Brainstorming meeting, Weds 31 August

Attending: Joanna Innes, Mark Philp (co-ordinators), Franz Fillafer, Cody Inglis, Marcin Jarząbek, Piotr Kuligowski. Marc Lerner, Iain McDaniel, Claire Morelon, Anne Nørgaard, Joris Oddens (regional experts), Peter Hill, Maurizio Isabella, Eduardo Posada Carbo (project aficionados).

Apologies: Bence Bari

1. **Welcome, introductions.**

2. **Review of possible timeline for project**. Joanna emphasised that everything was very fluid. There would be 2-3 years of network-building and discussion, which would gradually give way to a consolidation phase. It was unclear through what mix of online discussions and face-to-face meetings the project would unfold; this will depend partly on funding.

3. **Discussion of suggested themes.**

Iain McDaniel: he noted that Germany was vast, diverse, and divided. Debates about democracy were generally inextricably bound up with the national question and federalism. To give a flavour of the content of thought about democracy and change over time, he had decided to focus on two thinkers, Carl von Rotteck, who in 1837 wrote a famous article about the 'democratic principle', and the much-less-well-known Gustaf Dietzel, who in 1852 wrote about Germany and western civilisation. Rotteck [who came from Baden], is best known as one of the compilers of the encyclopedic *Staats-lexicon.* He was a big supporter of Polish independence, and more concretely of emigres who passed through Germany after 1830. He almost participated in the famous Hambacherfest. He welcomed the French revolution of 1830, but thought that it failed to fulfil its promise. He was keen to distinguish good from bad democracy (ochlocracy, mob rule) and the pathologies of the ancient model. (Influenced by Constant). Notably, he argued that good democracy is best realised in a monarchical regime. But he differed from the anglophiles of Gottingen, Dietzel's was one of a flurry of works which appeared in the aftermath of 1848. He too wanted to distinguish good from bad democracy, and to reject the problematic Roman model for a preferable German one. Democracy building on Roman legacies tended to absolutism, whereas democracy in the German tradition prioritised freedom, individualism and was (implicitly) capitalist. Democracy, he argued, takes different forms according to national character.

Anne Nørgaard: she explained that Denmark lacked representative institutions 1660-1830s. Then estates assemblies were revived; in 1847, a new king, under pressure from liberals and radicals, agreed to end absolutism. As elsewhere, democracy leapt in use at this time, being given especial prominence by a leftist peasant movement. The words 'democracy' and 'movement' came to be strongly associated. The idea was that Denmark was participating in a larger historical movement, across European states, in favour of democracy. Believing that this was happening was compatible with a variety of views. Conservatives sought to control and dampen the movement, those on the left, to put themselves at its head. Though it

came into much wider use after 1848, the word can be found in earlier texts. Already in the 1780s Tyge Rothe attempted to write it into the country's foundational myths. By his account, in the middle ages, there was a form of peasant democracy. Peasants, he thought, had enjoyed a special bond with the king, and there had been no aristocracy. Democracy and aristocracy were often contrasted in Danish discourse about democracy, though the peasant movement of 1848-9 changed its account of who was not democratic, now focussing on the urban middle classes and the liberals or 'doctrinaires' who represented them. Tocqueville was probably the most influential writer about democracy in Denmark. But there were also more radical French influences, transmitted to Denmark by artisans who had travelled to Paris as journeymen.

Joris Oddens: he began by reviewing the literature on the word 'democracy' in a Dutch context. He thought that the project's Zotero bibliography did a good job of covering this. There has been more work on related terms.(see work by Prak, Velema among others) The important te Velde article doesn't look back to the revolutionary period; we lack an overarching analysis. Still, what there is suggests that the Dutch trajectory is distinctive, in that the Dutch were early adopters, but the subsequent reaction against the term was exceptionally prolonged. He said that at no time did the Dutch describe their own republic as democratic. Patriots in the 1780s were known as and sometimes called themselves democrats; when they spoke of democracy, they meant a system of local, electoral representative democracy; they distinguished what they wanted from pure democracy. In the era of the Francophile Batavian republic, there were some radicals who advocated more direct forms of democracy, but they wielded power for only a few months in 1798. The effect of their efforts was to taint the word for decades to come. The Belgian story was different – and Belgium should perhaps be included; Belgian usage may have played its own part in shaping Dutch usage [given that the Belgians proved rebellious subjects].

Discussion: Joanna observed that in the seventeenth century the English did sometimes talk about the Dutch as democrats – though that was in a context in which the Dutch were rivals, of whom they were often critical. In the eighteenth century, they say the Dutch Republic used to be democratic but is now aristocratic.

She also said that in the 1780s say probably no one would have guessed that 70 years later the Swiss would still be attracting lots of comment and interest from people interested in democracy, but the Dutch would have dropped from the picture.

Marc Lerner: The Swiss were unusual in staying republican through the nineteenth century, when other old republics (Dutch, Venetian, Genoese) were superseded by monarchies. He noted that 'Switzerland' is a misnomer for most of this period. The Old Confederation is probably better glossed as the Swiss republics (plural). The Swiss creation myth identified a core of highly democratic republics from which the later confederation state was said to have expanded. These were the *landesgemeinde* cantons, ruled by general assemblies. Linked to that myth was the idea that to be truly Swiss was to be democratic. He differs from other authors in maintaining that their assemblies were indeed sovereign – because they sometimes overruled decisions by leaders. But it's important to note who was and who

was not included. Membership was restricted, to certain adult males in the core lands of the canton. In the nineteenth century, these arrangements were challenged by men from the outer districts who wanted to have a voice. When Switzerland became a federal state after 1848, the question of how far this democratic heritage should or should not be seen as a defining feature of the whole was opened up. And what did it mean to be democratic in changing circumstances? Some new answers were found to these questions, for example, with the introduction of popular vetoes from the 1830s.

Franz Fillafer: He said that he liked having the opportunity to re-insert the Habsburg world into a story from its inhabitants are often excluded, as 'backward' or 'reactionary'. He said that like Iain and Anne he found variations in use as people located democracy either in *forma Imperii* or *forma regiminis* [the Kantian distinction between forms of sovereignty and forms of rule]): democracy could lurk behind a panoply of ostensibly very different regimes. A central design challenge was: How to represent the general will, given Rousseau's assertion that it was inalienable, unrepresentable and infallible? Also he found in central Europe, as Anne reported for Denmark, the idea of a primeval democracy prior to its destruction through an (foreign or domestic) aristocratic warrior caste: thus in the writings of the Slovak scholar Anton Bernolák or those of the Bohemian historian Palacký. When threatened by the rising ambitions of Maria Theresa and Joseph II, the Habsburg nobility toyed briefly with the idea that they represented the people – though they dropped that claim quite quickly in the 1790s, going on to find a new role for themselves developing forms of regional patriotism, as sponsors of cultural activities. In the nineteenth century there was much debate around *Demokratismus* (the -ismus suffix generally connoting something bad). He thought it would be interesting to see how new or newly fashionable terms were taken up across the different language domains of Habsburg Europe particularly regarding the cross-fertilisation between the Monarchy's languages in 1848, at a crucial moment of broad, multilingual political mobilization in a shared public sphere with pamphlets, brochures, petitions etc.: he thought that hadn't been done. When elected legislatures were instituted (after 1861), they had a distinctive design, being organised around three, later four estate-type chambers or *curiae.* It would be interesting to know more about how candidates for these made their sales pitches when they sought election. The discussion document raised the question of the significance of religious confessions. He thought that quite a lot could be said about this, eg about the legacy of the Catholic notion of the *consensus fidelium.* He noted the project's ambition not just to do conceptual history, but to locate use of concepts in concrete historical milieux, and thought that would be challenging, especially given the complex cultural and political layering of the milieu.

Cody Inglis: he noted that he was stretching his knowledge by reaching back into the early nineteenth century (given that his interests are primarily twentieth-century, against a later nineteenth-century backdrop), but he had found it a good exercise. He had looked at Hungarian and Slovene dictionaries, to see if they included 'democracy' and if so what they said about it. In Hungary the word *demokrácia* appeared already in 1612, when most of medieval Hungary was still effectively under Ottoman occupation. Ideas about its use may

have been influenced by French and German discourses as well. But it is important to remember that Latin was the language of official life in Hungary at this time (indeed, through to the early nineteenth century) so there was also a direct line from medieval Latin [the context in which the Greek term was Latinised, and became an element in European Latin culture]. These twin lines of inheritance meant that the term carried a mix of ancient and modern connotations. In Slovene, by contrast, the term was a nineteenth-century calque [loan word]. Its use was mediated primarily by German-language culture, though there were potentially also French influences (courtesy of the Napoleonic 'Illyrian' episode). In Serbo-Croatian, adoption of the term was still a work in progress in this period. E.g., in 1873, the Serbian liberal political thinker Vladimir Jovanović included a long entry on 'democracy' (*demokratija*/демократија) in his *Politički rečnik* [Political Lexicon], tying the Serbian concept back to the word's Greek origin (an emphasis possibly influenced by Serbia's geographical position and cultural heritage).

Also of interest was the trajectory followed by republican ideas in the region; there is a historiography about the reception of French republican ideas. In Hungary there was a so-called Jacobin conspiracy which failed miserably. Nonetheless, images of the conspiracy kept cropping up in historiography and political languages throughout the nineteenth century: it remained in memory in Hungary as well as in Croatia-Slavonia and in Vojvodina. Among Croats and Slovenes, there was some reflection that the broader region was the site of historical noble republics, e.g., the Venetian Republic, the Republic of Ragusa (Dubrovnik), as well as republican legacies from the French-occupied "Illyrian Provinces."

Institutionally in the period in question (1780s–1870s), representative legislative bodies certainly existed, being one key site of "democracy". For example, there was a regional diet in Croatia, the *sabor*, separate from the *rendi országgyűlés* (estate-based country assembly) in Budapest, though representation was likewise dominated by the noble class as well as the clergy and some burghers. In this context, political democracy was still conceptualised as the purview of the traditional (feudal) estates, whereas strong bourgeois representation in these bodies only appeared around the middle of the nineteenth century (1848–…), with workers' and peasants' representatives appearing toward the turn of the century or afterward in strong numbers.

As to the political culture of the countryside, mentioned as a topic of interest in the discussion document, he thought there was not much to be said about this until the 1860s/1870s, with the appearance of more organised mass parties bidding for mass rural support. Until the rise of broader suffrage and representation in institutionalized legislative bodies, alternative concepts to 'democracy' dominated at the level of everyday use. In Serbia, for example (and to some extent also in Croatia-Slavonia), the concepts *zadruga* and *opština* referred, respectively, to forms of local economic self-management and political self-organization based on the (patriarchal) extended family structure, pointing toward deeply agrarian and male-centered notions and practices of local "democracy."

Similarly, it was chiefly from the 1860s and 70s that liberal thought acquired a social dimension and allowed for a transition to socialist thought in the region. In this scheme, the concept "democracy" and its semantic field played the role of fulcrum. This development was influenced also by the experiences of Serbian, Croatian, Slovene, and Hungarian emigres and students in France, Germany, and Switzerland, to name three key contexts, who then returned to start the first socialist and agrarian parties in their respective home countries. For the Serbian Svetozar Marković, e.g., the experience of studying in St. Petersburg and Zürich helped him articulate the first body of coherent socialist thought in Serbia, based in part on the republican-democratic element in Swiss political thought, and of Russian *narodnik* ideas transmitted locally in Russia and by *narodnik* emigres in Zürich sharing their place of refuge. Ideas from these various sources were robustly adapted to local circumstances.

Piotr Kuligowski: he noted that he was writing the entry on 'democracy' for an ongoing Polish conceptual history project [his work on this probably won't be complete until 2024].. The term underwent a deep transformation in the early nineteenth century, during which it was popularised. It gained momentum in the wake of the failed rising of 1830-1. Before then it was hardly used in public discourse; when it was used, it usually carried negative connotations. It was suggested that it was impossible in larger states. The term did appear in the first Polish dictionary, in the early nineteenth century (in the first volume of the six-volume dictionary edited by Samuel Bogumił Linde published in Warsaw in 1807).where it was defined in a negative way. The word 'democrat' also appeared, also with negative connotations; a democrat was conceived to be someone who belonged to a particular subculture. Its use after 1831 was encouraged by a wave of emigration which exposed Poles to other influences. In 1832, the 'Polish Democratic Society' was founded in Paris. 'Democratic' here connoted more than just a political arrangement. It also implied the deep transformation of the entire society, especially by the abolition of noble privilege and bonded labour. They said that the US was not democratic because slavery survived there. 'Aristocracy' was attacked, as conceived both as a political system and a concrete social group. Over time, the concept broadened, partly under the impact of writers like Tocqueville, Lamennais and Leroux. The traditional governance arrangements of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth were not considered to have been democratic at all. A Polish democratic tradition could be found only in the distant past.

Discussion: Claire Morelon noted that the idea of an early historic democracy could also be found in the Czech tradition. Joanna noted that there was warrant for this kind of story in natural law theory: Pufendorf said that all early societies were democratic. That account and historical stories could converge and reinforce one another.

Marcin Jarząbek: he said that Piotr and Franz between them had covered much of the ground that he might have covered. He thought he could best focus on a Polish/Czech comparison, in relation to three topics especially: protochronism [as said to have come first in time]; the relationship between democracy and nation and the peasant question. In both

Poland and Bohemia, 'democracy' was projected backwards into the past (historians: Joachim Lelewel and František Palacký). Even the institutions of the Polish Commonwealth were sometimes represented if not as democratic themselves, still as representing a step on the way to democracy. He noted that older institutions did not immediately disappear with Partition: some, at the district rather than national level – *sejmiki*, survived both in Russian Poland and under the Habsburg monarchy. As for democracy and nation, it was pretty clear by the early nineteenth century that 'democracy' was strongly associated with a nation-building project. Herder was an important influence here. The term nation was originally quite loose and inclusive. It might incorporate various ethnic groups inhabiting the same territory, including Jews and various Slavic groups. Over time it gained clearer definition, and became less inclusive. 1848 marked a turning point in this regard. In relation to the peasant question: serfdom was abolished throughout the region during the nineteenth century, at points between the mid nineteenth century and 1863/4 (in the case of Russian Poland). Attitudes to the peasant question came to be a test of someone's identity as a democrat. Finally, in relation to vernacular variants on 'democracy', he noted that there was a Polish equivalent [(pl.) *gminowładztwo*], but it developed a different meaning, being associated with the right of villagers to run their own local affairs. The word used at the level of the nation was democracy.

[***There wasn't time to give Claire Morelon a slot at the meeting, but she's commented subsequently as follows***

I would concur with what Franz and Marcin have already remarked. In the Czech context, the term democracy seems to be more in use in the political discourse from the 1840s onwards. Palacký points out in the 1860s that the term is so ubiquitous as to obscure its meaning. The term *lidovláda* (literally, "government by the people") can also be found in Czech texts, sometimes with reference to a primitive democracy of early Slavic communities or sometimes with reference to the more populist version of democracy. Nineteenth century Czech authors locate a Czech tradition of democracy both in a mythical past of early Slavic tribes before feudalism but also in the concrete historical experience of Hussitism. Democracy as a concept is seen in opposition to feudalism. An important feature of discussions of democracy in the region is that the term refers as much to a social structure as to a political system of government. The notion of democracy is not necessarily directly linked to universal suffrage but to broader social principles such as equality before the law. Finally, 1848 seems a particularly key moment in the region to examine discourses around democracy. Some work has been done on election manifestos, which could be continued. See, Thomas Stockinger, *Dörfer und Deputierte : Die Wahlen zu den konstituierenden Parlamenten von 1848 in Niederösterreich und im Pariser Umland (Seine-et-Oise)* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2012)

General discussion:

Maurizio Isabella: wondered if the recurrent theme of good/bad democracy had roots in the writings of Lamennais. It's found throughout Europe in the 1830s: thus in Portugal 'bad'

democracy was seen as represented by royalist counterrevolution. Also he wanted to hear more from Anne about the social base and political agenda of the peasant democrats. *Iain* said in response that Rotteck was influenced more by Constant and Lafayette than Lamennais: by liberals and republican monarchists. He did think Rotteck's connections with Polish emigres were very interesting. Rotteck linked democracy with human rights; he thought that in supporting Poles he was supporting that cause. He was very critical of Russian absolutism. *Piotr*, by contrast, said that Lamennais was crucial for the Polish Democratic Society. They translated some of his works into Polish. Notably, Lamennais himself wrote an afterword to Polish readers to *Le livre du people* (under the title 'Księgi ludu' (therefore in plural, contrary to the French original version), translated by one of the main ideologists of the Polish Democratic Society, namely: Jan Nepomucen Janowski. Nonetheless, compared with other Polish organisations, this one was relatively secular. *Anne* said that the peasant democrats tried to represent the interests both of middle-sized farmers and of smallholders: they consciously tried to cover a broad spectrum. In terms of issues they had a menu including reforms to tenure, sharing of burden of military service, educational reform and other things. *Maurizio* noted that support for a monarchy conceived as supportive or potentially supportive of peasants could also be found among self-proclaimed democrats in Piedmont.

4. **Plan for 2022-23.** Marcin suggested that regular online project meetings might be good for sustaining engagement. Joanna said that she thought she and Mark could commit to assembling the same group in a couple of months to talk about how their own thinking about the project had developed (in both intellectual and practical terms). In the longer term, the intention was that the network would expand and diversify, and meetings of subgroups might be more appropriate, but that would be for further consideration.

5. **We continue to welcome suggestions** for (a) further reading, (b) who else we might involve in the project, and (c) about any institutions which might be able to sponsor and at least part fund a meeting. *Since the immediate priority was to get a good map of how 'democracy' and cognate words were used, those present were encouraged especially to make suggestions about other relevant publications, or about others working in the field who might be able to help flesh out the picture.*

   Also, note our notion, set out in the papers for the discussion, that we might sometime in the summer of 2023 have a workshop taking stock of how people were talking about democracy in the context of crises in the 1860s – precipitated by the Crimean war and Italian unification and changing power balances in central Europe. Do you think this would provide a viable and interesting focus for discussion? Which scholars might be best placed to speak to it (feel free to name yourself, if you think you are the best person).