek order after the old foundations had been shaken. This dual dynamic influenced the patterns of emerging national public spheres. As Geoff Eley remarks, “the emergence of a bourgeois public was never defined solely by the struggle against absolutism and traditional authority but addressed the problem of popular containment as well. The public sphere was always constituted by conflict.”<sup>23</sup> Accommodating the rising working class within the modern polity was one of the more serious challenges that the European political systems of the nineteenth century had to face. At the same time, it drove their democratization on the institutional, social, and imaginary levels, as Eley documents elsewhere.<sup>24</sup> The resulting changes stirred up conflict, and often only an intense social protest was able to tip the scales in favor of political and social democratization.

The limits of the public sphere and of what was considered political was a major stake in this conflict. It defined the realm of the debatable and the set of legitimate claimants. It was the working class who opposed the strongholds of the *ancien régime*, which had merged with a new bourgeois hegemony often reluctant and fearful of any concessions.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, working-class formation, coherent class action, and labor political identities were crucial factors in the outcome of this confrontation.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, changes in regimes of the public sphere were crucial for the formation of the working class and hence for its recognition as a political actor.<sup>27</sup> In a modified, but not so divergent, sense “every class struggle is a political struggle,” as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels announced in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*.<sup>28</sup> In this sociopolitical vortex the social question concerning economic well-being was closely intertwined with the acceptance of political citizenship for workers. As the historical sociologist Reinhard Bendix explains:

The workers organize in order to attain that level of economic reward to which they feel entitled. . . . These practical achievements of trade unions have a

far-reaching effect upon the status of workers as citizens. For through collective bargaining the right to combine is used to assert “basic claims to the elements of social justice.” In this way the extension of citizenship to the lower classes is given the very special meaning that as citizens the members of these classes are “entitled” to a certain standard of well-being, in return for which they are only obliged to discharge the ordinary duties of citizenship.<sup>29</sup>

This admission proceeded differently within various national or imperial polities. Often it faced powerful opposition and counterblows executed by the liberal proponents of individual rights. Once opposed to the old autocracies, liberals nevertheless rejected the collective entitlement and political agency of workers, embarking on a “politics of fear,” as Marc Mulholland calls it.<sup>30</sup> According to Victoria Bonnell, however, “the two battles—for the civil rights and for the collective rights of labor—had been fought . . . simultaneously in Russia during the 1905 revolution and workers played a leading part in advancing both claims,” elsewhere often made sequentially.<sup>31</sup> As a result, the middle strata of the entire empire with all their regional specificities were initially much more saturated with radical ideas and prone to support working-class revolutionary fervor than in Western Europe.<sup>32</sup> The conflict and the class struggle from above came later, not unlike in other instances of European history.<sup>33</sup> The configuration of forces was, however, quite different. It was from within popular constituencies that many actual incentives to reform came. Nevertheless, working-class public activities were not well integrated in the liberal political culture of the scarce but influential bourgeois social order.<sup>34</sup> Thus they faced resistance, conspicuously present on the fringes of the Russian Empire, where seemingly the national question might unify various contenders against the tsarist autocracy.

While the presence of the “foreign autocracy” concealed important tensions within the Polish polity, it did not render them obsolete. Methodological nationalism of any sort is not a good tool to understand this charged reality. Such a research framework still stands strong even if some scholarship has been chipping away at it.<sup>35</sup> The way out is not only to consider the broader imperial situation but to look for fractures within the nation, society, or language-based communicative sphere. The strained negotiation of the working-class presence epitomized the dynamic of democratization and contraction, as well as the internal conflicts and limitations of the forces pitted against old monarchical order. Correspondingly, this study is intended

to bring these heterogeneous forces to light and complicate the picture of European democratization and contraction, or revolution and reaction.

The revolution with all its corollaries was a pivotal moment in the transformation of the public sphere in Russian Poland. It underwent a severe transformation encompassing the renegotiation of the age-old nobility's hegemony. Unlike the entrenched landed elites of the ready-made nation states, the Polish elites could not postulate a neat separation from the people or preach their own interests as the embodiment of universal reason. The eighteenth century implosion of the Polish Lithuanian-Commonwealth, leading to the collapse of Polish statehood and the broadly acknowledged "degeneration" of the Polish nobles' political culture, had effectively prevented them from retaking the reins of national leadership. The modern economic transformation and political repression after the January uprising in 1863 further unseated the landed elites from their privileged status, even if some of them remained economically powerful.<sup>36</sup> By the turn of the century, they were put under pressure by the imperial administration and lost credibility among their co-nationals. The industrial bourgeoisie was still scarce and widely perceived as foreign. Members of the urban elite had just begun to assert themselves through philanthropy and could make only a rather weak attempt at social and urban reforms.<sup>37</sup> They were too detached from the state to take the lead, and only later could they get involved in the domestic conflict with new contenders. The self-proclaimed leader of Polish society was the intelligentsia, a particular social strata usually composed of the educated offspring of the gentry and neither a bourgeois intellectual elite nor a professional middle class.<sup>38</sup> Putting into practice their ethos of social service, members of the intelligentsia were quite aware of the fact that in order to think about any national revival, they needed to get the populace on board. The question was under what conditions, in which direction, and how the new crew would behave if confronted with the rough sea of modern politics.<sup>39</sup>

When the benign assumptions about "the people" were challenged, the progressive alliance of the intelligentsia and the populace appeared to be a fragile one. In Russian Poland, state policing was even harsher than in Russia, which prevented any "decent" citizen from conspiring with the militant workers. The same concerned those workers who would be willing to embark on any open conversation with the urban elite. Apart from this, the bourgeoisie had hardly any developed social patterns that workers could

imitate and adopt.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, the state was not a viable addressee of any claims possibly forged in negotiation and supported by other social groups. Had such mediation been possible, the search for support among the progressive bourgeoisie might have boosted the incentives for political moderation.<sup>41</sup> Simultaneously, the “foreign” tsarist regime inhibited any practical political action within the framework of the state and the accompanying modes of reasoning. As a result, a quasi-utopian radicalism and unrealistic views about popular politics nourished debates among the intelligentsia and in the liberal salons. This development further distracted these groups from adopting a political way of thinking,<sup>42</sup> perhaps much more than in the Western context of earlier opposition against the absolutist state or even in the context of Russia proper under the tsar. All this created a power vacuum under and against the autocratic state. The evacuated space was reoccupied by the industrial working class, which, regardless of its insular presence, defined the situation to a much larger extent than in Russia.<sup>43</sup> This trend, however, did not remain unanswered by other social strata, fearful about the overall destabilization of the social order.

Nevertheless, the constellation of the state, labor movement, civil society, and changing social structure renders the case of Russian Poland particularly helpful in exploring patterns of European democratization—especially because, so far, it has typically been overlooked in otherwise well-informed comparisons.<sup>44</sup> The reason was perhaps its peculiar, intermediary, and sub-state status or the aforementioned binary imagination unanimously pitting autocracy against the democratizing society. The long-inhibited modern transformation combined with uneven yet rapid industrialization made the 1905 Revolution a much more revealing, intensified confrontation than those known elsewhere. Thus it is a “laboratory” shedding light on dynamics and tensions accompanying the emergence of modern mass politics and admitting workers within the assumed political community. The imperial situation of Eastern Europe, additionally marked by the national self-assertion of imperial subjects, supplements the findings regarding the strained negotiations of the working-class presence within the national polities of Western Europe.

At the same time, however, Polish politics in 1905 is worthy of study not because it offers a revealing exception but quite the contrary—a typical case. Unlike the Western bourgeoisie-led models, the Polish path exemplifies the way most of the world actually experienced political modernization. The liminal intelligentsia performed a central role, with elites grabbing with

simultaneous devotion to and fear of “the people,” not unlike in Central and Southern America, the Mexican Revolution being the most notable example.<sup>45</sup> If in many African or Asian contexts the situation was complicated by the colonial question and racial distinctions, it was not entirely different, with comprador vernacular elites suppressing populist attempts. For this reason, Poland is more in line with global patterns than we often assume, with Western Europe standing apart as the odd case that requires explanation.

## **A Historically Changing Political Space and the Public Sphere**

In historical terms, modern politics was forged as a particular nexus of power and communication within a vortex of state, law, civil society, the public sphere, and other, more tangible institutional forms, such as parliaments or monarchical settings.<sup>46</sup> In part because the problem is viewed from this angle, governments, monarchs, parties, or parliaments and the activities related to these agents attract the bulk of attention in the existing research.<sup>47</sup> My study, in contrast, focuses on more dispersed regimes of class-based political visibility and agency.

Because I aim to investigate the paramount transformation affecting the indirect corollaries of the political regime, I do not deal much with parliament, the legal setting, or the attitude of the state to civil society. Instead, I focus on the public sphere, variably accessible for various social groups, and represent them in a patterned manner. The reason for this is threefold: (1) it is an important under-researched dimension of the emergence of modern politics; (2) in Russian Poland political change affected precisely this aspect, and not so much the state structure; and (3) change was stimulated on the streets and during political mass meetings and not in parliament, for the simple reason that there was none. The State Duma created during the revolution was a place of debate on pan-Russian politics and national autonomy but not on the problem investigated here. My focus, therefore, is the contingent process of reordering and reunifying society in respect to class and nation, through revolutionary dislocation. The fierce struggle that ensued was waged to a large extent within the public sphere.

In particular, I am interested in the transformation of the public sphere by insurgent alternative subspheres, through the introduction of new political practices and modes of participation. Inasmuch as the public sphere is—in the seminal depiction of Jürgen Habermas—the “sphere which mediates between society and state, in which the public organizes itself as the bearer of public

opinion,” I am interested in how different social groups participated and how public opinion regarding those groups was formed.<sup>48</sup> Usually, the educated, decent, burgher constituencies assuming the mantle of general social representation in the face of the state apparatus have been placed at the center. Here, on the contrary, they are of interest only inasmuch as they evolve in terms of their social composition and react against new contenders making claims from the revolutionary street.

At the same time, the focal point of my interest is the Polish public sphere, seen as a realm of political reasoning, discussion, and practice, “in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk,” to borrow Nancy Fraser’s definition.<sup>49</sup> Thus I limit this exploration to Polish-language materials constituting the field of effective discourse and interaction.<sup>50</sup> This decision may appear problematic given a multilingual imperial context and transnational and global academic incentives. This limitation notwithstanding, I do not assert that the polity being envisioned in this sphere had stable borders. On the contrary, the intersection of class and ethnicity was often played out in order to police these borders and secure stabilization of the national body politic. For instance, as it will be revealed below, class-based claims were delegitimized as not appropriately Polish. At the same time, however, class mobilization might acquire undertones of national self-assertion. Class and national elements played out in different proportions within both shop-floor politics and highly nuanced theoretical approaches wavering between “nationalism and Marxism,” to borrow Timothy Snyder’s wording.<sup>51</sup> The focus on a single language-based communicative space enables me to read such tensions from within and uncover layered cultural imaginaries or a history of particular concepts active in shaping the debate. It gives me a chance to focus on social rifts within the contested polity and the inner struggle defining the public sphere. Unavoidably I present here an incomplete picture of an incredibly complicated situation unfolding in the medium of at least four languages, with Yiddish playing almost as prominent a role as Polish. The origins of the Polish-speaking political sphere, however, are worth studying, because it became dominant throughout this area after 1918. While Yiddish and Polish may have had a similar status before the First World War, their relative weight certainly shifted afterward.

Having said that, I regard this case as particularly revealing when the relationship between the public sphere and the nation state is considered. Modern politics in the Eurocentric sense developed inseparably from the

“post-Westphalian” state order. Important in this context is a remark by Chiara Bottici, who notes that “the success of a definition of politics that reduces it to the state is inseparable from the fact that it clearly reflected the change occurring in political life itself: it is because of the emergence of the modern state—a form of political community characterized by the sovereign monopoly over legitimate coercion within territorial boundaries—that people felt the need for a new word.”<sup>52</sup> Such an entanglement weighed heavily on the ongoing delimitation of the public sphere, especially given the existence of an external state structure. Within empire states, insurgent national claims were combined with a reappropriation of conceptual and practical inventions regarding politics that initially emerged elsewhere. The political sphere was defined and performed not within the state but to a degree against it. This opposition affected not only patterns of political reasoning and practice in respect to the state but also those concerning contenders from below. For instance, it influenced the shape of Polish nationalism, which “began to hate”—to paraphrase Brian Porter-Szűcs’s apt expression—because it was funneled into an ethnic, and not civic, framing.<sup>53</sup> Its later vitriolic ethnic exclusivity was also perpetuated by the particular confrontation with the masses on the revolutionary streets in 1905 and the inability to endorse the state as a principle of order.

Furthermore, the subimperial forging of politics severely affected the potential accommodation of class-based demands. For those excited by new possibilities, and for those frightened by the menace of social turmoil and the fall of old authorities, the revolution was a confrontation with “the masses.” The masses, however, were not merely existing groups of people who had never been politicized before; above all, “the masses” (as a concept sometimes coded with differed wording) were a product of a particular regime of political (mis)representation. As Stephan Jonsson notes: “The masses have always been produced through the ways in which certain social agents and aspirations have been represented—politically and intellectually—in modernity. Instead of defining the mass as those without representation, we should investigate the mechanisms whereby any given community represents itself, politically, intellectually, or aesthetically, necessarily produces a remainder, a group of agents and aspirations that cannot be accounted for by the dominant mode of representation.”<sup>54</sup>

“Politics in a new key” was also a politics of public representation of the interests that had hitherto been carefully policed out of the public sphere—in

part by the tsarist police apparatus, which like its counterpart in every state sought to restrain the turbulent expression of contentious claims, but also by the deliberate exclusion of street politics. Most liberal visions of politics and nostalgic theorizations of the bourgeois public sphere clearly exclude “laws passed under the ‘pressure of the street.’” Such laws, according to Habermas, “could hardly be understood any longer as embodying the reasonable consensus of publicly debating private persons.”<sup>55</sup> Regardless of the fact that the bourgeois salon itself was never a site of “reason” (in the Enlightenment or liberal sense), it is the logic of representation that sits at the center of the transforming public sphere and determines the targets of exclusion. “The act of representing socially significant passions can be seen as an originary mechanism of politics, as the cause of power—comparable to the distribution of presence and absence, rationality and irrationality, civic agency and subalternity within the public sphere,” as Jonsson adds.<sup>56</sup> This “originary mechanism of politics” was activated at a time that may be dubbed a preamble to the age of extremes, when new political ideologies but also uses and abuses of political language gained unprecedented currency and influence in shaping the life of entire populations.<sup>57</sup> It was a time marked by intense testing and contesting of democracy, a crucial oscillation in twentieth-century European politics, as Jan-Werner Müller indicates.<sup>58</sup> On the fringes of the Russian Empire it was more a democratic principle within the social imaginary than democracy as a form of political organization, which was a bone of contention. Nonetheless, the basic principles of division of the body politic forged at the onset were to have long-lasting, often resilient afterlives—including when politics migrated to the loci more typical of a parliamentary nation state. Therefore, how the “presence and absence” of workers and ways of “representing socially significant passions” changed “under the pressure of the street” in this foundational moment is the focus of my interest here.