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‘Public Opinion and Seditious Language from the Wars of the Roses to the Pilgrimage of Grace, *c.* 1461-1537’

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ABSTRACT

‘Public Opinion and Seditious Language from the Wars of the Roses to the Pilgrimage of Grace, *c.* 1461-1537’

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Although the traditional divide between the late medieval and the early modern periods has increasingly been addressed by scholars, this arbitrary division has long dictated historical research and it has inevitably affected the way we study public opinion and seditious language. While late medievalists have increasingly acknowledged that public opinion was indeed significant in the late medieval period, they do not always agree about its workings, fluctuations, intensity, and most importantly about who mattered in the public arena. Early modernists have increasingly argued against the Habermasian ‘public sphere’ in order to establish that England experienced a dynamic public debate in the sixteenth century. This study interacts with both groups of scholars and approaches public opinion and seditious language by surveying a variety of sources that combines legal records, private and official correspondence, chronicles, proclamations, legislation, and other texts that were directly or indirectly related to the contemporary public opinion. To illustrate the workings of public opinion, the popular attacks against the hegemonic voices of the ruling elites, and the interaction of these two features, this thesis resorts to a combined theoretical framework to examine five broad features: the rhetorical references to ‘the people’ and ‘the commons’, and the stereotypes about them; the profound and instinctive nature of rumour-mongering; the patterns of seditious language; the continuities and shifts in popular discourses across the period; and the government’s reactions and attempts to control all these different variants in the public realm. In other words, this study explores the workings of the communication system that underlay the interaction between rulers and ruled to explain how the tropes and

discourses of the Wars of the Roses mostly remained in use and powerful during the early Reformation – and the extent to which some of these discourses shifted or intensified. Overall, this thesis argues that the continuities in how people criticised and reacted to crises throughout the period partly explain the peaks in records of complaint and rumour as well as provide significant insights into how government policy was more frequently reactive than proactive.

LONG ABSTRACT

‘Public Opinion and Seditious Language from the Wars of the Roses to the Pilgrimage of Grace, *c.* 1461-1537’

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Historians of both sides of 1500 have long discussed late medieval and early modern public opinion. However, there has not been any attempt to demonstrate the relationships between the contexts of the Wars of the Roses and the early Reformation in respect to the reactions of the people and the dialogue that existed between them, the crown and the royal officials. Most late medievalists can easily demonstrate and recognise that the commons involved in popular politics from the 1450s to the 1490s were not substantially different from those of 1381. Likewise, the public debates around the usurpations of Edward IV, Richard III and Henry VII were not that far away from what happened in 1399. Yet, academics focused on the fifteenth century are not particularly interested in what came later with Henry VIII’s ‘usurpation’ of the Pope’s authority and how close that period was to the Wars of the Roses. Similarly, early modernists commonly acknowledge that 1485 was not a significant turning point in English history, but they are still at times trying to prove that there was some significant change in Henry VIII’s period – not without a good reason. What there was not in sixteenth-century England was a significant shift in public opinion, for this would take much longer than a few decades: people were still reacting to their government under much older patterns. Hence, this thesis contributes to this historiographical debate around public opinion not only by trying to bridge the traditional divide between late medievalists and early modernists but also by providing valuable insights into the structure of public opinion, the means used to contest its fabricated consensus, and the dialectical relationship between public pressure and government policy.

In that sense, this thesis charts how the people engaged with the emergent public opinion from the ascension of Edward IV in 1461 to the defeat of the Pilgrimage of Grace in 1537. It is important to note that this public opinion is not analysed here as a Habermasian 'public sphere', but mainly in two other ways. First, I approach public opinion as a fabrication that serves specific purposes – the ruling elites and commentators tried to maintain or achieve consensus by calling the voices of the people. This perspective is largely based on the sociological propositions of Pierre Bourdieu about public opinion, but I also combine this analytical framework with what historians of this period have seen as political language, common perceptions and expectations, accepted political principles and established patterns of contemporary political culture. Second, this study investigates shared opinions and the circulation of rumours, as well as the role of seditious language and rebellions in order to chart the 'actual' popular perspectives. By looking at the dynamics of rumour-mongering from a sociological and psychological point of view, and by comprehending how rumour is the root of contemporary understandings of seditious language and other forms of dissent, this study shows that we cannot treat rumour as irrational or exceptional. In addition to analysing constructions of public opinion and forms of popular contestation, this thesis is also an analysis of the existing dialogue between the crown and the people.

To illustrate the arguments around these central issues, I investigate a wide range of different sources. The constructions of public opinion and its uses are charted by observing the way commentators – in chronicles, letters, treatises, official sources and other forms of commentary – referred to the common people, how they used these comments and how they created stereotypes. The people's opinions, reactions, rumours and their seditious and rebellious behaviour are found in rebels' manifestoes, in the indictments of the King's Bench and in other legal records (such as those of the King's Council, the Star Chamber and the

Chancery), but also in descriptions of rebellions in chronicles and in a great deal of private and public correspondence. The political dialogue between the crown and the people also commonly occur in these sources, but others are quite fruitful to this approach – such as narratives and treatises sanctioned by the crown itself, royal proclamations, and local records.

The illustrations and vocabulary of public knowledge, contestation, and interaction with the crown that arise from these sources are considered side by side across the period so that comparisons, patterns, some statistics, and most notably the analysis of words and expressions, may answer a few research questions. Was there a conflict between what commentators recorded, what they seemed to mean with their depictions, and what was the purpose of their references to 'the people'? How was popular opinion regarded in these sources? Was it merely unimportant and rustic? Or was it considered as relevant, though dangerous and often unreliable? How did the language of specific popular movements fit in the whole discourse of 'the people'? When, why and how were 'the people' perceived, recorded and depicted? How much can we say that people knew about politics? How did they think about it? Can we judge their knowledge from the vocabulary of rumours? What was the relationship between rumour and sedition in contemporary sources? And why that was the case? Was ideological surveillance of these issues more clearly a phenomenon of the early modern period? If so, can we suggest why? Can we assess the motives behind the use of seditious speech? What were the continuities and shifts guiding popular politics between the mid-fifteenth and the early sixteenth century? And finally, how did all this relate to the government's techniques of political communication? Were authorities driven to public justification by pressure or by ideology?

To address these questions, the three parts that structure this thesis reflect the multifaceted and dialectic approach to public opinion that this study proposes. Part I sets out to discuss two fundamental concepts and their specific vocabulary and meanings that both

contribute to the current understandings of public opinion and inform the following chapters. Chapter I introduces the analysis of a wide range of sources across the period that variably refer to 'the people' and 'the commons' as a way of constructing public opinion and creating a consensus effect. In trying to establish contemporary understandings of the concept of 'the people', this first chapter argues that the ruling elites had a more complex, even paradoxical, relationship with this 'people' as they constituted what we might call 'public'. On the one hand, the governments of the period feared the commotions of ordinary people more profoundly and continuously than historians have considered. On the other, more material paying attention to popular actions, or addressing them directly, survives as the period advances. Although popular opinion was often treated as rustic and unwise, I argue that it was persistently instrumentalised to create a hegemonic and favourable 'public' which included the less privileged. Consequently, the ambiguous treatment of the people as both harmful to politics and useful to construct consensus inevitably put pressure on the governments of this period because they were two layers of the same public opinion.

Chapter II focuses on one aspect that could break the 'consensus effect' of an obedient public opinion, and that was more often attributed to the common people: rumour-mongering. A study of the vocabulary of rumour – and its meanings, contents, and frequency – offer a better comprehension of how extensive the 'problem' of rumour-mongering was and how it affected both the conception of public opinion and the concept of sedition. By stressing the psychological and sociological aspects that surround the origin and the spread of rumours, I suggest that rumours skyrocketed in specific periods more than in others because they provoked a spiral of anxiety that was shared by anyone – commons and gentlemen, clerics and nobles. The consequences of this sociological phenomenon to the workings of public opinion are, therefore, that rumours are always a problem in times of crisis, and they consequently amplify the fear that sedition might ensue from misinformation.

Having established the structures of a dialogic public opinion in the first part, the second part of the thesis comprises two chapters devoted to the treatment, contents, and variance of seditious language. Chapter III first focuses on how popular language was treated by royal and church authorities in the later medieval period in other to contextualise what at first sight seem as extreme changes proposed by the new parliamentary acts of the 1530s – especially the royal supremacy, the new treason act, and the acts of succession. Then, this third chapter traces the contents and suggests the purposes of seditious and treasonous speech among the commoners that were either formally indicted or reported in other unofficial sources. Overall, it is clear from the analysis of Chapter III that the surveillance of deviant speech was always the case in late medieval England because popular language often intended to be politically persuasive: the official responses to it could involve statutes against treason, heresy, prophecies and rumours. In that sense, while the measures adopted in the 1530s can be seen as sharper and more authoritarian, they must also be interpreted as answers to public pressure, to levels of rumour-mongering, slanderous comments and seditious language.

Meanwhile, Chapter IV extends the argument of Chapter III about popular intentions in using seditious language – first by examining the kinds of continuities in popular speech between the Yorkist period and the 1530s. I argue that there are two fundamental continuities that rule popular language: the way commoners saw the role of the crown; and the way they interpreted what I call 'structures of oppression'. Subsequently, Chapter IV investigates the possible ways in which popular language shifted across the period through a brief enquiry into numbers and vocabulary, suggesting that any observable changes may be also seen as a result of continuing attitudes towards political crises and oppression. There was a significant change in degree rather than type of popular attacks which is explained by the increasing levels of rumour-mongering that resulted from the governments' own decision

in pursuing the king's divorce from Catherine of Aragon, the break with Rome, the religious reformation and the subsequent reforms.

Finally, the last part of this thesis is a result of the accumulated argument of the previous chapters on increasing public pressure, the nature of complaints, and the popular awareness and engagement that result in governmental reactions. Rather than resorting to a concept of 'propaganda', we can re-use the evidence of political communication to suggest that there was a seemingly constant political dialogue and exchange between the crown and the people. Such dialogue clearly resulted from the government's awareness of the necessity to influence people's opinion – noted throughout the thesis – though I argue that this attitude was invariably driven by pressure rather than ideological motivations. By putting the traditional evidence of 'propaganda' under the light of a dialogic and dialectic interaction, we can see a more realistic picture of the workings of public opinion in late medieval England and close the sequence of arguments that begins with the constructed concepts in Chapter I.

The Conclusion first summarises the findings of each chapter before considering their implications and limitations. In the current state of historical research, in which avenues of investigation invariably become fragmented into highly specialised niches of activity, I believe it is exceptionally valuable to establish and publicise relevant connections and long-term trends. This thesis advocates this belief. On top of the striking similarities between fifteenth- and sixteenth-century England, any coincidence between the 'fake news' of our current political situation worldwide and the 'false rumours and seditious words' of the late medieval period – not to mention the ancient goddess Fama that haunted Greek and Roman public figures – may well serve to connect us with the otherness of distant periods and societies that, in certain aspects, were more similar to us than they were different.

PREFACE

I have been asked the same question many times during my time at Oxford, and I thought it would be convenient to share it here: 'why do you study British history?' This question has always troubled me, and not because I never thought about it – in fact, I will not bother the reader with my career justifications. This question sounds surprisingly odd to me because I have been educated to think about history not as the history of myself or of my own country – Brazil – but as the history of otherness in the past, whatever that may be to different historians. To paraphrase Simon Schama in an interview of 1998, history to me is an investigation of the nature of being human; it is a negotiation between familiarity and strangeness and the historian is in between. We write history because we need to 'rebel against the shortness of our own span of years', and this is a human instinct. History, then, is not about oneself and one 'nation', but about exploring other people in time, culturally remote from us but humanly closer than we probably suspect. In our profession – as in that of other 'humanities', but especially anthropology – there is an element of stretch that presupposes toleration and compassion for things that are categorically different from ourselves. Thus, history is not necessarily about finding our roots, because it is not history of *me*, it is a history of *them* – and *them* in the past. Two observations stem from this standpoint.

First, this toleration and compassion, and the eagerness to understand the other have also moved numerous foreign scholars to research South America. I can take only three examples that were also important during my career. The British historian Kenneth Robert Maxwell has produced important analyses of the later period of the colonization of Brazil up to 1808 and his books remain a classic in history degrees across the country. The American Professor Thomas Skidmore has published substantial volumes about the republican period

of Brazilian history that every undergraduate in history will also know. And the travels of the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss through Brazil resulted in his well-known masterpiece *Tristes Tropiques*. With this, I am far from comparing myself with these extraordinary academics that inspired me, but saying that otherness and strangeness combined with methodology and eagerness to research other societies have always produced examples like these. I just want to offer my small contribution to the study of late medieval England in these same terms.

Second, the element of familiarity that might arise from a work like this thesis results from the fact that historians are indeed in between two worlds – and as Marc Bloch enlightened us, the present inevitably influences the questions we pose to the past. In that sense, there is no reproach in assuming that events in the present have profoundly shaped my methodological choices. And with 'present' I mean the degrading realities of politics in my own country, but also in the US, in the UK, and elsewhere. Despite my Master's Dissertation, late medieval commoners still sounded new to me when I began my research at Oxford, but they led me through a journey to discover the fabrications of public opinion we still live in, the psychology of rumours that seem innate to human beings, and the relations of power we always construct through symbolic violence and language exchanges. I hope the findings of this research and its wide-ranging methodology will encourage others to build upon it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is impossible to write a work of this length and depth without owing a great debt to your colleagues, friends, and family. The doctoral life can be especially lonely when you are researching and writing but it is thanks to all these people that I have managed to cope with everything and finish my work. First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor John Watts, who firmly believed in my project from the first e-mails we exchanged – when I was still uncertain about whether I would ever come to Oxford, receive funding or even be accepted. He has persistently believed that I could do things I thought I could not; that I could improve my writing style and strengthen my ideas and arguments; and that my work could become more intelligible to native speakers in due time. It is thanks to his kindness, politeness, patience and professionalism that I have finished this thesis in the way I did. I would also like to thank other scholars who assessed my work from the beginning for they have been tremendously helpful – Dr Eliza Hartrich and Professors Steve Gunn and Lyndal Roper. That is especially the case of Steve Gunn, with whom I have had the pleasure of having numerous conversations, teas and drinks before and after the Early Modern Britain Seminar at Merton College, and who has always promptly answered all my questions about a period that I was still learning. I extend these thanks to all the convenors of the Early Modern Britain Seminar for they have quite often inspired me, and Ian Archer has suggested important bibliographical references after one of my papers. I am also grateful to my former supervisor, Professor Fabiano Fernandes, for he has also encouraged me and believed in my work more times than I could count over the past years.

I am also privileged for having been surrounded by numerous friends who have supported me in many ways. My first friends at Corpus Christi were the reason why I had a memorable first year at Oxford, and I would like to thank Alasdair Grant who read my first ideas while I was concerned with my Transfer of Status. My friends from the Early Modern

Britain Seminar have not only shared many cheerful moments and celebrations, but also read my work and for this I will always be grateful to Emily Glassford, Tom Pert and Tara Greig. In the History Faculty I have also made friends for life, especially during the numerous sessions of the 'Shut Up and Write' group. So I am thankful to Luca Zenobi who first organised the sessions and also helped me with the Confirmation of Status, as well as to the others who were kind enough to read different pieces of this thesis – Pablo Gonzalez Martin and Tom Goodwin. I also want to thank my other fellow historians who have not only read sections of my work but also became good and supportive friends: Brandi and Tim Miller, and Michael Depreter. My Brazilian friends have proved to be a family in Oxford too, and I owe special thanks to my writing buddies, Eduardo Queiroz and Adir Fonseca.

During these years, my wife Tamy Feitosa has proven once more how resilient she is by adjusting more than I could to our new life in the UK. She has been my endless support and she is one of the reasons why I applied to the DPhil course and why I managed to complete this part of my career with so much love. In fact, she has always been more caring and loving than one can possibly be, and only this attitude made it possible for her to endure the grumpiness occasionally provoked by my thesis.

As a Brazilian citizen I must also explicitly acknowledge that if it were not for the affirmative policies of past governments in my country, I would probably not have applied to the history degree in the first place, nor would I be in Oxford. The left-wing government between 2003 and the parliamentary *coup* of 2016 was responsible for the unprecedented multiplication of public universities in Brazil, and the heavy investment in post-graduate courses and research. My career has been marked by these policies, and I owe my eternal gratitude to the CAPES Foundation of the Ministry of Education for funding my studies. I also seize this opportunity to dedicate this thesis to all the Brazilians who are fighting against

neo-fascism and for freedom of speech, and to those who have already died victims of the state, or victims of the widespread hate speech provoked by the current president himself.

Finally, I also express gratitude to the librarians and archivists where I worked these years; to those who work at the History Faculty; and to my college staff – especially Rachel Clifford, who has been so incredibly supportive in everything I ever needed and answered to my endless doubts about bureaucracy, Corpus and the University. Last but not least, I am thankful to my family, cheering from a far distance across the Atlantic and the Equator. Thank you all.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Anglica Historia	*The Anglica Historia of Polydore Vergil A.D. 1485-1537*, ed. Denys Hay (CS 3rd Ser. 74, 1950).
Arrivall of Ed.IV	*Historie of the Arrivall of Edward IV…*, ed. J. Bruce (CS 1st Ser. 1, 1838).
Ballads from Manuscripts	*Ballads from Manuscripts*, ed. F.J. Furnivall (Vol.1, 1868).
CCR	*Calendar of the Close Rolls…: Edward IV,* ed. Public Record Office (1949-53).
CS	Camden Society.
Crowland Chronicle	*The Crowland Chronicle Continuations: 1459-1486*, ed. N. Pronay and J. Cox (1986).
CSPM	*Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts… of Milan*, *1385-1618*, ed. A.B. Hinds (1912).
CSPSp	*Calendar of Letters, Despatches, and State Papers, relating to …Spain, Vols. I-V*, ed. G.A. Bergenroth and P. de Gayangos (1862-88).
CSPV	*Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts… of Venice*, *Vols. I-V*, ed. R. Brown (1864-73).
CLB	*The Coventry Leet Book…1420-1555,* ed. M.D. Harris (EETS, Or. Ser. 135 & 138, 1908-9).
DKR	*Reports of the Deputy Keeper of Records,* ed. Public Record Office (1842-1892).
DMLBS	*Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, at http://www.dmlbs.ox.ac.uk/web/welcome.html.
Duggan, 'Thought Control'	Duggan, C.R., 'The advent of political thought-control in England: seditious and treasonable speech, 1485-1547' (PhD Thesis: Northwestern University, 1993).
EEBO	Early English Books Online, at http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home.
EETS	Early English Text Society.
EHR	English Historical Review.
FC	Fabyan, R., *The New Chronicles of England and France*, ed. H. Ellis et al (1811).

GC	*The Great Chronicle of London*, ed. A.H. Thomas and I.D. Thornley (1938).
Gregory's Chronicle	Reproduced in *The Historical Collections of a Citizen of London,* ed. J. Gairdner (CS 2nd Ser. 17, 1876).
HC	*Hall's Chronicle,* ed. J. Johnson *et al* (New York, 1965).
HR	*Historical Research*.
Historical Poems	*Historical Poems of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries,* ed. R.H. Robbins (New York, 1959).
HMC	Historical Manuscript Commission.
JVB	*The Politics of Fifteenth-Century England: John Vale's Book,* eds. M. Kekewich *et al.* (Stroud, 1996).
Lincolnshire Chr.	'Chronicle of the Rebellion in Lincolnshire, 1470', in *Camden Miscellany I,* ed. J.G. Nichols (CS 1st Ser. 39, 1847).
LKE	*Letters of the Kings of England,* J.O. Halliwell (Vol. I, 1846).
LP	*Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII,* ed. J.S. Brewer *et al*. (23 Vols., 1901-1932).
LP RIII/HVII	*Letters and Papers Illustrative of the Reigns of Richard III and Henry VII,* ed. J. Gairdner (2 Vols., 1861-1863).
MED	Middle English Dictionary, at https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary.
Morison's Tracts	*Humanist Scholarship and Public Order: Two Tracts against the Pilgrimage of Grace by Sir Richard Morison*, ed. D.S. Berkowitz (Washington, 1984).
ODNB	*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, at https://www.oxforddnb.com/.
OED	*Oxford English Dictionary*, at https://www.oed.com/.
Original Letters	*Original Letters Illustrative of English History,* ed. H. Ellis (1st, 2nd and 3rd Ser., 1824-1846).
Paston Letters	*The Paston Letters: 1422-1509*, ed. J. Gairdner (6 Vols., 1904).
P&P	*Past and Present.*
PROME	*The Parliament Rolls of Medieval England, 1275-1504,* ed. C. Given-Wilson *et al*, Scholarly Digital Editions, http://www.sd-editions.com/PROME/home.html (Leicester, 2005). The majority of the sessions quoted (1461-1504) are edited by Rosemary Horrox, unless otherwise stated.

Records of Nottingham	*Records of the Borough of Nottingham, Vols. II-III,* ed. W.H. Stevenson (Nottingham, 1883-5).
RHVIICS	*The Reign of Henry VII from Contemporary Sources,* ed. A.F. Pollard, (3 Vols., 1913-14).
Select STAC	*Select Cases in the Star Chamber*, ed. I.S. Leadam (Selden Society 16 & 25, 1903-11).
Skelton Poems	*The Complete English Poems of John Skelton*, ed. J. Scattergood (Rev. Edition, 2015).
St.R.	*Statutes of the Realm*, ed. J. Raithby (Vols. I-III, 1963).
Three Books of Vergil	*Three Books of Polydore Vergil's English History…,* ed. H. Ellis (CS 1st Ser. 29, 1844).
TRP	*Tudor Royal Proclamations, Volume One: The Early Tudors (1485-1553)*, ed. P.L. Hughes and J.F. Larkin (New Haven, 1964).
Vitellius A XVI	Chronicle reproduced in *Chronicles of London*, ed. C.L. Kingsford (Oxford, 1905).
Warkworth's Chronicle	*Warkworth's Chronicle of the first Thirteen Years of the Reign of Edward the Fourth,* ed. J. Halliwell, (CS 1st Ser. 10, 1839).
WC	Wriothesley, C., *A Chronicle of England during the Reigns of the Tudors, Vol. I*, ed. W.D. Hamilton (CS 2nd Ser. 11, 1875).
White Rose	*The Chronicles of the White Rose of York*, ed. J.A. Giles (1845).
YCR	*York Civic Records,* ed. A. Raine, (Vols. I-IV, Yorkshire Archaeological Society 98, 103, 106, 108, Wakefield, 1939-1945).
YHB	*The York House Books, 1461-1490*, ed. L.C. Attreed (2 Vols, Stroud, 1991).
Yorkshire STAC	*Yorkshire Star Chamber Proceedings,* ed. W. Brown *et al* (Yorkshire Archaeological Society 41, 45, 51, 70, Leeds, 1909-27).

NOTE TO THE READER

For the sake of brevity and clarity, I have made some adjustments in the citations, references and spelling of quotations in Middle English throughout this thesis.

All edited sources are cited by their sequence number in the relevant edition unless otherwise indicated by page numbers. Only places of publication other than London are mentioned in the references and bibliography. The citations of KB27 records (*King's Bench, Crown and Plea Side*) of The National Archives are exclusively from the 'Rex side' – so I omitted this information throughout. I also suppressed the common 'TNA' from the references to original manuscripts, as that was the only archive consulted – except for one microfilm in the Weston Library at Oxford. I have surveyed the *Letters and Papers* of Henry VIII's reign mostly through the *State Papers Online* due to the convenience of checking the available originals whenever necessary. However, I decided to omit the references to the original SP sequence of The National Archives. I have also extended all the contractions used in the original sources; removed all unnecessary capitalisations and initial double consonants (as in 'ffor', 'Ffrench'); replaced thorns with 'th'; and modernised the usage of 'v', 'u', 'j', 'i', 'y' and, less frequently, 'w' and 's/c'. Names of counties follow the late medieval descriptions, rather than the modern boundaries – unless otherwise stated.

Finally, I ask benevolence and sympathy of native speakers who read my work. Despite my endless efforts, I am aware that my writing style is probably still somewhat foreign to the Anglo-Saxon tradition.

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INTRODUCTION

Since I came to understand the profession of a historian more than a decade ago, I have always firmly believed that we are – to paraphrase a book that has profoundly influenced my position concerning the science of history – inevitably asking questions about the past which stem from our lives and experiences in the present.[1] Thus, a few pertinent comparisons between past and present are useful to introduce this study. Ian Arthurson once suggested, while analysing espionage in the period investigated in this thesis, that 'the age before telecommunication was the age of rumour par excellence'.[2] Yet, if we are to believe that there has been less rumour-mongering today as a result of developed communication technologies, we would have to ignore the recent trends in the manipulation of news and misinformation as a political weapon, or the fact that people have been dying as a result of rumours increasingly spread through mobile chatting apps.[3] Deadly riots in different parts of the world, too, have been prompted by unverified and anonymous reports that only take hold, it has been convincingly argued, if there is a 'market' for them – a social need in an emerging

[1] I refer to M. Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (Manchester, 1954), p.43.
[2] I. Arthurson, 'Espionage and Intelligence from the Wars of the Roses to the Reformation', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 35 (1991), p.153.
[3] See the Oxford Internet Institute's research on the elections of the United States: University of Oxford, News & Events, 'Trump supporters and extreme right share widest range of junk news' (8 Feb. 2018), http://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2018-02-06-trump-supporters-and-extreme-right-share-widest-range-junk-news (30 June 2019). And on Brazil: C. Machado, B. Kira, *et al*., 'News and Political Information Consumption in Brazil: Mapping the First Round of the 2018 Brazilian Presidential Election on Twitter', Data Memo 2018.4: *Project on Computational Propaganda* (Oxford, 2018), https://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/research/brazil2018/ (30 June 2019). There is also work on China: J. Liu, *Contention and Communication in the Digital Age* (To be published soon); which will include his talk '"To Retweet Each and Every Rumour": rumouring as contention in contemporary China' (14 Nov. 2018), http://www.chinacentre.ox.ac.uk/am_event/to-retweet-each-and-every-rumour-rumouring-as-contention-in-contemporary-china/ (30 June 2019). For more: A. Guess, B. Nyham, and J. Reifler, 'Selective Exposure to Misinformation: Evidence from the Consumption of Fake News during the 2016 U.S. Presidential campaign' (9 Jan. 2018), http://www.dartmouth.edu/~nyhan/fake-news-2016.pdf (30 June 2019); R. Meyer, 'The Grim Conclusions of the Largest-Ever Study of Fake News' (8 Mar. 2018), https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2018/03/largest-study-ever-fake-news-mit-twitter/555104/ (30 June 2019). As for murder cases resulting from rumours: A. Hern, 'WhatsApp to restrict message forwarding after India mob lynchings' (20 July 2018), https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/jul/20/whatsapp-to-limit-message-forwarding-after-india-mob-lynchings (30 June 2019).

situation.[4] Rumours satisfy people's needs and consequently are likely to prevail over accurate information.

While late medieval and early modern society had few means of confirming or denying the news people received – giving room, as Adam Fox proposes, to speculation and rumours[5] – we live in a world with abundant sources of information, but we do not necessarily double-check the news we receive. In the United States, for instance, around forty per cent of the people have confirmed in a recent poll that they get their news from Facebook – where speculation and rumours are also rife.[6] This is not to say that nothing has changed. After all, technology has increasingly set us aside from our ancestors. However, rumour-spreading, misinformation, and their consequences that I will analyse in this thesis – the formation of some kind of public opinion, the seeds of seditious language and dissent, and the anxiety it prompts in governments – are characteristic of human societies and, therefore, bear similarities in the way they rise, spread, cause distress and potentially fade out. In that sense, public opinion is always more fluid, sentimental and hard to grasp than based on reality. In late medieval society, there was, of course, a 'market' for the consumption of rumours and kinds of news, and both rumours and seditious language fit a 'language system' and its associated 'accepted principles'.[7] Within that system, a rumour could be about something real, such as taxation, as easily as it could be about predictions and the future, in the form of prophecies. The comparison with the present will become more transparent as I explain my theoretical framework below, but it suffices to say that this perspective has

[4] For this and the following point: D.L. Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot* (Los Angeles, 2001), pp.75-85.
[5] A. Fox, *Oral and Literature Culture in England*, *1500-1700* (Oxford, 2000), p.356.
[6] For the comment on Americans: K.A. Matsa and E. Shearer, 'News Use Across Social Media Platforms 2018' (10 Sept. 2018), https://www.journalism.org/2018/09/10/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-2018/ (21 Aug. 2019); for an example of analysis in the UK: R.K., Nielsen, 'Where Do People Get Their News?' (30 May 2017), https://medium.com/oxford-university/where-do-people-get-their-news-8e850a0dea03 (11 July 2019).
[7] 'Market' of rumours is proposed by Horowitz, *Deadly Ethnic Riot*, p.75. 'Language System' is from J.G.A. Pocock, *Political Thought and History* (Cambridge, 2009), p.34. And 'accepted principles' is a concept from Quentin Skinner, handled by J. Watts, 'Ideas, Principles and Politics', in A.J. Pollard (ed.), *The Wars of the Roses* (Basingstoke, 1995), pp.118-9.

influenced both the arguments emerging from the qualitative analysis and those resulting from the quantitative observations in this thesis.

The overarching argument of this study is twofold. First of all, I argue that we need to think about a communication system in which references to the people and their actions, the rumours in circulation, the language considered as 'seditious', and also the governments' responses are all part of one single phenomenon that we may call public opinion. While the historians of this period have analysed specific parts of this communication system in scattered articles (on rebellions, rumours, 'propaganda', or seditious language, for instance), this thesis approaches the system as a whole. It is an attempt to contribute to a better understanding of how the mass of the people were crucial to the political system and how we can think about them as engaging in and contributing to this public opinion directly and indirectly. In other words, this thesis proposes that we must see public opinion not only as opposition or criticism but as a dialectic process revealed by a language system that is continuously both constructed and contested. There is no question among historians of this period that some kind of public opinion already existed in late medieval England – perhaps from the early fourteenth century or before – and early modernists have more explicitly argued against the Habermasian assumption that the 'public sphere' only developed later, trying to push its temporal boundaries earlier.[8] Rather than adding to this artificial enterprise, this thesis will simply argue that the critical public debate and public pressure observed in the early modern period was grounded in and informed by the late medieval developments and vocabulary – that is, by the interactive language system of late medieval public authority and popular opinion. Once we analyse this interactive communication system we will comprehend that public opinion was an almost constant pressure – or a reminder of the

[8] I refer specifically to J. Watts, 'The Pressure of the Public on Later Medieval Politics', in L. Clark and C. Carpenter (eds.), *The Fifteenth Century IV* (Woodbridge, 2004), pp.159-69 for the late medieval period. And to K. Sharpe, *Selling the Tudor Monarchy* (New Haven, 2009), pp.30, 177 for the early modern ideas. Sharpe also gives a concise review of the recent trend among the early modernists.

possibility of turmoil – considered by the ruling elites in critical moments because ordinary people not only recycled powerful political discourses but also influenced and challenged the hegemony of the official voices imposed on them.[9]

Secondly, this thesis highlights the continuities within this specific period, which has usually been seen as one of change. From the people's point of view and language, not much changed in this period and some studies have suggested that there was a common language between the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 and the rebellions of 1549 or even the Civil War in the seventeenth century.[10] What they have not done, however, is to consider how these rebellions fit a broader language pattern and how this language was partly affected by the Wars of the Roses and partly re-used and recycled during the early stages of the Reformation. Just as we must acknowledge specificities of the discourses in the fourteenth century, as well as those of the later sixteenth century, we must also address the specific issues that concerned men and women between one deeply challenging political scenario – the Wars of the Roses – to another that mixed politics and religion more profoundly with the 'usurpation' of the pope's authority. Even so, having acknowledged the specificity of the period, we shall see that little changed in popular discourse over these decades; and it is precisely the lack of change that will explain the increase in public pressure and the dialogic reaction of governments in the following chapters.

1. Literature

During the last few decades, historians have had plenty to say about late-medieval and early-modern public opinion and popular politics. This has resulted from numerous developments

[9] For the discourses during the Wars of the Roses: J. Watts, 'Popular Politics in England's Wars of the Roses, c.1445-c.1485', in J. Dumolyn *et al* (ed.), *The Voices of the People in Late Medieval Europe* (Turnhout, 2014), pp.107-8. For the challenge to 'hegemony' I refer to the approach of: Sharpe, *Selling the Tudor Monarchy*, p.100.

[10] As in: D. Rollison, *A Commonwealth of the People* (Cambridge, 2010), pp.1-11; and M.L. Bush, 'The Risings of the Commons in England, 1381-1549', in J. H. Denton (ed.), *Orders and Hierarchies in Late Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Manchester, 1999), pp.111-2, *passim*.

that include, on the one hand, social approaches to politics and the impact of 'cultural studies' on historiography.[11] On the other, the recent trends also partly emerged from, and in opposition to, Jürgen Habermas's influential book on the public sphere since its late translation.[12] As a result of these new approaches, historians of this period no longer hesitate to resort to the concept of 'public opinion' as they have increasingly envisaged a wider political society, more fluid dynamics in politics, and the pursuit of political communication between rulers and ruled. In doing so, academics have recognised that ordinary people were not only interested in but also influenced politics in the later medieval period.[13] This thesis aims to build on this body of work, and on three of its themes in particular.

The first of these is the dialogical relationship between ideas and politics in the late medieval period. This relationship was not broadly acknowledged until seminal studies began to revitalise political history after the so-called 'linguistic turn' by applying John Pocock's and Quentin Skinner's theoretical propositions to the field.[14] What that still means, in a few words, is to study politics through accessing the contemporary political language and its ideas and principles – which has recently been labelled as 'new constitutional

[11] See two comprehensive summaries of this in: C. Carpenter, 'Introduction: Political Culture, Politics, and Cultural History', in Clark & Carpenter, *The Fifteenth Century IV*, pp.1-11; C. Carpenter, 'Political and Constitutional History: before and after McFarlane', in R.H. Britnell and A.J. Pollard (eds.), *The McFarlane Legacy* (Stroud and New York, 1995), pp.175-206. For the social approach only: J.P. Cooper, 'Introduction', in K.B. McFarlane, *The Nobility of Later Medieval England* (Oxford, 1973), pp.vii-xxxvii; G.L. Harriss, 'McFarlane, (Kenneth) Bruce (1903-66)', *ODNB* (17 Aug. 2019).

[12] J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, 1989).

[13] For instance: C. Ross, 'Rumour, Propaganda and Popular Opinion During the Wars of the Roses', in R.A. Griffiths, *Patronage*, *the Crown and the Provinces* (Gloucester, 1981), pp.15-32; I.M.W. Harvey, *Jack Cade's Rebellion of 1450* (Oxford, 1991); Eadem, 'Was there Popular Politics in Fifteenth-Century England?', in Britnell and Pollard, *The McFarlane Legacy*, pp.155-174; Watts, 'The Pressure of the Public', esp. pp.168-73; J.-P. Genet, 'Political Society and the Late Medieval State', in T. Dahlerup, and P. Ingesman (eds.), *New Approaches to the History of Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Copenhagen, 2009), pp.11-36.

[14] Such as: Watts, 'Ideas, Principles and Politics', p.117; Idem, *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship* (Cambridge, 1996), pp.13-77; J-.P. Genet, 'New Politics or New Language? The Words of Politics in Yorkist and Early Tudor England', in J. Watts (ed.), *The End of the Middle Ages?* (Stroud, 1998), pp.23-57; R. Horrox (ed.), *Fifteenth-Century Attitudes* (Cambridge, 1994); C. Carpenter, *Locality and Polity* (Cambridge, 1992), p.3; P. Strohm, *Politique: Languages of Statecraft between Chaucer and Shakespeare* (Notre Dame, Indiana, 2005); C. Fletcher, 'What makes a political language? Key Terms, Profit and Damage in the Common Petition of English Parliament, 1343-1422', in Dumolyn *et al*, *The Voices of the People*, pp.91-106.

history'.[15] Through their increased attention to political languages, historians have increasingly acknowledged that ordinary people were part of the political arena and that their voices were sometimes even invited by the elites, but most importantly, that the commons seized the prevailing language in order to be heard as well as to promote their particular ideas.[16] These people organised rebellions, wrote bills of complaint, used seditious language reasonably often, and prompted negotiations with authorities by various means which all directly or indirectly affected and were connected to the political context – that is, the Wars of the Roses and their developments until the early Reformation.

A second trend in the past few decades that branches out from cultural studies has been to apply James Scott's concepts of 'infrapolitics' and 'hidden transcripts' to the study of rumour and seditious language. The notion of the 'infrapolitics of subordinate groups' conveys the idea of an 'unobtrusive realm of political struggle' in which people resort to forms of everyday resistance that are substitutes for direct aggression.[17] These concepts seem to have received more attention since Simon Walker's article on the rumours that followed Henry IV's usurpation of 1399.[18] The fact that academics have already begun to revise and criticise the Scottian approach should not annul the valuable analyses that developed from applying such concepts, and they have shed light on individual aspects of popular language.[19]

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[15] W.M. Ormrod, 'The New Political History: Recent Trends in the Historiography of Later Medieval England', in Dahlerup and Ingesman, *New Approaches*, pp.41-2.

[16] G. Harriss, 'The Dimensions of Politics', in Britnell and Pollard, *The McFarlane Legacy*, p.14; Harvey, *Jack Cade's Rebellion*, esp. ch.4; Eadem, 'Was there Popular Politics?', p.156; J. Watts, 'Polemic and Politics in the 1450's', in *JVB*, pp.3-42; Idem, 'Pressure of the Public', pp.159-80.

[17] J.C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, 1990), pp.183-187. These ideas also partly underlined his previous work: J.C. Scott, *The Weapons of the Weak* (New Haven, 1985).

[18] S. Walker, 'Rumour, Sedition and Popular Protest in the Reign of Henry IV', *P&P*, 166 (2000), p.33. See: H. Wicker, 'The Politics of Vernacular Speech: Cases of Treasonable Language, c.1440-1453', in Eadem and E. Salter (eds.), *Vernacularity in England and Wales*, *c.1300-1550* (Turnhout, 2011), pp.185-6; some comparative comments in Fletcher, 'What makes a political language?', p.95; M. Sizer, 'Murmur, Clamor, and Tumult: The Soundscape of Revolt and Oral Culture in the Middle Ages', *Radical History*, 121 (2015), p.13; J. Walter, 'Public Transcripts, Popular Agency and the Politics of Subsistence in Early Modern England', in M. Braddick and J. Walter, *Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society* (Cambridge, 2001), pp.123-48; J. Dumolyn and J. Haemers, '"A Bad Chicken was Brooding": Subversive Speech in Late Medieval Flanders', *P&P*, 214 (2012), pp.47-8.

[19] Critics include: Watts, 'Popular Politics', pp.107-10; J. Haemers, 'Filthy and Indecent Words. Insults, Defamation, and Urban Politics in the Southern Low Countries, 1300-1550', in Dumolyn *et al*, *The Voices of the People*, pp.247-8; C. Liddy and J. Haemers, 'Popular Politics in the Late Medieval City: York and Bruges',

Therefore, the field of popular politics, rumours, and sedition is now quite well-defined and with diversified approaches, but there is still plenty of work that can be done by combining this trend with that of 'public opinion'.

This brings me to a third theme: the work of Jürgen Habermas on the 'public sphere'. During the three decades since the English translation of 1989, arguments for and against Habermas's thesis have usually been based on the fact that he dismissed the possibility of a critical public opinion before the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, that is, in comparison to the rational, informed, critical and 'free' public debate of the bourgeois Enlightenment.[20] Although some historians have tried to apply his models, the majority of academics concerned with public opinion and communication have rejected them by several means.[21] Peter Lake and Steve Pincus edited a collection of essays in 2007, which they claimed to be a 'variation' rather than an application of Habermasian ideas – suggesting the phenomenon of a critical public sphere was more present in the Elizabethan period than before.[22] More recently, Habermas has again been put under the scrutiny of a variety of European intellectuals who have historicised his thesis, placing it in its precise connection with the historical materialism as well as within the debates of Reinhardt Koselleck and the history of concepts.[23] In this context, Nicolas Offenstadt observed that Habermas had influenced a great variety of German scholars since the publication of his book, but more

EHR, 128/533 (2013), pp.780-1; A. Wood, *Riot, Rebellion and Popular Politics in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp.18-19.

[20] Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p.xviii.

[21] For those who tried a Habermasian approach, see for instance: D. Lawton, 'Dullness and the Fifteenth Century', *English Literary History*, 54 (1987), pp.761-99; and partly J. Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge, 1996), ch.4. For a clear rejection, besides those mentioned in this paragraph: H.R.O. Herrer and V. Challet, 'La Sociedad Política y el Mundo Rural de la Edad Media', *Revista de História: Edad Media*, 7 (2005-6), pp.75-98; J. Masschaele, 'The Public Space of the Marketplace in Medieval England', *Speculum*, 77/2 (2002), pp.383-421; W. Scase, '"Strange and Wonderful Bills": Bill-Casting and Political Discourse in Late Medieval England', in R. Copeland, D. Lawton and W. Scase (eds.), *New Medieval Literatures*, II (Oxford, 1998), pp.225-47.

[22] P. Lake & S. Pincus (eds.), *Politics of the Public Sphere in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 2007), pp.3-12.

[23] P. Boucheron and N. Offenstadt (eds.), *L'Espace Public au Moyen Âge: Débats autour de Jürgen Habermas* (Paris, 2011), esp. the Introduction and the chapters by Stéphane Haber, Stéphane Van Damme, and Nicolas Offenstadt.

importantly, that German historians were using the concept of 'public opinion' – both before and after Habermas – more freely than one would expect.[24] A year later, another publication, edited by Massimo Rospocher, addressed similar concerns about the public sphere in this period and recognised that, although Habermas has been thoroughly criticised for his teleological paradigm, he is still the subject-matter of a significant number of books and discussions.[25] Interestingly, Rospocher acknowledges other prominent trends in recent analyses which have been applying a variety of antithetical models, including the idea of different levels of communication proposed by Filippo De Vivo, as well as other works that include the models of Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu.[26]

As these points demonstrate, there is no reason to give primacy to the Habermasian paradigm. Apart from German historiography, some historians have also used the concept of public opinion freely, such as Bernard Guenée, who acknowledged the presence of political communication between kings and people in Western Europe from around the fourteenth century.[27] More interestingly, in 2002, Guenée openly referred to people's feelings and attitudes recorded in a fifteenth-century chronicle as a form of public opinion as seen by the chronicler.[28] Others, before Habermas's concept had even become a paradigm, referred to 'public opinion' more liberally: Thomas Tout analysed parliamentary dynamics, partly in connection with the Peasants' Rebellion of 1381; and John Hale recognised that wars needed

[24] N. Offenstadt, 'Le Moyen Âge de Jürgen Habermas: Enquête sur une réception allemande', in Boucheron & Offenstadt, *L'Espace Public*, pp.85-8.
[25] I refer to the introduction to: M. Rospocher (eds.), *Beyond the Public Sphere. Opinions*, *Publics*, *Spaces in Early Modern Europe* (Bologna, 2012), pp.9-11. Further to those already cited, it is worth mentioning: B.A. Bolumburu and J.S. Telechea (eds.), *La Gobernanza de la Ciudad Europea en la Edad Media* (Logroño, 2011); and H.R.O. Herrer *et al* (eds.), *La Comunidad Medieval Como Esfera Pública a fines de la Edad Media* (Sevilla, 2014).
[26] Rospocher, *Beyond the Public Sphere*, p.26. For De Vivo: 'Public Sphere or Communication Triangle? Information and Politics in Early Modern Europe', in Ibidem, p.123. Bourdieu will be discussed in Section 2.
[27] B. Guenée, *L'Occident aux XIVe et XVe siècles. Les États* (Nouvelle Clio, Paris, 1971).
[28] Idem, *L'Opinion Publique à la fin du Moyen Age d'après la "Chronique de Charles VI" du Religieux de Saint-Denis* (Paris, 2002).

to be justified broadly in order to obtain both taxation and troops.[29] Pioneering approaches to popular politics in British historiography pursued an independent path that neither involved nor clearly opposed Habermasian ideas, but demonstrated that rumours and 'propaganda' may tell us just as much about the people as they do about the government.[30] This study derives partly from these older discussions, and relates to the post-Habermasian historiography in its flexible treatment of public opinion: on the one hand, by treating it as a multifaceted concept, as proposed by John Watts and Christian Liddy;[31] on the other, by handling communication *as* politics itself, in the sense that, to quote De Vivo, it was 'the terrain of both conflict and compromise, possibilities and difficulties'.[32]

This thesis also claims a place in the debate by addressing a virtual gap in the field that is temporal as well as conceptual: there is a surprising dearth of work on public opinion between the end of Henry VI's reign and the early Reformation. After nearly three decades of studies more or less related to these varied approaches, it is noticeable that such gap persists despite the discussion proposed by Christopher Duggan in 1993, as we shall see below.[33] Steven Gunn has identified the major difficulties posed by this period, calling our attention in 1995 to the two distinct historiographical branches of late medievalists and early modernists that were still separated by different views and traditions set in the 1950s by

[29] T.F. Tout, 'The English Parliament and Public Opinion', in his *Collected Papers* (3 Vols., Manchester, 1932), II, pp.173-90; J. Hale, 'War and Public Opinion in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries', *P&P*, 22 (1962), pp.18-35.
[30] Ross, 'Rumour, Propaganda, and Popular Opinion', pp.15-17; A.R. Allan, 'Political Propaganda employed by the House of York in England in the mid-fifteenth century, 1450-1471' (PhD thesis, University College of Swansea, 1981); W.R. Jones, 'The English Church and Propaganda during the Hundred Years War', *Journal of British Studies*, 19/1 (1979), pp.18-30; A.K. McHardy, 'Liturgy and Propaganda in the Diocese of Lincoln during the Hundred Years War', *Studies in Church History*, 18 (1982), pp.215-27. An interesting consideration about poetry and public opinion was suggested in: V.J. Scattergood, *Politics and Poetry in the Fifteenth Century* (1971), p.9.
[31] Watts, 'Pressure of the Public', pp.159-62; C. Liddy, *Contesting the City: The Politics of Citizenship in English Towns*, *1250-1530* (Oxford, 2017), pp.126-64. Liddy has more clearly rejected Habermas in: Idem, 'Bill Casting and Political Communication: A Public Sphere in Late Medieval English Towns?', in Bolumburu & Telechea, *La Gobernanza*, pp.447-61.
[32] F. De Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice* (Oxford, 2007), p.16.
[33] Duggan, 'Thought Control', p.3.

Bruce McFarlane and Geoffrey Elton.[34] Many historians have also made calls to fulfilling the specific conceptual gap in the study of late medieval popular politics.[35] The first part of this lacuna – the major historiographical threshold set either on Henry VII's usurpation in 1485 or his death in 1509 – has been increasingly acknowledged during the last three decades though it still rules the field and has prompted Gunn to go back to the paradox of 'liminality' surrounding Henry VII in 2007.[36] The second part, the approach to popular politics, and especially to public opinion and sedition in the sense proposed here, demands even more attention. Late medievalists have considered popular speech roughly until 1461 – or focused on rebellions – while early modernists have produced extensive works on the reactions to the Reformation onwards.[37] Even when the period in between has been partly addressed, the conflicts of the Wars of the Roses and the Reformation have often overshadowed the dynamics of popular politics or prevented us from understanding the broader scenario of public opinion and the constant effort for popular support, public legitimation, and political communication.[38] While overview studies treat this period as merely transitional and specific studies cover particular aspects of popular politics and public opinion, an approach assembling these individual aspects for both the Yorkist and early Tudor period is needed.[39]

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[34] S. Gunn, *Early Tudor Government*, *1485-1558* (1995), pp.2-8. Similarly noticed by M.K. McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehaviour in England*, *1370-1600* (Cambridge, 1998), p.5, who also adds the isolation of British debates from the Continental ones.

[35] Specific calls were made in: Harriss, 'Dimensions of Politics', pp.1-20; Wicker, 'Politics of Vernacular Speech', pp.171-3; Dumolyn & Haemers, 'Subversive Speech', pp.47-8. While John Watts was already writing about the 1450s in 'Polemic and Politics', pp.7-17.

[36] S. Gunn, 'Henry VII in Context: Problems and Possibilities', *History: Journal of the Historical Association*, 92/307 (2007), pp.301-17.

[37] Further to the ones already cited (Walker, Wicker, Harvey), John Watts gives an overview of the Wars of the Roses in 'Popular Politics', pp.107-122. For early modernists: E. Shagan, 'Rumours and Popular Politics in the Reign of Henry VIII', in T. Harris (ed.), *The Politics of the Excluded*, *c. 1500-1850* (Basingstoke and New York, 2001), 30-66; E. Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* (Cambridge, 2002); Fox, *Oral and Literature Culture*, *passim*; Wood, *Riot*, *Rebellion and Popular Politics*, *passim*. This gap is further exemplified by the works cited in Rollison, *Commonwealth of the People*, pp.10-1, 240-2, that is, they are all focused on the period after the 1520s.

[38] For example: Harvey, 'Was there Popular Politics?', p.169; Ross, 'Rumour, Propaganda and Popular Opinion', p.29; Shagan, *Popular Politics*, pp.1-22; S.L. Jansen, *Dangerous Talk and Strange Behavior* (New York, 1996).

[39] By 'particular aspects' I mean rumours, rebellions, seditious language, and others usually treated in isolation. D. Cressy, *Dangerous Talk* (Oxford, 2010) and Rollison, *Commonwealth of the People*, for example, are not particularly concerned with 'public opinion', and the Yorkist and Early Tudor periods are only transitional to

In order to address this gap, this thesis focuses on a periodisation that bridges the traditional divide between the medieval and early modern period and is purposefully unconventional: beginning with the accession of Edward IV to the throne in 1461 and finishing with the subsequent months after the rebellions of 1536-7. Despite being unconventional for this specific purpose, there are indeed many subtle reasons for seeing this period as a unity. The Englishmen/women who lived in this period were connected not only by the unifying features of their political and religious culture – until it was challenged from the 1530s – but also by the fact that their lifetime was directly or indirectly related to the Wars of the Roses. Most of those born in the 1450s and 1460s lived their whole lives against a background of civil war. Those who lived their adult lives during Henry VIII's reign and the early stages of the Reformation were still learning the lessons of the civil wars through the memory of their parents and grandparents, and potential threats still had to be kept under close control. After all, they progressively learned that loose ends were always a potential danger that could turn into a Warwick, a Perkin Warbeck, or an Edmund de la Pole; even the common people knew about this and occasionally alluded to conspirators in their wishful thinking.[40] By the end of this period the De La Poles had been neutralised, but the descendants of George, Duke of Clarence, were still at large and allegedly plotting against Henry VIII, and even later against Elizabeth.[41] Although this climate of uncertainty and conspiracy was not new – kings had already been deposed in the fourteenth century – the memory of the Wars of the Roses and the surviving descendants of Yorkist blood affected how the crown dealt with sedition, treason, and dissent more broadly because it also affected public opinion.

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their long-term analysis. J.P.D. Cooper, *Propaganda and the Tudor State* (Oxford, 2003), ch.4, focuses on a specific region and is ultimately concerned with 'propaganda', which will be discussed in Chapter V below.

[40] See below, pp.174-8.

[41] Such as Reginald Pole and his brother Sir Geoffrey Pole. In Elizabeth's reign, Sir Geoffrey's eldest son, Arthur Pole, showed support to Mary, queen of Scots, and was sent to the Tower with his brother Edmund, where they remained until their deaths: H. Pierce, 'Pole, Arthur (1531/2-1570?)', *ODNB* (29 June 2019).

More importantly, we might envisage the unity of this period by noticing that this background of civil war affected the common people who were increasingly aware of significant changes in the political setting of the kingdom – to which they frequently reacted and attributed their material loss and social oppression. First of all, if the civil wars incentivised the crown to make more use of pre-existing means of political communication – such as proclamations and political pamphlets – it also left scattered vacuums of power in which commoners felt obliged to take action, to make their grievances public, and sometimes to support different sides depending on the discourses that occasionally invited them: hence the popularity of men like the father of both Edward IV and Richard III, Richard Duke of York (1411-1460), or the Earl of Warwick, Richard Neville (1428-1471).[42] Secondly, the common people also seemingly never forgot the dynastic struggles of the Wars of the Roses because it never became apparent that there was an end to it in 1485, 1487 or later – the crown seemed to be open to never-ending negotiation when it failed to do its job. Thirdly, these men and women experienced neither the worst part of the economic recession of the mid-fifteenth century, nor the alleged prosperity of the second half of the sixteenth – though they deeply felt the fluctuations of the economy, the effects of bad harvests, and the constant attempts at innovating the means and efficiency of tax collection.[43] Consequently, the commons either thoroughly complained, strongly resisted, or openly rebelled against the changes to the subsidy and to the fifteenth and tenth, against the more innovative 'benevolences' – later rephrased as Amicable Grant (1525) – and even against rumours of imaginary taxation in 1536.[44] Moreover, popular resistance to these changes to the collection

[42] A. Pollard, 'The People, Politics and the Constitution in the Fifteenth Century', in R.W. Kaeuper (ed.), *Law, Government and Justice* (2013), p.329; Watts, 'Pressure of the Public', pp.159-62; Harriss, 'Dimensions of Politics', p.14; J. Watts, 'Politics, War and Public Life', in R. Marks and P. Williamson (eds.), *Gothic: Art for England, 1400—1547* (2003), pp.28-9.
[43] R. Britnell, *Closing of the Middle Ages?* (1997), p.1, 105-6, 116.
[44] For the changes to the traditional subsidies and fifteenth and tenth: Gunn, 'Henry VII in Context', p.310; Idem, *Early Tudor Government*, pp.134-6; M.L. Bush, 'Tax, Reform and Rebellion in Early Tudor England', *History*, 76/248 (1991), pp.380-1.

of taxes affected government's ambitions directly: parliament never approved the same innovations for decades in a row (especially those of 1489 and 1497), benevolences remained an infamous and partly unacceptable move, and foreign campaigns were directly affected in 1497, 1525 and later in 1549.[45] And lastly, the common people also promptly reacted to the challenges they faced in the 1530s – first by cursing Henry VIII's first divorce, and later in the Pilgrimage of Grace by questioning the political and religious innovations during the first crisis of the Reformation. Invariably, therefore, no important political, economic and religious shift passed unnoticed by the commonalty and they always recycled the same discourses about the 'common weal', the 'commonwealth' and the many levels of oppression they wanted to remedy. Thus, this period has multifaceted unifying features that include more significant levels of communication, higher political awareness among the population and more political engagement that resulted both in a prolonged public pressure and a progressively responsive and instructive political culture. All in all, the few consolidated treatments of popular opinion in this important period deserve to be remedied.

There is one major study which could have filled the historiographical gap, but it was written when discussions of popular opinion were still at an early stage, and it mostly ignored the reigns of Edward IV and Richard III. In 1993, a thesis by Christopher Duggan, entitled 'The Advent of Political Thought-Control in England: seditious and treasonable speech, 1485-1547', was primarily concerned with how the policy towards ideological deviance supposedly changed radically between that of Henry VII and the one engendered by Henry VIII and Thomas Cromwell.[46] Duggan did not address Habermas in his discussion and despite his criticisms while discussing the work of Geoffrey Elton, he was continually looking for signs of modernity in how Cromwell treated political dissent. He argued that the

[45] Bush, 'Tax, Reform and Rebellion', pp.385-6, 396-7.
[46] Duggan, 'Thought Control', pp.101-13.

'new' attempts to control 'minds and bodies' during the later period of Henry VIII's reign arose from a new dismissive attitude towards public opinion from about the 1520s onwards – typified at the treason trial of the Duke of Buckingham, Edward Stafford, in 1521.[47] After this, he continued, the number of prosecutions for abusive language surged because there had been a shift in the English policy and the behaviour of the crown towards political criticism. These premises of his thesis raise several problems, and perhaps the root of the main one is that Duggan considered the government's perspective alone. While he focused on the King's Bench, council records and the State Papers, he was only concerned with punishment and how the government wanted to mould public opinion in an exaggeratedly authoritarian fashion, arguing that Cromwell completely transformed the principles of the treason law to prosecute breaches of political concord rather than breaches of peace. As we shall see, the one-sidedness of this treatment and its interpretative limitations are critical weaknesses of Duggan's approach, but there are two more specific problems with his thesis which are worth introducing here.

First of all, Duggan claimed that prosecuting public speech was peripheral and unimportant to medieval government and, by association, that when seditious words were part of an indictment, it was only due to the crown's concern with breach of peace and physical violence rather than with political statements and ideological deviance. In his argument, the shift to punishment for breach of political concord came only with the approval of the new acts of Treason and Supremacy in 1534.[48] However, because of Duggan's emphasis on legislation and prosecution, he almost completely ignored the contemporary preoccupation with rumour-mongering and misinformation, and this ultimately compromised the outcome of his analysis.[49] We shall see that for both the people and the

[47] For this and what follows: Duggan, 'Thought Control', pp.263-71.
[48] Duggan, 'Thought Control', p.242.
[49] He has random comments but does not conclude anything from the evidence of rumour-mongering: Duggan, 'Thought Control', pp.9, 32-5, 63, 85-99, 173-4.

authorities, the understanding of sedition derived from its original Latin meaning of 'division': because it meant the 'fragmentation' of loyalty and the commonwealth, seditious speech – the vocalised division – was a crime in itself, and typically a consequence of rumour-spreading.[50] So it is that if one ignores the treatment of rumours and their relationship with seditious language, the conclusion of any analysis about sedition can only be limited. Even in the Middle Ages, then, the crown was just as worried by deviant speech as it was by deviant action. Consequently, Duggan's argument about the government's relaxed attitude towards language before Thomas Cromwell cannot remain unchallenged.[51]

Furthermore, Duggan overlooked the different numbers of surviving sources and the problems posed by those differences, reading too much into the low number of cases of seditious and treasonable language recorded under Henry VII's reign as opposed to the hundreds of records in the 1530s. He concluded, for instance, that 'the country remained remarkably peaceful until 1535', and that Henry VII, and by extension the late medieval government, offered a weak response to political dissent.[52] However, the fact that fewer records have survived for Henry VII's reign and before, compared to the impressive numbers that survived in the State Papers of Henry VIII and elsewhere, should not overshadow what seditious language meant to late medieval society and governments.[53] Duggan fundamentally exaggerated his conclusions and neglected all the differences between the records he was comparing from 1485 to 1547. Even so, while numbers drove him to problematic judgements about the existing evidence, they can be revealing of other aspects of public dynamics – as we shall see.[54] All in all, my main disagreement with his thesis is that it does not seem to reflect reality. There are striking continuities between the late medieval period and the 1530s,

[50] See below, pp.121-30.
[51] Duggan, 'Thought Control', pp.86-99, 173-4, 176-7. The importance of early evidence has been only briefly recognised in: Fox, *Oral and Literature Culture*, pp.336-7; Cressy, *Dangerous Talk*, pp.44-6; Rollison, *Commonwealth of the People*, pp.265, 278-80, 284.
[52] Duggan, 'Thought Control', p.245.
[53] See below, pp.151-8.
[54] See below, esp. pp.107-14, 221-31.

and it was precisely the Wars of the Roses and the late medieval experience more broadly that informed the policing of the Henrician Reformation and the government's attitude to political dissent and public opinion.

In sum, this thesis builds upon recent trends in historiography to address public opinion and popular politics in a specific period. One of these trends derives from the 'new constitutional history', the influence of cultural studies, and the growing body of thought about how to include popular speech in late medieval politics. The other is the recent discussions on public opinion and the prevailing rejection of Habermas's model. Alongside these historiographical developments, there is the virtual isolation between late medievalists and early modernists which is addressed throughout this thesis both by proposing this period as a unity and by reconciling different perspectives and sources that we shall see below. It follows from the foregoing that I consider it crucial to analyse the contemporary treatment of rumours and seditious language as an inherent part of public opinion. However, neither the government's approach to dissent nor the public pressure can tell us anything independently: they need to be considered alongside each other and the following sections will make this point clearer while introducing the theoretical framework and the sources.

2. Theoretical Framework

Several features from the literature review affect the concepts, theory and methodology adopted by this study. The first is Pierre Bourdieu's alternative proposition to studies of public opinion.[55] In an essay of 1973, Bourdieu proposed that even in modern society public

[55] See n.26, p.8; and N. Crossley, 'On systematically Distorted Communication: Bourdieu and the Socio-analysis of Publics', in N. Crossley and J.M. Roberts (eds.), *After Habermas: New Perspectives on the Public Sphere* (Oxford, 2004), pp.91.

opinion does not exist in the ways polls and newspapers frequently analyse and present it.[56] He argued that there is a presupposition that 'everyone' has an opinion about what is being asked; that 'every' opinion counts; that these newspapers and polls tend to ignore those who do not answer creating a 'consensus effect' about the questions that need to be asked; and that, in this sense, public opinion is an 'illusion' (even '*un sentiment naïvement démocratique*') if we think that it results from individual opinions, or that it is an 'average opinion'. This illusion called 'public opinion', he carried on, always serves particular political interests and is, in fact, an artefact. Late medieval England, of course, had no newspapers, let alone organised surveys of opinions. However, I assume a similar theoretical position while facing both the concept of public opinion and how one can approach it in the sources that survived: that is, that public opinion is always a construction made by commentators and activists to serve particular ends.

This study of late medieval 'public opinion' is mainly carried through texts, but the terminology used in contemporary sources is heterogeneous. It reflects a variety of uses by different authors with varying intentions, and it is important to notice that this terminology is rarely about the words 'public' and 'opinion'. On the one hand, constructions of 'the public' were made by references to the 'common voice', to the concern with the 'common weal' and the 'good publique' – and as John Watts has argued, to anything involving 'the commons'.[57] While these fabrications were only occasionally based on actual widespread complaints or concerns, other expressions used in this period point to something more than being 'a public', but closer to shared opinions 'in public'. Expressions such as 'it is said', 'it is reported', 'people say', or 'the fame is' – studied by Bernard Guenée[58] – may suggest that there was indeed a broader 'public' discussion existing side by side with the constructions of

[56] For this whole paragraph: P. Bourdieu, 'L'opinion publique n'existe pas', *Les Temps Modernes*, 318 (1973), pp.1292-309.
[57] Watts, 'Pressure of the Public', p.159.
[58] Guenée, *L'Opinion Publique*, p.22.

'the public' – and even if this was based on rumours, it affected the immediate perceptions and reality, as we shall see. Meanwhile, the word 'opinion' is not only implied by the kinds of subjects that this 'public' supposedly chose to discuss and dispute – government policy, taxation, war, oppression – but it is also revealed by other words used more clearly to describe complaints, such as the 'grudge' and 'murmur' of the common people.[59] By studying all these expressions together, I am not only combining the understandings of 'public' posited by Watts and Guenée, but also surveying what it was that created Bourdieu's *effet de consensus*, i.e. a contemporary artefact for public opinion that also had a particular purpose.[60] By approaching this language in this way, this thesis assumes that these fabrications allowed commentators, activists, and the government itself to turn 'the people' into actual political actors.[61] In pursuing at least an illusion, an imperfect image of public opinion in the late middle ages – much as sociologists, journalists and politicians do today, if one follows Bourdieu's rationale – I assume from the beginning that some kind of public action lay behind these representations. That is, a public action that takes place somewhat 'in public' or addresses 'a public' with either speech or writing that reveals 'opinions' through established discourses.

Another layer of 'public opinion' considered in the following chapters reveals an entirely different purpose carried forward by royal authorities. In order to sustain consensus and political unity, the government tried to control and suppress certain opinions and behaviours by labelling them as seditious, rebellious, scandalous or treasonable. In that sense, this evidence is the exact opposite of Bourdieu's contentions. It is the evidence that resulted not from the consensus effect, but precisely from the authorities representing

[59] Quoting: *HC*, pp.264-5.
[60] Steven Justice openly recognised that all the written evidence about the Peasants' Rebellion of 1381 served 'large and distorting ideological interests' but he was more concerned with 'representations' throughout his work, rather than with what I purposefully call constructions of public opinion here: S. Justice, *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381* (Berkeley, 1994), pp.4-8, 258-9.
[61] I refer partly to: C. Gauvard, 'Qu'est-ce que l'opinion publique avant l'invention de l'imprimerie?', in Eadem *et al* (eds.), *L'Opinion. Information*, *rumeur*, *propagande* (Nantes, 2008), pp.58-9.

particular expressions as divisive, violent, and seditious. The pattern of this disaffected popular language in this period was sometimes indeed a language of violence and exaggeration, and sometimes just veiled criticism, but both aimed at undermining authority through established codes and pursuing a sense of community through particular forms of verbal and physical protest. Because the representations of these opinions come to light more quickly in official sources, it has been the main focus of historiography concerned with the topics of public opinion mentioned above. Nonetheless, in combining these two different manifestations of the phenomenon of public opinion in contemporary sources, the one that creates the consensus effect and the one that reveals dissent, this study pursues what is perhaps a more complete picture of both public and popular perspectives.

A more compelling picture will also emerge by treating language as a series of acts carrying symbolic power, as well as the written version of these speech acts as historical events themselves.[62] This perspective is at the basis of this research and refers back to the current literature once more: to the role of ideas and accepted principles, to refer to John Watts, or more specifically the role of language – as speech acts and text-events – in the politics of this period.[63] I have already stated the broader conceptual standpoint related to this: that communication is treated as politics throughout the thesis.[64] In that sense, beyond dealing with 'politics itself as a language-system and language itself as a political system', this study considers public opinion as the result of different kinds of interactions that resorted to the same common and shared 'language system', affecting both the 'system' and the people involved.[65] Scholastic thinkers and theologians in this period believed that any sin – including seditious language – had three phases that were equally problematic: thoughts,

[62] Respectively: P. Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, 1991), p.37; Pocock, *Political Thought and History*, pp.106-8, 114.
[63] See n.14, p.5.
[64] See pp.8-9 and nn.26, 32.
[65] Quoting: Pocock, *Political Thought and History*, p.34.

speech, and actions.[66] The problem of inflamed political language for the authorities and rulers of late medieval England was that they knew it was certainly revealing of thoughts and could be persuasive and quickly result in actions, as it was uncontrollable once it spread.[67] After all, contemporaries noticed that both speech alone (speech acts), and the occasional bills and lampoons (text-events), were carriers of symbolic power because commoners resorted to established discourses to make themselves heard – sometimes cleverly twisting the rhetoric to make criticisms or attribute a negative social essence to superiors with well-known insulting language.[68] In other words, the commons were trying to acquire the 'means of liberation' of their grievances by using a language which had been imposed on their reality, but, once re-used, it set off conceptual consequences that were unforeseen.[69] So it is that this study is also 'a history of discursive conflicts' combining theoretical positions of both Bourdieu and Pocock, as well as building upon the historiography that has already worked in similar ways.[70] Conflicts over the meanings of political concepts and of abusive language dictated the relationship between popular politics and their superiors.

By taking the view that communication and language – including disputing meanings – are the principal means of making politics, this thesis moves away from the studies that apply James Scott's concepts of 'infrapolitics' and 'hidden transcripts' to explain

[66] C. Casagrande and S. Vecchio, *Les Péchés de la Langue* (Paris, 1991), pp.137-43. A more circumspect analysis of these 'sins of the tongue' is given by: S. Bardsley, *Venomous Tongue: Speech and Gender in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia, 2006), ch. 1.
[67] See the characterisation of women's speech which partly applies to all dangerous language in: M.C. Bodden, *Language as the Site of Revolt in Medieval and Early Modern England* (New York, 2011), pp.8-27.
[68] With 'social essence' I refer to: Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, pp.37, 105-6.
[69] Pocock, *Political Thought and History*, p.42.
[70] The quote is from: J. Dumolyn and J. Haemers, '*Takehan*, *Cokerulle*, and *Mutemaque*: naming collective action in the later medieval Low Countries', in Firnhaber-Baker and Schoenaers (eds.), *The Routledge History Handbook of Medieval Revolt* (2016), p.49. But I also refer to Bourdieu's treatment of opinion as 'forces' and to the reports of opinion – as the sources surveyed here – as 'conflits de forces' in: 'L'opinion publique n'existe pas', pp.1303-4. In addition, there is 'lutte discursive' developed in: J. Dumolyn and E. Lecuppre-Desjardin, 'Le bien commun en Flandre médiévale: une lutte discursive entre prince et sujets' in E. Leccupre-Desjardin and A.-L. Van Bruaene (eds.), *De Bono Communi. The Discourse and practice of the Common good in the European City (13th-16th c.)* (Turnhout, 2010), pp.253-66; and Andy Wood's similar approach of struggle over meanings in: *Riot*, *Rebellion and Popular Politics*, pp.17-18, 21-3.

the dynamics of popular politics in late medieval England.[71] John Watts once suggested that 'infrapolitics' is a rather narrow concept to approach popular politics in this period because the commons were not wholly excluded from the political sphere and because the government's preoccupation with seditious speech, slander or tale-bearing reflected the extent of the discussion, not its secrecy and clandestine character implied by Scott.[72] Among continental historians, Jan Dumolyn and others have asserted that late medieval commoners had clear ideas on the nature of social power and how it should be exerted, raising their voices whenever necessary.[73] Moreover, historians have recently agreed that it is unfruitful to oppose the elite and the commons – which is what using 'infrapolitics' risks doing – when looking for subversive speech, as there were shared strands of political culture.[74] Among the patterns of this political culture, the power of all manners of insults, rumours, songs, pamphlets and other forms of expression can indeed be considered as 'opinions' – and they were mainly not discreet or unobtrusive as those analysed by Scott.[75] The range of political activity of late medieval commoners, too, was usually not as clandestine as that of the subaltern groups in Scott's work.[76] While his propositions have been fruitful and explain other aspects of human societies, this study assumes that language in all its forms – even murmuring and grumbling – is more public, political and powerful than 'clandestine', 'subaltern', or 'hidden'. Every speech act constitutes political language within a discursive conflict which, in the end, is the nature of public opinion itself.

[71] See above, pp.6-7 and Scott in n.17.
[72] Watts, 'Popular Politics', pp.109-10.
[73] J. Dumolyn *et al.*, *The Voices of the People*, pp.1-12.
[74] For instance: Watts, 'Popular Politics', pp.107-22; R.B. Goheen, 'Peasant Politics? Village Community and the Crown in Fifteenth-century England', *American Historical Review*, 96/1 (1991), pp.42-62; Harvey, 'Was therer Popular Politics?', pp.170-1; Wood, *Riot, Rebellion and Popular Politics*, pp.8-11; Idem, *The 1549 Rebellions and the Making of Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2007), pp.xiii-xvi, 145-6.
[75] Haemers, 'Filthy and Indecent Words', pp.247-267; Dumolyn & Haemers, 'Subversive Speech', p.56.
[76] I am generalising a point made by Liddy and Haemers in: 'Popular Politics in the Late Medieval City', pp.780-1.

In order to close this discussion of the theoretical framework, I want to highlight briefly the psychological and sociological considerations that help with the understanding of the relationship between public opinion and one specific type of speech act referred to since the beginning of this introduction: rumours. The presumed founders of the study of rumours, Gordon Allport and Leo Postman, argued that rumours are a social and psychological phenomenon that thrives in times of crisis when real facts are shrouded in ambiguity, distrust and emotional tension.[77] These scholars identified four categories of motivation for rumour-mongering of which three almost entirely classify the rumours we will see here: anxiety generates macabre and threatening tales; hope and desire underlie pipe-dream rumours; and hatred sustains accusatory tales and slander.[78] More importantly, according to Tomatsu Shibutani, rumours always reflect shifts in preoccupation; they are a recurrent form of communication through which men and women, especially in ambiguous situations, attempt to construct a meaningful interpretation of reality.[79] In agreeing with most of these previous postulations, Jean-Noel Kapferer adds that among several academic definitions, one common feature among scholars is that rumour is a piece of information destined to be believed and usually of public interest. Social interactions, he claims, rest upon trust and faith, and more significantly, upon the delegation of the task of verifying the facts.[80] Rumour seduces people because it allows them to understand their reality better while considerably simplifying essential facts. It provides a sense of order to the periods of crisis they are trying to cope with – the fact that rumours coincide with times of crisis, as we shall see, demonstrates this dynamic.[81] What also seems to be shared by psychologists and sociologists of rumours, since

[77] For this and what follows: G.W. Allport and L. Postman, *The Psychology of Rumour* (New York, 1947), pp.vii, x, 33, 36, 199.
[78] Which also applies to the rumours analysed by Daniel Horowitz: see n.4 above.
[79] T. Shibutani, *Improvised News: A Sociological Study of Rumour* (New York, 1966), pp.17, 65.
[80] J.-N. Kapferer, *Rumeurs. Le plus vieux media du monde* (Paris, 1987), pp.11-2, 14, 305.
[81] Kapferer, *Rumeurs*, p.95. See below, pp.107-14.

Allport and Postman, is the view that anxiety plays a huge part in their origin and spread.[82] These perspectives enable us to see the generation of a multifaceted public opinion as something natural, that is, as emotional and almost irrational; that does not exclude its critical and political role, but it does remind us that the construction and circulation of rumours was not necessarily (or even often) a matter of calculation.

Overall, these studies in the psychology and sociology of rumours emphasise that they are an inherent part of any communication system. By noting that rumours pervade every aspect of public opinion, therefore, we shall better comprehend the late medieval communication system as a whole, and consequently the making and workings of public opinion itself. First, because rumour and its anxieties were one of the sources for the fabrications of public opinion – they did not need to be true, but they needed to fit the consensus effect expected by commentators. Second, because rumours invariably reflect shifts of preoccupation, they equally affected both the commoners and the government. For one thing, rumour was culturally understood as the source of sedition and rebellion. For another, the government thought that widespread rumour was a threat and authorities did what they could – usually unsuccessfully – to alter public discussion about undesired, slanderous, or dangerous subjects. As one of the most subtle forms of speech act, rumour carried a symbolic power also because it was usually indistinct from, or disguised as, 'news'. In sum, the authorities did not know precisely how to control the circulation and spread of rumours – and they had no means to do it – but the results of the anxiety that rumour-mongering invariably caused are all over the sources.

[82] This is stressed by the overview of: R.L. Rosnow, *Rumor and Gossip: The Social Psychology of Hearsay* (New York, 1976), p.62.

3. Sources

The sources for this thesis are well-known among historians of the period. In broad terms, they are chronicles and other kinds of narratives, political poems, correspondence (private and official), treatises and pamphlets, as well as a number of official materials such as the indictments of the King's Bench, Chancery bills, some early Star Chamber cases, parliament records, proclamations and statutes.[83] In all, the aim has been to include as many examples as possible for each aspect of public opinion analysed in the following chapters: the constructions of public opinion, the circulation of rumours, the patterns and meanings of the use and prosecution of seditious language, and political communication more broadly. It is important to highlight that after analysing the sources described here, I have classified them into these four aspects of public opinion in order to demonstrate broad statistical points which support the analysis in each chapter – but especially in Chapter IV.

Following the theoretical framework above, it is necessary to observe that these texts were produced within a precise language system that made them possible and set their limits, but was also modified by them. This interaction of speech acts and texts within the contemporary language system fundamentally explains why there is no contradiction in using 'elite' sources when they analyse popular reactions, respond to them, or characterise them.[84] The difficulties with using these sources – including those written by foreigners, such as ambassadors – will be briefly outlined here while I survey their different types and discuss the interpretative challenges they involve.

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[83] Further to the materials mentioned in this section, there is a varied number of sources that has been considered in parallel but that will not be treated in detail here. It is worth noting, for instance, the materials in *John Vale's Book* (*JVB*) and one later example of commonplace book: *Gleanings from the Common Place Book of John Hooker*, *Relating to the City of Exeter*, *1485-1590*, ed. W.J. Harte (Exeter, 1926). Moreover, the poems, ballads, and treatises that survived mostly in these commonplace books have been extensively analysed by historians, and I rely on the various editions of this material, that include: Furnivall's *Ballads from Manuscripts*, Robbin's *Historical Poems*, Scattergood's *Skelton Poems*. And to a lesser extent: *Political Poems and Songs Relating to English History*, Vol.2, ed. T. Wright (1861).

[84] This last point is also shared by Dumolyn *et al*, *The Voices of the People*, pp.7-8. See also above, n.74, p.21.

First of all, I have surveyed the historical narratives of this period and attempted to include all the chronicles available. Mary-Rose McLaren tells us that about forty-four London chronicle manuscripts survived for the period 1430-1566, but, insofar as this study is concerned, those related to the period 1461-1537, and including other narratives from outside London, are about thirty-nine.[85] It would be impractical to describe all of them in detail here, but it is worth highlighting that chronicles are not merely static narratives of private individuals, nor in general were they just 'propaganda' sponsored by the crown. They were also somewhat public documents that were often written by several hands, were based on a vast range of official documents and probably circulated more than we can assess.[86] More importantly, they have a great deal to say about public opinion and popular speech – while they reproduce the consensus effect and help to fabricate public opinion, they also pay close attention to people's grievances and to widespread anxieties and rebellions.[87] As Samuel Cohn has posited, in the majority of cases, and despite the stereotypes and selective attention, chronicles tell us about the context in which people's action took place, they can provide a reasonable narrative, frequently with some comprehension of the motivations behind various political actors that no other record can.[88]

It is undeniable, however, that these chronicles raise interpretative problems. On the one hand, even the chronicles that are remarkably detailed (Edward Hall and Dominic Mancini) and partly contemporary to the events they describe (*Warkworth's Chronicle* and the *Crowland Chronicle*) rapidly show their inconsistencies and persistently derogatory treatment of some characters/events and not others.[89] On the other, some chronicles are

[85] M.-R. McLaren, *The London Chronicles of the Fifteenth-Century* (Cambridge, 2002), pp.3, 49.
[86] McLaren, *London Chronicles*, pp.140-5.
[87] It is worth mentioning the similar remarks about popular opinion in chronicles made by: C.L. Kingsford, *English Historical Literature in the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford, 1913), pp.70-4.
[88] S. Cohn, *Lust for Liberty: The politics of social revolt in medieval Europe* (Massachusetts, 2006), pp.19-20.
[89] *HC*; and D. Mancini, *The Usurpation of Richard the Third*, ed. C.A.J. Armstrong (Oxford, 1936). See also the case of Vergil's *Anglica Historia* in: A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England II:* c. *1307 to the Early Sixteenth Century* (1974), pp.433-41. Dating and authorship of the specific continuation of the *Crowland*

indeed fragmentary, less empirical, were sponsored (the Yorkist narratives and partly the case of Polydore Vergil), or sometimes, on the contrary, are convincing narratives which were not written during (nor near, such as Jean de Wavrin) the events they depict.[90] In some cases, we also remain uncertain about their authorship (the *Vitellius A XVI* chronicle, for instance).[91] While some of these narratives are highly tendentious, they are themselves trying to build public opinion for particular ends and this is also part of the analysis that follows – especially in Chapter I. We might certainly expect such texts to tell us some opinions purely to discredit or promote particular figures, without any regard for the actual range of popular opinion. Even so, as long as we are analysing the use of language, discourses, representations, and popular opinion that can often be compared with other sources, the problems posed by chronicles do not compromise the outcome of this study as their advantages are indeed quite promising.

The second category of sources mapped by this study comprises various kinds of letters. Private correspondence reveals particular anxieties about local people, threatening riots, and occasional insights into rebellions. As most letters were about directly contemporary events, they provide a different insight into the circulation of information, rumours, and perceptions of the local elite working in between the common people and the higher authorities.[92] Historians of the fifteenth century are lucky to have the first surviving extensive collections of letters in vernacular language – the Paston, Stonor, Cely and

Chronicle is discussed by Gransden, *Historical Writing II*, pp.249-53, 491-2; *Crowland Chronicle*, pp.57-60; and A. Hanham, *Richard III and his Early Historians*, *1483-1535* (Oxford, 1975), pp.74-102.

[90] With 'Yorkist narratives', I refer to: *Lincolnshire Reb.*; *Arrivall of Ed.IV*. For Wavrin: J. Wavrin, *Anchiennes Chronicques d'Engleterre*, ed. L.M.É. Dupont (3 Tomes, Paris, 1858-63); and see the discussion of how informed he was in: L. Visser-Fuchs, 'Jean de Wavrin and the English newsletters: the *Chronicle of the Rebellion in Lincolnshire*', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 47 (2003), pp.217-35.

[91] Kingsford, *English Historical Literature*, p.99. After McLaren's disagreement, the authorship of *The Great Chronicle of London*, for instance, seems to be now accepted as Robert Fabyan: Gransden, *Historical Writing II*, pp.220-48; J. Boffey, *Manuscript and Print in London*, c.*1475-1530* (2012), pp.164-7; McLaren, *London Chronicles*, pp.26-9. The relationship between the *Great Chronicle* and other manuscripts in London (including the *Vitellius A XVI*) is discussed in: Kingsford, *English Historical Literature*, pp.70-192; McLaren, *The London Chronicles*, pp.7-8; Boffey, *Manuscript and Print*, pp.11-44 and *passim*.

[92] See for instance: H. Castor, *Blood and Roses* (2005), pp.5-6; the introduction to *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers*, *1290-1483*, ed. and intr. C. Carpenter (Cambridge, 1996), pp.1-31.

Plumpton letters.[93] The practice of exchanging letters was, of course, far from unusual and correspondence between colleagues, friends, and relatives tends to be more about private matters. However, these letters are also frequently well-informed about local and central politics – sending instructions, for instance – or asking for the confirmation of news, rumours and other anxieties. For these significant insights, I have surveyed all the available collections of these letters which cover this period, including some of the originals. Secondly, there are the widely-used and vividly-written letters of ambassadors who lived in London for some time representing the Duke of Milan, the Spanish monarch (later Holy Roman Emperor), and the Doge of Venice.[94] These foreign correspondents reproduced certain kinds of rumours, carrying forward not only what they heard at court and from their informants, but all kinds of rumours that they generally gathered, we assume, from second hand.[95] The most politically engaged with the issues reported was, perhaps, the Imperial ambassador Eustace Chapuys, who can typify the problems of this kind of letter: he did not know any English but spoke in Latin and French at court, and possibly had informants among the Spanish, Flemish and German mercantile communities in London.[96] Regardless of their flamboyant and at times partial accounts, these letters retain impressive analyses of society and alleged 'popular' reactions – at least as seen through the lens of their informants. While these two kinds of correspondence – private and ambassadorial – retain some of the disadvantages of chronicles, they remain fruitful as they were directly contemporary reports.

Another collection of letters that could not have been ignored by this study is preserved in the voluminous State Papers of Henry VIII – the letters between distinct parts

[93] *Paston Letters*; *Stonor Letters*; *The Cely Letters*, *1472-1488*, ed. A. Hanham (1975); *The Plumpton Correspondence*, ed. J. Kirkby (1996). The letters related to central government before Henry VIII are mostly in: *LP RIII/HVII*; *LKE*; and *Original Letters*.
[94] Unfortunately, I have not had time to trace any of the originals in the continental archives. I rely on the published calendars: *CSPM*; *CSPSp*; *CSPV*.
[95] See a concise criticism of these sources in: S. Gunn, 'The structure of government in Early Tudor England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5 (1995), pp.64-7.
[96] C.S.L. Davies, 'Chapuys, Eustache (1490x92?—1556), diplomat', *ODNB* (20 June 2019).

of local and central government (mostly incoming ones) which also throw light on law-enforcement.[97] The principal part of this varied material includes the papers of chancellors – and later the king's secretary or 'minister' – handed over to the Keeper of State Papers when they died. The surviving material is admittedly diverse but the size of Cromwell's papers alone is a major complicating factor in using this material for two reasons. First, because these later papers are unparalleled – Wolsey's correspondence, for example, mostly disappeared, and Thomas More destroyed his papers before he was arrested. A comparison between all the sources analysed in this thesis also shows that these papers comprise more than half of all the data collected. This realisation leads to a second analytical problem about change over time discussed in Chapter III, as we cannot simply ignore the concentration of sources in the last decade as opposed to the rest of the evidence covering the period between 1461 and 1526. Even so, the volume and nature of these sources – as well as the practicality of using an electronic and online version – are indeed fruitful, especially to an analysis that includes sedition and treason. I have used the calendared version for practical reasons, and because it contains materials from archives other than the State Papers. Whenever a document or specific vocabulary proved essential to my analysis, I resorted to its reproduction in the online version.[98]

The third, and the most laborious, part of this research has consisted of mapping expressions of popular speech through other types of official records – both edited and in The National Archives. I have first set out to chart the Ancient Indictments of the King's Bench (KB9), looking into all the original records between 1461 and 1537.[99] I have also

[97] For the background of these sources and the following points in this paragraph I rely on: G. Elton, *England: 1200-1640* (New York, 1969), pp.66-75; S. Alford, 'Introduction to *State Papers Online* and the Sixteenth Century State Papers, 1509–1603', in *State Papers Online I-IV*, *1509–1714* (Andover, 2008), https://www.gale.com/intl/primary-sources/state-papers-online-early-modern; A. Bevan, 'State Papers of Henry VIII: the Archives and Documents', in Ibidem (15 Aug. 2019).
[98] *LP.* When originals exist, they are reproduced in the *State Papers Online*.
[99] For the background and workings of this court I rely on: J.H. Baker, *The Oxford History of the Laws of England. Vol.VI: 1483-1558* (Oxford, 2003); M. Blatcher, *Court of King's Bench*, *1450-1550* (1978). Also, both for the King's Bench and what follows in this paragraph: Gunn, *Early Tudor Government*, pp.71-108.

analysed part of the *Coram Rege Rolls* of the King's Bench (KB27) for this same period, but with intervals of five years – as they only occasionally add substantial cases that are not recorded in the indictments. Secondly, I have surveyed the whole detailed catalogue of the Chancery bills (C1) from the first fragmented records of the reigns of Edward IV and Richard III to the 1530s. Whenever cases were related to royal and local officers, defamation, riot and abusive language, I have read the originals.[100] I have followed the same procedure to analyse the Star Chamber records, but I also added the available published records.[101] Moreover, I have examined a number of salient examples of local sources through edited materials in order to compare – whenever appropriate – local and national strategies as well as different or similar political language in play.[102] This part of the analysis also revealed some significant aspects of how popular politics worked at the local level, especially in the records of Coventry and York, but also in the nuances of popular language illustrated by ecclesiastical records.[103]

Admittedly, these records, like much of the material in the State Papers, are the result of authorities' efforts to suppress popular voices, instead of giving them any weight. Scholars have scrutinised these records to the point of considering them a combination of the prejudiced perspective of approvers, local rivalries, and popular gossip that invariably

[100] For these bills see: T.S. Haskett, 'Conscience, Justice and Authority in the Late-Medieval English Court of Chancery', in A. Musson (ed.), *Expectations of the Law in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 2001), pp.151-63; T.S. Haskett, 'Country Lawyers? The Composers of the English Chancery Bills', in P. Birks (ed.), *The Life of the Law* (1993), pp.9-23; T.S. Haskett, 'The Medieval English Court of Chancery', *Law and History Review*, 14 (1996), pp.245-313.

[101] *Select STAC*; *Yorkshire STAC*; *Abstracts of Star Chamber Proceedings Relating to the County of Sussex*, ed. P. D. Mundy (Sussex Record Society 16, 1913). For the Star Chamber I rely on: J. Guy, *Cardinal's Court: The Impact of Thomas Wolsey in Star Chamber* (1977); Idem, *The Court of Star Chamber and its Records to the Reign of Elizabeth* (1985).

[102] Further to the following note: *Records of Nottingham*; *Records of the Borough of Leicester*, ed. M. Bateson (Vols. 2-3, 1865-1905); *The Great Red Book of Bristol*, ed. E.W.W. Veale (Bristol Record Society, 5 Vols., 1931-53).

[103] *CLB*; *YHB*; and: *Kent Heresy Proceedings*, *1511-12*, ed. N. Tanner (Maidstone, 1997); *Lollards of Coventry*, *1486-1522*, ed. S. McSheffrey and N. Tanner (CS 5th Ser. 23, Cambridge, 2003); *Norwich Consistory Court Depositions*, *1499-1512 and 1518-1530*, ed. E.D. Stone and B. Cozens-Hardy (Norfolk Record Society 10, 1938); *A series of precedents and Proceedings in Criminal Causes*, *Extending from the Year 1475 to 1640; Extracted from Act-Books of Ecclesiastical Courts in the Diocese of London*, ed. W.H. Hale (1847); *Select Cases on Defamation to 1600*, ed. R.H. Helmholz (Selden Society 101, 1985).

resulted in a mixed record of 'fact and fiction'.[104] Indeed, they are problematic, and we now know that one in five cases in the King's Bench did not reach a conclusion; that a significant number of cases with known verdicts ended with acquittals; and that these records are simultaneously massive and fragmented.[105] However, one cannot merely diminish the importance of the quotations of supposedly direct speech in the judicial proceedings of this period and attribute them to the 'boredom of scribal work'.[106] More importantly, these quotations shifted from formal Latin to vernacular English whenever seditious words were recorded in the proceedings, which offers some compelling evidence of official attitudes towards such utterances.[107] The King's Bench material is, in fact, the only traceable contemporary source that survived reasonably equally throughout the period. The Star Chamber records are only fruitful towards the end and throw more light on local dynamics. The Chancery bills shed light on popular language only occasionally, but their significance, like the records of the Star Chamber, is that they were entirely in English in the first place.

To this present study, even considering these problems and inconsistencies, records of law-enforcement are particularly revealing of the authorities' anxieties when dealing with popular politics. For one thing, any representation of reality that involves many socio-historical figures – especially in law courts – is based on conflicting narratives that invariably consist of blending 'fact and fiction'.[108] For another, these conflicting narratives that result

[104] I refer to Wicker, 'Politics of Vernacular Speech', pp.172. Similarly in: R.F. Hunnisett, 'The reliability of inquisitions as historical evidence', in D.A. Bullough and R.L. Storey (eds.), *The Study of Medieval Records* (Oxford, 1971), pp.226-7; M. Holford, ''Testimony (to some extent fictitious)': proofs of age in the first half of the fifteenth century', *HR*, 8/218 (2008), pp.635-54; and Ross, 'Rumour, Propaganda and Popular Opinion', p.16.
[105] J.B. Avrutick, 'Commissions of Oyer and Terminer in Fifteenth-Century England' (M.Litt. thesis, University of London, 1967), p.95; P. Tucker, 'Historians' expectations of the medieval legal records' in Musson, *Expectations of the Law*, p.91; J.B. Post, 'The Evidential Value of Approvers' Appeals: The Case of William Rose, 1389', *Law and History Review*, 3/1 (1985), 91-100; Idem, 'Crime in Later Medieval England: some Historiographical Limitations', *Continuity and Change*, 2/2 (1987), pp.214-5.
[106] S. Justice, 'Inquisition, Speech, and Writing: A Case from Late-Medieval Norwich', *Representations*, 48 (1994), p.26.
[107] The importance of the language shift is recognised by both late medievalists as Wicker, 'Politics of Vernacular Speech, pp.173-4; and early-modernists as A. Wood, *The Memory of the People* (Cambridge, 2013), pp.58-9, 61.
[108] I refer, again, to the criticisms of n.104 above.

from the desire of the authorities to marginalise popular voices demonstrate, in fact, the inherent power of these voices to affect the reality of their language system.[109] Just as the fiction of representing a homogeneous public opinion partly reveals popular politics, so does the prosecution of more specific speech acts. To use these records properly, one needs to place them in a broad social and linguistic context of other available sources in order to distil a more realistic interpretation.[110] Handled properly, the blend of 'fact and fiction' is not a drawback, but a necessary and inseparable aspect of this approach of public opinion.

The last type of source used in this study emerged from a socio-political process that sheds light on the contemporary treatment of public opinion and popular speech, that is, the official and semi-official means of political communication. We shall see that royal proclamations were widely used and invariably interacted with popular perspectives by appropriating and exchanging ideas, apart from continually offering instructions. The Tudor proclamations are more widely known than the Yorkist ones due to the well-known edition of Paul Hughes and James Larkin.[111] Still, I have attempted to trace the proclamations of Edward IV and Richard III to the best of my ability, and although the Close Rolls reveal many of Edward's proclamations, the most critical proclamations of Richard III are scattered in letters sent to specific towns or mentioned in the chronicles.[112] Finally, other aspects of political communication that shed light on public opinion come from the numerous political

[109] A wider context of this debate in historiography is given by: J.H. Arnold, 'The Historian as Inquisitor: the Ethics of Interrogating Subaltern Voices', *Rethinking History*, II/3 (1998), p.384. For ecclesiastical proceedings, also considering these 'voices': R.N. Swanson, '"…Et Examinatus Dicit…": Oral and Personal History in the Records of English Ecclesiastical Courts', in M. Goodich (ed.), *Voices from the Bench: The Narratives of Lesser Folk in Medieval Trials* (New York and Basinstoke, 2006) pp.203-20. Also: T.S. Fenster and D.L. Smail (eds.), *Fama: the Politics of Talk and Reputation in Medieval Europe* (2003), pp.1-9; and J. Théry, '*Fama:* l'opinion publique comme preuve judiciaire / Aperçu sur la revolution médiévale de l'inquisitoire (XII-XIV siècle)', in B. Lemesle (ed.), *La Preuve en Justice: de l'Antiquité à nos jours* (Rennes, 2003), pp.119-47.

[110] This is now widely shared by the references above, though it was more emphatically suggested by: J.H. Baker (ed.), *Legal Records and the Historian* (1978), pp.1-6.

[111] Referred here as *TRP.* But it is worth mentioning the work of: R.W. Heinze, *Proclamations of the Tudor Kings* (Cambridge, 1976).

[112] This part of my work originally began with tracing the steps of: A. Allan, 'Royal Propaganda and the proclamations of Edward IV', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 59 (1986), 146-154; Eadem, 'Political Propaganda', pp.10-30, 78-105.

pamphlets and treatises also surveyed here – first the manuscripts produced by Sir John Fortescue, for example, and later the printed ones of the early Reformation.[113] In short, all these sources will, taken together, provide the bedrock for each chapter that follows and it is only by studying their interactions that we will be better able to analyse public opinion and seditious language in the era of the Wars of the Roses and the early Tudors.

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The three parts that structure this thesis reflect the multifaceted and dialectic approach to public opinion that this study proposes. Part I sets out to discuss two fundamental concepts and their specific vocabulary and meanings that will both contribute to the current understandings of public opinion and inform the following chapters. Chapter I introduces the analysis of a wide range of sources across the period that variably refer to 'the people' and 'the commons' as a way of constructing public opinion and creating the consensus effect. In trying to establish contemporary understandings of the concept of 'the people', this first chapter will argue that the ruling elites had a more complex, even paradoxical, relationship with 'the people' as they constituted what we might call 'the public'. On the one hand, the governments of the period feared the commotions of ordinary people more profoundly and continuously than historians have considered. On the other, more material paying attention to popular actions, or addressing them directly, survives as the period advances. Although popular opinion was often treated as rustic and unwise, it will be argued that it was persistently instrumentalised to create a hegemonic and favourable 'public' which included the less privileged. Chapter II focuses on one aspect that could break the 'consensus effect' and was more often attributed to the common people: rumour-mongering. A study of the

[113] Fortescue, Sir J., 'Declaracion upon Certayn Wrytinges', in *Sir John Fortescue*, *Knight. His Life*, *Works and Family*, ed. Lord Clermont (2 Vols., 1869), I, pp.523-41; Idem, *The Governance of England*, ed. C.E. Plummer (Oxford, 1885). For Morison: *Morison's Tracts*.

vocabulary of rumour – and its meanings, contents, and frequency – will offer a better comprehension of how extensive the 'problem' of rumour-mongering was and how it affected both the conception of public opinion and the concept of sedition. By stressing the psychological and sociological aspects described above, I will suggest why rumours skyrocketed in certain periods more than in others and what the consequences of this sociological phenomenon were to the dynamics of public opinion.

Having established the structures of a dialogic public opinion in the first part, the second part of the thesis comprises two chapters devoted to the treatment, contents, and variance of seditious language. Chapter III first focuses on how popular language was treated by royal and church authorities in the later medieval period in order to contextualise what at first sight seem as extreme changes proposed by the new acts of the 1530s. It will, then, trace the contents and suggest the purposes of seditious and treasonous speech among the commoners that were either formally indicted or reported in other unofficial sources. Chapter IV will extend the argument of Chapter III about popular intentions in using seditious language first by examining the kinds of continuities in popular speech between the Yorkist period and the 1530s. Subsequently, it will investigate the possible ways in which popular language shifted across the period through a brief enquiry into numbers and vocabulary, suggesting that any observable changes may be seen as a result of continuing attitudes towards political crises and oppression.

Finally, the last part of this thesis is a result of the accumulated argument of the previous chapters on the increasing public pressure, on the nature of complaints, and on the popular awareness and engagement that resulted in government reactions. Rather than resorting to a concept of 'propaganda', we can re-use the evidence of political communication to suggest that there was a constant political dialogue and exchange between the crown and the people. Such dialogue clearly resulted from the government's awareness

of the necessity to influence people's opinion – noted throughout the thesis – though I will argue that this attitude was invariably driven by pressure rather than ideological motivations. By putting the traditional evidence of 'propaganda' under the light of a dialogic and dialectic interaction we can see a more realistic picture of the workings of public opinion in late medieval England and close the sequence of arguments that began with the constructed concepts in Chapter I. After all, the whole purpose of political communication was to fabricate and maintain a favourable and unified 'public' to authorise government decisions.

PART I

CONCEPTS

CHAPTER I

Animi Popularium: the Concept of 'the People' and Public Opinion

The significance of 'the people' and of 'public opinion' is ambiguously characterised, though thoroughly considered in contemporary sources. When Dominic Mancini took up his pen to write about the usurpation of Richard III, for example, he reported that both Richard and the Duke of Buckingham, Henry Stafford, were seeking 'to arouse hatred against the queen's kin, and to estrange public opinion from her relatives'.[1] Despite Armstrong's translation of '*animi popularium*' as 'public opinion', we might question the precise meaning of this expression in this context. Who were the *populares* implied in this statement? Was Mancini suggesting that the support of the common people was necessary for high political manoeuvres like usurpations? Another contemporary expression that shares the same semantic problem is the 'common voice' that was often claimed to legitimise the government's actions: ruling elites had to be aware – it was urged in parliament – of 'the commyn voice grounded in a resonable presydent'.[2] Taking account of similar contemporary claims, it has been argued that the final appeal to legitimise usurpations was indeed to the authority of the kingdom: to the *vox populi* and *communitas regni* in 1327, to the 'estates and the people' in 1399, and to the public opinion fused with parliamentary consent in both 1461 and 1483.[3] More recently, historians have increasingly thought that public support was indeed important to high politics of this period, that commoners shared some aspects of the political culture of the ruling elites, that they 'could scarcely have avoided forming opinions'

[1] Mancini, *Usurpation*, pp.100-1.
[2] Draft sermon to a possible Edward V's parliament, reproduced in S.B. Chrimes, *English Constitutional Ideas in the Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1936), pp.171-5. For a detailed analysis of these sermons, see: J. Watts, '*The Policie in Christen Remes:* Bishop Russell's Parliamentary Sermons of 1483-4', in S. Gunn and G. Bernard (eds.), *Authority and Consent in Tudor England* (Abingdon, 2002), pp.35-6. A recent discussion of authorship of one of these sermons is found in: D.E. Seward, 'Bishop John Alcock and the Roman Invasion of Parliament', in L. Clark (ed.), *The Fifteenth Century XV* (Woodbridge, 2017), pp.145-67.
[3] W.H. Dunham and C.T. Wood, 'The Right to Rule in England: Depositions and the Kingdom's Authority, 1327-1485', *The American Historical Review*, 81/4 (1976), p.761.

about national and local politics, and that 'public support' could ultimately determine who should rule during political crises.[4]

However, it is not entirely clear to historians whether 'public support' and 'popular support' means the same thing – just as it is not clear whether '*animi popularium*' could be equivalent to 'common voice'. This problem has two sides that this chapter will address. First of all, we shall need to look closely at uses and definitions of the key terms, 'people', 'commons', and 'public' to find answers to this issue. This chapter will map these discursive strategies to examine whether 'popular' opinion was indeed partly accepted within the concept of 'the people' and as 'public opinion'. Secondly, we also need to consider what it might mean for our understanding that the 'commons' were sometimes included in the 'public opinion' and regarded as legitimate, and at other times excluded and treated as 'rustic' or 'fools'.[5] These two treatments also lead us to consider whether or not the people were always a factor in politics, or whether that was a peculiar feature of the period before 1485, as Michael Hicks, David Cressy and Christopher Duggan have argued for different reasons.[6] Evidently, the uses of public and popular ideas in contemporary sources were unstable and inconsistent, and although commoners were typically prevented from expressing their thoughts, they still made their way through contemporary narratives. Whether second-hand claims about people's feelings are unrealistic we cannot always assess, but as claimed in the Introduction, even in modern societies public opinion is still, to a certain degree, a fabrication of insufficient polls and biased journalism.[7] Hence, we must deal with the sorts of fabrications of late medieval 'public opinion' as they reached us, for they have

[4] Quoting: Watts, 'Popular Politics', p.109. A similar claim has been made by Cressy, *Dangerous Talk*, p.14. For the rest of these statements, see: Harvey, 'Was there Popular Politics?', p.156; Watts, 'Polemic and Politics', pp.7-17; Idem, 'Pressure of the Public', pp.159-62; Idem, *Henry VI*, p.262; Dumolyn et al, *The Voices of the People*, p.4.
[5] Quoting, for instance: *HC*, pp.422-3, 427, 477; *LP*, XI, 987; *George Ashby's Poems*, ed. M. Bateson (EETS, Ex. Ser. 76, 1899), p.49.
[6] M. Hicks, *The Wars of the Roses: 1455-1485* (2010), pp.262-4; Cressy, *Dangerous Talk*, pp.10-2; Duggan, 'Thought Control', pp.263-73.
[7] See above, pp.16-18.

consequences both to the contemporary political culture and to our understanding of the public arena in this period. By looking at these sources from this perspective, we shall be better able to assess the role of the people in the construction of public opinion and why it fluctuated.

The duality between who the people were and what they thought, and what contemporary sources made of them will provide an essential interplay to the following sections of this chapter as well as to the whole thesis. Section 1 will introduce the analysis of the concept of 'the people' and its different shades to pursue what fabrications this term covers and to approach the contemporary ways of understanding and reporting public opinion. Ultimately, Section 1 examines the question of whether 'popular' opinion was simultaneously accepted as 'public'. Subsequently, Section 2 deals with what was made of this, that is, how contemporaries re-used 'the people' in their narrative, as well as why they insisted in depicting the commons as ignorant fools or dangerous.

1. The Concept of 'the People'

The discursive idea that underlines 'the people' and 'the commons' invariably creates what has been described in the Introduction as a 'consensus effect'.[8] Some commentators were specific in saying that they meant 'nobles, clergy, and commons' while referring to 'the people of England', but that was not often the case.[9] In parliament, the king could simply assume that 'the commons of this realm' only meant the representatives of the gentlemen and oligarchs.[10] Edmund Dudley, one of Henry VII's closest ministers, envisaged that the 'root of concord' was grounded and fastened around the king, the clergy, the chivalry and commonalty – being part of the sustentation of the 'noble tree of commenwealth'.[11]

[8] See above, p.18.
[9] *CSPM*, 379.
[10] *PROME*, 1467, It.7 (23 Feb. 2019).
[11] E. Dudley, *The Tree of Commonwealth*, ed. D.M. Brodie (Cambridge, 1948), p.48.

However, could the lower orders ever constitute 'the people', or was the participation of the ruling elites necessary for this discursive construction? What lay behind the illusion of consensus conveyed by uses of the terms 'people', 'commons', and 'men' is a multifaceted concept that might point to either the 'lower classes' or the collectivity, and that tends to exclude women. We can begin by exploring these complications before we attempt to solve the discourses around them in the following sections.

First of all, one can easily assume, as some historians have done, that the straightforward and conservative definition of the 'commons' is that they were those who constituted the third order of medieval society – the non-nobles, and the non-clerics – who worked with their hands.[12] From a broader perspective, the commonalty to Edmund Dudley was made of a varied group of people who 'maye not murmur nor grudge to live in labour and paine, and the most parte of theire time with the sweat of their face'; but that group included the merchants, craftsmen, artificers, labourers, franklins, graziers, farmers, tillers, 'and other generallie the people of this realme'.[13] Arguably, though these groups were relatively under-privileged, they were not the wretched vagrants and sowers of rumours that government frequently took them to be.[14] In fact, it has been convincingly argued that the commons became politically influential in the fifteenth century because they became slightly 'less poor' and better placed.[15] Although historians have not always agreed about how poor

[12] For their social realities, see: C. Dyer, *Standards of Living in Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989), pp.16-24. For the commons during rebellions with that connotation: Bush, 'The Risings of the Commons', p.109; Rollison, *Commonwealth of the People*, pp.244-7.
[13] Dudley, *Tree of Commonwealth*, pp.45-6.
[14] Dyer, *Standards of Living*, p.25 suggested we cannot even accommodate these 'vagabonds' – and neither criminals nor prostitutes – into 'any system of social analysis based on status or class'. Similarly in: M.K. McIntosh, *Poor Relief in England*, *1350-1600*, (Cambridge, 2012), p.5. And see also: C. Gauvard, 'Le Petit Peuple Au Moyen Âge', in P. Boglioni *et al* (eds.), *Le Petit Peuple dans l'Occident médiéval* (Paris, 2002), pp.707-22. See contemporaries' willingness to conceive a simple division between 'poor' and 'rich' in: A. Wood, '"Poore Men Woll Speke One Daye": Plebeian Languages of Deference and Defiance in England, c.1520–1640', in Harris, *Politics of the Excluded*, pp.73-4. And see below, pp.71-2.
[15] Harvey, 'Was there Popular Politics?', p.159. Despite lack of mobility and economic fluctuations, wages remained relatively high in the fifteenth century, even though it is also clear that the commons lived only with the basics: R. Horrox and W.M. Ormrod (eds.), *A Social History of England: 1200-1500* (Cambridge, 2006), pp.113-33, 257, 282-6; Dyer, *Standards of Living*, p.276, *passim*.

these commons were, poverty was – at least rhetorically – often highlighted by contemporaries.[16] The rebels of October 1536 thought important to establish that Poverty was alongside their captains Charity, Faith and Pity.[17] Even so, poverty and 'lower class' cannot restrict the meaning of the 'commons'.

Second, despite the social reality of late medieval commoners, they were increasingly well-informed and ready to make claims on behalf of the collectivity: that is, to defend their rights and the 'common weal' in all rebellions of this period; as well as their religion in 1536-7 and in 1549. When such rebellions or local riots broke out, 'the commons' assumed an even more politically charged meaning: the expression signified all the able-bodied adult males who gathered as an undifferentiated corporation of men – be them peasants or urban artisans and labourers – to represent the whole commonalty, not only the poor.[18] This is quite significant given that there seemed to be in course attempts to exclude the lower commons from the 'commonwealth' or of the 'political society'.[19] That is precisely why the use of the crucial word 'commonwealth' by the pilgrims of 1536, as well as others, bore an active attempt at being included in the political body and representing it.[20] Moreover, John Watts has noted that the expression 'the commons' was indiscriminately used for the variety of social gradations among the non-nobles, and more broadly, it could mean both political collectivity and social ordinariness.[21] In this way, the commons were clearly below the gentlemen. Whether the uses of the term to denote the lower classes was more prevalent

[16] See: Rollison, *Commonwealth of the People*, pp.242-7, 280. And contemporary examples in: *HC*, pp.381, 585, 702; *Original Letters*, 3rd/1, CXXVII; *LP*, IV/1, 1318. See the discussion of the discourse of oppression in Chapter IV, pp.210-17.
[17] *LP*, XII/1, 687.
[18] R. Hoyle, *The Pilgrimage of Grace and the politics of the 1530s* (Oxford, 2001), p.425.
[19] J. Watts, 'Public or Plebs? The Changing Meaning of "the Commons", 1381-1549', in H. Pryce and J.L. Watts (eds.), *Power and Identity in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2007), pp.254-9; A. Pollard, 'The People and Parliament in Fifteenth-Century England', in L. Clark and H. Kleineke (eds.), *The Fifteenth Century X* (Woodbridge, 2011), p.3.
[20] Assertiveness about their political role is discussed in: Harvey, 'Was there Popular Politics?', pp.156-9; Watts, 'Public or Plebs', p.250; Rollison, *Commonwealth of the People*, pp.239-50. See also the different points below, pp.182-5, 201-10.
[21] J. Watts, 'The Commons in Medieval England', in J.-P. Genet (ed.), *La Légitimité Implicite II* (Paris-Rome, 2015), pp.211-16.

than the uses to reify political collectivity do not matter significantly here – as we shall see below. What matters the most is what the discourse about 'the commons' reveals about popular politics both to us and to contemporaries – that is, constructions of publicness and, ultimately, public opinion based on the 'non-nobles'.

A third complication is that the terms 'people' and especially 'commons' were sometimes applied to the kinds of people who were elected to parliament – that is, a fundamentally different kind of collectivity. These were the lesser landowners, sheriffs and undersheriffs, constables, Justices of the Peace, lawyers, escheators, tax collectors, and many other local officers who carried the broad social status of 'gentleman'.[22] The contemporary approaches to public opinion sometimes saw parliamentary proceedings as a possible concretisation of the will of the people or the 'community of the realm' – which, in turn, has attracted some historians.[23] After all, since the fourteenth century merchants and gentlemen, as representatives of boroughs in parliament, were also the 'commons' who increasingly became critics of the failings of central government.[24] Still, the gentry monopolised shire offices, and that is reason enough to distinguish them radically from the less privileged commons.[25] It was also the position of the gentry within local politics that made them either a source of local prestige or more easily a target of local opposition.[26] In that sense, the support of either commons or gentlemen to each other could cut both ways. Just as a gentry leader was a common way of strengthening rebellions, commoners' support to the gentry and noble plots could either attribute legitimacy to their claims or undermine them. During the Wars of the Roses, this proved relatively successful when, for instance, an associate of the

[22] See: Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, ch.3; G. Harriss, *Shaping the Nation* (Oxford, 2005), ch.5; R. Radulescu and A. Truelove (eds.), *Gentry Culture in Late Medieval England* (Manchester, 2005), ch.1.
[23] For instance: Tout, 'The English Parliament and Public Opinion', pp.173-90; Pollard, 'The People and Parliament', pp.5-6; Britnell, *Closing of the Middle Ages?*, ch.6; P. Cavill, *The English Parliaments of Henry VII, 1485-1504* (Oxford, 2008), pp.144-5.
[24] Rollison, *Commonwealth of the People*, pp.242-3; Harriss, 'Dimensions of Politics', pp.10-13.
[25] For the shire offices: G. Harriss, 'Political Society and the Growth of Government in late medieval England', *P&P*, 138 (1993), pp.33-4.
[26] See the complaints below (generally targeting the local gentry), pp.185-6.

Earl of Warwick, Sir Robert Welles, led the commons of Lincolnshire against Edward IV in 1470.[27] But later in 1497, when Perkin Warbeck resumed his attempt of invading the kingdom, both the king and the Milanese ambassador stressed the fact that 'not one gentleman' was supporting the pretender – both trying to undermine the conspiracy and transmit the idea that only 'ignorant commons' were still following Warbeck.[28] In 1536 the support of local gentry and clerics was crucial to the longstanding rebellion, although the commons of Westmorland would accept 'no gentyllman of our counsel because we be affraied of thaim'.[29] Thus, even though mutual cooperation might have occasionally been significant, class struggle is noticeable in the interactions between the commoners and the gentry; and this was a way of negotiating everyday politics in the localities.[30] By all means, even if we exclude them from the spectrum of 'the commons' – and we definitely have reasons to do that – they were clearly in direct relationship with popular politics: they were frequently their interlocutors and, therefore, the ones who firstly reported and more directly responded to popular feelings and attitudes. Just as we should not oppose elite and popular culture, we must keep the definition of popular politics as open as possible: that means considering the gentlemen as often intertwined with the actions and ideas of the common people.[31] Consequently, the gentlemen might fall within the scope of 'the people' and 'public opinion' and be in direct connection with popular politics, but they can hardly be conciliated with the realities of the less-privileged 'commonalty'.[32]

Lastly, while analysing 'the people' and 'public opinion' we also have to consider whether the women had any role in these discourses.[33] This is, obviously, a whole debate by

[27] *Lincolnshire Chr.*, pp.7, 22-3. See: H. Kleineke, *Edward IV* (New York, 2009), pp.102-3.
[28] *RHVIICS*, I, 117; *CSPM*, 545.
[29] *LP*, XI, 1080.
[30] See below, pp.185-6 (local complaints), 192-3 (riot in Coventry), 212-3 (enclosure).
[31] See above, n.74, p.21. Here I paraphrase: Shagan, *Popular Politics*, pp.18-19.
[32] See for instance, the suggestions about the sixteenth century in: M.L. Bush and D. Bownes, *The Defeat of the Pilgrimage of Grace* (Hull, 1999), pp.336-8.
[33] I am thankful to Alice Raw for sharing her recent insights into this problem with me: A. Raw, 'Gender and Protest in Late Medieval England, 1400-1532' (in preparation for publication).

itself, though a few words should serve as a helpful reminder for this whole analysis. Contemporary sources mostly ignore ordinary women and the evidence that only men were politically active might look overwhelming at first sight.[34] However, it is inconceivable to conclude that women did not express their opinions. First of all, women were actively engaged in the formation of 'local public opinion' concerning sexual behaviour and local wrongdoers, often bringing them to the attention of authorities.[35] Secondly, even though women were rarely arrested for being involved in riots – and some records of their participation were usually a way of belittling the importance of specific movements – we can certainly expect them to have taken part in mobs and crowds.[36] Thirdly, if women were not arrested for rioting, some were for their seditious words and prophecies, and due to critical circumstances of the 1530s, were considered a danger to the stability of the realm and subsequently executed.[37]

Moreover, there is evidence of at least thirty-eight episodes in which women were recorded for abusive language throughout this period either for being involved with other men or for speaking seditiously themselves.[38] From about 1528, they are increasingly recorded for defending other unfortunate women – Catherine of Aragon and Princess Mary – and verbally attacking Anne Boleyn to the point of plotting to kill her in London.[39] In light

[34] For a few examples that only use the word 'men' instead of 'people': *YHB*, II, p.618; *Anglica Historia*, pp.76-9, 110-1, 181-2; *HC*, pp.261-2, 264-5, 271-2, 291, 297, 350-1, 502-3, 585, 784, 795-6; *Three Books of Vergil*, p.117; *Original Letters*, 1st/1, LXXIX; 3rd/1, CXXVII; *A Glasse of Truthe* (1532), *EEBO* (20 Feb. 2019), E3; T. Swinnerton, *A Litel Treatise ageynste the Mutterynge of Some Papistis in Corners* (1534), *EEBO* (15 Jan. 2019), A7v, B2v; *Gregory's Chronicle*, p.227; *CSPM*, 177; *CSPV*, I, 421; *Paston Letters*, V, 782, 834; *Crowland Chronicle*, pp.152-3.
[35] McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehaviour*, p.24.
[36] See T. Harris's introduction to: *Politics of the Excluded*, pp.19-20. For an example of women attacking commissioners for the dissolution of monasteries: *Common Place Book of John Hooker*, p.14.
[37] I refer here to the cases of Margaret Cheyne, Elizabeth Barton, and Elizabeth Wood, all brilliantly analysed by Jansen, *Dangerous Talk*, chs.1-6. For other crimes such as defamation, witchcraft and scolding: Bodden, *Language as the Site of Revolt*, pp.8-35; and Bardsley, *Venomous Tongue*, pp.71-85.
[38] See a few examples on pp.227-8 and the statistics shown by Figure 8Figure 9 below, pp.225-6. For a few examples of defamation and heresy: *Vitellius A XVI*, p.200; *FC*, p.685; *CLB*, II, p.552; *Ecclesiastical Courts in London*, lxxix; *YHB*, II, p.708. There are comments about women's expressions in both 1517 and 1525 in: *CSPV*, II, 910; *HC*, pp.699-700.
[39] *HC*, pp.754, 774-80; *LP*, IV/3, 5702; VI, 1193; *CSPSp*, III/2, 550; IV/1, 270; IV/2, 980; *CSPV*, IV, 701, 768.

of all this, then, and despite the scanty evidence, we must acknowledge that words such as 'commons', 'people', or 'commonalty', can certainly involve women even if our sources might disguise their numbers and role.

Therefore, we have arrived at different layers of 'the people' which can inform and be contrasted with the ambiguous relationship between the reality and the rhetoric of public opinion in the next sections. This concept might comprise the commons of the lower orders of society as well as the commons trying to represent collectivity and associate themselves with the gentry for a greater purpose – in times of rebellions, for example. Moreover, given the evidence of actively engaged women, we cannot simply exclude them from the concept of 'the people' – neither because they were under-represented nor because contemporary discourses mostly ignored their opinions and actions. Nonetheless, questions remain for the next two subsections about how the sources use these different ideas to create the consensus effect of public opinion. What was the significance of the more rhetorical ways in which the 'voix of the people' was indeed taken as the 'voix of Jhesu'?[40] To what extent do these contemporary discursive strategies allow us to include the pressure of the 'plebs' as an inherent feature of 'political society' and 'public opinion'?[41] What kinds of low-class language implied collectiveness, if any did? Taking account of these questions, Section 1.1 will focus on whether popular opinion and public opinion can be the same thing in contemporary discourses. Section 1.2, then, seeks to untangle the problem of 'the commons' and the relationship between 'people' and 'commons'.

[40] Quoting the poem 'A Political Retrospect' (1462): *Historical Poems*, 93.
[41] For an analysis that acknowledges the importance of popular politics but sees the commons as mostly excluded from the 'political society': Harriss, 'The Dimensions of Politics', p.14; Idem, 'Political Society', pp.33-4. For an exclusion of the commons from 'political disturbances': M. Mollat and P. Wolff, *The Popular Revolutions of the Late Middle Ages* (1973), p.9.

1.1. Popular Opinion and Public Opinion

The way anyone invokes public opinion is usually by claiming it is a widespread phenomenon – hence its inevitable sense of artificiality. Fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century observations about the people's opinions and behaviour seem to have had motivations in claiming that their comments were the 'common voice'. Scholars have already posited that uses of 'the commons' confer a sense of 'public transcript' to narratives; in other words, they may constitute what we would consider as public opinion in modern languages.[42] In the political (and Christian) thought shared by most parts of western Europe in the late middle ages, the opinion of the whole community was widely considered to be always a better judge of what was in its own interest.[43] It is in that sense that while reporting the opinions of 'everyone' or of 'all men', commentators of this period might have sought to acquire greater authority and legitimacy even if they were endorsing their individual perspective.[44] The value of such narratives, ideas, and chronicles would stem from the 'common voice of the people' and their collective character. Interestingly, the word 'commonalty' was used as a direct synonym to 'public' since the fourteenth century – both the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Middle English Dictionary* give examples in which 'in commonalty' stood for 'in public'; while 'out of commonalty' stood for 'in private'.[45] More importantly, the common proverb *vox populi, vox Dei* also still played a role in contemporary political culture. As Jan Dumolyn and Jelle Haemers have suggested, it did not mean that this *vox populi* was necessarily wise or right, but that the ruling classes could not ignore it.[46] The question is whether this discursive collective opinion intended to include the actual 'popular' voices.

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[42] Watts, 'Popular Politics', pp.115-6; Idem, 'Pressure of the Public', pp.159-62; J.-P. Genet, 'Espace Public: du religieux au politique?', in Herrer *et al*, *La Comunidad Medieval*, p.41.
[43] M.S. Kempshall, *The Common Good in Late Medieval Political Thought* (Oxford, 1999), pp.357-8.
[44] Quoting: *CSPM*, 282; *HC*, p.297.
[45] 'Commonalty', 6, *OED*; and 'Communalte', 4, *MED* (1 July 2019).
[46] Dumolyn & Haemers, 'Subversive Speech', pp.54-5. Geoffrey Elton argued similarly about the rumours and tales of the 1530s in *Policy and Police*, p.46.

First of all, it must be noted that the common voices, almost invariably, converged on the language of the common good or commonweal. Just as the government justified its actions with this trope, the commons claimed, as in 1469, that they only rebelled to defend 'the commone wele of this lande'.[47] This points to a broader language pattern in which commentators would also invariably fall, that is, to consider the matters that concerned the 'common weal' as a demonstration that they cared about the wellbeing of the whole polity. In parallel, this language also substantiated the king's authority as the head of 'a form of polity that enabled the pursuit of the common good and interest of the people', that is, a commonwealth.[48] Sir John Fortescue (or Prince Edward), for example, pointed out sometime in 1470-1 – as well as in *The Governance of England*[49] – how the king's council must constantly and wisely advise the king in order to maintain the 'good politike wele of the londe' and consequently avoid the people's poverty and complaints.[50] It follows from this that to maintain the commonweal also meant to achieve and sustain a favourable 'public opinion' by avoiding complaints. Consequently, if 'common weal' was embedded in 'public opinion', when chroniclers and other writers chose to include the people's voices in their narratives, we can assume that they were also trying to attach more legitimacy to their reports. After all, just as seditious bills originated 'from nowhere and everywhere' to speak on behalf of the people and the 'common weal', the commentators who reported widespread feelings and opinions indirectly cared for them.[51]

For that reason, the commentators of this period seem to read politics as involving a popular element. They claimed, sometimes explicitly, that their narratives were the opinion

[47] For the government: *CCR*, I, p.216. For 1469: *JVB*, p.214.
[48] M. Knights *et al*, 'Commonwealth: The social, cultural, and conceptual contexts of an early modern keyword', *Historical Journal*, 54/3 (2011), p.666. See also: C. Fletcher, 'De la Communauté du Royaume au Common Weal', *Revue Française des Idées Politiques*, 32 (2010/2), pp.359-372; and Genet, 'Espace Public', p.41.
[49] Fortescue, *Governance of England*, pp.149-50.
[50] *JVB*, pp.222-3.
[51] Quoting: Scase, 'Bill-Casting and Political Discourse', pp.245-6. We shall see further developments of the concept of 'common weal' below: pp.182-5, 201-10, 266-7.

of ‘many’, of ‘the people of this realme… aswel nobles as other’, and that ‘most people thought’ the same ways they described.[52] The discontent caused by Edward IV’s marriage, for instance, was described as spread not only ‘throuwth alle England, but alsoo it famyd into Flaundyrs & Fraunce’.[53] The crisis of 1469-71 is significantly chronicled with the insights of the people, their movements around London, their variable support to different parts of the conflict, and their rebellions.[54] If we include the comments on the benevolences collected in the early 1470s, we find the same pattern: Polydore Vergil thought that ‘many gave that benevolence with evell will’; Hall wrote that the king could not obtain benevolences without ‘grudge and malevolence’ of ‘many’; and the more contemporary Crowland chronicler pointed out that although people should pay what they wanted, they had to pay unwillingly.[55] Fortescue also resorted to the ‘knowlache of the people’ in the dialogue of the *Declaracion* about his writings against the Yorkists.[56] Similarly, the crisis of Richard III’s usurpation and reign was based not only on what happened in parliament and the king’s council but also on what people made of it: the princes in the Tower caused people in the south to ‘murmur greatly’, and later the rumour caused ‘inward sorrow into the hartes of all the people’.[57]

The pattern is the same for the early Tudor period. According to the *Crowland Chronicle*, Henry VII was praised ‘by everyone’ for his clemency after Bosworth as the battle was seen, according to a poem reproduced by the chronicler, as justice done by ‘the people’ against Richard III.[58] The *Great Chronicle* notes that Henry was greeted with the greatest

[52] Quoting: *Anglica Historia*, pp.74-5; *Crowland Chronicle*, p.147; *HC*, pp.810, 812. Similar ideas in: De Commynes, P., *Memoirs*, ed. and tr. by M.C. Jones (Harmondsworth, 1972), p.194; *Further Supplement to CSPSp*, ed. G. Mattingly (1947), pp.369-70.
[53] *GC*, pp.202-3, 206-07. Similarly in: Wavrin, *Anchiennes Chronicques*, II, pp.405-8.
[54] *Warkworth’s Chronicle*, pp.7-9, 11-12, 14-5; *Arrivall of Ed.IV*, p.21; Wavrin, *Anchiennes Chronicques*, III, pp.5-7, 141; *Vitellius A XVI*, pp.181-2; *GC*, pp.212-3.
[55] *Three Books of Vergil*, p.161; *HC*, p.308; ‘*ut per benevolentiam quilibet daret id quod vellet imo verius quod nollet*’: *Crowland Chronicle*, pp.134.
[56] Fortescue, ‘Declaracion upon Certayn Wrytinges’, p.523.
[57] Quoting: *Crowland Chronicle*, pp.162-3; *HC*, pp.379, 381-95. Similarly in: *Anglica Historia*, p.177; Mancini, *Usurpation*, pp.80-1, 88-9, 92-5; *GC*, pp.236-7.
[58] *Crowland Chronicle*, pp.182-5.

joy 'by all'; that he soon won the good-will 'of all men' and was made king by the instigation of both 'nobles and people'; and that he received the crown by 'popular consent'.[59] His marriage in January 1486 was recorded as being 'at the humble request of all three estates of the realm'.[60] Chroniclers considered that 'people everywhere' lamented and cursed Henry VII's ministers Richard Empson and Edmund Dudley, in 1509, for being 'wretched extortioners', and when they were arrested and later executed the event was described as appeasing 'the indignation of the people'.[61] The treatment of Cardinal Wolsey in Vergil's narrative follows the same pattern of depicting the people's hatred from 1514, and he argues that the cardinal's hostility towards 'nobles and common folk' raised 'the hatred of the whole people (*totius populi*)' against himself.[62] These chroniclers include the commoners' insights in numerous other public issues such as the memory and fame of monarchs;[63] war and peace treaties;[64] treason and punishment;[65] economy and taxation;[66] Henry VIII's annulment of his marriage;[67] and the new religion.[68] These varied expressions reasonably show that public opinion was purposely represented as covering a wide social range as possible and that, through their occasional class distinctions, it is already apparent that these expressions do not merely refer to an indistinct collectivity.

Naturally, when chroniclers account episodes of rebellions they do not mean to legitimise the rebels' grievances as necessarily good for the commonweal. It is apparent from their inclusion in these narratives, however, that they saw rebels as political actors. What

[59] *GC*, p.238.
[60] *Crowland Chronicle*, p.190-1.
[61] *Anglica Historia*, pp.130-1, 151-3; *HC*, pp.499, 502-5, 514-5; *GC*, pp.334-5, 344-7.
[62] *Anglica Historia*, pp.224-5, 230-1, 254-5.
[63] Edward IV: *White Rose*, p.152; *HC*, p.342. Henry VII and the successful accession of his son: *Anglica Historia*, pp.150-1.
[64] Such as the treaty of Étaples in 1492: *Anglica Historia*, pp.56-7. Wolsey's attempt of war on France in 1514-5: Ibidem, pp.234-5. The deliverance of Tournai in 1518: *HC*, p.598. The crisis of 1523-5: Ibidem, p.645-6, 650, 703, 719; *Anglica Historia*, pp.314-5. And taxation granted in 1529: *HC*, p.767.
[65] *Anglica Historia*, pp.68-9, 118-9; *GC*, pp.275-6.
[66] *GC*, p.238.
[67] Such as in 1529: *HC*, p.756-9.
[68] Especially after the Supremacy Act: *WC*, p.30.

sometimes might have influenced them into doing so was the political language used both by popular rebels and the magnates who either stirred or supported them.[69] The rebellion of Robin of Redesdale in 1469 provides a significant example of how universal language was manipulated to legitimise individual claims against the monarch. In the background of this revolt was the Earl of Warwick, who presented the arguments against the king's 'secrete consele' as if they were assumed by, and in favour of, 'all the people' for the 'commone wele'.[70] In 1470, both Clarence and Warwick addressed the commons again with a language that concerned 'the thinges (*sic*) publique of the comonaltie'.[71] Similarly, the rebels of 1489 – not co-opted by any magnate, we assume – also claimed that people should withstand those who were likely to destroy their king and 'the Comowns of Engeland'.[72] And in 1536 this was ostensibly shown by the use of the commonwealth language not only in the 'title' of the Pilgrimage of Grace but in many different documents written by the rebels and their leaders – after all, they also used 'commonwealth' to mean 'commonalty' by juxtaposing it with 'baronage'.[73] By this evidence, we can suggest that this linguistic attitude – by the rebels themselves – of presenting popular opinion as more collective and legitimate than only rebellious might have also affected the commentators. In the reports made by chroniclers and others, therefore, the commonalty – even if a localised portion of it – was included in claims of public opinion. Paradoxically, these narratives turned the commons into political actors.

Besides the chroniclers, perhaps the keenest observations that support this argument that the commons were decisively part of 'public opinion' come from the various foreign correspondents that lived in or passed by London in this period. The pattern of their

[69] That included MPs, poets, preachers, and others, see: Watts, 'The Commons in Medieval England', p.216.
[70] *JVB*, pp.213-4; *Warkworth's Chronicle*, pp.7-8, 46-51; *CSPM*, 173.
[71] *Original Letters*, 2nd/1, XLII.
[72] *Paston Letters*, VI, 1039. This is similar to the situation in 1497, if we are to trust Vergil's version: *Anglica Historia*, p.92-3.
[73] For instance in the Lincolnshire articles: *LP*, XI, 705(1); in 'The oath of the honourable men': Ibidem, 705(4); in a letter from Robert Aske to Lord Darcy: *Original Letters*, 3rd/3, CCLXXV; and in the Hampole Articles: *LP*, XI, 902 (2).

dispatches is undeniably similar to that of the chronicles: they attribute the same subjects, anxieties, complaints to 'the people of England'. Arguably, there might be problems with trusting in their accounts – as remarked in the Introduction[74] – and they evidently made their personal beliefs more transparent in their claims than others, but it does not simply follow that they were deliberately lying.[75] Moreover, the fact that they provide a similar picture in comparison to the (mostly English) chroniclers is reassuring, for they also believed that it was 'the people' who legitimised the usurpations of Edward IV and Henry VII;[76] were discontented with Henry VI's death in 1471;[77] were praised for not supporting Perkin Warbeck in 1495, but 'love[d] and long[ed]' for Edmund de la Pole in 1505;[78] gossiped substantially about the marriage of Mary Tudor, Henry VIII's sister, to Charles Brandon;[79] were not happy, in 1527, with the possible marriage of Princess Mary to the French king, nor with plans of promoting Henry Fitzroy, Henry VIII's illegitimate son;[80] complained about international affairs (primarily as a result of taxation) in 1475, 1514, 1522-5, 1527, and 1529;[81] and were exponentially a matter of comment during the debates of 1529-37 for not supporting the reforms, resisting the king's supremacy, or detesting Anne Boleyn.[82] These are only a few examples of matters reported by ambassadors who attributed them to the 'people', to 'everyone', to the 'universal' opinion, 'the English', the 'general opinion', and the 'kingdom'. In this language of public opinion, therefore, they also seem to allot a significant role to the popular opinion.

[74] See above, pp.26-7.
[75] Such as the Imperial ambassador during the later stages of the Reformation Parliament and the Pilgrimage of Grace: *CSPSp*, V/2, 76, 110.
[76] *CSPV*, I, 371, 374, 506.
[77] *CSPM*, 220; *CSPV*, I, 434.
[78] *CSPM*, 545; *CSPV*, I, 861.
[79] *CSPV*, II, 618, 1103.
[80] *CSPSp*, III/2, 37.
[81] *CSPM*, 313; *CSPV*, II, 649; *Further Supplement to CSPSp*, pp.99, 369-70; *CSPSp*, III/2, 37; IV/2, 211.
[82] *CSPM*, 817; *CSPSp*, IV/1, 232; IV/2, 598 635, 641, 1057-8, 1107; V/1, 1; V/2, 71, 1161; *CSPV*, V, 54; *CSPM*, 973.

Another lens through which to observe the inclusion of popular opinion in ideas of the 'public' comes from a more circumspect – though equally revealing – source. The Paston letters do not present as much collective language as chroniclers and ambassadors, but they do suggest that their writers saw the local commons as part of the political collectivity and, therefore, as contributors to the construction of public opinion. Between July and August of 1461, for instance, the commons of Norfolk – 'the commynes in this cuntre' – were described as satisfied with the ascension of Edward IV and apparently waiting for the resolution of their local matters. While some were reported in these letters for complaining about the local 'gret enemies, and oppressors of the Comynes', and 'oribyll extorcions', others were hoping to be eventually rewarded for having assisted Edward IV.[83] These letters also did not hesitate to highlight when the county was peaceful with 'no noise or speking aboute the king'.[84] Later in 1464, the king's visit to Norfolk seems to have prompted new expectations that he would remedy the commons' grievances.[85] These letters reveal many other comments about the local commons of Norfolk and surrounding areas, and overall they might suggest that other families of similar wealth and position throughout the kingdom reported the alleged opinions of 'the Comynnes throw all the schier' and the 'generall voise of the pepyll' as the Pastons did in the 1460s, in 1489, and later.[86] Similarly, another gentry family would resort to the collectivity to defend themselves from Richard Empson's 'extortions' by claiming that 'all the greate parte of England [knew]' about his 'malicious enmity and false craft'.[87] In a smaller scale, therefore, private correspondence shows the same pattern of including the commons' perspectives in the political collectivity – or the (local) public opinion.

[83] *Paston Letters*, III, 470, 475.
[84] *Paston Letters*, III, 476.
[85] *Paston Letters*, IV, 559.
[86] Quoting: *Paston Letters*, III, 471; IV, 525. See also: III, 463, 471, 482; IV, 489, 497-8, 593; V, 782; VI, 1039. For other families: *Stonor Letters*, II, 220; *Plumpton Correspondence*, 31, 39, 119.
[87] Letter of Elizabeth de la Pole in support of Sir R. Plumpton in Nov. 1501: *RHVIICS*, II, 69.

This compelling and copious evidence corroborates the point that whilst commentators might sometimes attribute legitimacy to the people – and turn them into political actors – their priority was probably to acquire legitimacy for their own words by claiming political collectivity in their narratives. Both processes were intrinsic. The fact that this language was applied to describe so many different aspects of politics, and in different sources, shows that popular opinion was undoubtedly one aspect of public opinion. If one removes the public pressure, the people's love for their king, their complaints and rebellions, and their reactions to government policy from these chronicles, we would have much simpler narratives of kings and nobles struggling among themselves and not looking for fame, not feeling anxious about false rumours, not caring about their people's actions, opinions, and murmuring. Moreover, these narratives invariably use the popular element of politics to express something about the rightfulness or wrongfulness of kings, nobles, and other political actors, in the same way that rebel magnates did.[88] Ultimately, a narrative without the popular element – and consequently without politics and public opinion – would be more unrealistic than several pieces of these textual fabrications already seem to be. The next section will add more nuances to this point.

1.2. The 'people' and the 'commonalty'

Let us now consider the question of 'the commons' when the expression carried clearer class connotations – i.e. 'the commons' and 'the people' as the ordinary, the 'commonalty' rather than the 'community of the realm'[89] – and the extent to which their opinions counted as 'public opinion'. John Watts has tried to isolate the meaning of 'the commons' by suggesting that in the sixteenth century the concept became more clearly that of *plebs*, rather than

[88] Further to the examples already quoted, it is worth mentioning the treatment of the Duke of Somerset in 1463: *Gregory's Chronicle*, p.221. And Hall's famous depiction of Richard III, which is legitimised through the people's reaction in many instances, such as Buckingham's Rebellion of 1483: *HC*, p.385.

[89] Although 'commonalty' can also stand for the political body, this word is always used here to highlight more clearly the *common* part of the concept and distinguish it from other uses. See: 'Commonalty', 1-3, *OED* (06 July 2019).

populus.[90] In a more recent evaluation, however, he concludes that this term evoked the combination of both the 'commonalty' and the 'community'.[91] It is clear from the previous section that the rhetorical value of the concept of 'the people' as a political community played an important role in the perceptions of public opinion. Nonetheless, there is indeed evidence that more clearly presents the commons with class connotations – that is why Watts has analysed this issue more than once. Rather than reviewing his argument about the relative weighting of different meanings, we can profit from comprehending what light is thrown by class-based representations of the commons on conceptions of 'public opinion'.

As we have seen above, the vocabulary of class distinctions was undoubtedly limited as it tended to homogenise the non-nobles as 'the commons', the 'third order' or 'estate'.[92] It is important to notice, however, that whenever claims of widespread feelings and opinions were made, low-class opinions might have been in the background for one simple social and demographic fact: 'the commons' were undeniably the majority of 'the people'. They were the ones who could consume and spread rumours in large scale, as much as they were those who mainly took part in rebellions and riots. In March 1524, for instance, Louis de Praet wrote to Charles V about 'the disposition of this people' towards the international scene. While he used 'this people' to mean 'the English', he subsequently mentioned the possibility that 'some part of [the] people w[ould] revolt' soon, and he could only mean the commons.[93] Although insurrections often had other components such as gentry, or sometimes clerical leaders, most contemporary records mainly refer to such periods of social unrest by merely using the word 'commons' – usually a sign that they were indeed overwhelmingly popular.[94] Consequently, the 'commune peple of the cuntre' and

[90] Watts, 'Public or Plebs', p.254.
[91] Watts, 'The Commons in Medieval England', pp.221-2.
[92] See above, pp.39-41. For a use of 'estate': *A Relation*, *or rather*, *a true account of the Island of England*… ed. C.A. Sneyd (1847), p.46.
[93] *Further Supplement to CSPSp*, p.319.
[94] For analyses of their social composition, see, for example: M. Hicks, 'The Yorkshire Rebellion of 1489 Reconsidered', *Northern History*, Vol. 22 (1986), pp.42-8; I. Arthurson, 'The Rising of 1497: a Revolt of the

their concerns and willingness to take matters into their hands are indeed the subject of these specific references to popular opinion – not the leadership or the ideas of the gentlemen.[95] As stated above too, there was a complicated relationship between the gentlemen and those below them, but whenever they united themselves for a higher purpose, the rising had to be characterised as a rising of 'the commons' because they were the majority. This might also explain why common leaders regularly became widely known and memorable – Jack Straw, Jack Cade, or Robin of Redesdale – but not the two parish priests of 1381 (John Ball and John Wrawe), not Sir Robert Welles in 1470, and neither the monks nor Robert Aske in 1536. The opinions of the commons might well have coincided with that of these leaders concerning the order, administration of justice, local government, and the 'common good'.[96] However, they also frequently disagreed, especially when the MPs granted taxation – and that was normally when petitioning with arms and gatherings came to be seen by them as legitimate.[97] Therefore, only the lower classes could be the majority of any 'public', because they were the majority of the population. But this is particularly true in moments of rebellion, as they allow us to see commoners more clearly as 'the people' when rebels made claims on behalf of the collectivity and influenced the way others reported their actions and opinions.

Moreover, it was not only during rebellions that 'the commons' were a political class representing the less privileged masses. The sources in which these low-class connotations appear are virtually the same as those presented in the previous section, thus strengthening a similar argument about the popular voices of 'the commons' as public opinion itself. Contemporaries would make social distinctions, for example, as: 'lords and

Peasantry', in J.T. Rosenthal and C. Richmond (eds.), *People*, *Politics and Community in the Later Middle Ages* (Gloucester, 1987), pp.5-9; Hoyle, *Pilgrimage of Grace*, p.423.

[95] Quoting: *An English Chronicle…* ed. J.S. Davies (1861), p.107. This is a reference to the commons who attacked the earl of Salisbury in 1460 after the Battle of Wakefield.

[96] For instance: *YHB*, II, pp.670, 672.

[97] See: Pollard, 'The People, Politics and the Constitution', pp.323-4; and R. Hoyle, 'Petitioning as Popular Politics in Early Sixteenth-Century England', *HR*, 75 (2002), pp.365-89.

people in general';[98] 'noble men [and] common people';[99] 'nobles and common folk';[100] 'great lords, nobles, magnates and commoners';[101] 'gentlemen and commonalty';[102] and 'baronage and commonwealth'.[103] In some instances, these sources even seem to make distinctions about what they mean with 'the commons' and include both the better sort and the less privileged as sharing the same opinions. That is the case of the commons in the crowds and the commons in the Guildhall of London in 1461;[104] the commons involved in elections for the Knights of the Shire in Norfolk that same year;[105] the 'common people' and the 'citizens' of London in 1471;[106] or the 'most substantial commoners' and the 'common people' in 1523.[107] At other times, 'the commons' were perceived as representing the localities but still fitting in a wider definition of 'the people': the 'comynes in this cuntre [of Norfolk]';[108] the common people of the north;[109] 'the comons of [Lincoln]shire'.[110] Thus, the sources that distinguish the less privileged and those that pay attention to the localities both contribute to the same discourse surrounding the 'commonalty' as 'the people'.

Put in another way, these 'commons' were those not powerful enough to protect themselves from the oppression of nobles without the help of their king.[111] Thus, 'common people' could be a direct translation of *vulgus* such as in Vergil's narrative but they necessarily fit the wider context of 'the people'.[112] They were the 'simple persons' who were

[98] *CSPM*, 137; *CSPV*, I, 395
[99] *HC*, pp.264-5.
[100] '*nobiles et populares*', in *Crowland Chronicle*, pp.126-7.
[101] '*dominorum*, *nobilium*, *procerum et popularium*', in *Crowland Chronicle*, pp.170-1.
[102] *LP*, IV/3, 6385.
[103] *LP*, XI, 902, 1244.
[104] *Vitellius A XVI*, pp.174-5.
[105] *Paston Letters*, III, 471.
[106] *CSPM*, 216.
[107] *HC*, pp.645-6.
[108] *Paston Letters*, III, 470.
[109] *GC*, p.208; *HC*, p.476.
[110] *Warkworth's Chronicle*, pp.7-9.
[111] As in: *Original Letters*, 2nd/1, XLII; *Three Books of Vergil*, pp.129, 198; *YHB*, II, p.619; *HC*, pp.586, 650; *LP*, III/2, 1543; *Paston Letters*, III, 475; *PROME*, 1484, It.18[22] (23 Feb. 2019); *CCR*, I, pp.54-5; *The Customs of London Otherwise Called the Arnold's Chronicle*, ed. F. Douce (1811), p.xliv; *GC*, pp.344-7. See the discussion of oppression below, pp.210-17.
[112] *Anglica Historia*, pp.228-9.

actively behind the popular rumours, the 'common talk', the 'common voice', or the 'popular feeling'.[113] They formed the 'great multitudes' of turbulent periods and named themselves 'true commons' to oppose 'evil counsellors'.[114] Regardless of whether some of these depictions implicitly intended to dismiss 'the commons', they were already including them in their analysis of what 'the people' were thinking – that is, an analysis of 'public opinion'.

It is also significant that despite the classical meaning of *populus* as a reference to either the political collectivity or the citizen body, it is not entirely clear that late medieval vocabulary cared about distinguishing *populus* (people) from *vulgus* or *plebs* (common people).[115] Jean de Wavrin indeed seemed to use this classical meaning when he mentioned that 'tout le commun et le peuple' were dissatisfied with Edward IV's marriage, in 1464, and that Robin of Redesdale was the leader of 'tout le commun' only, in 1469.[116] However, in a single sentence, Polydore Vergil used both *populus*, for popular uprising and *vulgus* for what had been publicly spoken about Perkin Warbeck.[117] Similarly, Augustino Scarpinello wrote of the opinions of 'the vulgar' to the Duke of Milan in 1530 and mentioned that the king's proclamation intended to 'circulate amongst the vulgar and the populace'.[118] A quick look at the *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* also clarifies that *populus*, *vulgus* and *plebs* were freely and interchangeably used for common people, populace, multitude, laity, the general public, and nation/state.[119] Such a loose meaning seems to have remained unchanged later – if we are to trust a single example of Sir Robert Wingfield when writing

[113] *CSPSp*, III/2, 75; IV/1, 9; IV/2, 1073; *Anglica Historia*, p.167; *HC*, pp.278, 381-95, 744-6, 788; *PROME*, 1484, It.1[5] (23 Feb. 2019); *YHB*, II, p.618; *GC*, pp.282-3, 328; *LP*, V, 1458.
[114] For references of 'multitude': *Paston Letters*, III, 463; *RHVIICS*, II, 40; *Anglica Historia*, pp.38-9; *LP*, IV/1, 1332; XII/1, 70; *HC*, p.719; *GC*, pp.212-3. For this language during rebellions: *Paston Letters*, VI, 1039; *Anglica Historia*, pp.92-3; *LP*, XI, 672, 705(I), 1080; *GC*, pp-198-9; *HC*, pp.701-2.
[115] For the classical meaning: T. Cornell, 'Populus', *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:10242/classics/ (08 July 2019).
[116] Wavrin, *Anchiennes Chronicques*, II, pp.329, 407.
[117] *Anglica Historia*, pp.68-9.
[118] *CSPM*, 833; *CSPV*, IV, 637.
[119] '*Populus*', '*vulgus*', and '*plebs*', in *DMLBS* (09 Apr. 2019).

about Queen Mary.[120] This is not simply to suggest that the use was more random than we might expect but also to strengthen the argument that if the language to describe 'the people' was more persistently used to homogenise the 'non-nobles', that same language must have included popular voices in the spectrum of public opinion as well.

This hypothesis might also be strengthened by looking at references to poverty. Contemporaries would occasionally make a social distinction more clearly while resorting to 'poore people', 'poore men', or 'the poor of England'.[121] Part of this usage might not reflect poverty, but simply humble status, though it is revealing that both the people and the commentators used the language artfully.[122] A poem of the early 1460s states that merchants and clothmakers made 'the poreylle to morne and wepe', and that they lived in distress and were 'oppressyd in all manner of thing'.[123] According to Vergil, the rebellion of 1497 was a response to taxes imposed on 'the wretched Cornish' who focused their accusations on the evil counsellors who 'were plotting the extermination of the poor'.[124] The bill that addressed the government of London during the Evil May Day riots pleaded 'compassion over the poor people'.[125] Regarding the dissolution of monasteries, the chronicler Charles Wriothesley wrote 'it was a pitye the great lamentation that the poore people made for theim'.[126] As a reaction to the dissolution, the pilgrims of 1536 might have openly sung 'for the church sake

[120] The loose usage of these terms has been pointed out by Hoyle, 'Petitioning as Popular Politics', p.389, n.87.
[121] *HC*, pp.585, 642; *CSPM*, 819.
[122] Vergil treated opinions of nobles and of 'persons of the lowest birth everywhere' as similar in 1495: *Anglica Historia*, pp.76-9. The same is found in *GC*, pp.294-5 about the death of Bishop Morton. See also: *CSPSp*, III/2, 113; IV/2, 934, 1058, 1081; V/1, 183; *CSPM*, 832; *CSPV*, IV, 632; *Plumpton Correspondence*, 52. The people were said to be pleading poverty to avoid taxation in 1525: *LP*, IV/1, 1266, 1318, 1332. Early in 1523, wrote Hall, 'the poore men were content' that only the rich were being forced to lend money to the king: *HC*, p.642. Regrating and forestalling were particularly reported for affecting the poor people who made 'great lamentacion' in periods of bad harvest: *Select STAC*, II, pp.173, 178-84; *Stonor Letters*, II, 220; *The Records of the City of Norwich*, ed. W. Hudson and J.C. Tingey (2 Vols., Norwich, 1906), II, pp.116-7. Taxes that charged the 'pore people' and 'pouer comons' were recorded in the 1490s: *GC*, p.245; *RHVIICS*, II, 83. Enclosures affecting the poor were reported in 1528, for instance: *LP*, IV/2, 4796. This will be further addressed below, pp.183-4, 210-17.
[123] *Political Poems and Songs*, pp.285-7; *Historical Poems*, 70. Similar treatment is found in George Ashby's 'The Active Policy of a Prince', in *George Ashby's Poems*, p.33.
[124] *Anglica Historia*, pp.92-3.
[125] *HC*, p.587. For the Venetian correspondent they were 'the populace': *CSPV*, II, 887.
[126] *WC*, p.43.

/ Pore comons wake / And no marvell'; and Robert Aske highlighted that 'much of the relef of the comyns was by sucur of abbeys'.[127] It is remarkable, then, to notice that the matters discussed by the 'poor commons' as well as by the 'non-nobles', who were not that poor, were virtually the same as the 'whole kingdom' or 'everyone' approached in the previous section. Such consonance suggests that the poor were not only frequently heard by the same commentators, but – more importantly – that the comments on the collectivity in the previous section most certainly included lower-class opinions as well.

In sum, the distinction between 'the people' as a political collectivity, noticed by universalising language, and 'the people' as the lower classes and the commons/non-nobles, demonstrated by subtle class distinctions, might not be too important to the discourses and fabrications of public opinion. After all, due to their varied and random use, the terms 'people', 'common', *populus*, *vulgar*, and *plebs* were used interchangeably, and the issues discussed by these varied groups seem to match in how concerned they were with the commonweal, taxation, justice, and oppression. What they reveal, and this is crucial, is that popular opinion was indeed part of the discourse of the 'public'; that it put a discursive and persistent pressure on politics; that politics (even international politics) was done whilst considering a popular element; and consequently, that 'the people' must generally be included in any definition of 'political society'. The next section will examine the implications of this concept of the people and suggest how we can conciliate this view of 'the people' as significant with the other contemporary view that they were 'rustic', 'foolish' or suggestible.

[127] Emphasis added: *LP*, XI, 786; XII/1, 6. Other documents related to the rebellion also stressed poverty: *LP*, XI, 1244; *Original Letters*, 3rd/3, CCLXXIV.

2. Characterising and Using Popular Opinion

Thus far we have seen that it was not only the ruling classes that were significant to the language of public opinion, as the concept of the people was wide enough to include the majority of non-nobles – and among them, the masses. Why is it, then, that so many negative and dismissive depictions of the same commoners survive? Do these contemporary rejections of the people allow historians to downplay the people's role in politics either in the late fifteenth or in the sixteenth century?[128] To engage with these questions, we might consider the proposition of Gerhard Jaritz about the treatment of the people in late medieval sources. He has convincingly argued, for a different but comparable context, that depictions of the lower orders were never 'neutral'.[129] The social gradations of the lower classes, he continues, were not worth describing in detail – much as Sir Thomas Smith informed us in *De Republica Anglorum*[130] – and whenever ordinary people were recorded they had 'signs of exceptionality'. While commentators did not generally identify different strata of commoners, they did tend to characterise them as either 'good' or 'bad'. Here we might adapt Jaritz's idea and call these characterisations of the common people as either 'useful' – the collectivity that tends to create a consensus effect of public opinion – or 'harmful' – the rumour-mongers who were allegedly keen on using seditious language.[131] These two perspectives influence the way we interpret public opinion – either as a rhetorical tool or as plebeian language. Thus, we must enquire further into these characterisations and their frequency in order to understand why they fluctuated and how they interacted.

Before we begin this examination, it is useful to note that the amount of evidence referring directly to the people already demonstrates a different kind of 'exceptionality' in

[128] As mentioned above, p.37.
[129] For this and what follows: G. Jaritz, 'The Good and the Bad Example, or Making Use of the *Petit Peuple* in Late Medieval Central Europe', in Boglioni *et al*, *Le Petit Peuple dans l'Occident médiéval*, pp.83-90.
[130] T. Smith, *De Republica Anglorum*, ed. M. Dewar (Cambridge, 1982), pp.76-7.
[131] A similar point to Jaritz on this 'exceptionality' is found in: R. Fossier, 'Le Petit Peuple au Moyen Âge: approaches et questions', in Boglioni *et al*, *Le Petit Peuple dans l'Occident médiéval*, p.12.

comparison to those proposed by Gerhard Jaritz. Figure 1 below is based on the quantity of generalisations about 'the people' and 'the commons' found in all sources analysed in this chapter. As such, this 'exceptionality' here is that these records mostly characterise the people during political crises and rebellions: the ascension of Edward IV and the crisis of 1469-71; Richard III's reign with fluctuations until the rebellion of 1489; the rebellion of 1497 and Perkin Warbeck's invasion; the succession of Henry VIII in 1509; and increasingly from 1523 to the rebellions of 1536-7.

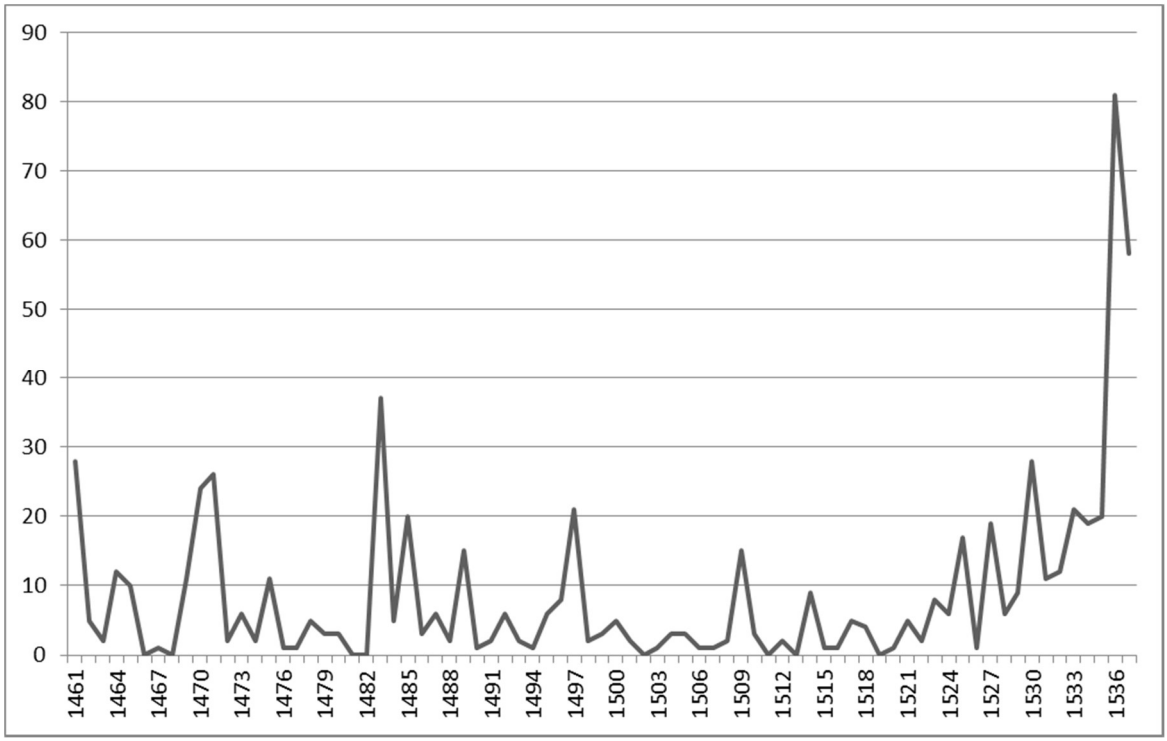

Figure 1 – Frequency of References to the People and the Commons

In all, despite the periods of silence or low frequency of references, the commonalty was a significant subject of written sources all over the period. What this section will clarify is how to conciliate the two sides of the 'exceptionality' of the common people as they appear in written sources: the characterisation that was 'useful' such as, for instance, the people who supported Edward IV in 1461 and 1471; and the 'harmful' ones, the people who claimed that the 'comyns…[had] brought king Edward to his prosperite in the realme of England', and if

he would not rule accordingly they '[would] depose him and put him down'.[132] It is comprehensible that the people's role was downplayed and that they might have been – as an Italian visitor tells us around 1500 – 'held in little more esteem than if they were slaves'.[133] However, we shall enquire into the problem of why commentators also allotted a role for the people in similar periods. As in the concept of the people implied above, popular opinion was sometimes side by side with the nobles and 'worshipfull men' even in a chronicle that dismissed them so often such as that of Edward Hall.[134] What does this apparent contradiction mean to our understanding of public opinion? The references to the people, represented in Figure 1, were not only focused on those who mattered to fabrications of contemporary public opinion – when they were 'useful' – but also on those who behaved as if they mattered: the people who seized the political language, and consequently bothered others who wrote dismissively about them and treated them as 'harmful' to politics.[135] How can we combine these two perspectives into one understanding of 'public opinion'?

Due to this double-edged characterisation of the commons, we must enquire why popular views were depicted and treated as such in the precise moments that they were. In that sense, sections 2.1 and 2.2 will shed more light on sections 1.1 and 1.2 respectively. First, we shall be able to better understand this ambiguity by treating the collective language of public opinion (section 1.1) as that of the people who were possibly seen as 'useful' in these narratives (section 2.1), that is, the people whose views served to construct the consensus effect. Second, the plebeian language of the commonalty (section 1.2) will be treated as the language of those who were more likely seen as 'harmful' to the collectivity (section 2.2) because they were also foolish, ignorant, unreliable and dangerous. Section 2.3

[132] KB9/21/28, 54; 299/25.
[133] *A Relation of England*, p.33.
[134] *HC*, pp.358-9, 462-4, 503-4.
[135] This point about behaving 'as if they thought they mattered in politics' is from: Harvey, 'Was There Popular Politics?', p.156.

will conclude the analysis of this duality and attempt to reconcile these two perspectives by suggesting motivations lying underneath such depictions.

2.1. The People Seen as 'Useful'

We have already established in the previous section that 'the commons' might reasonably be seen as 'the public', and that this public frequently involved a more plebeian/popular opinion. In that section, extensive evidence from chroniclers, ambassadors, and private correspondence has revealed ordinary people's opinions being called for various discursive purposes. These opinions that were invited and re-used is what this section will treat as 'useful'. The question of when they appear more, however, might provide us with other insights into their 'exceptionality' and their significance to the language of public opinion.

Firstly, usurpations and other magnate rebellions provided a context in which contemporaries allotted a role to the actions and voices of the people. Perhaps the only way to reasonably justify usurpations before their approval in parliament was by using the common voice and abstaining from what they were: a *coup* or treason against the previous regime. Thus, one of the primary resources of favourable narratives of transitional periods is to demonstrate people's dissatisfaction with the previous reign and to attribute the succession's outcome partly to the crowds. Polydore Vergil, analysing the 1460s from a comfortable distance, attributed Henry VI's deposition to 'a general revolt of the nobilitye and commons' as the commonwealth had been neglected for so long, and even after Edward IV's victory, the role of the people was being taken seriously, as circumstances could still change.[136] John Whethamstede claimed that Edward IV's accession was by *acclamatio populi* without mentioning critical military victories.[137] In George Neville's words the new king was received 'joyfully by the entire population', and this is reaffirmed by Milanese and

[136] *Three Books of Vergil*, pp.113, 115.
[137] *Registrum Abbatiae Johannis Whethamstede*, ed. H.T. Riley (2 Vols, London, 1872-3), I, p.407.

Venetian letters reporting 'the love of the commons' and the rejoicing of 'all England', as well as by the *Great Chronicle*'s description of the 'grete favour of the commonys'.[138] The 'commowns of divers parties of [the] royome' were often perceived as contributing not only with their visible human force but also with their inherent legitimacy while facing an illegitimate or unpopular government.[139] In this sense, the common people were called to these narratives because they helped to construct the consensus effect around usurpations.

Meanwhile, depictions of the people were useful to demonstrate the opposite, that is, that the consensus effect and the unity of the kingdom had been or was about to be broken by conspirators co-opting the commons. The act of stirring the common people was the main charge against the Earl of Somerset in 1461-3 and the Duke of Buckingham in 1484.[140] Contemporaries throughout this period recorded not only the actual role of the commons in nobles' conspiracies – in 1469-71, 1483-5, 1497 – but also the occasions where popular support was possible – in 1487, 1492-5, 1497; and they did so either with anxiety or enthusiasm.[141] The most significant amount of commentary on possible rebellion dates from 1527 onwards when it became public that Henry VIII intended to annul his first marriage, and this prevails in ambassadors' despatches to the Empire since before Eustace Chapuys came to England.[142] The legitimacy of Henry VIII's first marriage is alleged by Hall to have been 'talked among the common people sith the first day of his marriage', and he uses this to justify the king's intent and warn the reader about the possibility of a prolonged period of

[138] Respectively: *CSPM*, 78; *CSPV*, I, 370-1; *CSPM*, 85; *GC*, pp.206-7.
[139] The quotation is from a letter by Edward IV to Henry Vernon, concerned with social commotion in May 1471: *Twelfth Report*, *Appendix*, *Part IV* (HMC, 1888), p.5.
[140] Somerset: KB9/310/2; *PROME*, 1461, It.4; 1463, It.28. Buckingham: *PROME*, 1484, It.3[7] (23 Feb. 2019).
[141] For the period 1469-71: Wavrin, *Anchiennes Chronicques*, III, pp.5-7; *CLB*, pp.358-9; *HC*, p.285; *GC*, p.209; De Commynes, *Memoirs*, p.194; J. Rastell, *Pastime of People*, *or the Chronicles of Divers Realms*, ed. T.F. Dibdin (1811), p.285. For Richard III's period: *HC*, pp.358-9; *Three Books of Vergil*, pp.179, 194-5, 198; *Vitellius A XVI*, pp.190-1; Mancini, *Usurpation*, pp.88-9. In Henry VII's reign: *Anglica Historia*, pp.22-3, 56-9, 64-5; *RHVIICS*, I, 120; *HC*, pp.480-6; *CSPM*, 545.
[142] *CSPSp*, III/2, 75, 113, 550; IV/1, 290, 345, 354, 415, 509; IV/2, 598, 615, 664, 934, 1058, 1073, 1076, 1081, 1149, 1154, 1161; V/1, 9, 183; V/2, 9, 55, 70, 76; *LP*, V, 912, 1143, App.10; VI, 1112; VII, 420; *CSPV*, IV, 601; *CSPM*, 818, 838; *HC*, pp.772-3.

strife – if the king did not produce an heir – that was comparable to the Wars of the Roses.[143] Regardless of these commentators' favourable or unfavourable opinion towards usurpation and magnate rebels, they all made the views of ordinary people a useful element of their narratives because popular perspectives help to demonstrated the wickedness of conspirators.

Secondly, London and its suburbs were certainly perceived as the leading site for 'relevant' public opinion that could spread either consent or rebellion. Londoners' role in transitional periods is thoroughly recorded even if these records can be seen, again, as partial fabrications. The Bishop of Salisbury, for instance, reported to the Italian ambassadors the people's reactions immediately after the usurpation of Edward IV. He claimed that the commons of London 'acclaimed [the king] unanimously and with enthusiasm' and this is repeated in several different records.[144] Similar descriptions are used to legitimise the return of Henry VI in 1470, and although London seems to have favoured Warwick and the new king, 'it [was] clear' to the Milanese correspondent 'that if they realise[d] that they [were] not in the road to peace, they may turn sides'.[145] Later in 1471, Edward IV was again said to have been 'receivyd with moche joy and gladnesse' by the people of London.[146] Richard III did not have to invade the kingdom or win the battlefield to seize the crown, but he appealed to the city of London and needed to be legitimised there first – urging people 'to be content to depose the prince & accept the protectour for king'.[147] Hall's chronicle contrasts Richard's visit to York – where people 'so rejoised that they extolled and praised him far above the starres' – with his reception at London where the great companies were present 'more for

[143] *HC*, pp.753-6.
[144] *CSPM*, 79. Favourable reactions are also found in: *Vitellius A XVI*, pp.174-6; *Six Town Chronicles of England*, ed. R. Flenley (Oxford, 1911), pp.161-3; *Three Fifteenth-Century Chronicles*, ed. J. Gairdner (1880), p.76; *White Rose*, p.7; Wavrin, *Anchiennes Chronicques*, II, p.268
[145] See: *HC*, p.285; *CSPM*, 197. The quotation is from: *CSPM*, 76.
[146] *Arrivall of Ed.IV*, p.21. The rejoicing of Londoners is also recorded by De Commynes, *Memoirs*, p.194. Their role in resisting Fauconberg's rising that year is also significant in: *FC*, p.662; *Vitellius A XVI*, p.185; *Warkworth's Chronicle*, p.15.
[147] *HC*, pp.353, 355, 359-63, 365; *Anglica Historia*, pp.183-4; Mancini, *Usurpation*, pp.98-101; *GC*, p.232; T. More, *The History of King Richard III*, ed. R.S. Sylvester, *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, Vol.II (New Haven, 1963), pp.67-8.

dread then for love'.[148] His decision to imprison the princes in the Tower and the events which followed 'horrified' everyone and it was definitely through London's perspective that the rest of the kingdom came to know about it.[149] In 1485, London had no choice but to accept Henry Tudor, and a foreigner describes him as being 'received in great triumph and with demonstrations of pleasure'.[150] Finally, the belief that Londoners were crucial to decisive episodes of the Wars of the Roses seems to have reached the Imperial ambassador later in 1533, and in numerous situations he perhaps wanted to believe that anything that affected the Londoners would have consequences to the rest of the kingdom.[151]

Another repeated political scenario in which the views of the people were seen as 'useful' to commentators was during periods of war. Normally, the initial official rhetoric to justify expeditions was based on the pursuit of justice, honour and glory but their funding and outcome were almost invariably controversial. Consequently, whenever foreign expeditions proved a fiasco or tax collection looked excessive commentators allotted room for people's reactions in order to make their own criticisms. Sir John Fortescue had advertised that people would promptly grant money to their king if they realised that he could maintain his estates and livelihood without extraordinary taxation.[152] It was probably with similar commonplaces in mind that contemporaries reported disappointment in 1463, 1469 and resistance towards paying taxes in the 1470s.[153] Edward Hall tells us that in the 1490s Henry VII was trying to avoid the commons' hatred by asking for a benevolence from 'the rich';[154] and Polydore Vergil points out that Henry was carefully reconsidering the possible accusations of extortion if he put his people in danger by attacking France with no allies –

[148] *HC*, pp.380-1.
[149] For the Londoners' reaction: Mancini, *Usurpation*, pp.96-7.
[150] E. Nokes and G. Wheeler, 'A Spanish Account of the Battle of Bosworth', *The Ricardian*, 36 (1972), pp.1-5.
[151] For the comment on the Wars of the Roses: *CSPSp*, IV/2, 1161. For others: *CSPSp*, V/1, 75, 174; V/2, 55.
[152] Fortescue, *Governance of England*, pp.135-7.
[153] *Gregory's Chronicle*, p.221; *Warkworth's Chronicle*, pp.3, 8, 48; *Brief Latin Chronicle*, in *Three Fifteenth-Century Chronicles*, p.177; *CSPM*, 254, 255; *Paston Letters*, V, 871.
[154] *HC*, p.451.

after all, whenever people cursed him, it 'would be believed by all'.[155] If taxation had been granted and collected, and no results were realised, 'the people' were promptly re-used in narratives not merely to explain widespread dissatisfaction but seemingly to express something about the wrongfulness or shamefulness of some decisions.[156] Others, like Lord Bothwell in 1496, tried to prevent more war by claiming that 'king Edward had never fully the perfit love of his peplen whill he had wer off Scotland'.[157] The attempts to collect the Amicable Grant in 1525, and the people's misery and demonstrations in Suffolk and elsewhere, were reported partly also to portray Wolsey's avarice.[158] Although most of these accounts were drawing upon secondary reports, contemporaries knew that the people were also partly responsible for the direct and indirect impact on national and foreign policy either by delaying the collection of taxes or by indirectly influencing the decision for peace or truce.[159] By re-using popular discourses about taxation, commentators also attributed significance to public opinion via what might have been localised complaints. Mismanagement of taxation and expeditions most certainly bothered both the commons who rose in specific rebellions and the aristocrats who might have believed in achieving the good old 'glory' in France. However, it was always the 'useful' portrayal of public opinion that would be convenient in such records, especially to support the commentators' views.

Moments of quietness and peace were now and then recorded as a way of emphasising royal authority by highlighting people's obedience and demonstrating consensus – especially after periods of turmoil. After Henry VI was imprisoned in 1465, the

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[155] *Anglica Historia*, pp.52-3.
[156] As in 1492: *HC*, pp.458-9; 1514: *CSPV*, II, 456; *Anglica Historia*, pp.230-1; and 1527: *CSPM*, 527.
[157] *RHVIICS*, I, 101.
[158] *Further Supplement to CSPSp*, pp.235, 301-2, 319, 369-70; *LP*, IV/1, 1243, 1260, 1318-9, 1323; IV/3, App.39; *CSPV*, III, 1025; *CSPSp*, III/2, 37, 69; *HC*, pp.696-702; *Original Letters*, 1st/1, LXXXIX. A poem of 1528 states that 'The peopyll do curse bothe day & nighte; / This is the comon voise': *Ballads from Manuscripts*, p.352.
[159] As in 1489: *Six Town Chronicles*, p.187; *YHB*, II, p.646; *HC*, p.442-3; *Vitellius A XVI*, p.194; *FC*, p.683. And 1497: *Report on Manuscripts in Various Collections II* (HMC, 1903), pp.39-40; *GC*, p.275-6; *Vitellius A XVI*, pp.213-6; *Arnold's Chronicle*, p.xxxix; *HC*, pp.476-9; *Original Letters*, 1st/1, XV.

realm was said to be 'in more quietnes & tranquilitie'.[160] When he returned to the throne in 1470, 'alle his goode lovers were fulle gladde' because 'the people looked after alle the foresaide prosperites and peece, but it came not' with Edward IV.[161] In 1498, it was reported that Henry VII was able to 'keep the people in such subjection as has never been the case before'.[162] In 1500, after Henry VII had eliminated both the Earl of Warwick and Perkin Warbeck, the Spanish ambassador wrote to Ferdinand and Isabella that there was not 'a drop of doubtful Royal blood' anymore, as this was what had prevented 'the English' from remaining 'peacefully in obedience to their king'.[163] Cardinal Wolsey, in June 1527, tried to convince his king that 'the realm was never in better quiet, in spite of all reports to the contrary'.[164] It is reasonably clear that the people's alleged passivity and obedience, or perhaps their positive opinion about a certain king or specific context, was handled and manipulated by sources only in specific moments. It is also possible to complement this idea by suggesting that moments of absolute silence about 'the people' in contemporary sources can be interpreted as moments of 'quietness and tranquillity'. In Figure 1 above, these moments invariably followed peaks of records that represented turmoil, widespread complaints or rebellion.[165] Tellingly, both the reports of tranquillity and obedience, as well as the virtual absence of them, equally demonstrate that people were called to narratives in what may indeed be called 'exceptional' but 'useful' moments. It does not follow from this, however, that there was indeed absolute peace and tranquillity or simply compliance across the kingdom as Figure 1 only occasionally matches moments in which little or no rumours or seditious words were recorded in this same period.[166]

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[160] *HC*, pp.261-2. Similar in *Three Books of Vergil*, p.115.
[161] *Warkworth's Chronicle*, pp.11-12.
[162] *CSPSp*, I, 204.
[163] *CSPSp*, I, 249, *LP RIII/HVII*, I, 12.
[164] *LP*, IV/2, 3231.
[165] See above, Figure 1, p.60.
[166] In Figure 2, p.108 moments with no records of rumours would be only 1463, 1474, 1479, 1494, 1508, and 1516. As for seditious language – in Figure 3, p.153 – there is even less 'silence': 1474, 1481, 1507, 1513, and 1519.

Lastly, open demonstrations of localised loyalty were equally crucial and consequently useful to these narratives – as much as open disloyalty that informed the more biased accounts and enthusiastic commentators. The 'province of Yorkshire' was seen as 'friendly to King Henry' in August 1461, even though it would 'submit to king Edward, considering that favour fail[ed] king Henry on every side'.[167] The northerners' loyalty was particularly realised again when Edward IV returned from his brief exile in 1471. The episode of Edward's appeal to York is remarkable for even though the city was 'sometime comfortyd and sometime discomfortyd', one Yorkist narrative portrays the locals as favouring the earl of Northumberland and Henry VI.[168] The major chroniclers portray the lack of support that Edward IV faced in March-April 1471, and even a near-contemporary poem highlighted that 'at his londing in Holdyrnes he had gret paine; / His subjectes and people wolde not him obey'.[169] In 1487, 'the commons being watchmen' defended York's city gates from Lambert Simnel's supporters.[170] Similarly, the people of Kent refused to join Perkin Warbeck in July 1495, whose party fled 'when they sawe that they cowed have no comfort of the Cuntre'.[171] In fact, a Spanish letter demonstrates that in this same episode the 'people rose up in arms against them without the intervention of a single soldier of the King';[172] while Polydore Vergil interpreted the reaction of the Kentish people as a rational decision for their 'recent revolts had always fallen out badly for themselves'.[173] Those of Exeter did the same by defending the town from Warbeck and other rebels in 1497.[174] In 1496 it was the commons' clamour against the Scots that alerted the nobles about the

[167] *CSPV*, I, 384; *CSPM*, 119.
[168] *Arrivall of Ed.IV*, pp.2-6.
[169] *Political Poems and Songs*, p.273. For the chronicles: *Arrival of Ed.IV*, pp.2-8, 21, 31; *Warkworth's Chronicle*, p.14; *HC*, p.290; *Three Books of Vergil*, pp.136-7; Wavrin, *Anchiennes Chronicques*, III, pp.99-106.
[170] *YHB*, II, p.572.
[171] *Vitellius A XVI*, pp.205-6.
[172] *CSPSp*, I, 98.
[173] *Anglica Historia*, pp.82-3.
[174] *HC*, pp.480-6; *Common Place Book of John Hooker*, pp.35-7; *Chroniques de Jean Molinet (1474-1506)*, ed. G. Doutrepont and O. Jodogne (3 Vols., Brussels, 1935-7), II, pp.439-41.

invasion of the north.[175] These demonstrations of loyalty were not as frequently recorded and re-used as they were during the divorce discussions from 1527 onwards – especially the sympathies expressed towards Queen Catherine, Princess Mary, and the traditional religion.[176] This selection of opinions may also tell another side of these episodes: that the rest of the kingdom was perhaps thinking differently, but their opinions or reactions might not have mattered as much as those who allegedly behaved in a specific way in crucial moments. Loyalty served to reify royal authority while disloyalty to defame the enemy or the commons themselves. In both cases, people's reactions – or more precisely, a representation of them – were useful tools to these commentators. Had the people failed to defend their regions during invasions, for example, another usurpation might have ensued in 1487 or 1497 – or even prevented Edward IV in 1471. They had a crucial political role that was not immediately realised but subsequently attributed to them in these descriptions.

All in all, the people were more recorded when they served an exceptional but useful purpose. From the suggestions of this section, it was in periods of crisis or immediately after that these records essentially made public opinion out of what might have actually been either isolated manifestations or private opinions of the reporter. In any case, the usefulness of this rhetoric about the people remains the same across the period. Even a later chronicler that persistently depicted the people as ignorant and rustic, Edward Hall, had an ambiguous relationship with them. He stated that it was not possible to completely ignore the 'vulgare opinion': those who 'folowe[d], love[d] and embrace[d] the contrary, d[id] prove bothe sad and wise', but they would be deemed as 'mad & undiscrete person[s]'.[177] In the next section, we will assess the more negative aspect of these characterisations.

[175] *HC*, p.476.
[176] *HC*, pp.772-3; *CSPSp*, V/1, 109; *WC*, pp.56-7; *CSPM*, 972. For support to Catherine, see n.39 above.
[177] *HC*, p.286.

2.2. The People seen as 'Harmful'

Contrary to the previous section, popular opinion was also often mentioned in contemporary narratives to ridicule or delegitimise people's views because they were allegedly 'harmful' to politics. Isobel Harvey has raised our attention to the numerous parliamentary statutes trying to place the commons outside the 'political sphere' by, for instance, limiting their participation in the election of MPs from 1429 and trying to prevent them from using apparel above their social status in both 1463 and 1483.[178] While the status of commoners was a broader political and social problem, it has been claimed that the common voice enjoyed greater prestige in the later Middle Ages, undergoing a cultural shift only in the sixteenth century due to the influence of humanist discourse.[179] This shift would have resulted in suspicion about the people and a more profound questioning of their political judgement from the 1520s onwards. However, that does not seem to reflect reality.

Just as the usefulness of the language of public opinion in the previous section seems constant across the period, so does the evidence despising popular perspectives.[180] The author of the *Somnium Vigilantis*, in 1459, seeing that the Yorkists gave much credit to what people believed, affirmed that their favour had no 'grounde of sure argument, for by cause hit is so variable and for the moost parte it groweth of oppinable conceitis, and not of trowith'.[181] George Ashby urged princes to 'put no ful truste in the comonalte, / thay be ever wavering in variance' with which Hall would agree, as he also described the people as 'mutable & wavering'.[182] This 'mutable' character can be exemplified by a letter of 1472 in

[178] Harvey, 'Was there Popular Politics?', pp.162-3.
[179] For this and the next point: Duggan, 'Thought Control', pp.263-71. This argument is also partly shared by: Watts, 'Public or Plebs', pp.254-9.
[180] Beyond the period analysed here, the language choices used to record the Peasants' Rebellion of 1381 reflects a similar pattern, see: Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*, ch.5. And both 1381 and 1450 in: McLaren, *London Chronicles*, pp.63-70.
[181] J.P. Gilson, 'A Defence of the Proscription of the Yorkists in 1459', *EHR*, 26 (1911), p.521.
[182] *George Ashby's Poems*, p.40; *HC*, p.483.

which the Milanese correspondent wrote that 'people still believe[d] that another Warwick [would] arise because they d[id] not love th[eir] king [and] things [we]re doubtful and changeable'.[183] A Florentine traveller reported in 1496 that Henry VII was rather feared than loved, and 'if fortune allowed some lord of the blood royal to rise and he had to take the field… his people would abandon him. They would treat him as they did King Richard'.[184] It was because the commons were mutable, 'wavering', or 'puerile' that they were often characterised as having no rational kind of opinion.[185] This characterisation, however, did not undergo any apparent shift.

The perception that they were 'unlearned' and a 'grosse multitude' was not exclusively reserved to early sixteenth century humanists such as Thomas More and Erasmus.[186] There is no difference between treating the people as an undifferentiated mass 'wavering in variance', or as 'simple comyns of bestialle contenaunce' in the fifteenth century and the 'rude and rusticall' or the 'mad breines of the commen people' in the sixteenth.[187] The people were rumour-mongers and 'sowers of seditious language' in the proclamations of Edward IV as much as they were in 1536 and later.[188] The social stereotype throughout the period was that, whenever they got involved with sedition and conspiracy,

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[183] *Paston Letters*, V, 795; *CSPM*, 240.
[184] *CSPM*, 490.
[185] Such as in Hall's chronicle's narrative about the Cornish rebellion of 1497: *HC*, pp.480-6. Also in: *CSPM*, 534; *CSPV*, II, 887. That people were 'blind' and easily 'seduced' is the perspective of *A Glasse of Truthe*, C7; and of Swinnerton, *A Litel Treatise*, A3. Similar examples of 'inconstant commons' and 'simple folk' in: *LP*, VI, 738; VIII, 1069.
[186] As quoted in: Duggan, 'Thought Control', p.268.
[187] W. Worcester, *Boke of Noblesse*, ed. J.G. Nichols, Roxburghe Club (1860), p.77. The other examples – together with 'rude and ignoraunt', 'folish fantasies', 'wise men' as opposed to 'others', 'venemous lies and imaginacions', and others stressing simplicity and ignorance – are from: *HC*, pp.274-5, 427, 465, 497, 753-6, 759, 782-3, 788, 796, 819-20. For more: 'their madness and untruth': *LP*, IV/1, 1319; 'simple': *LP*, V, 1458; 'no men but beasts': *Records of the Reformation: The Divorce*, *1527-1533*, ed. N. Pocock, (2 Vols., 1870), Vol.2, CCXLIII; 'many mad follies': *LP*, VI, 967; 'folishe commocion': *FC*, p.700; 'rude and ignorant' and 'madness': *LP*, XI, 780 (2); *Morison's Tracts*, pp.88-100, 112-29; and 'blasphemous mouthes of rude commonalty': G. Cavendish, *The Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey*, ed. R.S. Sylvester (EETS, Or. Ser. 243, 1959), p.3. Other similar examples in: *Three Books of Vergil*, p.118; *Anglica Historia*, pp.80-1, 242-5; *LP*, VIII, 955; IX, 561; XI, 625, 1058, 1234, 1271; XII/1, 84, 102.
[188] See the proclamations of 1464 and 1470: *CCR*, I, p.216; II, 537. For 1536: *TRP*, 168. For later, see: A. Fox, 'Rumour, news and popular political opinion in Elizabethan and early Stuart England', *Historical Journal*, 40/3 (1997), p.603.

they would subsequently fall into idleness and become 'vagabonds and beggars' who move around 'sowing seditious language', or who were seen as 'makers of new rumours and tidings'.[189] Even though contemporaries could refer to such familiar tropes to characterise those involved in the riots of the Evil May Day of 1517 or the rebellions of 1536-7, it was rarely the case that a 'vagabond' was brought to court as a 'sower of seditious language'.[190] 'Vagabond' was a catch-all phrase to label transgressors of various kinds even if they technically were not wandering or begging, and this word was an integral portion of the discourse surrounding the 'harmful' people.[191] The fears and anxieties informing the elites writing about the commons, therefore, were substantially consistent: besides being the majority, the common people were potentially dangerous because they could not distinguish the truth from falsehoods – they were born to work and be ruled, not to give opinions. Thus, they were 'hurtful to the commonwealth', and their occasional opinions and expressions had to be despised in order to be kept under control.[192]

It was also common, throughout the later medieval period, to dismiss opinions and ideas by associating them with women.[193] Women appear more often in narratives when they died for heresy, for example, but we might also notice this dismissive approach in political crises.[194] Their speech was recognised as powerful enough to 'jeopardize reputations, community interests, and religious and political authority' as well as to destabilise

[189] *CCR*, II, 1090; *TRP*, 19; *LP*, I/1, 157. Other examples include: *CLB*, II, p.538; *Ecclesiastical Courts in London*, cxxv; *Select Cases in the Council of Henry VII*, ed. Bayne & Dunham (Selden Society 75, 1958), p.40; *Records of the Borough of Leicester,* ed. M. Bateson (Vols. 2-3, 1865-1905), V.3, XVII.
[190] For 1517: *Arnold's Chronicle*, p.l. For 1537: LP, XII/1, 1271. Compare with: *LP*, XI, 670. Only two accusations were found linking 'vagabonds' directly with treasonable words in 1521, and with the act of 'sowing' inflammatory rumours in October 1537: *LP*, III/1, 437; XII/2, 918, 1076. Numerous proclamations targeted vagrancy in this period: *TRP*, 16, 22, 30, 63, 80, 118, 131-2.
[191] For vagrancy: C1/145/44; 238/36; KB9/415/20; 430/45; 961/48; 962/2; 472/70-1; 968/46-8, 40, 29-6; 498/24; 502/41; 504/7; 505/16; 508/62; 975/49-7; 518/35-6, 42; 524/5; 528/32; 529/12. Simon Fish used the word both for the poor and for the corrupt clergy in *Supplicacyon of Beggers*, ed. F.J. Furnivall (1871), pp.1-14. For the problem of work behind this stereotype, see for instance: P. Cavill, 'The Problem of Labour and the Parliament of 1495', in L. Clark (ed.), *The Fifteenth Century V* (Woodbridge, 2005), pp.143-55.
[192] *TRP*, 168.
[193] See: Bardsley, *Venomous Tongue*, chs.3-4.
[194] *Vitellius A XVI*, p.200; *FC*, p.685.

'authoritative discourses, domestic economy, and power structures'.[195] While men were more clearly attacked as rebels and traitors, women sometimes did not even need such labels to be despised and we can easily notice the example of Margaret of Anjou. Even though she was an elite figure, she typified the treatment of a powerful woman who needed to be despised at all costs to prevent the rest of the people from joining the Lancastrians. Even later narratives about the Wars of the Roses, for instance, followed the Yorkist tone in treating her as 'the woman' instead of using her name, or associating her deeds in 1470-1 with 'sorcery or wicchcrafft'.[196] If that was not enough to undermine her support, Edward IV kept referring to her as a 'malicious woman' in 1462; and in the proclamation of April 1471 she was 'a French woman'.[197] As for the treatment of ordinary women, Edward Hall, for example, might have been mocking the 'women' and 'young folks' who cried when they realised the locals had to pay the Amicable Grant in 1525.[198] He also opposed 'wise men' to 'women & such' to dismiss the latter's words against the arguments in favour of the king's divorce.[199] When Cardinal Campeggio arrived in London in October 1528, the same chronicler recorded that 'the common people being ignorant of the truth' were reporting 'folishe wordes', but especially the women.[200] Given all this evidence, then, if the people – influenced by women or not – were so volatile, foolish, unwise, why would any government bother to be responsive to public pressure? How could they ever be dangerous?

First of all, whoever believed in the power of social commotion, presumed that a gentle/noble leader had to guide the masses and, because of this, charismatic and popular nobles were seen with suspicion, especially during and after the Wars of the Roses.[201] Sir

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[195] Bodden, *Language as the Site of Revolt*, p.143. See, for instance, 'uncomely and ungodly manner, outrageous tongue, and "dissidydyus" (*sic*) language': *LP*, XI, 231.
[196] *Three Books of Vergil*, p.115; *GC*, p.214. Witchcraft was also used against Elizabeth Woodville, remembered in *Three Books of Vergil*, p.180.
[197] *Original Letters*, 2nd/1, XLI; *CCR*, II, 703.
[198] *HC*, pp.699.
[199] *HC*, pp.754, 759, 782.
[200] *HC*, p.780.
[201] *FC*, p.659; *HC*, p.278.

John Fortescue, most likely alluding to Richard of York and Warwick's examples, advised that if a king were poorer than his nobles, people would instead follow a wealthy aristocrat.[202] Conversely, if such a leader did not emerge, the people were typically dismissed. For instance, although the people were reported as shocked by the news that Henry VI had died in the Tower in 1471, they were said to have 'found neither head nor tail' to raise them against Edward IV again.[203] In 1497 the fact that the Cornish rebels had no gentlemen or nobles supporting them was mistakenly, and perhaps purposely, reported at least twice.[204] Even though the people were stunned by the possible divorce of their king from 1527, Iñigo de Mendoza claimed it was not possible to attach any faith 'to such popular asseverations, especially as they have no leader to guide them', and should the king carry on with his intent 'the people [would] most probably content themselves with grumbling'. This same ambassador had said a month earlier, reporting people's reaction to the foreign war, that 'no great reliance can be placed on popular opinion', namely, that they were unlikely to have any impact on the matter.[205] Thus, there is a tendency to dismiss the common perspective if there was 'no leadership'. However, 'leader' could mean a number of things, and local riots, large-scale rebellions and dynastic upheaval were all powerful examples of what could happen if the common people were guided towards sedition. In that sense, the potential to be 'harmful' to the rest of the kingdom was always in the background of such characterisations of the people, even when they had no 'head nor tail'.

It was precisely from the perspective that the commons were highly suggestible that their most dangerous aspect emerged. Hall's chronicle sees the Rebellion of Robin of Redesdale, in 1469, as the result of gentlemen who 'reise[d] suche a phantesie in the peoples

[202] Fortescue, *Governance of England*, pp.118-20.
[203] *CSPM*, 220; *CSPV*, I, 434.
[204] *Original Letters*, 1st/1, XV; *CSPM*, 545.
[205] *CSPSp*, III/2, 83, 113. This is quite similar to what Chapuys wrote about the Pilgrimage of Grace early in October 1536: *CSPSp*, V/2, 105.

hartes, that they should thinke that king Edward was neither a just prince to God, nor profitable to the common welth of the realme'.[206] The leaders of the Rebellion of Lincolnshire in 1470, to Jean de Wavrin, were gentlemen attached to the Earl of Warwick 'qui avoient grandement labouré, provocquié et esmeu le peuple des dites parties contre le roi'.[207] These commons were ready to rise if the standard, indirect, representative procedures failed, but it was undoubtedly more threatening when they were led by an 'overmighty subject' in defence of the commonweal.[208] The rebellion of 1489, too, traumatised many contemporaries not because of its leadership, but because of the unfortunate fate of the Earl of Northumberland. Vergil, for instance, said that the commons 'assaulted the earl as though he were the author of their wrongs', and proclaimed that they 'would march to attack the king'.[209] More importantly, this scary event made some believe that there was 'some great Lord' behind the commons and that it would be 'worse than others imagine'.[210] The reign of Henry VIII also began quite concerned with social commotion if we consider at least two examples: Lord Darcy informed Bishop Fox, in August 1509, that there was popular muttering suggesting that Buckingham should be protector of England;[211] and Edmund Dudley highlighted that the commons should not wear any Lord's livery.[212] And in 1536, Richard Morison lamented that dissension had been the ruin of both Greeks and Romans, but his ferocious attacks on the northern rebels illustrate how dangerous they were, and how seriously they were taken.[213] Therefore, it was clearly because the commons were deemed as rude and ignorant that they could be deceivable and easily co-opted by prominent leaders.

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[206] *HC*, pp.272-4.
[207] Wavrin, *Anchiennes Chronicques*, III, pp.26-7.
[208] See: A.J. Pollard, *Warwick the Kingmaker: Politics*, *Power and Fame* (2007), pp.155-65.
[209] *Anglica Historia*, pp.22-3, 38-9. The alarm with this rebellion is also reported in: *GC*, p.242; *HC*, pp.442-3; *RHVIICS*, I, 53.
[210] *CSPV*, I, 553. This has, obviously, troubled some historians: M. Bennett, 'Henry VII and the Northern Rising of 1489', *EHR*, 105/414 (1990), pp.45, 50; Hicks, 'The Yorkshire Rebellion of 1489', p.58; S. Cunningham, *Henry VII* (Abingdon and New York, 2007), pp.463-64.
[211] *LP*, I/1, 157.
[212] Dudley, *Tree of Commonwealth*, pp.15-16, 45-6.
[213] *Morison's Tracts*, pp.88-100, 112-29; *LP*, XI, 1175.

Secondly, it was probably because of the exceptional circumstances of rebellions and riots – when the commons pushed authorities for better justice, less taxation and the advancement of the 'common weal' – that another aspect of the commonalty was highlighted: that they were violent, loud, and dangerous. It is reasonable to suggest, as Dumolyn and Haemers have argued, that people only resorted to physical violence when they failed to influence politics with words.[214] However, given these cultural stereotypes we are seeing – as well as the memory of threatening rebellions –, only the spectre of mob action and spread of rumours was enough to put pressure and fear on the authorities. The commoners who resorted to violence or seditious words might have been symbolically saying that they just wanted to be heard, to negotiate, and to ask for redress.[215] But the emphasis upon the duties of their rulers, on the one hand, probably generated both anti-clerical and anti-aristocratic sentiments among the lower classes. On the other, this constant pressure accompanied by fear of violence and revolt led to a deep suspicion of the commons among the ruling elites.[216] When the people reunited with some gentlemen and clerks for a greater cause – such as 'the commonwealth' and the traditional religion in 1536-7[217] – the many-headed monster of widespread rebellion undoubtedly placed an even higher pressure on the government. Thus, it was because of their volatility to turn into violent gatherings – with or without a clear leadership – that these 'unlearned' commons were also frequently characterised as 'harmful' to politics.

Once again, this characterisation follows closely what we are calling 'signs of exception', but these exceptions – that people were ignorant, potentially co-opted by dangerous leaders, and consequently violent – persistently caused fear among the authorities

[214] Dumolyn & Haemers, 'Subversive Speech', p.86.
[215] Dumolyn *et al*, *Voices of the People*, p.11. That is especially true in urban conflicts, when the commons would sometimes be invited to the deliberations in the town hall, see: C. Liddy, 'Urban Enclosure Riots: Risings of the Commons in English Towns, 1480–1525', *P&P*, 226 (2015), pp.69-71.
[216] See: Bush, 'The Risings of the Commons', p.123.
[217] As Chancellor Audeley was notified in 1536, 'the dangerest insurrection that hath been seen': *LP*, XI, 585.

for various reasons. The fear of turmoil could follow commissions to collect taxation as well as the unsatisfactory use of them. In 1475 the possibility of a rebellion due to Edward IV's agreement with France was widely reported and one chronicler gives a full range of complaints, pointing out, for instance, that the king was in deep anxiety and aware of 'the condition of his people and how easily they might be drawn into rebellions and strange schemes'.[218] Before Richard III's usurpation, Mancini tells us how the execution of William Hastings – 'muche beloved of the common people', adds Vergil[219] – was carefully publicised as it could lead to turmoil instead of provoking what it intended: acquiescence among the people.[220] The alarm caused by the possibility that people would join Perkin Warbeck is also sufficiently demonstrated.[221] Similarly, the actual violence of the Evil May Day riots in 1517 was preceded by what Vergil described as a threatening murmuring 'through the streets and public places'.[222] Because of their numbers or potentially dangerous actions and rumours, the commoners were increasingly noticed during their refusal to pay the Amicable Grant, and especially during the crisis of the 1530s.[223] Although the circumstances in which the people were seen as more harmful than useful were vastly diverse, there is evidence to sustain that people's opinions had to be at least considered and possibly dampened by political dialogue – as we shall see below[224] – otherwise, their potential danger could become a reality.

This section must not serve as evidence that public opinion had no significance at all, or that people were indeed foolish, ignorant, irrelevant, and ultimately harmful to the commonwealth when they expressed their opinions 'freely'. The 'useful' and the 'harmful'

[218] *Crowland Chronicle*, pp.134-9. Similarly in: *CSPM*, 313, 316; *CSPV*, I, 449.
[219] *Three Books of Vergil*, p.179.
[220] Mancini, *Usurpation*, pp.110-3.
[221] *Anglica Historia*, pp.64-5; *HC*, pp.462-6, 472-4.
[222] *Anglica Historia*, pp.242-5.
[223] *HC*, pp.697-702; *Original Letters*, 3rd/2, CXXXI; *LP*, IV/1, 1319. For the 1530s: *CSPSp*, IV/1, 539, 547; IV/2, 1107; V/2, 104, 114; *LP*, VI, 246; VII, 751; *CSPM*, 974, 976.
[224] In Chapter V, pp.281-3.

characterisations were not antithetical. These signs of exceptionality were, again, inherent to depictions of the people in most sources that survive. They emerge because ruling elites wanted to reaffirm themselves and maintain their status as better educated, as well as the status of the commonalty as ignorant and violent. Nonetheless, it was the commonalty's actual pressure on public policy that prompted commentators to react – just as it was their rebellions that underpinned the elite's fears and constructions of stereotypes.[225] These attacks and dismissive comments conceal attempts to keep the commons silent and obedient. Seen from this angle, the people seen as 'harmful' comprised only a different side of a single argument in this chapter: one that stresses the people's significance to the constructions of public opinion. Put differently, when the characterisation of the people was 'useful', they legitimised governments, attributed fame to rulers, and cheered during public ceremonies, and they could never exist in significant numbers if the 'harmful' people were not kept under a discursive and symbolic control. Lastly, it is noteworthy that, just as when people were seen as 'useful', the negative characterisation of the commons remained steady: commentators were no more dismissive in the sixteenth century than they were in the 1460s.

2.3. Motivations and Implications

Thus far, this chapter has charted the uses of 'the people', 'the commons' and a few other linguistic constructions that reveal the uses of public and popular opinion between 1461 and 1537. Overall, Section 1 argued that notions of 'public opinion' typically included 'popular opinion', just as the major terms used for 'the people' included the lower classes. More importantly, we have seen that the difference between political collectivity and 'the commons' did not matter much to the discourses of public opinion because what was 'popular' was also 'public'. The previous two sections have also shown that because this

[225] See explicit examples of fear during the turmoil of 1536-7: *LP*, XI, 678, 714, 927, 947, 987; XII/1, 72, 185, 392. Implied in: *LP*, XI, 692; XII/1, 271.

language of public opinion occurred during 'exceptional' periods, ordinary people were also presented with 'signs of exception'. In these circumstances – taxation, war, usurpations, and others – 'the people' were manipulated and depicted in these narratives as either 'useful' – as a collectivity or representing the collectivity – or 'harmful' – as the 'commonalty' that was unreasonable, foolish, and consequently dangerous. To put it in another way, it was when the collectivity was seen as 'useful' that the people mattered the most to commentators; meanwhile, when the commonalty was seen as 'harmful' was usually when people were behaving as if they mattered, and causing disconcerting reactions that we will keep seeing in the next chapters. What summarises both reactions to the people is the fact that they were an ingredient of politics that could not – despite several attempts – be ignored.

For one thing, the collectivity and publicness of the statements produced by chroniclers, ambassadors, royal officials and others seem to be intended to bestow legitimacy and authority on their narratives and claims. The authority comes from the collectivity, the publicness, the 'common weal', and ultimately from the *vox Dei*. Thus, the language of public opinion was constructed by references to a 'useful' aspect of the people, and although it included the views of the commonalty, it had to be disguised as the view of 'everyone'. To return to the words of Bishop John Russell, the ruling elites who did not beware of public opinion 'grounded in a resonable presydent' could end up in distress. Even though he stressed that princes and lords 'ha[d] the first and principalle undrestondinge', he promptly recognised that if 'the lower people and commens… agre eche to other… thinges can be better'.[226] What mattered to the language of public opinion, therefore, was consensus, and hence, universalising statements. These depictions were the constructions of late medieval public opinion, a frequent fabrication of consensus about the relevant issues which was

[226] In: Chrimes, *Constitutional Ideas*, pp.171-5.

paraded as widespread, and entailed legitimacy and authority to narratives as they chose to report what 'mattered' to the commonweal through the virtual voices of the 'useful' people.

For another, the public was rarely ignored because even when seeing the people as 'harmful' to the unity, these sources seemed to seek legitimacy and authority. Any contemporary reader would probably share the cultural values of the writer and agree about the kinds of behaviour that were 'harmful' and needed to be symbolically despised. Moreover, this language and attitude of the 'harmful' people was also the essence of popular opinion which would be ultimately labelled as 'false rumour', 'seditious language', 'grudge', and treason. Nobles such as the Earl of Warwick during the early and mid-stages of the Wars of the Roses, the Duke of Buckingham in 1483, the conspirators that threatened Henry VII's reign, and courtiers who resisted Henry VIII's reforms in the 1530s would probably agree with these ways of labelling popular opinion, but they had particular reasons to support the commons' views. Even while doing so, they might have still agreed with the satirised view of the 1459 tract *Somnium Vigilantis*: 'Hit is a shrewyde consequence: The peple favoureth [certain opinions], ergo thay be good'.[227] By attacking dissenters, these narratives revealed they cared for unity, hierarchy, obedience, and consensus. They might not have intended to legitimise such opinions even when they reproduced bills and ballads. Nonetheless, what these commentators involuntarily did while attacking the 'harmful' attitudes of people was to turn them into political actors. They were including popular ideas in what was indeed a political debate with a precise political language. They acquired legitimacy and authority by dominating the written account that despised the commons, but they automatically gave agency to part of the commonalty who was behaving as if it mattered to the same debate. In other words, even when the people's views seemed divisive – rather than representing the consensus and the collectivity – they were still important to commentators and rulers. On the

[227] Gilson, 'A Defence of the Proscription', p.521.

one hand, these sources gained legitimacy precisely by denouncing division. On the other, they paradoxically attended to the complaints of the people, even as they tried to deny them any legitimacy.

Finally, regardless of discursive strategies and the motivations of commentators, rulers throughout this period seem to have cared about their people's inner feelings towards public policy – partly because it mattered to the rulers' reputation, and partly because the concern with a proper policy was genuine. In the articles sent by Prince Edward to the Earl of Warwick in early 1470, it is stated that if the king were compelled to 'live upon his commones' for mismanagement of his finances, he would lose 'the hertes of his subgiettes'.[228] Richard III is reported to have lost the 'hearts of the people' by October 1483, which in turn developed Buckingham's rebellion.[229] Edmund Dudley, in his *Tree of Commonwealth*, similarly argued that 'cruell counsell ever provokyth the ire of god [and] The covetouse counsell shall lose the hartes of the subjectes'.[230] When people refused the Amicable Grant in 1525, Hall's chronicle suggests that people blamed Wolsey generally and it was him that would 'plucke the peoples hartes from the king'.[231] And in 1532, one of the Lawyer's responses to the Divine's arguments in *A Glasse of Truthe* was that it would move the hearts of true subjects towards accepting the king's divorce.[232] Thus, popular opinion was not merely a matter of discourse about depicting people as 'harmful' when they were critics of the government, and seeing them as 'useful' when they collaborated with the appearance of consensus. The ruling elites did not want to 'lose their hearts' because that meant their obedience, their trust – and not even foreign leaders would want to risk losing the 'affections of the English people'.[233] Even though we have seen that they show up more frequently in

[228] *JVB*, pp.222-3.
[229] *Vitellius A XVI*, p.191.
[230] Dudley, *Tree of Commonwealth*, p.27, 30.
[231] *HC*, p.698.
[232] *A Glasse of Truthe*, C3v-C4r.
[233] Don Iñigo de Mendoza advising Charles V about defending Catherine of Aragon in 1528: *CSPSp*, III/2, 550.

what looked as exceptional moments, the rhetoric of these records helps us to reconstruct the patterns in these narratives, to understand them better and to provide an essential background of discursive strategies of public opinion to the following chapters.

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We have reached an elaborate definition of the *animi popularium* and of who 'the people' were. We saw that the uses of 'the people' and 'the commons' that could stand for 'public opinion' were mainly a fabrication that attributed legitimacy and authority to contemporary narratives – though they also give some sense of what might have been indeed a public debate given the importance of the matters described. This fabrication also has other two layers: the uses of popular opinion sometimes reveal a concern with the political collectivity, and sometimes with the 'commonalty' as a section of the collectivity. However, we have also seen that the issues considered by both the 'collectivity' and the 'commonalty' were virtually the same; that the social distinctions within such rhetoric do not matter much; and that the vocabulary was used interchangeably. Therefore, despite the discourses, popular opinion was indeed considered as quite widespread and ultimately 'public'. The impression that people were more often recorded in 'exceptional' periods might be explained by the nature of the fragmented sources that survive, but this nature strengthens the perspective that less-privileged people were an integrated and relevant part of public opinion. In sum, this chapter has sought to propose several arguments within a larger scale: seeing the people as a source of public pressure; pointing out that the most humble opinions also mattered to and affected the 'public'; and suggesting that negative depictions of the people should not lead us to a limited view of their role.

The fact that a great variety of writers in this period took up their pens to record collective voices or to speak as/for the people cannot, therefore, be overlooked. We have

noticed that there is an implicit dialectic in all this rhetoric, as there seems to be a struggle between what these writers were recording, what the actual popular 'voices' might have been and what the possible intention of such records was. Thus, this chapter has sought to explore the wide range of ramifications of the concept of 'the people' and how they can inform us about the public and popular opinion that resulted from the same dialectic interplay. Despite the attempts to define these concepts, it is virtually impossible to restrict 'the people' to 'the commons', or 'the commons' to 'the poor'. To a certain extent, the uses of the concept were references to an abstraction of what the people might have been, in which sources appeal to the legitimacy of the public as a way of substantiating their own claims, narratives, policies.

A further aim of this chapter was to analyse what the frequency of such references to the people might tell us. We have seen that these depictions and re-uses of people's opinions and actions took place in what might be seen as exceptional moments, but that they both demonstrated that 'popular opinion' was considered as 'public' and showed that positive and negative depictions were steady across the period. On the one hand, the people were as essential to the Wars of the Roses as they were under what is traditionally seen as a more authoritative government in the 1530s.[234] On the other, the people were also 'harmful' and had to be despised equally by the elites of the 1460s and 1470s as they were by Thomas More, Polydore Vergil, Edward Hall, and Richard Morison. In any case, these people comprised two aspects of the same story: one that accumulated in public pressure; one in which the 'harmful' attitudes of the people were always kept in mind by governments of this period; one in which the same 'harmful' people were seen as rumour-mongers and keen on using seditious words; and one in which the 'useful' people were called to legitimise public ceremonies and royal policy just as in the narratives analysed here. All of these ramifications will be discussed in the following chapters.

[234] This will be analysed in more detail below, but see: G. Bernard, 'The Tyranny of Henry VII', in Gunn & Bernard, *Authority and Consent*, p.119. For later: Fox, 'Rumour, news and popular political opinion', p.598.

CHAPTER II

'The false, fainyd fables, and disclandars': Rumours and Popular Opinion

Rumour races, is swift, flourishes by speed, gains strength as she goes, reaches the sky, hides in the clouds and flies through shadows, cities, and kingdoms. These are a few of the words to describe the ancient goddess Fama in Virgil's *Aeneid*.[1] For the Greeks and Romans, the goddess could attribute both notoriety and scandalous rumours to people; and several ancient and medieval authors thoroughly commented on the ability of rumours to 'run and fly', such as Hesiod, Ovid and Isidore of Seville.[2] These characteristics are also crucial to understanding descriptions of rumours in the late medieval period. Along with the duality between fame and slander, these qualities of rumour survived not only in the way people dealt with the social phenomenon but also in the way the vocabulary evolved. The thin line between what is notable and what is slanderous – or, *in extremis,* seditious – cuts across the analysis of the sources in this chapter because it was precisely this difficult distinction that provoked fear and anxiety in people and rulers.

Late medieval and early modern historians have substantially covered the grounds for the discussion of rumours and it has been thoroughly recognised that the government's concern with rumours, seditious speech and slander reflects the extent of public discussion on political matters – pushing against preconceived notions that only politically active classes were engaged in public discussions of political matters.[3] It was through rumour, prophecy, ballads, street theatre and other genres that 'non-elites evolved their own

[1] Virgil, *The Aeneid*, tr. J. Dryden (Auckland, 2009), pp.135-46, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oxford/reader.action?ppg=5&docID=432360&tm=1540637987400 (03 Aug. 2019). For an analysis of these depictions of rumours, see: H.-J. Neubauer, *The Rumour: A Cultural History*, trans. C. Braun (1999), chs. 1-3.
[2] See: C. Gauvard, 'Rumeur et Stéreotypes à la Fin du Moyen Age', in *Actes des Congrès de la Société des Historiens Médiévistes de l'Enseignement Supérieur Public*, 24 (Avignon, 1993), p.157.
[3] Here I rely mainly on: Watts, 'Popular Politics', pp.109-10.

languages for describing contemporary events' – and it was above all through rumours and seditious language that common people took part in politics.[4] So much so, that words such as 'clamour' and 'murmur' made it possible for contemporaries to, rhetorically at least, reify public opinion and prompt interactions between social groups to avoid collective actions.[5] Part of this attitude of reifying public opinion was done by chroniclers who referred to the content of rumours to help with the shaping of their narratives.[6] Another part was recorded by the government while trying to act rationally towards rumours and people's alleged inclination to sedition – revealing once more that the cultural difference between rulers and ruled was not as huge as it might seem.[7] Therefore, most rumours that survived in written records did so because they happened to be socially and politically significant – their veracity mattered as little to contemporaries as they do to this analysis.[8] Lastly, we shall see, there is the physical part of the phenomenon, the constant noise of people talking to each other asking for news, swapping stories, and exchanging views – often through the channels of traders, travellers, and watermen.[9] Taking all this into account, the study of rumours is the study of semi-concealed versions of public discussion and, ultimately, of popular opinion.

All these considerations are significant to the interpretation of the sources in this chapter. However, while there were many ways of reporting rumours, as well as numerous consequences and responses to them, historians of this period have not widely considered

[4] Harris, *Politics of the Excluded*, pp.9-13; Shagan, 'Rumours and Popular Politics', p.30; Pollard, 'The People, Politics and the Constitution', p.318; Cressy, *Dangerous Talk*, p.37; Scase, 'Bill-Casting and Political Discourse', pp.239, 246.
[5] C. Fletcher, 'Rumour, Clamour, Murmur and Rebellion: Public Opinion and its uses before and after the Peasant's Revolt (1381)' in Herrer *et al*, *La Comunidad Medieval*, p.209; J. Dumolyn, 'The Vengeance of the Commune: Sign Systems of Popular Politics in Medieval Bruges', in Ibidem, p.255.
[6] As in: *Three Books of Vergil*, pp.117-8; *GC*, pp.206-7; *FC*, p.657.
[7] Gauvard, 'Rumeur et Stéreotypes', pp.171, 177; Wood, *Riot*, *Rebellion and Popular Politics*, pp.8-11. See also above, n.74, p.21, and the nuances discussed on pp.41-2.
[8] See similar claims in: X. Nadrigny, 'Rumeur et Opinion Publique à Toulouse à la fin du Moyen Age', *Annales du Midi*, 121/265 (2009), pp.27-8; C. Wickham, 'Gossip and Resistance among the Medieval Peasantry', *P&P*, 160 (Aug. 1998), p.11.
[9] For these channels of communication: Fox, *Oral and Literature Culture*, pp.336, 346-351. This is also an alarming problem to the spread of heresy: J. Fines, 'Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Coventry and Lichfield, 1511-12', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 14/2 (1963), p.170.

the broader social and political phenomenon they represent. For one thing, the current works available are articles with a precise focus which is not to enquire into continuity and change, let alone to place rumour within a wider communication system as this chapter does within this thesis. For another, some have either pursued aspects of rumours that are not available in the sources – such as trying to find a more structured political agenda in rumour-mongering[10] – or have treated the commons as more likely to consume rumours for their 'credulity and volatility'.[11] We have seen above that rumours are an integrated part of any society, that they are an inherent part of a communication system and that they are more natural and human than we usually assume.[12] Thus, in order to approach them from this perspective, this chapter is concerned with both the understandings of rumour and their implications to society.

We will explore this problem in three ways that are constituent parts of what might be called an 'anxiety loop' – that is, a social feedback that surrounds the birth and consequences of rumour.[13] Firstly, we shall survey the different words through which rumour and misinformation often appear in contemporary sources, namely, 'fame', 'rumour', 'clamour', 'grudge', 'murmur', and associated descriptions. By treating this vocabulary as a communication system, we might be able to access the understandings of rumour in these sources and their relationship with popular opinion. Then, Section 2 addresses the implications of rumour to the social loop of anxiety from a broader psychological and sociological point of view, analysing the variance of rumours in relation to specific contexts and how the volume of recorded rumours might change over the period. Finally, Section 3 examines the last feature of this social loop of anxiety that led the ruling elites of this period

[10] Partly implied by Walker, 'Rumour, Sedition and Popular Protest', pp.31-65.
[11] Ross, 'Rumour, Propaganda and Popular Opinion', pp.16-17.
[12] See above, pp.22-3.
[13] The issue of 'anxiety' in this chapter refers back to the discussion of psychology and sociology of rumour presented in the Introduction, pp.22-3 and n.82.

to label some of these rumours as 'seditious'. By putting the concept of sedition side by side with the nature of rumour, we will better understand both phenomena.

1. The Vocabulary of Rumour

As several historians of late medieval and early modern Europe have shown, rumours played an important role in the politics of the period, putting pressure on the public sphere before any action was taken.[14] The claims made in Chapter I, that commoners were invariably included in considerations about the 'public', complements this point: they were the 'simple persons' often described as rumour-mongers and easily deceivable – but who were rarely ignored because they were also potentially dangerous.[15] These rumours that commoners allegedly spread were referred to by a variety of words such as 'fame', 'rumour', 'grudge', 'clamour', 'noise', and 'murmur', as well as by some other ways of describing similar expressions related to them or to the casting of bills, public complaints or 'idle speech'. In order to understand this wide range of vocabulary and how it compares to the political language of this period, we must examine these expressions together. It is only by doing this that we can avoid misjudging the role of rumours and popular pressure between the fifteenth century and the Reformation. Anthony Pollard, for example, has partly dismissed the analysis of rumours proposed by Simon Walker merely because the 'better sorts' had a louder voice in politics than ordinary people.[16] Christopher Duggan has analysed sedition and treason without giving a proper treatment to the role of rumours in the concept and treatment of seditious language.[17] Primarily, the amount of evidence that survived, the hysterical answers

[14] Gauvard, 'Rumeur et Stéreotypes', pp.157-177; W.M. Ormrod, 'Murmur, Clamour and Noise: Voicing Complaint and Remedy in Petitions to the English Crown, c.1300–c.1460', in Idem, G. Dodd and A. Musson (eds.), *Medieval Petitions: Grace and Grievance* (Woodbridge, 2009); Walker, 'Rumour, Sedition and Popular Protest', pp.31-65; Watts, 'Pressure of the Public'; Cooper, *Propaganda*, p.112; Cressy, *Dangerous Talk*, p.37; Sizer, 'Murmur, Clamor, Tumult', pp.13-14.
[15] See above, pp.70-8.
[16] Pollard, 'The People and Parliament', p.5.
[17] Duggan, 'Thought Control', pp.9, 32-5, 63, 85-99, 173-4, 245.

they prompted and the possible intrinsic consequences of rumours should not be overlooked as they are always part of political societies. Rumours were often considered a midway between the general expressions of the people and open manifestations of seditious words and rebellion: they could be seen as turning into an insurrection against 'the comyn wele and pollicie' in 1469 as much as they were recognised to be the cause of alienation from loyalty, giving room to strife, commotion and sedition in 1536.[18] Thus, this section will focus on a survey of the words that informed contemporary understandings of rumour, and on establishing that this range of vocabulary choices – far from being a list of synonyms – is revealing of the importance of public opinion in contemporary written sources, especially in times of political struggle. We shall see that while the understandings of rumours are crucial to interpreting popular opinion, rumour coexists with other forms of popular opinion that were either more threatening or more ambiguously treated.

Before approaching the vocabulary of rumours directly, we might briefly observe the practice of exchanging news in this period, as that was probably how rumours originated as well as one of the ways through which they travelled. A while ago, John Armstrong demonstrated a few instances of the speed of the distribution of news, especially those about wars, battlefields and usurpations. He concluded that news based on 'certain knowledge' was usually called 'tidings', even though most people relied on hearsay for this as well as for rumours.[19] 'Certain knowledge' does not seem to be always the case but the use of hearsay and rumours to replace news demonstrates that we need to rid ourselves, as Tim Harris has urged, of the assumption that to spread political ideas people needed literacy and 'popular' press.[20]

[18] *CLB*, II, p.340; *TRP*, 168. See also the 'grudge' reported in May 1536: *LP*, XI, 891.
[19] C.A.J. Armstrong, 'Some examples of the Distribution and Speed of News in England at the Time of the Wars of the Roses', in R.W. Hunt *et al* (eds.), *Studies in Medieval History Presented to F. M. Powicke* (Oxford, 1948), pp.432-4.
[20] Harris, *Politics of the Excluded*, p.8.

Moreover, among the elites rumours circulated just as much as among the ordinary people, and their written form most likely developed in a similar manner – first orally, then written, or vice-versa. Adam Fox has shown the written origins of political rumours circulating in Henry VIII's reign and later, suggesting that they could evolve from both private letters and public communication – such as misunderstanding a sermon or a royal proclamation.[21] But the opposite direction is also real, that is, rumours could come 'from below' and reach private letters, as well as the records of local and central authorities. The Paston family, for instance, reproduced a great deal of the local 'noise' without openly distinguishing between 'tidings' ('true' news) and 'rumours' (potentially falsehoods) – they were all part of the news that needed to be reproduced. In September 1471, for instance, they reported 'tidings' side by side with several sentences of what 'some men' were saying about recent events – reproducing a great deal of uncertainty.[22] They equally picked up 'foule noise' over the county, the grudge of the people in fragile contexts, their 'great fears', the 'reports', or simply the news.[23] Hence they resorted to what 'it was told' or what 'it was said' to them, sometimes 'secretely' such as about disloyalty in Calais in 1462, sometimes referring to 'many tales' that 'non accorth (*sic*) with [each] other'.[24] Uncertainty is sometimes reproduced by different opinions in the same letter, such as during the Lincolnshire rebellion of 1470, when 'it [was] supposyd' that Warwick was going with the king to the north and 'some men' said it would be a good idea, others asserted 'it doeth harme'.[25] Other kinds of murmuring of 'some men' can be found all over the Paston correspondence at least until 1506 and there is only one example of 'it [is] seid for certein', dated 6 November 1473.[26] We cannot merely say that the writers of these letters reproduced uncertainty and, therefore,

[21] Fox, *Oral and Literature Culture*, pp.367-8.
[22] *Paston Letters*, V, 782. See also: V, 828.
[23] Ibidem, III, 470, 482, 497; IV, 593, 599; VI, 1059;
[24] Ibidem, IV, 531, 594; V, 771; VI, 1038; 1061.
[25] Ibidem, V, 742. Other similar confusion was written to John Paston in March 1470: V, 743.
[26] Ibidem, V, 781, 795, 830, 834, 841, 900; VI, 1012, 1081.

rumours, indiscriminately. They did so because they needed news and although the truth was certainly better than uncertainties, spreading information was the priority in order to inform others about what 'everyone' was saying and to prompt reactions or better-informed answers. Rumour was, then, an attempt to make sense of events when the real facts were not yet known; it might replace news to a gentry family just as to the commonalty and chroniclers.

Thus, there is compelling evidence to draw at least two introductory statements from these letters that are crucial to approaching the vocabulary of rumour in this section. First, the anxiety of not knowing the facts led people to conjecture what was happening in London, in the north, on the Continent, or wherever the development of events might affect their lives. It was this feeling that possibly led to the reproduction of uncertainties and, consequently, rumours. And second, the information being copied and exchanged was not only within the social circle of its reporter; it derived from hearsay either among the commons or above them, but certainly circulated in both writing and oral forms, crossing social boundaries. This dynamic is precisely the one that originates the descriptions we shall see here. Such a rich vocabulary of rumours reflects an intrinsic relationship that involves reputation, hearsay, actual and metaphorical noises, rumours, news, and sedition – above all in uncertain conjectures of a political crisis that most likely affected people's lives and ideas.

Two aspects revealed by this survey guide the organisation of the following sections. First, even though these words might sometimes be synonyms, they are all chiefly bound by the fact that they are popular voices that are perceived and recorded because of their actual or metaphorical sounds – what the contemporaries called 'noise'. In that sense, 'noise' – more than 'rumour' – might be semantically associated with all these words, and only adjective or adverbial qualifications might reveal the intensity and intentions of these sounds. The second aspect that explains the organisation of these sections is how these noises are more often associated to qualify and characterise popular voices.

1.1. Fame

The word fame might usefully introduce this analysis because it was the only one that had both positive and negative connotations.[27] To refer once again to the duality of the ancient goddess, *fama* could imply both slanderous rumours and good reputation. In a society based on honour and public reputation, contemporaries used both 'fame' and 'common fame' more or less in the sense of what is being named here as public opinion, and even if that was sometimes localised, they also used these expressions to report news.[28] Yet, the uses and understandings of 'fame' were still as complicated in this period as the ancient Romans and Greeks thought.

First of all, the use of *fama* as reputation was manipulated in the same way that sources advanced 'useful' characterisations of the people in Chapter I, that is, as a powerful rhetorical tool – but in this case a judicial one too.[29] In ecclesiastical courts, for example, *fama publica* was accepted as the report of the locality and often treated as part of the official evidence that prompted inquisitions and needed to be convincingly contradicted by the accused/defendant.[30] Interestingly, this was also true in respect of two of the worst crimes one could commit in this society: heresy and treason.[31] In the records of the King's Bench, too, phrases such as '*gestu et fama*', '*publica vox et fama*' and '*certificamus quod per commonem vocem et famam*' are found in the inquiries concerning people's local reputation

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[27] See: Fenster & Smail, *Fama*, p.1-9.

[28] Such as the plot to set free the earl of Warwick and Perkin Warbeck in 1499, described 'aftir the common fame': *Vitellius A XVI*, pp.291-2. Similarly in *GC*, pp.291-2. In the records of Nottingham we see the use of both 'the commen voice and fame' to justify complaint to the civic authorities: *Records of Nottingham*, III, pp.358-9. In 1530, Cromwell used 'the fame is' (as in 'the news is') to report the death of Luther: *LP*, IV/3, 6391. In December 1530, Archbishop Cranmer wrote 'such newis as be here nowe *in fame* among us (emphasis added)' to report the Nun of Kent: *Original Letters*, 3rd/2, CCXXXI.

[29] See above, pp.62-9.

[30] For example in: *Ecclesiastical Courts in London*, xxiv, xxvii, liv, lxxix, cxxiii, clxxiv, clxxviii, ccvi, ccxi, ccxxxi, ccl, cclix, ccxli, cclxv, cclxxii, ccxcvii, ccxcviii, ccc, ccciii, cccvii, cccx; *Kent Heresy Proceedings*, pp.110-1, 113-4; *Select STAC*, I, pp.37, 162-3; *Select Cases in the Court of Requests 1497-1569*, ed. I.S. Leadam (Selden Society 12, 1898), pp.4-5; *Select Cases on Defamation*, 23, 26; *Norwich Consistory Court*, 6, 7, 12, 107, 144; C1/11/280. An answer of 'defamous report', for instance, is alleged in: SC1/51/166. See an analysis of the role of *fama* in courts in: I. Forrest, 'The Transformation of Visitation in Thirteenth-Century England', *P&P*, 221 (Nov. 2013), pp.21-3.

[31] I. Forrest, *The Detection of Heresy in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, 2005), pp.150-1, 198.

in order to support indictments.[32] In that sense, *fama* as 'reputation' and a local tale – even if based on slanderous rumours – was an intrinsic feature of legal proceedings.[33] Even though judges and people alike knew it was dangerously related to slander, it was accepted because it was either fabricated or was under the control of the local authorities.

While *fama* was a 'legitimate' and controllable collective voice in court proceedings, the widespread reputation of political figures was an uncontrollable form of public opinion. After all, the dynamics of reputation played out on a 'national' scale if we consider the emblematic fates of defamed kings and queens, such as Richard III and Anne Boleyn. Their defamation was firmly attached to the circulation of rumours about seemingly uncertain facts: the death of the princes in the Tower in the summer of 1483; or Anne Boleyn's alleged adultery in 1532-3.[34] Richard III was later reported to have 'never preferred fame or honestye before ambicion tyranny and mischiefe'; while Henry VII ultimately achieved 'honour & fame'.[35] Rulers could also look for 'fame by military skill' such as Henry VIII in the Italian Wars, or Wolsey 'commemorating his fame' with a new building that could only 'enhance his own empty glory'.[36] Edmund Dudley paradoxically advised that 'hit [wa]s unfitting and inconvenient to advance to promocion any defamyd persons'.[37] This spectrum of the meaning of fame is evidently accompanied by what sources call 'calumnies',

[32] Specific examples related to treason: KB9/297/90; 317/72, 94, 115; 427/50, 54; 976/123-4, 117. For the other expressions: KB9/378/32, 411/57, 445/18, 445/18, 453/335. Suspicious persons were often said to be '*de mala fama et mala gubernacione*', for instance: KB9/530/12. For other similar uses: KB9/358/127; 490/15; 500/28; 502/35; 525/17; 527/35; 528/32, 37; 533/9, 16; 535/19; 536/23-4.

[33] This has been discussed in detail by several scholars: C. Gauvard, '*Fama* explicite et *fama* implicite', in Genet, *La Légitimité Implicite II*, pp.39-55; C. Gauvard, 'Introduction', in M. Billoré and M. Soria (ed.), *La Rumeur au Moyen Âge* (Rennes, 2011), pp.23-31; Cressy, *Dangerous Talk*, pp.5, 37, 44; Scase, 'Bill-casting and Political Discourse', p.246; S. McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture in late Medieval London* (Philadelphia, 2006), p.175; Swanson, 'Oral and Personal History', pp.203-20

[34] For Richard III, see: A.F. Sutton, '"A curious searcher for our weal public": Richard III, piety, chivalry and the concept of the "Good Prince"', in P.W. Hammond (ed.), *Richard III* (1986), p.77; and C. Ross, *Richard III* (1981). For Anne Boleyn: E. Ives, *The life and death of Anne Boleyn* (Oxford, 2004).

[35] *HC*, p.421; *GC*, p.286; *FC*, pp.678, 690. See a similar use in 1533: *LP*, VI, 433.

[36] *Anglica Historia*, pp.160-1, 224-5, 316-7. The 'building' is mentioned in 1513-4, but it is probably Hampton Court, which started to be constructed in 1515.

[37] Dudley, *Tree of Commonwealth*, p.27.

'disclaunder', and also 'noise'.[38] Therefore, political reputation depended on fame, but this 'fame' also relied heavily on rumours – that is, rumours about military leadership, honour, proper counselling, piety or wise policy. While power-holders might try to construct their fame before the public, they might find that their efforts were undermined or corrupted by 'noise' and 'slander'. In short, popular opinion was the source of both threatening rumours and of 'good fame', which helps us to understand why popular muttering was so important.

Moreover, that is also why the use of 'the fame went' was just another way of writing 'rumours ran'. The *Great Chronicle* is a typical example of the kinds of rumours described by this expression. The chronicler includes in this fame 'running' the reputation of kings (1471, 1485), international relations (1468, 1475, 1497, 1510, 1512), the oppressive administration of Richard Empson and Edmund Dudley, and even a felon who organised Robin Hood plays but robbed the people in 1502.[39] In Hall's chronicle, similar uses are found such as when, by the summer of 1527, 'began a fame' in London about the validity of the king's marriage, being soon spread among the common people and abroad; or when the Nun of Kent became well known to people in the south and government authorities.[40] In sum, this survey reveals that most chroniclers indeed used fame as a direct synonym of rumour, hence the use of auxiliary verbs such as 'begin', 'spread', 'run', 'blow', 'go', 'fly', 'disperse', 'divulge', and 'spring'.[41] At the same time, it does not follow that these examples of running 'fame' constituted 'false and seditious rumours': rather, they were notable events that spread quickly among the people and one could as well label them as 'news'. The anxiety apparent in such descriptions, however, comes from the 'movement': while information is running or

[38] Calumnies about the Woodvilles: J. Gairdner, *The Life and Reign of Richard III* (Cambridge, 1898), pp.338-9. Slander and 'noise' treated as similar in a few Chancery proceedings: C1/11/280, 284-290. Noise and slander are found together in: *CLB*, II, pp.447, 535-6; *YHB*, I, p.359; *RHVIICS*, III, 63.
[39] *GC*, pp.204, 208-9, 220, 223, 226, 238, 240-1, 253, 258, 277-8, 318-9, 320, 348-51, 352-65, 377, 379.
[40] *HC*, pp.728, 808-10.
[41] *Three Books of Vergil*, pp.121-2; *Anglica Historia*, p.189; *FC*, pp.657, 662, 669, 670-1; *HC*, p.285-6, 290-3, 303, 326-7, 350-1, 362, 379, 380-1, 407, 419-20, 728, 808-9; *GC*, pp.236-7; *Crowland Chronicle*, pp.170-1; *Vitellius A XVI*, pp.203-4; *Skelton Poems*, p.96.

flying and satisfying people's appetite for news, it cannot settle, be controlled, or re-used for anything.[42] Even while it is in motion, it can end up settling as either good or slanderous fame – depending on the circumstances, the facts themselves, and the people's anxieties about the news they received and spread. That is perhaps the reason why court proceedings accepted an established reputation as proof of facts and intentions, and prosecuted the others that were in motion and could create sedition, as we shall see in Section 3.

1.2. Rumour and Noise

Unlike the uses of fame as reputation, a rumour is primarily an oral phenomenon which explains why the word fame was often associated with movement and speed when it meant rumour. Despite this fluid impression given by sources, we only know, of course, about the rumours that settled enough to have become written memories (in chronicles) or about temporary concerns of people and authorities (such as in official sources and letters).[43] Although some versions of rumour are at times too biased to be taken as 'actual' rumours among the common people, they can indeed be seen as 'public knowledge' when several sources about the same rumour survive.[44] At certain times, such as in the early Reformation, 'many versions and glosses of rumour circulated simultaneously', so much so that this chapter would not be sufficient to deal with them.[45] That profusion of rumours arose because, to highlight the argument being advanced here, people tried to cope with reality and change

[42] Further to the examples in this paragraph: More, *History of King Richard III*, p.53; *The Chronicle of John Hardyng…* (1543, facsimile: Amsterdam and Norwood, NJ, 1976), ff.107v, 111r; Cavendish, *Life of Wolsey*, pp.62, 148; *CSPSp*, IV/1, 539; *LP*, VI, 1148; XI, 1019; XII/1, 70, 201.

[43] For the written issue of an oral phenomenon, the review of De Craecker-Dussart is thought-provoking: 'La Rumeur: une source d'informations que l'historien ne peut pas négliger. A propos d'un recueil recent', *Le Moyen Âge: Revue d'Histoire et de Philologie*, 118/1 (2012), p.170.

[44] An example of a constructed rumour, according to Greg Walker, is John Skelton's depiction of Cardinal Wolsey: *John Skelton and the Politics of the 1520s* (Cambridge, 1988), pp.185-6.

[45] Quoting: Shagan, 'Rumours and Popular Politics', p.35. The rumours in 1536-7, for example, were about war, invasion, rebellion, new taxes (on property, bread and animals), new duty on the export of wool, new tributes to the king (at christening, marriage and burial), a possible pilgrimage being made by the king and on Cromwell having fled the country or been killed: Idem, Ibidem, p.49. Most of them are in: *LP*, XI, 854.

through idle speech, grumbling and rumour-spreading. Whenever circumstances were critical, rumours proliferated as a reaction to make sense of events – and that explains why the word 'rumour' was more frequently used in comparison to the others surveyed in this section.[46] As a result of the contexts in which rumours naturally grow, another ambiguous meaning emerges: further to being a synonym of fame (or translation of *fama*), there is the Latin meaning of *rumor* as both a 'noise' in motion (as news) and the meaning associated with rebellion, that is, a 'seditious' rumour.[47] While it is pertinent to leave the problem of sedition to Section 3, we can briefly analyse the understandings of both 'rumour' and 'noise' here.

Unsurprisingly, rumours that were related to noises, and 'ran' like 'fame' are handled by commentators in the same manner. However, they are accompanied by a broader range of verbs and qualifications: they 'reign' (July 1469), 'spread' (1470), 'run' (1471, 1483), are 'great in the realm' (1483), are 'sinister' (1483), 'grow daily' (1485), are 'erroneous', are a 'vaine fable' (1492), 'fly' (1501), 'wax greatly / rail openly / arise' (1525), are 'evil' (c. 1526-30), are 'mummeries' (1527), 'spring' (1527), are 'ill' (1533), are 'afloat' (1535), and are associated with slander, noise, prophecy, bruit, and frequently with the common people and 'common vulgar' (1533).[48] Still, this use of rumour not only as 'news' but also as a noisy 'buzzing' of the people is different from the contemporary understandings of fame in the sense that it necessarily implies the voices that might lead to slander and gossip – not only a possibly silent (or less noisy) 'common fame' or established reputation. The

[46] See Appendices 1-2 below, p.314.
[47] 'Rumour', *DMLBS* (22 July 2019). I refer also here to: Glauvard, 'Rumeur et Stéreotypes', p.161.
[48] *Paston Letters*, V, 719, 830; VI, 1081; *HC*, pp.277, 379, 407, 431, 464, 728; *Three Books of Vergil*, pp.124, 181-2, 189; Wavrin, *Anchiennes Chronicques*, III, p.128; *Arrivall of Ed.IV*, p.21; *Plumpton Correspondence*, 31; *Cely Letters*, 200; Mancini, *Usurpation*, pp.88-9, 98-101, 128-9; *Crowland Chronicle*, pp.176-7; *Anglica Historia*, pp.12-5, 74-5, 222-3; *GC*, pp.246, 296; *YCR*, II, p.100; *Original Letters*, 3rd/1, CXXVIII; 3rd/2, CLIV; *LP*, IV/1, 1471; IV/3, 5190, App.39; VI, 586, 1336, 1514; VII, 252, 874; *CSPSp*, III/2, 37; IV/1, 211, 422, 509; IV/2, 1053; V/1, 109, 156; V/2, 55 *CSPM*, 833, 843, 850. For more examples not quoted: *Brief Latin Chronicle*, pp.175, 280; *LP*, X, 865, 873; XI, 569, 712, 785, 826, 926, 971, 1086, 1363, 1378; XII/1, 6, 40, 46, 64, 70, 201, 271, 380, 392, 456, 481, 533, 701, 849, 1000, 1087, 1194-5, 1255; XII/2, 264; *Chronicle of King Henry VIII of England… Written in Spanish*, ed. and trans. Marin A. Sharp Hume (1889), p.73.

word ‘obloquy’ is here and there used in the same way, such as when Fabyan describes ‘what obloquy ran’ after Edward IV’s marriage in 1464; when Hall mentions the ‘great obloquy’ that Richard III ‘was in’ right before his usurpation; or when Archbishop Cranmer wrote about the current ‘great obloquy’ and ‘misreport’ about himself and Hugh Latimer in 1534.[49] Rumours are concurrently disguised in the uncertainty of chroniclers’ ‘reports’ (sometimes ‘opprobrious’ or ‘common’) and in the expression ‘it was said’ throughout the period.[50] In addition, it was rarely the case that contemporaries would use the word ‘rumour’ to what they thought was a complete falsehood; it was perhaps more natural for them to use it as the uncertain ‘news and tidings’, than to use it for lies.[51] Hence the apparent necessity of sometimes distinguishing rumours from ‘false’ rumours and tales in sources.[52] In any case, they are always reported with a certain level of suspicion.

Furthermore, rumours that were intimately related to the metaphorical noises they produced could easily assume the words ‘noise’ and ‘bruit’ instead. As such, these noises could be intensified as ‘gret’ or ‘foule’, be associated with doubtfulness as ‘mervelous’, as well as be used as a verb in the constructions of ‘it is noised’ or ‘brutyd’.[53] Curiously, bruit and noise can also be found together with ‘rumour’ and qualify local popular opinion as the ‘bruit of the country’ – a claim made by Bishop Fisher about the Nun of Kent’s reputation in 1534.[54] The main distinction between choosing rumour and noise here seems to be guided

[49] *FC*, p.654; *HC*, pp.351, 353, 355; *LP*, VII, 30.
[50] As above, pp.89-90. And: *FC*, p.657; *Three Books of Vergil*, p.167-8, 194-5, 221-2, 225; *HC*, p.324, 469, 588-9, 817; Mancini, *Usurpation*, pp.70-3, 84-9; *GC*, pp.232, 236-7, 336; *Crowland Chronicle*, pp.174-5; *Vitellius A XVI*, p.257; *Anglica Historia*, pp.224-5, 234-5; *LP*, IV/3, 6652; VI, 89, 246; VII, 140, 149, 287, 824; XII/1, 946; *WC*, pp.42-3, 53; Rastell, *Pastime of People*, pp.286, 291; W. Worcester, *Annales Rerum Anglicarum*, in *Letters and Papers Illustrative of the Wars of the English in France During the Reign of Henry VI*, ed. J. Stevenson (1864), V.II, pt.II, p.792.
[51] As in: *Anglica Historia*, pp.56-7. Hall, in describing the Lovell’s plot of 1486, avoided the word ‘rumour’ for what the ‘king estemed …for vaine & uncertain’: *HC*, p.427. The only example of rumour meaning lie found by this survey is: *Anglica Historia*, pp.10-1.
[52] For instance: *GC*, pp.209-10; *CCR*, II, 537; *Arrivall of Ed.IV*, p.21; *CLB*, II, pp.374-5.
[53] *Paston Letters*, III, 482; *Three Books of Vergil*, pp.117, 181; *Arrivall of Ed.IV*, p.4; Wavrin, *Achiennes Chronicques*, III, p.101; *King’s Letters…*, ed. R. Steele (2 Vols., 1903-4), V.2, IX; *Original Letters*, 3rd/2, CCXXIX; *TRP*, 168.
[54] *LP*, VII, 240; *Original Letters*, 3rd/2, CCXXII; comparable to ‘publike noise and rumour’ in *YCR*, II, p.100.

by the fact that the latter does not assume the same attributes of movement and speed of the former. We can safely assume that while rumour was dangerous because of its dynamic qualities, noise and bruit were so because of their 'intensity'.[55]

1.3. Clamour and Open Noises

The third level of these word choices that represent popular opinion is directly found in open and loud noises combined into 'clamour'. Both 'noise' and 'clamour' are close to each other in their physical properties, in the sense that they were typically attached to disturbing and disorderly sounds that were aggressive to formal and respectful speech, challenging authority and order.[56] This phenomenon has been thoroughly demonstrated by historians of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 when sources used sounds produced by animals as well as the expression 'noise and clamour' to describe people's complaints and public opinion.[57] In fact, it has been argued that since the reign of Edward II contemporaries used the expression 'clamour of the people' to establish the notoriety of traitors, while in late fourteenth and early fifteenth century petitions in Latin, Middle English and French, it referred to more generic public concerns.[58] Wendy Scase has treated 'clamour' as a form of tradition of complaint that had ramifications in literature, judicial procedures, and, evidently, popular politics.[59] However, she seems to treat any evidence of complaint as 'clamour' while this is a concept

[55] For more evidence: Rastell, *Pastime of People*, p.292; *The Black Book of Winchester,* ed. W.H.B. Bird (Winchester, 1925), pp.130-1; L.E. Whatmore, 'The Sermon Against the Holy Maid of Kent and Her Adherents…', *EHR*, 58/232 (1943), p.472; J. Longland, *A sermond made be for the kynge hys hyghnes at Rychemunte* (1536), ff. 2r-v; *LP*, XI, 547, 563, 650, 768, 781, 853, 970, 1227, 1294; XII/1, 4, 29, 70, 115, 369, 392, 466, 1175; XII/2, 303, 988, 1242; *Records of Leicester*, V.2, CCV; *YHB*, II, pp.417, 656; *YCR*, III, p.173.
[56] For noises in general see: J.J. Cohen, '*Kyte oute yugilement:* An Introduction to Medieval Noise', *Exemplaria*, 16/2 (2004), p.269. For rebellions challenging the 'hegemonic' voice of the king (here applied to any challenging voice at local level), see: Sharpe, *Shelling the Tudor Monarchy*, p.100.
[57] Sources such as Chaucer, Gower and Walsingham are all analysed in: Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*, pp.211 – and more recently in: Fletcher, 'Rumour, Clamour, Murmur and Rebellion', p.199.
[58] See: W. Scase, *Literature and Complaint in England*, *1272-1553* (Oxford, 2007), pp.56-62; Ormrod, 'Murmur, Clamour and Noise', pp.137, 151; and E. Steiner, 'Commonalty and Literary Form in the 1370s and 1380s', in D. Lawton, W. Scase and R. Copeland (eds.), *New Medieval Literatures*, *Vol. 6* (Oxford, 2003), pp.199-221.
[59] Scase, *Literature and Complaint*, esp. chs.1 and 2.

that not only seems to have had a particular meaning that must be briefly charted here but was also decreasing in use during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century.[60]

We can find 'clamour' in a few sources in the period under analysis, but it seems unlikely that the word was still widely used in comparison to the others already considered. A quick search in the parliament records demonstrates, for example, that while the word was much used in troubled times such as in Richard II's and Henry VI's reigns, it was no longer used after 1450 when there was a 'universal rumour and clamour' in the kingdom.[61] In the King's Bench records, the use of *clamor* is intimately related to loud cries and tumultuous events associated with illicit games and brothels – rather than riots – and still not widely recorded between 1461 and 1537.[62] Seemingly, the only use of 'clamorous exclamations' during a violent gathering was recorded in 1535, when the officers of the Bishop of St David's attacked William Barlow, then prior of Haverfordwest, for he defended the new religion and heretical books.[63] The other few examples of the direct use of 'clamour' in this survey are all used rhetorically to reify widespread complaints. The first is from 1483, when Richard III claimed in a proclamation that there was 'grete clamor, grugge, and complaints' about the devalued Irish coins circulating in England.[64] Later, Hall alluded to the northern nobles fortifying their strongholds upon 'heringe the clamour of the common people' fleeing from the Scots.[65] In 1497, 'a grete glamor (*sic*) and grete ill sainges' were recorded to describe the indignation towards the adjourning of court sessions in Derby.[66]

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[60] Scase, *Literature and Complaint*, pp.143-56. For statistics, see Appendices 1-2 below, p.314.
[61] This brief search of *PROME* (30 July 2019) reveals interesting expressions not found in the early-sixteenth century records, such as 'comune clamour' in 1393, 'clamour among the people' in the later fourteenth and early fifteenth century, and 'murmur and clamour' in 1439 and 1442.
[62] For gaming: KB9/953/46-5; 506/1/124. For brothels: KB9/450/49-50; 454/25; 469/46; 490/33-4; 964/111; 1002/32. There is only one example that does not fit these categories, a coroners' inquiry of 1492: KB9/394/29.
[63] *LP*, IX, 1091.
[64] *LP RIII/HVII*, II, App. B/I, p.286.
[65] *HC*, p.476.
[66] *Report on Various Collections II* (HMC), p.43. Compare with 'hideous clamour' in *LP*, XII/1, 380.

Three examples of this usage we only know through translations.[67] First, Andrea Badoer wrote that 'the whole kingdom clamour[ed]' about the marriage of Mary Tudor to Charles Brandon in 1515.[68] The second, in March 1527, came from the Spanish ambassador, who wrote that 'people here were clamouring for a truce'.[69] And the third was Eustace Chapuys, the imperial ambassador who hoped that the 'clamouring' of the Pilgrimage of Grace must have also referred to Princess Mary – while Edward Hall acknowledged the 'open clamours in every place' to defend the old religion.[70] In spite of these uses that either endorsed or simply described public and popular opinion, we can assume that if the original word was 'clamour' in French, Spanish, or Latin, it might suggest that the lack of frequent usage in England was precisely because this word sounded more unfamiliar and alien than other expressions for public discussion in English. That also explains why historians have encountered this word more frequently in the fourteenth and early fifteenth century – when Anglo-Norman/Medieval French was the current language of the ruling elites.

Moreover, the meaning of 'clamour' might be illustrated by other expressions that alluded to noisy complaints either with semantically related expressions or with full descriptions. First of all, we see Hall's description that people 'woulde openly crye and make vociferacion' about Richard III's 'crime and offence'.[71] That is the case of rebels who, in 1497, 'claim[ed] loudly' or were 'cryenge out openly & pronouncinge' against taxation.[72] Hall also analyses the arrest of Empson and Dudley in 1509 as the king's attempt to 'shifte the noise' and, then, 'appeace the people'.[73] The use of noise as the actual sound of turmoil

[67] Due to the impediment of having checked the original records of the Habsburg Empire at Simancas, Brussels and Vienna.
[68] *CSPV*, III, 1486.
[69] *CSPSp*, III/2, 37. This is commented again in June: *CSPSp*, III/2, 83. The people's lamentation can be seen in Hall's chronicle, when it became clear that war with the Emperor was 'inevitable' in 1527: *HC*, p.744.
[70] *CSPSp*, V/2, 110; *HC*, p.820. There was an acute concern with the rumours about the rebellion circulating abroad, as Cromwell reported in December: *LP*, XI, 1363.
[71] *HC*, p.381.
[72] *Anglica Historia*, pp.90-1; *HC*, p.477.
[73] *HC*, p.505.

is also found in the *Great Chronicle,* while describing the election of the Mayor of London in 1492-3, in which the tailors 'had many riottous & heinous wordys, grete rumour & noise'.[74] It can also be verified in the 'noise of the raving mob' penetrating London during the riots of 1517.[75] Curiously, even seditious words were described as 'seditious bruits' by the king in 1520; and complaints as 'ill bruit or murmuring' in 1521 and 'noise or bruit' in 1522.[76] During the collection of the Amicable Grant in 1525, Archbishop Warham reported the state of Kent to Wolsey, and stressed that the 'idle voices of the people' were turning into 'rumor and brute of this matier'.[77] And early in 1537 'such bruits, rages, and furies' were the words used by Lord Darcy to describe the new rising of Sir Francis Bigot.[78] Therefore, while words denoting open noises were still widely used to capture protest, 'clamour' itself had been replaced by other terms more commonly used in English.

1.4. Grudge and Constrained Noises

While the above facets of public opinion involve a widespread phenomenon that could both 'fly' and settle (fame), 'run' and 'spread' (rumour/noise), or that might scare authorities with loud voices (clamour/noise), grudge was a more constrained version of complaint and had a more precise meaning. Needless to say, any unsatisfied group of people complain to each other, yet grudge seems to involve more resentment and bitterness in people's individual and collective conscience than any of the ideas we have seen thus far.[79] Thus, because it was more concerned with feeling than with movement and reputation, 'grudge' is associated with words that imply mistrust and doubt – such as the verbs 'marvel', 'wonder', and 'muse' (to consider, ponder, be concerned) – and a frequent adverb that may suggest physical or

[74] *GC*, p.246.
[75] *Anglica Historia*, pp.242-5.
[76] *LP*, III/1, 1003; III/2, 1543, 2615.
[77] *Original Letters*, 3rd/1, CXXVIII. Compare with: *LP*, IV/1, 1470; *Original Letters*, 3rd/2, CLIV.
[78] *LP*, XII/1, 115.
[79] Bitterness and resentment are both found among the definitions of 'grucche' in *MED* (08 Aug. 2019).

emotional pain, that is, 'sore'.[80] To begin with, the narratives of both Hall and the *Great Chronicle* about the people's feelings once they knew about the deaths of the princes in the Tower can provide a meaningful example of the use of 'grudge'. In Hall, 'when their sorowe was sumwhat mitigate, their inward grudge could not refraine but crye out in places publike'.[81] In the *Great Chronicle*, people 'grudgid soo sore again[st] the king for the deth of the innocentys that as gladly wold they have been French'.[82] Thus, grudge seems to be constrained by distress, but more importantly by fear of repression, on the grounds that the content of grudging was invariably challenging and exposed public dissatisfaction. Although it might eventually 'cry out' publicly, grudge was what probably preceded action and noise in a *mélange* of other feelings that might lead to sedition.

Unsurprisingly, grudge also accompanied acute perceptions of political and economic crises. In a time of crisis, Sir John Fortescue, writing on behalf of Edward Prince of Wales to the Earl of Warwick, claimed that if the king granted too many of his properties and privileges to his favourites, he could cause 'grete grugge amonges his peopull' because of the economic impact of such practice. If this 'order be kepte' and the king does not 'live upon his commones and upon the chirche', he continued, 'no man may grugge'.[83] This grudge extended to various other subjects in the Yorkist period, which included: the creation of nobles (1461), new coinage (1464), clerical dissent (1465), heresy (1467), the king's counsellors (1470), a local crisis at Coventry (1480), and many events surrounding Richard III's usurpation (1483) as well as the possibility of his marriage to Elizabeth of York.[84] While

[80] Definitions of 'muse' and 'sore', in *OED*; and as 'musen' and 'sor(e', in *MED* (08 Aug. 2019). Further to what follows: Rastell, *Pastime of People*, pp.280, 297; More, *History of Richard III*, pp.68, 75-6; *HC*, p.697; *Ballads from Manuscripts*, p.354; Cavendish, *Life of Wolsey*, pp.100-1; Whatmore, 'The Sermon against the Holy Maid of Kent', pp.467-75; *LP*, X, 891; XI, 569, 687, 712, 970, 1086, 1128, 1227; XII/1, 6, 29, 70, 201, 369; XII/2, 1242; *YCR*, III, p.173; *CLB*, II, p.485; *Arnold's Chronicle*, p.xlii; C1/375/39.
[81] *HC*, p.379.
[82] *GC*, p.237.
[83] *JVB*, pp.222-3.
[84] *White Rose*, p.11; *Gregory's Chronicle*, pp.227-8, 234. *Warkworth's Chronicle*, pp.11-2; *CLB*, II, p.432; *HC*, pp.355, 419-20, 422; *FC*, pp.669-70.

only a few words accompanied the 'grudges' in the Yorkist period – particularly 'sore', 'wonder', and 'ill will' –, in the early Tudor sources there is a frequent association of grudge with 'sore', 'marvel', 'curse', 'astonishment', 'repugnation', 'agony', 'musiness' (from 'muse'), and a few other nouns.[85] Edmund Dudley proposed that only the king could address and reform 'any manour of grudge bytwene his subjects', whereas the crown and parliament were the primary sources for the proliferation of 'grudge' against taxation, foreign policy, and religious reforms – roughly from 1491 to 1537.[86] It is noteworthy that while most of what we have seen in the previous subsections implies either idle or slanderous words about public matters which derived from fear and anxiety, grudge seems to convey the idea of bitterness and mistrust that this anxiety and fear caused in people's hearts and minds. There are, evidently, other examples of 'grudge' but these provide compelling evidence to reaffirm that the distress and constrained noises in these sources are distant from rumour in the sense that they do not move anywhere but stay in people's hearts.[87] Still, both 'grudge' and 'rumour' were products of apprehension and shifts in preoccupation.

When grudge was likely to be followed by action, it is common to find the association 'murmur & grudgis' in troublesome contexts. Although Edmund Dudley wished to believe that the common people would neither 'murmur nor grudge to live in labour and paine', we have been seeing that this was not exactly true.[88] The *Great Chronicle* described the rebels of 1469 using the terms 'murmur and grudge', and they themselves accused Edward IV's counsellors of having caused 'all the peopull of this land to grugge'.[89] We find this same association conveyed by various sources in describing usurpations, rebellions,

[85] This is a reference to the same sources quoted in the previous paragraph. In addition: *HC*, pp.586, 718, 772-3; *GC*, p.238.
[86] Dudley, *Tree of Commonwealth*, p.41; *GC*, p.245; *Anglica Historia*, pp.48-9; *HC*, pp.451, 476-9, 630, 645-20, 696-7, 767, 772-3; *Original Letters*, 3rd/2, CXXXI; *LP*, XII/1, 852, 900, 901, 945-6, 1175.
[87] Other possible examples would be 'grudgys and dyspleasurs' during London elections of 1510-11: *GC*, pp.366-7; the marriage of Mary Tudor: *HC*, p.582; and the execution of Buckingham in 1521: *HC*, p.622.
[88] Dudley, *Tree of Commonwealth*, pp.45-6.
[89] *GC*, pp.208-9; *JVB*, pp.214-5.

'extortions', and other events. They all imply that uproar could follow if the 'murmur and grudges' were not suppressed, and many usages were accompanied by other words, such as 'marvel', 'sorrow', 'obloquy', 'grief', 'complaint', 'pain', 'curse', and 'mutter'.[90] Hence, by using 'grudge' and 'murmur' in the same sentence, often in association with other feelings, contemporaries probably assumed that if not turmoil at least a great resistance was about to take place – that is precisely what makes them political.

1.5. Murmur and Low Noises

The last major vocabulary choice in contemporary sources has a closer relationship with the low sounds of grumbling and muttering. Although Claude Gauvard has suggested that 'murmur' could be a substitute for 'rumour' in late medieval sources, this is an over-simplification of the concept.[91] If we are to believe that the parliament records are typical of mainstream usages, they can serve as a starting point of the analysis again: only a few results for 'murmur' turn up and none later than 1442.[92] Conversely, parliament records widely used rumour, especially during the political crises of both Richard II and Henry VI. This suggests that the two words could not be straightforward synonyms. There is a subtle and important ambiguity in the use of murmur.

First of all, this concept can only be compared to rumour inasmuch as it represents a liaison between discontent and sedition.[93] That partly explains why both rumour-mongering and murmuring, as forms of possibly dangerous popular speech, went on being labelled as sedition in the early modern period.[94] After all, when elite and clerical writers

[90] *FC*, p.670; SC1/58/53; *HC*, pp.442-3, 697-52, 808-14; *YHB*, II, p.619; *GC*, pp.294-5, 334-5; *Skelton Poems*, p.96; *Original Letters*, 3rd/1, CXXVIII; *TRP*, 145.
[91] Gauvard, 'Rumeur et Stéreotypes', p.165.
[92] For this and the next point, a quick search of *PROME* (29 July 2019) for these words reveals the numbers and contexts in which they were used throughout the sessions.
[93] The only example in which murmur means 'slander' is provided by the chronicle of Edward Hall, though describing episodes of Richard III's reign which is openly biased and derogatory: *HC*, pp.352, 358.
[94] See: J. Walter, 'Public Transcripts, Popular Agency and the Politics of Subsistence in Early Modern England', in Braddick & Walker, *Negotiating Power*, pp.128-9.

used the word 'murmur', they were trying to understand 'the phenomenon of concealed or semi-public complaining' precisely because that could imply growing discontent and threat of revolt.[95] Carla Casagrande and Silvana Vecchio, in analysing medieval 'sins of the tongue', could not commonly find *murmuratio* listed as a sin, although it is clear for them that the expression was born in the environment of monasteries, and that the most precise normative definitions involved words pronounced (in a low voice) by an inferior to a superior while complaining about a designated task.[96] In that sense, then, murmur was plain defiance of authority, while the menace of rumour was a result of information and misinformation 'running'. Admittedly, both could lead to sedition, but one cannot assume they were synonyms. This alarming sense is perhaps why 'murmur' was also used in the indictments of the King's Bench and could attribute a more dangerous meaning to 'grudge' in contemporary reports – as seen in the previous section.[97] The 'seditious' and more dangerous spectrum of this word is clear, therefore, when it was used to report rebellions, riots, and treasons in 1469-71, 1483-4, 1517 and 1521.[98] So it is that, when 'murmur' was used to contextualise social turmoil, the concept assumed – just as 'murmur and grudge' together – a 'seditious' and alarming meaning, but not the same of rumour.

Secondly, in the medieval use of the Latin *murmuratio*, as well as in Middle English, the word also assumed its modern sense of 'low and continuous' noise of indistinct complaining.[99] Thus, 'murmur' by itself sounds weaker than possibly all the words analysed above; it had to be complemented by more substantial words, such as 'tales', 'doubtfulness', 'commotions', 'assemblies', 'sedition', 'threats', and open disloyalty. If not, the meaning of 'low noise' prevails over its potential danger, and 'murmur' seems to betoken impotence.[100]

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[95] Dumolyn & Haemers, 'Subversive Speech', pp.56-8.
[96] Casagrande & Vecchio, *Les Péchés de la Langue*, pp.183-5.
[97] KB9/490/8; 491/10; 495/122; 509/9, 11, 13; 514/32, 50; 517/33; 528/33.
[98] *GC*, pp.206-7; *Three Books of Vergil*, p.125; *Twelfth Report* (HMC), p.5; *Crowland Chronicle*, pp.162-3; KB9/952/13; *Anglica Historia*, pp.244-5; KB8/5/28, reproduced and translated in *DKR*, III, p.232.
[99] 'Murmuratio', *DMLBS*; and 'murmur(e', *MED* (15 July 2019).
[100] This 'low sound' can contrast with the only example of 'murmur loudly', in 1527: *CSPSp*, III/2, 83.

At least three crucial examples can illustrate this meaning. The first is found in Hall's narrative about the commissioners who tried to collect the Amicable Grant in 1525 when there was 'muttering through all the realm with curses and wepinges, that pitye it was to beholde'.[101] The second is in a letter of the Imperial ambassador reporting that although people loved Queen Catherine and would not accept a divorce – something that was already 'notorious as if it had been proclaimed by the public crier' – they would probably 'content themselves with grumbling' (*con murmurar*).[102] And the third is used during the suppression of a monastery in Tonbridge, Kent, when Archbishop Warham reported the murmuring of the locals at Wolsey's request but stressing that their murmurs were not suspicious.[103] This powerless connotation is commonly found in chronicles and letters from the 1460s to the early Reformation, and not only to describe the grumbling of people in general but also of 'men of might'.[104]

In sum, just like spreading rumours, people murmured for fear of changes that they probably only knew through hearsay, and they did so because they lacked power while facing aristocratic manoeuvres, parliamentary taxation, foreign war, or dynastic upheavals. Both simple unquietness and alarming contexts are conveyed by other examples of 'murmur', but these ones should suffice to allow us to conclude this section by stating that the uncertainties that caused grumbling and murmur were likewise reflected in the ambiguous uses of this concept.[105] Murmur and mutter might sound absolutely hesitant or potentially dangerous –

[101] *HC*, p.697.
[102] *CSPSp*, III/2, 113.
[103] *LP*, IV/1, 1471.
[104] Wavrin, *Anchiennes Chronicques*, II, pp.299, 332; *Brief Latin Chronicle*, p.177; *CSPM*, 137-8; *CSPV*, I, 395; *White Rose*, p.155; *Crowland Chronicle*, pp.170-1; *HC*, pp.326, 759, 767, 782-3; *GC*, p.320; *LP*, III/2, 1543; VI, 411, 738, 1077; IX, 345, 791; *CSPSp*, IV/1, 174, 345; IV/2, 1062; *Records of the Reformation*, V.2, CCCXXXIX.
[105] For more examples: More, *History of Richard III*, p.44; *Croniques de Jean Molinet*, II, p 467; *Common Place Book of John Hooker*, p.34; Cavendish, *Life of Wolsey*, p.62; *LP*, IX, 733; X, 926; XI, 567, 650, 663, 714, 831, 1118, 1215, 1378; XII/1, 348; XII/2, 846; Longland, *A Sermond Made Be For the Kynge*, ff.2r-v.

only the circumstances, and historical figures who were themselves affected by some kind of fear and insecurity, could decide whether murmur would 'spark' rebellion.[106]

This survey of the facets of public and popular opinion has thoroughly illustrated that to study them is concurrently to study their indirect and semi-public representations. These representations, however, involved suspicions, fears, anxieties, and uncertainties from the moment they were born – that is, in the feelings of actual people – to the moment they were recorded and reported, when they were structured by the feelings of those who wrote about them. Thus, the challenge of understanding these words lies in the double layer of concerns that is condensed in this rich vocabulary, but we have seen that they are indeed revealing of the dynamics of public and popular opinion.

We began this section by claiming and illustrating that rumours replace information in the absence of proper news, which creates anxiety for its uncertainty and the multiplication of the rumours themselves. Additionally, this anxiety and rumour-mongering cut across social boundaries – and that is why we have the sources that we do. Because they are invariably reported by the ruling elites (or the better-educated), all these words and the popular opinion they convey are about noises and sounds. Despite all the ambiguity, shared or combined meanings, and the problems they report, these noises were not altogether feared or despised. Some of them (a few uses of fame, rumour, and clamour) were indeed 'useful', i.e. they can either reify the collectivity of public opinion or create good and bad reputation for specific purposes. Whereas others (slanderous rumours, murmur, grudge) were the domain of the divisive voices seen as 'harmful' – and certainly closer to popular complaints.[107] While rumour helped people make sense of reality and change, it coexisted with and offered contents to these numerous other forms of popular opinion that were

[106] The sense of 'spark' is used by Guenée, *L'Opinion Publique*, p.78.
[107] For 'useful' and 'harmful' see also above, pp.62-78.

fundamentally different. The diversity of words chosen by contemporaries to describe the buzzing of the people, their rage, their grumbling, or what they thought was a threat of revolt, ultimately suggests that richness of vocabulary, as well as ambiguous meanings, reflect how profound was public discussion and how the common voices were indeed included in such debates. The next section aims to explore how often these feelings, opinions and uncertainties were recorded and what else they can tell about popular opinion.

2. The Frequency of Rumour

Having established the possible understandings of rumour in the previous section, we can now explore the implications of these popular 'noises' by their frequency. The fluctuation in the volume of reported rumour might tell us something about the state of uncertainty among the people and those who wrote the sources analysed in this chapter. More importantly, it might help us to understand the alarmed responses of the authorities in the next section and in Chapters III and IV, that is, to comprehend why rumours were at times regarded as 'seditious' and criminalised. We might also ask why a few specific slanderous comments about the king became treason in 1534. While the Reformation parliament (1529-36) has been typically interpreted as a new step towards ideological surveillance and a more authoritative government, we might shed light on the alarming circumstances in which specific rumours were condemned and attacked by looking at their variance across this whole period.[108] The previous section has already begun to suggest why rumours were associated with turmoil, but attention to the frequency of references will take the argument further.

To begin with, we have seen in the Introduction that the literature of rumour has established that rumour-mongering is partly a rational and timeless response to incomplete information in challenging times.[109] Misinformation and uncertainties are reproduced and

[108] I refer to Duggan in n.17 above, p.87.
[109] For this and the next points, see above, pp.1-2, 22-3.

spread rapidly because social interaction is based on trust and because rumours are pieces of information destined to be believed that satisfy the interlocutors. Consequently, there is no politics free of rumour. Moments of crisis prompted a certain level of anxiety that generated the so-called 'seditious rumours' of this period; that gave room to hope and desire of better times which underlay wishful thinking and prophecies; and that produced resentment and hate which are the sources of accusatory tales, slander, and 'seditious language' more broadly.[110] This underlying nature of rumours and its connection with challenging periods can be corroborated by peaks in the number of rumours recorded through this period.

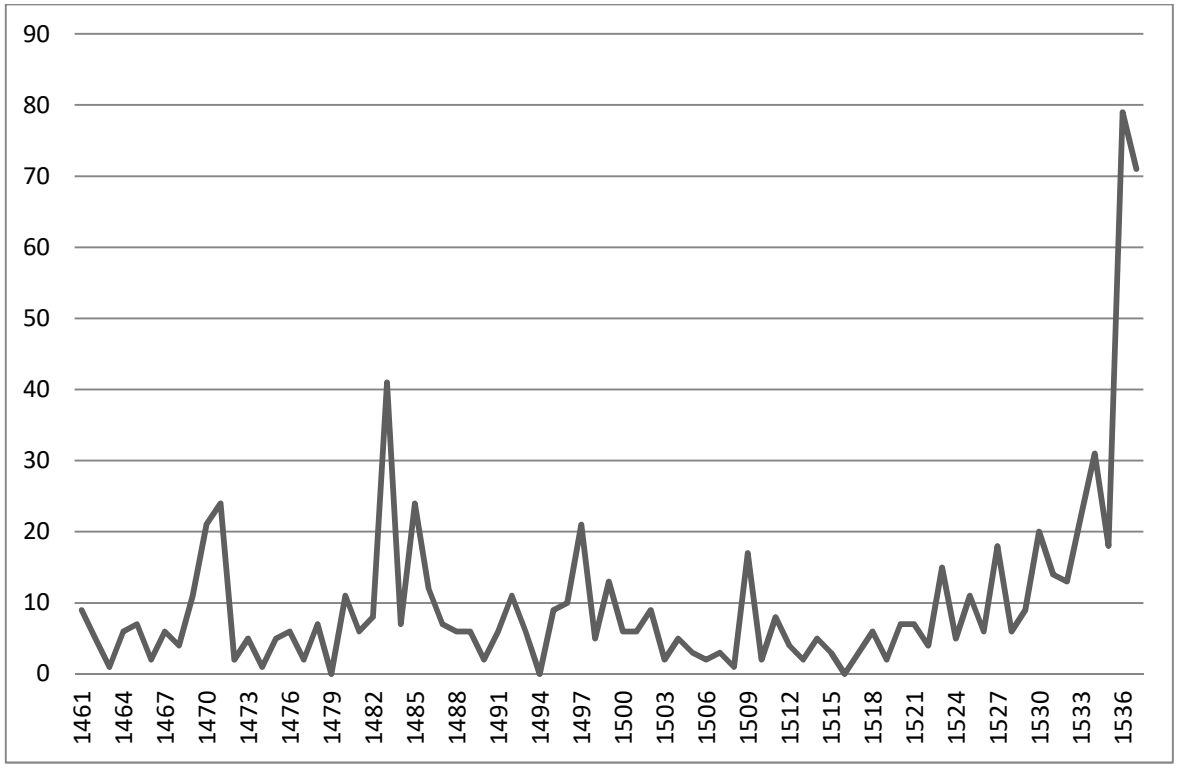

Figure 2 – Number of References to Rumours per Year

As we have seen in the previous section, the variety of terms for popular speech reflects the social and cognitive processes of the mass of the people as they came to terms with experience and incomplete knowledge. In that sense, the peaks in Figure 2 may illustrate the spiral of anxiety more persistently, reflecting not merely that records grew, but possibly that the number of rumours in circulation grew together during 'shifts in preoccupation'.[111]

[110] I partly refer here to the propositions of Allport & Postman, *Psychology of Rumour*, p.33, 36, 199.
[111] This expression is from Shibutani, *Improvised News*, p.65.

These shifts were the rebellions and dynastic upheaval of 1469-71; the whole crisis of Richard III's reign and the first few months of Henry VII in 1483-5; the Western Rebellion and the invasion/capture of Perkin Warbeck in 1497; the death of Henry VII and the ascension of Henry VIII in 1509; the fiscal crisis of 1523-5; and the final decade of this analysis, 1527-37, that is, the period of Henry VIII's 'great matter', leading to the Act of Supremacy, his marriage with Anne Boleyn, the early stages of the Reformation, his third marriage with Jane Seymour, and the rebellions of 1536-7.

Although these peaks might all sound like obvious moments for rumour-spreading, they are revealing of the loop of social anxiety during challenging moments: rumours originated in anxiety and lack of proper information among the populace, but they ended up causing another sequence of anxious processes when they reached the ruling elites and the government – which were evidently also dealing with the same context from another perspective. We mostly have the records and memories of this second round of anxiety observing the first, but what is more important here is that contemporaries would label popular rumours as 'noisy' and, ultimately, 'seditious' firstly because of their context, and only subsequently because of their content. To put it in another way, widespread rumours easily troubled the elites and were labelled seditious not merely because they could indeed constitute the process of opinion formation against the government, but because they grew and circulated in alarming periods for the authorities as well. They sounded seditious and 'noisy' not because the gentry and central government did not understand popular complaints – they surely did – but primarily because of the moments in which they 'ran and flew' more often: political crises that sometimes accompanied economic struggle and, at the end of this period, religious change.

Additionally, the fact that records of rumour increased in times of crisis or change should not lead us to conclude that they were exceptional in social interaction. Once we have

assumed that they are innate responses to shifts in preoccupation and that they naturally crossed social boundaries, their danger rested not simply in their mobility, but in the fact that they could be believed, twisted, re-used, or augmented by anyone. This tendency can be noticed by looking at the reproduction of uncertainties that potentially led to non-dangerous rumour-mongering across social levels. As we have already observed in the Paston Letters above, hearsay and uncertainties replaced and filtered incomplete information and this is commonly noticeable in the private correspondence of other families and among royal officers.[112] The Plumpton correspondence, for example, offers numerous instances of information reproduced by claiming that 'it [was] said' or that there was 'much speech' from 1468 to 1499.[113] Similarly, the Cely letters contain various word choices that also include 'suche tidingys', 'strange speking', and 'as men saye'.[114] As these letters make clear, a highly doubtful report was preferred over silence in moments of potential war or invasion, for instance – as in 1471, 1480, 1486-7, and 1493-5.[115] In later periods of tension, the pattern remained virtually the same, especially in the 1520s and 1530s.[116]

The reproduction of fear, anxiety and uncertainty in this correspondence had at least one purpose that broadly explains rumour-mongering: to offer versions of news and to prompt the interlocutor to provide more evidence in exchange. For the writers of these letters, to use Thomas Cromwell's words in 1523, 'the news refreshe[d] the spirit of life'.[117] In so doing, however, this 'news' could indeed be circulating rumours that were initially among the common people or that came from court gossip. Or worse, they could be 'true' news that brought with them 'sorrow and anxiety' themselves – as Vergil described the news of the

[112] Above, pp.89-90.
[113] *Plumpton Correspondence*, 16, 39, 42, 46, 114, 119, 142.
[114] *Cely Letters*, 11 (SC1/53/197); 110 (SC1/53/62), 134, 143, 200. It is also worth mentioning: *Stonor Letters*, I, 64; II, 318.
[115] *Twelfth Report* (HMC), p.3; *King's Letters*, V.2, IX, p.16; *CLB*, II, pp.427-8; *YHB*, II, 572; *YCR*, II, p.100; *Records of Nottingham*, III, p.401.
[116] *LP*, IV/3, 6447; VII, 238, 240; X, 365, 782, 855; *Original Letters*, 3rd/2, p.247.
[117] Reproduced in: *The Tudor Constitution: Documents and Commentary*, ed. G.R. Elton (Cambridge, 1982), p.236.

rebellion of 1497.[118] In these critical periods, as in Figure 2, the phenomenon of spreading potentially wrongful reports escalated and because authorities knew that rumour-mongering had no boundaries, they needed to shut it down with accusations of falsehood and sedition – as during the crises of 1470, 1485, 1487, 1536.[119]

This point can also be illustrated by other commentators dignifying – or believing – what were probably popular rumours by reproducing them in the first place. These reports were sometimes slanderous, sometimes falsehoods and at other times even prophecies, but what 'was said' both in court and on the streets was to contemporaries equally worth reporting – as the rumours filled in the picture of incomplete information and possibly of public discussion.[120] Just as the claims about 'everyone' included the common people – as we have seen in Chapter I –, the commentators who reported rumours probably included not only court gossip and their own wishful thinking, but also popular rumours. Since the 1460s, there were a few rumours circulating in the Italian letters about the economy, Edward IV's marriage to Elizabeth Woodville in 1464, and the crisis of 1469-71.[121] As in the family letters, confusion and uncertainty were often the case, such as when Edward IV was reported dead in April 1470, or when prophecies were reproduced in 1499 and 1521.[122] Substantial news-letters with these uncertain features are increasingly found from 1485. The rumours in them certainly multiplied during the conspiracies of 1486-7, 1494-9, and 1501-9, and during periods of war (e.g. 1514) and other issues.[123] There is, then, compelling evidence that even respectable figures like diplomats circulated popular rumours.

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[118] *Anglica Historia*, pp.92-3.
[119] *CCR*, II, 537; *Acts of Courts of the Mercers' Company*, *1453-1527*, ed. L. Lyell and F.D. Watney (Cambridge, 1936), pp.173-4; *English Historical Documents IV 1327-1485*, A.R. Myers (1969), 209; *TRP*, 11; *LP*, XI, 598.
[120] Further to this paragraph, see: De Craecker-Dussart, 'La Rumeur', p.171; and Fenster & Smail, *Fama*, esp. Introduction, chs.2, 7, and Conclusion.
[121] *CSPM*, 137, 138, 173; *CSPV*, I, 395.
[122] *CSPM*, 183; *CSPSp*, I, 239; *CSPV*, III, 219.
[123] *CSPV*, I, 506, 644, 647, 751, 759, 861; II, 22, 613, 975; III, 1486; *CSPSp*, I, 439; *LP*, III/1, 402.

From the 1520s these dispatches increased once again in number and frequency, and so did the rumours reported in them. These rumours varied from ideas about Wolsey's international policy to court gossip; from the king's 'Great Matter' to Wolsey's possible plan to escape to France or Scotland, or his possible causes of death; from Anne Boleyn's position to increasing popular discontent.[124] Such reports would increase even more in the 1530s, not only because the dramatic moves made by the government gave room to more speculative conjecturing, but also because these ambassadors were against everything that was happening in the kingdom and were overreacting, twisting the facts, and adding what sound like some made-up stories.[125] It is true that, from what we can gather, none of the ambassadors before the Reformation was as politically engaged as Eustace Chapuys when he reported from England about Queen Catherine, Princess Mary, and the state of the church. Nevertheless, the common practice of reporting uncertain news and rumours match both the private letters of prominent families and those coming from government officials. Ambassadors knew that news 'spread about in public places' could be both manipulated and omitted according to their intentions, but these diplomats were contributing to the spreading of rumour themselves.[126] In sum, and to go back to the spiral of anxiety, the critical moments in which rumours spread more often contributed to make them sound alarming and seditious: they could reach anyone, even in international scale, and nourish dangerous ideas of conspiracy and war.

Having explored what the frequency and variance of rumours tell us about their implications to political society, it is possible to close this section by arguing that despite being always a common feature of politics, rumours were probably indeed growing by the

[124] *CSPSp*, III/2, 37, 69, 75, 113, 152, 240; IV/1, 132, 135, 232, 509, 522; *CSPM*, 833; *CSPV*, 637. For other issues and kinds of news-letters: *CSPSp*, III/2, 152; IV/1, 211, 270, 290, 345, 422; IV/2, 641, 1149; V/1, 10, 109, 156, 174, 183; V/2, 9, 55, 76, 110; *CSPM*, 843, 850, 861, 882, 976.
[125] See: *CSPSp*, IV/2, 664, 805, 899, 980, 1161; *CSPM*, 873-4; *CSPV*, IV, 677, 712, 773, 792; V, 54.
[126] Quoting Chapuys, Jan. 1531: *CSPSp*, IV/2, 615.

end of this period alongside the number of records. The reason for this was surely the crisis represented by the early Reformation itself. If rumour-mongering is an act of conjecturing and coping with change, the context of the Reformation – the new parliamentary statutes of 1529-36 (especially the new Act of Treason and the Supremacy), the novelties in taxation, the king's marital problems, the possible invasion of Catholic powers, and, more importantly, the changes in religion that affected parish life – comprised a cataclysm of changes that fed such rumours. These reasons for new or increased preoccupation with changes from around 1527 caused an unprecedented level of rumour-mongering, slanderous comments, and wishful thinking that were a response to unprecedented levels of change. It was in the spring of 1527, George Cavendish tells us in his *Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey*, that 'began other matters to brewe & take place, that occupied all mens hedes w[ith] divers imaginacions, whos stomakes ware therw[ith] fulfilled w[ith]out any perfect digestion'.[127] Undoubtedly, the Wars of the Roses had affected people's lives – and the levels of rumour-mongering in 1469-71 and especially 1483 illustrate this point in Figure 2 – but no king of that time was a heretic, no generation had three queens with no change of dynasty, no parliament had approved so many changes for the whole kingdom as it did in 1529-36. The previous generations had dealt with one or two of these problems at a time. The level of rumours between 1527 and 1534, therefore, was an accumulation of public pressure but it was only after more changes between 1534-6 that serious rebellion broke out. This natural growth of pressure – materialised in rumour-mongering and, we shall see, seditious language – was answered by an equally natural response resulting both from the anxiety loop and from political circumstances: more legislation and control. It is by seeing the 1530s under this light that we will better understand the dialectics between popular opinion and late medieval governments in the following chapters.

[127] Cavendish, *Life of Wolsey*, p.74.

To conclude, it is clear that the fluctuation of rumours in this period reveals the level of uncertainty. We have seen from the sociological and psychological literature that levels of recorded rumours increase in times of crisis because people speak more about their problems in order to build some sense of reality, and in doing so they might overreact, twist, exaggerate, and forget details. More importantly, however, these rumours also create a social feedback in which they cross social boundaries and might either multiply or achieve a dangerous level that threatens the establishment more than the political crises themselves. After all, anyone could believe in rumours: commoners, gentlemen, chroniclers, ambassadors, and even monarchs and nobles. It was precisely because they grow in these specific periods and cross social boundaries that anxiety and fear also dictated how authorities dealt with rumour-mongering, as we shall see in the next section.

3. Official Perspectives: Rumour and Sedition

Royal authorities and others who surrounded the central government undoubtedly knew the political potential of 'idle words' and rumours – especially, as we have seen, because they grew exponentially in periods of political struggle and economic crisis. In discussing the situation of the Yorkists in 1459-60, the author's interlocutor in the political pamphlet commonly called *Somnium Vigilantis* claimed that 'it [was] hard to abolisshe a rumour that is oones taken in the [vu]lgare voice'.[128] Similarly, Edmund Dudley, in 1509, admonished counsellors and the king's servants 'to let as few idle wordes, and speciallye of slaunder and of untrouth, to passe your mouthe… nor to give your eares nor your eyes over often to fantasies'.[129] In 1532, the author of the *Glasse of Truthe* urged people to withstand slanderers and understand that 'it [was] farre from [their] duetie of allegiaunce to believe untrue reports

[128] Gilson, 'A Defence of the Proscription', pp.514.
[129] Dudley, *Tree of Commonwealth*, p.27.

and false malignations againste [the] soveraine'. In fact, the tract continued, what was crucial was 'nat what [people] kn[ew]: but what [was] to be belevid' – that is, the knowledge of the fact that Queen Catherine consummated her marriage with Prince Arthur did not stand if no faith was given to the (male) witnesses.[130] Two years later, when the Reformation had already advanced, Thomas Swinnerton wrote against the 'muttering of some papistis in corners', stating that there had been 'some mervailinge' among the people about the Supremacy because they did not actually understand the Scriptures where it says 'thou shalte not speke yvell by the prince of the people'.[131] It is debatable whether these writings reached the mass of the people but we can be reassured that they represent what authorities thought of running rumours, of the fame that 'flies', of people grudging 'inwardly in [their] hartes', of their murmuring or 'muttering in corners', and of the 'blasphemous mouthes of rude commonalty' that believed in lies with 'a visage of truthe'.[132]

In this final section, we will explore the relationship between authorities and rumours while aiming to explain the seeming contradiction between the kinds of rumours that were acceptable and orchestrated by governments of this period and the kinds of rumours that were deemed as potentially dangerous. Then, we will consider how the concept of sedition emerges from its relationship with rumours and close the argument about the importance of the vocabulary, frequency, and potentiality of rumours to the comprehension of popular opinion and political criticism in this period.

[130] *A Glasse of Truthe*, C4-r, E8-d.
[131] Swinnerton, *A Litel Treatise*, A2 r-v, A7v, C2.
[132] *A Glasse of Truthe*, C1r-v; Cavendish, *Life of Wolsey*, p.3.

3.1. The Ambiguity of Rumour

We have just seen that the same wave of fear and anxiety that prompted rumours among the people would lead government officials, in consequence, to their own sequence of distress.[133] There was a parliamentary statute to support royal officials against 'devisors of tales' since 1275, and in the course of the fourteenth and the fifteenth century the control over rumours progressively spread to local courts.[134] They could be a crime, a sin, or constitute treason, and there was a thin line between these definitions. It has also been noted that authorities seemingly knew how to distinguish rumours that were 'wind' from rumours that materialised in 'deeds', such as the common contemporary views of slanderous and seditious words.[135] However, we have also seen above that there was one kind of 'rumour' that was formally accepted in court proceedings, that is, the *fama publica*, the local 'tale' that was alleged to be 'openly known' to legitimise and substantiate accusations.[136] This problem was noted even by chroniclers, such as the *Great Chronicle* reporting proceedings in the Court of Requests in London and stating that 'men of might' murmured against the court because 'he that told the first tale had avauntage'.[137] And an Italian traveller in the late fifteenth century had the impression that there was no punishment for slanderous accusations in England.[138] Therefore, we might want to ask what this seeming ambiguity between acceptable and unacceptable rumours means.

Primarily, the ambiguity in the treatment of rumours can be explained by the willingness – on the part of the government – to stay in control of their meaning and content.

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[133] See Henry VII's communication with the city of York in 1488: *YHB*, II, p.609; the proclamation to avoid the rumours about Edmund de la Pole in 1499: *Paston Letters*, VI, 1065; Henry VIII's attitude 'to shifte the noise' in 1509: *HC*, p.505; and the anxiety that followed the Pilgrimage of Grace in 1537: *LP*, XII/1, 46, 67.
[134] *St.R.*, 3 Edw.I, c.34. For the local courts, see: Bardsley, *Venomous Tongue*, pp.34-5; Eadem, 'Sin, Speech, and Scolding in Late Medieval England', in Fenster & Smail, *Fama*, pp.148, 163-4.
[135] Bardsley, *Venomous Tongue*, pp.30, 42, 99. A contemporary example should include the use of 'fame' (as truth) as opposed to 'winde' (as lie) in: *GC*, p.365.
[136] See the evidence discussed above, pp.91-2, esp. n.30, p.91 for the ecclesiastical courts.
[137] *GC*, p.320.
[138] *A Relation of England*, pp.32-3.

On the one hand, the manipulation of ideas of *fama* in court proceedings was a rhetorical and judicial tool perfectly acceptable because its content was defined during the decisions of a jury – in the King's Bench case – or according to the perceptions of the chancellor and the Council – in the Chancery or the Star Chamber, for instance. On the other, the rumours that were floating among the people would remain in circulation until they proved dangerous and seditious. The reason for this is that contemporaries seemingly understood that rumours were often simply one kind of uncertain 'news' running through informal and uncontrollable channels. That is why sources do not necessarily use the adjective 'false' to qualify rumours.[139] Admittedly, as the Crowland chronicler pointed out about Edward IV's intentions in France in 1475, 'there is nothing so holy or proper that it cannot be distorted by ill report' and consequently cause 'deep anxiety in the king's heart'.[140] Thus, rumours were not immediately or invariably seen as 'ill report', 'slander', 'erroneous', 'prophetic', or 'seditious', but they nonetheless kept causing some level of apprehension.[141] What made threatening rumours a political weapon was not merely their freedom – as Ethan Shagan has posited[142] – but their movement and speed.[143] They were indeed not completely free, but their mobility probably made them sound as uncontrollable – developing fear and distress among the ruling elites whenever the context and content of rumour proved a potential menace.

Therefore, specific political circumstances explain why the king and his officers were so anxious about certain kinds of rumours, as a few examples have already demonstrated. It was in specific moments, as during the peaks observed in Figure 2, that rumours could be interpreted as the seeds of sedition – undermining the political unity from

[139] As opposed to what has been claimed by: N. Vincent, 'Conclusion: Rumeur à l'anglaise', in Billoré & Soria, *La Rumeur au Moyen Âge*, p.334.
[140] *Crowland Chronicle*, pp.171-2.
[141] Hence the rich vocabulary of Section 1, pp.87-107. See more explicit apprehensions in: *Three Books of Vergil*, p.167; *HC*, pp.380-1, 431; Cavendish, *Life of Wolsey*, pp.128-9.
[142] Shagan, 'Rumours and Popular Politics', p.32.
[143] As revealed by some uses of 'fame' and 'rumour' above, pp.91-7.

within its structures. The usurpations of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries proved that rumours about a king proclaimed dead, but believed to be alive (such as Edward II or Richard II), could haunt the *de facto* monarch and eventually lead to rebellion or his deposition.[144] This was especially true between 1461 and 1471 when another anointed king was still alive; and for the period after 1483, when the unexplained death of the true heirs to the crown developed into a series of rumours that fed a rebellion in 1483 and the conspiracies of 1486-7 and 1494-9 – which mostly counted on international support.[145] Contemporary sources would also chronicle rebellions and episodes of urban turmoil as a result of the relationship between rumour and sedition.[146] This relationship is demonstrated by virtually all the different kinds of sources analysed here: private letters expressing alarm; reports about rebellions emphasising the rumours; proclamations targeting specific rumours in delicate contexts (1470, 1483, and 1536); their formal prosecution in central and local proceedings; and their prominence in both state papers and the ambassadorial letters.[147] Therefore, from the government's perspective, it was paramount to try to control the movement and content of rumours before they reached an uncontrollable scale and turned into sedition.

This virtual calculation regarding the control of the movement and content of rumours is more explicit in the vocabulary of proclamations.[148] And this attitude also helps us to begin to understand the concept of sedition, as historians must rely on these 'seditious

[144] Walker, 'Rumour, Sedition and Popular Protest', pp.45, 58. For the general phenomenon see: I. Mortimer, 'The Regnal Legitimacy and the Concept of Royal Pretender', in his *Medieval Intrigue: Decoding Royal Conspiracies* (2010), pp.305-39.
[145] See: M. Bennett, *Lambert Simnel and the Battle of Stoke* (New York, 1987), pp.15-31; I. Arthurson, *The Perkin Warbeck Conspiracy, 1491-1499* (Stroud, 1994), pp.60-5.
[146] See: Wood, 'Plebeian Languages', p.88; C. Liddy, 'Cultures of Surveillance in Late Medieval English Towns: the monitoring of speech and the fear of revolt', in Firnhaber-Baker & Schoenaers, *The Routledge History Handbook of Medieval Revolt*, pp.319-20, 324; Gauvard, 'Rumeur et Stéréotypes', pp.161-5.
[147] For a few examples: *Paston Letters*, IV, 509; V, 719; *Stonor Letters*, I, 112; *Plumpton Correspondence*, 39; *Lincolnshire Chr.*, pp.5-10; *CCR*, II, 537; *HC*, pp.283, 290-3, 351, 353, 355, 359-63; *Arrivall of Ed.IV*, pp.2-6, 21; Mancini, *Usurpation*, pp.88-9; KB27/895/9f; KB8/5/28; *Records of Nottingham*, III, p.401; *GC*, p.318; *LP*, III/1, 402, 1193; III/2, 2615, 2708, 2755, 2768-9, 2798, 2800, 2856, 2869-70; IV/1, 631; VIII, 771; *Records of the Reformation*, V.2, CCCXXIX.
[148] For more: Ross, 'Rumour, Propaganda and Popular Opinion', pp.44-5, 148-51; Duggan, 'Thought Control', pp.173-7; Allan, 'Political Propaganda', pp.97-101; Bennett, *Lambert Simnel*, pp.8, 15-25, 48-51, 70, 78-81.

rumours' to explain, for example, the causes and the development of rebellions.[149] Edward IV addressed the 'unfitting and sedicious tales and langage' in the context of the rebellion of Robin of Redesdale in 1469 as damaging to the 'comyn wele and pollicye'.[150] In the following year, proclamations were issued ordering authorities to 'arrest and imprison all persons found within [London] spreading false and malicious rumours against the king and common weal'.[151] In 1483, according to the perspectives of Hall and Vergil, Richard III thought it wise to explain the execution of Hastings to avoid rumours; and again in 1485 he sent out proclamations against people who 'daily sow[ed] seeds of noise and slander'.[152] In June 1487, a proclamation ordered punishment at the pillory for the spreading of 'forged tidings and tales'.[153] In the pardon to the rebels of 1497, the government claimed that it was 'openly understood and known' that the western counties caused a 'great slander and infamy of this land'.[154] In the early stages of the Reformation proclamations were issued to contain the spreading of heretical ideas in 1530, and in 1532 the king again attacked 'new-fangled news, tidings and false tales' that 'stir sedition, murmur, grudge, and division among the people', and were ultimately a 'great hurt of the commonwealth'.[155] This vocabulary was closely followed when rebellion broke out in 1536.[156] Such inherent necessity of suppressing and controlling rumours all emphasise the same point: that an official answer was thought to be necessary in order to prevent people from being 'seduced' by 'sedition', as we shall see below.[157] The official answers were an initial attempt to contain the spreading of rumour, on the one hand, and to correct and actualise misinformation, on the other.

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[149] For instance: Hoyle, *Pilgrimage of Grace*, pp.53, 88-90, 91, 102-4, 199-205, 313, 429-30.
[150] *CLB*, II, p.340-1.
[151] *CCR*, II, 537.
[152] *HC*, p.363; *Three Books of Vergil*, pp.181-2; *King's Letters*, V.1, CXII; *YHB*, I, p.359.
[153] *TRP*, 11.
[154] *TRP*, 35.
[155] *LP*, IV/3, 6487; *TRP*, 138.
[156] *TRP*, 167.
[157] Further examples include: *Arrivall of Ed.IV*, p.21; Liddy, 'Cultures of Surveillance', p.316; *Great Red Book of Bristol*, IV, pp.93-5; *CLB*, II, pp.535-6; *HC*, p.728; *LP*, IV/1, 1470-1; IV/2, 4189, 4300; IV/3, 6487; V, 1458; VI, 738; VII, 420, 874, 1386; XII/2, 91; *CSPSp*, III/2, 586; V/1, 97; *CSPM*, 976.

Nevertheless, despite this fear of rumours, contemporaries and authorities recognised the potentiality of using rumours as a political weapon, not only as *fama publica* in courts. Edward IV had deliberately 'lied' in proclamations to attack the Lancastrians and again 'fraudulently seduced' the northerners about his intentions when returning from exile in 1471, saying he had come only to claim his title to the Duchy of York, so people 'shuld noise, and say [that] openly'.[158] Richard Duke of Gloucester allegedly seems to have 'procured a common rumour… to be published and spred abroade emonge the common people' that Queen Elizabeth Woodville had died in March 1485.[159] During his reign, Richard apparently used this technique several times – even defaming his mother to bastardise his nephews, for instance.[160] Henry Tudor allegedly used all he knew to defame Richard III and consolidate the running rumours before the Battle of Bosworth: his enemy had not only 'murthered his nephew, being his king and sovereign lord, bastarded his noble brethren, and defamed his virtuous and womanly mother', but also 'compassed all the means and ways that he could invent how to stuprate (violate) his own niece under the pretence of cloaked matrimony'.[161] Sometime before 1536, John Rastell wrote to Cromwell that he had written a book and claimed that if that book 'may be brutyd that it commyth of the Kings mind', he trusted it would do a great job, proposing the printing of ten or twelve thousand copies to be 'giffyn in to every shire of England, sparklyd abrode among the people'.[162] It is striking, therefore, that even though popular rumours were potentially dangerous for being open to misunderstandings, other forms of rumour were profusely used. That was not only the case of *fama publica* in courts, but also of forms of communication that could bring support to a particular cause such as during the Wars of the Roses or the Reformation.

[158] *Arrivall of Ed.IV*, p.4; *HC*, p.292. See the proclamations of 1461 and 1471: *CCR*, I, pp.54-5; *CCR*, II, 703.
[159] *HC*, p.407.
[160] *HC*, pp.353, 355, 379, 407; *King's Letters*, V.1, CVII; Mancini, *Usurpation*, pp.102-3; *GC*, p.232, *Three Books of Vergil*, pp.183-4, 189; *PROME*, 1484, It. 1[5] (15 Mar. 2019).
[161] *RHVIICS*, I, 4. The verb 'stuprate' here certainly comes from 'stupre', see *MED* (29 July 2019).
[162] *Original Letters*, 3rd/2, CCXXIX.

Thus far, this compelling evidence demonstrates that, in fact, there was no ambiguity in using *publica vox et fama* while trying to repress 'seditious' rumours. They were not ambiguous, but given facts of political reality just as the 'useful' and 'harmful' characterisations of the people.[163] The crown's initiative in sometimes using the 'public voice and fame throughout this land' as a unified and agreeable voice to attack the 'seditious' and divisive voices of popular complaint must be seen, therefore, as an attitude that attempted to filter what was, or should be, publicly and popularly known.[164] That was an attitude – as the proclamations equally illustrate across this period – that discursively preserved the integrity of the commonwealth by extirpating dissent from people's minds and tongues. By responding to critical moments of rebellion and unrest, the government attempted to update the running rumours and bring popular opinion back under control, that is, as a united and manageable voice which integrated the discourse of the 'common weal' and 'commonwealth'. What popular rumours represented was a corrosive threat to this idea of commonwealth: they spread quickly and could undermine political unity. Rebellions and dissent could only happen when segments of the commonweal had been corroded by these seditious rumours. The seeds of rebellion and dissent were lack of deference and respect, and rumours carried them both by 'creating' slander and by providing opportunity to form opinions based on what constituted – or so the government thought – lies and falsehoods. We can further explore this relationship in the next and final section.

3.2. Rumour and the Concept of Sedition

Because the government had neither the proper and efficient means to counter rumours, nor a stable and easily-mustered military force to suppress uproar, there was a seemingly constant fear of turmoil. The government thought that if rumours were not suppressed, addressed, or

[163] As discussed in Chapter I, pp.62-78.
[164] Quoting Richard III's royal title, as phrased in parliament: *PROME*, 1485, It. 1[5] (15 Mar. 2019).

controlled soon enough, they would 'deteriorate' into sedition – meaning that they would incite plots and rebellions or multiply to outstanding proportions.[165] Thus, we are back to the social loop of anxiety to explain how rumour-mongering kept informing and expanding the concept of sedition according to its historical context, and why it is so significant for comprehending popular opinion in this period.

First and foremost, we can envisage the anxiety widespread rumours prompted and how they informed the concept of sedition by observing the relationship between two words that were etymologically different but frequently confused for a reason: seduction and sedition. Contemporaries saw rumours 'seducing' people into division and strife, and consequently used these two different words interchangeably to explain and report the dangers of rumour and seditious language.[166] By the contexts in which these words were used, as well as by the use of the verb 'seduce', it is clear that 'seducious' was not simply a matter of different spelling of 'seditious', but of using different words for a similar purpose. Just as the citizens of York were said to have been seduced when Edward IV invaded the north in 1471, the rebellion of 1497 was described as led by three blacksmiths who 'dared to seduce the people'.[167] The regulations of Coventry, in 1477, make for a compelling example of both the authorities' attitude and the concept of sedition. It is recorded that 'seducious langage… might sowe eny sysme betwixt the kinges goode grace and eny his lordez or the cominalte of this roialme'.[168] That is, the language itself provokes the 'sysme', the 'division' – the original meaning of *seditio*.[169] We have demonstrated that rumours replaced various kinds of news, spread quickly and was believed by anyone because they explained and filled

[165] For the 'deterioration' of speech, see: Bodden, *Language as the Site of Revolt*, pp.11-13.
[166] *Lincolnshire Chr.*, p.15; *HC*, p.398; *CLB*, II, pp.433-4, 520, 536-7, 566, 574-8; *Three Books of Vergil*, p.183; *RHVIICS*, I, 25; KB9/373/3, 414/9, 415/33; *Eleventh Report*, *Appendix*, *Part III* (HMC, 1887), p.108; *LP*, IV/3, App.39; VI, 1077; VIII, 623; *A Glasse of Truthe*, C7; Swinnerton, *A Litel Treatise*, A5; *CSPSp*, V/1, 10; *The Notebook of John Port*, ed. J.H. Baker (1986), pp.lv-lvi.
[167] *HC*, pp.290-3; *CSPM*, 534.
[168] *CLB*, II, p.420.
[169] '*Seditio*', *DMLBS* (21 July 2019). See more discussion in: R.B. Manning, 'The Origin of the Doctrine of Sedition', *Albion*, 12/2 (1980), p.100.

out incomplete information, and in light of this vocabulary, we can conclude that it 'seduced' people by offering a sense of reality. The problem in this, from an official perspective, was that this 'seduction' was usually for the worse: criticism, factionalism, sedition, and violence.

Secondly, the concept of 'sedition' can be defined according to either the popular or the official perspective, though both carried the same concern with the integrity of the commonwealth and the danger of 'division' in moments of crisis. On the one hand, 'sedition' was an official tool to characterise and condemn critical popular opinion as 'harmful' to politics.[170] It was by associating popular opinion with rumours, misinformation, lies, and ultimately with verbal violence that the crown frequently labelled it as 'seditious' and likely to cause 'commotion'.[171] A 'seditious' rumour, therefore, was a speech act that implied either violence or the intention of acting violently, but that could also 'seduce' others to reproduce it, believe in it, or act upon it.[172] Therefore, there was a continuum of anxiety about subversive and idle speech that was underlined by a wider discourse about order, control, and hierarchy, centred on the dangerous potential of spoken words.[173] On the other, the people used this concept to blame evil counsellors and their politics of factionalism – and although they were often correct in their opinions, they were indeed partly inflamed by rumours of destruction, punishment, taxation, and more oppression.[174] Hence, 'sedition' could be a matter of circumstance and perspective, culturally defined but contextually adaptable. There were undoubtedly rumours and criticisms that did not entail sedition and treason, but every 'seditious person' was believed to be informed by rumours and tales. One thing to underline here is that the anxiety spiral was always in the background of both sides of accusations because both the people and the authorities were over-sensitive about the

[170] See above, pp.70-8.
[171] As in: *CLB*, II, p.340; *HC*, pp.350-1; *Vitellius A XVI*, p.225; *HC*, p.393; *RHVIICS*, I, 25; *GC*, pp.294-5.
[172] 'Violence with their tongue' is the definition adopted, for example, by Cressy, *Dangerous Talk*, p.10.
[173] See: Gauvard, 'Introduction', in Billoré & Soria, *La Rumeur au Moyen Age*, p.31; Bardsley, *Venomous Tongue*, p.42; Dumolyn & Haemers, 'Subversive Speech', pp.65-70; Cressy, *Dangerous Talk*, p.37; Nadrigny, 'Rumeur et Opinion Publique', pp.26-7.
[174] See, for instance, the manifestoes of 1450 and 1469 in: *JVB*, pp.204-6, 212-3.

repression of 'truth' and the problem of wicked counsel. And this allows us to see moments of crisis and high levels of rumour-mongering as more dialogic than authoritative – which must include the Cromwellian period.[175] Taking this double-sided idea of sedition into account – the people's idea about counsellors sowing sedition, and the official idea that popular rumours and misinformation did the same – we might want to finish this chapter by enquiring whether the dynamics of seditious rumours, or the concept itself, could change over the period.

In order to tackle this question of change, a brief chronological analysis of the trend of seditious rumours may point to a few answers. As seen in the introduction to this chapter, rumours had been seen as potentially dangerous since antiquity.[176] In late medieval history, there are plenty of examples to see official views as alarmed and cautious about false news and slander, such as in 1381, in the first years of Henry IV's reign or the 1450s.[177] Rumour-mongering and its resulting fears and anxieties indeed explain a great deal of social turmoil across the period, especially during attempts at reforming the tax system and in the case of dynastic upheavals. Historians of Edward IV's reign have not failed to highlight the rumours that drove political shifts, 'propaganda', and, ultimately, the depositions of 1470-1 and 1483.[178] There is compelling evidence that Edward IV dealt with dangerous rumours since the beginning of his reign as his adversary was not a ghost nor a mere pretender, but an actual anointed king being supported by foreign forces. Then, the seditious rumours that spread in Edward's reign were mainly related to the Lancastrian strategies, followed by his marriage, his failure to fulfil his promises of reform, his collection of a 'benevolence', his attempt to

[175] See anxious behaviour and responses in: *LP*, IV/2, 4188-90, 4192, 4236, 4243, 4276, 4287; VII, 874, 1386; *CSPM*, 818; *CSPV*, IV, 601; V, 54; *CSPSp*, V/1, 97, 109.
[176] Above, p.84. Also: Allport & Postman, *The Psychology of Rumour*, pp.159-63.
[177] Walker, 'Rumour, Sedition and Popular Protest', pp.35-65; P. Morgan, 'Henry IV and the Shadow of Richard II', in R.E. Archer (ed.), *Crown, Government and People in the Fifteenth Century* (Stroud, 1995), pp.1-31; Wicker, 'Politics of Vernacular Speech', pp.187-90.
[178] C. Ross, *Edward IV* (1997), pp.44-5, 128-9, 148-51; Idem, 'Rumour, Propaganda and Public Opinion', pp.15-29; Kleineke, *Edward IV*, pp.93-103, 125-8; P. Morgan, 'The death of Edward V and the rebellion of 1483', *HR*, 68/166 (1995), pp.229-32; Allan, 'Political Propaganda', pp.97-101.

invade France in 1475, and his quarrel with his brother George, Duke of Clarence.[179] The trend in seditious rumour-mongering during the first Yorkist reign did not prove notably different from what had happened to other kings before Edward IV, nor did it prove more dangerous – as the circumstances in which these rumours were born and circulated were relatively alarming by themselves.

At first sight, what happened next was indeed more sobering and unnerving. The death of the princes in the Tower was supposed to remove Edward IV's male heirs from the succession line, but it became one of the most prolific sources of dangerous rumours and, consequently, conspiracies.[180] Richard III attempted to circulate a rumour about their 'sudden' death which convinced neither the Londoners nor the rest of the kingdom.[181] Conversely, the poorly explained deaths allowed the renewed phenomenon of the 'hidden king' that would return 'from prison, death or exile' to rescue his subjects from oppression.[182] The first major challenge and immediate consequence of the princes' death and the rumours around it was the rebellion of the Duke of Buckingham in October 1483.[183] The king did what he could to contain the growing rumours, especially by widely publicising his proclamation against seditious speech, but after April 1484 he no longer had an heir, and Queen Anne died soon after.[184] By then, the rebels and part of the nobility had already turned to another claimant, whose appeal had increased as an indirect result of the princes' death: Henry Tudor.[185] Had Richard survived the Battle of Bosworth, rumours would probably

[179] Wavrin, *Anchiennes Chronicques*, II, p.299; III, pp.100-1, 128, 141; *Paston Letters*, IV, 593; V, 781; KB9/319/17-9; 321/109; KB27/839/2r-v; *CLB*, II, pp.340-6; *JVB*, pp.212-3, 222-3; *GC*, pp.209-10; *HC*, pp.277, 326-7; *Warkworth's Chronicle*, pp.11-2; *Twelfth Report* (HMC), p.5; *Arrivall of Ed.IV*, pp.21, 31; *Crowland Chronicle*, pp.136-7; *Three Books of Vergil*, pp.167-8. See also local examples in: *CLB*, II, pp.429-73; *Plumpton Correspondence*, 31.
[180] As Rastell wrote later: 'divers men conjectured to be treue because that the bones of the said childerne coude never be founde buried', *Pastime of People*, p.293.
[181] *GC*, p.232; *Three Books of Vergil*, p.189; *HC*, p.379; *Crowland Chronicle*, pp.162-3; *FC*, pp.670-1.
[182] Comparable to Richard II: Walker, 'Rumour, Sedition and Popular Protest', p.45.
[183] M. Hicks, 'Unweaving the Web: The Plot of July 1483 against Richard III and its wider significance', *Ricardian*, 9/114 (1991), p.106; *GC*, pp.234-5; Vergil, *Three Books of Vergil*, pp.194-5; *HC*, pp.381-95.
[184] R. Horrox, *Richard III. A Study in Service* (1989), pp.298-99; *Eleventh Report* (HMC), p.106; *King's Letters*, V.1, CXII.
[185] *GC*, pp.234, 236-7; KB9/952/9, 12, 13; *Crowland Chronicle*, pp.174-5; *HC*, pp.421-2.

decrease, but the uncertainty about Edward IV's heirs had already proven to be the source of the highest peak in rumour-mongering before 1536.[186] In that sense, the logic, motives and treatment of rumour-spreading in Richard's reign remained the same in comparison to his brother's reign – but the context itself clearly amplified the rumours as a result of shared shifts in preoccupation and alarming news from the summer of 1483 to Richard's death.

As historians have extensively analysed, although Henry VII benefited from the vacuum in the succession and did everything he could to maintain Richard III in the past, the ghosts of the Yorkist kings and heirs were responsible for northern dissent and Francis Lovell's plot in 1486, for the initial success of Lambert Simnel in 1487, for the impressive duration of Perkin Warbeck's conspiracy in 1494-7, and for the unease provoked by Edmund de la Pole from 1501 to 1506.[187] What these scholars have not necessarily acknowledged is that it was not only the political circumstances of that context and the immediate rumours that allowed such plots to succeed for some time, it was primarily the nature of rumour-spreading and the lack of proper information. Most narratives of this period imply a direct link between the lack of explanation and 'official truth' about the death of the Yorkist princes back in 1483 and the possibility of so many new 'seditious rumours' and tales that fed Lovell, Simnel, Warbeck, and perhaps the De la Poles and others – also explaining a few of the rumours surrounding the rebellions of 1489 and 1497.[188] Therefore, although no moment in Henry VII's reign can compare with 1483, rumours were clearly a worse problem when there was a real lack of clarity about important facts. It follows from this that he managed public

[186] Figure 2, p.108.
[187] C.S.L. Davies, 'Information, Disinformation and Political Knowledge under Henry VII and early Henry VIII', *HR*, 85 (2012), pp.233-7; E. Cavell, 'Henry VII, the North of England, and the First Provincial Progress of 1486', *Northern History* 39 (2002), p.193; Hicks, *Wars of the Roses*, pp.243-4; G. Smith, 'Lambert Simnel and the King from Dublin', *The Ricardian*, 10/135 (1996), pp.502-3; Bennett, *Lambert Simnel*, pp.8, 15-25, 31, 48-51, 70, 78-81; Arthurson, *Perkin Warbeck*, pp.60-5; S. Cunningham, 'Pole, Edmund de la, eighth earl of Suffolk' (1472?-1513), *ODNB* (31 July 2019).
[188] *RHVIICS*, I, 25; *Anglica Historia*, pp.12-5, 64-9, 90-1; *HC*, pp.428-30, 442-3, 459, 464-6, 476-9; *GC*, pp.240-1, 277-8, 282-3, 318; *Vitellius A XVI*, pp.194, 217-21, 225; *LP RIII/HVII*, V.1, II; *CSPV*, I, 553, p.181; KB9/441/5.

opinion as carefully as possible, but also that the 'movements' of seditious rumours remained informing the concept of sedition just as they had during and before the Wars of the Roses – that is, that they could turn the gaps in public knowledge into sedition.

From a superficial analysis, Henry VIII's reign might seem to have turned the page on dynastic upheavals provoked by the rumours which resulted from the suspicious events of the summer of 1483. Indeed, in view of the past half-century and despite a few rumours that Buckingham would be made protector of England in 1509, Henry VIII's smooth succession to the throne seemed a new episode once we consider that there was in fact no struggle.[189] However, when analysed carefully, the evidence of 'seditious rumours' in Henry VIII's reign is reasonably similar to both the Yorkist and Henry VII's period. There was a considerable amount of dissatisfaction with the tax system and with other political and religious matters.[190] The king's ministers, chancellors and counsellors remained targeted by similar rumours just as before.[191] And we also see a king obsessed with his succession, given the recent history of his predecessors, who gradually persecuted his possible rivals mainly based on renewed 'seditious rumours' about their alleged conspiracies.[192] This, in turn, led him to believe that his marriage was unlawful, that he needed to marry again in order to produce a male heir, and that whoever stood against him (especially the pope) was not seeing the truth.

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[189] *The Letters of Richard Fox*, *1486-1527*, ed. P.S. Allen & H.M. Allen (Oxford, 1929), pp.42-4; *LP*, I/1, 157.
[190] Initially with the inherited issue of Empson and Dudley: *HC*, pp.505, 514-5. Taxation rumours appear more in 1524-5: *HC*, pp.696-702; *Original Letters*, 3rd/1, CXXVII, CCXXVIII; 3rd/2, CXXXI; *LP*, IV/1, 1272, 1321, 1343, 1470; IV/3, App.39. Complaints requesting the return of loaned money in April 1528: *LP*, IV/2, 4188-90, 4192, 4236, 4243, 4276, 4287. Comments in parliament about the fear of past tax rebellions are reproduced by Chapuys in April 1531: *Further Supplement to CSPSp*, pp.450-1. Taxation rumours grow exponentially during the Pilgrimage of Grace: *HC*, pp.819-20; *TRP*, 168; *LP*, XII/1, 852, 900, 901, 945-6, 1175; XII/2, 918, 1076. Other matters around seditious rumours include Richard Hunne's case and the Evil May Day: *Anglica Historia*, pp.228-9, 242-5; *HC*, pp.586-91; *CSPV*, II, 975.
[191] *Original Letters*, 3rd/2, CXLV, CLIV; *HC*, pp.719, 721; *CSPSp*, III/2, 37, 69. And see: P. Gwyn, *The King's Cardinal* (2002), pp.600-2; Walker, *John Skelton and the Politics*, pp.185-6, 197-8.
[192] As early as 1515 there were 'seditious rumours' about the possibility that the king's soldiers serving in Tournai would join Richard de la Pole: *LP*, II/1, 147-8, 171, 325-6, 1259. Another rumour related to a possible invasion orchestrated by him via Scotland is recorded in September 1520: *LP*, III/1, 995, 1003. The case of the Duke of Buckingham is found in: KB8/5/28; *CSPV*, III, 219.

The resulting changes in religious precepts, the annulment of the royal marriage, and the break with Rome increasingly generated more 'seditious rumours' and rebellions in an already chaotic conjuncture – some of which were wishful thinking in response to what was seen as radical and sinful changes.[193] Besides, the allegiance to the crown was presented in opposition to the allegiance to the 'Bishop of Rome' after the Act of Supremacy, which resulted in a new way of accusing the conservatives of sedition and treason. The Nun of Kent and her supporters comprise probably the loudest manifestation of this paradox in its early stage.[194] But it was in late 1536 and early 1537 that most of these issues were skilfully gathered, presented and criticised by the rebels.[195] The rumours being persecuted in 1537, along with the sharpening of the treason legislation to comprise other kinds of rumours, also illustrate the authorities' concern about what happened in the previous year and before – and what they were going to pursue from then onwards.[196] In sum, what this survey chiefly reveals is that while rumours were no exception in politics – and their content is comparable throughout the period – they could decisively grow stronger according to the kinds of challenges presented to the people, boosting the anxiety loop and affecting both the government and public opinion. The difference in Henry VIII's pattern of evidence is that these changes – especially the reform of the church – affected most people and took place in a short period of time that gave no time for people to cope with them.

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[193] *CSPSp*, III/2, 37, 69; V/2, 9; *HC*, pp.728, 819-20; LP, IV/3, 5190, 6652; V, 793, 912, 1209; VI, 411, 433; VIII, 1043; IX, 791.

[194] Shagan, 'Rumours and Popular Politics', p.57; Idem, *Popular Politics*, pp.75-6. Her case and the resulting rumours and prophecies are found in: *CSPSp*, IV/2, 1149; *HC*, pp.808-14; *LP*, VII, 72. The spreading of the Act of Succession in January 1534 is mentioned in: *LP*, VII, 54, 64.

[195] See n.45, p.94. For extensive analyses mostly based on these rumours: Shagan, 'Rumours and Popular Politics', pp.30, 32, 38, 57-9; C.S.L. Davies, 'Popular Religion and the Pilgrimage of Grace', in A. Fletcher and J. Stevenson (eds.), *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1985), pp.67-71; M. Bush, '"Up for the Commonweal": the significance of tax grievances in the English rebellions of 1536', *EHR*, 106/409 (1991), pp.299-316; Idem, '"Enhancements and Importunate Charges": an analysis of the tax complaints of October 1536', *Albion*, 22/2 (1990), pp.408-19; Idem, 'Tax, Reform and Rebellion', pp.380-1; Idem and Bownes, *The Defeat of the Pilgrimage of Grace*, p.29; M.H. Dodds and R. Dodds, *The Pilgrimage of Grace and the Exeter Conspiracy* (1971), I, pp.69-86, 98, 329-33, 341; G. Elton, *Policy and Police: The Enforcement of the Reformation in the Age of Thomas Cromwell* (Cambridge, 1972), pp.65-6.

[196] Cooper, *Propaganda*, pp.110-2; Elton, *Policy and Police*, 73, Cressy, *Dangerous Talk*, 37.

Consequently, when rumour-mongering seemed to be most out of control – that is, when we observe the peaks in Figure 2 above[197] – the judicial use of sedition expanded as an attempt to control the new trend of dangerous rumours, and to restore the crown's hegemonic voice about the changes in progress. The impact of anxiety and fear in this logic, therefore, cannot be underestimated: the number of changes people faced in the 1530s caused an unprecedented wave of both true and false rumours as they endeavoured to cope with such a disconcerting reality. The middle of this influx was the background of the approval of the new Act of Treasons of 1534, condemning specific slanderous words about the monarch. The content and logic of rumour-mongering in this later context, therefore, did not change in its essence. But the official approach to rumours could not afford to deal with their alarming levels as they could divide the commonwealth, corrode its structure and bring sedition – as in fact it did in 1536-7. These approaches to rumour and sedition will remain under analysis in Chapter III and IV, and we shall see the ramifications and consequences of this expansion in the scope of sedition and treason.

In conclusion, there was a constant pressure orchestrated by the fears and anxieties surrounding rumours – the anxiety that produced rumours among the people, and the anxiety that produced the responses by royal authorities. While there was no ambiguity in the government's use of the 'public fame' and its persecution of other rumours, what Section 3.1 revealed was that it was crucial for the governments of this period to believe that they were in relative control of the content of essential rumours and news. They needed to try to control rumours because these pieces of information could turn into judicial, social, and political devices. This helps to explain why, when rumour-mongering slipped out of any possible control, the judicial use of 'sedition' grew in 1534 and caused another wave of uneasiness

[197] Figure 2, p.108.

that led to more rumour and more dissatisfaction. Therefore, this section also demonstrated that the levels of rumour-mongering observed in Section 2 and the social anxiety they caused cannot be wholly separated from significant changes in policy such as the statutes of 1534. The more there was change, the more there were rumours and complaints. The accumulating evidence of recorded rumours observed in Figure 2 probably increased the concern about sedition, and perhaps the readier use of judicial action that will be discussed in the following chapter. It is only by seeing this whole period under this light of the anxiety loop that we can better understand the impact of rumours on public and popular opinion, on the one side, and on the government's concern and new legislation, on the other.

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This study of rumour has shown that the views of the people were an insistent pressure on high politics, and this also explains the government's attention to rumours and its attempts of controlling and establishing political communication through them. After all, they were a midway between disaffection and rebellion, between opinion formation and forms of reputation that invariably affected politics. 'The publication of [rumours]', Cromwell was informed in 1537, 'encourage[s] divers persons to rebellion'.[198] Thus, Section 1 has sought to argue that we need to consider the whole spectrum of popular voices – as they appear in the sources – both to comprehend popular opinion itself and to understand the official and anxious responses to rumour. We have seen that the anxiety loop plays a crucial role in this vocabulary precisely because popular tongues were 'full noyous and jopardous'.[199] They were the 'harmful' voices of the people who were stigmatised as not only 'vagabonds and beggars' but also as 'vagabonds and diffamers'.[200] The variety of vocabulary choices,

[198] *LP*, XII/2, 800. Compare with: *Three Books of Vergil*, p.189; *Crowland Chronicle*, pp.162-3; KB9/952/9; *Thirteenth Report, Appendix, Part IV* (HMC, 1892), p.106; *LP*, XI, 984, 1294; XII/1, 1195; *TRP*, 169.
[199] KB9/414/15.
[200] *Ecclesiastical Courts in London*, cxxv.

including numerous ambiguous meanings, reflects contemporary attempts at comprehending public speech and dealing with it. To summarise with Neubauer's words, much 'like the multitude, the rumour is one voice and many voices at the same time'.[201] Hence, those words are not merely rumours; they are reflections of public speech and feelings often associated with anxiety, uncertainty, and fear of change. On the whole, this vocabulary also demonstrates that rumour coexists with various forms of popular speech that were used to conjecture about the political context and consequently bothered and affected contemporary observers to the point that they were also recorded as 'marvelling' about popular speech.[202]

Then, in Section 2, we have observed the level of uncertainties among the populace and commentators by the fluctuation in the volume of reported rumours. First, that variance showed the anxiety loop more clearly: the peaks in the volume of evidence reflected shifts in preoccupation when rumour-mongering commonly become a response to incomplete information. Second, those peaks also illustrated the consequence of rumour: the authorities and commentators who were ready to use the label of 'seditious rumour' were themselves also coping with change, anxiety and uncertainty. Thus, it was the social loop that maximised the impression of more crisis and the necessity of controlling popular speech because if it were not controlled, these 'noises' could be manipulated by ill-intentioned subjects and could be believed by anyone. Therefore, there was a dialectic between popular opinion, rumours and the crown that was driven by this social loop of anxiety and might explain both the highest peaks of the period and the crown's response. What is revealing of the government's behaviour in the 1530s is that, if we agree that there was a more authoritarian trend, we must see it as more natural. We must comprehend the new law of treason, the supremacy, and what seems a bolder treatment of dissent as a common reaction to pressure and to the anxiety

[201] Neubauer, *The Rumour*, p.79.
[202] Henry VIII is recorded as such numerous times: *LP*, XI, 569, 687, 748, 1227. As for the people conjecturing, see, for examples, the uses of 'marvel' and 'wonder' above, pp.100-2, and: *Three Books of Vergil*, pp.121-2, 124, 175; *HC*, p.290.

loop that affected anyone in the political society. In this sense, the concept of sedition and its relationship with rumour, in Section 3, is clarified by the same dialectic of fear and symbolic control: the crown and church officials needed the 'common fame' as a unitary voice to counter-attack the divisive and corrosive 'seditious rumours'. These rumours were seen as feeding seditious movements and needed to be repressed and clarified as soon as they were identified in order to avoid division and strife. That is the most precise and basic premise of the concept of 'sedition': it developed from the idea of 'division' of the commonwealth itself, but also of the duty of allegiance. The rumours considered 'seditious', or 'slanderous', were already seen as signs of violence that could provoke fissures in the political structure. They both manifested breach of political concord and possible rebellion because rebellion and rumours 'differ nothing in kind and blood, but as it were in sex only'; one 'masculine, the other feminine'.[203]

[203] Sir Francis Bacon in his *The Wisdom of the Ancients*, quoted in Neubauer, *The Rumour*, p.79.

PART II

THE CONTENTS OF POPULAR SPEECH

CHAPTER III

'We shall never have good world': Popular Language as Sedition

During the turmoil that swayed northern England in late 1536, a monk of Lenton Abbey, Nottinghamshire, said 'it [was] a marvellous world, for the king [would] hang a man for a word speaking' those days – further adding that, while the king lived, they would 'never have better world'.[1] Rather than implying sedition, this monk simply made ambiguous remarks about an unsettling world, as did a Kentish spinster months later, also lamenting that people would 'never have good world'.[2] However, from the authorities' standpoint, these words ultimately implied the death of the sovereign and sedition. Although people were not necessarily executed for spoken words, the late medieval approach to and prosecution of seditious language had been fairly similar to what followed in the sixteenth century: authorities resorted to a substantially subjective and sometimes overtly arbitrary definition of sedition. In July 1461, for example, one John Clerk of London, who often caused 'debate, strife and vexacion' among his neighbours, was indicted for seditious words against the king because he refused to attend Edward IV's coronation saying he would have preferred to see 'the hunting of a dooke'.[3] And yet, the new treason law that condemned speech and slanderous comments in 1534 has obfuscated the late medieval evidence mostly because the impressive records that survive for the 1530s have no counterpart.[4] Consequently, this imbalance contributes to seeing an increasingly authoritarian state under Thomas Cromwell and Henry VIII, but not necessarily to understanding the roots of these new measures and their connection with the late medieval approach to seditious language.

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[1] KB9/542/11; *LP*, XII/1, 892.
[2] KB9/538/13; *LP*, XII/2, 1301.
[3] KB145/7/1, mm. unnumbered.
[4] Elton, *Policy and Police*, pp.304, 325; Duggan, 'Thought Control', pp.105-113, 156, 158-65, 242; Cressy, *Dangerous Talk*, pp.xi, 48-50; Cooper, *Propaganda*, pp.87-90, 107, 125-30. For an overview: Gunn, *Early Tudor Government*, pp.181-3.

This perspective about the approach to dissent and a more authoritarian policy is justifiable if we consider that most of these studies were carried out by early modernists. After all, these scholars have every reason to envisage a more centralised government that necessarily accompanied new institutions and more definitions of sedition and treason.[5] Nonetheless, the arguments advanced in Chapters I and II have suggested that the ruling elites' persistent willingness to use the 'public' and the 'people' as well as to react to the movement and content of rumours, cannot possibly be considered as something 'new and disturbingly modern' – nor can it be merely named as 'censorship' or 'thought control'.[6] These exaggerations and problematic assumptions made by Christopher Duggan – briefly discussed in the Introduction[7] – will serve as a useful starter for the discussion of this chapter and its approach to the contents of popular speech.

Therefore, this chapter makes some important revisions to interpretations of seditious language and treason, but it is not about every case or every rebellion or plot that took place between 1461 and 1537. It is rather about a central argument that considers critical popular language as inherently seditious while analysing its treatment, content, prevailing trends, and possible intentions. Section 1 will firstly argue that by comprehending the treatment of abusive speech and dissent in the later medieval period we can shed more light on the new treason law approved in 1534 and enquire whether it was indeed innovative and authoritative. Secondly, by examining what the fluctuating volume of evidence means to this analysis – that is, the dramatically different numbers of surviving sources for 1526-37 as opposed to 1461-1525 – we shall understand that more records do not necessarily mean that more prosecution of speech was the case, nor that its treatment was radically different from

[5] This may include: Duggan, 'Thought Control', p.277; Cooper, *Propaganda*, pp.87-8; Manning, 'The Origin of the Doctrine of Sedition', pp.99-114; Wood, *Riot*, *Rebellion*, *and Popular Politics*, pp.17-18; Idem, 'Plebeian Languages', pp.67-98.
[6] Quoting: Duggan, 'Thought Control', pp.196-7, 199-200, 242.
[7] See above, pp.13-16.

that in the Middle Ages. More importantly, Sections 2 and 3 will advance that we might consider any critical popular utterance as potentially seditious because it was 'harmful' to politics, and because it also constituted the 'noisy' language of anxiety and rumour.[8] In other words, merely by lacking compliance in speech, ordinary people were disputing language, sometimes even disputing the meanings of politically charged words such as 'commonwealth', and consequently breaking the hegemonic voices of the elites, the church and the crown.[9] Although we have seen that the commons could put pressure on local and central authorities by simply spreading rumours, we shall also investigate, in Section 3, whether they did use language persuasively and insulted and accused authorities intentionally, or whether popular speech was too readily miscast as seditious in periods of crisis.

1. The Treatment of Abusive Language by the Authorities

The debate on constructive treason by words helps us to begin to contextualise the Cromwellian legislation, and therefore, the overall argument of this section. Over the past century, historians have assumed various positions about the problem of 'treason by words', but we can summarise this debate in two virtually opposed sides. Some would see the statute of 1534 as ground-breaking by downplaying the existence of cases of treason by words in the later medieval period.[10] These academics have reached this conclusion either because of the technical illegality in prosecuting speech or because some trials that involved linguistic

[8] I refer to the treatment of the people as 'harmful' in Chapter I, pp.70-78; and the vocabulary of rumours in relation to 'noise' in Chapter II, pp.91-107.
[9] This is a reference both to the idea of 'discursive conflicts' on p.20 and n.70; and to the similar approaches to the hegemony of voices, such as in: Wood, *Rebellions of 1549*, pp.143-84; Idem, *Riot*, *Rebellion and Popular Politics*, pp.18-23; Sharpe, *Selling the Tudor Monarchy*, p.100; and S. Minson, 'Political Culture and Urban Space in early Tudor London' (DPhil. Thesis, Oxford, 2013), chs.7-8.
[10] S. Rezneck, 'Constructive Treason by Words', *American Historical Review*, 33/3 (1928), pp.546, 548, 551-2; C.A.F. Meekings, 'Thomas Kerver's Case, 1444', *EHR*, 90 (1975); Elton, *Policy and Police*, pp.277-88; and *The Tudor Constitution*, ed. G.R. Elton (Cambridge, 1982), pp.59-63. See also the overview of Cressy, *Dangerous Talk*, pp.48-50.

expressions also revealed a more dangerous conspiracy in the background. On the other side are scholars who have interpreted the Cromwellian law as a product of circumstances and as merely incremental to the late medieval developments.[11] The thesis of Christopher Duggan could be described as standing in between these perspectives: he acknowledges the late medieval cases of treason by words, but to him, they are exceptions proving the rule.[12] Given the low numbers that survive, he continues, the late medieval evidence and especially the cases under Henry VII only stress that the prosecution was 'weak' because of a contemporary view of public opinion that discouraged punishment of language. He further argues that what facilitated Cromwell and Henry VIII in their pursuit of 'censorship' and 'thought control' was the new 'ideology' of the Supremacy aided by the dismissive humanist view of public opinion. While he revises the historiography about treason in this period, and particularly Geoffrey Elton's work, he concludes with a more 'revolutionary' and 'Machiavellian' view of Cromwell than one could expect.

Thus, this section builds upon this historiography of treason and sedition. Section 1.1, in particular, examines the treatment of challenging language by late medieval governments to juxtapose it with the early modern discussion. Subsequently, section 1.2 will focus on what numbers of cases can and cannot tell about the prosecution of abusive language.

1.1. Abusive Language as Breach of Political Concord

We can commence tackling the late medieval approach to abusive language first by a survey of the legislative framework in order to observe that, just as in 1534, every piece of legislation

[11] I. Thornley, 'Treason by Words in the Fifteenth Century', *EHR*, 32 (1917) 556-561; Eadem, 'The Treason Legislation of Henry VIII (1531-1534)', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 11 (1917), 87-123; Manning, 'The Origin of the Doctrine of Sedition', pp.101-12; J. Bellamy, *The Law of Treason in England in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1970), pp.102-5, 116-9, 208-9; Idem, *The Tudor Law of Treason* (Toronto, 1979), pp.6-7, 10-2, 22-32, 43-4.

[12] For what follows: Duggan, 'Thought Control', pp.86-99, 173-4, 176-7, 196-7, 199-200, 242, 245.

was circumstantial and invariably responded to its political context. Statutes since the thirteenth century were concerned with the consequences and intentions behind speech acts, already treating challenging language as a political crime itself. In 1275, an act against 'devisors of slanderous tales' mentioned they were causing discord, or 'occasion of discord', between the king and his people – proposing punishment for those who 'told or published' any such tales.[13] The Statute of Treasons of 1352 has been interpreted both as a declaration by the king's council that ambiguous charges of 'accroaching the king's power' would cease and as a declaration of trust between the king and his nobles.[14] Despite having resulted in other ambiguous charges – 'compassing and imagining the king's death' – two petitions of that session demonstrate that there were at least two immediate political concerns in 1352: with people who were being condemned for 'reasons unknown to the commonalty as treason'; and with judges convicting clergymen for treason when they allegedly should be judged in the ecclesiastical courts (which the king denied).[15] Under Richard II, new acts in 1378, 1388, and 1397-8 pointed to an acute concern with 'debates', 'discord', 'subversion of the realm', 'false news', and with anyone 'purposing' the king's death.[16] Given that the legislation of Richard II was repealed in 1399, the next few generations of lawyers had to deal with the statute of 1352 as it stood until 1534 and, whenever necessary, they had to adjust its ambiguous clauses to fit political interests of the crown.[17] By all means, these statutes were directly responsive to their context and were all concerned with political concord and speech.

Due to a lack of precision in the statements of 1352 and the complex and frequently fictitious tone of judicial proceedings, it is difficult to be sure whether certain treason cases

[13] *St.R.*, 3 Edw.I, c.34.
[14] M. Ormrod, 'Edward III: Parliament of 1352, Introduction', *PROME* (02 Aug. 2019); Bellamy, *The Law of Treason*, pp.64-70, 97.
[15] *PROME*, 1352, Its. 17, 60 (02 Aug. 2019).
[16] *St.R.*, 2 Ric.II, c.5; 12 Ric.II, c.11; 21 Ric.II, c.3.
[17] For other advancements in the scope of treason not related to this discussion, see: Bellamy, *The Law of Treason*, pp.124-37; Idem, *The Tudor Law of Treason*, pp.15-22.

in the fifteenth century were addressing speech alone.[18] Still, a few studies have already shown that some of the surviving cases were clearly responding to immediate political circumstances and therefore were also about the intentions revealed by speech. There were several cases in the early fifteenth century in which rumours about the survival of Richard II and the consequent protests against Henry IV led authorities to act promptly against seditious speech.[19] Equally, a chronicler reported that one William Clerk, a scribe from Canterbury, had his tongue cut out in 1401 'for speaking disrespectfully about the king', his hand cut off because he had written about it, and, when he accused others and could not prove his accusations, he was executed at the Tower.[20] There were also a considerable number of cases of punishment for slanderous speech during the reign of Henry VI – the king who was considered by contemporaries as 'a child and a fool', or 'a sheep', and who underwent a great deal of gossip about his Queen, Margaret of Anjou.[21] By looking at all this evidence and legislation, we can already suggest that despite the difference in the number of surviving records, the late medieval governments acted similarly towards seditious speech in comparison to the sixteenth century. They were all concerned with inward sedition, with the symbolic fragmentation of the political concord that challenging language represented.

Thus, the somewhat artificial charges claiming that traitors wanted to 'destroy the king and the realm' or were 'hurtful to the commonwealth' can be reinterpreted as a concern with political unity. After all, seditious and treasonable language could 'extirp love, concord and quiet whereby any commonwealth flourishes, and… sow in their place sedition'.[22] Those who abhorred the government's policy in tumultuous periods would probably not agree that

[18] Also recognised by: Avrutick, 'Commissions of Oyer and Terminer', p.302.
[19] Walker, 'Rumour, Sedition and Popular Protest', pp.31-65.
[20] Quoted in: P. Strohm, *England's Empty Throne* (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1998), p.25.
[21] Wicker, 'Politics of Vernacular Speech', pp.171-8, 188-93; H. Maurer, 'Delegitimizing Lancaster: the Yorkist use of gendered propaganda during the Wars of the Roses', in D.L. Biggs, S.D. Michalove and A.C. Reeves (eds.), *Reputation and Representation in Fifteenth Century Europe* (Leiden and Boston, 2004), pp.169-86.
[22] Charge sent to inferior courts in the 1530s, reproduced by Elton, *Policy and Police*, p.46.

their criticism was seditious, but they would also say that the 'evil counsellors' and 'oppressors' were likewise sowers of sedition because these advisers also 'extirped love' and replaced it with division. In that sense, every piece of new legislation about dissent and treason, as well as their immediate concerns, fundamentally targeted public opinion: in 1275, in 1352, in the attempts of Richard II, and in 1534 the target was both the political opinions and words, as well as the political actions that could involve first speech, and only later, violence.[23]

This pattern of approaching abusive language as a political crime can be observed in more detail in the period under analysis here. Indictments that do not show physical actions or riots multiply under the same vague notion of 'imagining and compassing the king's death' or, what is more important, actually showing the punishment of treasonable, seditious, opprobrious words.[24] Even before John Clerk's indictment of 1461, quoted in the introduction to this chapter, contemporaries realised that people were being condemned for words alone: the *Great Chronicle*, for instance, records that one Walter Walker, grocer, was beheaded in Smithfield 'for misbehaving & wordis spokin again[st] the King'.[25] Equally revealing is the consciousness that language was dangerous and could be punished at any time: an action in Chancery demonstrates that, although the plaintiff, one John Bruhern, showed true allegiance to Edward IV, he nevertheless went into hiding 'for certain language he said about king Henry and other lords about him' sometime in 1467-72.[26] Sir John Paston wrote cautiously in April and September 1471, advising a certain cousin to be aware of his 'deling or langage…for the world…is right qwesye', and saying that John Paston should

[23] I prolong here the proposition of Andy Wood about the sedition legislation of the sixteenth century to the late medieval acts about rumours, slander and treason: *Riot*, *Rebellion*, *and Popular Politics*, p.34.
[24] KB9/295/6; 297/90, 126; 299/37, 60; 135/47, 82; 311/2; 320/13-4, 16; 325/4; 321/109; 33/30, 33, 34, 36, 39; KB27/801/1v; 816/2r; 817/17f. For indictments that merged charges of other crimes with words against the king: KB27/801/6v; KB9/8/55, 64, 78-9; 306/31; 312/69; 41/53; 331/43-4; 334/44. For mere 'suspicious' behaviour: KB9/304/38, 43; 312/66-7; 316/35-6; 944/45; KB27/837/1r & m.4v; 838/3v; 840/1r; *CLB*, II, p.340.
[25] *GC*, p.196.
[26] C1/46/169.

control his speech, 'so that fro hense forthe *by your langage* noo man perceive that ye favor any person contrary to the Kinges plesur'.[27] Likewise, the only extant example of loyalty expressed by words in such indictments also stresses the importance of speech. One Thomas Moryce pledged his allegiance to Edward IV in April 1462 by saying that when there was an uproar in Winchester to help Lancastrian nobles, he was asked whether he 'wold goo to Harry that was king howe they wold', but his answer was 'I wold not come there nor no man shuld'.[28] Thus, although the surviving evidence of punishment for the Yorkist period is modest, the uneasiness surrounding language is indeed compelling.

Moreover, some rather obscure cases of seditious language as well as the well-known rumours surrounding prophecies in the Duke of Clarence's household help to shed more light on the question. In the context of Henry VI's second deposition, one Geoffrey Buntyng asked the court of Chancery for surety of peace as he feared for his life and stood 'in grete gruge and malice of his neigburs'. What had led to his situation was his accusation against one Thomas Gausell of 'unsitting (*sic*) language agains[t] the king', of supporting Henry VI at the battle of Tewkesbury (May 1471), and of inciting people to rise in Henry's favour in Norfolk. In reaction, Gausell forged the same bill of complaint by hiring a scrivener of Westminster to copy it and exchange his name with that of Geoffrey Buntyng.[29] This whole case, and especially Buntyng's attitude, reveals that even though we do not know whether he was punished, people who were loyal to the king knew they could not tolerate 'unfitting language'—let alone from someone inciting others to rebel. Suspicions of treason, most likely reaching the court of King's Bench via rumours or local gossip, were being recorded throughout the realm even in the final and rather peaceful months of Edward's reign.[30] Therefore, when referring to the symbolic case of Thomas Burdett in 1477 – accused

[27] Emphasis added: *Paston Letters*, V, 774, 781.
[28] KB9/942/3.
[29] C1/43/284-90.
[30] KB9/301/26; 317/72, 94, 115; 318/14; 332/32; 360/47, 52, 56; 361/68.

of having calculated the king's and Prince Edward's death by 'necromancy' and 'astronomy', as well as of spreading 'seditious and treasonable bills' with 'treasonable arguments' – one should bear in mind that it was not unprecedented.[31] Besides, the only comments that survived about the subsequent accusation of George, Duke of Clarence, also highlighted speech acts – for he allegedly said the king 'was a bastard, not fit to reign, and made men take oaths of allegiance to him'. [32] In comparison, just because Chief Justice Fyneux openly declared in 1521 that intentions showed by various acts, including words, were enough proof of treason, the trial of the Duke of Buckingham cannot possibly be seen as a watershed in the treatment of treasonable language.[33] Thomas Burdett's case was already appalling enough to be remembered in the alleged speech given by Buckingham at the Guildhall in 1483, and in Sir Thomas More's words, who claimed that Burdett 'was for a worde spoken in hast, cruelly behedded, by the misconstruing of the lawes of this realme for the princes plesure'.[34] Both cases, of 1477-8 and 1521, might reflect a specific and tempestuous attitude but it also indicates that this attitude was always the case – there was no ideology of persecuting abusive language, there were just responses to immediate threats. In addressing seditious and treasonable language, authorities were as mindful of the role of speech as they were of the role of possible action.

Despite the scarcity of evidence of seditious and treasonable words in Richard III's brief reign, other sources are still revealing of his attitude. It has already been established above that the levels of rumour-mongering were extraordinary in 1483, and this resulted in arbitrary executions and alarming proclamations.[35] When parliament met, Richard's title to

[31] KB9/344/18; KB8/1/9, 58-9; *DKR*, III, App.II, p.213-4.
[32] *PROME*, 1478, App.1 (05 Aug. 2019).
[33] This is part of Duggan's argument: Duggan, 'Thought Control', pp.54-5. For more details on Fyneux: Bellamy, *The Tudor Treason Law*, p.32. And contemporary comments in: *HC*, p.623; *The Notebook of Sir John Port*, pp.124-5. Buckingham's trial is in: KB8/5/28.
[34] More, *History of Richard III*, pp.69-70.
[35] *Anglica Historia*, pp.181-2, 187-8; *HC*, pp.364, 393, 397; *FC*, p.669; Gairdner, *Richard III*, pp.343-4. See the statistics of rumour-mongering above: Figure 2, p.108.

the crown was explicitly enacted with the purpose of 'quieting men's minds' and removing 'the occasion of all doubt and seditious language' from the people.[36] This struggle of the Ricardian government for political concord in its first year seems to have resulted in little or nothing, and from July to November 1484 supporters of Henry Tudor were either already fleeing to Brittany or sending money to incentivise an invasion.[37] That was partly the case of William Collingbourne, who pinned his 'ballads of murmurs and seditions' at the doors of St Paul's and other places in London with their infamous title: 'The Catt, the Ratt, and Lovell ouyr dogge rulin all Engeland, undyr a hogge'.[38] He was also executed for his other actions that suggested communication with Henry Tudor or his supporters, but it is the rhyme that is highlighted by the chroniclers and sets the tone for the official indictment. By early 1485, the rumours of plots had multiplied, and an invasion by Henry seemed closer than ever. In April, Richard sent new proclamations to Southampton and York (and most certainly to other places) saying that seditious people were multiplying both in London 'and elliswhere', and ordered that anyone who saw a seditious bill being cast, should 'take it down, and without reading or showing the same to any other person, bring it forthwith unto us or some of the lord of our council'.[39] Again, the crime rested primarily on the use of language and the treatment of abusive language was persistently meticulous.

Thus far, we have seen that the treatment of abusive language was undoubtedly not weak because it was always concerned with breach of political concord, rather than only with violence and the 'king's peace'. The pattern of prosecution in the early years of Henry VII strengthens the same point.[40] First of all, scholars have shown that Henry VII's distribution

[36] *PROME*, 1484, It.1[5] (05 Aug. 2019).
[37] *GC*, pp.236-7. Richard Edgecombe: KB9/369/9; Sir William Brandon and his sons: KB9/953/18-16; Other suspicions: KB9/952/56, 40, 39. See accounts and discussions in: Horrox, *Richard III*, pp.275-81; Ross, *Richard III*, pp.202-3; Scase, *Literature and Complaint*, pp.141-2.
[38] For this and what follows: KB9/952/9, 12, 13; *GC*, p.236; *HC*, p.398; *FC*, pp.671-3. See also: R. Horrox, 'Richard III and London', *The Ricardian*, 6/85 (1984), p.328.
[39] *Eleventh Report* (HMC), p.106; *King's Letters*, V.1, CXII, pp.265-7; *YHB*, I, p.359.
[40] KB27/901/13v; 902/4v; 905/1r, 7r, 16r; 909/13r; 910/3v; KB9/138/1-6, 66-79; 1060/70; 371/4, 16; 379/15; 412/21; *King's Letters*, V.2, IX-X. Other traitors with no speech recorded include: KB9/957/8; *RHVIICS*, I, 28,

of bonds, and their inherent threat of financial loss, was even applied to loose talk and they were ultimately a political weapon to enforce loyalty and behaviour from an early point in the reign.[41] Secondly, the naturally disconcerting situation of his usurpation, exacerbated by the number of pretenders claiming the crown for a significant number of years, prompted anxious reactions which showed – also from the beginning – that there was going to be a sharp response to dissent, including bolder attacks on clerical dissenters.[42] A letter sent to Henry Vernon in 1485, for example, shows Henry's state of alarm with the 'north parties' that were taking captains whose nicknames mimicked the rebellions of 1381, 1450 and 1469 – and these threats haunted Henry VII at least until 1487.[43]

The political climate was probably too uncertain to take any risks. In London people were indicted for treason in May 1486 for their suspicious conventicles and, most importantly, for circulating threatening banners that included the ragged staff (certainly a reference to the Earl of Warwick, then in prison) and, strangely enough, the 'red rose'.[44] This case shows that the authorities were particularly alarmed by what looked like a threat of popular rebellion in the city, as the people involved were also distributing other symbols (perhaps in the same banners): 'plowghes' and 'wolsakkes', as reference to peasants and farmers; and 'clowted shoes' (that is, patched or ragged shoes), characteristic of the ordinary people more broadly.[45] Moreover, in the context of Lambert Simnel's plot, the Earl of

36; KB27/914/7r, 8v, 15r-v; 915/1r; *PROME*, 1487, It.27 (07 Aug. 2019); *Plumpton Correspondence*, 52. For the concern with Lambert Simnel and the resulting rumours, see: Hicks, *Wars of the Roses*, pp.243-4; Bennett, *Lambert Simnel*, pp.7-8, 70. And see the evidence below, pp.176-7.

[41] Hicks, *Wars of the Roses*, pp.258-9, 270; S. Cunningham, 'Henry VII and Rebellion in North-Eastern England, 1485-1492: Bonds of Allegiance and The Establishment of Tudor Authority', *Northern History*, 32 (1996), pp.42-74; Idem, 'Loyalty and the usurper: recognizances, the council and allegiance under Henry VII', *HR*, 82/217 (2009); 459-481; Arthurson, 'The Rising of 1497', pp.11-14.

[42] *Paston Letters*, VI, 1006; KB9/369/35; 370; KB27/902/2v-3v; *RHVIICS*, I, 59.

[43] *RHVIICS*, I, 12; *Select Cases in the Council of Henry VII*, p.8; *YHB*, II, 540-5. For the context: Bennett, *Lambert Simnel*, p.33; Hicks, *Wars of the Roses*, p.240.

[44] For this and what follows: KB9/371/23. A. Goodman inverted the meaning by claiming 'the Yorkist badge of the white rose' in his *The Wars of the Roses* (1981), p.205, though it clearly reads 'rubee rose' in the indictment.

[45] I owe the important meaning of 'clouted shoes' to Andy Wood – who raised the example of Elizabeth Wood (indicted for treason in 1536) in a recent paper given at The National Archives: 'Rebel voices: seditious words in England, 1500-1640' (Feb. 2019). See Elizabeth Wood's case below, p.178 and n.194.

Northumberland wrote to the city of York asking for 'sure watche to be made… and also in subduing all riot and *riotous langage* by any persone committed contrary to the well of the king'.[46] As Polydore Vergil summarised the later years of Henry VII, even though clergymen were preaching against Empson and Dudley, 'no one dared to complain, at all events openly, but all greatly feared for themselves'.[47] And yet, plenty of people did complain, and their speech was seen as the main threat to political unity.

In sum, late medieval governments were just as much concerned with words and public opinion as they were with violence and public order. Abusive language was just the first step towards challenging authority, and late medieval governments did not doubt that – just as they did not doubt that rumours were the seeds of sedition and needed to be controlled.[48] Such attitude was demonstrated by legislation and numerous cases that even precede the Yorkist period. Hence, what some historians of the early modern period have mostly considered as a despotic and 'unconstitutional' move, a 'real novelty', or the beginning of 'censorship' and 'thought-control' by Henry VIII and Cromwell in 1534-6, can be relatively seen here as a natural reaction in a complicated political and religious scenario that had many precedents.[49]

The second essential point in this section concerns the role of the church and heresy in this analysis of breach of political concord evinced by language. After all, what we normally call heresy merely constituted evidence of political surveillance in a different shape, but also involving unorthodox – and frequently disrespectful – manifestations of speech acts. This

[46] Emphasis added: *YHB*, II, p.544. Similar concern in 1488: *YHB*, II, p.609. For the disturbance before and after Stoke Field: Hicks, *Wars of the Roses*, p.237; Chrimes, *Henry VII*, pp.73-7; Bennett, *Lambert Simnel*, p.103.
[47] *Anglica Historia*, pp.130-1.
[48] See above, pp.121-29.
[49] Elton, *Policy and Police*, p.288; Cooper, *Propaganda*, p.87; Duggan, 'Thought Control', p.119. Cressy is probably the only one who has envisaged some continuity: *Dangerous Talk*, p.37. But J. Baker has (rightly) stressed that the acts of the 1530s constituted an unusual repressive trend of legislation, hence their repeal under Edward VI and Mary I: *History of the Laws of England VI*, p.587.

evidence is also significant because it would partly form the backstory of the issues discussed in the 1520s and 1530s: first heresy (Lutheranism) and, officially after 1534, 'popery' were treated as the seeds of sedition and treason against Henry VIII. However, we must consider church and crown as two sides of the same structure well before the Reformation. Just as heresy had frequently involved temporal authority, ecclesiastical punishment of defamation, slander, and the 'sins of the tongue' formed the background to prosecutions of treason by words.[50]

In that sense, temporal and spiritual powers were intertwined. For one thing, the government trusted the ecclesiastical courts to deal with most cases of defamation, and the fact that later in the mid-sixteenth century the Star Chamber treated some of them as criminal offences, rather than 'moral' ones, should not lead to the conclusion that central authorities had been unconcerned with such matters earlier.[51] For another, the structure of late medieval government was such that opinions about the priesthood generally reflected opinions about society and the state.[52] That is why jurisdictions were virtually merged if people rioted against clerical temporalities, and the act of 1414 made heresy an offence punishable by the common law, treating heretics as 'enemies to the crown and traitors to the kingdom'.[53] In this way, then, ecclesiastical and temporal issues coincided: heretics had been under ideological control, both for their theological pronouncements and for their political statements, at least since the fourteenth century.[54] As a result of this double threat, they caused much distress from the 1380s to the 1430s, for they constituted a 'seditious movement' themselves: the Lollards were advocates of sedition within the church and

[50] See Forrest, *Detection of Heresy*, pp.198-203.
[51] Fox, *Oral and Literature Culture*, p.307. Much of what was seen as defamation by the Consistory Courts, for instance, was treated by the King's Bench as breach of peace, such as personal insults in: *Norwich Consistory Court*, 6, 7, 12, 117, 144, 294.
[52] M. Aston, *Lollards and Reformers* (1984), p.2.
[53] Eadem, Ibidem, pp.42-3; *St.R.*, 2 Hen.V, c.7. Cases of heretical comments that were 'criticisms' are numerous in lay courts: C1/33/210; KB9/33/37; 308/67; 350/16; 370/25; 977/32; 1065/113, 117; 536/31; 338/43.
[54] G.W. Bernard, *The Late Medieval English Church* (New Haven, 2012), pp.207-24.

sedition within the polity as well.[55] George Bernard has suggested that some of the accused heretics may not have comprehended the dangerous nature of what they reproduced, yet the anxiety surrounding the Lollards' potential (and at times, actual) threats has been interpreted as one of Henry IV's moves against sedition itself, resulting in the *De Heretico Comburendo* act in 1401.[56] On this occasion, the clergy claimed that the Lollard doctrine 'incite[d people] to sedition and insurrection… and ma[de] great dissensions and divisions'.[57] These acts were a response to public issues, then, making it clear that, despite their occasional conflicts, political and religious authorities worked in the same machinery.[58]

Although the political activity of Lollards decreased in the mid-fifteenth century, their prosecution and their representation in different sources reveal the nuisance that their acts and ideas caused, casting more light on the inseparable control of political and religious dissent.[59] It is worth mentioning, for instance, that the only 'corrupted and sedicious' bishop to lose his see for being accused of heresy in the fifteenth century, Reginald Pecock, probably lost it because of the concerns of the crown more than those of churchmen.[60] Most likely, it was clear for most people in the mid-fifteenth century that Lollardy and heresy were crimes that required both the church and the crown to coordinate the punishment – and there is

[55] Aston, *Lollards and Reformers*, pp.1-44. See also: A. Hudson, *The Premature Reformation* (Oxford, 1988), p.363.
[56] Bernard, *Late Medieval Church*, pp.218-9; *St.R.*, 2 Hen.IV, c.15. See some cases in: *Ecclesiastical Courts in London*, lx; Thomson, *Later Lollards*, p.45. For the discussion and the act: Aston, *Lollards and Reformers*, p.4. For what it represented in the sixteenth century: S. Brigden, *London and the Reformation* (Oxford, 1989), pp.150-1.
[57] *PROME*, 1401, It.48 (07 Aug. 2019).
[58] See: B. Thompson, 'Prelates and Politics from Winchelsey to Warham', in Clark & Carpenter, *The Fifteenth Century IV*, pp.69-88; Genet, 'Espace Public', pp.37-41; Forrest, *Detection of Heresy*, pp.150-1. To exemplify this interaction before the Reformation: *Articuli Cleri*, 1315 (*St.R.*, 9 Edw.II, cc.1-16); An Ordinance for the Clergy, 1351 (*St.R.*, 25 Edw.III, cc.1-9); Arrest of Clergy (*St.R*, 1 Ric.II, c.15); Act of Praemunire, 1392 (*St.R.*, 16 Ric.II, c.5); Act for Privileges of the Clergy during parliament sessions, 1429 (*St.R.*, 8 H.VI, c.1); Act for bishops to punish priests for dishonest life, 1485 (*St.R.*, 1 Hen.VII, c.4).
[59] *Lollards of Coventry*, p.65. This is especially true about 'Lollard books': Ibidem, pp.22-3, 41-5, 67, 72, 105-7, 108-9, 116-21, 133-4, 152-3; Thomson, *Later Lollards*, pp.45, 74-94, 104-16, 154-8, 187-91, 197-201; *Kent Heresy Proceedings*, pp.xvii-xxv, 2-7, 59-60, 110-1, 113-4. Later authorities turned to 'Luther's books': *LP*, IV/1, 2073; IV/2, 4029, 4254, 4260.
[60] Quoting a letter reproduced in: J. Catto, 'The King's Government and the Fall of Pecock', in R. Archer (Ed.), *Rulers and Ruled in Late Medieval England* (1995), p.215. This is still a matter for debate: W. Scase, 'Reginald Pecock, bishop of Chichester', *ODNB* (22 Feb. 2019); Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, pp.440-3.

evidence that early in his reign Edward IV assisted the ecclesiastical authorities in this endeavour.[61] Heretics were as much a public issue as sedition and treason, representing 'a great dangerous example to the people of God' that could infect the whole community – hence their depictions in sources even if it was 'nothyr pleasaunt nor frutefull' to hear.[62] Oliver Germaine, one of the first cases of 'treason by words' under Edward IV, was also called a 'false heretic' in his indictment.[63] Heretic-traitors like him reveal a consistency of approach if compared to cases of seditious words, for it was not only necessary to state they had 'false and heretical opinions', but to emphasise that they were 'publishing and saying' them openly, which remained central to accusations of heresy after the act of Supremacy. [64] In that sense, instead of seeing an abrupt break or a 'revolution' in the ideological control represented by the Supremacy and the Treason acts of 1534, we should see them as a result of a long process in which crown and church played complementary roles.[65]

It was during the debates of the 1520s and 1530s that the fusion of church and state, and more importantly of heresy and sedition, was most completely achieved. Peter Gwyn has suggested that Cardinal Wolsey might have taken a while to associate heresy with sedition until the events of the Peasants' War in Germany, in 1525, proved they went together; or at least until he realised that Tyndale's translation of the New Testament was in circulation from 1526.[66] However, it is highly debatable that anyone would ever doubt that

[61] He sent 'a special commaundement' to the Mayor and Bailiffs of Wycombe to help the Bishop of Lincoln: C1/27/394.
[62] Quoting: KB9/452/61; *GC*, p.252. For depictions: *LP*, IV/1, 1962; *Skelton Poems*, pp.328-33; *Gregory's Chronicle*, pp.234-5; *Later Lollards*, p.43; *Registrum Abbatiae Johannis Whethamstede*, II, pp.22-3, 86, 165; *GC*, pp.227, 261, 264, 286, 290, 294, 365-6; *CSPM*, 326; *CSPVn*, I, 799; IV, 712, 765; *FC*, pp.663, 666, 685-6, 687, 689; *Vitellius A XVI*, pp.200, 208, 226, 229; *WC*, p.16-7, 22; *Arnold's Chronicle*, p.xlvi; *Christ Church, Canterbury. I. The Chronicle of John Stone*, ed. W.G. Searle (Cambridge, 1902), pp.108-9. And see Aston's comments on their public character in: *Lollards and Reformers*, pp.4-7; M. Aston, *Faith and Fire: Popular and Unpopular Religion* (Rio Grande, 1993), p.xiv.
[63] KB9/135/47, 82. Similar in: KB9/21/28, 54, 299/25.
[64] KB9/475/2/1-2; 977/32; 1065/113, 117; 536/31; *LP*, VIII, 609. Compare with: KB9/435/78; *RHVIICS*, III, 83.
[65] See: Thompson, 'Prelates and Politics', pp.71-5; Bernard, *Late Medieval Church*, pp.1-16; Gwyn, *King's Cardinal*, pp.228-9; Brigden, *London and the Reformation*, pp.252-3; and Elton, *The Tudor Constitution*, pp.318-21.
[66] Gwyn, *King's Cardinal*, pp.487-8. See also: Brigden, *London and the Reformation*, pp.156-7, 173-4.

sedition and heresy informed each other and were likely to cause a breach of political concord at this point. Early in 1521, Archbishop Warham had alerted the Cardinal that Lutheranism was an 'infection' at Oxford and also reported a priest in Maidstone who not only pulled down writings against Luther at the abbey of Boxley but was casting seditious bills against the king and his council as well.[67] The vocabulary of the proclamation against heretical books in 1529 resembles the clerical petition that partially resulted in the *De Heretico Comburendo* Act of 1401, for it was considered that heretics 'sowe[d] sedition among Christian people' with their erroneous opinions.[68] George Cavendish, when writing about Wolsey's possible last speech, alluded both to the Hussite Wars (*c*.1419-1434) and to the 'time of wykclyffes *sedicious* oppinions' (as one possible element of the rebellion of 1381) to warn his reader about what could happen in England if heresy spread.[69] Increasingly, therefore, it had become common to use the words 'Lutheran', 'heretic' and 'Lollard' as synonyms, but the Act of Supremacy offered an important nuance: old traditions and 'popery' were not to be treated as deviations from the new religion, but as open sedition and treason once they were manifestations of the division of allegiance between the monarch and the pope.[70]

Nonetheless, attacking 'papists' was only one of the running discourses in the 1530s. Despite the government's efforts to update political and religious concepts, most people who were yet to be convinced of the new policy and religion were still using words with their traditional connotations.[71] The pilgrims of 1536-7 epitomised this concern with

[67] *LP*, III/1, 1193, 1353. Wolsey's reactions can be exemplified by: *TRP*, 85; *LP*, IV/1, 995, 1962, 2073; IV/2, 4254, 4260, 4545; *Skelton Poems*, pp.328-33.
[68] *TRP*, 122, 129. Also: *LP*, IV/3, 6487.
[69] Emphasis added: Cavendish, *Life of Wolsey*, pp.179-80.
[70] *A Glasse of Truthe*, C1-C2; *Records of the Reformation*, V.2, CCL, p.530. Shagan discusses the issues of loyalty more fully in: *Popular Politics*, p.51.
[71] See, for instance: *Skelton Poems*, p.226; *CSPVn*, IV, 768; *LP*, VI, 433, 799, 1077; VII, 28, 140, 145-6, 261, 454, 577, 754, 939, 1608; VIII, 278, 406, 565, 589, 624, 1000; IX, 84, 740, 789, 1059, 1067, 1091, 1130; X, 52, 594, 950, 1140; XI, 325, 892; XII/1, 6, 308, 567, 1147, 1021; XII/2, 436, 505, 530, 1114; XIII/1, 1241; C1/872/51; *Common Place Book of John Hooker*, pp.13-14; KB9/529/39; 531/5-11; *WC*, p.126. See a partial discussion on this in: Davies, 'Popular Religion and the Pilgrimage of Grace', p.75; Shagan, *Popular Politics*, pp.124-7.

the traditional meaning of heresy and swore they were fighting for the 'restitution of Christ's Church and suppression of heretics' opinions', but to the government they had become traitors not only for being rebels, but also for being 'papists'.[72] These ambiguous accusations can be exemplified by a conversation at Colchester after a gaol delivery in December 1536. When the visitors asked about the 'traitors in the north', Marmaduke Neville said that the frequent answer of the locals to the accusation of treason was 'no traitors, for if ye call us traitors we will call you heretics'.[73] As we shall see below, those considered as traitors after 1534 inflated the numbers of accusations, but their prosecution does not indicate that there was a 'new' and fundamentally different form of 'censorship' that aimed at controlling political thought. Once we understand that heresy had always been simultaneously a form of religious dissent and a breach of political concord, we must consequently acknowledge that its persecution was also a form of ideological surveillance. Such surveillance was just as authoritative in the fourteenth century, and especially after 1401, as it would be with the 'papists' from the 1530s onwards. The new episode of the English history, the Reformation, was prompted by immediate concerns, but the motives for prosecuting political and religious dissent were not fundamentally different from those that preceded them. What was probably different, or at least more intense, was the public pressure.

To conclude, the persecution of and concern with both sedition and heresy had always been partly about words as evidence of immediate or future dissent that only eventually could cause violence. Primarily, considering legislation, punishment and the reactions of other contemporaries, it is reasonably clear that prosecution of speech was not at all weak before the Reformation, though it invariably followed political crises, much as it would go on to do in the 1530s. The apprehension surrounding seditious words, therefore, had always preceded

[72] *LP*, XI, 705 (4), 818 (v), 1059 (ii), 1182, 1246; XII/1, 163, 901, 1021.
[73] *LP*, XI, 1319; XII/1, 29.

any other anxiety about how to maintain political concord, loyalty and unity because everyone understood that language had a more constant social presence than violent behaviour. Secondly, heresy was just another face of the problem: a form of sedition within the church that posed the danger of spreading out to the lay society and affecting politics. It constituted a double threat of breach of political concord and, therefore, prompted double coordination of punishment that led to an authoritative move in 1401 and later the fusion of the concepts of heresy and treason in 1534. While the circumstances of the 1530s were distinctive, the measures adopted from 1534 were no more than an intensification or clarification of long-standing trends. The circumstances, in sum, explain everything – as we shall see in the following section.

1.2. Circumstantial Evidence

Until recently, commented Alexandra Walsham not long ago, historians rarely considered how and why the evidence we find in the archives came into being.[74] However, this issue dramatically affects the outcome of historical research, and it might lead historians to conclude, for example, that the treatment of abusive language dramatically changed during the Reformation when observing the hundreds of cases that survived in the State Papers.[75] While we cannot guarantee that every possible record has been analysed when we compare numbers, we still ought to make sure that statistics are taken from historical records considering their circumstances of origin and preservation. A great deal of what we know about cases of seditious and treasonable language, from the accession of Edward IV to the opening of the Reformation Parliament, comes virtually from the same kinds of sources: formal indictments of the King's Bench; incomplete cases before the chancellor and the

[74] L. Corens, K. Peters and A. Walsham (eds.), *The Social History of the Archive* (*Past & Present*, Supplement 11, 2016), p.9.
[75] That is the case of: Duggan, 'Thought Control', pp.85-6.

Council in Chancery, and very few in the Star Chamber; local sources; and some indirect, but valuable, reports recorded in chronicles and various kinds of correspondence. Part of this material, after the accession of Henry VIII, is included in the State Papers, but the fact that hundreds of examples survive only in the 1530s needs to be more closely scrutinised. The figures alone do not naturally show any significant shift in the government's perspective of how to deal with sedition, but they can reveal other nuances.

On the face of it, even the lowest figures of recorded evidence of both physical and linguistic expressions of sedition and heresy should first and foremost be interpreted as a genuine concern with political disaffection throughout the period. As we have seen thus far and in Chapter II, the sources gathered by this study reveal that inward political dissent manifested by language was the primary problem because it was the necessary pre-condition for what could develop into sedition and physical violence.[76] Furthermore, we have also seen in the previous section that the government tackled this issue quite systematically much earlier than the 1530s. And yet, if we do not analyse Figure 3 below carefully, it would be natural to conclude that punishment was indeed looser before the 1530s and that an erosion in respect for public opinion and peaceful criticism enabled some new kind of 'censorship' that accompanied the royal supremacy.[77] However, there are several explanations for the outstanding numbers of seditious and treasonable words in the 1530s.

[76] See above, pp.121-29.
[77] As in: Duggan, 'Thought Control', pp.196-7, 199-200, 242.

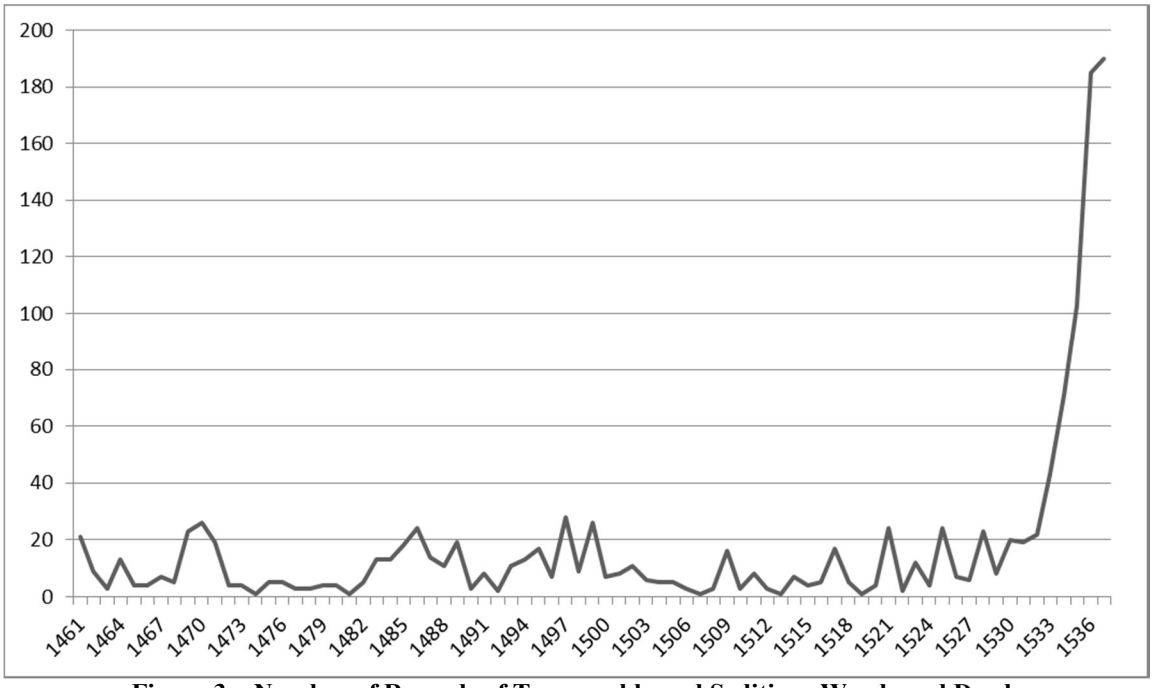

Figure 3 – Number of Records of Treasonable and Seditious Words and Deeds

Firstly, Cromwell's papers became part of the State Papers after his execution in 1540. His correspondence with agents around the country and its survival as it stands is a real, but unusual, historical treasure.[78] Consequently, it casts shadows over the preceding period and even over the activity of his former master Thomas Wolsey, who stayed longer in power and whose papers must have been as impressive but have mostly disappeared.[79] Archbishop Warham, for example, commented in 1525 that 'if God should punish extremely every lewd word and deed, he would within a little while, leave but few alive'.[80] This letter suggests that Wolsey's papers could indeed have been massive given the apparent level of complaints, but it also implies that the number of complaints was certainly higher than the written evidence of punishment can illustrate. Moreover, if earlier ministers had kept similar records, they would have been mostly lost. The Banqueting House fire of 1619 destroyed the majority of the medieval council records and the fact that we have detailed proceedings for parts of Henry VI's reign, for instance, is only because of their preservation in the Cottonian

[78] Elton, *England: 1200-1640*, p.66.
[79] Idem, Ibidem, pp.70-1.
[80] *LP*, IV/3, App.39.

library.[81] Even the records of the Star Chamber were progressively destroyed once they moved from Holborn Court to the Chapter House at Westminster in the seventeenth century – where they stayed in poor condition until the 1850s.[82] Meanwhile, the King's Bench indictments – which hold a comparable and stable amount of evidence throughout this period – seems to include records of only about ten per cent of the commissions recorded in the Patent Rolls of the fifteenth century.[83] Our view of the surveillance of popular speech before the 1530s, therefore, is certainly limited in comparison to the Cromwellian period, but it does not follow that we can overestimate the latter and underestimate the former.

Secondly, both Cromwell's convictions and the way he used his power to uncover political dissent could also clarify the possible increase in the prosecution of speech – but this increase was neither the result of a 'police force', nor of a despotic 'censorship'.[84] By all means, the evidence of the 1530s does not entitle historians to conclude that the previous Treason Act of 1352 – or even the *De Heretico Comburendo* Act – was weaker, that is, that it was not used in a virtually comparable 'authoritarian' way through the flexible charge of 'compassing and imagining the king's death'. And thirdly, it might have also been the case that authorities destroyed the evidence quicker earlier in the period than later for fear of its reproduction. While contemporaries across the period equally and persistently referred to seditious words and bills with caution – sometimes omitting, sometimes paraphrasing, and sometimes only reporting by word of mouth (through the messenger or carrier of the letter)

[81] See: 'The Banqueting House', in *Survey of London: Volume 13*, *St Margaret*, *Westminster*, *Part II: Whitehall I*, ed. M.H. Cox and P. Norman (1930), pp.116-139, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol13/pt2/pp116-139 (3 Aug. 2019).
[82] As reported in 1719, see the TNA website https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C249 (3 Aug. 2019) and J. Guy *The Court of Star Chamber and its Records to the Reign of Elizabeth* (1985), ch.2.
[83] Avrutick, 'Commissions of Oyer et Terminer', p.104.
[84] As in: Elton, *Policy and Police*, pp.217-62; Duggan, 'Thought Control', p.35.

– there is more direct reproduction of such words in the Cromwellian evidence – which was kept, of course, for private purposes – than in any other source.[85]

Nevertheless, if there ever was a 'system' of sorts, some aspects of Cromwell's regime might well have incentivised people to bring forth charges against dissenters, thus increasing the numbers observed in Figure 3. Firstly, more than ever before, he probably resorted to espionage or an organised system of reporting sedition and treason that might have worked better than less formal arrangements did under the Yorkists and Henry VII.[86] Even so, one could suggest that had the details of communication with informants survived for the reigns of Edward IV, Richard III and Henry VII, a different story could be told. Secondly, the significant figures under Cromwell may be explained by the religious changes and another aspect of the treason legislation: an outstanding number of people indicted for seditious speech and treason after the new law passed – which includes those who joined Robert Aske and other leaders in 1536-7 – were members of the clergy.[87] The non-conformists, those who denied the king's supremacy, and those who used opprobrious words against the ongoing reforms, including in their preaching, were now considered traitors to the king and that significantly augmented the numbers. Furthermore, men and women who conformed to the new ideas had a new weapon to banish or discipline their local clergy by accusing them of disobeying the king or of being 'papists'.[88] While the conformed clergy

[85] Such as in: *YHB*, I, 402-3, 405, 408; II, 609, 625, 627, 638; CLB, 2, 536-7, 566, 577-8; KB9/414/9; 415/31 & 33; 379/15; DL5/4/153; *LP*, III/1, 1314, 1353, 1363; IV/1, 891; IV/2, 3703, 4140, 4252, 4501, 4669; XII/1, 969, 515, 1299; XII/2, 515, 622, 776, 835, 852, 896, 1151, 1183, 1299; XIII/1, 358, 371, 519, 624; *HC*, p.721.
[86] Although Elton dismissed Merriman's claims about a system of espionage, he noted that Cromwell investigated the 'ramifications' of an uncovered treason more thoroughly: *Policy and Police*, pp.327-70. See more discussion in: Thornley, 'The Treason Legislation of Henry VIII', p.91; Dodds & Dodds, *Pilgrimage of Grace*, I, p.179. Henry VIII himself instructed that the Duke of Norfolk should use spies to know 'the state of the country' in November 1536: *LP*, XI, 1064. As for the Yorkists and Henry VII, see: Harvey, 'Was there Popular Politics?', pp.161-2; Arthurson, 'Espionage and Intelligence', pp.134-54; Idem, *Perkin Warbeck*, p.65; and a few contemporary comments: *HC*, p.393; *LP*, IV/1, 1267; IV/2, 4669.
[87] See the statistics below, Figure 9, p.226. For Cromwell's direct involvement as well as the clergy being prosecuted, see: Jansen, *Political Protest and Prophecy*, p.36.
[88] Shagan, *Popular Politics*, pp.144-7.

could help with dampening dissent and be part of Cromwell's web of informers, the 'papist' clerics became traitors to the king and magnified the numbers observed in Figure 3.

The broader picture of all the sources put together reveals another minor point. Virtually two-thirds of the evidence collected and analysed in this thesis corresponds only to the last decade, from 1526 to 1537. Therefore, we might reasonably suggest that the evidence of dissent survives in the same proportion to the total amount of evidence from both 1461-1525 and 1526-37. There was no exponential growth concentrated in a particular period that cannot be compared to the other peaks at least until 1530. Figure 4 below demonstrates that the levels of recorded political disaffection in the majority of this period is indeed comparable: the figures for the crisis of 1469-71 are similar to those of Richard III, the early years of Henry VII, 1497-9 and the early 1520s.

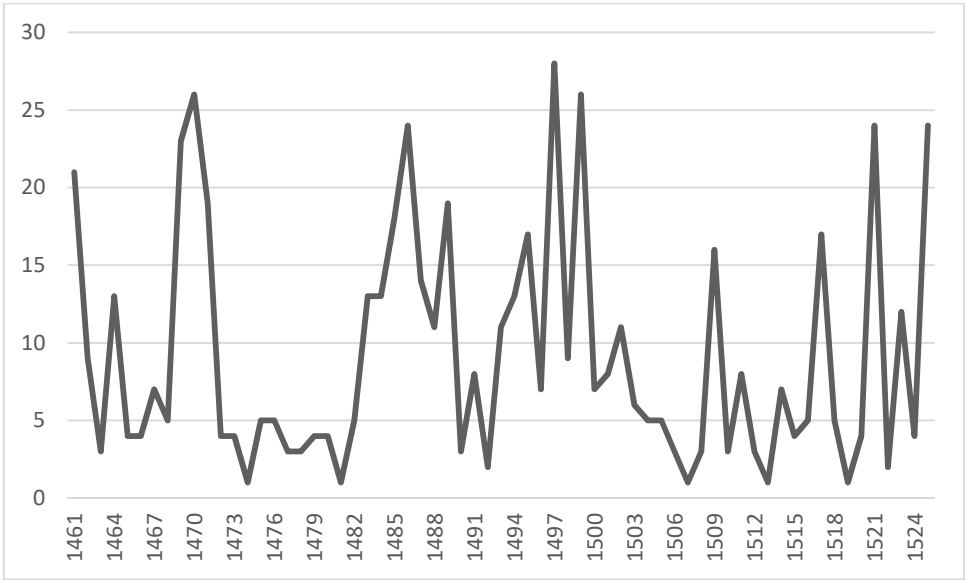

Figure 4 – Variation in the Records of Seditious and Treasonable Evidence, 1461-1525

Meanwhile, Figure 5 can be seen as a reflection of the authorities' and commentators' natural approach to seditious behaviour during public and widespread dissatisfaction with the king's 'great matter' from 1527 onwards, with the Reformation Parliament more broadly, and with other economic and religious grievances. Hence, the outstanding peak reached during the rebellions of 1536-7 reflects only partly the attitude of

a more anxious government towards political disagreement. As we have seen in Chapter II, there is more rumour and grumbling when there is more change which, in turn, can either lead to periods of crises or amplify the levels of rumour-mongering.[89] Therefore, due to the exceptional circumstances of the 1530s and the figures presented here, there is every reason to believe that there was indeed more seditious speech going on later than there was earlier. However, even if there was more complaint after 1530, that does not mean that the government was uninterested in popular opinion before this, or that there was a step-change in the response to popular speech in the 1530s. The highest point was reached only when an astounding number of conditions converged: numbers increased both because people were reacting to unprecedented changes and because of an immediate official response to growing political and religious grievances. The peak reached in 1536-7 was not a mere trend within the government sphere itself nor as a result of a new ideology – it was a common reaction.



Figure 5 – Variation in the Records of Seditious and Treasonable Evidence, 1526-1537

Accordingly, the point worth making is that the surging evidence does indeed reflect an exceptional situation that indicates both sides interacting: the public and the governmental sphere concurrently magnifying these figures. Moreover, we should observe the rebellions

[89] See above, Figure 2, p.108.

of 1536-7 as a representation of unusual circumstances, as the Pilgrimage of Grace was not only one of the biggest risings in English history up to the Civil War but was the best documented too. It was also the first time that the government directly answered rebel grievances and issued printed material to counter them.[90] And finally, while these high figures for Henry VIII's reign can point to the level of subscription to specific ideas in 1534-7, low numbers or even a single indictment, poem or letter can sometimes show equally critical thoughts and feelings in the preceding century. Thus, we should avoid thinking that historians cannot judge through fewer examples of radical opinions when comparing different and unequally documented periods.[91] After all, every piece of evidence is as circumstantial as the conditions of its survival.

In sum, as the evidence in this section suggests, the impression of a virtually centralised state offered by Henry VIII's supremacy leading to new radical notions of authority that would result in an obsessive persecution of critical public opinion does not seem to reflect reality.[92] This section has sought to stress that attempts to restrict minds and bodies were part of the aims of both spiritual and temporal authorities well before the Reformation, and that government became increasingly responsive and scared as a consequence of continuing attitudes, rather than revolutionary ones. Such attitudes were partly due to what we called in Chapter II an anxiety loop: the rising anxiety on the part of the crown resulted from its own decisions concerning religion, the structure of the church, and the king's matrimonies. Fundamentally, earlier regimes were just as ready to prosecute the intentions revealed by language as Henry VIII and Cromwell, and earlier parliamentary moves – as in 1352 and 1401 – as well as several moments of crisis could be equally seen as 'authoritarian' and

[90] See below, pp.263-4 and nn.37-39.
[91] See a similar point in: Wood, 'Plebeian Languages', p.64.
[92] I refer to the exaggerated perspective of: Duggan, 'Thought Control', pp.248-51.

arbitrary. Therefore, speech was not a peripheral issue to medieval governments: the concern with breach of peace had always been firstly informed by the concerns with political concord manifested by speech acts of both 'seditious' people and heretics. These two facets of dissenting language constituted a threat that could produce fissures and 'subvert the commonwealth'. To a certain extent, we may conclude with a statement that informs the following section: governments in this period always wanted to control the content of public opinion to their own benefit, and whenever it became critical, it was deemed as seditious and potentially treasonable. Critical popular opinion was itself seditious because it lacked deference, because it escaped from the control of central and local authorities, and because it broke the hegemonic authoritative voices and the political unity. The evidence in the next section will demonstrate the common trends revealed by this constant struggle.

2. Seditious Language as Popular Opinion, 1461-1537

In the poem 'Against Venemous Tongues', written in 1515 or 1516, John Skelton posited that 'malicious tunges… [we]re sharper than swords, [and had] made great division'.[93] Although he did not use the word sedition, he resorted to 'division' to illustrate the danger of seditious language, and we have seen several reasons why in the previous sections and chapters: the common people were dangerous, 'harmful' to the commonwealth, rumour-mongers, and believers of 'false tales' and lies.[94] In short, critical opinions were seen as causing 'great division' because people lacked wisdom and judgement. They were frequently 'seditious' to the ruling elites because they were 'divisive' and did not usually speak unanimously about the truth of affairs. Whenever the ordinary people broke the social code, they were breaking the hegemonic voices of temporal and spiritual authority. Whenever they disputed the meanings of critical political concepts, or twisted and inverted them to their

[93] *Skelton Poems*, p.121.
[94] See above, pp.70-8 and pp.121-29.

logic, contemporaries thought they were giving room to strife and sedition. But what was the content of popular opinion that caused so much distress? What were the themes that counted as a breach of political concord? And should we also assume – along with the contemporaries – that popular language was more frequently 'seditious' than potentially wise?

This survey of common topics gathered from reported speech intends to address these questions and to provide an overview of its content via the evidence that emerges both from its prosecution and from extra-official reports of seditious speech. Whenever possible, much of what follows has been gathered from direct speech quoted in judicial procedures. As we saw in the Introduction, this evidence has raised various critical reactions among historians, but we should not neglect its inherent value, whatever the problems with it.[95] Richard Hoyle has rightly observed, for example, that indictments are not records of what happened but of reputations and of the evidence presented to the jury.[96] In that sense, we have two important aspects that emphasise the importance of these sources to this study: they contribute to the stereotype that common people were keen on using seditious words to express themselves; and they provide some evidence of popular language that might or might not have been fabricated, but that still had a social presence regardless of its veracity. More importantly, if we are to believe that people could tolerate many things if the attitudes of their king and political leaders led to stability, the evidence of abusive language might be closer to actual complaints than to fabrications.[97]After all, this language was important enough to be quoted in full and in English, and we can partly assume that if the authorities simply wanted to prosecute dissent to keep 'the king's peace', evidence of speech would have been ignored. The label of 'seditious language' was not invariably used in all cases surveyed in this section – which include other charges and descriptions such as 'unfitting

[95] See above, pp.29-31.
[96] Hoyle, *Pilgrimage of Grace*, pp.407-8.
[97] The first point is from: Horrox, *Richard III*, p.333.

language' and, of course, treason. But 'sedition', as kinds of dangerous, divisive, and abusive speech that defied authority in some level, certainly holds all this evidence together.

2.1. The King's Counsellors

We should begin by looking at complaints of corrupt government commonly attached to the king's counsellors. Whenever the king's government failed, the first suspicions clustered around the counsellors because they were a powerful, unfixed group usually selected by the king or able to gain access to him by means that were unknown to the people. These advisers were probably trusted by commoners until the point they broke down the normal process of counselling by advancing themselves or by being advanced beyond the interests of 'the common weal'.[98] To attack the council, instead of the king, was a long and well-established rhetorical device also used by 'populist nobles' in this period.[99] In April 1525 Archbishop Warham recognised that 'whoever [wa]s in most favour and counsel with a great prince [would] be maligned'; and similarly the king himself wrote to the commissioners on 8 May, that 'it [was] the custom of the people, when anything miscontenteth them, to blame those that be near about the King… when they dare not use their tongues against their Sovereign'.[100] Although Warham dismissed the content of the criticism uttered against Wolsey at that time, Henry VIII cleverly noticed that the people's target was usually the king himself. The criticism of the council, therefore, disguises the point that the king was indirectly criticised because it was him that chose or maintained such counsellors in the first place.

Although the contents of these 'seditious' complaints varied considerably, we might characterise them in three ways. First of all, popular complaints implied that the closest

[98] See: Hoyle, *Pilgrimage of Grace*, pp.59-60.
[99] See: Watts, 'Polemic and Politics', pp.1-42; Rollison, *Commonwealth of the People*, pp.252-66.
[100] Respectively: *LP*, IV/3, App.39; IV/1, 1318.

counsellors to the king prevented the voices of the people – as well as of the nobles – from reaching the king's ears. That is why popular critics maligned the counsellors – to use Warham's words again – and that is precisely what the commons meant in 1469: the counsellors were labelled 'seditious persons' because of the division they caused between the king and his kingdom.[101] The second and third trends of these complaints evolve directly from this fissure.

The second is about the avarice that counsellors developed when their power remained unchecked and the king remained isolated from other 'voices'. In that sense, they gradually became known as both 'covetous and seditious'.[102] After all, wrote the poet George Ashby, 'howe may any estate be in surtee/ Of his welthe [and] prosperite… If covetous folke be in [the king's] favour?'.[103] Covetousness was the catch-all phrase to denounce self-advancement of counsellors at the king's expense. This was clearer to the people when individuals who were neither 'true nobles' nor particularly known for anything rose rapidly to power as the Woodvilles did under Edward IV.[104] Towards the end of Henry VII's reign, Richard Empson - 'a cancrid knave, [and] a churle' – and Edmund Dudley caused much distress and complaints with that same discourse about covetousness, with numerous accusations of extortion until they were executed in 1510.[105] And finally, the epitome of avarice in the people's eyes seems to have been Cardinal Wolsey, who was targeted multiple times for his appetite for money and fame – both privately and on behalf of the king; for his low status as a 'Churle, A Bochers Curre'; for his ambitious campaigns that demanded heavy taxation; for funding new colleges by suppressing monasteries; as well as for being a

[101] *JVB*, pp.212-7; *GC*, pp.208-9; *FC*, 657; Wavrin, *Anchiennes Chronicques*, II, pp.405-8.
[102] Again in 1469-70: *Warkworth's Chronicle*, pp.46-51; *Original Letters*, 2nd/1, XLII.
[103] *George Ashby's Poems*, p.19.
[104] I refer to the previous notes about 1469-70, but also to Wavrin, *Anchiennes Chronicques*, II, pp.331-2; and to a threatening occupation of one of Anthony Woodville's properties in September 1470: KB9/326/42.
[105] *GC*, pp.318, 334-5, 344-7; *HC*, pp.499, 502-5, 514-5; *Arnold's Chornicle*, p.xliv; *Anglica Historia*, 151-3; *FC*, p.387. Early in 1502 two men probably referred to Empson and Dudley with their 'Disclaundyrs wordys spokyn… of the king and his counsayll': *GC*, p.218; compare with: *FC*, p.387. For more on Empson and Dudley: Ives, *Common Lawyers of Pre-Reformation England*, pp.234-5, 419.

Cardinal sending 'al money to Rome' – as some believed in 1525.[106] These complaints could also be quite violent as early as 1517, such as asking for 'vengeaunce apon my lorde Cardinall and all the kinges counsell' and hoping to 'thrust a dagger in my lord cardinall orelles kill him with a hand gon'.[107] It is remarkable that even George Cavendish, who wrote about Wolsey apparently to improve his master's reputation, would make such an ambiguous statement that 'an other hongery and a leane officer' (certainly meaning Cromwell) would replace Wolsey and 'bite' people 'nerer the bone than the old'.[108]

Like his old master, Thomas Cromwell would also be deemed a man of 'villain's blood' that rose quickly to power. But he probably better epitomised the third consequence of the *seditio* that counsellors could cause between the subjects and their king – that of evil or treacherous advice. From a popular perspective, the fact that the monarch was surrounded by Cromwell and his trusted circle blinded him to how the advice he received was 'evil' – and this logic applies to all 'evil counsellors' before him.[109] That was probably the tone of William Collingbourne's bill of 1484, echoing similar voices while attacking Richard III's advisers.[110] In the rebellions of 1489, and again in 1497, popular uprisings were accompanied by claims against the evil counsellors that resembled the 1450s and 1460s: they claimed the counsellors were 'aboutward for to dystroy oure sufferein Lorde the Kinge and the Comowns of Engelond'.[111] It is significant to notice that just as the central authorities would indict traitors with the vocabulary of 'death and destruction', so did the commons against those that

[106] Respectively: *LP*, II/1, 1832; Duggan, 'Thought Control', p.287; *LP*, II/2, 2733; *Ballads from Manuscripts*, p.333; *YCR*, III, 66; *LP*, III/1, 154 (26), 1142; III/2, 3076; *HC*, pp.696-7. For others: *LP*, IV/1, 1243, 1264, 1267, 1470-1, 2178; IV/2, 2450, 3230; IV/3, App.39; *CSPVn*, III, 1025, p.443; *Original Letters*, 2nd/2, XCIX. It is worth mentioning the scurrility in: *Skelton Poems*, pp.201-14, 221-6, 259-67. These poems seem to have circulated considerably in London: D. Parker, *The Commonplace Book in Tudor London* (Lanham, MD and Oxford, 1998), pp.91-123.
[107] Labourers and yeomen indicted in Southwark, 1517: KB9/475/2/1, 4, 9-11.
[108] Cavendish, *Life of Wolsey*, pp.100-1.
[109] Further to the evidence already cited: *GC*, p.232, 344-7; *HC*, pp.598, 699.
[110] See n.38, p.143.
[111] Quoting: *Paston Letters*, VI, 1039. For 1497: *Vitellius A XVI*, p.216; *Anglica Historia*, pp.90-3; *GC*, pp.277-8; *HC*, pp.476-9; *Six Town Chronicles*, p.173; *Common Place Book of John Hooker*, pp.35-7.

threatened the commonweal.[112] Thomas Cromwell supposedly led a heretical council that was responsible for the king's divorce from Catherine of Aragon, for the royal supremacy over the church, for the 'decay of the commonwealth', for more taxation, for the 'spoil' of the monasteries, and many other accusations that we will encounter along in this chapter and the next one.[113]

In sum, this first frequent form of popular speech frequently labelled as 'seditious' by the authorities is profoundly revealing of the understandings of 'sedition' as a whole. For one thing, whenever the commoners were attacking the counsellors, they were symbolically trying to seize the act of counselling to themselves and were consequently breaking the hegemony of the elites. For another, while they blamed the king's council for their grievances, they made clear that there was another form of *seditio* between the people and the king which had been caused by the king's advisers themselves. Overall, ordinary people re-used a familiar topic of their political language to construct clever – and usually justifiable – criticisms. Because commoners were on the weaker side of this discursive conflict, they were more often punished as 'seditious' – both for publicising their ideas and for offering unrequested and unconventional advice.

2.2. Taxation and Extortion

The commons both in and out of parliament expected their king to 'live of his own' in peaceful times, so as to relieve themselves of unnecessary taxation.[114] Almost anything else that involved financial aid to the crown was seen as exploitation, oppression or extortion,

[112] As in: KB9/475/2/4, 9-10, 11; KB8/5/28.
[113] KB9/529/39; 542/3v; 538/13, 18; 540/2; 541/88-92; 542/3v, 10; KB27/1121/19r-v; *LP*, VIII, 862; IX, 84; XI, 585, 645 705, 818 (v), 826; XII/1, 1327; XII/2, 150, 436, 672; XIII/1, 595, 787-88; *WC*, 91-2; *HC*, p.780. For a discussion of the hierarchical aspect of the discourse of the commons in 1536-7 as opposed to people of 'villain's blood' like Cromwell, see: Bush, 'The Risings of the Commons', p.113. And some evidence of it in: *LP*, XII/1, 6, 212, 1286, 1320; XII/2, 51, 291, 340, 422, 431, 479, 732, 776, 835, 1181, 1299, 1305.
[114] See the rebels' words in both 1450 and 1469 in: *JVB*, pp.204-5, 212-3. The expression was re-used, for instance, by Edward IV to gain support of the commons in parliament in 1467: *PROME*, 1467, It.7 (07 Aug. 2019). See also: Cavill, *Parliaments of Henry VII*, p.187-8.

and even taxation for war had its limits.[115] We may understand how the ordinary people in this period expressed their grievances in two common ways.

First of all, and most frequently, these complaints were about the propriety of taxation. On the one hand, it was partly unacceptable that the crown would exploit its people, by mismanaging either the sums collected or the military expedition itself. Edward IV's invasion of France had been discussed since the 1460s, and although he began to raise funds in 1463 and 1468, the invasion only came in 1475, after the infamous 'benevolence' was collected with people's 'evell will'.[116] This taxation for war was part of the oppression alleged during the rebellion of 1469, and in 1473 the northern counties offered only manpower instead of money.[117] Once the expedition came to an abrupt end, there may have been seditious talk, as some sources reveal that the king's return was a great surprise and there was a general feeling that disturbance could follow because he had 'exacted great treasure and done nothing'.[118] We shall see in Chapter IV that the immoral aspect of collecting taxes and doing little with it might have progressively changed people's attitude towards military expeditions and taxation.[119]

On the other, uncustomary and extra-parliamentary taxation was a more profound source of grievances. Even though no direct seditious speech survived against the collection of Edward IV's 'benevolence', it is suggestive that Richard III prohibited such measures later to gain some popularity.[120] In the 1490s Henry VII resumed the idea of benevolences to finance his wars, which prompted a few chroniclers to call them 'malyvolence' as well, and Perkin Warbeck seemingly used it to attack Henry in a proclamation to his supporters in

[115] For a general overview of the 'tradition' of tax rebellions: Bush, 'Tax, Reform and Rebellion', pp.379-97.
[116] *Crowland Chronicle*, p.134; *Three Books of Vergil*, p.161; *HC*, p.308. For the context: Carpenter, *Wars of the Roses*, pp.173.
[117] *JVB*, pp.212-3; *Historia Croylandensis*, pp.542-3; *CSPM*, 254; *King's Letters*, V.1, CIII; LKE, p.145.
[118] *CSPM*, 316; *CSPVn*, I, 449.
[119] See below, pp.240-4.
[120] *PROME*, 1484, It.18[22] (08 Aug. 2019); *HC*, p.369; More, *History of Richard III*, pp.69-70. Discussed in: Horrox, *Richard III*, pp.299-306; Hicks, *Wars of the Roses*, p.229.

1497.[121] In both 1489 and 1497, two different regions of the kingdom were asked for taxation under very unusual circumstances, and they not only rebelled but certainly used their voices throughout the turmoil.[122] In 1515 a tax collector was reported to have said to the king's commissioners that if he had 20,000 like-minded men, and more supporters in parliament, they 'shuld [have] amended' the subsidy.[123] Clearly, in 1536 people struggled with many issues at the same time, but it is hard to dismiss taxation as a crucial ingredient of the rumours that both led to, and prolonged, the rebellion in Lincolnshire, the Pilgrimage of Grace, and the post-pardon rebellions of 1537.[124] It is significant to notice, therefore, that people with different social backgrounds could reach the same conclusions about taxation: that the king and his ministers were potentially 'the strongest thieves in England [who] robbed the poor commons' – as a priest cried in 1528.[125]

Within these claims against the propriety of taxation, there was a common discourse about 'extortion' that the common people occasionally re-used. Contemporaries assumed that the king – and the judicial system – should protect the commons from 'extortioners'.[126] The sentiment that commons were victims of 'polling and shaving', that they were 'exacted and polled', or 'pild & pold with hongery dogges', is overwhelming in various sources but their actual complaints were only occasionally represented as 'seditious' if they directly

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[121] *GC*, p.245; *Anglica Historia*, pp.48-9; *HC*, p.451; *RHVIICS*, I, 108. In comparison, there was an angry threat of a hosteller of Kent, in April 1498, who attacked local constables saying he would 'paye no taske nether for lorde nor kinge': KB9/417/59.

[122] For 1489: KB27/913/14v; KB9/381/3, 6-8, 16; KB27/915/2r, 6r, 10r; *YHB*, II, pp.618, 646-7; *Paston Letters*, VI, 1039. Reports in: *GC*, p.242; *HC*, p.442-3; *Six Town Chronicles*, pp.171, 187; *FC*, p.683; *Anglica Historia*, pp.38-9; *CSPVn*, I, 553; *YHB*, II, pp.646-7. For 1497, see n.111, p.163, as well as: *CSPM*, 527, 540. Later during Perkin Warbeck's invasion, they also killed the Provost of Penryn for collecting 'more money than came unto the kinges use': *Vitellius A XVI*, p.218; similar in *GC*, pp.282-3.

[123] Liddy, 'Cultures of Surveillance', p.320.

[124] Taxation is dismissed by Hoyle as a serious cause in: *Pilgrimage of Grace*, pp.53-4. Convincingly emphasised in: M.L. Bush, 'Enhancements and Importunate Charges', pp.403-19; Idem, 'Tax, Reform and Rebellion', pp.379-400; Idem, 'Up for the Commonweal', pp.299-318. Comments on the First Fruits in: Dodds & Dodds, *Pilgrimage of Grace*, I, pp.6-7. As for the burden over the clergy: Gunn, *Early Tudor Government*, pp.141-2. Seditious rumours about taxation are in: *LP*, XII/1, 520, 632; XII/2, 353, 741; XIII/1, 107, 705.

[125] Such as: *LP*, IV/2, 4040; *HC*, pp.502-3; *GC*, pp.334-5.

[126] See: *George Ashby's Poems*, p.33; Worcester, *Boke of Noblesse*, pp.71-4; Dudley, *Tree of Commonwealth*, pp.40-4; Fish, *Supplicacyon for the Beggers*, p.4; *PROME*, 1461, It.7; 1472 (1st roll), It.10; 1484, It.1[5]; 1495, It.43 (08 Aug. 2019); *Literae Cantuarienses V.III*, ed. J.B. Sheppard (Roll Series, 1889), pp.275; *GC*, p.233; Gairdner, *Richard III*, pp.343-4; *Anglica Historia*, pp.52-3; *Select STAC*, I, pp.52-3; *HC*, p.369.

accused the king or the chief counsellors – as in the 1500s and 1530s.[127] These usages also perfectly fit the seditious words recorded during local disputes and the accusations of oppression and extortion used to either expose actual grievances or prompt negotiations via judicial proceedings.[128] In other words, all these forms of financial exploitation – taxation and the broad accusations of 'extortion' – were seen as some kind of robbery and injustice.

These claims of injustice lead us to the second common way of expressing opinions against taxation that was somewhat obvious: the financial reality of these 'poor commons'. In virtually all the complaints in this section, there is an underlining allegation of poverty and some contemporary thinkers would see a direct connection between social disadvantage and rebellion.[129] The situation of the 1520s – when the burden of taxation increased dramatically and the disguised 'benevolence' renewed under the title of an 'Amicable Grant' – typifies the kind of language used against these levies and motivated by what seemed actual poverty.[130] People wished Wolsey were dead a handful of times and during the revolt in Suffolk, for instance, John Grene said to the collector 'that no man [would] paye no money to the King'.[131] The Duke of Norfolk reported how the rebels and locals came humbly to him, but their cry was subsequently treated as high treason and 'evell demeanour againste the kinges highnes as of their railing wordes'.[132] Even so, much seems to have been ignored due to the level of poverty alleged by the locals, and the Amicable Grant was ultimately cancelled.[133] Taxpayers were not wretched vagrants, but they were potentially dangerous

[127] Quoting: *HC*, pp.476-7; *Skelton Poems*, pp.222-3, 267; Cavendish, *Life of Wolsey*, pp.101, 136. Examples of seditious language uttered by commoners (men and women) and clerics include: DL3/4, N1 & a-d; DL5/4/138v, 141v; KB9/961/72-3; *LP*, VII, 1609; VIII, 838; XI/1182, 1246; XII/1, 126. Similarly in: KB9/961/52-3; *LP*, VIII, 407; XII/2, 1068.
[128] 'fals extorcioner and thief' in 1512: *YCR*, III, p.38; 'extorsioner and… poller' in 1514: KB9/966/16; 'thou dost extort and powle my friends' in 1537: *LP*, XII/1, 129. There is also a curious example of 1518 in: Liddy, 'Cultures of Surveillance', p.323.
[129] Fortescue, *Governance of England*, pp.118-20, 140.
[130] *HC*, pp.642, 657, 697-703; *Anglica Historia*, pp.314-5; *LP*, IV/1, 1267.
[131] *LP*, IV/1, 1243; *Original Letters*, 3rd/1, CXXVIII; KB9/497/7-10.
[132] *LP*, IV/1, 1323.
[133] *Original Letters*, 1st/1, LXXIX; 3rd/1; *HC*, p.642; *LP*, IV/1, 1264, 1272. Archbishop Warham apparently doubted the claims of poverty in: *Original Letters*, 3rd/2, CXXXI; *LP*, IV/1, 1332.

regardless of whether their claims of poverty were real or rhetorical. This perspective of poverty probably played a significant role in directing seditious language more often against the morality of taxation with the labels of 'oppression' and 'extortion'. Moreover, this evidence illustrates that popular views were shared with others above their social status, suggesting that the extant sources are probably closer to actual complaints than to the construction of attacks to criminalise popular language and action.

2.3. The King

Despite the smart alternative of verbally assaulting the king's council or the immediate local officers instead of the monarch, part of the language considered as 'seditious' – and most often treasonable – comes from people who dared to address their king. Such cases can evince other issues that affected people's feelings to the point that they despised their monarch or wished him to be replaced or dead.[134] Attacking the sovereign, however, was not a question of pure and unreasonable hatred, it was a demonstration of concrete ideas about politics, expressed through radical speech.

The principal cluster of accusations during most of this period is related to the king's legitimacy. Popular feelings about a change of rule could be appeased if a usurpation was followed by a period of stability, or they could be enraged and disappointed, as the *Warkworth's Chronicle* suggests about Edward IV in the late 1460s.[135] Threats of deposition if the king did not rule according to the people's wishes were made as early as 1462 in Dorset, and 'the comyns' – who sometimes recognised their role in the usurpation of 1461 – actively thought about it in Yorkshire until sometime after Henry VI's death.[136] Popular ideas about the legality of the usurpation, therefore, should not be underestimated and part of the people

[134] Simple 'despise' is demonstrated by John Clerk's case: KB9/145/7/1, and see p.134 above. As well as: KB9/961/52-3; 1063/26; *LP*, II/2, 1932; Tucker, 'Government and Politics in London', p.339.
[135] *Warkworth's Chronicle*, pp.11-2.
[136] KB9/21/28, 54; 299/25; 41/1, 41, 42, 50, 53; 330/10, 13, 40, 85; KB27/855/2r.

probably could not accept a 'usurper' even if stability ensued, openly labelling Edward IV as such, or undermining his position by calling him 'traitor' or 'bastard'.[137] Similarly, in 1471 the brief rebellion of the Bastard of Fauconberg was seen by foreigners in London not as a simple demonstration against legitimacy, but also as a reaction of the 'people of England' against the 'cruelty' of Henry VI's death in prison – which resembles the accounts of Buckingham's Rebellion in 1483 as a reaction to the death of the princes in the Tower.[138] Despite Richard III's reputation, very few direct attacks on him survive to compare with the stereotype created by Tudor chroniclers – though the level of rumour-mongering suggests that a great deal of seditious talk must have indeed been the case.[139]

Following Henry Tudor's victory at Bosworth, the majority of seditious language referred to the pretenders he had to face for a great number of years – as we shall see below as well.[140] These conspiracies can explain why, late in 1497 when the ghosts of the Wars of the Roses were still haunting the crown, one Master Butlar claimed that one needed not to pray for the king by name 'for why 'tis hard to know who is righetwys king'.[141] In August 1499, a smith of Salisbury, William Woderose, openly claimed in Southampton that Henry VII was not the rightful king and did not have the title to the crown.[142] As late as 1504, officials of Calais talking about the king's health considered both Buckingham and Edmund de la Pole as his successor, 'but none of them… spake of my lord prince'.[143] These

[137] KB27/801/6v; 802/6v; KB9/299/60; *CSPV*, I, 408; *Corporation of London: Letter Book L*, pp.97-8. The word 'bastard' is openly used in: KB9/325/4. For the use of this word as an accusation of 'bad government' in Europe, see: Haemers, 'Filthy and Indecent Words', p.265.
[138] For 1471: *CSPM*, 220; *CSPV*, I, 434; *Three Books of Vergil*, p.153; *Vitellius A XVI*, p.185. For the Princes in the Tower: *FC*, pp.670-1; *GC*, pp.234-5; *Vitellius A XVI*, p.191; *HC*, pp.381-9; *Vergil's Three Books*, p.198.
[139] For instance: *HC*, p.385. There is one gentleman indicted for spreading slanderous comments in taverns of Suffolk: KB27/895/9r; KB9/953/46-45. For rumour-mongering, see Figure 2, p.108. See some discussion on the lack of information about Richard III in: Davies, 'Information, Disinformation and Political Knowledge', *passim*.
[140] Other evidence involves somewhat vague references to seditious words in: *YHB*, I, p.402; KB9/379/15; *YHB*, II, p.627; *CLB*, II, pp.536-7, 556-7, 566, 577-8; KB9/414/9; 415/31, 33; 453/326; *Records of Leicester*, V.2, CCXLVIII; V.3, XXVI; *LP*, IV/1, 891; VII, 298; *GC*, p.318; *Archaeologia*, 25 (1834), p.392; DL5/4/153.
[141] I have not been able to access this case myself. I rely on: Arthurson, *Perkin Warbeck*, p.167.
[142] KB9/111/13.
[143] *LP RIII/HVII*, V.1, XXVI; SC1/58/57-8.

accusations of speech involving the legitimacy of the ruler are a useful reminder that people debated openly about who was, or should be, the 'true king' throughout the period.[144] Even if powerful magnates had not been around to remind people about high politics, they had their own ideas that were indeed political, even though often extreme.[145]

Secondly, a significant number of indictments and reports of defiant language, above all against the king's life, reflected opinions against unpopular policy rather than the legitimacy of rulers. Taxation, as we have just seen, prompted not only serious rebellions but occasional radical attacks wishing, for example, 'a pound of molten lead in the king's belly, for he did never good since he came to this land' in 1490.[146] After hearing of new taxes in 1523, it was declared in Norfolk that 'rather than [they] should pay any taxes, it were better to take against king Herry' and 'get him by the head'.[147] A significant number of people in the 1530s reacted to the novelties being brought about by the Reformation Parliament. Some were probably seriously concerned with the salvation of their souls, because the king, as declared a yeoman of Yorkshire, had become 'a loller and ma[de them] all lollardes'.[148] Others, like George Balburney, tailor of Buckinghamshire, openly declared that Henry was 'a traitour to God and his lawes' who should be no king at all.[149] In 1537, it was even said that 'there [was] no King but one, which is [God] in hevyn', while another wished that the king should die just like King John and Richard III.[150] The evidence from the mid-1530s should not be read only as a reaction to the religious policy. Other accusations from that period draw on very common themes to attack the king, wishing the 'swerd of vengeans'

[144] For examples during the Yorkist period: KB9/135/47, 82; 320/13-4, 16 (aristocrats); 321/109; KB27/801/1v; *Brief Latin Chronicle*, p.175. For Henry VII: KB9/453/292. And an accusation of 1513 that delegitimises both Henry VII and VIII: *LP*, III/1, 1313.
[145] Such as in: KB9/135/49.
[146] KB9/448/53, 56.
[147] *LP*, III/2, 3082. A few gentlemen and a schoolmaster, in this same context, were accused of 'treasonable conversations' in London: KB9/492/2/1, 4, 6; noted by the chronicles: *HC*, p.673; *WC*, p.14.
[148] KB9/533/44; *LP*, IX, 37; and KB9/531/5-11.
[149] KB9/531/5-11; *LP*, VIII, 278.
[150] KB9/542/3v; KB8/7/1/1-4, 11; *LP*, VIII, 565, 567, 609, 802. For clergymen complaining: KB9/542/12; KB8/11/1; *WC*, pp.91-2.

upon him for a variety of faults: unjust local proceedings; increase of lay and clerical taxation; and the neglect of the popular queen Catharine of Aragon.[151]

Essentially, both the grievances surrounding the legitimacy of rulers and those reacting to specific policies took place within a trend of complaints that were seemingly widespread. Overall, this evidence points to the fact that kings were only sacred in theory, as these complaints only increase over the period – as we shall see in Chapter IV.[152] Once again, these people were treated as 'seditious' because they broke the hegemony of the royal word – in these cases, disagreeing about legitimacy and policy-making.

2.4. The Queen

Slanderous comments about the queen positively fell into the category of seditious and, sometimes, treasonable speech, above all because they occasionally reflected the king's choices. In a sense, given what monarchy and dynasty represented in late medieval society, we could expect to find plenty of slanderous comments about queens who failed to produce an heir – as had also happened to Margaret of Anjou.[153] However, the queens of the Yorkist and early Tudor period either produced an heir quickly (as Elizabeth of York and Jane Seymour) or found themselves both without a male heir and in alarming circumstances that provoked seditious talk and treason.

Primarily, the sorts of allegations characteristically made against two queens in this period have to do with their supposedly low birth and how their family was advanced to the king's favour through marriage. Thus, this discourse invariably overlaps with the accusations against the 'evil counsellors'. Even though indirect comments surrounding Edward IV's

[151] Ideas of 'vengeance' were proliferating: KB9/542/3v, 10; *LP*, XIII/1, 595, 787-8. For other examples of defiant language against Henry VIII, especially because of the divorce and the Supremacy: KB8/7/1-2, 7; 11/1/21; KB9/533/45; 536/51; 539/150; 548/4; 540/2, 26; 541/88-92; 977/43; *HC*, p.832; *WC*, pp.26-9, 115; *LP*, VIII, 1025, 1033, 1038, 1069, 1151; IX, 37, 491; X, 49, 77, 254, 529-30, 535; XI, 878, 1086, 1246, 1417 (10); XII/1, 725, 777-8, 1172, 1293; XII/2, 231; XIV/1, 867; *Archaeologia*, 27 (1838), p.365; *FC*, p.700.
[152] FiguresFigure 10-11, pp.228-9.
[153] Maurer, 'Delegitimizing Lancaster', *passim*.

marriage to Elizabeth Woodville in 1464 have survived, we cannot be sure whether they were really popular views or whether they were merely a reflection of the resentment publicised by the popular Earl of Warwick.[154] Ambassadorial correspondence reveals that the mayor of London and 'autres seigneurs' were dismayed by the news of the marriage, while the people were 'greatly offended'.[155] Hall's chronicle suggests that the commons directly grudged at this affair, but he wrote much later, and no direct evidence seems to have survived apart from the attacks on the queen's relatives who formed a 'secrete counseile' and were brought 'from nothing' to the king's favour – as the rebels claimed in 1469.[156] This is why Richard III tried to earn the public's favour in 1483 by referring to Queen Elizabeth and her mother as sorceresses and to the Woodvilles as 'bloody adherents' who were opposing the 'old royall blode of this realme'.[157] The other infamous relatively 'low-born' queen who was partly responsible for the advancement of her family was Anne Boleyn, although the evidence that survives about her also points to a second common trend of popular language directed at queens – or more accurately, at the king's mistreatment of his queen.

The common people seem to have utterly abhorred the mistreatment of 'true noble' queens. This is revealed by the serious rumour that circulated after Queen Anne died in March 1485 – heir to the earl of Warwick stressed the Crowland chronicler.[158] There was 'muche simple comunicacion' that Richard III had poisoned her in order to marry his niece, Elizabeth of York – which horrified everyone, almost caused rebellion in the north and prompted desperate proclamations from the crown.[159] This was a rumour about Richard himself, of course, but it also informs us about popular attitudes about queens that may be

[154] See briefly: Kleineke, *Edward IV*, pp.83-91.
[155] Tucker, 'Government and Politics in London', pp.346-7; *CSPM*, 137-8; other comments in Ibidem, 173. Chroniclers also include the 'nobility', Flanders and France: *Historia Croylandensis*, p.539; *GC*, pp.202-3.
[156] *HC*, p.264. See above, nn.101-104, p.162.
[157] *Three Books of Vergil*, p.180; *FC*, pp.669; *King's Letters*, V.1, CVII; *YCR*, I, p.73; Mancini, *Usurpation*, pp.86-7, 102-3.
[158] For this and what follows: *Acts of the Court of the Mercers' Company*, pp.173-4; *Crowland Chronicle*, pp.174-5; *GC*, p.234; *HC*, p.407.
[159] *Eleventh Report* (HMC), App. Part III, p.106; *King's Letters*, V.1, CXII; *YHB*, I, p.359.

compared to what happened with Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn. Despite being a foreigner, there is evidence that the commons thoroughly loved and supported Catherine when the divorce began to be openly discussed from 1527 – and for this much violent language against Henry and Anne Boleyn probably ensued very early, even though it was a while before there were any prosecutions.[160]

As Susan Brigden points out, the people were much less affected by the humiliation of the pope than by the repudiation of Catherine.[161] The prominence of women publicly defending Catherine or attacking Anne Boleyn is remarkable in the complaints that survived.[162] These women expressed their opinions in 1529, planned to attack Anne in 1531, impeded a royal journey to the countryside in that same year, and were punished in London for seditious language in 1532.[163] For obvious reasons, others who 'railed' greatly against her were clerics who might have heard about her religious ideas, and who included many words to describe the new queen, such as 'whore', 'harlot', 'a dog', and other epithets also shared by the commons.[164] A substantial number of clerics and commons equally abhorred the idea that the king and queen lived in adultery because they did not have 'the popys consent' and therefore, uttered a Yorkshire yeoman in 1534, 'the quenes grace schuld nott be called quene'.[165] By 1536, Anne Boleyn had fed so many slanderous tales that she was even rumoured of having somehow poisoned the king's bastard son Henry FitzRoy, who

[160] For Catherine's favour: *CSPSp*, III/2, 75, 83, 113, 550; IV/1, 354, 509; IV/2, 598, 1058, 1062, 1107, 1161; V/1, 1, 58; V/2, 9; *CSPM*, 817, 831; *LP*, VIII, 809; X, 282; *Original Letters*, 1st/2, CXV; *Records of the Reformation*, V.2, CCCLVII. For the early disapproval of Anne: *HC*, p.754, 782; *Original Letters*, 2nd/2, CVII; *LP*, VI, 585; VII, 802, 840; IX, 136.
[161] Brigden, *London and the Reformation*, p.208.
[162] Apart from the following examples in this paragraph: *LP*, VII, 1510, 1609; VIII, 196. See the discussion below, pp.226-8.
[163] *LP*, IV/3, 5702; *CSPSp*, IV/2, 980. *CSPV*, IV, 701; *Two London Chronicles from the Collections of John Stow*, in *Camden Miscellany XII*, ed. C.L. Kingsford (CS 3rd Ser. 18, 1910), p.8.
[164] *LP*, V, 1143; VI, 733 (2), 964, 967; VII, 454, 480, 559; IX, 846. For other clerics who complained with no cursing: *LP*, VII, 559, 939, 1624; VIII, 480, 589. For common people using comparable words and attacks, including women: *Original Letters*, 3rd/2, CCXXXVI; *LP*, VII, 678, 840; VIII, 196, 838; IX, 691, 1123.
[165] KB9/529/39. Similarly in: *LP*, VI, 634; KB8/7/1/1-4, 11; *DKR*, III, App.II, pp.237-8; *LP*, VIII, 565, 609; *Records of the Reformation*, V.2, CCCXXIX.

only died two months after her execution.[166] Jane Seymour was insulted by yet another cleric after her coronation, who said that the king married 'oon of the same generacion as evell as thother quene was before' – that is, probably, a 'generation' of either protestant queens or of 'villain's blood'.[167]

All things considered, we might suggest that from the perspective of public criticism in this period, queens were vulnerable to the same cultural stereotypes attributed to women.[168] If they were noble-born and produced a male heir, they were executing their duty accordingly. However, if they wanted to meddle with politics or 'entice' their king, they were a potential menace to the commonwealth as they had even more intimate access to the king than his counsellors. They could be loved and publicly acclaimed for their blood and good life – such as Anne Neville, Elizabeth of York, and Catherine of Aragon. Or they could be defamed as 'sorceresses' advancing their family – as Elizabeth Woodville – and leading the king to unprecedented measures such as pursuing a divorce from a noble queen, changing the traditional religion and forsaking the pope – as Anne Boleyn. These criticisms were 'seditious' or treasonable because they were divisive of the ideal of consensus, that is, they proposed different perspectives about either the queen herself, or the king's decision about her.

2.5. Supporting Traitors

Amongst the most numerous cases of seditious language reported both in indictments and extra-official sources are the acts of either shouting the name of conspirators, pretenders, or rebels during uncertain contexts or showing open sympathy towards them with words and

[166] *WC*, p.53.
[167] KB9/542/10; 'villain's blood' was apparently used by a Portuguese 'wretch' arrested in Nov. 1537: *LP*, XII/2, 1057. A priest also was accused of having said that Jane Seymour should have never been crowned: *LP*, XII/2, 1102.
[168] See Bardsley, *Venomous Tongue*, ch.2.

deeds. That was the case in Lincolnshire, during the rebellion of 1470, when shouts for Clarence and Warwick were uttered, as well as other surrounding cries in favour of Henry VI in 1470-1.[169] A few chroniclers recounted that people were 'crying out in public' in 1483, first lamenting Lord Hastings' execution, then in support of the Princes in the Tower, but nothing more substantial seems to have survived.[170] In contrast, Henry VII's reign saw a dramatic increase in the records of this kind of language, as a result of the conspiracies in which popular names came to be a constant reminder of the Wars of the Roses: Warwick (the actual title of Clarence's heir Edward Plantagenet; and used by the pretender Lambert Simnel), York (used by the pretender Perkin Warbeck), and De la Pole (John, Earl of Lincoln in 1486-7 and Edmund, Earl of Suffolk in the 1500s).[171]

Warwick the Kingmaker's memory certainly had a strong and long-lived appeal in popular memory.[172] And so did rebels who indirectly followed his lead such as Robin of Redesdale. In York, there was a rumour that the earl of Lincoln 'wold giff the kinges grace a brekefast', and that he 'wald have goone over the walles to Robin of Redesdall to take his part'.[173] The rumour that Henry VII lost the Battle of Stoke made people in London shout 'long live Warwick! To King Edward!'.[174] When Perkin Warbeck came to public notice from 1491, he was sometimes openly recognised as the Duke of York he claimed to be, and suspicious conversations, letters and rumours about him soon turned into charges of treason.[175] In 1494-5, dangerous and treasonable bills circulated in London and elsewhere –

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[169] For Clarence and Warwick in 1470: *Lincolnshire Chr.*, p.10; Wavrin, *Anchiennes Chronicques*, III, p.15. For Warwick and Henry VI: *HC*, p.283. For Henry VI only: *Warkworth's Chronicle*, pp.7-9; *Three Books of Vergil*, p.133. And during Fauconberg's rising of 1471: *Three Books of Vergil*, p.153.
[170] *HC*, pp.379-81; *Three Books of Vergil*, pp.181-2, 189.
[171] KB9/138/1, 10, 12, 14-5, 66-79; 371/16-7; 127/11-7; KB27/901/13v; 902/4v; 905/1r; 909/13r; 910/3v.
[172] There were rumours about one 'Warwick' in the Channel Isles and Ireland: Hicks, *Wars of the Roses*, pp.243-4. The earliest example of support to the name 'Warwick' during Henry VII's reign dates from May 1486 – namely, a reference to Edward Earl of Warwick, son of the Duke of Clarence and Richard III's nephew. See above: n.44, p.144.
[173] *YHB*, II, 540-4, 572.
[174] Bennett, *Lambert Simnel*, p.103.
[175] *GC*, p.244; *Anglica Historia*, pp.56-9; KB9/390/84-6; 934/4-5; 397/39; 401/20, 30; 404/16; 956/1-24; 1109, m. unnumbered; 51/7-8, 17-8; 52/1 412/22-3; *RHVIICS*, I, 62, 87; *Six Town Chronicles*, p.172; *FC*, p.685; *Records of Nottingham*, III, p.401.

some spread by 'persons of lowest birth' – both in support of Perkin Warbeck and Sir William Stanley and as a direct attack on the King's Council.[176] What is curious about the episodes after Warbeck was imprisoned in 1497, and revealing of popular feelings, is the fact that people seemed to be keener on supporting the name Warwick rather than York. The son of a cordwainer from Bishopsgate, London, was executed in February 1499 for claiming he was Warwick's heir as an attempt to raise a 'new rumour and insurrexcion'.[177] Even during the conspiracy to release Warbeck and Warwick from the Tower, in 1498-9, the conspirators showed affection to Perkin Warbeck, and one considered him truly 'the son of king Edward IV', but John Fynche was hoping to hear people crying 'A Warwick!' while wearing the earl's badges in Cheapside.[178] These episodes suggest, for instance, that a noble considered to be the people's spokesman was more highly regarded than someone who merely had a dynastic right.[179] In any case, the memory of Warwick might have gradually faded away with the executions of 1499, but the Yorkist shadow did not.

The De la Pole brothers were the next source of dynastic problems that could affect both Henry VII and his son, and the commons were relatively informed about them. The fourth main plot in Henry VII's period seems to have posed more threat to the stability of the kingdom than we can tell from the fragmented sources about the affair.[180] Edmund de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk, was the source of great anxiety, and after what seems a long negotiation, he was sent to England in 1506 and remained imprisoned until his execution in 1513.[181] In the meantime, people openly showed their sympathies towards him by wishing him to be

[176] KB9/78/8-9; *Anglica Historia*, pp.76-9. Compare with *HC*, pp.468-70. See also: *Six Town Chronicles*, p.172; *FC*, p.684-5; *Vitellius A XVI*, p.199. For more discussion on Warbeck's supporters: Arthurson, *Perkin Warbeck*, pp.1, 90-7, 181-2, 194; Cooper, *Propaganda*, p.57; Chrimes, *Henry VII*, p.92.
[177] *FC*, p.686; *Vitellius A XVI*, p.225.
[178] KB8/2/4-5, 15; *DKR*, III, App.2, pp.216-7; Ibidem, LIII, pp.31-3.
[179] See the phenomenon in the 1450s and 1469-71 in: Pollard, *Warwick the Kingmaker*, ch.9.
[180] One example is the narrative in *LP RIII/VII*, I, xviii.
[181] For most of this paragraph I rely on: S. Cunningham, 'Pole, Edmund de la, eighth earl of Suffolk (1472?-1513)'; and Idem, 'Pole, Richard de la (d. 1525)', both in *ODNB* (05 March 2019). See also: T. Penn, *The Winter King: The Dawn of Tudor England* (2011), pp.213-34; W.E. Hampton, 'The White Rose under the first Tudor Part 2: Edmund de la Pole', *The Ricardian*, 7/98 (1987), pp.464-478.

their king, spreading rumours, exchanging letters, or sharing treasonable conversations and prophecies.[182] Cordwainers in Norwich, in April 1504, trusted '[they would] se Edmund de la Pole were the crowne or [the king] died'.[183] Others in 1505 would spend their 'body and [their] goodes' with the 'gentilman be yound the see, Edmond de la Pole'.[184] After Suffolk's imprisonment, it was his brother Richard who would keep the 'White Rose' alive by feeding rumours and treasonable language until he died at Pavia in 1525.[185] As in most of these examples, the language in support of Richard de la Pole was associated with other grievances: unpaid soldiers in 1515; disgust at Wolsey in 1518.[186] Moreover, both in 1518 and 1521 people longed for a rumoured invasion – either with Welsh or Scottish support – and Richard's name was recycled even after his death, in a sermon of 1528.[187] It was probably Wolsey's unpopularity that also provoked words in favour of Buckingham in 1521;[188] just as the disapproval of Cromwellian reforms led others to confabulate prophecies about the 'papist' and great-nephew of the Yorkist kings, Cardinal Reginald Pole, later.[189]

It is remarkable to notice, therefore, that even though we can reasonably assume that the Wars of the Roses traumatised the political society, commoners remained engaged with discourses – and sometimes actions – that could prompt new *coups* and renew civil strife. This attitude suggests not only a great deal of intentionality behind these utterances, but most importantly, how well-informed they were about conspirators, pretenders, and actual possible legitimate heirs to the crown. The governments' anxieties about getting hold

[182] KB9/426/, 1b, 41; 427/26-7; 441/4-6; 111/1, 7, 14-5, 18; 4/1-2, 9; 79/1/6-10, 18-21; 79/2/3, 6a, 7a, 7b; 448/51; *RHVIICS*, I, XXVI; *GC*, p.296, 318, 325; *FC*, p.687, 689; *HC*, p.496.
[183] DL3/4/28-30.
[184] DL5/4/138v, 141v.
[185] For the foreign policy in that period and Richard's threat: G. Bernard, *War, Taxation and Rebellion in Early Tudor England* (New York, 1986), pp.3-45.
[186] *LP*, II/1, 147-8, 171, 325-6, 1259; KB9/475/2/1, 4, 9-11.
[187] *LP*, III/1, 995, 1003, 1221; IV/2, 4040.
[188] *LP*, III/1, 1320, 1356; III/2, 2415; Addenda, I, 319; *Ballads from Manuscripts*, pp.334-5, 355.
[189] *LP*, XII/1, 508. For the Exeter Conspiracy: KB8/11/1-2; *WC*, pp.91-2. The prophecy was thoroughly discussed by: Jansen, *Political Protest and Prophecy*, pp.1-7, 11-4, 39-49, 105-6, 147-8. See also: *LP*, XII/2, 1212.

of conspirators – as well as about having a rightful male heir as soon as possible – should be likewise seen under this light.

2.6. Wishful Thinking and Prophecy

Perhaps more than any of the previous trends of popular language, wishful thinking and prophecy can be seen as a direct result of the anxiety discussed in Chapter II.[190] While the commons 'wondered' about or 'marvelled' at the future, they could join conspiracies, as in the previous section, or spread convincing political prophecies that could turn into turmoil.

Alternative political scenarios were seen as a source of 'new hope' by popular critics, but to the authorities, their claims often meant that people were wishing the king's death or causing the 'cordial love of the people [to] be withdrawn from [him]'.[191] Some of these wishes were clearly hostile, such as those of the monk quoted at the beginning of this chapter, who wished the northern rebels, in December 1536, had 'striken off [the king's] hedde' because 'as the king doth liffe we shall never have better world'.[192] More importantly, examples like this one comprised both lamentation and hope, for people wished 'a new change be midsomer day', as in 1488, or considered, possibly in 1499, that 'it [would] never be better unto the time ther be a newe world'.[193] Time and again, in periods of rebellion and conspiracy, these new hopes emerged, and the woman whose words are in the title of this chapter, Elizabeth Wood, spinster of Aylesham, Kent, demonstrated this perfectly. She said in May 1537 that:

> it was pety that those Walsingham men were discovered for we shall never have good world till we fall too gether by the eres and with cloobbes and clouted shoone shall the deede be doone for we had never good world since this king reigned.[194]

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[190] See above, pp.107-14.
[191] For instance: KB8/1/9; *DKR*, III, App.2, p.213.
[192] KB9/542/11; *LP*, XII/1, 892.
[193] *YHB*, I, p.402; II, p.460; KB9/441/4. For more 'lamentations': *LP*, VII, 678; VIII, 736.
[194] KB9/538/13; *LP*, XII/2, 1301.

Thus, she lamented a failed attempt (the Walsingham Conspiracy) to renew a rebellion that had already been suppressed (the Pilgrimage of Grace and the smaller risings), but the context was uncommonly unstable and she was executed because she both believed in revolt to bring about change and dared to express that feeling openly.[195] Therefore, popular 'wondering' can show specific desires, sometimes hidden in forms of predictions of the king's or his counsellors' and ministers' demise.[196] A tinker of Hereford, for example, said in 1514 that though the Scots lost their king, they lost no battle and 'wolde come agane into Ynglond unto Hamptone'.[197] Another expression of these popular speculations revealed by this survey relates to what the speakers of such words expected from the 'new world', that is, 'to have a *mery* woreld', but again they often found themselves wondering about pretenders to the crown.[198] Thomas Swinnerton, while attacking 'papists' in 1534, openly recognised that people were saying 'that it was a mery world before men spake' of reforming the church.[199] While some of these uses were not dangerous, others were inciting rebellion or implying strife. To the ruling elites, however, any popular 'marvelling' about politics needed to be suppressed and controlled as soon as it was reported.

Another dangerous and politically charged form of wishful thinking was spread as prophecies. Just as the common people spread rumour as a form of understanding the present, the act of re-using, recycling, or even inventing prophecies was a form of anticipating the future – instead of merely believing they would 'never have better world'. And just like rumours, too, the majority of surviving manuscripts about prophecies in the fifteenth century followed the usurpations of 1461, 1470-1, and to a lesser degree 1483-5.[200] Much of the

[195] A substantial analysis of this case is found in: Jansen, *Dangerous Talk*, pp.77-114.
[196] Such as in 1499: *DKR*, LIII, p.35; KB8/2/14; in 1503: *LP RIII/HVII*, I, XXVI; in 1520: *LP*, III/1, 1142; in 1521: Ibidem, 1320.
[197] *Thirteenth Report* (HMC), p.306.
[198] Quoting a case about Richard de la Pole, early in 1517: KB9/475/2/1, 4, 9-11. But the expression was also used in reference to the Duke of Buckingham later: *LP*, I/1, 157; *Thirteenth Report* (HMC), p.306.
[199] Swinnerton, *A Litel Treatise*, B5v-B6r.
[200] L.A. Coote, *Prophecy and Public Affairs in Later Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp.220-34.

evidence in this area – both in elite manuscripts and popular culture – has already been examined by scholars, and there is no room for a lengthy discussion here, but overall prophecies must be seen as both inherently subversive as well as persuasive because they constituted a tradition of political language that crossed social boundaries.[201] Even though contemporary elites clearly showed discomfort about popular prophecies, it has been convincingly argued that many of the prophecies accessed through manuscripts that were owned by them originated or evolved among popular traditions.[202]

In any case, whenever prophecies were not serving to aggrandise a particular dynasty or narrative, they were typically labelled as sedition or treason because they either sounded disloyal or were used by possible conspirators. With different risk levels, that was the case of a tailor of Wiltshire in 1461, an obscure man reporting 'old talys' in 1473, Thomas Burdett and the Duke of Clarence in 1477-8, and the Duke of Buckingham in 1521.[203] The surviving evidence of people re-using prophecies highlights how cleverly they manipulated and expressed this language: for one, because they did so in either potentially dangerous or uncertain periods; for another, because of the threatening content of these predictions.[204] A woman called Mistress Amadas in 1533, for instance, was said to have been interpreting prophecies for twenty years in London, affirming very detailed predictions, among which: that in that year the king would be banished 'as Calwalider was'; that 'before Midsummer

[201] B. Taithe and T. Thornton (eds.), *Prophecy: The Power of Inspired Language in History*, 1300-2000 (Stroud, 1997), p.3; T. Thornton, *Prophecy, Politics and the People in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge, 2006), p.51. See also: Elton, *Policy and Police*, pp.46-82; Cooper, *Propaganda*, pp.107-12; Jansen, *Political Protest and Prophecy*, pp.1-7.
[202] L.A. Coote and T. Thornton, 'Merlin, Erceldoune, Nixon: a tradition of popular prophecy', in *New Medieval Literatures*, IV (Oxford, 2001), p.137. For discomfort, see for instance: Cavendish, *Life of Wolsey*, pp.128-9; and the laws passed in 1402 and 1406: *PROME*, 1402, It.90; 1496, It.62 (08 Aug. 2019). See also: T. Thornton, 'The battle of Sandeford: Henry Tudor's understanding of the meaning of Bosworth Field', *HR*, 78/201 (2005), 436-42; Jansen, *Political Protest and Prophecy*, pp.17-19.
[203] KB9/135/47, 82; *Paston Letters*, V, 829; Burdett's predictions were curiously recycled in both *Three Books of Vergil*, pp.167; and *HC*, pp.326-7; see his case above, p.142, nn.31-32; and Buckingham's trial in: *DKR*, III, App.II, p.213; KB8/5/28; KB9/53/1-16.
[204] Such as during the plot to set Perkin Warbeck free in 1498-9: KB8/2/15; *DKR*, LIII, pp.32-3; *CSPSp*, I, 239; those used against Wolsey in the 1520s: *LP*, III/1, 1142; *Ballads from Manuscripts*, pp.341-61; and an indictment of Welshmen repeating an ancient prophecy about the Scots conquering England in 1531: KB9/517/3.

the realm shall be conquered by the Scots'; and 'that there shall be a battle of priests, and the king shall be destroyed'.[205] From this point in Henry VIII's reign, the escalating number of prophecies can be exemplified by another woman, Elizabeth Barton, the 'holy maid of Kent'.[206] She caused significant unrest recorded by many different sources, including international correspondence, and her 'visions' reached important men like Sir Thomas More and Bishop Fisher.[207] The cases of the 1530s were extraordinarily diverse, but they again reflect one single aspect of wishful thinking: they travelled side by side with rumours and, therefore, were as threatening because they articulated possible political scenarios usually involving prominent figures. Sometimes this strategy resorted to the written word and a mixture of Merlin and the Christian tradition of predictions which were powerful enough, but their danger also rested on the use of symbolic figures, acronyms and other obscure elements that could be easily adjusted according to the circumstances.[208]

This is not to say that people did not believe in these predictions, but to stress that prophecies proliferated in critical times both because some of these people spread them intentionally and persuasively, and because wishful thinking went side by side with rumour-mongering. The latter was more anxious about the present, while the former looked to the future. Just as kings used prophecies to make sense of their role in the cosmos, popular predictions seemingly caused distress because they were interpreted as already 'compassing' the future to change just by saying them out loud.

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[205] *LP*, VI, 921. For more: Jansen, *Political Protest and Prophecy*, pp.29-34.
[206] For only a few of examples up to 1534: *LP*, IV/3, 6652; V, 830, 1679; VI, 733 (2); VII, 1624, App.23; *CSPSp*, IV/1, 547; IV/2, 1149.
[207] *LP*, VI, 1336, 1468, 1470; VII, 72; *Original Letters*, 3rd/2, CCXXXI. Bishop Fisher's letter demonstrating his knowledge and belief in the prophecies is: Ibidem, CCXXII; *LP*, VII, 240. For Thomas More's comments: *LP*, VII, 287. For comparisons of other prophecies and 'revelations' with those of Barton: *LP*, VII, 930, 1047. Chapuys' comments are reported in: *CSPSp*, IV/2, 1149. Hall offers a vivid description: *HC*, pp.810-4. For more on her case: Jansen, *Dangerous Talk*, pp.57-75; E.H. Shagan, 'Print, Orality and Communications in the Maid of Kent affair', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 52/1 (2001), pp.21-33.
[208] Jansen, *Political Protest and Prophecy*, pp.1-19.

2.7. The Commonalty and the Commonwealth

Even though rebels and others claimed to have the best intentions when they made claims about what constituted a 'merry world', their arguments invoking the 'common weal', the 'commonwealth', or the 'commonalty', had a long history that put them under suspicion.[209] These expressions were part of one of the most influential political concepts of late medieval society that justified a great deal of public actions.[210] However, despite the fact that commoners would embrace this apparently unimpeachable principle to make their claims heard, this language was occasionally regarded as 'seditious' because it implied social struggles and was a reminder of dangerous rebellions.[211]

The first problem with regard to the language of 'commonweal' and 'commonalty' was that ordinary people seemed to understand it differently – which could mean 'seditiously'. While late medieval governments used this language to justify various policies, the people used it to denounce their failings. In 1472, there is a subtle but significant example of how the government saw a link between 'the commonalty' and insurrection. Surely, the commoners indicted on that occasion also claimed they 'wolle have the king put douum', but the seditious aspect of this 'commonalty' was also expressed by inserting the vernacular words 'the comyns' in the middle of the Latin formula.[212] This is a single example in which the expression 'the comyns' is translated to English in this structure, but it is remarkable that it refers to possible insurrection led by servants of George Neville and that it follows the verb '*commovere*'. What partly explains this association between 'the comyns' and their claims with sedition throughout this period is the fact that while they were making less aggressive

[209] Contemporaries compared, for example, the rebellion of 1497 with 'Jak Straw, Jack Cade & Othir Rebellis': *GC*, p.278. See the discussions in: Knights *et al*, 'Commonwealth', pp.666-9; Rollison, *Commonwealth of the People*, pp.32-235; Watts, 'The Commons in Medieval England', p.219-21.
[210] Watts, 'Ideas, Principles, and Politics', pp.118-21.
[211] For instance: *LP*, IV/2, 3530; XI, 1064, 1409; *Morison's Tracts*, pp.177-84, 88-9, 112-9; *Sermons by Hugh Latimer*, ed. G.E. Corrie (Lewes, 1987), p.29.
[212] '*quod ipsi commoverint* the comyns': KB9/41/1/37, 41; 330/10, 13, 40, 85.

claims, they took up arms to defend the 'treue commons and subjettes' in 1469;[213] 'the kinge and the comowns of England' in 1489;[214] or the king, the commons, and the commonwealth both in 1525 and 1536.[215] In 1536-7, Thomas Cromwell was seen as the 'destroyer of the commonwealth', and further south from the insurgent counties the clergy had also adopted and supported the commons' language because 'they c[a]me for a comen welthe and a good entent'.[216] Therefore, physical violence, or the possibility of it, automatically invalidated these loyalist claims made on behalf of the commonalty or the commonweal and turned them into seditious language. But the people did not think so: they were simply seeking, to follow the rationale of a Norfolk husbandman indicted in April 1537, to rise 'for the commen welthe', which also meant 'the welthe of the commynalte'.[217] This last example undoubtedly illustrates that ordinary people interpreted the concept differently, but it also leads us to another feature of this type of language.

References to 'commonwealth' or 'commonalty' were also treated as seditious when commoners seemed to evoke clear social class distinctions – i.e., the wealth (or wellbeing) of the 'poor commons' achieved by rebellion if necessary. Sir John Fortescue indeed thought that poverty should be remedied to avoid rebellion, but Richard Morison later claimed that social disadvantage was no excuse for disobedience.[218] The main point is, however, that the welfare of the 'poor commons' could not be achieved if greedy gentlemen and counsellors were between them and the king and nobles they venerated;[219] for them,

[213] *Warkworth's Chronicle*, pp.48-9; *JVB*, pp.218-21.
[214] *Paston Letters*, VI, 1039.
[215] *HC*, p.696; *LP*, XI, IV/3, 5749; *GC*, p.719. Another of Wolsey's critics at that time, John Skelton, used 'communewelth decayed' and 'the commune welth / Shall never have good helth': *Skelton Poems*, pp.221-3, 267. For the claims in 1536: *LP*, XI, 585, 705, 714, 785, 892, 902, 1059.
[216] *LP*, XII/1, 6, 901; KB9/541/93. For more evidence of supporters: KB9/538/13; *LP*, XII/1, 193, 201; XII/2, 13, 150; XIII/1, 1241, 1313; XIII/2, 20, 42, 142, 156, App., 43; XV, 498; *HC*, p.823; *WC*, p.57.
[217] KB9/538/13.
[218] Fortescue, *Governance of England*, p.140; *Morison's Tracts*, p.128. Compare with Worcester, *Boke of Noblesse*, pp.80-1. And with other more subtle ideas on the 'poor commons' in: *YHB*, pp.618-9; *Original Letters*, 3rd/2, CXXX; *LP*, IV/1, 1332; *LP*, IV/2, 4040, 4188-90, 4192, 4236, 4243, 4276, 4287, 4310. In 1536 it was mentioned in part of the articles as 'poverty and losses' of the last two years: *LP*, XI, 705.
[219] As the commons of Westmorland informed Lord Darcy in Nov. 1536: 'we doo accept no gentyllman of our counsel because we be affraied of thaim… we besuche your noble lordchep of your goodnes and discreet consell

there was something unnatural about kings favouring the Woodvilles, Edmund Dudley, Richard Empson, Thomas Wolsey, Thomas Cromwell, and others of 'low-birth' when the commons remained miserable and oppressed.[220] The popularity of certain nobles arose not merely from their blood, but from the manipulation of such language in their favour, claiming they were 'reprovinge of falsehodd and oppression of the *pore people*' and defending 'the things (*sic*) publique of the *true comonaltie*'.[221] If lower gentlemen or the commons themselves tried to make the same claims about the commonalty, the label of sedition was more readily applied, such as the case of Laurence Saunders in Coventry (in the 1480s and 1494-6);[222] the elections of 'captain poverty' with 'cosin Necessitie' in Suffolk, 1525;[223] in the use of 'Maister Povertye, the conductor, protector, and maintainer of *the whole commonalty*', in 1536;[224] and the Cumberland captains Faith, Poverty, Pity, and Charity, when one of the depositions also showed that they might have wanted to destroy the local gentry.[225] Thus, class distinctions exposed sedition more profoundly because it usually exposed the class struggles that prevented the wellbeing of the 'comynalte'.

In summary, this seditious language that revolves around 'commonalty' and 'commonweal/th' consists of two elements: a different interpretation about what leads to the wellbeing of the commons, as well as a sense of identity that provided a frame through which the commons could interpret their reality, deal with the problems of their commonwealth and potentially get closer to a 'good world'. The popular meaning of 'commonwealth' and its variations was, then, a mixed idea of both 'welfare' and 'commonalty' that should not be

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wat may doo in the said premisses for the comen welthe': *LP*, XI, 1080. Similar in the Walsingham Conspiracy: KB9/538/13; *LP*, XII/2, 150. And the rebellion of 1549: Wood, *Riot, Rebellion and Popular Politics*, pp.32-3.

[220] See also the discussion of hierarchy in: Bush, 'Risings of the Commons in England', pp.114-6, 119-23.

[221] Emphasis added: *Original Letters*, 2nd/2, XLII.

[222] *CLB*, pp.556-7, 574-8.

[223] *HC*, p.700.

[224] Emphasis added: *LP*, XI, 892. According to Robert Aske, poverty was one reason to support the abbeys, which helped to relieve the commons: *LP*, XII/1, 6, 901. Such argument was subsequently refuted in: *Morison's Tracts*, p.173. See also: Scase, *Literature and Complaint*, p.157; Hoyle, *Pilgrimage of Grace*, p.241.

[225] *LP*, XII/1, 687.

widely re-used as it implied rebellion and exposed the problems of the 'commonwealth' rather than aggrandising the achievements of rulers or justifying their policies.

2.8. Complaints about Local Officers

Defiant popular language at local level drew on very similar topics throughout the period by using claims of 'extortion' and 'injustice' to explain a wide range of grievances.[226] However, while people probably avoided insulting their king in public, they seemingly did not refrain from insulting and confronting local officers. The overall trend of local issues frequently involved violent statements that also demonstrate that local authorities had a hard time in being respected or in trying to enforce a royal writ. Even reasonably respected noblemen, like Richard Duke of Gloucester in 1482, could be doubted as to what 'might he do for the cite [of York]?'; the 'seditious' answer was 'nothing'.[227] The records of verbal attacks during riots show that, perhaps, if the royal commissioners or JPs listened to their threats, the riot would have ended.[228] Even so, rioters asserted, such as in Erith, Kent in 1493, that neither sheriffs nor undersheriffs, 'ne any of the kinges baillies' had anything to do with their local jurisdiction. They planned several actions in Erith, but mainly to assault the undersheriff and teach him a lesson so 'that all other of the kinges offecers shall be ware howe they medle here in this fraunches herafter'.[229] This case can be compared with that of a yeoman of Essex who disrespected everyone in 1522 by saying: 'I set nought by God, by the King ner the

[226] *Yorkshire STAC*, V.1, XXXII, LII, LXV; V.2, XXIV-XVII; V.3, X, XIX, XXV, LXII, LXXVIII; V.4, 13, 18; C1/11/31; 27/148; 61/387; 64/827, 1067; 66/417; 71/162; 128/33, 36; 195/35; 204/87; 205/2; 207/64; 290/36; 292/7; 336/30; 337/63; 354/82; 413/31; DL5/1/105v; KB9/345/65; 349/7, 49; 953/45-46; 415/25; 453/125, 129-30, 135, 138, 250-1, 252-3, 255-70, 273, 279-80, 344, 361; 456/10-1, 16, 25; 460/53; 963/32; 964/49; 461/21; 489/5; 505/15; 506/1/11; 976/112; SC8/192/9594; *Paston Letters*, III, 475; IV, 497, 504, 513; *Great Red Book of Bristol*, II, pp.66-7; IV, pp.13-17; *Plumpton Correspondence*, 31; *LP RIII/HVII*, II, XIV; *Select Cases in the Council of Henry VII*, p.70; *RHVIICS*, II, 82; *Select STAC*, I, pp.120-9, 256-60, 275-7; II, pp.16, 68-74, 121, 123-35; *YCR*, III, pp.38, 109, 173; *LP*, VII, 1669; XII/1, 129; XII/2, 158. See the discussions in: Liddy, 'Cultures of Surveillance', p.316; C. Carpenter, 'Law, Justice, and Landowners', *Law and History Review*, 1/2 (1983), pp.231-7.

[227] *YHB*, II, App.II, p.696.

[228] Suggested by statements such as: 'if ye goo any further… hit shall cost you your lives': KB9/394/27. Similarly in: KB9/405/3; Duggan, 'Thought Control', p.286-7.

[229] KB9/401/9.

Quene, by lord ner lady, by sheriff ner sheriffes man, by bayley ner constabull, ner by no man'.[230] Projecting this same sense of freedom, others used a common technique that implied their total lack of deference to higher authority: they would make the officer eat the privy seal whatever inquisition they were facing.[231] Given that cases of confrontations that did not involve local officers demonstrate a more violent use of words and insults, one could argue that this sense of liberty – both in juridical and linguistic terms – tended to reflect clear political ideas on the people's part.[232] Overall, the assumption seems to have been that, as long as they did not criticise the monarch and his family directly, almost everything else was (and should be) open to negotiation – especially easier targets in local affairs.

In summary, what is remarkable about abusive language in the localities is that people used a similar vocabulary in comparison to those who talked about 'national' issues. More importantly, 'sedition' was a crime against local authority as much as it was against central power – and it was both thoroughly persecuted as well as backed by the king.[233]

The evidence surveyed and analysed in this section compels us to see commoners as politically informed, manipulating a wide array of concepts to articulate their critical thoughts both at a national and local level. As a result of being informed and challenging the hegemonic voices usually imposed on them, these ordinary people were frequently labelled as 'seditious'. In the examples seen in subsections 2.1-2.4, popular perspectives disputed

[230] KB9/487/13; KB27/1045/7r-7v.
[231] In 1494, for instance: 'I shall make yowe or ye departe to ete them and also to make yowe to drinke youre owne herte blode', KB9/1109, mm. unnumbered. For another similar example in 1504: KB9/446/40-1. Other more serious threats to local officers, not involving the royal writ: KB9/418/43, 33, 6; 962/30; 455/36; 456/30; 457/2, 28-9, 32, 40, 61; 458/26; 460/12; 465/15, 46-8; 466/40; 469/2-3; 475/1/16; 481/17, 26; 489/54; 491/15, 18; 492/1/22; 496/9-11; 514/38; 518/70; *Records of Nottingham*, III, Supp.VI.
[232] These different, and more threatening, words are recorded in: KB9/394/29; 431/21; 434/11; 445/18; 465/38; 470/8-9; 490/83; 500/74; 973/137; 526/57; *RHVIICS*, II, 103, pp.196-7; *Select STAC*, I, pp.227-30, 275-7; II, pp.123-35.
[233] See the case of Henry VII, for example, encouraging persecution by the local authorities of Exeter, Bristol, Nottingham and Dover in: Gunn, 'Henry VII in Context', p.314. And some evidence in York: *YHB*, I, pp.402-3, 405, 408; II, pp.609, 625, 627, 638; and Coventry: *CLB*, II, pp.536-7, 566, 577-8.

ideas about the counsellors, the financial burden of taxes, the legitimacy of their king, and the role and mistreatment of their queen. Quite frequently, though, these cases of popular 'seditious' speech simply reflected actual problems that were also criticised by gentlemen, political thinkers, MPs and others. The problem of popular language was that it was frequently seen and recorded as more violent and disrespectful – and therefore more easily targeted. In subsections 2.5-2.8, however, popular opinion reflected even more critical issues because the commons were not simply causing the alleged 'division' by idle talk. More accurately, they were persistently pursuing this *seditio* by openly supporting traitors, speculating about alternative political scenarios that implied replacing their sovereign, using an increasingly ambiguous and threatening language of collectivity that alluded to past rebellions, and more violently attacking local authority.

Overall, the discourses surveyed here might seem constrained by a limited range of techniques or rhetoric, but that is all we can know about the speech of ordinary people, and from this evidence it may indeed be suggested that it was a language more likely to be seen as sedition than as peaceful criticism. For one, because it put an undesired pressure on public policy; for another, because people were not expected to publicise their dissenting opinions in the first place, and when they did so, they were breaking the code and causing division. The development of this stereotype of popular language as sedition did not necessarily lead the government to become more authoritarian. On top of the difference in surviving records discussed in Section 1 of this Chapter, the crown was merely paying more and more attention to public opinion and, as a result, was uncovering more seditious talk. Following from the discussion in Section 1, what this survey ultimately shows is that the approach to sedition and treason had always been about kinds of political disaffection that stemmed from undesired expressions of popular opinion. Therefore, there was a consistent concern with dealing with seditious and challenging speech and neither the situations under which political

dissent was targeted, nor the content of this disaffection was reinvented in the 1530s, though they steeply increased together as a product of circumstances.[234]

3. The Intentionality of Popular Speech

So far we have established that late medieval governments had always been concerned with political concord, and that concern produced a rich, though variable, number of records. Moreover, we have also seen that users of popular language had a variety of strategies to express their grievances and that they were reasonably well-informed. Now, we might investigate briefly whether these same commoners were simply expressing anger and reacting without much thinking, or whether they purposefully used their insults and challenging ideas to assign a negative 'social essence' to the authorities and their governments, as a way of engaging with politics and discursive conflicts.[235] By treating these linguistic exchanges as relations of symbolic power, we can further understand whether the commons always intended to actualise power relations by using abusive language or whether their language was simply miscast by the authorities.

Thus far in this chapter, the discussion of the frequency and trends of seditious speech has suggested that 'sedition [was] a… public and violent [thing]'.[236] Even though the popular statements that survive are neither always public nor invariably violent, they were indeed treated as such because they could infect public opinion with division, putting an undesired pressure on the authorities with virtually illegitimate criticisms. Despite this lack of legitimacy, the pressure the common people put on policy-making was inevitable.[237] But can we assume that people had such political intentions with their utterances? One Chancery bill quoted above to discuss the concern with political concord during the Yorkist period,

[234] This last point will be further analysed in Chapter IV, pp.218-50.
[235] I refer to the claims made in the Introduction, p.20 and n.68.
[236] This was stated by a judge in 1578, reproduced in: Cressy, *Dangerous Talk*, p.42.
[237] For public pressure, see the conclusion to Chapter I, pp.82-3 and: Watts, 'Pressure of the Public', *passim*; Idem, 'Popular Politics', pp.109-10.

against Thomas Gausell in 1471-2, can begin to demonstrate how persuasive people could be.[238] Potential rebels like him – accused of 'unfitting language' about Edward IV and of supporting the Lancastrians at Tewkesbury – were conscious of the fact that they could complicate the authorities' judgements about facts by twisting the crucial information that could cost somebody's life, money, or reputation. What we also have in records like this is both an example of the intentionality of a defendant twisting the narrative, inverting the original bill, and damaging the reputation of the plaintiff; as well as an example of disobedience, since it was the issue of 'unfitting language' that triggered the whole case. This Chancery bill of Geoffrey Buntyng against Thomas Gausell was a peculiar case, but we can enquire further into the issue of how authorities treated abusive language by looking at other examples.

Although contemporary vocabulary was not as consistent as researchers might wish, the charge of 'unfitting' or 'unsitting' language may reveal that authorities were not frequently miscasting popular language as 'sedition' without a good reason or without realising intentions.[239] The fact that the label of 'unfitting' existed in parallel to 'seditious' also illustrates that authorities had different gradations to qualify and persecute speech – they did not do so indiscriminately. Occasionally, people were even pardoned for their abusive speech, and authorities did their best to gather evidence to dismiss 'malicious' accusations, even in delicate periods such as in the early months of 1537.[240] In fact, that had also been the case of Thomas Gausell in the sense that he was apparently accused with a great deal of evidence but reacted 'maliciously' to defame his opponent. Consequently, the authorities

[238] The case is in: C1/43/284-90. See above, p.141. It can be compared with a treason accusation of 1479 in: *Great Red Book of Bristol*, IV, pp.57-93.
[239] Further to what follows in this paragraph: STAC 10/4/2; *LP*, II/2, 3951; III/1, 1221, 1363; *Archaeologia*, 25 (1834), p.392; *Original Letters*, 3rd/1, XVII, XCV.
[240] In Oxford, one John Parkyns tried to accuse the abbots of Eynsham and Osney of 'certeine wordes againste the kinges dignitye contrary to ther alleigaunce (*sic*)' – apparently related to the rebellions in the north. But the inquisition found only 'very light matters of malice againste them'. John Parkyns, then, wore a paper with the inscription 'for faulse accusacion' in front of Carfax Tower and remained in prison for a while: STAC 2/34/11.

seem to have realised both Gausell's original 'unfitting language' and his 'malicious intents' against the plaintiff. Early in Henry VII's reign, too, one John Hotton was brought to Chancery for 'diverse wordis and languages unsitting the king' while the plaintiff, John Aleyn, claimed to have been 'maliciously' accused to remain in prison and not give his testimony against Hotton.[241] Meanwhile, the city of York informed the Archbishop that John Eglisfeld, sword-bearer of the chamber, was impeached for treason and, as a reaction, attacked the city council with 'unsitting langage'.[242] Thus, 'unfitting language' was an inappropriate, indecorous and offensive form of speech act that might or might not turn into sedition.[243] What is compelling about these cases is that they demonstrate, on the one hand, that the 'malicious' attitudes of the people involved were considered as clear intentions during the proceedings. Political intentions, even between private individuals, seem to have been distilled during the interrogatories, not readily miscast. On the other, they show that authorities had certain criteria to label abusive language: they used 'unfitting' to qualify what sometimes was actually seditious or treasonable speech, but they did so because this word concurrently emphasised the nonconformity of violent and disrespectful speech acts.

As demonstrated in the previous section, it could only have been an intentional behaviour to maintain criticisms under the conceptual umbrella of 'justice', 'evil counsellors', or the 'commonwealth', as these general statements could enable people to make criticisms without being immediately accused of treason.[244] As Pollard has suggested, the people saw their practice as 'an extension of parliamentary politics by other means'.[245] Moreover, they would use repeated names such as Jack Straw, Jack Cade, Robin of Redesdale or Robin Hood not because these names were merely popular, but probably

[241] C1/76/23. Similarly in: *Paston Letters*, VI, 1004.
[242] *YHB*, I, pp.377-8.
[243] Such as 'words inconveniently spoken': *LP*, III/1, 1314.
[244] Further to the above, see: Fortescue, *Governance of England*, p.140.
[245] Pollard, 'The People and Parliament', p.15. This, of course, remained the same in the early-modern period: J. Walter, 'A Lincolnshire Libel and the Politics of Sedition', *P&P*, 203 (2009), pp.63-4.

because everyone could understand their political meaning.[246] They would negotiate their demands and try to convince authorities that they should not pay taxes in 1525, for instance, because 'they had over-assessed themselves' previously.[247] And in 1536, the clever title of the 'Pilgrimage of Grace for the Commonwealth' bore a profound meaning that merged the religious aspect of the rebellion with the political act itself – not to mention that the rebel leaders enforced a powerful oath on the rest of the pilgrims.[248] Admittedly, sometimes these leaders were better educated than the ordinary people who joined them, but we can still turn to other practices to illustrate these calculations and intentions.

Rebels' manifestoes and the practice of bill-casting, for example, can only have happened with clear and persuasive intentions before words were written, exchanged, copied, posted on church doors, cast in the streets and probably shouted at market places.[249] Historians have thoroughly discussed the most well-known bills and manifestoes, as well as the political strategy behind them, but a few observations are necessary here.[250] The symbolic importance of bill-casting prompted contemporary chroniclers and other writers to report the practice, especially in London, and even though we have surviving examples of copies of crucial ones, the content of many others will probably remain unknown to modern historians.[251] Indictments of treason sometimes suggested that the act of spreading 'bills and

[246] As in 1485-7: *RHVIICS*, I, 12; *Select Cases in the Council of Henry VII*, p.8; *YHB*, II, pp.540-5. More strikingly in 1528: *LP*, IV/2, 4310. And as used by the chroniclers: *GC*, pp.277-8; *Vittelius A XVI*, p.216. Robin Hood references can be exemplified by a case in 1502, when a shoemaker of Shropshire was enquired by the constable of Hampstead 'by cause he seid he was grene leffys man': KB9/427/50, 54; apparently the same reported in: *Vitellius A XVI*, p.257; *FC*, p.687.
[247] *LP*, IV/1, 1272.
[248] For this, see: Hoyle, *Pilgrimage of Grace*, p.206.
[249] Copies can be exemplified by the articles of Robin of Redesdale, 1469 in: *Warkworth Chronicle*, pp.46-51; *JVB*, pp.212-6; by the brief references to Collingbourne's bill against Richard III: *GC*, pp.236-7; *HC*, p.398; and by the 'Ballad of Empson' (c.1509) in: *GC*, pp.344-7.
[250] Ross, *Edward IV*, pp.126-35; Kleineke, *Edward IV*, pp.93-9; M. Hicks, *Warwick the Kingmaker* (Oxford, 1998), pp.271-4; K.R. Dockray, 'The Yorkshire Rebellions of 1469', *Ricardian*, 6/83 (1983), pp.246-57; Scase, *Literature and Complaint*, p.150; Brigden, *London and the Reformation*, p.129; P. Croft, 'Libels, Popular Literacy and Public Opinion in Early Modern England', *HR*, 68/167 (1995), pp.267, 284; Fox, *Oral and Literature Culture*, pp.384-5; Hoyle, 'Petitioning as Popular Politics', pp.365-89; Pollard, 'People and Parliament', p.15; Liddy, 'Bill Casting and Political Communication', pp.447-61; Cressy, *Dangerous Talk*, p.34.
[251] Such as the bills of complaints 'set up in all partes' in 1524-5: *HC*, p.697. And: *GC*, 209-10; *Lincolnshire Chr.*, p.10; *Six Town Chronicles*, pp.163-4; *LP*, II/1, 1832.

writings, rhymes and ballads' was an extremely persuasive practice that needed to be treated as the centre of the charges.[252] The example of the Yorkshire insurgents of 1489 can also illustrate how outstandingly intelligent common rebels could be in pursuing a political purpose. They did not simply spread copies of their bill: their vocabulary almost sounded like an official proclamation or an order for commissions of array. They addressed the 'north partes of England' summoning 'every lorde, knight, esquier, gentylman, and yeman' to be 'redy in defensable aray' on the following Tuesday in specific places 'upon peine of losing of ther goodes and bodies'. Because of this language, we may wonder if the rebels thought they could lure or force some people to their side.[253] Furthermore, we have briefly seen that the goal of this gathering was to withstand the evil counsel that was causing more taxation, but they went on and used another popular statement to justify the rising: it was 'for such unlawful pointes as Seint Thomas of Cauntyrbery died for'.[254] In the King's Bench, some of the rebels said that they had neither able men for the war nor sufficient armour, though they would not pay the tax in any case.[255] Hence, there are definite elements of manipulation and persuasiveness in strategies that merged revolt, proclamation, popular themes and loyalist language, and these strategies were present in almost every insurgent movement of the period.

An enclosure riot which took place in Coventry in 1525, helps to illustrate similar strategies taking place in the localities.[256] The locals affirmed they were rising against enclosures, initially requesting the 'comen boxe with the money' as a symbol of what the

[252] As Thomas Burdett in 1477: KB8/1/9; *DKR*, III, App.II, p.213. And Thomas Bagnale in 1494: KB9/78/8-9.
[253] This could be compared with Jack Cade, for instance: M. Bohna, 'Armed force and civic legitimacy in Jack Cade's revolt, 1450', *EHR*, 118 (2003), pp.563–582.
[254] *Paston Letters*, VI, 1038-9. See: Hicks, 'The Yorkshire Rebellion of 1489'; Bennett, 'Henry VII and the Northern Rising of 1489', pp.34-59; Chrimes, *Henry VII*, p.77. Thomas Becket was curiously compared to Robin Hood by a prisoner in 1532, for both 'died for the commonwealth': *LP*, V, 1271. See these 'political saints' in: S. Walker, *Political Culture in later Medieval England* (Manchester, 2006), pp.198-214.
[255] KB9/381/3, 6-8, 16, 20, 22.
[256] See n.222, p.184; and Liddy, 'Urban Enclosure Riots', pp.47-8, 57, 63.

enclosure of commons represented to them.[257] They subsequently assaulted some aldermen, rang bells and threatened the mayor's life before submitting their articles for considerations, adding that 'if [he would] not consent to the articules [they would] doe worsse'. The articles were, then, reproduced in the most detailed indictment found in the King's Bench records of this period, which requested:

> - the common fields to remain as they ought to;
> - the punishment of the aldermen responsible for the enclosures;
> - the 'rentes and profetes' of certain fields of the past 30 years;
> - the respect for the 'constitucions & rules of Coventry';
> - the freedom to elect sheriffs;
> - the demarcations of common fields to be notified amongst the 'Comenalte';
> - the investigation of the breaking of the great bell 'bought with the comens money';
> - the civil officers not to 'meddle' with the common grounds;
> - the selection of men to the king's wars from every ward, not 'of craftes only'.

This impressive list of grievances indicates not only that there was an acute conflict of interests between different classes – just as in most large-scale rebellions – but also that the rebels had a clear, and smart, strategy. The commons of Coventry positively sent a warning to the local government emphasising their role in taking care of what was common by law and custom.

By looking at other examples of abusive speech at local level, we can see that people indeed wanted to act defiantly while negotiating with authorities. Eliza Hartrich and Christian Liddy have recently addressed the tensions in urban politics that gave room to a rise in the prosecution of defiant language.[258] The punishment of these words was diverse, and they varied between fines, imprisonment, cutting off ears, time spent at the pillory, and other measures, but they demonstrate how defiant language was seen.[259] In riots, people

[257] The whole case and articles treated in this paragraph are in: KB9/500/6-9.
[258] E. Hartrich, 'Town, Crown and Urban System: The Position of Towns in the English Polity, 1413-71' (DPhil. Thesis, Oxford, 2014), p.275-9; Liddy, 'Cultures of Surveillance', pp.313-9.
[259] *CLB*, II, pp.328-32, 340-6, 536-7; *YHB*, I, 377-8; II, 460, 625; *Records of Nottingham*, III, pp.300-1, 401; Liddy, 'Cultures of Surveillance', p.320; Brigden, *London and the Reformation*, p.154.

tended to resort to 'scurrility, illicit words, and dishonest talk' not only against the local officers but also against the clergy to achieve their aims.[260] JPs often were attacked with words '*inhonesta, insultuosa, litigiosa et maliciosa*' which were very often recorded in the indictment as to give a broader sense of the rioters' intentions and behaviour.[261] In Coventry, Laurence Saunders incited enclosure riots by claiming publicly, in September 1494: 'Sirs, here me! we shall never have oure right till we have striken of the hedes of iij or iiij of thes churles hedes that rulen us'.[262] In 1515, the Mayor of Newcastle complained in the Star Chamber about 'certaine sedicious and maliciously disposid persones… [that] hath moved and stered many of the comons of the same towne to disobedience of their maire'.[263] During the appointment of local officers in Peterborough in 1517, several 'sediciouse persons' interrupted the deliberations and 'with greate high wordes seid all the same officeres shuld be at thear appointement'; there followed a riot that affected the Abbot of Peterborough and included 'innumerable oresonable (*sic*) opprobrious wordes'.[264] Therefore, local evidence even more clearly helps to support the argument that people meant to be seditious more often than we might presume and this behaviour undoubtedly informed the authorities.

Naturally, rebellions and riots comprise a straightforward example of common people acting with clear political intentions. However, we also need to remember that it was during periods of turmoil – as seen with figures above – that the majority of cases of abusive language were recorded.[265] Rebellions provided elements to popular memory and they frequently received support – expressed with 'seditious language' – from commoners not

[260] Quoting: KB9/411/13-4. See more in: KB9/368/30; KB27/897/3r and the revealing descriptions of the Evil May Day in 1517: *Anglica Historia*, pp.242-5; *HC*, pp.586-91; *FC*, p.696; *Arnold's Chronicle*, p.l; *Six Town Chronicles*, p.192; *CSPVn*, II, 879.
[261] Quoting: KB9/308/42; KB27/818/26r. For similar expressions: KB9/372/10; 297/55; 308/67; 311/2; 447/7; KB27/816/30r.
[262] *CLB*, II, pp.556-7.
[263] *Select STAC*, II, p.76. Later in 1516 the Mayor was committed to the Tower for perjury: Ibidem, p.118.
[264] *Select STAC*, II, pp.123-35.
[265] Figure 3, p.153.

directly involved with them.[266] Moreover, rebels' actions demonstrate strategies, discipline, purpose, organisation and sometimes impressive networks of communication.[267] As we have seen, rebels who were crossing the line by their gatherings, occasional violence and the carrying of arms in public rhetorically reified their deference and claimed they were always loyal to the king. However, despite their cleverness, it is virtually impossible to reconcile loyalist language with physical violence or threats, which comprise a significant portion of the evidence. On the one hand, this loyalist behaviour alone should not imply the idea – thoroughly criticised by Andy Wood and John Walter – that popular language was inherently conservative.[268] Popular challenges in rebellious times such as in 1469, 1489, 1497, 1525 or 1536-7 articulated an impressive array of problems that only a critical gathering could make sense of – even if led by nobles, gentlemen or clerics. Furthermore, the element of social and class conflict in many of these situations inherently led to lack of deference, hatred and insubordination shown, primarily, by speech itself – not to 'conservatism'.[269] On the other, the point worth making to close this section is that even though we should not overestimate popular calculation and purpose, this language was for the most part genuine: it intended a piece of forceful advice or a scornful complaint that was symbolically violent and subversive.[270] This was a kind of language that concurrently reflected both class and political struggles. People probably knew they were breaking certain social rules as well as the hegemonic voices of crown and church imposed on them – and they primarily and purposefully resorted to the political tool that was easily accessible and inherently powerful: language.

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[266] As in part of the evidence on pp.175-8 and in n.246, p.191. For popular memory: Wood, *Memory of the People*, pp.50-63.
[267] S. Cohn, 'Enigmas of Communication: Jacques, Ciompi, and the English', in Herrer *et al*, *La Comunidad Medieval*, p.227-31.
[268] Wood, *Memory of the People*, pp.316-8; Walter, *Understanding Popular Violence*, pp.4-7.
[269] Wood, 'Plebeian Languages', pp.70-1, 82.
[270] For more on this thin line between revolt and other forms of contesting politics see John Watts's conclusion to Firnhaber-Baker & Schoenaers, *The Routledge History Handbook of Medieval Revolt*, pp.374-5.

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This chapter has sought to explore the relationship between popular language and sedition in various ways and to develop the understandings we achieved with rumour in Chapter II. We have seen in Section 1 that the governments of this period had always been concerned with political disaffection and they had always intended to manage people's verbal behaviour to prevent what were mainly rumours from turning into divisive opinions. They did so by passing statutes against slander, false news, heresy, prophecies, and ultimately, treason. We also noticed that, for the most part, both the peaks in seditious language and the alarming responses – sometimes with new legislation, sometimes not – were circumstantial, that is, they had precise motives and they followed the same spiral of anxiety that rumour-mongering provoked in times of crisis.

From the people's point of view in these periods of crisis, their expressions were likely seen as 'free speech', for just as they thought they could get away with rioting to defend franchises and local 'liberties' they probably thought they could say anything to express grievances in a more informal conversation. Hence, it is hard to agree with the idea that only the nobles and the clergy acted as if they had such 'free speech'.[271] By the extremism of popular speech seen in Section 2 and their relative calculation and intentions summarised in Section 3, we can assume the common people also behaved as 'free', or, more accurately, as men and women seeking to maintain their relative freedom and wellbeing by disputing symbolic power through linguistic exchanges. However, if 'freedom of speech' was 'something to apologise for' by the Tudor period, as David Cressy has claimed, so it was in the late medieval period, and we have noticed that sources deployed a variety of expressions to frame popular speech.[272]

[271] Duggan, 'Thought Control', pp.151-3.
[272] Cressy, *Dangerous Talk*, p.xi.

Therefore, we must also conclude from the above that, although the government could undoubtedly miscast the people's views and behaviour, commoners indeed had a clear political purpose for saying the things they said, and for using insurgent expressions. They were persuasive, manipulative, smart, and had their own values and ideas about what was a 'merry world', which needed to include a rightful king in lawful marriage, a proper council for a good policy, and a prosperous commonwealth free from heresy and extortioners. Should any of these elements fall short, the commons – and those who supported and shared their views – would rise, firstly in speech, then *vi et armis*. When all of these elements seemed upside down during the early stages of the Reformation, the pressure of the public increased dramatically – contributing to the reactions by the king and Cromwell that included new legislation. As the people were not expected to dispute policy, critical popular speech was by itself inherently seditious regardless of its content. In the next chapter, we shall see how the people's reactions did or did not change over the period and consider why.

CHAPTER IV

'Now a Dayes': Continuities and Shifts in Popular Speech

> Greate deth & much idelnes, / litle mony and much sicknes, / gret prid & smale riches, / How can these agree? / Gret auctorite & smale wisdom, / Simple officers & gret extorsion: / Light offence & sore correction, / An end of this must bee.[1]
>
> By reason of rulers that have no petye/ to oprese the commons…: / owur comon welthe dekeyeth; this is an hevy case!; Where be the rulers & minesters of justice / That sumtime spake for the common wele? / Now they be gon![2]

The first of these ballads, entitled 'Now a Dayes' by its anonymous author, was written in the 1520s. The second, 'The Ruin of a Realm', dates from the fourteenth century but continuations were added either in the 1490s or 1510s with the same tone of criticism. Both endeavoured to express the decay of the present, opposing it to an imagined better past. Seeing continuities in familiar discourses about the 'commonwealth' or 'extortion' is a simple task for most historians of this period.[3] However, that does not mean we should take these continuities for granted. The moments in which ideas were recycled can tell us more than that such complaints merely demonstrate continuities. In fact, these poems illustrate a central overarching theme that clarifies both continuing and changing spoken attitudes to authority in this period; that is, the sentiment that people lacked justice, but also that repressiveness was increasing as there was 'light offence & sore correction'. To take just one other example of that change, a 'wretched man', reported in May 1537 for words against the king and spreading prophecies, noticed that people were 'so used… as was never seen afore this; for if two or three good fellows be walking together, the constables come to them and woll know what communication they have or else they [would] be stocked'.[4] This chapter

[1] *Ballads from Manuscripts*, p.98.
[2] *Ballads from Manuscripts*, pp.158-9.
[3] For 'commonwealth', see especially the long-term approach of: Rollison, *Commonwealth of the People*, pp.237-89. For complaints of oppression and extortion see the comparisons of Wood, *1549 Rebellions*, pp.7-9, 164-77, while paraphrasing the fourteenth-century parallels approached by R. Goheen and R. Hilton.
[4] *LP*, XII/1, 1212.

will enquire how people who, like this 'wretched man', thought they were living in a more repressive context – both economically (by seeing 'great extortion') and politically (by envisaging the 'decay of the commonwealth') – used their cultural baggage of political and seditious language both to reproduce old ideas and to express new ones.

The previous chapters have already emphasised a few continuities in this period. It has been argued above that the concept of the people was virtually unchanged by the Reformation. People were seen as both 'credulous fools' and 'dangerous', but the pressure of their views and actions was as varied as it was persistent.[5] At the same time, the widespread practice of recording and exchanging rumours, as well as the vocabulary used for it, attributed both importance and legitimacy to public opinion and constituted a crucial ingredient of popular opinion itself and, partially, a feature of sedition.[6] However, a gradual shift has already been noticed in Chapter II: rumours grew in number as a reaction to political and religious changes; and they accumulated, sounding increasingly dangerous by the early Reformation.[7] Ultimately, the Henrician reforms condemned some rumours and other speech acts that touched the monarch and his marriages as not simply slanderous and seditious, but also treasonable. Although it might look as if this crucial change came solely from above, the previous chapters have already established that popular sentiment and official repression existed in dialogue with each other. Thus, it is this same interaction between how crown officials saw the people and how the people talked about politics that explains both the continuities and the shifts here.

In order to untangle this discussion, this chapter will firstly demonstrate the continuities in the contents of popular and public opinion by arguing that there were enduring discourses and ideas between the Wars of the Roses and Henry VIII's reign which refer back

[5] See above, Chapter I, pp.62-78.
[6] See above, Chapter II, esp. pp.121-29.
[7] See above, Chapter II, pp.107-14.

to and complement the argument of Chapter III about popular uses of defiant language. We shall also see that while popular language – like many aspects of a political culture – tended to re-use the same concepts in a strikingly similar way, the circumstances in which these expressions were used, as well as the interaction with the authorities and contemporary 'extortioners', gradually contributed to noticeable shifts in the language of popular complaint itself.

1. Continuities: The Crown and the People

This section focuses on the same evidence analysed in Chapter III, but we shall explore the extent to which the later evidence (*c*.1526-1537) confirms the patterns and trends seen earlier. It has been argued, for example, that the prevailing discourses in political society encouraged popular complaints in the 1450s and 1460s, and we shall see here that they were virtually the same later.[8] The main reason why these discourses encouraged complaints was because both the aristocratic debates and the popular complaints resorted to a 'common framework of assumptions' that was frequently shared by both the ruling elites and the ordinary people.[9] However, we have seen that despite this shared aspect of political culture, popular language was frequently unwelcome to the authorities and inherently disrespectful – and that insults and verbal attacks were more than expressions of hatred.[10] Abusive language consisted of manifestations of concrete ideas about society and politics skilfully manipulated to denounce bad government and convey political criticism. Naturally, that is why the authorities saw popular language as breaking their hegemony and causing sedition even if they shared political principles. The common elements of these popular speech acts

[8] For the 1450s and 1460s, I refer to: Watts, 'Popular Politics', pp.107-8, 116.
[9] Quoting Harriss's introduction to Walker, *Political Culture*, p.11. For these aspects of political culture, see: Carpenter, *Wars of the Roses*, pp.1-2; M. Hicks, *English Political Culture in the Fifteenth Century* (2002), pp.3-27; Horrox, *Fifteenth Century Attitudes*, esp. Introduction and chs.1-3.
[10] Especially on pp.188-95.

that will help us to comprehend the continuities in popular ideas are all somehow related to this interaction between the commons and the authorities. In other words, all the continuities noticed in these period are about how the commons contested what was imposed on them by resorting to their understanding of the 'commonalty' and to their ideas about how the 'commonweal' should be maintained for a healthy 'commonwealth'. We shall first explore how these persisting ideas about the 'common weal' underlined popular reactions to oppressive regimes. Subsequently, we shall explore the consistency in this discourse that attacked repressiveness by observing the 'structures of oppression' that commoners often tried to denounce. Ultimately, we shall see how the commons throughout the period interpreted various kinds of oppression which impeded their wellbeing – or their 'commonwealth'.

1.1. Commonweal and Commonwealth

The main argument guiding the points here relates to a crucial bond in popular language – and an essential part of contemporary political culture – that explains the majority of criticisms in this period. Commoners had a clear and fully developed idea that the institution of the crown should represent political, judicial, and economic stability and, therefore, it was more important to preserve this abstract concept of the crown as closely associated with the commonalty rather than any specific king, counsellor or minister.[11] The often-quoted expression of the Kentish sailors of 1450 against the evils of Henry VI's counsellors, therefore, remained unchallenged: they had claimed they did not know the king who signed William de la Pole's safe-conduct but 'knew well the crown of England [which] was the community of the said realm, and that the community of the realm was the crown of the

[11] This is partly related to Harriss's point that the monarchy was a guardian and a symbol of the commonweal, 'any malfunction of the monarch, or any dissonance between crown and people, produced political crisis': Harriss, 'Political Society', p.57.

realm'.[12] The preservation of the crown explains why the commons were 'fulle gladde to have a chounge' in 1461, to refer to another famous excerpt, this time taken from *Warkworth's Chronicle*.[13] The chronicler claimed that the commons openly grudged against Henry VI's counsellors and 'fals lords', but 'whenne Kinge Edwarde iiijth regnede, the peple looked after alle the foreside prosperites and peece, but it came not; but one batayle aftere another, and moche troble and grett losse of goodes'. The rationale here is that once the Yorkist government did not provide 'prosperity and peace' in the 1460s, it was legitimate to accept a new usurpation in 1470. Dynastic claims mattered only to a certain point if rulers preserved the commonweal, and consequently, as the *Warkworth Chronicle* implied, expectations ran high that the new king would remedy the grievances.[14] All across this period, the commons acted for – and spoke of – safeguarding the crown in order to preserve their wellbeing, and though this happened more often in speech than in arms, the rebellions and a few riots are equally revealing. When a husbandman of Fincham, Norfolk, claimed that the northern rebels of 1536-7 'did rise for the commen welthe', meaning 'the welthe of the commynalte', the Pilgrimage of Grace was interpreted as an uprising to defend the crown itself from wicked counsel and heresy on behalf and in the interest of the commonalty.[15] The crown stood for a 'community' in 1537 much as in 1450 – a plural, though unified, community that needed to include both a good and wise council and the welfare of the more vulnerable subjects, that is, a commonwealth. In trying to guarantee that the crown and stability went together, the people had had two ways of expressing their ideas that remained virtually unchanged.

[12] Reproduced in: R. Virgoe, 'The Death of William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk', in C. Barron, C. Rawcliffe and J. Rosenthal (eds.), *East Anglian Political Society and the Political Community of Late Medieval England* (Norwich, 1997), p.253.
[13] *Warkworth's Chronicle*, pp.11-2.
[14] That was probably the case in 1485 too: M.R. Horowitz, 'Introduction', *HR*, 82/217 (2009), pp.375-6.
[15] KB9/538/13. For this concern with the crown, see also: KB9/531/5-11; *LP*, VIII, 278; XII/1, 901.

First of all, even though rebels made claims in threatening and unlawful assemblies, and carried arms in public, we have seen that they could endeavour to criticise the political situation by proclaiming their loyalty to the king.[16] This was a smart strategy as commoners knew it would be dangerous to criticise the government directly: that is why they frequently used the same catch-all phrases about the 'commonweal/th' that should be the aim of any good government. Historians have envisaged a variety of interpretations for this essential political concept: it derived both from humanistic discourse as well as from independent plebeian language; it was the 'common good' and 'common profit' being translated from Latin as English increasingly rose as a standard written language; it also evolved, mostly for the government, as a word for the polity; and it could be a simple language of community in town and village settings.[17] However, what is more significant is the fact that this language, when used by the commons, was urged to denounce fiscal or political oppression either at local or national level.[18] Far from being a sophisticated appropriation of the Aristotelian idea, or a humanistic word for the state, the commons had their particular meaning which was closer to the welfare of the 'commonalty' than specifically, or merely, to material prosperity.[19] Hence commoners professed loyalty to the monarch and the 'true nobles', for only they could remedy the oppression that impeded the wellbeing of the commonalty.

The second way of expressing this language is, in one sense, the opposite of the previous point. While some people doubted the legitimacy of their rulers – as a result of instability or unpopular policies – and resorted to openly disloyal language, they were still

[16] See above, pp.161-4, 182-5.
[17] J. Watts, '"Common Weal" and "Commonwealth": England's Monarchical Republic in the Making, c.1450-c.1530', in A. Gamberini *et al* (eds.), *The Languages of Political Society* (Rome, 2011), pp.147-63; Watts, 'The Commons in Medieval England', pp.207-22; Knights *et al*, 'Commonwealth', pp.663-9; Fletcher, 'De la Communauté du Royaume au Common Weal', pp.359-372. See also above, p.46.
[18] For the 'loyalist' language at local level, see for instance: S. Cohn, *Popular Protest in Late Medieval English Towns* (Cambridge, 2013), pp.7, 327-9 and *passim*. This discourse is also related to Wood's view of rebels' 'legalism': Wood, *1549 Rebellions*, pp.7, 155-6. For a particular example (the rebellions of 1536): Bush, 'Up for the Commonweal', p.304.
[19] See also above, pp.182-5.

loyal to the notion that crown and commonweal were a single entity. These people simply rejected the present king in a system of political thinking in which the crown was open to negotiation as it had been in the mid-fifteenth century.[20] Part of the existing evidence of the prosecution of monks and others during the Cromwellian reforms reveals that the prophecies in circulation were remarkably detailed in how they foresaw – or wished – the king's, the queen's, and Cromwell's demise.[21] In Furness, for instance, the monks came up with a prophecy in 1537, saying that clergymen would destroy the 'red rose' and restore the pope's authority, urging the commons to support the rebels: 'for if they sit down both [they] and Holy Church [would be] undone; and if they lack[ed] company [the monks would] go with them and live and die with them to defend their most godly pilgrimage'.[22] Other prophecies propagated by laymen like William Neville, poet and brother to Lord Latimer, even referred back to the civil wars, as he claimed in 1532 that Henry VIII would die soon, for 'none of Cadwaladre's blode shulde reign longer than xxiiij yeres; and that prince Edward [of Lancaster – son of Henry VI –] had issue[d] a sonne which was conveyed over see, and there had issue[d] a sonne who [was] yet alive, eithre in Spaine or Almyne'.[23] The thought of replacing a king, therefore, proliferated when the monarch was falling short of preserving the commonweal.

It is equally significant that while they discussed these alternative scenarios, commoners resorted to the word 'knave' – as an alternative to bastard – to delegitimise the nature of government in the same manner that they thoroughly undermined local authority, the clergy, and insulted each other in defamation cases.[24] At least in eight cases, people used that specific word against the king himself – not to mention the uses against his ministers.[25]

[20] See also above, pp.168-71, 174-8.
[21] See the treatment of prophecy above: pp.178-81, and Jansen, *Political Protest and Prophecy*, *passim*.
[22] *LP*, XII/1, 841.
[23] *LP*, V, 1679. For more: Jansen, *Political Protest and Prophecy*, pp.29-34.
[24] For instance: KB9/368/30; 1109, mm. unnumbered. For defamation: *Ecclesiastical Courts in London*, ccxvii, ccxiii; *Norwich Consistory Court*, 6.
[25] KB9/1063/26; 531/5-11; 542/3v; *LP*, III/1, 437; VI, 572; VIII, 278; XII/1, 652.

In one of them, in 1534, one Margaret Cowpland was recorded for a mix of radical offences, 'calling the King an extortioner, knave and traitor, and queen Anne a strong harlot'.[26] What is remarkable about these persisting attitudes that undermined the legitimacy of rulers is not merely that people went on attacking their sovereign, but that they kept thinking, as in 1462 and 1472, they could 'put [the king] down' – at least in their conversations, prophecies, rumours, and wishful thinking.[27] The goal was always to preserve the crown as a provider of the commonweal, not to defend specific kings.

This persisting discourse in which some form of disloyalty was arguably justified by bad government might resemble the contexts of the Wars of the Roses even more closely if we consider the linkages between the civil wars, the failure to uphold the commonweal, and the serious doubts about the succession to the crown.[28] While critics of Henry VIII made the same kind of equations about illegitimate government that critics had made during the Wars of the Roses, they did not openly question his descent in the same way. What they remained doing was doubting the king's or his ministers' capacity to maintain the stability of the commonwealth. At various times Henry VIII himself, as well as Wolsey and Cromwell, did not represent the good government or stability so desired by the people. Ultimately, it was this lack of concern with the commonwealth, sometimes verging on illegitimacy, that made commoners express support to conspirators. That had been the case in 1469-71 with Warwick's supporters in Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, and elsewhere, and the scenario was probably similar in the southern counties during Buckingham's rebellion in 1483. Although Sir Hugh Conway and Sir Robert Clifford were not commoners, their conversation in Calais recorded in 1504 is revealing of how this framework of behaviour

[26] *LP*, VII, 1609.
[27] KB9/21/28, 54; 299/25; 41/1, 41, 42, 50, 53; 330/10, 13, 40, 85; KB27/855/2f.
[28] For the early comments in this paragraph, see esp. the evidence on pp.174-8. See also the discussion in: T. Westervelt, 'Manifestoes for Rebellion in Late-Fifteenth-Century England', in B. Thompson and J. Watts (eds.), *Political Society in Later Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2015), pp.184-98.

worked. Clifford considered Perkin Warbeck as Edward IV's son, while Conway revealed a prophecy in which Henry would not last for long on the throne, adding it was good to wonder about the past and the future 'for the kingis grace is but a weke man and a siklow, not likly to be no longe livi[d] man'.[29] The possibility of renewing the Wars of the Roses as a result of public dissatisfaction, therefore, seemed to remain in contemporaries' minds throughout this period. Edward Hall interpreted the threat of Edmund de la Pole, for instance, as a possible renewal of 'domestical sedicion & civile discorde' in the 1500s – reminding his readers of the late 1540s about how civil wars could have developed in the last decade of Henry VII's reign.[30] The chronicler goes further when Henry VIII's intention of annulling his marriage with Catherine is firstly mentioned in his narrative. He alerts his readers to the fact that experience had taught the English, since Edward IV's death, that it was necessary to know the king's heir before he died, because 'some have heard what mischief & manslaughter *continues* in this realme betwene the houses of Yorke and Lancaster'.[31] This perspective should, of course, be read in the light of the publication of this chronicle in 1548, but the reminiscences of 'the days of Lancaster and York' were certainly vivid and Reginald Pole, for example, was openly concerned with that memory and the problem of uncertain succession before he turned against his king.[32] Thus, the distress caused by the memory of the Wars of the Roses was a powerful one: it constantly reminded the ruling elites that there was a complex that linked defence of the commonweal with support for dynastic alternatives. After all, the common people would always choose their instincts about good government and the 'commonweal', not merely the royal descent.

[29] *LP RIII/HVII*, V.1, XXVI; SC1/58/57-8.
[30] *HC*, p.496.
[31] Emphasis added: *HC*, p.755. This is almost the same discourse in W. Tyndale, *Expositions and Notes… together with The Practice of Prelates*, ed. H. Walker (Cambridge, 1849), pp.341-4.
[32] Reported by Cranmer: *LP*, V, App.10; Pocock, *Records of the Reformation*, V.2, CCXLIII. For the context of this letter (and Pole's book described in it): G. Bernard, *The King's Reformation: Henry VIII and the Remaking of the English Church* (New Haven, 2005), pp.215-6.

Consequently, people who expressed words in favour of any of the pretenders throughout this period might have realised that the government was profoundly concerned with dissenting lords, so they took advantage of that fact to make political statements.[33] After all, commoners were aware of a framework of ideas in which nobles could rise on behalf of the commonweal and as an alternative to a corrupt government. Despite Henry VII's claim to have ended the conflict, the pretenders claiming to be Yorkist heirs kept that framework alive and were backed by international powers just as before: Burgundy, for instance, supported Edward IV through the 1460s and 1470s, while the widow of Charles the Bold, Margaret of York, would support the pretenders against Henry VII.[34] People might also have been partially aware of the rumours about the 'white rose' virtually everywhere from the 1500s to the death of Richard de la Pole in 1525.[35] They might equally have pondered what would be wiser: to join a pretender and renew the dangers of civil strife, or to support their king – this was the dilemma presented during the invasions of 1487 and 1497.[36] Even the French chronicler, Jean Molinet, explicitly sensed that the execution of the Earl of Warwick in 1499 was lamented by many, but recognised that the earl could 'susciter, en tampz future, nouveles guerres ou royame', so he died 'affin de eviter effusion de sang humain'.[37] Later, one Robert Stoppar, alias Pewterer, of Hereford, not only trusted that Queen Catherine of Aragon would be restored in 1534 but claimed that he himself was the king 'of the name of Henry, the eldest son of Henry late earl of Wiltshire' – a dangerous remainder of the Stafford family and the Dukes of Buckingham executed in 1483 and 1521.[38] Even the Imperial ambassador was well-informed about the invasions of Warwick in 1470 and Henry VII in

[33] I refer in this paragraph, to the evidence analysed above, pp.174-8.
[34] See a concise summary of international relations in: Britnell, *Closing of the Middle Ages?*, pp.25-42. It is worth mentioning Bernard Vignolles, supported by Margaret of York to find means to poison Henry VII and the royal family in 1496: *LP RIII/HVII*, V.2, App.B, pp.318-22.
[35] Bernard, *War*, *Taxation*, *and Rebellion*, pp.3-45.
[36] See, for instance, the approach of: Arthurson, *Perkin Warbeck*, p.165; Penn, *Winter King*, pp.230-1.
[37] *Chronicques de Jean Molinet*, II, p.467.
[38] *LP*, VII, 802.

1485, urging the emperor to invade England because 'Madame and the Emperor' had 'better title to succession'.[39] Robert Aske seemed to have feared an invasion by the Empire, but the clerics who supported the rebels in 1536-7 referred happily to this possibility in prophecies more than once.[40] It would be foolish to believe that the number of people who accepted these alternative scenarios of succession was significant most of the time; the majority probably remained loyal to their sovereign. But it is significant that the possibility of supporting a traitor in hope for better times existed at all, and that it persisted across the period whenever political circumstances were strained – that is, fairly regularly. The common people knew enough about high politics to use these anxieties of the royal family and the possible successors during their defiant utterances – if that was not a direct result of the Wars of the Roses, it was indirectly connected to and was exacerbated by the conflict and by the descendants of Yorkist blood.

Meanwhile, both the loyal and the disloyal speech about the 'common weal' tended to find common ground in how much they blamed the 'evil council' for their grievances, and the persistence of this trope over the period and beyond is noteworthy.[41] The commons themselves behaved as if they were legitimately entitled to judge the matters that were in their interest – that is, the matters that were related to the 'wealth of the commonalty'.[42] In that sense, commoners were offering opinions and pieces of advice to their king when they used what was labelled as seditious language. They seized the same political language of counselling to prevent the counsellors from ruling the king as 'a child'.[43] Consequently, this

[39] *CSPSp*, IV/2, 1161. Compare with the comments of other diplomats considering an invasion by Reginald Pole to support the rebels in 1537: *LP*, XII/1, 463.
[40] Aske's Examination is in: *LP*, XII/1, 901. The prophecies and rumours are in: *LP*, XII/1, 990; XII/2, 1212. The question of possible invasions will be furthered discussed below, pp.237-9.
[41] For the continuity in the discourse of political thinkers about the council too (from Fortescue to Elyot and Starkey) see J. Guy, 'The King's Council and Political Participation', in A. Fox and J. Guy (eds.), *Reassessing the Henrician Age* (Oxford, 1986), p.142 as well as his observation about the seventeenth century on pp.146-7. And see above, pp.161-4.
[42] See p.202 and n.15.
[43] As happened with Henry VI: Wicker, 'Politics of Vernacular Speech', pp.193-4. Under Henry VIII this expression was used to accuse both Wolsey and Suffolk of ruling the king in 1516: *LP*, II/1, 2733.

advice was mainly focused on the removal of covetous counsellors that allegedly caused a cascade of problems.[44] It was this continuous pursuit of proper justice that informed popular perception and shaped this language around structures of oppression that we shall see in the following section. Even so, to attack oppression did not mean that this language that united both loyal and disloyal subjects in defence of the commonwealth revolved around poverty, as David Rollison has argued.[45] Poverty undoubtedly played some role in gathering people to rise or express their 'grudge' scornfully – especially in tax rebellions – and we have already encountered examples that implied poverty when people evoked social distinctions as a discursive bond.[46] However, even when allegations of poverty were part of the claims against the king's council, they constituted collective claims to dispute policies with the actual counsellors themselves and to offer the voice of a more representative advice.[47] Contemporaries shared this attitude in many ways and both the attitude of offering counsel and the idea that covetousness quickly infected the king's council persisted across and beyond the period, and was replicated in local politics.[48] Much like the rebels of 1469 who repeatedly named Edward IV's evil counsellors as 'sedicious personnes' causing dissension, the advice written to the Pilgrims at Pontefract, in 1536, compared the counsellors of Edward II and Richard II to their situations under Cromwell and heretic bishops, stating further that it was 'necessary that vertuus men that luffythe the communwelthe schulde be of his [counci]l'.[49] A healthy commonwealth should undoubtedly avoid poverty, but it was a political attitude that drove both loyal and disloyal language against the counsellors.

[44] As above, pp.161-4.
[45] Rollison, *Commonwealth of the People*, pp.249-63.
[46] See above, pp.183-4.
[47] As was the position of political thinkers: A. Cromartie, 'Common Law, Counsel and Consent in Fortescue's Political Theory', in Clark & Carpenter, *Fifteenth Century IV*, p.66; and of the commons in towns: Liddy & Haemers, 'Popular Politics in the Late Medieval City', pp.789-92.
[48] Worcester, *Boke of Noblesse*, pp.56-8; *Stonor Letters*, II, 256. See also the humanistic approach to counsel in: A. Walzer, 'Rhetoric of Counsel in Thomas Elyot's *Pasquil de Playne*', *Rhetorica*, 30/1 (2012), pp.1-21.
[49] *JVB*, pp.212-3; *LP*, XI, 1244.

To summarise, the ordinary people continuously engaged with a discourse in defence of the commonweal as a mediator between their grievances and their remedy – found in the stability of crown and the commonwealth. Despite being sometimes rhetorically loyal to the king, and sometimes openly disloyal and supporting traitors, this language found common grounds in the attacks against the king's counsellors because they were frequently seen as the main oppressors and the obstacles to the wellbeing of the commonalty – which we will explore further in the following section. In a sense, abusive speech – perhaps even rebellion – was justified in popular minds whenever the oppression of the commonalty prevailed over the commonweal.

1.2. Structures of Oppression

Notwithstanding the remarkable continuity in the discourses of the previous section, there is another – more significant – layer of interpretation to explore. What the 'evil council', as well as city councillors or gentry officials at the local level, also represented to rebels and those who used seditious words was what we might call 'structures of oppression' which were seen similarly across the period. Political wrongs were interpreted as an integral part of a whole system in which the council was simply the most obvious target. 'Liege people', wrote William Worcester in considering the idle soldiers in the kingdom, only broke their allegiance

> by manere of cohercion for suche rapin, oppressions, and extorcions. And also the officers than being nedithe not to have so many lieutenauntis or undre officers as they have hadde, which wastithe and destroiethe youre saide peple by undew charges to enriche hemsilfe. [No country increases its weal by] nedeles officers and governours that onlie have a renomme, and undre that colour be a extorcioner, piller, or briboure.[50]

Whenever the counsellors acted greedily, then, they were contributing to this whole system of oppressions described by Worcester.

[50] Worcester, *Boke of Noblesse*, pp.71-4.

To begin with, we might say that this structure had the 'evil council' at the top in specific periods of failing governments, but the common people acknowledged a whole oppressive system and they adapted this discourse to a series of concerns. That was the root of most of the abusive language seen in this study, and it was what made them trust, for instance, in the memory of popular figures that typified the struggle for better justice and less oppression. In 1489 the rebels of Yorkshire claimed to be withstanding the same 'pointes as Seint Thomas of Cauntyrbery died for'.[51] Similarly, a prisoner at the Tower claimed, in 1532, that Thomas Becket 'died for 52 points concerning the commonwealth' just like Robin Hood, asking also 'why St Thomas was a saint rather than Robin Hood?'.[52] That kind of memory of past popular figures (real and imaginary) who 'died for the commonwealth' certainly included the legendary leaders of notable rebellions.[53] By the time of the Lincolnshire Rebellion and the Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536, the rebels revealed an even more complex picture of how they saw this structure of oppression: they were also reacting to the new oppression of the church under the royal supremacy. To the northern rebels, this new oppression was mainly represented by the suppression of the abbeys, but it included a range of other grievances such as the rumours of absurd new taxes, the nature of the Act of Uses, and ultimately the 'decay of the commonwealth'.[54] To quote the illustrative interpretation of Edward Hall on the rebels' proclamation, the Pilgrimage was a rising in support of 'the maintenaunce and defence of the faith of Christe and deliveraunce of holy Church sore *decayed & oppressed*, and also for the furtherau[n]ce aswel of private as public matters in the realme touching the wealth of al the kinges poore subjectes'.[55] From the rebels' point of view, it seemed as though the commonwealth, which included the state of the church, was

[51] *Paston Letters*, VI, 1039.
[52] *LP*, V, 1271. There is also the idea that Becket died to prevent a tax on children being sent to school and on poor men eating meat: Davies, 'Popular Religion and the Pilgrimage of Grace', p.72.
[53] See above, p.191 and n.246; and Wood, *Memory of the People*, pp.50-63.
[54] For instance: *LP*, XII/1, 70.
[55] Emphasis added: *HC*, p.822.

more oppressed in the 1530s than ever before. The discourse of oppression was, therefore, persistent in popular rhetoric, but commoners frequently adjusted it to a new set of concerns as they did in 1536.

This general perception of being oppressed progressively acquired a spatial and socio-economic dimension the more enclosures took place in towns and villages. The poem 'Now a Dayes', quoted in the introduction to this chapter, is particularly concerned with the mischiefs faced by early-sixteenth-century commoners and the apparent rise of poverty and decay which included the problem of enclosures.[56] The attack of enclosures was an essential ingredient of popular perceptions and they have been recently described by Christian Liddy as an expression of public values.[57] Enclosures were first pointed out as a problem in 1459, but the crown only showed occasional concern from 1482 onwards.[58] Examples of complaints and riots survive in great numbers in Coventry at least since the fourteenth century, and in York since 1401, but in both cases, these grievances seem to have grown steadily from around the 1480s and 1490s in other places as well.[59] More importantly, Liddy has demonstrated that enclosures were not exclusively a rural phenomenon, and the attacks that targeted enclosers had more political than economic motivations.[60] To a certain extent, the complexity of the riots and complaints that emerged in response to the enclosure of common fields might suggest that they were about both economy and local politics, for contemporaries like the author of 'Now a Dayes', Sir Thomas More or the Bishop of Lincoln would argue that enclosures were causing more hardship.[61] As we have seen with the

[56] *Ballads from Manuscripts*, pp.93-100.
[57] Liddy, *Contesting the City*, p.75.
[58] Gwyn, *The King's Cardinal*, pp.412-34. See also: J.J. Scarisbrick, 'Cardinal Wolsey and the Common Weal', in E.W. Ives, R.J. Knecht, and J.J. Scarisbrick (eds.), *Wealth and Power in Tudor England* (1978), pp.45-67.
[59] For the early evidence: Liddy, *Contesting the City*, pp.78, 83, 177-8. For the later: *CLB*, II, pp.350, 443-73, 491, 510-2, 556-7, 566, 574-8; *Historical Poems*, 25; *Fifteenth Report, Appendix Part X* (HMC, 1899), pp.144-6, 154; DL5/3/264r; *Select STAC*, II, pp.6-8; *Yorkshire STAC*, II, pp.84-5, 88-90; *HC*, p.568; *TRP*, 75.
[60] Liddy, 'Urban Enclosure Riots', pp.72-7; Idem, 'Cultures of Surveillance', pp.321-4.
[61] See the comments on Thomas More's views on enclosure in: Gwyn, *The King's Cardinal*, pp.415-6; Liddy, *Contesting the City*, pp.77. The Bishop of Lincoln's concern was expressed to Wolsey in 1528: *LP*, IV/2, 4796.

example of 1525 in Coventry, however, the commons did not simply complain about the fields that had been enclosed for its economic impact, but took the opportunity to request the punishment of the aldermen responsible for them, the preservation of their liberties and 'constitucions & rules', a better investigation of local crimes, and the freedom to elect sheriffs.[62] Thus, enclosures became and continued to be part of the discourse in popular political action during this period because newly enclosed fields came to be also seen as signs of 'destruction of the common people' and against the 'commonwealth'. To attack them was fundamentally to dispute power. The claims of 1536-7 also showed this perspective about enclosure in some areas (the West Marches, Westmorland, and Cumberland), as well as the rebellion of 1549 and later riots.[63] It might have been that the people's concern with poverty increased, later in this period, with the stagnation of wages, inflation and rising prices, and population growth.[64] Nevertheless, if most people 'still lived close to the edge of subsistence', the concern with poverty remained constant, while we can assume that attacking enclosure was indeed a more politically charged act, than a manifestation of economic struggle.[65] What is remarkable, then, is that the reactions to the enclosure of common fields, occasionally involving claims of social disadvantage, was essentially addressing a structure of oppression that needed to be contested so that the 'wealth of the commonalty' could be maintained.

The second poem mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, 'The Ruin of a Realm', focuses on criticising another constituent of this system of oppression: the clergy.

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[62] See p.193 and n.257. For riots in Coventry and elsewhere: Liddy, *Contesting the City*, pp.73-85.
[63] It was briefly included in the Pontefract articles of 1536: *LP*, XI, 1246. For the other areas: Dodds & Dodds, *Pilgrimage of Grace*, I, pp.8-13, 192-225; Bush & Bownes, *The Defeat of the Pilgrimage of Grace*, pp.158-74, 230-88, 290-7. For 1549: Wood, *Riot, Rebellion and Popular Politics*, pp.60-7; D. MacCulloch, 'Kett's Rebellion in Context', in P. Slack (Ed), *Rebellion, Popular Protest and the Social Order in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1984), pp.39-62. For later: J. Walter, *Crowds and Popular Politics in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 2006), pp.16-25; Idem, 'A Lincolnshire Libel and the Politics of Sedition', pp.29-67.
[64] See: Gunn, *Early Tudor Government*, pp.176-80; McIntosh, *Poor Relief in England*, pp.39-121; G. Elton, *England Under the Tudors* (1962), pp.80-1.
[65] Quoting: M. Kowaleski, 'A Consumer Economy', in Horrox & Ormrod, *A Social History of England*, p.257.

To a certain extent, anticlericalism seems to have been a feature of public speech and culture much earlier than the beginning of this period.[66] In any case, there was a prolonged resentment towards the clergy, and the Lollards' arguments in favour of disendowment of the church comprise only one small piece of the puzzle in which attacking the clergy also meant disregarding the structure of authority.[67] In that sense, the poem 'The Ruin of a Realm' shows how enduring these issues were even more clearly as it seems to have been written partly in the late-fourteenth century and continued in the late-fifteenth or early-sixteenth century.[68] The authors saw the oppression of the commons by rulers, nobles, and clergy as an instance of the decay of the commonwealth itself, but highlighted 'that spirituall men undoutydly/ dothe rule this realme now brought to mysery'.[69]

These words closely parallel those of early reformers who also saw the clerics ruling the kingdom as the reason for decay, such as Simon Fish in 1528.[70] Other poems convincingly illustrate the same attacks both before and after the Reformation had begun to affect the government: they highlight the clergy's hypocrisy and greediness; call the corrupt clergy rebels responsible for making the 'communewelth decayed'; as well as harshly attack the pope as the 'Antichrist of Rome' or the 'Devil's holy priest' – resembling the words of one Stephen Swallowes in 1489.[71] Indeed, this common and seemingly widespread attitude towards the clergy led Cranmer, in 1531, to disbelieve that it was possible to persuade the

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[66] See some examples: *English Historical Documents IV*, 378 (1376), 381 (1389), 407 (1464), 409 (1468), 410 (1472); and: P. Marshall, 'Anticlericalism Revested? Expressions of Discontent in Early Tudor England', in C. Burgess and E. Duffy (eds.), *The Parish in Late Medieval England* (Donington, 2006), pp.365-80.
[67] Aston, *Lollards and Reformers*, pp.16-37; Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, pp.446-507, and *passim*; Cressy, *Dangerous Talk*, pp.27-8; Horrox, *Fifteenth-Century Attitudes*, pp.56-8. Contemporary evidence includes: *Lollards of Coventry*, pp.64-285; *Kent Heresy Proceedings*, pp.2-7, 59-60, 117; Thomson, *Later Lollards*, pp.44, 135; *Ecclesiastical Courts in London*, xxv, cciii; KB9/77/15, 20, 25; *LP*, VII, 449; *Vitellius A XVI*, p.211. For violent attacks: KB9/8/55, 64, 78-9; STAC10/4/117. Further to the examples in n.24, p.204, the words 'churl' and 'knave' were frequently used against the clergy: STAC2/16/74-6; *Select STAC*, I, pp.138-62; II, pp.123-35; *RHVIICS*, II, 49; KB9/966/16; *Common Place Book of John Hooker*, pp.13-14; *Ballads from Manuscripts*, pp.331-5.
[68] I rely on the editor's analysis of this manuscript: *Ballads from Manuscripts*, pp.152-7.
[69] *Ballads from Manuscripts*, pp.159-60.
[70] S. Fish, *A Supplication for the Beggars*, in *The Tudor Constitution*, ed. G.R. Elton (Cambridge, 1960), p.323.
[71] Compare 'Collyn Clout' in *Skelton Poems*, pp.221-6; with 'The Image of Ypocresye', in *Ballads from Manuscripts*, pp.167-178. For the recantation of Stephen Swallowes: *Literae Cantuarienses III*, 1099.

people about the legality of Henry VIII's first divorce by 'learning or preaching', as the people 'hate priests'.[72] In the following year, however, anticlericalism was deployed in parliament to attack clerical abuses with the 'Supplication of the Commons', and in 1536 it was manipulated by Richard Morison to attack the rebels that seemed to contradict the well-known resentment when they complained about the dissolutions and allied themselves with the monks.[73] Late in November 1537, Cromwell was informed that – contrary to what the pilgrims had claimed earlier in the north – the poor people were 'so gredy' during the dissolutions that they would come day and night to the suppressed houses to plunder them 'as long as any dore, windoo, iren, or glasse, or lawse ledde remainythe'.[74] Even well before the visitations of 1535-6, riots quite frequently targeted monasteries, as it happened in Coventry in 1533 when 'certain busy people' wrote a bill of complaint against them 'pretending the common weal'.[75] While this bill suggested that attacking a monastery meant the advancement of the commonweal, they implicitly asserted that the monks were part of the local problems that contributed to their oppression in the same way that the poem 'The Ruin of a Realm' denounced the clergy as the root of the 'comon wealthe dekey[ed]'.[76]

In light of this continuity, how should we understand the apparent contradiction presented by rebels who defended the clergy and the monasteries in 1536? It has been claimed that popular attitudes to traditional religion by the 1530s were exceedingly diverse and that they greatly varied between regions.[77] The suggestion about anticlericalism here is not that there was a *crescendo* of criticism leading towards the Reformation, for as George

[72] *Records of the Reformation*, V.2, CCXLIII. For other reasons, that hatred had also been reported by the Imperial ambassador in Nov. 1529: *CSPSp*, IV/1, 211, 232.
[73] *Documents of the English Reformation*, ed. G. Bray (Cambridge, 2004), 4; *Morison's Tracts*, p.93. For the parliament discussions, see: P. Cavill, 'Anticlericalism and the Early Tudor Parliament', *Parliamentary History*, 34/1 (2015), pp.14-29.
[74] *Original Letters*, 3rd/3, CCCX.
[75] *LP*, VI, 18.
[76] *Ballads from Manuscripts*, pp.158-9.
[77] R. Whiting, 'Local Responses to the Henrician Reformation', in D. MacCulloch (ed.), *The Reign of Henry VIII* (1995), pp.205-20.

Bernard has pointed out, this constant cannot explain the change.[78] What there was, therefore, was a persistent discourse that the church should reflect righteousness rather than stimulate grievances, that it should project humility rather than luxury, and that it should foster the relief of souls rather than material and political oppression of the commons.[79] It is the overall trend of popular speech and action towards the structures of oppression that explains the apparent contradiction between the persistent attacks on the clergy, which had recently been outstandingly typified by Wolsey in the 1520s, and the localised cooperation between commons and priests/monks in 1536-7.[80] When the northern commons, and those who expressed sympathy towards them, felt that the whole church was under a different wave of oppression (the Supremacy, followed by the Dissolution of Monasteries), their differences were briefly set apart for a greater good. When facing the 'new learning', which sounded like open heresy to many, people preferred to safeguard both the commonwealth and the church from what seemed growing coercion – sympathy with anticlerical views did not mean acceptance of heretical opinions and 'destruction of the church'.[81] This mutual support in 1536-7 might look controversial when compared with continuing anticlerical attitudes; but in fact, it sheds more light on the most substantial continuity being advanced here – the rhetoric around structures of oppression.

Resentment of oppression could be illustrated in many other ways, but we shall close this section with a final and crucial detail. People continued to react to representatives of this structure as if the oppression itself justified – at least in violent speech acts – an unlawful response: decapitation ('smite off your head'), trespass ('we shall break your gate'),

[78] Bernard, *Late Medieval Church*, pp.151-63; Idem, *King's Reformation*, p.68. In addition, see the comments on the relationship between the dissolution of the monasteries and older anticlerical practices in: D. Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England: Volume 3: The Tudor Age* (Cambridge, 1959), pp.13-14, 141-4.
[79] Interestingly, this kind of discourse has been treated by Ethan Shagan as a 'point of contact' between popular culture and government policy which ultimately contributed to the cultural impact of the reformation ideas in England: Shagan, *Popular Politics*, pp.131-61.
[80] For Wolsey and anticlericalism: Walker, *John Skelton*, pp.126-51; Elton, *Tudor Constitution*, pp.318-9; Idem, *England Under the Tudors*, pp.102-16.
[81] See also: Brigden, *London and the Reformation*, p.174.

riot ('we shall do worse'), kidnapping an officer to negotiate a better outcome (as in case of 1493 in Kent), and much more.[82] Ultimately, not merely did the language of the commonwealth justify thoughts and actions, but the feeling of oppression and injustice could legitimise defiance and law-breaking – and this exposed the commons to allegations of sedition, as disrespect for the law was a disregard for authority. Under the two aspects of popular speech persisting in this period, the defence of the commonweal and the perception of structures of oppression, commoners had a sense of liberty that sometimes overcame the law that they otherwise (and insistently) wanted to defend.[83] As the continuator of the chronicle of John Hardyng put it, the Yorkshire rebels of 1489 were fighting 'for no nother cause but to defend the *common libertie*' – which others would understand as defending the commonwealth itself.[84] And as the author of 'Now a Dayes' wrote, there were 'great franchises' but 'smale liberte'.[85] Popular practices and speech, therefore, continued to be grounded in an imagined past of prosperity, in this sense of 'liberty', and in the desired future of prophetic utterances or wishful thinking. In all cases, the only remedy for the oppression was safeguarding the 'common weal'.

In sum, to defend the crown, the commonwealth, and the collective 'liberties' from 'evil counsellors' and other 'oppressors' was not merely a posture aimed at preserving the 'common good'. It was also a claim for protection from systemic oppression, and so it tended to involve attacks on the clergy and local officers. In standing by the crown and the

[82] For threats of decapitation: KB9/8/55, 64, 78-9; 306/31; 330/78; 349/16, 18; 500/72-3, 75-6; *CLB*, II, pp.556-7; For trespassing and riots: KB9/353/92-9; 372/40; 418/33, 43; 500/6-9; KB27/905/18; *Select Cases in the Council of Henry VII*, pp.78-9; *Select STAC*, I, pp.141-5; *LP*, XI, 1047; XII/1, 81, 1011; *CLB*, II, p.575; *Common Place Book of John Hooker*, pp.13-14. The riot of 1493 in Kent is mentioned above, p.185, n.229.
[83] This dates back (at least) to 1381, see: H. Eiden, 'The Social Ideology of the rebels in Suffolk and Norfolk in 1381', in M.-L. Heckman and J. Röhrkasten (eds.), *Von Nowgorod bis London: Studien zu Handel*, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft im mittelalterlichen Europa* (Göttingen, 2008), pp.437-8. This 'sense of liberty' is also related to what Walter has called 'politics of rights' in: *Crowds and Popular Politics*, p.25. I also refer to: Liddy, 'Urban Enclosure Riots', pp.41-77.
[84] Emphasis added: *Chronicle of John Hardyng*, f.119v.
[85] *Ballads from Manuscripts*, p.99.

commonwealth, the commons and all those who used the same language in favour of the less privileged were preserving themselves from what seemed like escalating oppression, as well as seizing what they thought was their place in politics. From their experience with lower nobility, local gentry officials, JPs, clerics, mayors and many others, the commons everywhere knew how oppression worked in times of taxation, war, judicial commissions, visitations to enquire heresy. When those 'low-born' and greedy locals rose to the king's favour as counsellors, therefore, commoners probably felt like their behaviour was going to be as 'covetous' as the local extortioners were. The 'true nobles' who should be in the king's council, according to this traditional logic, were born privileged and did not need to rely on 'extortion' for their prosperity. What is remarkable in all this is, firstly, that commoners who were also 'low-borns', were behaving as informal counsellors offering insightful advice and breaking the hegemonic voices of the elites and the church. Secondly, given the entirely different monarchs, counsellors, and the significant political and economic changes of this period, the continuities seen here show a tendency to handle the same political language in traditional ways to address ever-changing problems. What we shall see next is how these problems and the pressures of the time contributed to the subtle shifts in popular speech.

2. Shifts in Public Perspectives

Despite the continuities in all major themes of popular discourse in this period seen above, if we look closer – though the evidence may present some problems of interpretation – we can also notice a few subtle and important changes. Overall, we have seen in the previous chapters that public pressure accumulated during the last decade analysed by this thesis. In Chapter I we noted that this pressure could be more intense in exceptional periods, so if we assume that the circumstances of the period between 1527 and 1537 were exceptional by

themselves, they indeed provoked more references to 'the people'.[86] In Chapter II, the same cumulative process was observed, as the anxieties driving rumours were outstanding from 1527 onwards.[87] In Chapter III, despite the discussion of the circumstances of the surviving evidence, we noted that people often used abusive language purposefully, so it is conceivable that they became more aggressive in their speech during the 1530s, and that our evidence is not only a reflection of Cromwell's new legislation.[88] What unifies these claims is one feature also implied in the previous section that will simultaneously explain the shifts in popular discourse: these shifts are all about reactions; and reactions to strained contexts and systemic oppression in a constant interactive process that sought the wellbeing of the commonalty.

In addition, it may be that the reactions we will analyse here emerged from an increasingly informed population that was more and more exposed to, and involved with, various kinds of political communication.[89] While these changes were underway throughout the fifteenth century, we might consider that the consciousness of the ongoing reforms by the 1530s was arguably higher than it had been during the battles and problems of the 1460s. More news, proclamations, preaching and printed texts were circulating, and these pieces of information inevitably generated more rumours and more talk if they reflected public shifts

[86] As observed in Figure 1, p.60 and analysed on pp.62-78, 82-3.
[87] See pp.107-14.
[88] See pp.188-97.
[89] This might have partly resulted from a series of changes discussed by historians. For the different approach to proclamations from Edward IV onwards: Allan, 'Royal Propaganda and the Proclamations of Edward IV', p.153; T. Thornton, 'Propaganda, Political Communication and the Problem of the English Responses to the Introduction of Printing', in B. Taithe and T. Thornton (eds.), *Propaganda: Political Rhetoric and Identity 1300-2000* (Stroud, 1999), pp.42-3. For the advent of the printing press and its early use: M. Hicks, 'Edward IV's *Brief Treatise* and the treaty of Picquigny of 1475', *HR*, 83/220 (2010), pp.253-65; Boffey, *Manuscript and Print*, pp.47, 90-1; Thornton, 'Propaganda, Political Communication', p.45; S. Anglo, *Images of Tudor Kingship* (1992), p.120; Bennett, *Lambert Simnel*, p.39; P. Neville-Singleton, 'Press, Politics and Religion' in L. Hellinga and J. Trapp (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, *Vol. 3* (Cambridge, 1999), pp.576-607; A. Pettegree, 'Printing and the Reformation: the English exception', in P. Marshall and A. Ryrie (eds.), *The Beginnings of English Protestantism* (Cambridge, 2002), pp.157-79; Gunn, *Early Tudor Government*, pp.188-90. For Literacy: Parker, *The Commonplace Book in Tudor London*, p.4; Fox, *Oral and Literature Culture*, pp.14-15; D. Cressy, *Literacy and Social Order: reading and writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge, 1980); J.A. Moran Cruz, *The Growth of English Schooling* (Princeton, 1985); Watts, *The End of the Middle Ages*, pp.267-8; Gauvard, 'Qu'est-ce que l'opinion publique avant l'invention de l'imprimerie?', pp.21-4; Harvey, 'Was there Popular Politics?', pp.159-60; Wood, *Memory of the People*, pp.250-60. Political communication will be broadly discussed in Chapter V.

in preoccupation.[90] And finally, in the early sixteenth century, ordinary people were seemingly both resorting to more petitioning and rioting as well as having more resources to prompt negotiations through formal actions in the Chancery and the council courts that were increasing in activity.[91] Therefore, the changes in the content and deployment of popular opinion that we shall see here were arguably a product of increasing awareness.

A further factor was the reaction of the authorities in an interactive process in which the traditional reactive behaviour of the people seen in Section 1 clashed with government's new efforts to control the undesired pressure of popular speech. As briefly mentioned above, until recently historians had been ready to recognise the increasingly authoritarian state that arose from the problems that affected the later medieval governments as well as from new attitudes towards the use of physical force and jurisdiction.[92] While they were right in seeing that reality, this picture by itself is incomplete. Why should we not assume that greater pressure from below equally drove Thomas Cromwell and Henry VIII to more insecurity and, thus, to 'despotic' reactions such as the new Treason Act, or the enforcement of the oaths of Succession and Supremacy? As a result of the symbolic threat that public opinion was posing with its increasing anxiety, rumour-mongering, and seditious language, the new treason legislation might be seen as a result of public pressure, not as a result of an unreasonable, personified, or isolated government's shift of perspective. Cromwell and Henry VIII, not to mention Wolsey, were consistently trying to shape and control popular speech, but the additional level of oppression originating both before and during the Reformation Parliament might have affected the construction and expression of the same

[90] Which is clear in Figure 2, p.108, especially because most of the rumours accounted there did not come from formal prosecution, so they were not part of the problems with evidence analysed in Chapter III, pp.151-8.
[91] Both the Chancery and the Star Chamber increased their judicial activity as a result of Wolsey's view of 'impartial justice', see: Guy, *Court of Star Chamber and its Records*, pp.51-2; Idem, *The Cardinal's Court*, pp.30-5. For Cromwell's activity: Idem, Ibidem, p.138. For the petitions, including seditious notes and bills, see: Hoyle, 'Petitioning as Popular Politics', pp.365-89; Liddy & Haemers, 'Popular Politics in the Late Medieval City', pp.771-805.
[92] I mostly refer to nn.4-5 on pp.134-5.

language. As discussed in Chapter III, this is not to suggest that the surveillance of speech was closer to 'censorship', but that the whole process that informed the new law, as well as popular speech, was a dialectical one, not merely authoritative. This section argues, then, that the same structure of oppression that was the essence of popular speech in the previous section was an essential component of the innovations or, more accurately, renovations in that speech observed later on.

2.1. Reactions and Numbers

We can begin this section by considering how popular speech changed partly in reaction to the government's new attempts at controlling it. Subsequently, we shall see that while these changes were partly a matter of numbers, there were also alterations in the kinds of charges employed, the people accused, and the frequency of popular attacks. These statistics are all based on the evidence of abusive language surveyed in Section 2 of Chapter III – that is, on formal accusations of popular language as 'seditious', treasonable, 'unfitting' and others, as well as on extra-official reports about similar kinds of popular expressions.[93]

As we have already seen, there is much evidence of popular reactions to the structures of oppression in the late medieval period – especially during rebellions – but they do not address the oppression of speech or anything similar as they would do from the 1520s.[94] Tellingly, early in 1531 Sir Thomas Elyot advised his readers and king that, according to ancient examples, lack of affability on the part of the elites leads to a 'pernicious daunger [to those who] either do refuse counsaile, or *prohibite libertie of speche*', especially to a 'hatefull grudge amonge [the] people'.[95] The commons were most certainly not as

[93] See above, pp.160-88.
[94] As illustrated by the comments found in 'Of Cardnall Wolsey', in *Ballads from Manuscripts*, pp.331-5; and 'Collyn Clout' in *Skelton Poems*, pp.221-6. As well as by the evidence briefly discussed on pp.161-4.
[95] Emphasis added: T. Elyot, *The Boke Named the Governour* (1531), *EEBO* (13 Aug. 2019), 106v, 109, 111. That this work was targeting Henry VIII directly is suggested in: G. Walker, *Writing Under Tyranny: English Literature and the Henrician Reformation* (Oxford, 2005), ch.8.

familiar with ancient history as humanists, but their resentment of lack of 'libertie of speche' tallies with Elyot's perception, and they held Cromwell and the king himself to blame. They were advised during the Pilgrimage of Grace, probably by Sir Richard Tempest via Robert Aske, that 'a prince schulde be mayde kinge to defende the realme, and rewle his subjetes vertuus[ly] be justece mixyd with mercy and pity, and *not undur displesur by rigore to put men to de[ath]*'.[96] In their articles of early December 1536, the insurgents included the symbolic demand for the repeal of the new 'statutes of tresons for wordes and such like'.[97] Robert Aske later clarified in his examination that it was in 'every man's mouth since the insurrection that the said statutes were *too grievous*' – that is, the suppression of abbeys, the supremacy, the illegitimacy of lady Mary, and others – and they also 'grudged at the Act that words should be treason'.[98] Even gentlemen who were not rebelling were generally more cautious about sending news, for it had become 'dangerous to do so', and 'divers [were] in the Tower for such matter'.[99] In light of this, the consciousness about the increasing level of control of political dissent, and especially of speech, might have played a dialectical role in shaping popular opinion – just as more changes generated more rumours and more seditious words in the previous chapters.

The evidence of this awareness of more repression of speech continuously caused discomfort, and two more revealing illustrations are necessary here. The 'wretched man' mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Richard Byshop, complained about good fellows' communications being always under suspicion in Bungay, Suffolk, but he added that 'if two men were together one might say to another what he would, as long as a third was not there' – implying that a third one could report the conversation to authorities. Byshop also suggested that if his interlocutor, one Robert Seyman, would come to Bungay at night,

[96] Emphasis added: *LP*, XI, 1244.
[97] 21st of the Pontefract Articles: *LP*, XI, 1246.
[98] Emphasis added: *LP*, XII/1, 901.
[99] *LP*, Addenda, 1148, 1149, 1151.

he would show him the copy of a prophecy that stated that new risings would happen, and in which the 'King was spoken of as a mole who should be subdued and put down'.[100] Likewise, the extraordinary case of Margaret Cheyne in July 1537 illustrates that not only the surveillance of speech had increased and was perceptible, but that it had grown to the point that 'a man may not say the truth lest he be blamed' – as one Robert Johns claimed in her support, while complaining about the rumoured pillaging of parish churches in Oxfordshire.[101] Therefore, the association between seeing more oppression – of speech, the church, Queen Catherine and Lady Mary, and the people more broadly – and reacting by radical expressions seems to be intensifying.[102] We shall see this intensification in vocabulary in the following section, but we can first observe how the escalation of criticism might be understood with numbers.

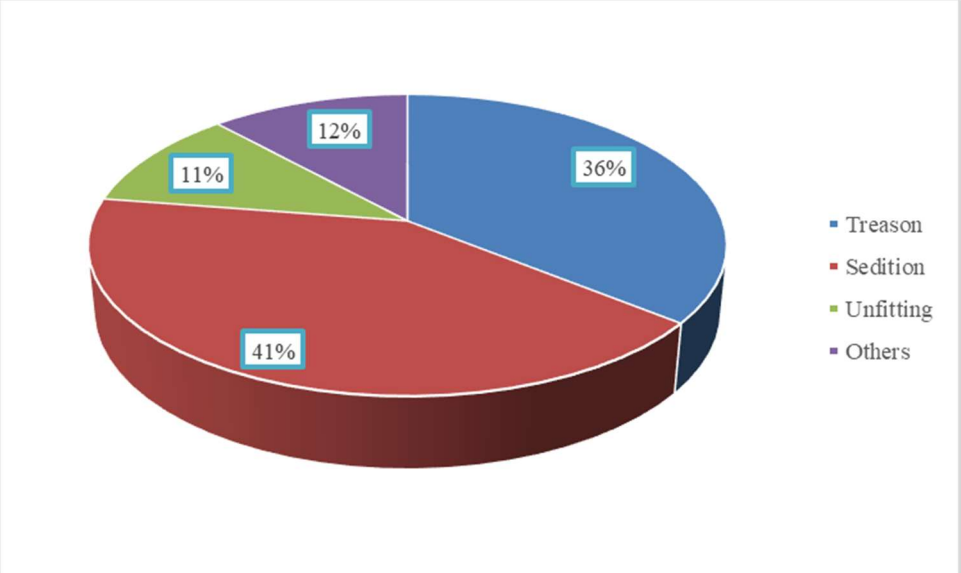

Figure 6 – Charges against Abusive Language, 1461-1525.

[100] *LP*, XII/1, 1212.
[101] *LP*, XII/2, 357. See a comprehensive analysis of M. Cheyne's case in: Jansen, *Dangerous Talk*, pp.5-38.
[102] Such as one Robert Newman in Brigstock, Northampton: 'It is pity that the King was ever crowned, for we have had more pilling and polling since he was crowned than ever we had before, and it is pity that he hath lived so long', in *LP*, XII/2, 1068. There are revealing examples after 1537 about the Henry VIII's death in: Elton, *Policy and Police*, pp.71-81.

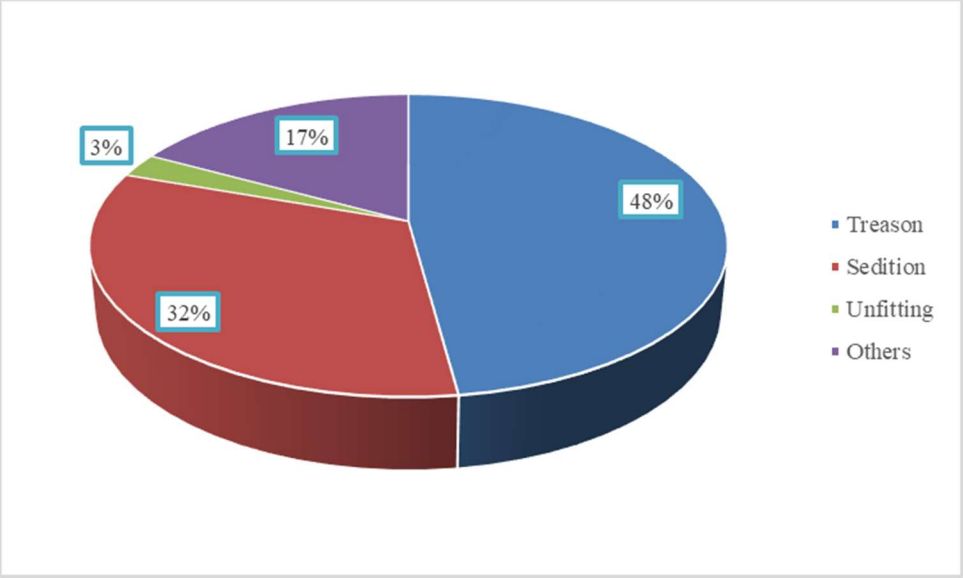

Figure 7 – Charges against Abusive Language, 1526-1537.

Firstly, we have seen in Chapter III that any statistical survey that compares the evidence of the Cromwellian period with what preceded it can be difficult, but we also noticed there that the cases of abusive language were increasing at least from 1531 (19 cases) to 1534 (71 cases) – not simply after the new statutes were enforced from early 1535.[103] In that sense, the different charges adopted to prosecute or report these cases of abusive language, observed in Figures 6 and 7, can be revealing of further details. In view of people's constant reaction to oppression, it is reasonable to expect that the changes observed in these figures here also reveal a shift in people's attitudes, rather than merely a shift in the official records and legislation. The common people were indeed committing more treasonable offences as a reaction to the ongoing debates about the divorce, the structure of the church, and ultimately, the new law of treason and the Acts of Supremacy and Succession. Moreover, there was proportionally less seditious language in the last decade of this analysis not solely because more treason was the case, but also because there was less 'unfitting language' among the accusations. In that sense, the number of other charges – opprobrious, slanderous, scandalous, 'lewd', terrible, or even unspecified words – also partly shared the space

[103] As observed in both Figure 3, p.153 and Figure 5, p.157.

previously occupied by charges of seditious and 'unfitting' language. The fact that treason was increasing together with these other definitions may also tell us that the authorities who previously would be in doubt as to whether a word was maliciously used, realised, by the late 1520s and the 1530s, that such words had become more problematic than 'unfitting words'. To the authorities, any of these words undoubtedly could not 'fit' the dignity of anyone in power, but because people had become more persuasive in a potentially dangerous context, the accusation of 'unfitting language' was gradually decreasing with those of sedition between 1526 and 1537. In assuming that people were progressively acting on purpose and reacting to the structures of oppression, it was natural that they would progressively be targeted as traitors due to the frequently alarming circumstances of the late 1520s and the 1530s, and to the radicalisation of such speech acts.[104] In other words, this first statistical point demonstrates an escalation of criticism that was less labelled as 'unfitting' and 'seditious', and progressively seen as treason.

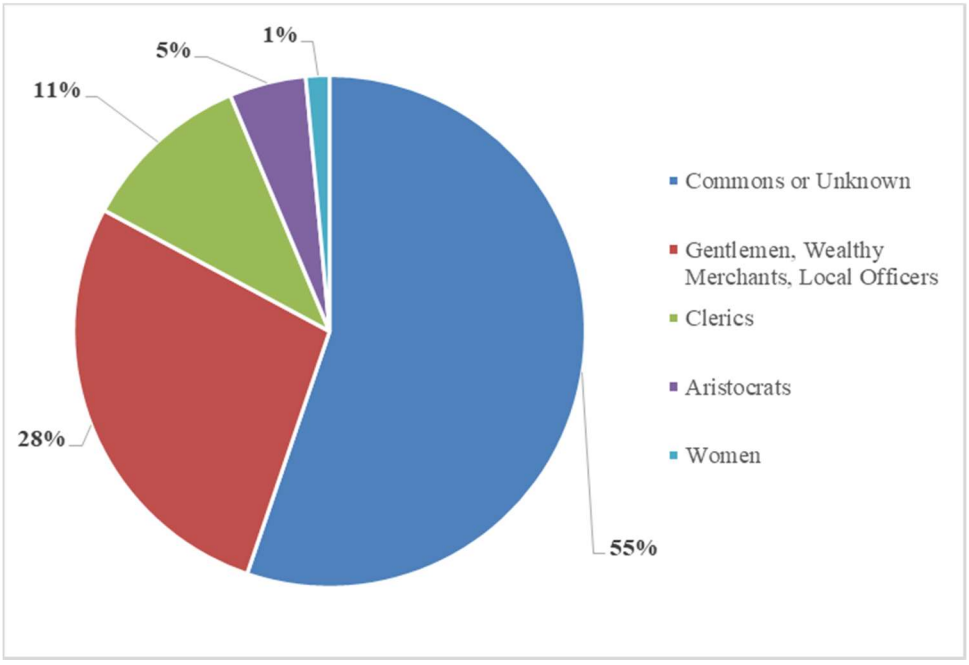

Figure 8 – Social Distribution of Abusive Language, 1461-1525.

[104] Curiously, there is at least one example of treason in which the words were described as 'unfitting' as well, a rather rare combination: *Original Letters*, 1st/2, CXV. Comparatively, in 1521 a charge of heresy was also accompanied by 'inconvenient and unfitting' words: Ibidem, 3rd/1, XCV, XCVII.

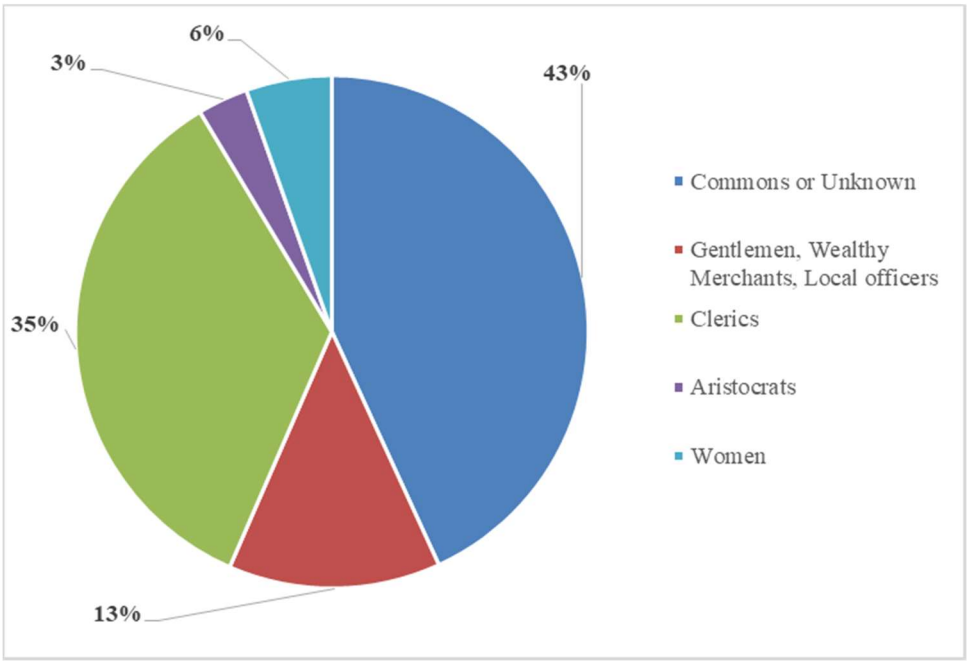

Figure 9 – Social Distribution of Abusive Language, 1526-1537.

Nonetheless, the charges presented in Figures 6 and 7 may conceal the varied demographics of public speech that is also revealing of shifts in popular discourse. We have observed that the clerics prosecuted at the end of this period – many of whom were of lower rank and included their servants – partly explain the growth of treason charges.[105] It does not follow, however, that they were simply victims of the new law and of the Reformation – they were also acting purposefully against the new circumstances they were facing, much as the commons did.[106] Moreover, their treasonable statements were frequently made directly to the people and seem to have had political intentions. The point in case is that, given all the evidence and discussion in this and the previous chapter, but especially Figures 8 and 9, it is reasonably conceivable that the increasing number of both women and clerics involved with abusive language in 1526-37 was not merely the result of the new treason law and a change in the nature of records. These two groups must also illustrate the escalation of criticism of

[105] See above, pp.155-6.
[106] Clerics also died for treason in the fifteenth century, but not necessarily for seditious preaching or 'private' conversations. In addition, parish priests have been accounted as one of the commonest leaders of rebellions too, such as John Ball and John Wrawe in 1381: Cohn, *Popular Protest in Late Medieval English Towns*, p.323.

oppression more broadly, and therefore, comprise an essential shift in the demographics of public speech.

While the threat posed by clergymen would become real, as the Pilgrimage of Grace proved, it has been rightly observed that the women who died for treason in this period did not pose a direct physical threat to the government for they did not join rebellions; nevertheless, they were interpreted as representing a severe menace to the political establishment.[107] Much as priests could deceive men and women through the rhetoric of their preaching, the threat posed by women's speech was in the fact that they 'enticed' men into treason either by spreading subversive prophecies, like the 'Nun of Kent', Elizabeth Barton, or by allegedly encouraging rebellion, as in Margaret Cheyne's case.[108] That is why the women included in the statistics of Figures 8 and 9 are from different social backgrounds: they are too emblematic to be socially distinguished from each other. Elizabeth Barton, a nun from a humble origin, became widely known and achieved the sympathy of important men like Thomas More and Bishop Fisher.[109] As Ethan Shagan has argued, however, her reputation as 'holy maid' (established before she turned her attention to politics) put her in a position to speak for an even higher power in comparison to More and Fisher, and allowed conservatives to 'construct a rationale for legitimate dissent'.[110] Margaret Cheyne, apparently married to Sir John Bulmer, was accused of 'enticing' her husband to join the rebels in 1536-7, and hence died for it.[111] Sharon Jansen has posited that Cheyne was probably not politically motivated, though she seems to have been executed because Henry VIII had a good reason for it.[112] Many other examples could be treated to exemplify women's

[107] Jansen, *Dangerous Talk*, p.3.
[108] More examples have been treated in Chapter I, pp.42-4, 72-3 and a few in Chapter III, pp.180-1.
[109] See p.181 and nn.206-7.
[110] Shagan, 'Print, Orality and Communications in the Maid of Kent affair', pp.21-33. See also: Jansen, *Dangerous Talk*, pp.57-75.
[111] Others were accused of many words in Oxfordshire, but extraordinarily also for lamenting the treatment of Margaret Cheyne's case, in July 1537: *LP*, XII/2, 357.
[112] Jansen, *Dangerous Talk*, pp.7-38.

speech here – and many have already been mentioned above – but it suffices to observe that women's participation in public speech grows exponentially after 1526.

These two groups arose in numbers together over similar issues too: women frequently defended an oppressed wife and daughter, Catherine of Aragon and Lady Mary; the clerics grudged at the oppression of the church and the spread of heresy and 'new learning' in the same period.[113] The interesting example of the 'Nun of Kent' comprises the two sides of this observation – women and the religious – while Margaret Cheyne and Elizabeth Wood typified the dangers surrounding speech and rebellion.[114] Finally, while stereotypes about women's speech pre-dated the medieval period, the growth in their participation in public and popular expression seems to reveal a shift in their attitudes to public issues at the beginning of the Reformation.[115]

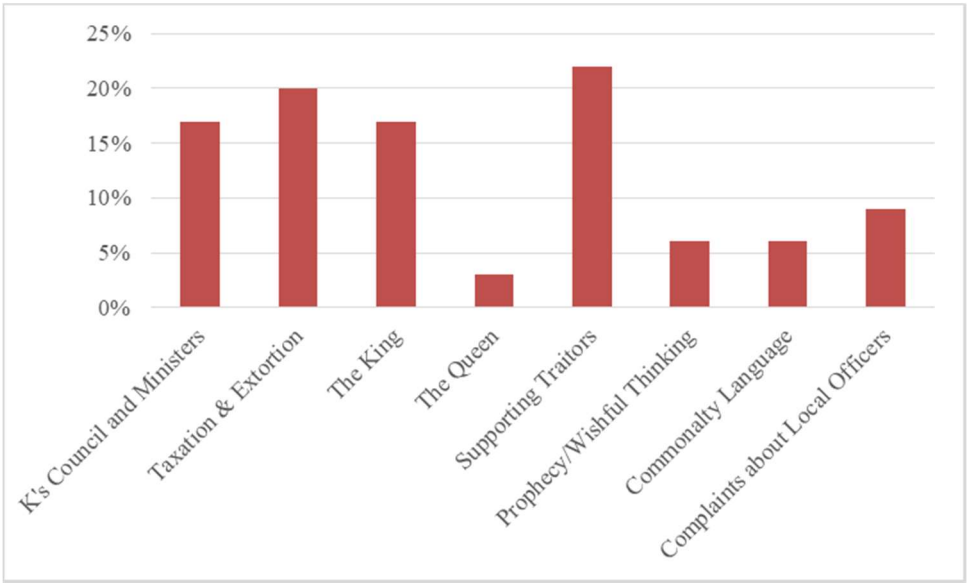

Figure 10 – Themes of Abusive Language, 1461-1525.

[113] For the reaction of women to Henry VIII's first divorce, see above, p.173 and nn.161-3.
[114] Elizabeth Wood was commented above, pp.178-9.
[115] For a wider approach of this stereotype: Bardsley, *Venomous Tongue*, ch.2; Bodden, *Language as the Site of Revolt*, esp. Introduction and ch.1.

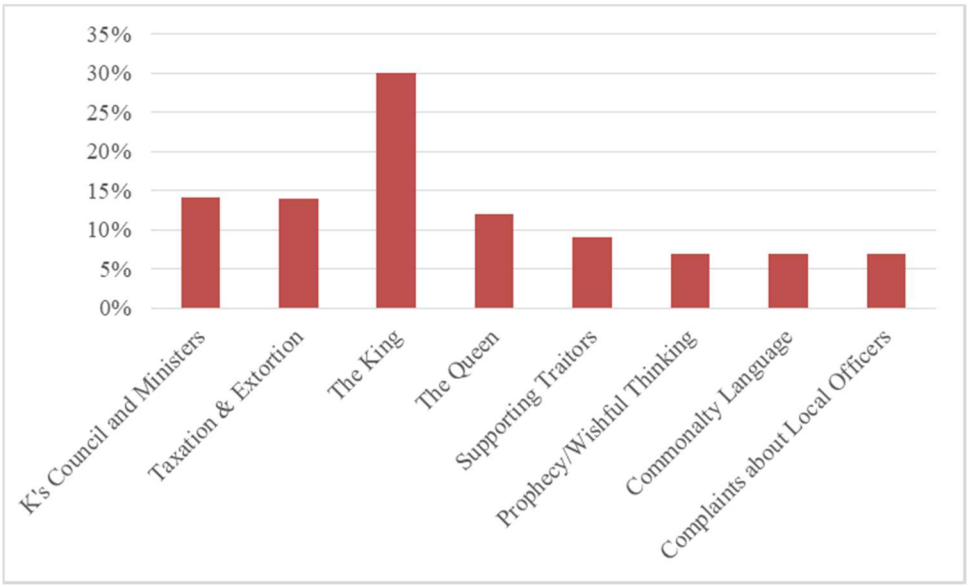

Figure 11 – Themes of Abusive Language, 1526-1537.

By noting the different distribution of abusive language in Figures 10 and 11 there is another point to be made about the escalation of criticism.[116] It might be slightly surprising to observe that Henry VIII was more directly attacked by public speech than anyone or anything in the later period of this analysis – especially in comparison to the dynamics of the Wars of the Roses. The prevailing discourses in the 1450s and 1460s, even if rebels wanted to target their king, as suggested by Westervelt, were chiefly focused on the language of the commonweal and the attacks on the council, denying treason at all costs.[117] However, while these discourses adopted by rebels and others remained similar long after the Wars of the Roses, as we have already seen, these numbers suggest that we must not reduce 'popular opinion' to 'rebels' opinion'. Moreover, it was because of harsher criticisms and direct attacks on the king that these figures also explain the growing accusations of treason between Figures 6 and 7. Therefore, this is the third element that illustrates some transformation of public speech towards harsher criticism of the royal policy, targeting the king more than in any of the preceding decades analysed here.

[116] Figures 10 and 11 reflect the directly the sub-sections of Section 2 in Chapter III, pp.161-86.
[117] Westervelt, 'Manifestoes for Rebellion', pp.185-8. That is partly the discourse analysed in Section 1.1 above, pp.201-10. See more discussion in: Watts, 'Ideas, Principles and Politics', p.125; and the numbers surveyed by Avrutick, 'Commissions of Oyer et Terminer', pp.103, 170-1.

Taking all these points into consideration, it is reasonable to establish that the dramatic growth of direct attacks on the king resulted not merely from the new legislation but also from new perspectives in popular attitudes. These were attitudes against systemic oppression that was seemingly growing: Henry VIII was simultaneously responsible for oppressing the commons, the beloved queen, and the old church that had its problems but could not be wholly destroyed by heresy. While the criticism directed at the king's council was decidedly equal to those targeting the king's person between the Yorkist period and 1525, this balance was broken by Henry VIII – who was seemingly more attacked than his 'heretic bishops' and Cromwell himself.

Moreover, another striking figure that deserves comment is that of the complaints of taxation and extortion – which would also be expected to be higher later, rather than earlier, given the growth of taxation under Henry VIII. Indeed, Figure 10 conceals that these numbers only grow closer to the 1520s; and if the crisis of 1523-5 were considered together with the later period, the picture would be slightly different. As for the evidence of people supporting traitors – comprising sympathetic expressions in favour of Lancastrians, rebels, Yorkist pretenders later on, and conspirators – it is important to stress that the high numbers for 1461-1525 only reveal the obvious: that the context of the Wars of the Roses, of Henry VII's challenges, and the early period of Henry VIII up to the death of Richard de la Pole in 1525 provided critics of the government with alternative allegiances. Despite the troublesome later period, there was less open support to conspirators because they were fewer in numbers in that particular decade; thus, the major part of this evidence in Figure 11 comes from supporters of the Pilgrimage of Grace.

All things considered, the remarkable change revealed by this statistical survey is indeed the criticism of the king himself from the moment it became public that he had decided to annul his first marriage in 1527 to the suppression of the later rumours after the

Pilgrimage of Grace, revealing a bolder public reaction to a repressive royal policy. As claimed at the beginning of this section, even before 1534 this bolder popular reaction to the structures of oppression began with the realisation that speech was more under surveillance than it had ever been. After all, 'every man [used to speak] at his liberty what he would without repression'.[118] The vocabulary analysed below will complement this point and provide further insights.

2.2. Vocabulary and Ideas

Perhaps more revealing and more profound than statistics are the subtle shifts noticeable in vocabulary and ideas – and they all lead us back to observing different shades of oppression perceived by ordinary people. The first two hypotheses about shifts in popular language in this section are grounded on the fact that the government specified a few particular words that became treason in 1534: heretic, schismatic, tyrant, infidel, and usurper of the crown.[119] At least some of these condemned words might have come from the government's actual perception of what people were already saying about the king, hence, also, the increase in cases of treason as shown in Figure 7 above.

The word 'tyrant' is particularly revealing for although there is no surviving use of it by the commons, it was frequently discussed by others whose words possibly reached the common people or were perhaps appropriations of popular narratives. 'Tyranny' was indeed part of the political vocabulary in the later middle ages – especially of those educated men familiar with Roman history – and it was used to condemn former regimes. As a Yorkist poem put it in 1463, Henry IV had reigned 'by tyranny & violence'.[120] One contemporary chronicler condemned Edward IV as a tyrant for the likely execution of Henry VI, and later

[118] *LP*, XII/1, 901.
[119] *St.R.*, 26 Hen.VIII, c.13.
[120] *Historical Poems*, 93.

in the narrative he compared Richard III's parliament to the Roman triumvirate.[121] In a similar tone, Tudor chroniclers claimed that Richard III used 'his force and tyranny' to usurp the crown and that 'a marvalous tyrany had… invadyd the commanwelth' when describing the situation of the Princes in the Tower in 1483.[122] Perkin Warbeck, too, skilfully attacked Henry VII in such terms in a letter to Queen Isabella of Castille in 1493, and his and the earl of Warwick's executions were later described as 'murdres and tyrannies'.[123] Henry VII's ministers Empson and Dudley were apparently accused of 'briberies and tyrannies' by a foreigner.[124] Under Wolsey, reactions to oppressive rule were harshly exposed by at least two critical poets, one of which claimed that 'there [wa]s not one the truthe dar[ed] speke,/ for fere of losing of his hede'.[125] After Wolsey was buried near Richard III – both in Leicester, but in different locations – Eustace Chapuys wrote to Charles V that 'people beg[an] already to call [it] "the Tyrants' grave"'.[126]

Concurrently, schismatics were making connections between tyranny and the new discussions of religious reformation. William Tyndale, in his *Practice of Prelates,* wrote that if the clergy put the ruler in fear of the commons he was implicitly recognising his own tyranny.[127] Others were more explicitly linking the image of the pope and the clergy with tyranny while trying to convince the audience that Henry was right in declaring his Supremacy. Simon Matthew, for instance, preached in June 1535 that if both St John and Jesus obeyed 'infidels' and 'tyrants' (a possible allusion to the Treason Act), 'howe moche

[121] *Crowland Chronicle*, pp.128-31, 170-1.
[122] *Three Books of Vergil*, pp.187, 189. Compare with Hall's interpretation of Richard's death: *HC*, p.421. This is virtually the same argument of Sir Thomas More, though A. Fox has convincingly argued that More resisted depicting Henry VII as the 'saviour' because he considered Henry himself as a tyrant: A. Fox, *Politics and Literature in the Reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII* (Oxford, 1989), pp.110-26.
[123] *Archaeologia*, 27 (1838), p.157; *LP RIII/HVII*, V.1, XVIII.
[124] Reproduced in Penn, *Winter King*, p.348.
[125] Quoting an unknown author: *Ballads from Manuscripts*, p.334. The second poet is, of course, John Skelton in both *Collyn Clout* and *Why Come Ye Not*: *Skelton Poems*, pp.221-3, 259-67.
[126] *CSPSp*, IV/1, 522.
[127] Tyndale, *Practice of Prelates*, pp.243-4.

more shal we be bounde to do the same to our christen prince?'.[128] So, the words 'tyrant/tyranny' were in circulation more or less throughout this period among the elite/clergy writers, but the fact that Henry VIII decided to shield his reputation from such terminology with the new law might indeed be a reflexion of anxiety towards public speech.

Despite the lack of use of 'tyrant' by ordinary people, they made similar allegations that were tantamount to tyranny. More importantly, the use of these similar concepts to refer to the structure of oppression discussed in this chapter was indeed intensifying and it had become clear to most of those who opposed 'these heretics Cromwell, Cranmer, and Latimer' that the changes in the structure of the church, followed by the suppression of the abbeys, were part of a broader 'tyrannical' trend within a government led by heretics/schismatics and a usurper (not of the crown, but of the pope's power).[129] A poem exhorting the pilgrims in 1536, and probably written by a northerner, complained about all these issues that had been discussed by the rebels, establishing a necessary description of the relationship between heresy and 'exactions', as well as the opposition between the 'faithful pepull of the boryalle region' and 'thes sothourne herytikes, devode of all vertu':

> this curseide Cromwell by his gret pollicie / in this Realme haith causid gret exaction, / them hily promoting that settes outte heresie; / by the aide of the chauncellors, using exortacion. / Agans[t] them all for to fight, I think it convenient, / and noit for to seisse till ther lives be spent.[130]

The justification to rebel here is twofold: against 'gret exaction' and heresy. These were two elements of the same policy that came together to oppress the people and the church – and mainly, in this poem, to oppress the northerners who could no longer rely on the abbeys to

[128] S. Matthewe, *A Sermon made in the Cathedrall Churche of Saynte Paule at London the XXVII Day of June. Anno 1535*, A4v, B4r. Compare with the accusations of the clergy in 'The Image of Ypocresye', 1533: *Ballads from Manuscripts*, pp.181-200. And the treatment of this question by Thomas Swinnerton in 1534: *A Litel Treatise*, B5r-v, B8r.
[129] *LP*, XII/2, 436.
[130] *Ballads from Manuscripts*, pp.304-9.

relieve them from misery.[131] To the pilgrims, the new policy was both tyranny (seen here as oppression/extortion by an unlawful government) and heresy – even though they only used the latter. These words reveal an interesting tension between what had been condemned and what was circulating and helps us with seeing some change, or at least an increase, in people's reactions and pressure within the period 1461-1537.

Whether the king was considered a 'tyrant' by ordinary people may remain controversial, but it has been argued that this possibility is not entirely anachronistic and that allegations of tyranny were more than common within the 'aristocratic public sphere'.[132] The fact that clerics were using such a word may reasonably lead us to suppose they were possibly preaching it to a favourable audience too. Robert Feron and John Hale agreed in 1534-5 that Henry was a tyrant and wished him to die just like King John or Richard III – that is, 'as tyrant' and, in Richard's case, 'usurper of this… realm'.[133] In May 1535, one Thomas Gold referred expressly to Cromwell as 'a false wretch, a baudy wretch and a tyrant'.[134] Unsurprisingly, Chapuys resorted to this word in October 1535, saying that people were provoked by the 'tyrannical extortions practised on Churchmen' – an idea that was later only partly substantiated by the rebellions of 1536-7.[135] In the meantime, Cranmer was notified of a book in which a former secretary of Archbishop William Warham wrote: '*Rex tanquam tyrannus opprimit populum suum*'.[136] Sir Davy, a priest of Durham, commented in 1537, that Henry VIII was 'a tyrant more cruel than Nero; for Nero destroyed but a part of Rome, but

[131] This idea was originally in Robert Aske's correspondence: *LP*, XII/1, 6. Closely reproduced by chroniclers: *WC*, p.58; *HC*, p.822. Compare with what the monks had said about the oppression of innocent people and the pretension to be 'above the church' in the trials of April 1535: KB8/7/1/1-4, 11; *LP*, VIII, 609.
[132] This is a reference first to: Bernard, 'The Tyranny of Henry VIII', pp.113-4. Second, 'aristocratic public sphere' is what G. Walker proposes while analysing the criticisms that emerged among the elite writers who wrote numerous veiled accusations of tyranny against Henry VIII, Sir Thomas Elyot being the most prominent: Walker, *Writing Under Tyranny*, chs.7-9, 17. J. Guy has suggested that the rebels in 1536 certainly saw Cromwell as despotic, and Henry VIII only confirmed the government's position in his answer to the rebels: Guy, 'The King's Council and Political Participation', pp.142-5. See also the discussion in: M.E. James, 'Obedience and Dissent in Henrician England: The Lincolnshire Rebellion 1536', *P&P*, 48 (1970), pp.68-78.
[133] KB8/7/1/1-4, 11; *LP*, VIII, 565, 567, 609, 802.
[134] *LP*, VIII, 738.
[135] *LP*, IX, 594.
[136] *LP*, X, 113.

this tyrant destroyeth his whole realm'.[137] Whether the government or Cromwell himself were bothered by increasing claims of oppression coming from below one cannot prove with exactitude, although authorities were certainly alarmed whenever clerics made such claims: after all, clergymen were in a position to influence the people more than others. The insertion of 'tyrant' in the Treason Act might have been responsive both to the conservative clergy preaching similar concepts and to the same framework implied in popular speech: that oppression of the commonwealth needed to be remedied by whatever means.

The second revealing word from the Treason Act that was in direct connection with public discussion has already been briefly mentioned: heretic (and Lollard). Early in this period, people had reason to use this word against neither the king nor the council. However, 'heretic' must be considered here as part of the shifts of attitude towards authority – as this is a strong accusation that undermines royal power as much as any treason, especially the word Lollard.[138] In contrast to 'tyrant', people did not hesitate to use the words 'heretic' and 'Lollard' throughout the realm, and although part of this evidence was (again) uttered by churchmen, the majority was spoken by commoners, including the rebels of 1536-7.[139] According to this research, this word was prosecuted at least thirty-five times between early 1534 (that is, before the new Treason Act) and late 1537, either attacking the council and Cromwell or attacking the king directly. Clerics began first to defend the pope by blaming the devisors of the Supremacy as heretics, some preferring to live in exile or die in the papal cause.[140] The parson of South Witham, Lincolnshire, for instance, uttered in this period or later that 'the kinge and the Queene [were] Eretikes (sic) and lowlars and wisshed his kniffe in ther bellies'.[141] Some clergymen far from the north, like the vicar of Bradford, Wiltshire,

[137] *LP*, XII/2, 908.
[138] As it was associated with sedition and treason quite early, see above, p.147 and n.55.
[139] In addition to the cases involving the commons described in this paragraph: *LP*, XII/1, 6, 29, 163, 1011; XII/2, 436, 530, 1114.
[140] *LP*, VII, 454, 577, 754, 1608; VIII, 1000; IX, 84, 970; XII/1, 308, 1021, 1147.
[141] STAC2/33/75.

openly supported the Pilgrimage of Grace, wished the king's death if he had gone north, and added that he was a heretic.[142] More than tyranny, heresy was an evil and poisonous infection hard to tolerate. While the accusation of tyranny did not necessarily imply illegitimacy, heresy certainly did.

The first commoner to appear in records using 'heresy' to delegitimise the government was perhaps the most radical: one George Balburney, tailor of Newport Pagnell, Buckinghamshire, indicted in February 1535. He explicitly called Henry VIII a heretic, infidel ('traitour to God and his laws'), and usurper ('not of right King of England'); on top of wishing the Scottish king to take over the English crown and urging the 'sword of vengeance' to 'light upon our seid soveraigne lord and his council'.[143] Similarly, a skinner in March that year, though not openly using 'heretic', affirmed 'that our sovereign lord king Henry was a wretch, a caitiff (captive/slave) and *no Christian man*, having two wives and a concubine'.[144] In July, a yeoman of Yorkshire was probably more concerned with his salvation, for he stated that 'the kinges majestie was a loller and makythe us all lollardes'.[145] The rebels of Lincolnshire, in October 1536, were careful only to mention the 'heretical bishops' who 'subverted the faith of Christ', a phrase which was later copied by the Pilgrims, while Robert Aske called them 'schismatics' – even though he admittedly could see no difference between a 'heretic' and a 'schismatic'.[146] The pilgrims argued that Henry VIII, 'though styled Defender of the Faith', was guided by heretics to support blasphemous preaching, suppress abbeys and holy places, and despise the laws 'of Holy Mother Church'.[147] At Pontefract, they agreed that they were writing a petition 'against the Lowler

[142] *LP*, XIII/1, 1241; XIII/2, App.43; XV, 498.
[143] KB9/531/5-11; *LP*, VIII, 278.
[144] Emphasis added: *LP*, VIII, 324.
[145] KB9/533/44; *LP*, IX, 37.
[146] In Lincolnshire, they accused the bishops of Canterbury, Rochester, Worcester, Salisbury, St David's, Dublin, and the 'beginning of all this trouble': *LP*, XI, 705, 818, 1182. Robert Aske also highlighted the 'new learning and maintainers of Luther and Tyndale's opinions' before commenting on the words 'schismatic' and 'heretic': *LP*, XII/1, 901.
[147] *LP*, XI, 892. Similarly in the Hampole Articles: *LP*, XI, 902.

and [trai]tur Thomas Crumwell', and later in December they also stated that Cromwell and Chancellor Audley were 'maintainers and inventors of heretics'.[148] Finally, the example of a man from Mere, near Glastonbury, spells out the implications of heresy allegations, for he claimed that no one was 'bound to keep the king's commandment, if it were naught' – referring to holy days and adding that Cromwell was 'a stark heretic and all his witholders'.[149] Heresy, therefore, complemented the view of an illegitimate government, but it was also occasionally seen as another form of oppression – i.e., manifested in the dissolution of monasteries, in the fact that the king would make them 'all lollardes', or in the idea that Cromwell and the 'hereticall bischoppes' were causing 'gret exaction'.[150]

Amid these complaints of tyranny and heresy, it seems that ideas of invasion by foreign powers to rescue the people from either Wolsey, Cromwell or Henry VIII became more prominent: George Balburney, the tailor of Buckinghamshire mentioned above, was not alone. Although some commons had supported invasions before, like that of Warwick in 1470, and significantly talked about Edmund de la Pole and his brother Richard later, they never explicitly favoured foreign rulers.[151] The *Great Chronicle* pointed out that in 1483 people had 'grudgid soo sore again[st] the king for the deth of the innocentys that as gladly wold they have been French', but direct evidence of popular speech supporting the French king leaves no trace.[152] The ambassador Eustace Chapuys certainly expected Emperor Charles V to invade and at times attributed his wishful thinking (or that of Sir Geoffrey Pole, his close informant) to 'the people of England', though this is also not conclusive evidence about the people themselves.[153] That Charles V was famous among English commoners,

[148] *LP*, XI, 1244. In December they urged the king to destroy many specific heresies too: *LP*, XI, 1246.
[149] *LP*, XII/1, 567.
[150] I refer again to the poem quoted above, *Ballads from Manuscripts*, pp.306-8.
[151] Possible invasions by Richard de la Pole were said to be with the help of the Duke of Albany in 1520-1, but Richard was the one considered to take over the throne: *LP*, III/1, 995, 1003, 1221.
[152] *GC*, p.237.
[153] For instance: *CSPSp*, IV/2, 1073, 1161; V/1, 109; VII/1368. For Geoffrey Pole's relationship with Chapuys, see: Bernard, *King's Reformation*, pp.78-87.

given the circumstances of Catherine of Aragon and Princess Mary, seems to be unquestionable, but he was conceived as alternative king only in one prophecy that circulated in April 1537.[154] He was also portrayed as the saviour of 'all good wives' by one Mistress Amadas in 1533, even though it is not clear whether she meant he would rule England in her prophecy.[155] Contrary to Chapuys's wishes, some people in fact feared that the Emperor would come and destroy the kingdom in retaliation against the situation of Catherine and Mary.[156] In any case, there is compelling evidence to suspect that ordinary people at least talked about the Emperor, and this is already revealing by itself.

Notwithstanding, the fact that common people considered and often wished for an invasion by the Scots illustrates wider expectations. As early as 1514, a 'poor tinker of Hereford', John Brown, commented on the news about the Battle of Flodden (September 1513) and added that the Scots would invade England again and reach Hampton Court.[157] However, threatening tales and prophecies multiply only in the 1530s.[158] In 1530, one William Harlokke was imprisoned for showing his 'kalendre of profysye' to a man named Byrte, of Whitestaunton, who predicted that in three years there would be 'much trouble and business'; after consulting with a better-informed goldsmith at Taunton they concluded that the prophecy was about an invasion by both the Earl of Desmond and the king of the Scots.[159]

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[154] For commoners' affection towards the Emperor, there is evidence in: *HC*, p.744; *CSPSp*, III/2, 83; III/2, 113, 224; *CSPM*, 817. A woman who impersonated Princess Mary at Boston, in order to criticise the circumstances in 1533, concluded that she (as Mary) would soon cross the sea towards the Emperor – although it is not clear whether she meant invasion of England would follow: *LP*, VI, 1193. A conversation reported in March 1535 shows more clearly how people lamented the divorce by recognising Catherine's background, for 'Pity it was of the King's life to forsake the noble blood of the Emperor and to take a poor knight's daughter': *LP*, VIII, 324. The prophecy of 1537 is in: *LP*, XII/2, 1212, 1231; XIII/1, 107, 705.
[155] *LP*, VI, 921.
[156] As claimed in: *HC*, p.796; *LP*, V, App.10; VI, 1077. The perspective of the rebels in 1536-7, according to Robert Aske, was the same as in Hall, but the primary concern was that if war was declared it could stop 'the recourse of merchandise into Flanders […] to the great danger and impoverishment of this realm': *LP*, XII/1, 901. A report of a traveller about a possible league of 'Christian Kings' to invade England reached Cromwell probably in 1534: *Original Letters*, 3rd/2, CCXXIII.
[157] *Thirteenth Report* (HMC), p.306.
[158] A. Fox considers that they were growing steadily throughout the reign, though more threatening in the last decades: Fox, 'Prophecies and Politics in the Reign of Henry VIII', p.77.
[159] *LP*, IV/3, 6652.

Some Welshmen, in 1531, were repeating a threatening prophecy that James V 'shuld conquere all Englond', just as William Neville would do in 1532, and Mistress Amadas in 1533.[160] In June 1536, the Scottish king was mentioned again by one John Hill, of Eynsham in Oxfordshire, during his criticisms of the late executions 'only of pleasure', and the king's new marriage to Jane Seymour.[161] A priest of Durham supported by two mariners – who either took part in or directly supported the Pilgrimage of Grace – conjectured that he 'and many others' would have guided the Scottish king to London if he had invaded the kingdom during the rebellions.[162] On that same occasion, depositions before the Mayor of Leicester revealed alarming rumours about Scotland, apparently rephrasing some that circulated in 1534 – including that some Englishmen, then living in Edinburgh, were supporting the Scottish in a future invasion and claiming to 'have the aid of all Northumberland'.[163] The growing number of prophecies in this exact period, therefore, is revealing of an attitude of dissatisfaction that was both using familiar tropes and spreading considerably. Admittedly, the young James V was only half a foreigner, for he was Henry VIII's nephew, but this abundant evidence of discussion about both the Emperor and James shows that attitudes to foreign powers did not remain the same throughout the period. It is clear, too, that foreign monarchs could well be cited in prophecies and expected to help with the invasions of claimants (as had happened many times since the Wars of the Roses), but that the king of England 'shold be no stranger' and, especially no Frenchman was probably agreed by all.[164] The subtle shift is to be seen, then, in the fact that a Scottish succession seems to have been seriously considered by commoners, in place of an illegitimate government.

[160] KB9/517/3; *LP*, V, 1679; VI, 921.
[161] *LP*, X, 1205.
[162] *LP*, XII/1, 1286; XII/2, 291, 340, 422, 431, 479, 732.
[163] The rumours of 1534 are in: *LP*, VII, 847; of 1536 in: XII/2, 6. Both can be compared to other threatening rumours spread by a 'vagabond' in Oct. 1536: *LP*, XII/2, 918, 1076.
[164] The comment on 'no stranger' is recorded in a case of treasonable language in which the destruction of Henry VIII was expected to be carried forward by both Charles V and Francis, but neither of the invaders would be king of England: KB27/1120/13-13v; *LP*, XVI, 1011; XVIII/1, 346.

There is a second apparent shift in popular speech that is directly linked to international politics, and it will be fruitful to draw a contrast with popular claims in 1450. Jack Cade's rebellion emerged in a context in which the memory of French victories was much closer to contemporaries, especially in the southeast, and that memory was, therefore, an essential ingredient in the rebels' lists of grievances.[165] They claimed that it was noised by the common voice 'that the kingis landys in Fraunce [had] beyn alienyd & put a wey from the croune & his lordys & peple there dystroyed'; then they asked for 'enquiries to be made' about how this had happened and the law to be executed against those responsible. The law had already been partly applied to the Duke of Suffolk, William de la Pole, who died on his way into exile, but alarming events in the continent were still causing anxiety in Kent and the surrounding counties: as 'the see [was] lost and Fraunce [was] lost', a French invasion was not wholly impossible. Again, in the third version of their manifesto, Cade's rebels stressed that 'the Realme of Fraunce, the Duchie of Normandy, Gasguyn, and Guyen, Angoy, and Main [were all] lost by the same traitours'. The loss of France remained in Yorkist discourse not purely because it was a 'national' cause, but also because it was popular. When Edward IV sent out his first proclamation, the 'loss of France and duchies of Guyenne and Normandy, and of Anjou and Maine' was readily pointed out.[166] In the parliament of 1467 the question was raised again, and when Edward IV lost his throne in 1470, Warkworth's chronicle included the recovery of France among the high hopes that people had towards him since 1461.[167] Edward was not able to renew war until the brief invasion of 1475, and although that was all for now, at least some contemporaries even claimed that people had

[165] The three manifestoes of the rebellion quoted here are reproduced in: Harvey, *Jack Cade's Rebellion*, pp.186-91.
[166] *CCR*, I, pp.54-5.
[167] *PROME*, 1467, It.26 (20 Aug. 2019); *Warkworth's Chronicle*, pp.11-2.

paid the benevolences 'willingly' and with 'no murmurs', while others did not expect him to come back so soon after having paid so much.[168]

However, despite the various reasons for possible war during the early Tudor period, the expeditions of 1492 and 1512-14, and the confusing events of 1522-5, promises of returning to the glorious past in France remained just a distant memory about Henry V while people reacted steeply against both taxation and the outcome of such ventures.[169] Surely, the 'dream of Agincourt' was still alive in the discourse of the elites and the government;[170] Henry VIII's and Wolsey's pursuit of splendour were indeed persistent, and the government more often celebrated war than peace treaties.[171] And yet, there might have been also a sense in which this enthusiasm gradually decreased. As opposed to what the nostalgic William Worcester had done in *The Boke of Noblesse*, Edmund Dudley discouraged war and alerted men to give good counsel to their king because 'there [we]re mayny wayes to enter into [war], and the begining semeth a great pleasure, but the waye is verye narroo to come honorablely out therof, and then oftetimes full painfull'.[172] Erasmus, Thomas More, and other humanists were also increasingly seeing war as irrational.[173] Perhaps with the increasing resistance in mind – and undoubtedly in view of the preparations to war – Richard Morison mentioned Agincourt among other glorious events in his military treatise published

[168] See the discourse convincing the commons about war in 1472-5 in: *Literae Cantuarienses III*, pp.274-85; and in the *Ninth Report* (HMC), Part I, p.107. Disappointment at Edward's return is recorded in: *Crowland Chronicle*, pp.136-7; *CSPV*, I, 449. For the favourable comments on the payment of taxes: *CSPM*, 282; *White Rose*, p.155, n.6. There is only one apparent 'celebration' at the end of the expedition: *Paston Letters*, V, 875.
[169] For the reactions of the commons against the 'benevolence' in 1491: *GC*, p.245; *Anglica Historia*, pp.48-9. For the negative reactions upon the sudden return of the troops in 1492: *Anglica Historia*, pp.56-7; *HC*, pp.458-9. For a few reactions at the outcome of 1514: *CSPV*, II, 456, 505; *Anglica Historia*, pp.234-5. For 1522: *Further Supplement to CSPSp*, p.99.
[170] For the elites see, for instance: S. Gunn, 'Chivalry and the Politics of the Early Tudor Court', in S. Anglo (ed.), *Chivalry in the Renaissance* (Woodbridge, 1990), pp.127-8. For the king himself, see Cliff Davies's chapter in: Watts, *The End of the Middle Ages*, ch.7. The quoted expression is from: Watts, 'Politics, War and Public Life', p.33.
[171] S. Gunn, 'War, Dynasty and Public Opinion in Early Tudor England', in Idem & Bernard, *Authority and Consent*, p.137; S. Gunn, *The English People at War in the Age of Henry VIII* (Oxford, 2018), pp.11, 53, 127.
[172] Dudley, *Tree of Commonwealth*, p.50. As for Worcester's 'lamentacions' about France: *Boke of Noblesse*, pp.1-2.
[173] Gunn, *The English People at War*, pp.130, 132.

in 1539.[174] So the elites still dreamed of Agincourt, but different views were emerging as they were certainly aware of popular resistance to uncustomary taxation to fund wars.

In contrast to Jack Cade's views of 1450, and the early support to Edward IV, it seems that commons' enthusiasm – or perhaps their fear of French invasion – fluctuated within the limits of this period. The Yorkshire rebellion of 1489, for example, was only a confirmation that the northerners' concern was obviously Scotland, not France (or Brittany, for that matter). The first war under Wolsey and Henry VIII, in 1512-14, was seen by Vergil as the Cardinal's private interest for there was 'no existing cause or portending danger'.[175] More importantly, the resistance that led to the risings of 1525 against the Amicable Grant should not be seen here as mainly, or merely, a question of poverty.[176] No matter how controversial the evidence of 1525 might seem, there is also compelling evidence that there was a political statement beyond 'poverty'.[177] Since 1523, during the loans asked by Wolsey, there is some evidence that, for instance, the 'poore men were content with this payment and said, let the churles pay, for they may well'.[178] When parliament was discussing more taxation, and the common people heard that the citizens of London would 'graunt. iiii. s. of the pound', they attacked them 'with many evill woordes, and threateninges'.[179] In 1524, foreign ambassadors reported that 'all classes are weary of the war on account of the heavy

[174] R. Morison, *An exhortation to styrre all Englyshe men to the defence of theyr countreye* (1539), *EEBO* (1 June 2019), C4. For this, see: S. Gunn, D. Grummitt, and H. Cools, *War*, *State and Society in England and the Netherlands 1477-1559* (Oxford, 2007), p.241; A.T. Sowerby, '"A brave knight and learned gentleman": the careers of Sir Richard Morison (c.1513-1556)' (DPhil. thesis, Oxford, 2005), pp.131-55.
[175] *Anglica Historia*, pp.234-5.
[176] G. Bernard has been inclined to argue – for economic reasons – that the claims of poverty were genuine, and that if people had money they would have willingly paid the Amicable Grant: *War*, *Tax*, *and Rebellion*, pp.110-27. For contemporary evidence that might support this argument, see Warham's letter of 15 April 1525: *LP*, IV/1, 1266; *Original Letters*, 3rd/1, CXXVII.
[177] In the same letter of the previous note, Warham also commented about the people's possible good intentions, but concluded: 'what trust is to be geven to their sayinges I cannot tell'. A great overview is found in Potter's chapter in D. McCulloch (ed.), *The Reign of Henry VIII: Politics*, *Policy and Piety* (1995). P. Gwyn did not see how the affair could be mainly about poverty, and taking the example of the riots in Suffolk, the majority of people indicted were not worth more than one pound, and therefore, were probably not asked to pay anything: *The King's Cardinal*, pp.402-4.
[178] *HC*, p.642.
[179] *HC*, pp.655-6.

taxes'.[180] When commissions were sent out to collect the Amicable Grant, Archbishop Warham reported that people were speaking 'cursedly' at these affairs and because the previous loan had not been repaid. Most importantly, he wrote a detailed analysis of why people were not going to pay anything else, which is revealing of local discourse about France:

> That it would be the greatest means of enriching France to have all his money spent there, out of the realm; and if the King win France, he will be obliged to spend his time and revenues there. They are sorry, rather than other wise, at the captivity of Francis I [at Pavia]. That all the sums already spent on the invasion of France have not gained the King a foot more land in it than his father had, "which lacked no riches or wisdom to win the kingdom of France if he had thought it expedient".[181]

These views were being aired in the same region where Jack Cade had led his men almost a century before (London and Kent). However, in the 1520s the people were facing not only the highest levels of taxation of this period – before those of the 1540s – but also reconsidering the limits of their support for more invasions.[182] The resistance to the Amicable Grant was too significant to be seen as merely an economic reaction, and the Kentish people were even persecuting the 'better sort' willing to pay the levy.[183] The vigorous reaction to the Amicable Grant possibly confirmed popular perceptions about new wars as distinct from 1450, and it restrained the most ambitious of Wolsey's and Henry's moves thus far.[184]

Such attitude did not mean, however, that people would be happier with an alliance with the traditional enemy, as Wolsey would try later with the perpetual peace declared in 1527 and find himself in a similar position to that of William de la Pole in 1449-50.[185] As Chapuys understood in March that year, 'people were clamouring for a truce' and 'great

[180] *Further Supplement to CSPSp*, pp.369-70.
[181] *LP*, IV/1, 1243. See the original in: *Original Letters*, 3rd/1, CXXVIII.
[182] For levels of taxation: Britnell, *Closing of the Middle Ages?*, p.116; Gunn, *The English People at War*, p.49.
[183] *LP*, IV/1, 1332.
[184] Further to this paragraph, there are comments on the unpopularity of Wolsey's foreign policy in: *CSPSp*, III/2, 69; and in a considerably aggressive ballad reproduced in: *Ballads from Manuscripts*, pp.352-60.
[185] S. Gunn, 'Wolsey's foreign policy and the domestic crisis of 1527-8', in S. Gunn & P. Lindley, *Cardinal Wolsey: Church, State, and Art* (Cambridge, 1991), pp.169, 176.

discontent prevail[ed] throughout the kingdom', but also that 'no settlement whatever between this country and France can be of long duration'.[186] Hall tells us that the 'common people much lamented that war should arise betwene the king and themperor' in 1527, and later, in 1536-7, there is also evidence that an alliance with France against the Emperor was seen as an ambiguous move.[187] Comparatively, however, more peaceful times seemed, in the late 1520s, more desirable by the common people than they had been in 1450. The religious challenges of the 1530s even prompted a preacher in Dorset, for example, to urge his audience provocatively towards the traditional religion and in favour of France (as a way of supporting the pope), but that seems to be an exception.[188] Ordinary people certainly commemorated their king's wars against the 'traditional' and 'ancient' adversaries whenever free wine was available in the market square, or they attended pageants and even paid their taxes when they could, but it is difficult to see how ordinary Englishmen and women would feel as strong about France in the 1530s, as they had been in 1450.[189] The commons surely remained shaping their identity by distinguishing themselves from the French (and others); the majority remained loyal to their king, and they certainly feared invasions – and their possibility renewed in the 1540s – but they were not explicitly demanding their king to reconquer 'the Realme of Fraunce' as Jack Cade's men had done.

The comparison with Jack Cade's rebellion can still show other two shifts in popular vocabulary, leading us back to the disconcerting contradictions of 'loyalist language' amongst rebels and dissenters. In the influential manifestoes of Jack Cade's rebellion in 1450 the rebels claimed that the evil counsellors 'calle[d them] risers and treiturs and the kinges enymis, but [they were] his trew lege mene and his *best frendus*'. In other articles, they

[186] *CSPSp*, III/2, 37. See other similar observations in: *CSPSp*, III/2, 75.
[187] *HC*, p.744; *LP*, XI, 841; XII/1, 990.
[188] Recorded in June 1536: *LP*, X, 1140.
[189] For commemorations, loyalty, and the next point on invasions: Gunn, *The English People at War*, pp.75, 127-8, 130, 135.

insisted that they were 'his verrey freendus' and that 'By [their] writtinges ye may conseive [they were] the *Kinges frends*'.[190] The commons went on naming themselves as 'true commons' rising for the 'commonweal of the land' later, and we have seen in Section 1.1 that this loyalist strategy was a consistent feature.[191]

Notwithstanding, it is suggestive that Robert Aske and his followers, though mostly loyal to their king to the end, were more concerned to be seen as 'good catholic men and *friends of the common wealth*' in 1536.[192] Ignoring the minor shift from 'commonweal' to 'commonwealth', what is more revealing to this discussion is the difference between 'king's friends' and 'friends of the commonwealth'.[193] This crucial change in addressing the king and the commonwealth simultaneously, but giving preference to one (the commonwealth) over the other (the monarch), adds to a minor point implied by a great deal of the evidence seen here: that even though loyalist language prevailed as a continuity, people felt that a greater distance from the king was better for the commonalty when he showed himself oppressive and a heretic. For one thing, the commons of 1536 may have been building on the same claim made by the sailors in 1450 – that they knew the crown as the 'community' of the realm, and did not know any king;[194] or on another assertion made in 1497: that one needed not to pray for the king by name for the righteous king was hard to identify.[195] For another, and this is more revealing, there was less reference to evil counsel in 1536. In 1450 and later, people had blamed the men about the king more persistently and, in almost every article of their grievances, by portraying themselves as his close and 'best friends'. One of Jack Cade's manifestoes was entirely dedicated to addressing the acts of the evil counsellors who plotted the destruction of the king and the commons, to the point that all the articles

[190] Emphasis added: reference cited above, n.165, p.240.
[191] See the manifesto of 1469, for instance: *JVB*, pp.212-3.
[192] *LP*, XII/1, 901.
[193] For the discussion of the 'commonwealth' vocabulary, see n.17 above.
[194] Cited and quoted above, p.202 and n.12.
[195] Arthurson, *Perkin Warbeck*, p.167.

follow the formula 'they say', 'they inform', 'they ask', as opposed to the propositions that follow with 'we say / we wold'. Likewise, in 1469 the people under Robin of Redesdale agreed to the formula 'the seid seducious personnes' in all of their nine articles.[196] In 1536, however, even though the king's council was indeed part of the discourse and the rebels had to proclaim their loyalty to the king to protect themselves in advance, the insistence was on rising 'for a Comen welthe [because] if thay did not so, the Comynaltie and the Churche shulde be distroyed'.[197]

As explained above, the loyalist language persisted, and the commons in 1536 took an oath 'to the preservation of the king's person [and] his issue, to the purifying of the nobility, and to expulse all villain blood and evil counsellors against the commonwealth from his grace and his privy council'.[198] But they did not consistently blame the council for everything, as they had in both 1450 and 1469. Instead, the commons took a step back and wished to be also loyal to the church, the 'Comens and the welthis (*sic*)'.[199] The Lincolnshire articles, for instance, directly addressed the council only once, and they complained about low-born counsellors that the king himself 'takes', and of the heretic bishops 'of the King's late promotion'; but it is left unclear whom to blame for the remaining complaints (the suppression of abbeys, the Act of Uses, and taxation).[200] In the meeting at Pontefract, the pilgrims considered the council only twice: in a seemingly threatening way, as in 1469, because 'Richarde the ii was deposyd for folowing the cunsell of susche like'; and attacking Cromwell; but they also complained about the king's rigour and questioned the legitimacy of the whole Reformation parliament.[201] Among the twenty-four articles written on 2-4

[196] In: *Warkworth's Chronicle*, pp.47-9; *JVB*, pp.212-3. Westervelt, 'Manifestoes for Rebellion', p.188 has recently argued that Clarence and Warwick, in 1470, were blaming the king directly, not the council. While that is reasonably convincing, it does not seem to be the case of the commons as this section proposes. See also the discussion of the 'privy council' in Guy, 'The King's Council and Political Participation', pp.142-5.
[197] *Archaeologia*, 16 (1812), p.331; *LP*, XI, 826.
[198] *LP*, XI, 705.
[199] *Original Letters*, 3rd/3, CCLXXIV.
[200] *LP*, XI, 705.
[201] *LP*, XI, 1244.

December 1536, only two were direct attacks on the council (again, on the heretic bishops and Cromwell), while the rest were as diverse as, for example, the restoration of the Friars Observants or complaints about enclosures.[202] On the whole, while the ambiguity of the Pilgrims' statements undoubtedly fits the tradition of 1450 and 1469, their relative and implicit readiness to challenge the king shows us that something was changing – and this was part of the looser tie to the king shown throughout this section and in the statistical survey above.[203]

The last comparison with the words agreed by Jack Cade's men in Blackheath demonstrates an increased emphasis on financial oppression.[204] Even though the discourse of oppression was seen as a remarkable continuity above, we must note that it adopted more words that seemed to express sharper resentment. The commons in 1450 had advised their king that he was 'steryd & mevyd to live only on his comyns', a discourse that had many contemporary adherents both before and after the rebellion; and they repeatedly complained about oppression exerted not only by the evil counsellors but through local corruption, 'extortions' and bribes. Edward IV strategically proposed to 'live of his own' in the parliament session of 1467, though the issues raised in the rebellion of 1469 were again focused on similar 'oppression and extortions' that went unpunished. Yet given the improvement of the crown's finances from 1471 in comparison to those of Henry VI and the 1460s, the specific claim 'to live of his own' seems to have given space to the criticism of general exploitation via taxation – both official (approved by parliament) and extra-official (such as the benevolences and the Amicable Grant).[205] There is an apparent innovation in vocabulary to attack taxes with words that express the metaphorical violence in the act of

[202] *LP*, XI, 1246.
[203] Above: Figure 11, p.229.
[204] Again, the manifestoes are the same as in n.165.
[205] *PROME*, 1467, It.7 (20 Aug. 2019). For the improvement of the management of the crown's revenues and taxation, see: Carpenter, *Wars of the Roses*, pp.165-8; B.P. Wolffe, *The Royal Demesne in English History* (1971), pp.146-80; G. Harriss, 'The King and His Subjects', in Horrox, *Fifteenth-Century Attitudes*, pp.23-5. For some local evidence, see above p.167 and n.128.

taking money from the people. The expressions 'pilling', 'polling', and 'shaving' – briefly mentioned in the previous chapter[206] – increasingly either accompanied ideas of 'robbery' or replaced the old claims of 'extortion'.[207] They were resourcefully adapted to describe various situations by all levels of society, though all relate to the oppression of the most vulnerable.[208]

Both the *Middle English Dictionary* and the *Oxford English Dictionary* point out that the word pilling, for instance, is closely linked to taking money or property through violence, but more interestingly, its etymology is related to peel (or to remove an outer layer, including skin/hair).[209] This is why 'shaving' and 'polling' (synonym to shave) were also being used in parallel to 'pilling' – as if taxation and extortion were an act that 'shaved' people from their outer (material / financial) protection. As early as 1504, one Thomas Gooch suggested, in Norwich, that 'the king was but a pillor of his people and my lord of Oxford an extorcioner'.[210] In 1508, Thomas Gylden of Kirkby, Lincolnshire, was indicted for attacking the local constable and disrespecting JPs, and for adding that he did not care for the king's business for he was an '*extorcionator anglice* [and] such a piller *suorum pauperum [et] generosorum*'.[211] Critics of Wolsey, in 1521-2, would say that his 'retainers' were 'All proude knavys full of disdaine, / And [th]at Can bothe polle & shave'; and in 1528: '[th]ou pillyste, [th]ou pollysted, & borowste eke; / To pay A-againe, no man [th]ou doste seke'.[212]

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[206] See above, pp.166-7.
[207] Further to what follows, see 'extortion' used against the king, but extended by 'knave and traitor' in the interesting words of Margaret Cowpland above, p.205 and n.26. And the rebels in 1536: *LP*, XI, 1182, 1246. For 'robbery': *Anglica Historia*, pp.314-5; *LP*, IV/1, 1567; VIII, 565, 567, 609, 802; KB8/7/1/1-4.
[208] See Hall, Skelton, and Cavendish in n.127, p.167. As well as Richard Morison resorting to 'pilled' and 'polled' to attack the pope: S. Anglo, 'An Early Tudor programme for plays and other demonstrations against the Pope', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 20 (1957), p.178.
[209] 'Pīling(e', in *MED*; and 'pilling', in *OED* (28 May 2019). A close observation of the examples in both dictionaries also reveals that the uses of 'shaving' and 'polling' as complaints against oppression are indeed quite rare in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. 'Poll', with that meaning, seems to appear from 1490; 'Shave' appears in a confusing sentence by Chaucer, but is only clearer in the sixteenth century; 'Pill' was more broadly used earlier in the late medieval period as it comes from the common word 'pillage', though it was rarely paired with the other two until the sixteenth century.
[210] DL3/4, N1 & a-d. Similarly in DL5/4/138v, 141v. Both were wishing for Edmund de la Pole to set the kingdom free from 'this polling'.
[211] KB9/961/72-3.
[212] *Ballads from Manuscripts*, pp.335, 353. Compare with the vocabulary of decay and corruption (blaming Wolsey) in *Skelton Poems*, pp.201-14, 242. And see: Fox, *Politics and Literature*, pp.156-72.

An unidentified woman complained, in June 1535, that 'since this new queen was made there was never so much pilling and polling in this realm, asking a vengeance also upon her'.[213] In November 1537, one John Newman was recorded for saying that 'It [wa]s [a] pity that the King was ever crowned, for [the people] had more pilling and polling since he was crowned than ever we had before, and it [wa]s [a] pity that he lived so long'.[214] An anticlerical poem written in 1533 states that the clergy went about 'shavinge and pollinge'.[215] Clerics, on the other hand, were glad to hear news from London, in November 1535, for 'ye temporal men be pilled and polled as well as the spiritual men be'.[216] A deposition in January 1537, revealed a conversation in which the king was called 'a poller and a shaver of the realm' adding that 'there never was so much polling and shaving in England as now'.[217] Hence, these words were vastly used in difficult circumstances to describe the metaphorical violence of economic exploitation, illustrating the extortion, oppression, and robbery of the old times with seemingly new concepts.

One last piece of apparent change that involves the use of the vocabulary analysed here demands attention: while physical violence seems to have decreased (at least in rebellions), negotiations with authorities increased, and we have noticed throughout this section that linguistic violence might have grown.[218] Mobs of commoners had taken action in their own hands relatively often to kill important figures and nobles between 1400 and

[213] *LP*, VIII, 838.
[214] *LP*, XII/2, 1068.
[215] *Ballads from Manuscripts*, p.265.
[216] *LP*, IX, 791.
[217] *LP*, XII/1, 126.
[218] This could be compared to the level of violence in rebellions discussed in: V. Challet, 'Violence as a political language: the uses and misuses of violence in late medieval French and English popular rebellions', in Firnhaber-Baker and Schoenaers, *The Routledge History Handbook of Medieval Revolt*, pp.279-291. Though all the strategies adopted by popular action were still in play, there does not seem to be the same level of violence in the early sixteenth century. See more discussion in: Dumolyn & Haemers, 'Subversive Speech', p.86; Wood, *Riot, Rebellion and Popular Politics*, p.50; Walter, *Crowds and Popular Politics*, p.2. For negotiations and attacks at local level, see the examples on pp.185-6, and: KB9/401/9; 1109, mm. unnumbered; 446/40-1; 417/59, 418/6, 33, 43; 436/13.

1489.[219] Conversely, when it comes to symbolic violence conveyed by speech an apparent shift is revealed by the speech acts of commoners in the later period. While the commons of southern counties had threatened to 'put down' Edward IV quite early, they never seemed to have seriously threatened his life in speech as others did to later rulers. Examples of violent speech are seen throughout this and the previous chapter, and they are not restricted to the period after 1527 when the king's divorce and the Reformation were on the horizon. We have seen, for instance, statements in 1490 wishing 'a pound of molten lead in the king's belly, for he did never good since he came to this land'.[220] In 1523, one Peter Wylkynson was accused of treasonable language in Norfolk because, whilst spreading exaggerated news about more taxation, he did not blame Wolsey, but added that 'rather than we should pay any taxes, it were better to take against king Herry', and 'get him by the head, and bring him down'.[221] And the discipline of the rebels and the king's response in 1536-7, for example, led a chronicler to state, in an exaggerated fashion, that they were 'appeaced *without* bloodde sheding'.[222] If symbolic violence conveyed by political language was understood both by authorities and the people, the decrease in physical popular action might reflect not merely the growth in negotiations but also the effectiveness of popular language itself. The commons were continually reacting to the structures of oppression in similar ways, but adjusting their tone and attacks according to the circumstances, and those circumstances were understandably alarming in the 1530s.

Given these last claims and the figures in Section 2.1, one could claim that even though people's reaction in speech became more radical (Figure 11), the commons increasingly

[219] Harvey, 'Was There Popular Politics', pp.157-8; M. Hicks, 'Dynastic Change and Northern Society: The Career of the Fourth Earl of Northumberland, 1470-89', *Northern History*, 14 (1978), p.80.
[220] KB9/448/53, 56.
[221] *LP*, III/2, 3082.
[222] Emphasis added: *FC*, p.700.

shared their space in public discourse and potentially lost their former prominence (in comparing Figures 8 and 9).[223] Such an interpretation might, ultimately, contribute to Andy Wood's compelling argument about 'the end of rebellion' in the later sixteenth century.[224] However, the analysis here has depicted one specific picture of a challenging period, and within its temporal limits (*c.*1461-1537) these conjectural changes in both numbers and vocabulary are significant to the understanding of popular opinion broadly speaking – not just the feelings and actions revealed by rebellions. Similar analysis about charges of abusive language and its social distribution during the remaining part of the sixteenth century would probably suggest various pictures given the political, social, economic and religious instability that people faced. Nonetheless, the claims of Chapter III remain unchallenged: that popular speech was more frequently seen as sedition itself – a development which only seems to have grown later[225] – and that popular speakers acted persuasively and intentionally whenever they could and thought necessary. Here we have seen that this inherent 'seditiousness' was also because people persistently challenged hierarchy by addressing oppression in various ways. The shift in numbers illustrates that such behaviour was increasingly treated as treason, but we have seen that it also became increasingly treasonable while popular statements were progressively critical of the king himself in strained contexts.

The overarching shift, therefore, is an interactive one: the consistent perception of escalating persecution of political dissent prompted intensified popular reactions. That intensification partly resulted in a higher number of treason cases, and partly catapulted more women and clerics to taking actions through speech. In that sense, public pressure certainly preceded the escalation of prosecution, and the evidence surveyed in Section 2.2 has shown

[223] Respectively: pp.229, 225-6.
[224] Wood, *Riot*, *Rebellion*, *and Popular Politics*, pp.71-81; Idem, *1549 Rebellions*, pp.1-10, 187-207. See also (with a lot of reservations): R.B. Manning, *Village Revolts: Social Protest and Popular Disturbances in England*, *1509-1640* (Oxford, 1988), pp.3-4.
[225] Adam Fox has demonstrated that between the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I, about 86% of the charges still comprised only commoners: A. Fox, 'Rumour, news and popular political opinion in Elizabethan and early Stuart England', *Historical Journal*, 40/3 (1997), p.600.

more clearly that this pressure was noticeable not only by numbers. Specific choices of words later in the 1520s and 1530s revealed radical attacks, sympathy for a Scottish succession, loyalty to the crown conditioned by circumstances, and overall a more direct and symbolically violent approach to the king and his ministers than before. This all accumulated as public pressure in an interactive relationship with the anxieties of the government and the approval of the new law of treason – and even if the people had not been using words 'heretic' and 'tyrant' before 1534, the king himself paradoxically gave more words to public discussion by forbidding them. The commons still cared for the crown in the same manner, but when the king himself simultaneously represented the so-feared 'decay of the commonwealth' and the phantom of heresy, it was not only the council that was the main target of public speech – leading them to more allegations of treason.

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The charting of both continuities and shifts in this chapter, therefore, highlights one single pattern: the escalation of awareness about what commoners saw as political, social, economic (and, at the end of this period, religious) oppression informs and underlines a multiplicity of political ideas. The persisting themes in popular discourse between the people who lived their adulthood during the Wars of the Roses and those who lived it during the Reformation – the rhetoric of the commonalty, the appeal to stability, the concern with the commonwealth, and the endemic necessity of addressing structural oppression (via the evil council, the corrupt clerics, and the local officers and enclosures) – were either intensified or altered in various ways that reflect the wider political circumstances. Thus, it was the people's same attitude of defending the crown and the commonwealth in the name of stability and their wellbeing that progressively led to more significant public pressure and possibly to some estrangement between the commonalty and the monarch. Given the specific political context

of the 1530s, more criticism and more radical ideas came to light under new legislation and new leaders. Cromwell, as much as Wolsey, was trying to please his master in attempting new strategies to deal with public speech and political concord, but both the strategies and the new legislation, at least in part, should be seen as a reaction to the escalation of public pressure. In any case, it is now reasonably safe to argue that the changes in public speech noticed in this period, though revealing and significant, are minor observations in comparison to the striking continuities that prevailed, even in such a fundamentally different scenario. In the end, the continuities accumulated as public pressure itself, while the shifts in vocabulary and attitudes were produced by circumstances.

Overall, both the continuities and the shifts probably led to more fear of turmoil from the authorities' viewpoint. Lest we forget, a responsive political culture bred throughout the Middle Ages – to paraphrase Simon Walker – led the ruling classes to expect the crown's political and financial stability as their own; and whenever there was 'substantial failure of political management, [it] generated widespread friction'.[226] We can further extend this interpretation to close this chapter. To go back to the claims in Chapter I, we must always include the less privileged in this 'responsive' political culture: for the commons, the crown's health implied the 'wealth of the commonalty' too; while its sickness endured and deepened structural oppression. Such oppression led some to claim that it was a 'now a dayes' phenomenon; others, as we have seen in Chapter III, believed that they would 'never have better world' until some drastic change came or the king died. Moreover, it was precisely because of this responsive political culture that fear of turmoil might have directly informed the Treason Act of 1534 – more than an unreasonable authoritarian trend, an 'ideology', or a strategy. The government knew it needed the people's support for such radical changes, hence the symbolic enforcement of oaths from 1535. Instead of seeing an utterly 'oppressive'

[226] Walker, *Political Culture*, pp.260-1.

and ‘controlling’ government, therefore, we must see it as scared and responsive to pressure more than it had ever been in the confusing events of the Wars of the Roses. The natural consequence was to increase political communication, which we shall analyse in the following, and final, chapter.

PART III

DIALOGUE

CHAPTER V

'Not only to exhorte, but also to enfourme': Political Dialogue, Exchange and Communication

In the 1490s, an Italian travelling through the kingdom wrote that the English 'd[id] not trust each other to discuss either public or private affairs together'.[1] And yet, we have seen throughout this thesis that public discussion of important matters was widespread in this period, and was most likely increasing by the 1520s and 1530s. Perhaps as a result of this intensification, the Imperial Ambassador anticipated, in April 1533, that the king was going to 'forbid everyone under pain of death, to speak in public or private in favour of… Queen [Catherine]'.[2] Even though repression was indeed a frequent policy, the government did not always follow that path. Thus far we have seen scattered evidence of what historians generally call 'propaganda', and to judge by the extent of the government's preoccupation with rumours and seditious language, there is no question that the authorities believed it essential to communicate with subjects and avoid – as much as possible – misinformation and dissent. The governments of this period were aware of how important public opinion and reputation were to the successful legitimation of new dynasties, and the era has been described as, perhaps, the first time of 'public debate', 'mass politics' and 'media management'.[3] While royal proclamations were nothing new, they had been changing, increasing, being printed to supplement the oral tradition, and being more widely and consistently distributed after 1484.[4] The role of the King's Printer would only be established

[1] *A Relation of England*, p.33.
[2] *CSPSp*, IV/2, 1058.
[3] Watts, 'Politics, War and Public Life', pp.28-9. A similar statement, though exaggerated in a few issues, is found in: A. Goodman, *The New Monarchy: England 1471-1534* (1988), p.79.
[4] Allan, 'Royal Propaganda and the proclamations of Edward IV', pp.146-154; Thornton, 'Propaganda, Political Communication', pp.41-3; Davies, 'Information, Disinformation and Political Knowledge', pp.229-30; G. Elton, 'The Sessional Printing of Statutes, 1484 to 1547', in Ives, Knecht & Scarisbrick, *Wealth and Power in Tudor England*, pp.68-86. For a longer perspective: J.A. Doig, 'Political propaganda and royal proclamations in late medieval England', *HR*, 71/176 (1998), pp.253-280. See an interesting analysis of the material and language of statutes in: D. Rowland, 'The End of the Statute Rolls: Manuscript, Print and Language Change in

in 1504, though some early printing was clearly conceived as an attempt to influence public opinion, and Thomas Cromwell recognisably built upon this technique. Similarly, there was nothing new in making use of preachers as Henry VIII did, but the frequency and the fact that by the end of this period all the pulpits in the kingdom were under the authority of the king himself is something to be taken into account.[5] There is indeed a sense in which political communication engendered by the crown followed this overall trend of more communication, but this chapter intends to set aside ideas of 'propaganda' in favour of a more dialogic approach that complements the conclusions of the previous chapters.

Historians have dealt with political communication in various ways, but there are two primary interpretations of how royal policy addressed and approached the people and public opinion. The first is more explicitly concerned with 'propaganda'.[6] There is evidence to suggest that political dialogue and levels of propaganda were increasing; that a sense of communication was present in virtually all statutes, proclamations, and printed material; that people were being invited to take political views during and after the Wars of the Roses; and that there was a growing awareness about the necessity of influencing public opinion.[7] It has also been suggested that we might distinguish between a propaganda – when the crown used deceitful discourses – and a publicist strategy – when the discourse was about 'facts'.[8] Bernard Taithe and Tim Thornton have recently asserted that the concept of propaganda allows historians to examine means of 'communication and persuasion' at the same time that

Fifteenth-Century English Statutes', in L. Clark (ed.), *The Fifteenth Century XI* (Woodbridge, 2012), pp.107-25.

[5] See: Cooper, *Propaganda*, pp.26, 51, 216.

[6] I will not address architecture or specific visual arts as signs of 'propaganda', even though that is also a promising field explored by historians. See, for instance: M. Condon, 'God save the king! Piety, propaganda, and the perpetual memorial', in T. Tatton-Brown and R. Mortimer (eds.), *Westminster Abbey: The Lady Chapel of Henry VII* (Woodbridge, 2003), pp.59-98; R.B. Marks, 'Yorkist-Lancastrian Political and Genealogical Propaganda in the Visual Arts', *Family History*, 12 (1982), pp.149-66.

[7] Gunn, *Early Tudor Government*, p.202; Hicks, *Political Culture*, p.211; Allan, 'Political Propaganda', p.3; Ross, 'Rumour, Propaganda and Popular Opinion', p.15; Elton, *Policy and Police*, p.173; Heinze, *Proclamations of the Tudor Kings*, pp.6-12; Goodman, *The New Monarchy*, p.79.

[8] C. Richmond, 'Propaganda in the Wars of the Roses', *History Today*, 42 (1992), pp.13-18. That propaganda was a conscious and 'possibly cynical' attitude is also shared by Allan, 'Political Propaganda', pp.378-9.

it allows us to look at how the language of propaganda appealed to established perceptions and political cultures.[9] But historians have simultaneously raised problems with the notion of propaganda: that it was usually intended for high levels of society;[10] that the concept could be misleading and anachronistic;[11] that only the most straightforward messages might have reached the people;[12] that people needed simple and easily recognisable symbols and that propaganda is, in fact, an academic invention.[13] Academics have also debated about the weaknesses of narratives concerned with the 'rise of the public sphere' in which propaganda played a role of manipulation in opposition to 'genuine' public opinion.[14]

Some scholars have taken the idea of propaganda further, to propose a policy that – together with the intensification of the Tudor state – excluded the common people from politics, attempted to 'censor' political dissent more persistently, and intended to control 'thoughts'.[15] Geoffrey Elton had a few reservations about the efficacy and purpose of proclamations but he mostly emphasised the efficacy of Cromwell's circular letters as a full-scale propaganda campaign side by side with printed materials and preaching.[16] The numbers of accusations and executions in the 1530s led Elton to acknowledge the 'efficacy' of the Cromwellian 'positive policy of persuasion and coercion', and therefore, to recognise that Cromwell was the absolute figure in the 'revolution' of those years.[17] Christopher Duggan, as seen above, advanced that the growing control over 'minds and bodies' resulted from new notions of authority and a newly devised relationship with public opinion.[18] Likewise, this

[9] Taithe & Thornton, *Propaganda*, pp.2-3.
[10] Allan, 'Political Propaganda', pp.4-5.
[11] J. Hughes, *Arthurian Myths and Alchemy. The Kingship of Edward IV* (Stroud, 2002), p.72. Also implied in B. Guenée, *L'Opinion Publique*, pp.8-9.
[12] Gunn, *Early Tudor Government*, p.200.
[13] Anglo, *Images of Tudor Kingship*, p.130.
[14] Discussed in: Taithe & Thornton, *Propaganda*, p.9.
[15] See also the discussion above, pp.136-7.
[16] Elton, *Policy and Police*, pp.218-43. Reservations recently shared by: Thornton, 'Propaganda, Political Communication', pp.42-5.
[17] Elton, *Policy and Police*, pp.222, 232, 394.
[18] Duggan, 'Thought Control', pp.166-7, 260-4. See the Introduction, pp.13-16.

same, supposedly new, relationship with popular perspectives led David Cressy to highlight that governments in the early modern period believed that the common people had no business with the 'affairs of the kingdom', and because of that premise it became increasingly dangerous to dispute politics.[19] The intensification of the Tudor state is also the focus of John Cooper's approach to propaganda, but he skilfully advances a significant element of political exchange between the crown and the western counties.[20] In this sense, control, censorship and enforcement of authority remain a common approach to political communication, especially in analyses of the Tudor period, but there is more to be said about it.

Despite their importance to this study and their contribution to the field, these perspectives of 'propaganda' or the advent of 'thought control' may demand untenable assumptions. The main one is, perhaps, to assume that there was indeed a conscious propaganda strategy that resorted to lies and deceitful discourses, and that mostly ignored the common people.[21] We have seen that although the commons were indeed depicted as ignorant fools, such a stereotype does not nullify the fact that the government feared their rebellions and seditious language as much as their rumours in troublesome periods.[22] A second assumption that traditional approaches usually demand, and harder to agree with after the conclusions of the previous chapters, is to consider strategies of communication in this period as a one-way relationship in which the crown was powerful enough to organise a 'system of police' or to 'censor' political ideas.[23] The epitome of these narratives, Thomas Cromwell, was neither completely innovative nor revolutionary: he should be regarded as the ultimate result of an ongoing process of how the government reacted to the people – a

[19] Cressy, *Dangerous Talk*, pp.10, 48.
[20] See especially ch. 8 in: Cooper, *Propaganda*, pp.51, 210-39.
[21] Allan, 'Political Propaganda', pp.4-5, 378-9; Richmond, 'Propaganda in the Wars of the Roses', pp.13-18.
[22] For the depiction and public pressure see above, pp.59-78; as for the anxiety surrounding rumours, see pp.107-14. See also the dynamics at local level in: Liddy, 'Cultures of Surveillance', pp.312-13.
[23] I refer again to both Elton, *Policy and Police*, p.232; and Duggan, 'Thought Control', pp.166-7, 260-4.

process that dates back, at least, to the Wars of the Roses.[24] Surely, there were unequal levels of power involved in this interaction between rulers and ruled, but as we have seen throughout this thesis, the people always made moves in reaction to government measures as much as the government invariably reacted to public pressure.

Therefore, this chapter will explore the complex means of political communication of this period in the light of a two-way relationship.[25] In order to do so, we shall consider the concepts of 'political dialogue' and 'political exchange', in Section 1, as more fruitful than narrow ideas of propaganda or censorship.[26] First, through the lens of a 'dialogue', one can see these regimes differently, that is, both fearful and susceptible to the public pressure and popular speech. More importantly, following from the previous chapters, we should see these governments as responsive rather than simply authoritative. And second, the concept of 'exchange' helps us to keep in mind that this was surely a dialogue of unequal proportions, that the discursive conflicts explored in the previous chapters constantly permeate the following analysis. As we shall see in Section 2, whenever the crown preferred to avoid such political struggles, it made use of its power to engage in what will be called here a 'pretended dialogue'. From this point of view of a 'pretended' interaction, we shall still understand that authorities were responsive to pressure, that every single effort analysed in Section 2 – instructions, performances of unity, refusals to answer to public demands, and the enforcement of obedience – took place in a dialectical framework and was always making sure it used familiar tropes, contemplated the audience and avoided misunderstanding. In

[24] For Cromwell: Thornton, 'Propaganda, Political Communication', pp.48-50. Other remarks in S. Anglo, *Spectacle*, *Pageantry and Early Tudor Poetry* (Oxford, 1969), pp.271-4; Watts, 'Politics, War and Public Life', pp.35-6.

[25] Here it is worth mentioning Stuart Minson's work on political communication in London. He has argued in similar ways to the points of this chapter, though focused on the civic interactions: Minson, 'Political Culture and Urban Space', chs.3-5.

[26] J. Dumolyn, 'Political Communication and Political Power in the Middle Ages: A Conceptual Journey', *Edad Media. Revista de Historia*, 13 (2012), pp.41-2. For the related approach of 'political exchange' see the introduction to: Boucheron & Offenstadt, *L'Espace Public au Moyen Âge.* I also rely on the similar approach of Sharpe, *Selling the Tudor Monarchy*, pp.xxiv, 11, 34-57, even though I disagree with his emphasis on the novelties (a 'new political culture', p.xxv) of the early modern period.

parallel, this last chapter will emphasise the continuity of ideas of communication over the minor changes. Although the means of conveying official communication and its frequency increased, both due to the pressure of unique circumstances and due to better use of new technology, royal authorities employed primarily the same tactics and extremely similar vocabulary later in the period.

1. Dialogue and Exchange

This section will demonstrate that there is compelling evidence for seeing a political dialogue in the traditional evidence of propaganda and, in doing so, paint a better picture of the vocabulary and exchange of political ideas through which the crown approached and responded to its subjects. Given that the primary goal of this analysis is to consider the evidence broadly discussed as 'propaganda' by others, petitions and the dialogue implied in the dynamics of parliament are not in the scope of this chapter – though it is useful to point out that proclamations could originate from petitions themselves.[27] Firstly, this section will chart the government's interest in responding to public complaints by observing what seem like direct answers in delicate contexts, and by pointing out indirect ones when the crown addressed issues in advance of possible turmoil. We shall also see that there was a frequent use of common vocabulary in government's responses, as well as echoes of public opinion which all refer to the pressure of the people – that is, the rumours, and the seditious and treasonable language analysed in the previous chapters.

First of all, although the crown reacted directly to public demands in rather unusual or possibly dangerous circumstances, the fact that it was a reaction or a response stresses the

[27] For petitions: W.M. Ormrod, 'The Language of Complaint: multilingualism and petitioning in later medieval England', in J. Wogan-Browne (ed.), *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain: The French of England c. 1100-c.1500* (York, 2009), pp.31-43; Ormrod, 'Murmur, Clamour and Noise', pp.136-55; Hoyle, 'Petitioning as Popular Politics', pp.365-89. For proclamations originating from petitions, see the observations in: Heinze, *Proclamations of the Tudor Kings*, pp.9-12.

concern with proper dialogue. The government probably felt that it needed to respond to the people by using familiar vocabulary whenever the fear that dissent could spread became real. The 'traitorous purpose' of the Lincolnshire men, as well as that of Warwick and Clarence, was immediately responded to in 1470. The proclamation emphasised the 'banners displayed' against the king, their unlawful proclamations to gather rebels in Yorkshire, and the open declaration of Warwick and Clarence as rebels.[28] When a proclamation against Buckingham's rebellion was issued in October 1483, Richard III attempted to publicise Buckingham's traitorous purpose and ensure support at least among the northern and loyal subjects.[29] However, the rebellion had long-lasting effects on Richard's confidence in addressing his subjects. In the proclamation of January 1484 he declared, in advance of his progress through Kent, that people had been blinded by a few leaders who intended the 'subversion of the common weal', but he responded to the rebels by also advertising his concern for justice, saying he would 'reform, punish, and subdue all extortions and oppressions' and urging people to bring forward their complaints.[30] Apart from later allegations echoing in chronicles that Buckingham's followers were avenging the death of the princes or already flirting with the idea of supporting Henry Tudor, Richard was clever enough to make use of the customary catch-all phrase of 'extortions and oppressions'.[31]

Naturally, Henry VII followed the same practice to address rebellions and prevent them from spreading. In Yorkshire in 1489, the government's claims that the rebels intended the 'subversion of the politic weal' and the 'destruction of south parts' were designated to dissuade people from rebellion.[32] This attack was simultaneously a direct negative reference to the rebels' proclamation which addressed the 'northe partes of England' and urged people

[28] *CCR*, II, 529.
[29] *YHB*, II, p.414.
[30] Gairdner, *Richard III*, pp.343-4.
[31] *Three Books of Vergil*, pp.194-200; *HC*, pp.381-95.
[32] *TRP*, 19.

to withstand those who would 'dystroy oure sufferein'.[33] Likewise, the western rebels in 1497 were demanding reforms, blaming the 'evil counsellors' and resisting to contribute to the expedition against Scotland.[34] The proclamation again typically twisted the discourse, claiming that the rebels would destroy the kingdom and were responsible for the retreat of the troops prepared to go to the northern borders.[35] These official claims may sound as if the crown only offered negative answers to shut down the voices of rebels, but it was also responding in an established and customary way, that is, by offering denunciations so that the rest of the people would remain obedient and loyal.

Even though these negative reactions were only trying to readjust public discussion and keep people obedient, they also show that royal officials were alarmed with the possible consequences and this became even more transparent in the 1530s. Officially-sanctioned preaching against the Nun of Kent's prophecies and supporters in November 1533 claimed that she put the king 'in danger of his realm and crown, and the nobles and commons of this realm in continual strife', and this was clearly perceived as an attempt to 'blot out from people's minds the impression they have that [she was] a saint and a prophet'.[36] During the turmoil of the Pilgrimage of Grace, the people of the northern counties prompted the crown to publish materials for the first time addressing and answering rebels directly. Tellingly, two out of four publications which addressed the rebels were characterised as 'answers'.[37] Even though they seem quite different from merely banning hostile perspectives or announcing official ones, these 'answers' emphasised several times how inappropriate the rebels' behaviour was, how they were 'rude and ignorant', and how their idea of addressing the king with such petitions was just 'madness'. Subsequently, the other two were printed,

[33] *Paston Letters*, VI, 1039.
[34] *Six Town Chronicles*, p.173; *Chronicles of London*, p.216; *Anglica Historia*, pp.92-3.
[35] *TRP*, 35.
[36] Whatmore, 'The Sermon Against the Holy Maid of Kent', p.464; *CSPSp*, IV/2, 1154. Reference to preaching is also found in: *WC*, pp.23-4.
[37] *Morison's Tracts*, pp.172-3, 177-8, 182-3; *LP*, XI, 780, 897.

symbolically at least, as an attempt to cool down the rebellion, make a statement about the government's position and prevent important figures from joining it. The first of Richard Morison's efforts, entitled *A Lamentation in which is shown what pain and destruction cometh of seditious rebellion*, addressed the rebels in the same manner, that is, as ignorant fools, or as beasts from rude countries who had no love for the commonwealth. And yet, the government's fear of rebellion was evident when Morison stated that 'the King's Grace will so prudently and graciously order this [rebellion] that hereafter England shall have little fear of insurrections'.[38] However, in Morison's second tract, *A Remedy for Sedition*, he not only persisted in the language of the 'commonwealth' ideal, but also recognised that punishment only 'helpeth but for a season', as the only remedy for sedition was obedience and concord.[39] Later he realised that the Pilgrimage of Grace 'wold have done excedynge moche hurt to England'.[40]

The purpose of these symbolic interactions was, therefore, to emphasise the official narrative about the rebels, to restate that the government always cared for the commonwealth and to avoid widespread turmoil. As Geoffrey Elton stressed, we cannot know whether this publishing effort was effective or not, but some recorded reactions of ambassadors and other sources show that these 'answers' and tracts at least circulated – together with other circular letters, proclamations, and sermons.[41] The rebels' sympathisers in aristocratic circles might have indeed read or heard about some of these writings, and they might well have discussed them during and after the Pilgrimage – even if Morison was primarily concerned with a foreign audience, as has been claimed by Tracey Sowerby.[42] Similarly, the proclamations claimed that the rebels were, obviously, traitors but most importantly that there were

[38] *Morison's Tracts*, p.90.
[39] *Morison's Tracts*, pp.112, 116-7, 125. And see: Cooper, *Propaganda*, p.239.
[40] Morison, *Exhortation to styrre all Englyshe*, D1v-2r.
[41] Elton, *Policy and Police*, pp.207-8.
[42] Sowerby, 'A brave knight and learned gentleman', pp.59-75.

'slanderous, false, and detestable rumours, tales and lies' responsible for alienating the people's heart from the king. When the pardon was granted, the offence was said to proceed of 'ignorance and by cause of sundry false tales never minded or intended by his highness'. In this proclamation, the king also assumed a threatening tone – not common in most royal responses to risings – while explaining that any unlawful assembly would be destroyed by royal power, as well as the rebels' 'wives, and children, with fire and sword, to the most terrible example of such rebels and offenders'.[43] Even so, although the government's answers were hostile to the commons and their leaders, and although the regime insisted on its right to obedience, these examples show that authorities were indeed entering into a political dialogue, as these tracts and proclamations were direct answers to pressure. As Ethan Shagan has argued, by addressing the rebels through 'public' commentaries, both Morison's attacks and the proclamation involuntarily legitimised – even created – public engagement.[44] The need to label the rebels' statements as falsehoods, then, demonstrates an awareness of the risk that others could indeed believe the insurgents. Authorities had to engage in a discursive conflict that minimised such risks.

Occasionally, the government's attitudes to public complaints were more positive than in times of dangerous rebellion, even in a period broadly considered as more repressive. Henry VIII attempted to be responsive to public issues from the first days of his reign when he decided to imprison his father's unpopular ministers Richard Empson and Edmund Dudley. They were sent to the Tower and convicted of treason months later but it was only after listening to a series of 'grevous billis & complaintis' while progressing through the country that Henry finally decided to execute them in the summer of 1510 – which Vergil

[43] *TRP*, 167-9. A concise narrative of the government's responses to and negotiations with the Pilgrims can be found in: Hoyle, *Pilgrimage of Grace*, pp.304-38; Dodds & Dodds, *Pilgrimage of Grace*, I, pp.274, 297-8.
[44] E. Shagan, 'The Pilgrimage of Grace and the Public Sphere?', in Lake and Pincus, *Politics of the Public Sphere*, pp.31-54.

claimed to have indeed appeased the 'indignation of the people'.[45] The next of the government's significant response to public pressure involved taxation and the king's decision to resume costly wars with France and Scotland. Passive resistance to taxation was apparent in the north in 1513, yet the most impressive concession of this period took place in 1525 when people had already paid the most substantial sums of the last generations and were requested to contribute with the renewed and extended Yorkist 'benevolence': the Amicable Grant.[46] We have seen how widespread these complaints were in the previous chapters, as well as how some, according to Hall, claimed that 'the Cardinall and all the doers therof were enemies of the king and to the common wealth'.[47] People in London, Kent, Suffolk and elsewhere demanded exemption from the new imposition and the repayment of the late loans, but after many negotiations, the whole matter had to be abandoned, and peace with France eventually agreed and proclaimed.[48] Two factors must be taken into account here. The first is that these negotiations about taxation and their result demonstrate an acute attempt to be positively responsive to public pressure which had both precedents (in 1489 and 1497) and legacies (in 1536-7).[49] The second is the significance of the expression 'enemies of the king and the commonwealth'.

Even though we cannot claim that the government invited dialogue every time it used the language of the 'commonweal/th', the use of this rhetoric always appealed to public values in a positive tone and constantly tried to construct consensus around it. Historians have shown how this concept, when handled by the government and humanists, was related to an intellectual debate which gradually moved from 'common weal' to 'commonwealth'

[45] Respectively: *GC*, pp.337, 366; *Anglica Historia*, pp.152-3. See a succinct narrative in: S. Gunn, 'Dudley, Edmund (c.1462-1510)', *ODNB* (28 Nov. 2019).
[46] Bernard, *War*, *Taxation and Rebellion*, pp.53-75.
[47] *HC*, pp.696.
[48] *LP*, VI/1, 1243, 1260, 1264, 1266, 1272; *HC*, pp.697-703.
[49] For the comparison: Bush, 'Up for the Commonweal', p.318. The innovations in taxation always left scars and took a long time to be attempted again: Chrimes, *Henry VII*, pp.198-203. More about the Amicable Grant in: Bernard, *War*, *Taxation*, *and Rebellion*, pp.150-3.

with a few shifts in its meanings.[50] Arguably, it suffices to observe here that when the crown used the discourse of the commonweal, it was both to tighten the political dialogue with the people and to keep its essential meaning under control while opposing how the rebels used it.[51] In parliamentary records, 'common weal' became a frequent expression from 1453, accompanying the development of the Wars of the Roses and the consequences of Jack Cade's rebellion.[52] The 'common weal' was used to substantiate the king's title in 1484, just as the 'commonwealth' would be used against the pope's title in 1535.[53] More importantly, the royal proclamations of this period either used this discourse to attack rebels and traitors with such arguments or to advance economic and social issues, such as enclosure and other enforcements of statutes.[54] There is, therefore, a vast range of concerns that prompted the commonweal discourse – so vast that we cannot deal with them in detail here – but they can be all summarised as political exchanges. That is, the crown deployed an easily recognisable concept to address its people in a positive tone and seek consensus when pressured by circumstances, complaints and crisis.

The issue of enclosures was perhaps one of the areas in which the tightening of dialogue between the crown and the people can be more easily observed – and it also resorted to the 'common weal'. Parliament had begun to address it in 1489, but the bad harvests of 1511-3 and 1527-9 may explain both the growing complaints and the crown's answers.[55] According to Hall's chronicle, complaints against enclosure in London suburbs started

[50] Watts, '"Common Weal" and "Commonwealth"', pp.147-63; Knights *et al*, 'Commonwealth', p.669. Prior to this late shift, there had been also the important one from *communitas* in the thirteenth century, to common weal in the late fourteenth century: Fletcher, 'De la Communauté du Royaume au Common Weal', pp.359-372.
[51] As opposed to the meanings seen in Chapter III, pp.182-5.
[52] Between 1453 and 1509, sixty examples are found in a quick search of the internet version of the parliament records, referred to here as *PROME*.
[53] Gairdner, *Richard III*, pp.343-4; *TRP*, 158.
[54] *CLB*, II, pp.340-6; *Archaeologia*, 16 (1812), p.1; Gairdner, *Richard III*, pp.343-4; *YHB*, II, p.570; *King's Letters*, V.2, XIII, p.23; *TRP*, 19, 75, 77, 110, 118-9, 123, 128, 133-4, 138, 142, 163, 168. For the danger of treating statutes as 'propaganda' see some criticism in: Cavill, *Parliaments of Henry VII*, p.77.
[55] R. Horrox, 'Henry VII: Parliament of 1489, Introduction', in *PROME* (24 Jan. 2019); Gwyn, *The King's Cardinal*, pp.424-5.

around 1513, and proclamations were soon ordered as an answer to chastise 'enclosers' and 'engrossers' of farms as, again, 'enemies of the commonwealth'.[56] Enquiries about the enclosure of lands started in 1517, followed by 1518-19, 1526 and 1528.[57] Destruction of enclosures, however, was ordered only in 1526 and 1529 together with other proclamations to control offenders; while in 1528 it was commanded that 'relaters and furtherers of the commonwealth' should bring bills accusing enclosers before Wolsey.[58] Peter Gwyn argued that there is no reason to suppose that Wolsey did not believe in what he was doing for the 'common weal'.[59] In any case, the use of the commonweal rhetoric to address a socioeconomic concern like the enclosure of common fields can be seen as a strategy that both tightened and stretched the relationship with popular complaints - even if the concept had different meanings to people and rulers. That is especially true if we consider that the popular concern with enclosure was one of the elements of oppression that people incessantly attacked.[60]

Thus far we have observed political dialogue by the direct royal attacks on rebellions (with proclamations and printed materials), the language of the commonweal and the enclosures, but other more subtle and indirect attitudes show the government's awareness of public discussion and willingness to be the initiator of political exchange. During Robin of Redesdale's rising in 1469, the king wrote to Coventry referring to 'unfitting and sedicious tales and langage' against the laws, peace and the 'comyn wele and pollicie of this our lande'.[61] Other proclamations were issued as an attempt to contain seditious rumours, the 'untrue language of his highness', and the Lancastrian supporters in 1470.[62] Furthermore, the

[56] *HC*, p.568; *TRP*, 75.
[57] Gwyn, *The King's Cardinal*, pp.412-5.
[58] *TRP*, 110, 113-4, 119, 123.
[59] Gwyn, *The King's Cardinal*, p.434. See a similar argument in: J.J. Scarisbrick, 'Cardinal Wolsey and the Common Weal', in Ives, Knecht & Scarisbrick, *Wealth and Power in Tudor England*, pp.45-67.
[60] See above, pp.212-13.
[61] *CLB*, II, pp.350-6.
[62] *CCR*, II, 528-9, 534, 537.

Chronicle of the Lincolnshire Rebellion, possibly a 'blend of fact and fiction', was most likely ordered by the king himself or someone close to him in order to attack the popular memory of Warwick and Clarence, including their selfishness in opposition to the king's sole concern with the common good.[63] It has been suggested that this chronicle is short enough to be considered a pamphlet, meaning that copies could have circulated and been easily distributed – although the fact that there is only a single surviving copy may indicate otherwise.[64] Narratives like this chronicle were certainly targeting nobles and gentlemen, though it is noteworthy that they were responsive to a commotion among the people, some of whom were under the leadership of a few of these aristocrats.

This political dialogue between the crown and the people – even if via the aristocracy – remained virtually in the same terms later in the period and in several moments there is compelling evidence to envisage the government responding indirectly to public pressure.[65] Bishop Richard FitzJames, in a sermon of February 1495, highlighted the papal bull that legitimised Henry VII's marriage and title as a response to the alarming rumours about Perkin Warbeck.[66] The excommunication of Edmund de la Pole and his supporters at Paul's Cross, in October 1501, was also a means to contain the rumours and the number of plotters apparently rising.[67] Following from the increase in popular discussion, political communication reached outstanding levels during the debate around Henry VIII's attempt to annul his marriage from 1527. Publications, proclamations and preaching were all focused on indirectly answering subjects who resisted the royal claims. In 1530 the proclamation against papal bulls was allegedly prompted by widespread rumours around the possibility of

[63] The quotation is from: P. Holland, 'The Lincolnshire Rebellion of March 1470', *EHR*, 103/409 (1988), p.868. See also: J.L. Knapp, 'The Lincolnshire Rebellion and its Part in the Downfall of the Earl of Warwick', *The Ricardian*, IV/62 (1978), 23-31; and L. Visser-Fuchs, 'Jean de Wavrin and the English newsletters: the *Chronicle of the Rebellion in Lincolnshire*', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 47 (2003), pp.217-35.
[64] Allan, 'Political Propaganda', pp.143-191.
[65] Further to everything cited in this paragraph, see also the comments in: Gunn, 'Henry VII in Context', p.314.
[66] Cavill, 'Preaching on Magna Carta at the End of the Fifteenth Century: John Alcock's Sermon at Paul's Cross', in Clark, *The Fifteenth Century XV*, 174.
[67] *HC*, pp.495-6.

the Queen or Wolsey having 'purchased' papal Bulls against the king.[68] In the *Determinations of the Most Famous Universities* (1531), Edward Foxe advanced the argument of how 'filthye and sklaunderous' it was for a man to marry his brother's wife. His book tries to convince the possible reader that the pope had no authority over this matter, mainly because it was forbidden by the laws of God and Nature.[69] One may wonder whether this book had any wide circulation both for its size and amount of evidence, and this is probably why, in the following year, a popularised version of the same arguments was advanced with *A Glasse of Truthe.*

Right in the preface to the reader, the author of the *A Glasse of Truthe* tries to convince his audience by exploring familiar threats to the stability of the kingdom.[70] One was the possibility of civil war that could result from a doubtful succession to the crown. The other threat was the fact that if a princess succeeded Henry VIII, she could marry a foreigner and the kingdom would be ruled by him. Both arguments probably reminded the reader about the Wars of the Roses, and, although attacking the rule of women was a common theme, it also resembles Fortescue's attacks on the Yorkist title.[71] This claim is further emphasised using common biblical arguments to attack Catherine of Aragon's position as former wife of Prince Arthur, for any man who 'take in mariage the wife of his brother… shall perisshe fro the middes of his people'. Thus, there is an acute attempt to make readers promptly accept these arguments for they were evident in popular and religious terms: they were believed to move the hearts of 'treue subjectes' and drive away opinions based on 'ignorance'. By the constant repetition of the words 'lawful' and 'unlawful' to refer to the king's new and old marriages, there is a sense in which this vocabulary should convince anyone listening to the

[68] *TRP*, 130; *HC*, pp.772-3.
[69] E. Foxe, 'The Determinations of the Moste Famous… Vniversities of Italy and Fraunce…', in *The Divorce Tracts of Henry VIII*, ed. V. Murphy and E. Surtz (Angers, 1988), pp.36-47, 166-7.
[70] For what follows: *A Glasse of Truthe*, A2d-A3r, B7v.
[71] See: M. Kekewich, '"Thou shalt be under the power of man": Sir John Fortescue and the Yorkist Succession', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 42 (1998), pp.209-22. See also the treatment given to Margaret of Anjou from a Yorkist perspective, discussed in: Maurer, 'Delegitimizing Lancaster', pp.169-86.

royal proclamation in 1533.[72] In December that year, the Imperial ambassador reported that the government had decided to 'throw contempt on the Pope's authority', later saying that with the new publications in early 1534 the monarch wanted to 'better justify himself in the eyes of his people, and gain their favour'.[73] Such favour, from Chapuys's point of view, was only achieved by 'fables and inventions' and 'to the many practices and threats' to induce people to be hostile to the pope.[74] Chapuys's perspective – as a Catholic and an Imperial ambassador – might suggest several problems of interpretation, yet he was drawing on the actual crown's initiatives of printing tracts, preaching the new 'truth', and increasingly addressing the people by both direct and indirect metaphors and paraphrases.

Overall, therefore, the crown was constantly endeavouring to offer self-explanations. Naturally, the governments of this period did so by answering directly when rebellion threatened the establishment, for example, but there is compelling evidence to see 'answers' in a political dialogue even when the public pressure was not manifested by rebellion. Popular 'muttering' and slanderous comments about the king's marital affairs from 1527 were also responsible for the indirect answers that involved proclamations and printed tracts. All these answers – direct and indirect, negative and positive – were inserted in a discursive conflict between official and unofficial perspectives about important matters.

Besides these direct and indirect answers seen so far, virtually the same sources and communication strategies demonstrate an intersection of political cultures that contributed to political exchange. Scholars have argued that late medieval and early modern commoners were increasingly more creative in their reactions to official and elite discourse.[75] For that

[72] *TRP*, 140.
[73] *CSPSp*, IV/2, 1158; V/1, 1, 7, 9.
[74] *CSPSp*, V/1, 10.
[75] This was argued by Walker, while considering the works of Roger Chartier, Peter Burke and Ernst Kantorowicz: Walker, 'Rumour, Sedition and Popular Protest', pp.53-4.

reason, the crown had to adjust to such new reality in order to show concern with dialogue, such as re-using popular prophecies that were otherwise labelled as sedition.[76] On the one hand, as in the case of the commonweal vocabulary already mentioned, these sources may reveal common grounds and shared concepts rather than 'propaganda' strategies. On the other, they illustrate even more clearly that there was an official willingness to engage in a dialogue that can scarcely be seen as 'propaganda', but as a genuine concern with communication.

First of all, the fact that the surviving proclamations about wars, truces and peace treaties were widely distributed demonstrates a willingness to engage in an interaction that might well have sounded as self-explanation after periods of taxation, negotiation, the mustering of troops and 'failed' expeditions.[77] Moreover, they were generally sent to the affected areas, that is, to the northern counties if they referred to Scotland, to the southern ones if related to France, or the whole country if it was considered a prestigious announcement such as in 1490.[78] In the Yorkist period, these proclamations were ordered at least seven times between the 1460s and 1480s, and in 1471 the truce with Scotland was alleged to be 'for the weal of' both realms.[79] Similar vocabulary is found in 1502 while urging the people against the Turks and in 1514-15 when peace was agreed with France.[80] Other common ideas were conveyed about the intercourse of merchandise in 1496 and 1499, and to the 'laud of Almighty God and tranquillity' in 1502 and 1534.[81] Probably in consideration of the late conspiracies, the treaties with France in 1498 and with Scotland in 1502 were openly communicated to the realm, stipulating that the foreign monarchs would

[76] See a compelling argument and examples in: Coote and Thornton, 'Merlin, Erceldoune, Nixon: a tradition of popular prophecy', pp.117-38.
[77] Further to this paragraph, see: Gunn, Grummitt, & Cools, *War*, *State and Society*, pp.237-321.
[78] Alliance with Spain and the Empire: *TRP*, 23.
[79] Quoting: *CCR*, II, 772.
[80] *TRP*, 52, 76, 79.
[81] *TRP*, 33, 45, 52, 147.

not receive any English rebel or traitor in their dominions.[82] The French monarch was attacked because of his 'perverted opinions and erroneous mind' in order to secure taxation in 1512; he was depicted as a 'tyrant', to secure troops and recover the 'usurped, detained and withholden' territories in 1513; and in 1525 the proclamation of a peace treaty with France was propagated as Henry VIII's wise decision for 'the restfulness and tranquillity of Christendom, and… to the weal, quiet, and increase of this his realm and his loving subjects'.[83]

There is also a significant element of xenophobia in communications about international relations that appealed to established values and constructions of identity. It played a role in Yorkist emphasis on French and Scottish support for the Lancastrians in 1461 and on the fact that Margaret of Anjou was 'French-born' and daughter (*sic*) to the enemy in 1471.[84] Likewise, Richard III attempted to undermine Henry Tudor's sympathisers by highlighting his French support in 1484-5.[85] Furthermore, foreigners' accounts, the riot of 1493 against the Steelyard, the Evil May Day riots in 1517 and other events may point to the fact that if xenophobia was not part of popular culture, it was at least a means for negotiation both at local and national levels.[86] The people were seemingly always wary of foreigners, but certainly more frequently when there was indeed a threat of invasion.[87] Thus, evidence of echoes of popular values or, more accurately, intersections of political cultures should not imply that the crown received immediate sympathy just because it resorted to common tropes. These discourses merely reveal that the government was doing what it always did – basing public policy on the rhetoric of the commonweal and justice, as well as

[82] *TRP*, 40, 51.
[83] *TRP*, 65, 71, 73, 79, 104-5.
[84] *CCR*, I, pp.54-5; II, 703.
[85] *White Rose*, pp.280-1.
[86] *A Relation of England*, p.33; *GC*, p.248-9, *Anglica Historia*, pp.242-5, *HC*, pp.586-91. For a full discussion see: L.B. Luu, '"Taking the Bread Out of the Mouth": Xenophobia in Early Modern London', *Immigrants and Minorities*, 19/2 (2000), pp.1-3. For the idea of negotiation see Ian Archer's introduction to his *The Pursuit of Stability* (Cambridge, 1991).
[87] Gunn, *The English People at War*, p.128.

attacking enemies first in aggressive speech. Even though this was a customary practice and a general public disclaimer for a variety of situations, the crown was concurrently highlighting shared ideas of justice and accepted values that provided the necessary openness for more communication about taxation, war, and possibly unpopular policies.

Besides this vocabulary addressing foreign relations, we can also note that the government echoed and shared genuine public concerns about economic and social issues – on top of the direct address of enclosures mentioned above. In fact, royal proclamations frequently shared information and decisions about matters that were likely to be causing murmuring among the people. In 1464, Edward IV decided to solve the scarcity of coins in the kingdom, stating that although seditious language was being raised around the crown's decision, anyone who had reasons to think that the measure was not 'for the common weal but rather a loss and hurt, [should] come before him and his council and show them'.[88] Such readiness to engage in dialogue is again evident in his purposeful claims that he would 'live upon [his] own resources' in the parliament of 1467 – an echo of, at least, the manifestoes of Jack Cade's rebellion in 1450 and the Kentish men in 1460.[89] In July 1483 Richard III allegedly responded to the 'clamor, grugge, and complaints' that people in England were raising against the difference in the value of the Irish coins – an issue which would be raised three times later in the 1490s.[90] Another significant concern was with the availability, or more importantly the scarcity, of grains. The enforcement of statutes against illegal trading of grains – unlicensed export, 'forestalling, engrossing, and regrating', and prices – was particularly addressed in 1491 as a policy aimed at the 'commonweal' of the subjects, then similarly in 1512, 1514, 1528-9, 1531, and 1534.[91] The contemporary concern with vagrancy and its consequences – rumour-mongering, robbery, murder, and decay – was also

[88] *CCR*, I, p.216.
[89] *PROME*, 1467, It.7 (20 Aug. 2019); *JVB*, pp.210, 214.
[90] *LP RIII/HVII*, V.2, App.B, I, pp.286; *TRP*, 25, 43-4.
[91] *TRP*, 26, 66, 75, 125, 127, 134, 151.

significantly addressed by proclamations in this period.[92] And so was the enforcement of local jurisdiction propagated as part of the 'advancement of the commonwealth', especially in suppressing the endemic practice of extortion.[93] Rulers who echoed these popular concerns undoubtedly wanted to solve imminent problems; it was probably not just about discourse. Whereas, by its frequency and formula, one can also infer that the government was addressing what people understood as a structure of oppression, demonstrated by many of the attacks seen in Chapters III and IV.[94] Ultimately, these measures and discourses legitimised popular complaints about the economy, prices, local jurisdiction, and sometimes all of this together in the form of local tyranny and 'extortions'.

Such legitimation of the popular voices – or more accurately, a fabrication of them – was cleverly exploited to defend the title to the crown of England when facing treason and conspiracy. In 1461, the proclamation which announced the title of the Yorkist king referred to the state of the realm in terms strikingly similar to those of the commons both inside and outside parliament in 1449-50, stressing the loss of France, the 'oppression of the people and decay of commerce', as well as the lack of justice.[95] The proclamation goes on stating that traitors were oppressing the people in the countryside like 'Saracens or Turks', and were allegedly bringing a 'great multitude' of French and Scots, so people should help the king withstand them. In 1467, Edward IV echoed this proclamation in parliament, still emphasising that England was (before his accession) 'barren of justice, the peace not kept, nor the laws properly administered'.[96] This discourse against the 'king's enemies' that intended to prevent the 'subversion of the realm' was the case once again in 1470 – to attack Warwick and Clarence for their rebellious behaviour – and in 1471 – when the 'truth of God'

[92] *CCR*, II, 1090; *TRP*, 16, 22, 30, 63, 80, 118, 128, 131-2, 141; *Records of Leicester*, V.2, CCXXIII.
[93] *TRP*, 17, 138.
[94] By the Tudor period these concerns comprised by far the majority of proclamations: Heinze, *Proclamations of the Tudor Kings*, p.56. For the discussion of oppression, see above, pp.164-8, 210-18.
[95] *CCR*, I, pp.54-5.
[96] *PROME*, 1467, It.26 (20 Aug. 2019).

appeared in battles, leading to Warwick's defeat and death.[97] Just as they were used in the 1450s and 1460s, Richard III resorted to the established attacks on the 'evil council', the ministers' avarice and the decay of the 'politique weal' against the Woodvilles in 1483.[98]

In the Tudor period, the common voices did not have to be repeatedly re-used to substantiate the royal title, but political dialogue remained echoing important values. Upon Henry VII's ascension there was no particular urgency to support his claim to the throne via the same discourses to convince his people. At first, he justified his title in a simplistic way in the parliament records and apparently sent no proclamations besides announcing Richard's death.[99] However, it is noteworthy that, following Edward IV, both Henry VII's title and the repeal of Richard III's were made through bills that looked and sounded like petitions.[100] Later in 1486, the Papal Bull did not need to adapt its vocabulary to sound convincing to popular audiences; it was a naturally powerful and popular tool translated, printed and finally proclaimed 'for the conservation of the universal peace and eschewing of slanders' – possibly to contain rumours about Lambert Simnel.[101] Henry VIII only needed to use similar approaches concerning his title to the crown when he launched his own form of usurpation, that of the papal authority, which he claimed would bring stability and tranquillity to the kingdom.[102] It is sometimes taken for granted that this practice of reasserting public values for political reasons was well-established in late-medieval political culture, and both Edward and Richard drew on the themes of their father's campaigns against the Lancastrian

[97] *CCR*, I, pp.54-5; II, 529.
[98] *White Rose*, pp.273-5.
[99] *PROME*, 1485, It.5 (20 Aug. 2019); *TRP*, 1. Despite the lack of widespread writs of proclamations, approved statutes were expected to be proclaimed in customary places: Cavill, *Parliaments of Henry VII*, pp.175-8.
[100] For the repeal of Richard's title: *PROME*, 1485, It.18[23] (20 Aug. 2019). Perhaps this was simply the distinction between 'public' and 'private' statutes, but important decisions like those ones were not always phrased as such and not necessarily included among the 'common petitions': Cavill, *The Parliaments of Henry VII*, pp.152-3. This terminology was not quite clear to R. Butcher, 'Propaganda in the prepared parliamentary speeches of 1455-1461', *The Ricardian*, 14 (2004), pp.37-53.
[101] *TRP*, 5. The comment on Lambert Simnel is from: Bennett, *Lambert Simnel*, pp.72-3.
[102] *TRP*, 158.

government.[103] In the early Tudor period, there was less urgency in 1485 and 1509, but progressively, it became necessary to adopt similar approaches given the challenges created by Henry VIII. The crown did all this not only because its subjects more or less expected it, but above all because it had proved to be a successful strategy of dialogue with the commons: deliberately to voice the tropes of public knowledge about what was just and right in regarding the rightful heir to the throne. This was not a one-way manipulative propaganda, but a clear dialogical interaction, as well as discursive conflict, with the public. Had that been unimportant, rulers could have carried on with their parliamentary procedures without caring about comprehensively publicising them.

Finally, a few last pieces of evidence may still contribute to the understanding of shared tropes about political issues. Just as seditious verses and ballads were important enough to be quickly suppressed, what appear to be 'propagandist' poems proliferated especially during the Wars of the Roses – demonstrating essential means of political communication. In the early 1460s, poems praised the Yorkist lords (just as in the previous decade) and cursed the Lancastrian recent past of 'perjury', 'tyranny & violence', 'treason' and 'endle[ss] langoure'.[104] One of these poems, called *A Political Retrospect* by Robbins, clearly attributed legitimacy to Edward's usurpation also by emphasising the commons' support in late battles, for 'The voix of the people [was] the voice of Jhesu'.[105] Repetition of sentences such as this was a common resource in poetry and may reflect an emphasis on political vocabulary which is also implied in the sentence 'blessid be the time that ever god sprad that floure'.[106] This sentence found in *The Rose of Rouen* or *The Battle of Towton*, a contemporary poem that describes the battle from a clear Yorkist perspective, also presented

[103] For Richard of York: Watts, 'Polemic and Politics', pp.3-7.
[104] 'Edward Dei Gratia', 'Twelve Letters Save England', 'A Political Retrospect' and 'God Amend Wicked Counsel' in *Historical Poems*, pp.196-8, 219-26. For these poems, see: Scattergood, *Politics and Poetry*, pp.173-211; and Kingsford, *English Historical Literature*, pp.194-5.
[105] 'A Political Retrospect', *Historical Poems*, 93.
[106] 'The Rose of Rouen', Ibidem, 90. Another example of repetitions is in 'Edward dei Gracia': Ibidem, 92.

a customary opposition between the north (in that context, the epicentre of Lancastrian support) and south. Concurrently, there is evidence to suggest that Edward IV ordered the circulation of a poem praising his coronation sometime between 1461 and 1464.[107] In 1471 the Battle of Barnet was apparently celebrated by a poem praising the king and his descent, as well as reconciliation, 'for he is gon that lovyd division' – that is, Warwick; not to mention the repetition of 'ye commons…drede your king'.[108] Early in Henry VII's reign, it was crucial to promote the marriage with Elizabeth of York so that people would 'love the rose both red & white'.[109] Similarly, it might not have been by chance that, right after the kingdom took knowledge of Perkin Warbeck's conspiracy, two poems appear to have circulated. One praised the king and the war with France, stressing that 'all hynglond for him schal pray & sing' for he had 'his righth to conquer'. The other was praising the memory of Henry VI, as famous, merciful and 'pacient in adversite', at the same time that it reminded the possible reader that the Tudors were attached to the house of Lancaster.[110] Later poets such as John Skelton made use of many common tropes, though the only poem which could be most certainly considered as intentionally conveying political messages on behalf of Wolsey came only in 1523, when Skelton ridiculed the Duke of Albany with *The Douty Duke* and tried to root out any possible De la Pole influence via Scotland.[111] With their repetitive sentences, easily memorable stanzas, quick circulation and possibility of being sung, it might have been that these poems served even more strategically as means of political dialogue.

Thus, in a number of different ways – from direct and indirect attention to common complaints, to the deployment of common tropes and vocabularies that reveal shared

[107] Scattergood, *Politics and Poetry*, pp.192-3.
[108] *Historical Poems*, 94. For more discussion on these see Scattergood, *Politics and Poetry*, pp.176-216.
[109] *Historical Poems*, 35; Scattergood, *Politics and Poetry*, pp.211-6.
[110] *Historical Poems*, 36, 83 and pp.300-1. For Henry VII's attempt at sanctifying Henry VI, see: Anglo, *Images of Tudor Kingship*, pp.61-73.
[111] *Skelton Poems*, pp.316-24; Walker, *John Skelton*, pp.197-217.

branches of political culture – the government persistently engaged in dialogue with the people throughout the period. This section has sought to clarify that the crown took steps in advance to avoid growing and apparent grievances; that it answered rebels and other dissenters with proclamations, preaching and other means; and that it shared political vocabulary. On the one hand, perhaps what is more striking than any divergence are the similarities between subjects and rulers: the majority of political concepts repeatedly used by the government – the commonweal, prosperity, endemic extortion, oppression, justice and the rule of law – broadly matched the people's own views about public issues if we exclude their violent and offensive attacks that usually accompanied complaints. On the other, the differences on each side – on the people's, radical thoughts and lack of deference; on the government's, the emphasis on more obedience, self-aggrandizement, control of dissent – highlight another critical aspect already argued above: that commoners did not merely reproduce and appropriate what they received from above, for they had their particular point of view.[112]

Moreover, both similarities and differences underscore on the overarching argument of this section: that political dialogue and exchange are concepts that stress the distinctiveness of contemporary political culture – or to use Walker's terminology again, the responsive political culture[113] – and avoid hierarchical and unrealistic depictions that the concept of 'propaganda' implies. If there are reasons to believe that officially-sanctioned political communication was increasing, it was not because the crown was overwhelmingly obsessed with controlling and manipulating minds and bodies, but primarily because this responsive political culture persistently prompted governments to consider resistance and opposition in their decisions. The official answer to that was to improve the levels of communication in order to influence and earn people's favour in a dialogic relationship, not

[112] See also: Liddy & Haemers, 'Popular Politics in the Late Medieval City', pp.792-800.
[113] Walker, *Political Culture*, pp.260-1.

by simply imposing an authoritative view of important policies. In the following section we shall see different strategies in which the commoners were not expected to play a direct role, but rulers and ruled were still in a constant dialogic interaction.

2. Pretended Dialogue

The governments of this period could also pretend to be engaged in a public discussion in order to make necessary statements about a particular interpretation of events or controversial policies. They made claims or organised public ceremonies that addressed allegedly public issues when these issues mostly concerned the ruling elites that needed to spread their views to instruct the people, maintain unity and enforce obedience to avoid sedition – and amid these interactions, even use silence at times. It would be easy, therefore, to see this section in opposition to the propositions made in the previous one about the existing and persistent political dialogue. However, even a false or 'pretended dialogue' – that is, when the crown was not necessarily answering anything and did not expect a response either – was technically still a dialogic interplay because the authorities either imagined a public or sought to construct a public that was necessary to legitimise their own existence and power. After all, as Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger has posited, 'power is not a *property* of the powerful, but rather a *relation* which arises from communication processes'.[114] This perspective stresses the need for more discussion of this evidence beyond seeing a one-way 'propaganda'. This kind of communication merely implies that the crown was more clearly exploring its unequal power in the political exchange, that is, the power of trying to control the meaning of essential concepts, the narrative of political events, the necessary and permitted crowds in coronations, pageants and other celebrations.[115] At first, an analysis of

[114] Author's emphasis: B. Stollberg-Rilinger, 'The Impact of Communication Theory on the Analysis of Early Modern Statebuilding Processes', in W. Blockmans, A. Holenstein and J. Mathieu (eds.), *Empowering Interactions* (Hants, UK; Burlington, VT, 2009), p.315.
[115] Essentially, the 'control of language', as in: Sharpe, *Selling the Tudor Monarchy*, pp.102-28.

the crown's performative initiatives of over-stressing unity, and sometimes resorting to silence, will introduce this section's argument. Subsequently, evidence of how the crown instructed the kingdom with meaningful material, concepts, and the 'official truth' will be followed by the recurrent theme of obedience in political communication.

First of all, a common strategy towards public knowledge was to emphasise stability and unity as a means of keeping political concord and avoiding sedition.[116] This approach could assume a variety of formats. The claims against foreigners that we have already seen above also held this kind of appeal in times of taxation for war. So did proclamations about truce and peace which not only echoed popular concerns but also stressed the 'repose and tranquillity' of England and the 'common weal'.[117] Henry VII's general pardon to the 'northern rebels' in 1485, for example, was an artefact designed to emphasise peace and unity by addressing those who supposedly assisted Henry VI and defended the kingdom from the Scots for decades.[118] Pardons to rebels such as in 1489 and 1497 evidently stressed the necessity of unity as opposed to insurrection, especially in times of alleged foreign threats.[119] Sentiments of stability and unity were the reason why poems circulated in 1513, as Henry VIII went to war, and also why the collection of the Amicable Grant started with commissioners making processions and bonfires to celebrate the French defeat at Pavia before announcing the collection of the subsidy.[120] The reference to the Act of Supremacy in a proclamation of 1535 confirmed its lawfulness and its purpose, which was to 'import and bring an inestimable weal, profit, commodity, unity, and tranquillity to all the public and

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[116] This has been pointed out by James Scott in other contexts as part of the political functions of what he called 'public transcript': *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, p.45. For the concept of sedition see above pp.123-31 and the discussion of political concord on pp.137-51.
[117] *TRP*, 23, 29, 40, 51, 79, 120, 147; *FC*, p.686. For their effect on the sense of stability, see similar considerations in: N. Offenstadt, 'The Rituals of Peace During the Civil War in France', in Boucheron and Offendstadt, *L'Espace Public*, pp.96-8.
[118] *TRP*, 2.
[119] *TRP*, 19, 35.
[120] I refer to the poem 'The Red Rose' in: *Original Letters*, 1st/1, XXVIII. For the Amicable Grant, see Suffolk's letter to Wolsey: *LP*, IV/1, 1260. A discussion is found in: G. Bernard, & R. Hoyle, 'The instructions for the Levying of the Amicable Grant, March 1525', *HR*, 67/163 (1994), p.194.

common state'.[121] Steven Gunn has demonstrated that special bell-ringing, processions, the singing of *Te Deum* and the lighting of bonfires (accompanied by free wine) were enough to make the people of London know of significant occasions such as suppression of revolts, military victories (1513), peace treaties (1525 and 1529), and dynastic occasions.[122] Positively, these performances that restated the unity of the kingdom for various purposes were again addressing the people and reinforcing dialogic interplays by pretended ways. Because they were artefacts to attack both internal and external enemies, it was probably expected that they had a possible dampening effect on sedition – that is, the opposite of unity.

What most certainly had the same effect on dissenters – or so the crown thought – were dynastic questions addressed in public performances. In these performances, not everyone would agree with the assertions made, but the role of the crowds was crucial and expected: they had to attend these performances in order to feel the 'unity' and, more importantly, to legitimise the dramatisation of politics.[123] Even though St Paul's Cross was quite often used also to preach seditious opinions, it was by far the central public pulpit to promote unity.[124] George Neville preached a political sermon there in 1461 to reinforce the Yorkist title – a practice later replicated during Henry VI's Readeption and by Richard III in 1484.[125] Edward IV also ordered processions for his success against the Lancastrians in 1462 and most likely in 1471.[126] Armstrong emphasised how Edward IV had to create his particular narrative and rituals in order to highlight his legitimacy and his title to the throne;

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[121] *TRP*, 158. Such vocabulary should be compared to: T. Starkey, *Exhortation to the People. Instructynge theym to Unitie and Obedience* (1536), *EEBO* (16 Aug. 2019).
[122] Gunn, 'War, Dynasty and Public Opinion', p.135-43. See also: Cooper, *Propaganda*, pp.31-2.
[123] I refer here to 'dramatization of rule' as proposed in: Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, p.58.
[124] Further to what follows: *Brief Latin Chronicle*, p.173; *GC*, pp.211, 317, 320-1, 322; *Vitellius A XVI*, pp.190, 255, 258-9; More, *History of Richard III*, pp.59, 75; Rastell, *Pastime of People*, pp.292-3; *LP*, III/1, 1273; V, 525; X, 462; *CSPSp*, IV/2, 922, 1154; Whatmore, 'The Sermon Against the Holy Maid of Kent', pp.463-75; *HC*, p.814; *WC*, pp.33-5; *Register of Sermons Preached at Paul's Cross*, *1534-1642*, ed. M. MacLure, P. Pauls and J.C. Boswell (Ottawa, 1989), pp.17-21; Matthewe, *A Sermon made in the Cathedrall Churche of Saynte Paule*, Aiii-v-Cviii-r. See also: W.E. Jones, 'The English Church and Propaganda during the Hundred Years War', *Journal of British Studies*, 19/1 (1979), pp.18-30.
[125] *GC*, p.195; *CSPV*, I, 103. For comparisons: C.A.J. Armstrong, 'The Inauguration Ceremonies of the Yorkist Kings and Their Title to the Throne', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4th Series, 30 (1948), p.57.
[126] Allan, 'Political Propaganda', pp.12-14.

and in so doing, he also promoted unity. The acclamation of the people, the ritual details of his coronation, the repetition of the ceremony after his brief exile in 1471, as well as the confirmation of his title through the commons in parliament, were all strategies undertaken by the first Yorkist ruler.[127] All these strategies counted on their validation through the popular element; they were not simply one-way 'propaganda'. For the coronation of Elizabeth Woodville in 1464, the copying of six ballads was ordered to accompany the pageants in London, and similar measures were taken in 1501 during the arrival of Catherine of Aragon, although already printed by Pynson.[128] Edward IV also took care of a symbolic act which addressed the foundation of his dynasty: the reburial of his father Richard of York in 1476. The written epitaph prepared for the new burial was copied several times by apparently unconnected copiers, suggesting a wide distribution.[129] Richard III followed his brother's rites in several aspects and substantially invested in his coronation and other festivities in 1483, as well as progressing through a few cities in July that year.[130] The climax was achieved at York, which was later repeated by Henry VII in 1486 for other reasons.[131]

The first Tudors did all they could to make people feel that the unity of the kingdom needed to be carefully constructed to avoid more civil war. Henry VII did not spare anything to achieve this aim at his and his wife's coronations.[132] These ceremonies staged the foundations of Tudor dynasty, aggrandised the monarchy after more civil strife, and promoted not only the unity of the houses of York and Lancaster, to paraphrase the Papal

[127] Armstrong, 'Inauguration Ceremonies', p.51; *PROME*, 1461, Its.8-15 (20 Aug. 2019).
[128] Boffey, *Manuscript and Print*, pp.92-3.
[129] P.W. Hammond, A.F. Sutton & L. Visser-Fuchs, *The reburial of Richard Duke of York, 21-30 July 1476* (*Richard III Society*, 1996), pp.1-3, 10-1.
[130] This is also stressed by Armstrong, 'Inauguration Ceremonies', p.17.
[131] Ross, *Richard III*, pp.148-9; 151-3. For Henry VII in York see the contemporary account in: 'A York Pageant, 1486', by A.H. Smith, *London Mediaeval Studies* (1939), pp.382-3; and the analysis of: E. Cavell, 'Henry VII, the North of England, and the First Provincial Progress of 1486', *Northern History* 39 (2002), pp.187-207.
[132] *English Coronation Records*, ed. L.F.G. Wickham Legg (Westminster, 1901), pp.219-39; 'The Coronation of Lady Elizabeth, King Henry VIIth's Wife…', in J. Leland (ed.), *Collectanea*, Vol.4 (1770), pp.216-33; *Crowland Chronicle*, pp.190-1. See more analysis in: Chrimes, *Henry VII*, p.58; Anglo, *Spectacle*, pp.10-9, 49.

Bull of 1486 and Edward Hall later, but of the whole kingdom.[133] Henry VIII had tried a solemn coronation of his second queen, and although it was described as a disappointment to everyone, it has been interpreted by historians as a 'long and loud public statement of Henry VIII's policy'.[134] More than diplomatic events, dynastic performances indeed tried to promote a sense of harmony and consensus, above all in unusual situations like in 1485 or 1533. Sermons, rituals, coronations, burials, and pageants for various purposes – not to mention printed materials that increasingly accompanied these ceremonies – were all opportunities to allow crowds to gather for a specific purpose: to contemplate the legitimacy and grandeur of their rulers through a spectacle.[135] But grandeur and legitimacy could easily fit interpretations of 'propaganda'. What the crowds also did was to legitimise the whole spectacle, because they were the target and their presence also helped to confirm the power to rulers. Richard Morison was probably expressing a typical interpretation by writing that 'into the commen people thinges sooner enter by the eyes, then by the eares: remembring more better that they see then that they heere'.[136] But at the same time, the people asserted themselves as one ingredient of such performative legitimacy by sharing these moments of the symbolic union of the kingdom and accepting what 'they see'.

Perhaps more effective to promote unity after these rituals was the expectation and celebration of royal babies in a period in which a succession of rulers had not been as fertile as they wished and in which the succession to the crown had not been evident for almost two centuries. Richard III was the symbolic proof of that problem, for he not only usurped the

[133] I refer here to the Papal Bull printed and proclaimed in 1486: *TRP*, 5; and to Hall's official title of 1548: 'The Vnion of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre & Yorke, Beeyng Long In Continual Discension for the Croune of This Noble Realme…', *HC*, p.vi.
[134] The contemporary (controversial) description is in: *CSPSp*, IV/2, 1089. The quotation is from: Anglo, *Spectacle*, p.260. The pageant at Paul's Gate had a long roll in which it was written that once Anne gave birth to a prince, 'there [would] be a golden world unto thy people'; the description of the whole ceremony was printed by Wynkyn de Worde, see: E. Arber (ed.), *An English Garner*, Vol.II (1879), pp.41-60.
[135] Further to what is mentioned in this chapter, see a concise discussion of printed materials in: Neville-Singleton, 'Press, politics and religion', pp.576-607.
[136] Reproduced in: Anglo, 'An Early Tudor Programme', p.179.

crown (and removed his potential threats) but lost his only son amid the unstable political scenario. It has been argued that Prince Arthur was the crucial point of public spectacle in Henry VII's early reign, as well as the divine confirmation of the new dynasty and the pivotal figure in ceremonies and diplomacy throughout the 1490s.[137] More significantly, if one takes into account that the kingdom had had none of these joyful moments for quite a long time, the celebration of royal (especially male) children remained a rather unusual, and therefore essential, spectacle. The creation of Prince Henry as Duke of York in 1494, for example, has been interpreted as a statement that the previous duke was indeed dead and that Perkin Warbeck was an impostor.[138] Still, public attention was only widely achieved again perhaps in 1533, when Princess Elizabeth was 'paraded' in London as a statement that she was, according to Chapuys's ironic report, the 'true princess of Wales'.[139] The coronation of Jane Seymour was described as a 'goodlie sight to beholde', but the celebrations for the birth of Prince Edward were, according to Gunn's analysis, the most enthusiastic between the 1480s and the 1560s.[140] Morison claimed that this excitement offered 'comfortable consolation' following Jane Seymour's death in 1537, as people's joy and thankfulness at the birth of a prince should overwhelm their grief.[141] All these performances, then, were meticulously planned as public statements of integrity which often required only spontaneous acts from subjects (such as joining a bonfire or procession, and/or drinking free wine), working impeccably as pretended forms of dialogue. In all these commemorations and rituals the crown partly imagined what the people were, or should be, feeling as they needed to be united in a single political body and react as 'true subjects' – not as a seditious one, that is, a member who provokes division in the polity. They worked as 'pretended' forms of dialogue because

[137] Anglo, *Spectacle*, pp.47-9, 52-6; Bennett, *Lambert Simnel*, p.3.
[138] Anglo, *Spectacle*, p.53.
[139] *CSPSp*, IV/2, 1161.
[140] *WC*, pp.44, 64-7; *LP*, XII/2, 911; Gunn, 'War, Dynasty and Public Opinion', p.139; Gunn, Grummitt & Cools, *War*, *State*, *and Society*, pp.269-70.
[141] R. Morison, *A Comfortable Consolation*, (1537), microfilm, A2f.

the crown tried to impose interpretations and narratives; but these rituals were nonetheless two-way interactions as there was, invariably, a popular element that both informed and was targeted by them.

Similarly, physical demonstrations of the royal person or, the complete opposite, of 'enemies of the public weal' should be recognised as a practice designed to create support and integration, especially in London and other important cities.[142] Edward IV immediately took care of displaying Warwick's body in 1471, and the king's physical presence proved crucial for the collection of benevolences later.[143] Marquis Montague and others riding their horses in London readily shouted 'Long live King Henry' while exposing Henry VI – released from the Tower in 1470 – to gather the crowds.[144] Richard III appealed personally to the mass of Londoners in 1483 both as protector and king; and he later showed the 'traitors', who were about to be executed and had to remain silent 'least their wordes might have enclined men to pitye'.[145] Henry VII's decision to show the real duke of Clarence's son in London must have also put significant pressure on people who were inclined to believe in Lambert Simnel's story.[146] Perkin Warbeck was also exhibited to the people as having been recaptured and imprisoned in 1499 – a measure to enforce obedience by suppressing the circulation of rumours much like in the case of the Nun of Kent in 1533.[147] The symbolic importance of public execution of traitors, especially in London, is thoroughly recognised by chroniclers, foreign ambassadors, and others throughout the period.[148] Diarmaid MacCulloch

[142] A concise treatment of the 'image of royalty' is given by: Goodman, *The New Monarchy*, pp.39-41. The importance of communication with and the royal visits to towns is highlighted in: Hartrich, 'Town, Crown and Urban System', pp.46-7, 66-7, 88, 101, 261; Gunn, Grummitt & Cools, *War*, *State*, *and Society*, pp.46, 51-6; J. Lee, 'Urban Policy and Urban Political Culture: Henry VII and his towns', *HR*, 82/217 (2009), pp.492-510. See the significance of Henry VII's first progress, for example, in: Anglo, *Spectacle*, pp.21-37.
[143] *Arrivall of Ed.IV*, p.21; *HC*, p.297; Wavrin, *Anchiennes Chronicques*, III, p.128; *FC*, p.664.
[144] De Commynes, *Memoirs*, p.187.
[145] Mancini, *Usurpation*, pp.98-101; *HC*, p.364. For this episode, see: Hicks, *Wars of the Roses*, pp.219-20.
[146] *Anglica Historia*, pp.18-19. I also rely on: G. Smith, 'Lambert Simnel and the King from Dublin', *The Ricardian*, 10/135 (1996), pp.506-7.
[147] *Six Town Chronicles*, p.174; *Two Chronicles of John Stow*, p.8; *LP*, VI, 1433, 1460; VII, 72.
[148] Lancastrians in 1465: *WC*, pp.5-6. Rebels in 1469: *HC*, pp.272-5. The Earl of Worcester in 1470: *FC*, p.659; *HC*, 286. Thomas Burdett and George, Duke of Clarence in 1477-8: *Anglica Historia*, p.168; *HC*, p.369. William Hastings, the Woodvilles and others in 1483: *Anglica Historia*, pp.181-2, 187-8; *HC*, p.364; *FC*, p.669.

has suggested that Henry VIII was too timid to explore the countryside – if he had visited the northern counties at least once before 1541, the Pilgrimage of Grace could have been avoided. Likewise, he proposes that one of the reasons why the western counties did not join the rebellion in 1536 was because Henry had been in a long progression there in 1535.[149] As the promotion of unity took several forms, the capture, imprisonment, and execution of traitors were as performative as the exhibition of the king's person. Therefore, even in these cases of mostly non-verbal spectacles, both sides of the 'pretended dialogue' were artificially playing their roles: the authorities dramatised their power while the people either watched their monarch, seeing in him the representation of the crown, or witnessed the death of traitors to learn that they threatened the unity and were being punished for a reason.

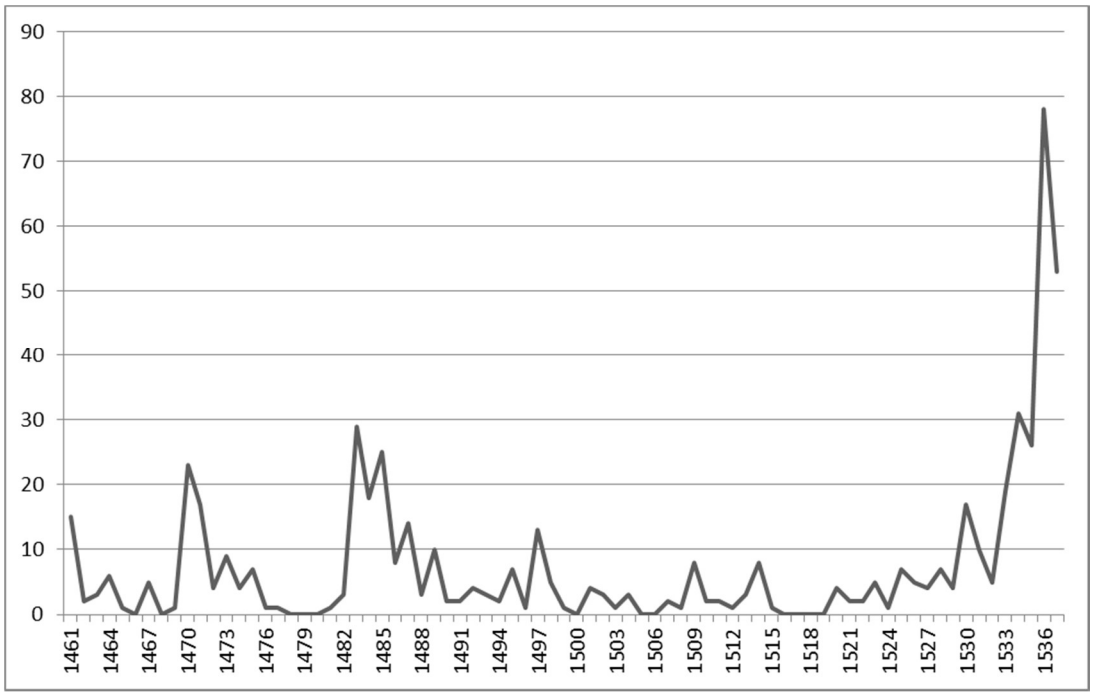

Figure 12 – Levels of Political Communication by the Government's Initiative.

William Collingbourne in 1484: *GC*, pp.236-7. Yorkshire rebels in 1489: *GC*, p.242. Conspirators in 1495-6: *Anglica Historia*, 76-9; *HC*, pp.468-70; *GC*, p.258. Rebels in 1497: *Anglica Historia*, pp.92-3; *CSPV*, I, 754. Perkin Warbeck and earl of Warwick in 1499: *HC*, 488-9; *Chronicles of London*, pp.226-8; *GC*, pp.287, 289, 291-2; *CSPSp*, I, 249. Supporters of Edmund de la Pole in 1501: *FC*, p.687-8; *GC*, pp.318, 325. Empson and Dudley in 1510: *Anglica Historia*, 152-3. Evil May Day rioters in 1517: *Anglica Historia*, pp.242-5; *CSPVn*, II, 887; *Six Town Chronicles*, p.192. Duke of Buckingham in 1521: *CSPVn*, III, 213, 219. Rioters in Coventry, 1523: *WC*, p.14. Bishop Fisher and Thomas More in 1535: *CSPSp*, V/1, 45; *WC*, pp.28-9. Carthusian monks in 1535: *CSPSp*, V/1, 156, 183; *FC*, p.700. Anne Boleyn in 1536: *CSPSp*, V/2, 55; *FC*, p.700.

[149] See his introduction to: MacCulloch, *The Reign of Henry VIII*, p.5. Ideas of Henry VIII strengthening his authority through progresses are discussed by N. Samman in: Idem, Ibidem, pp.59, 64-71, 73.

A further point should also be made about silence – especially considering Figure 12. The crown not only expected and encouraged its people to be obedient and unified most of the time, but it could also keep silent, ignore complaints, or not engage in any significant interaction for prolonged periods.[150] Richard Morison strongly believed that someone as evil as the bishop of Rome needed to be exposed and his true nature 'daily by all meanes opened inculked and driven into the peoples heddes, tought in scoles to children, played in playes before the ignoraunt people, songe in minstrelles songes'.[151] However, silence was sometimes better than engaging in an undesired dialogue or spreading policies that could be misinterpreted.[152] Figure 12 shows the distribution of all the evidence discussed in this chapter – that is, the 'traditional' evidence of 'propaganda', for some historians, being treated here altogether as individual events of political communication – but it might also demonstrate periods of virtual silence, on top of deficiencies in the existing evidence. A few years under Edward IV, for instance, had little or no significant political communication – that is, in 1465-6, 1468, 1477-81. Even significant political events, such as the imprisonment of Henry VI (and later the circumstances of his death), the Rebellion of Robin of Redesdale, or the execution of George, Duke of Clarence were handled with much care.[153] Comparatively, Richard III had no time to refrain from the political arena, and Henry VII had no significant dialogic interactions only in 1496, 1500, 1505-6, and in 1508. It is also noteworthy that, apart from 1486, none of the conspiracies of Henry VII's reign was widely

[150] For the crown's expectation of silence (or passive behaviour) among the people, see the conclusion of Section 2 in Chapter III, pp.186-7.
[151] Anglo, 'An Early Tudor Programme', p.178.
[152] As Chapuys curiously realised in Dec. 1530, the king was troubled by the fact that before publicly announcing the prohibition of several books (probably referring to the proclamation of June: *TRP*, 129), the people had kept silent. However, the 'very proclamation [had] considerably increased their desire to see the book mentioned in it, and that it [had] also led to a defamatory libel against the chancellor of Canterbury': *CSPSp*, IV/1, 539. That the crown always tried to use the same traditional tactics towards public performances for safety reasons has been observed by: Britnell, *Closing of the Middle Ages?*, pp.52-61.
[153] There was, at Henry VI's capture, a procession to Becket's tomb in Canterbury and a *Te Deum* sung at the Cathedral because Edward and Elizabeth were on a pilgrimage there. However, there is no record that any wide proclamation was issued: Scofield, *Edward IV*, I, p.382. In 1469, there is evidence of proclamation in Coventry, but apparently nothing else: *CLB*, II, pp.340-6. In 1478, there was virtually no communication about Clarence's attainder, and his death was not publicised.

and publicly addressed by proclamations. Along these lines, Cliff Davies convincingly argued that one of Henry VII's primary approaches to public knowledge was to remove Richard III's reign from popular memory.[154]

Under Henry VIII, meanwhile, the government seems to have virtually abstained from communication in 1512 (only announced taxation), 1515-19, surprisingly in 1524 (despite the war and Wolsey's efforts to collect taxes), and then there is a significant plunge from the levels of 1530 to those of 1532. When peace was agreed in 1514, for instance, it was not widely published, since 'were the adjustment proclaimed the people would refuse payment' of taxes.[155] Later that year it was reported that peace was proclaimed in London, although 'neither trumpet nor any other instrument was sounded, and but few persons heard the proclamation; neither were bonfires burnt nor any other demonstration made for this peace'.[156] The same treatment was given to the Treaty of Universal Peace in October 1518, that is, no clear public statement.[157] Even in 1525, no proclamation was ordered to cool down the turmoil in Suffolk and elsewhere against the Amicable Grant. Geoffrey Elton argued that Henry VIII's government was 'sparing in its use of proclamations' in the 1530s, but perhaps this should be interpreted as a clever attempt at avoiding the proliferation of misinformation based on misunderstandings or rejections of the official positions.[158] When the Kildare rebellion broke in 1534, for example, the Imperial Ambassador claimed that there was a proclamation against the circulation of news about Ireland 'for the purpose of concealing [the rebellion] from the people'.[159] In a sense, these examples from both the Yorkist and the early-Tudor period convincingly illustrate that at times the crown did not want to address the

[154] Davies, 'Information, Disinformation and Political Knowledge', pp.228-253.
[155] *CSPV*, II, 456. Four days later it was proclaimed in only a few places: *TRP*, 76.
[156] *CSPV*, II, 505.
[157] Anglo, *Spectacle*, pp.135-6.
[158] Elton, *Policy and Police*, pp.218-22.
[159] Even though no such proclamation has been found, it is an interesting example: *CSPSp*, V/1, 97. Compare with: *CSPM*, 957. The rebellion was later mentioned with enthusiasm by the monks of Charterhouse: *LP*, VIII, 609; KB8/7/1/1-4, 11.

public at all, or that it did so with extra care. While this dynamic does not perfectly illustrate pretended forms of dialogue, it nonetheless evinces that the crown constantly thought about its dialectic relationship with the people to the point of sometimes preferring to avoid interaction or misunderstandings. In several of those moments of silence or low level of communication, many aspects of political decisions could have been publicly announced. Instead of publicising them, however, these governments chose silence, but they did so because they thought twice about the possible consequences of publicly addressing, for example, the situation of Henry VI, the conspirators plotting against Henry VII, or other controversial policies throughout the reign of Henry VIII.

Another aspect that reveals pretended dialogue stems from the opposite of silence but also aimed at maintaining unity: the government behaved as if it were instructing the people with *the* official truth, certainly understood as more accurate information. Much like periods of silence or discreet responses, this was mainly to avoid the rise or proliferation of rumours, misinformation and, possibly or consequently, dissent.[160] When a new king usurped the throne, for instance, the somewhat exaggerated problems of previous reigns had to be part of the 'new truth' – hence the peaks in levels of communication in 1461, 1470-1, 1483-5 and 1534-6 ('usurpation' of the pope's authority) observed in Figure 12 above. Edward IV attacked the Lancastrians following the tropes used by his father and Warwick, while Richard III approached his brother's reign in a similar tone.[161] Some refined instructive strategies were attempted by Edward IV, or someone in his entourage, with the production of impressive genealogies to educate his courtiers (and possibly others) on the legitimacy of the Yorkist title to the throne, as well as with narratives known as the *Historie of the Arrivall of*

[160] For the connection between rumour and dissent/sedition, see above, pp.121-29.
[161] *CCR*, I, pp.54-5; *CLB*, II, pp.374-5; *Literae Cantuarienses III*, pp.274-85; *White Rose*, pp.273-5; Mancini, *Usurpation*, pp.110-3; *PROME*, 1484, It.1[5] (20 Aug. 2019).

Edward IV and the *Chronicle of the Lincolnshire Rebellion*.[162] Richard III promoted the practice of printing parliamentary statutes in 1484, among which was his title to the crown, but Henry VII was probably the first English monarch to advise the kingdom effectively with printed materials beyond statutes: the summary of the papal bull recognising his title to the crown (March 1486); the confession of the pretender Perkin Warbeck (*c.* September 1497, repeated in 1498) so that 'the trouth of such covyrd malice & falshode abhominable might be knowyn'; and one of his last royal pardons – to widespread complaints of oppression – printed after his death for 'every man [to] have knowlage'.[163]

But what is the difference between seeing a pretended dialogue and simply calling this evidence 'propaganda'? The strategy behind conveying an official truth is more profound and revealing if we look at it as a two-way relationship, rather than a top-to-bottom imposition of manipulative 'propaganda'. It was a question of trying to control the language used to express the understanding of former or present regimes. Therefore, the social presence of language made it crucial for the crown to think about how its people would understand these narratives and political language better – and then it carefully decided to

[162] Biblical genealogies, secular pedigrees and prose descents (in English and Latin) were produced under Edward IV. See the discussions in: R. Radulescu, 'Yorkist propaganda and *The Chronicle from Rollo to Edward IV*', *Studies in Philology*, 100 (2003), pp.401–24; Hicks, 'Edward IV's *Brief Treatise*', pp.253-65; Allan, 'Political Propaganda', pp.256-319; A. Allan, 'Yorkist Propaganda: Pedigree, Prophecy and the "British History" in the Reign of Edward IV', in C. Ross (ed.), *Patronage*, *Pedigree and Power* (Gloucester, 1979), pp.171-87; Hughes, *Arthurian Myths*, pp.19-20, 72, 168-76, 222; P.E. Gill, 'Politics and Propaganda in Fifteenth-Century England: the Polemical Writings of Sir John Fortescue', *Speculum*, 46 (1971), p.347. For a digital edition, see the Canterbury Roll project and its resources at: https://www.canterbury.ac.nz/canterburyroll/ (02 Feb. 2019). The narratives are *Lincolnshire Chr.*, pp.5-18 and the *Arrivall of Ed.IV*. They are approached in detail in: W. Scase, 'Writing and the "Poetics of Spectacle": Political Epiphanies in *The Arrivall of Edward IV* and Some Contemporary Lancastrian and Yorkist Texts', in J. Dimmock, J. Simpson and N. Zeeman (eds.) *Images*, *Idolatry*, *and Iconoclasm in Late Medieval England*, (Oxford, 2002), pp.172-84; L. Visser-Fuchs, 'Jean de Wavrin and the English newsletters', pp.217-35; see also n.63, p.269 above. Interestingly, Pollard treated the attacks on Warwick in these narratives as 'more regretful than vengeful', in *Warwick the Kingmaker*, p.3.

[163] Richard III's title to the throne is cited in n.161 in the previous page; discussed briefly in: Elton, 'The Sessional Printing of Statutes', pp.68-86; Gunn, *Early Tudor Government*, pp.188-9. For Henry VII: *TRP*, 5; *Chronicles of London*, pp.219-21; *GC*, pp.284-6, 337-9; *RHVIICS*, I, 120, 124. The evidence on Perkin Warbeck is discussed by Chrimes, *Henry VII*, p.92; partly reported in: *CSPSp*, I, 85. An interesting discussion on the lack of emphasis on genealogies under Henry VII and VIII is found in: S. Anglo, 'British History and early Tudor Propaganda', *Bulletin of John Rylands Library*, 44 (1961), pp.16-48.

publicise. If we consider this 'official truth' as a propaganda move, we might miss the popular element and the calculation of response, reaction, and resistance.

That perspective of official truth that was regularly linked to the public remains the same in later periods, usually considered as more authoritarian. The Wars of the Roses seem to have remained seen as the 'domestical sedicion & civile discorde' that could always return if the king had no legitimate male heir at the time of his death.[164] And it is that perception that partially explains why Henry VIII, in the 1530s, was primarily concerned with self-explanation, with the circulation of the legality of his divorce 'amongst the vulgar and the populace', and with the production of tracts such as *A Glasse of Truthe*.[165] The crown's perspectives in these narratives – and in fact since the Yorkist period – sound as if the king and his ministers believed that if they did not convince the people, their original claims would have been weaker. In that sense, the necessity of increasingly informing the people with what government thought they should clearly understand to avoid rumours and disloyalty implied that a clear comprehension of the truth led to the legitimation of the rulers' power. This pretended interaction sheds more light on the evidence and on our understanding of this period than one-way 'propaganda' could ever do. To see these strategies as propaganda is to forget about the legitimation of authority, for instance, because we would have to take authority for granted in a way that does not seem to reflect reality. Authority needed to be dialogically constructed, not bluntly imposed.

Especially when it came to the king's title and his dynasty, as we have also seen above, it was paramount to keep control of 'the truth' in this pretended dialogue. Sir John Fortescue is perhaps the most famous testimony, for it is revealing that he had to deny everything he wrote as the price of rehabilitation after the Lancastrians' final defeat. It has been argued that Fortescue likely had a 'popular' audience in mind when he wrote his

[164] *HC*, pp.496, 499, 754.
[165] *A Glasse of Truthe*, C4r; *CSPSp*, IV/1, 415; *CSPM*, 833, 838.

pamphlets in defence of the Lancastrian title, especially considering that he wrote most of them in English and that he could not convince scholars with his weak arguments.[166] The *Declaration Upon Certain Writings*, a dialogue between a 'learned man' and Fortescue, starts by recognising that the lawyer's pamphlets caused a 'grete noise and infamye', so his refutation should 'come to the knowlache of the people also clerely' as the previous writings did. In this dialogue, Fortescue denied having written anything, but it is crucial that the concern with the 'oppinion and knowledge of the people in that matier', that is, the Yorkist title to the throne, is emphasised throughout the *Declaracion*.[167] Similarly, in 1532, the dialogue between a Lawyer and a 'Divine' in *A Glasse of Truthe* resembles Fortescue's and Edward IV's concern with public understanding of these matters, stating that people should withstand slander, 'untrue reports and false malignations againste our soveraine'.[168] When the original answer of the French and Italian theologians about Henry VIII's marriage arrived in 1531, the king promptly 'caused [it] to be proclaimed in the streets and market-places' so that, according to a foreign ambassador, 'this intelligence might circulate amongst the vulgar and the populace'.[169] Later in December, the monarch wished that the opinions about his marriage should be 'generally known by the English people'.[170] Perhaps the fundamental message of all these instructive strategies was that a truth that was not publicly known and legitimised by common fame had no practical value.

An essential later expression, 'papist', demonstrates that the crown even had to innovate and create a new word 'not only to exhorte, but also to enfourme his lovinge subjectis of the trouthe'. This phrase was in the title of the 'Nine Articles' of 1533, a new printed tract to justify the king's new marriage to Anne Boleyn and an attempt at driving

[166] Gill, 'Politics and Propaganda in Fifteenth-Century England', p.338. More recently, Fortescue has again been treated as a writer undeniably aware of the 'public arena' which he had to address and through which he was supposed to legitimise his claims: Strohm, *Politique*, pp.9, 15, 136-8, 148.
[167] Fortescue, 'Declaracion upon Certayn Wrytinges', pp.523, 525, 532.
[168] *A Glasse of Truthe*, C4r.
[169] *CSPSp*, IV/1, 415; *CSPM*, 833.
[170] *CSPM*, 838.

away ‘sayings or preachings of any papists’.[171] The word ‘papist’ was first used in English attacks on Luther’s ideas in 1521, but it soon became a political concept to refer to those opposing Henry VIII’s supremacy in the 1530s.[172] Through the crown’s initiative to offer a new concept about a ‘new truth’, ‘papist’ progressively became a synonym for ‘traitor’.[173] Frequently in the 1530s, these two words were equivalents not only because the king became head of the church: papists were associated with ‘seditious conduct’ as opposed to the new learning that would teach ‘obedience’.[174] Sermons and treatises would invariably treat the conservatives pejoratively as ‘papists’, as well as forcing everyone to use the terminology ‘bishop of Rome’, instead of ‘pope’.[175] Perhaps the most compelling of these treatments was Thomas Swinnerton’s *A Litel Treatise ageynste the Mutterynge of Some Papistis in Corners*, published in 1534: he legitimised the Act of Supremacy with his arguments against the ‘papists’; called the ‘bishop of Rome’ a ‘usurper and tyrant’; and also attempted to manipulate popular themes such as taxation, by alluding to the pope’s ‘tyrannye and pillage’ that caused ‘great and huge somes of money’ to go to Rome.[176] The enforcement of the statute against mentioning the pope in official and clerical documents was reported with great surprise by the Imperial ambassador in July 1536.[177] When the king wrote to a JP about the northern rebels later that year, he had to use not only the common expression ‘evil and seditious rising’ but also to attribute the revolt to ‘certain papists’.[178]

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[171] ‘Nine Articles’, in *Records of the Reformation*, V.2, p.523.
[172] It seems to appear firstly in Bishop Fisher’s preaching against Luther in 1521 – as the examples in the *OED* suggest: ‘Papist’, *OED* (01 June 2019). For an account of that sermon: *LP*, III/1, 1273; and the brief analysis in Anglo, *Spectacle*, pp.171-3. ‘Popish’ appears in 1528 in a piece written by English Observant friars at Strasbourg; while ‘popery’ comes to frequent use from 1536 only: ‘Popish’ and ‘Popery’, in *OED* (01 June 2019). Because of these late connotations, there is evidently no entry for ‘papist’ in the *MED*.
[173] *Ballads from Manuscripts*, pp.226-30; *LP*, VII, 1251, App.43; IX, 747 (described as ‘Pharisaical papists’); X, 614; XII/1, 381, 530, 757, 1129; XII/2, 505, 661, App.14.
[174] *LP*, XI, 987; *King’s Letters*, V.2, LXXII; *LKE*, I, p.354.
[175] *WC*, pp.33-5; *TRP*, 158.
[176] Swinnerton, *A Litel Treatise*, B8r. Richard Morison did the same in comparing the pope to the pharaohs who oppressed the Hebrews: Anglo, ‘An early Tudor Programme’, p.178. This discourses were soon preached throughout the realm, as reported by Wriothesley: *WC*, pp.30, 33-5.
[177] *CSPSp*, V/2, 76.
[178] *King’s Letters*, V.2, LXXII; *LKE*, I, p.354. To Hall the rebellion was ‘supersticion and popery’: *HC*, p.820.

These official instructions, when seen in the light of a pretended dialogue, demonstrate that while the crown was trying to update perspectives and narratives, it needed the legitimation of the public. It was in this context that Richard Morison skilfully suggested to Cromwell and the king that there should be an annual triumph in the kingdom, with bonfires, processions, feasts, and prayers, 'to act as a perpetual memorial to the good fortune of the English people in their deliverance from the bondage of the Papacy'.[179] Another man employed by Cromwell, Clement Armstrong, wrote many ideas for the 'advancement of the commonwealth', also putting forward arguments against 'popish ceremonies'.[180] The fact that the crown's pens had to reinvent these expressions against the opposition is as significant as the appropriation of common tropes or the emphasis on other aspects seen above. The words 'papist', 'popish', and 'popery' suggest not solely the government's contempt towards the conservatives but that it was instructing the people by offering another range of political and religious concepts.[181] In order to do so, the crown still needed the pretended dialogue because only a dialogical relationship could make it possible to re-use the same public rituals, defend the same 'commonwealth', and attack the same kinds of 'oppression' to accomplish new objectives and legitimise reforms.

Finally, this section's last point stems from the attitudes towards the official truth and the enforcement of unequal levels of political power. Just as it was hard for governments to address rebels directly and rationally – they had to offer accusations and downplay popular complaints as illegitimate and violent – it often was the case that they preferred to enforce

[179] This is suggested in his *A persuasion to the king that the laws of the realme shulde be in Latin*, perhaps originally called *A discourse touching the reformation of the lawes of England* (*c.*1536) quoted by Anglo, *Spectacle*, p.266. This treatise is briefly analysed and partly reproduced in: Anglo, 'An Early Tudor Programme', pp.176-9. Calendared in: *LP*, XVII, App.2.

[180] E 36/197: C. Armstrong, *Sermons and Declaracions Agaynst Popishe Ceremonies*. See some comments on him in: Anglo, *Images of Tudor Kingship*, pp.24-8; Elton, *Reform and Renewal*, pp.26, 69-70. And the comprehensive analysis of: E.H. Shagan, 'Clement Armstrong and the Godly Commonwealth: Radical Religion in Early Tudor England', in P. Marshall and A. Ryrie (eds.), *The Beginnings of English Protestantism* (Cambridge, 2002), pp.63-75.

[181] Further to the evidence already mentioned, see the use of popery in: *Commonplace Book of John Hooker*, pp.13-14; *Original Letters*, 3rd/3, CCXIV. And 'popish' in: *LP*, VIII, 626; *Morison's Tracts*, p.129.

obedience instead of having to deal with complaints and dialogue. To paraphrase Richard Morison, obedience (or its enforcement) was perceived as the great remedy for sedition. Earlier in this period, Fortescue did not deny the innate necessity of all subjects obeying their king, but he gave more emphasisis to the greediness of the political community.[182] However, if he was the author of the *Somnium Vigilantis*, he claimed that a due subjection of all the people under the sovereign was the basis of the 'commone welthe of a royame'.[183] William Worcester did not show particular interest in obedience, but he stressed that the people commonly broke their allegiance to the king when they lacked justice while facing extortions and oppressions.[184] Edmund Dudley was already more concerned with disobedience as he highlighted social hierarchy and the problem of insurrection – which derives from the 'arrogancy' of questioning the duty of obedience.[185] This increasing concern allowed historians to talk about a 'theory of obedience' in Henry VIII's reign, but this theme was evident well before the emphatic treatment it received at the hands of Cromwell and his propagandists.[186]

From the overwhelming evidence about the crown's concern with illegal retaining throughout the period, it appears that this was one of the first aspects of disobedience that needed to be addressed. Historians have dealt with this in various ways. From the concern with 'overmighty subjects' and 'bastard feudalism' to the symbolic expression of political authority represented by liveries and both royal and non-royal badges, the relationship between retaining and local obedience seems paramount.[187] In this respect, George Ashby,

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[182] Fortescue, *Governance of England*, pp.118-20.
[183] Gilson, 'A Defence of the Proscription', p.518. Authorship is suggested by the editor, p.513.
[184] Worcester, *Boke of Noblesse*, pp.71-4.
[185] Dudley, *Tree of Commonwealth*, pp.88-90.
[186] I refer to the interpretations of: Cooper, *Propaganda*, pp.88-91, 215-6; A. Fletcher and D. MacCulloch, *Tudor Rebellions* (2004), pp.8-10; Elton, *Policy and Police*, pp.217-62; James, 'Obedience and Dissent in Henrician England', p.70. For 'theory of obedience' well before this period, see: N. Saul, *Richard II* (1997).
[187] For bastard feudalism: M. Hicks, 'Bastard Feudalism, Overmighty Subjects and Idols of the Multitude during the Wars of the Roses', *The Historical Association*, 85/279 (2000), pp.386-403. For liveries and badges: S. Gaunt, 'Visual Propaganda in England in the Later Middle Ages', in Taithe and Thornton, *Propaganda*, pp.27-37; Thornton, 'Propaganda, Political Communication', pp.41-2; Anglo, *Images of Tudor Kingship*,

John Fortescue and Edmund Dudley all agreed that people should exclusively obey their prince and ought not to be 'maintained' by other gentlemen or nobles, nor receive their clothing and badges.[188]

The willingness to pretend to be in dialogue about retaining, and make subjects understand its problems, is evident in the proclamations and statutes that addressed retaining. The Yorkist kings addressed the issue at least nine times between 1461 and 1484, and in 1472 it was openly recognised that 'gret tempests, divisions & troubles' had been caused also by the 'geving of tokyens, liverees, signes, [and] making of reteignders'.[189] Henry VII and his son addressed the problem almost as many times as their predecessors, and it was acknowledged both in 1489 and 1502 that private retaining caused 'enormities, dissensions, debates and other inconveniences'.[190] In 1514 and 1523 liveries were directly associated with unlawful assemblies and riots.[191] Therefore, the depth of the matter remained virtually the same across the period and the choice of wearing a badge during the Pilgrimage of Grace, for instance, is among one of the most meaningful and symbolic messages of rebels in this period – on the one hand, implying disobedience to the monarch; on the other, allegiance to 'papists'.[192] Ultimately, and going back to the concept of sedition, what the problem of retaining reveals is that it was a physical demonstration of *dividing* loyalty with retainers and

p.130; M. Hayward, 'Clothed by the Tudors: Yorkist Prisoner in the Tower 1485-1547', in H. Kleineke and C. Steer (eds.), *The Yorkist Age* (Donington, 2013), pp.64-80. For more: *Select Cases in the Council of Henry VII*, p.cxix; Goodman, *The New Monarchy*, pp.50-1; Britnell, *Closing of the Middle Ages?*, pp.92-4; D. Starkey, 'Ightham Mote: Politics and Architecture in Early Tudor England', *Archaeologia*, 107 (1982), 153-63.

[188] *George Ashby's Poems*, p.30; Fortescue, *Governance of England*, pp.127-30, 140; Dudley, *Tree of Commonwealth*, pp.15-16, 45-6.

[189] *CLB*, II, pp.314, 319-20; *PROME*, 1461, It.39; 1467, It.41 (20 Aug. 2019); DL5/1/133; *LP RIII/HVII*, II, pp.79, 288. The quotation is from: *CLB*, II, pp.374-5. It seems that this began to be addressed by government since Henry IV: S. Gaunt, 'Visual Propaganda', p.32.

[190] *PROME*, 1485, It.15; 1487, It.17, 23, 26; 1495, It.43 (20 Aug. 2019); *RHVIICS*, II, 39-41, 45-6; *YHB*, II, p.609. For 1489 and 1502, respectively: *RHVIICS*, II, 40; *TRP*, 50. Also: *Records of Leicester*, V.2, CCXLIX; V.3, XVIII. See comments in: Carpenter, *Wars of the Roses*, pp.225-7. I also share Chrimes's perspective about the oath enforced in 1486: all retaining was always 'explicitly or implicitly saving allegiance to the king': *Henry VII*, p.189. The 'Star Chamber Act', also in 1486, should be seen in light of the concern with retaining and rebellion: C.H. Williams, 'The Rebellion of Humphrey Stafford in 1486', *EHR*, 43/170 (1928), pp.181-89.

[191] *TRP*, 77; *LP*, I/2, 3353; *King's Letters*, V.2, LIII; also found in *LKE*, I, pp.273-4.

[192] *LP*, XI, 818; *Six Town Chronicles*, p.198.

liveries.[193] The crown needed to maintain referring to this problem in various interactions with subjects so that they would never forget the consequences of retaining. The dialogue needed to be implied in order to enforce the law and receive loyalty.

Accordingly, several other approaches implied obedience and silence, especially when rumours were afloat. The government could attempt to achieve support against rebellions by stressing the treasonous purpose of the enemy, such as in 1469, or by preventing another turmoil, such as in a proclamation sent to Kent in 1484.[194] Statutes against unlawful assemblies passed in the context of Perkin Warbeck's plot likewise imply that the crown attempted to take steps in advance of political dissent.[195] Edward Hall later described the monarch busily studying 'howe to restreine and kepe in streyte closure diverse malefactours' when the rumours were growing about Edmund de la Pole.[196] The enforcement of obedience was also the case in times of collection of taxes, when the government was usually taken by surprise facing reactions such as those of 1489, 1497, 1513-4, and in the 1520s.[197] This was specially the case during the summer, on the eve of St John and St Peter, for it was widely known that rebellions took place around that part of the year.[198] In 1533, for instance, it was reported that 'the King and his Council [were] mightily afraid' of possible rebellions.[199] When these rebellions finally came in 1536-7, the careful approach to dealing with the rebels demonstrated the crown's increasing attention to obedience, then stressed more than ever by proclamations, preaching and printed tracts.

The radical changes that came with the successive sessions of the Reformation Parliament (1529-36) resulted in an increasing level of talk, complaint and resistance – as

[193] See the idea of division/sedition and its connection to rumour above, pp.121-29.
[194] *Paston Letters*, V, 719; *CLB*, II, p.353; *Stonor Letters*, I, 112; Gairdner, *Richard III*, pp.343-4.
[195] *RHVIICS*, II, 45-6. See the comments on statutes in: Cooper, *Propaganda*, p.210; Cavill, *The Parliaments of Henry VII*, p.77.
[196] *HC*, p.496.
[197] Further to the ones cited above: *CSPV*, II, 456; *Further Supplement to CSPSp*, p.99.
[198] Harvey, *Jack Cade's Rebellion*, pp.94, 113, 126, 165-6; Wood, *1549 Rebellions*, pp.8-9, 164-77.
[199] *CSPSp*, IV/2, 1091.

we have seen throughout this thesis. The idea that obsessive 'control' and the 'advent of censorship' were products of the Cromwellian regime has already been dismissed in Chapter III, and although the assertive responses of the 1530s are partly undeniable – and also partly shown by Figure 12 – two points must be clear from the ongoing analysis.

The first is that if there was a theory of obedience under Henry VIII, other aspects of previous regimes might allow us to see that kind of enforcement well before the Reformation as well. Secondly, following from the conclusions of the previous chapters, the evidence of the 1530s needs to be seen in the light of public pressure: enforcement of obedience may look different because of the Act of Supremacy and what followed, but it was also natural because the government's decisions were always in a dialectic relationship with its subjects. Before the accession of Thomas Cromwell, both Cardinal Wolsey and Sir Thomas More had tried to cool down the discussion of evangelical ideas, for instance, by proclamations and the prohibition of books which implied disobedience to the king and the church.[200] Rumours and criticism around the king's mistress Anne Boleyn soon became the second of the government's concerns. In fact, as the mayor of London was instructed early in 1527, people should not talk about the king's marriage at all, and important sermons apparently started in 1529 to defame the pope's authority and preach in favour of the king's case.[201] As Susan Brigden has argued, if London could not accept the Reformation, it could not succeed nationwide – and the government indeed feared the political circumstances.[202] Events moved quickly from then on: influential dissenters such as More and Fisher were silenced;[203] Catherine of Aragon lost her title of queen to Anne Boleyn;[204] people were forbidden to speak in Catherine's favour;[205] and the Act of Supremacy concluded this first

[200] *Thirteenth Report* (HMC), pp.309-10; *HC*, pp.772-3; *CSPSp*, IV/1, 345; *TRP*, 122, 129.
[201] *HC*, p.728; *CSPSp*, IV/1, 232, 509; IV/2, 922, 934; *CSPM*, 861; *Six Town Chronicles*, p.196.
[202] Brigden, *London and the Reformation*, pp.216, 232-8.
[203] *King's Letters*, V.2, LXV.
[204] *TRP*, 140.
[205] *St.R.*, 25 Hen.VIII, c.22. Commented by Chapuys in: *CSPSp*, IV/2, 1058.

phase of reforms.[206] Simultaneously, officially-sanctioned sermons were multiplying as they attempted to enforce obedience by praising the new queen and by defaming the 'bishop of Rome'.[207] The government, therefore, needed to act rationally and pretend it had the control of its discourse while facing increased public muttering – the easiest form of acting rationally came to be the emphasis on obedience.

Allegiance was undoubtedly going to be the main issue after the Act of Supremacy and this pretended dialogue remained pursuing the same objectives. John Cooper has characterised the crown's growing enforcement of obedience by demonstrating a concise sequence of decisions during the Cromwellian regime: the oath of allegiance; the publication of Swinnerton's *A Litel Treatise* in 1534; the Succession Act of 1534; the changes in Treason Legislation; and the Second Succession Act of 1536.[208] Ideally, the duty of obeying the king should not have needed this much public reinforcement, and Eustace Chapuys interestingly claimed that the Scottish ambassador laughed at the king for 'presuming that oaths violently obtained from his people [could] make his quarrel good, and ensure obedience'.[209] However, circumstances had changed and both Cromwell and his king defied public opinion by several means, so they needed to keep updating the narratives about legitimacy and religion. To the government, these pretended forms of dialogue helped its officials to act as if they were in control of the discursive conflict they were facing. While both rulers and ruled had the same priorities in the 1530s that they had in the 1460s – peace, unity, the commonweal, and safe transmission of the crown – they had a new concern with the fate of their immortal souls. If those concerns were not hastily pursued and explained, the perilous times of 'intestine and

[206] *St.R.*, 26 Hen.VIII, c.13. Edward Hall highlighted that 'every sonday preached at Paules crosse a bishop, whiche declared the pope not to be the head of the Churche': *HC*, p.814. The intentions of such sermons were clear to anyone from either inside or outside government. See Chapuys's concern with the 'inculcation' on 'the minds of simple persons' expressed in: *CSPSp*, V/1, 9.
[207] Whatmore, 'The Sermon Against the Holy Maid of Kent', pp.463-75; *WC*, pp.23-4, 33-5; *CSPSp*, IV/2, 1062; *Two London Chronicles of John Stow*, p.8. See the interesting treatment of Elizabeth Barton as a 'metaphor' for the whole Reformation in: Shagan, *Popular Politics*, pp.85-8.
[208] Cooper, *Propaganda*, pp.87-90.
[209] *CSPSp*, V/1, 45. See also: Ibidem, 58.

private warre' could well return, and this explains why dialogue and its disguised forms had to take the paths that it did. The government always chose dialogue, and pretended to have chosen dialogue, because the public was always in the background: the people needed to be convinced, to feel united, to understand who was traitor and 'papist', and who was a loyal subject; otherwise they could not be obedient themselves. All these measures that look like merely enforcement of obedience or 'propaganda' must, therefore, be seen as responses and performances that needed a public and aimed at updating interpretations of reality for this public. While the topics slightly changed in the 1530s, the structure of this dialogue and interaction were surely the same as those that Edward IV faced when he usurped the crown in 1461.

Obedience, in sum, is technically implied in everything discussed in this section. The case that introduced Chapter III, John Clerk refusing to attend and despising Edward IV's coronation, can be recalled to conclude this argument.[210] Clerk's indictment of 1461 revealed the occasional (but revealing) merging of both points discussed here: the enforcement of obedience via the dramatisation of politics, on the one hand; and more specific measures of instruction and control of misinformation, on the other.[211] John Clerk should not have refused to see his new king parading in London, let alone sneering at the whole ceremony and prefering to see 'the hunting of a duck'. The political dialogue was treated as 'pretended' in this section precisely because of this: while it should have been natural for subjects to show up and cheer at a coronation, the refusal to attend verged on disloyalty. Henry VIII might have also encountered this problem in 1533, as some reports and the unpopularity of Anne Boleyn suggest. In any case, both ways of enforcing obedience are different sides of the same

[210] See above, p.134.
[211] See also the local dynamics of London of both construction of authority and contest in: Minson, 'Political Culture and Urban Space', pp.2-14.

story: a story in which neither the repression of dissent nor the strategies to dampen its danger should be seen as an isolated phenomenon from the public they invariably targeted. Nor should we see them focusing only on the elites: these actions counted on and needed the crowds. Every single one of these efforts took place in a dialectical framework, and even when some moments could be seen as a political 'monologue' – instead of dialogue – the audience was contemplated both in the idealisation and in the presentation of these policies.

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This chapter has been a study of political communication, stressing the continuities between late medieval and early modern strategies. It has sought to reinterpret familiar sources among historians by putting them side by side and challenging established interpretations about propaganda and government control or 'censorship'. It has also been an assertion of important contentions of this whole thesis, namely, that the importance of public opinion underlines political dialogue and exchange, and helps with the understanding of late medieval political culture. We have seen how the crown did engage in public dialogue, how it tried to reach people's expectations either by replicating successful strategies or by engaging with public opinion via popular concerns and both direct and indirect answers. We have also noticed that time and again the political exchange took place due to the simple fact that the crown and people shared strands of political culture – also something seen throughout this thesis. At the same time, this dialogue was undoubtedly unbalanced as the crown had agency and co-ordination to enforce interpretations of events and policies – or even choose silence – while the people had their manifold voices, some of which – 'seditious talk', petition by rebellion and riot – were illegal and risky. Thus, one might interpret a few of these strategies even as a political 'monologue' led by the royal authorities, but even this

would be a more productive and revealing interpretation than seeing cynical propaganda in this valuable evidence.

Overall, it is reasonably safe to assume that the crown discussed, exposed or imposed questions of public relevance more often than it merely responded to, or appropriated, popular perspectives. This approach was quite evident during Edward IV's and Richard III's establishment on the throne, the early Tudors' foreign and social policy, and Henry VIII's divorce and reformation. One could argue that this was because it was easier to deal with people's expected passive obedience than with some imagined popular opinion. However, it is also clear that the crown tried to change the terms of public discussion in controversial periods such as during 1469-71, Richard III's reign, the first challenges to Henry VII's authority, and especially the discussion around the king's divorce and reformation from 1527 to the 1530s.

Whenever possible this chapter has also demonstrated that the crown echoed popular ideas: in attempting to convince the people, for example, that Edward IV was coming to remedy a diseased political body; that Richard III was fighting against the low-born Woodvilles or the French-allied Henry Tudor; that Henry VII was reuniting the kingdom by marrying Elizabeth of York, pacifying the countryside and resuming war with France; and that Henry VIII was driving the kingdom away from the tyranny of a usurper and Antichrist (the pope) while trying to find a lawful marriage and provide a male heir to the kingdom. Although both the persecution of 'false rumours' and seditious language and the attempts of censorship throughout the period were indeed common features of this political exchange, this conclusion must stress all these dynamics were dialogic. Moreover, this dialogue – sometimes pretended, sometimes real, and sometimes even a 'monologue' – was a central and persistent feature of the whole period, increasing especially in so-called more authoritarian periods. The forms of dialogue seen here inherited well established practices

from the late medieval period – such as the royal proclamations and ceremonies – as well as began to use new technology within the traditional performances – that is, the printing press. All things considered, the continuities are paramount in comparison to any minor changes.

Although these strategies were arguably increasing by the 1530s in comparison to the rest of the period, this was only due to the crown's responses to the people's regular attitudes towards taxation, the 'evil counsellors', or the 'common weal'. Most importantly, if there was an increase that goes beyond the problem of surviving sources, it was concurrently because the government was answering to the shifts in popular perspectives too: its higher pressure, radicalism and violence in speech and new expressions examined in the previous chapter. Henry VIII and Cromwell may well have been the 'tyrants' in some interpretations, but this chapter preferred to highlight that, on the one hand, their energetic answers typified how responsive and fearful they also were; and on the other, that they were not so different and revolutionary as traditional interpretations would have wanted them to be. Regardless of individual characters and attitudes, political communication always managed to take place and promote the dialectical movement between what the crown imagined of public opinion, and what the people thought about their government.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has been a study of the interplay between the ideas that surrounded public opinion and the politics of late-fifteenth – and early-sixteenth – century England. It has sought to reveal how this interplay remained a constant feature of the period and how it led to the putatively distinctive scenario of the 1530s. The introduction set out a complex research agenda in which I proposed that the communication system explored here was politics itself, and that its variations, conflicts and hegemonic discourses were all constituent parts of the dynamics of public opinion. In other words, the language system shared by contemporaries is as revealing of politics as it is of public opinion – as the means of making politics is via communication strategies that either convey or contest power.[1] It was also implied in the introduction that the overall argument of this study highlights continuities more than changes. Assuming that any period naturally inherits the language system and discourses from what preceded it, these discourses could only be perfected, exaggerated, or recycled. Therefore, what we have seen throughout this thesis is the fact that – within the language system – the contestation of public policy, the crown's instructive strategies, the responsive political culture, and the interconnected expectations of contemporaries added up as public pressure which only increased towards the end of this period.

In order to scrutinise this communication system and demonstrate such continuities, we have explored a sequence of arguments. In Chapter I, I first outlined the concept of the people, showing that the 'commonalty' included not only the commons but part of the lower gentry that interacted with them, and women as well as men. On this basis, I was able to argue that the difference between addressing the political collectivity, on the one hand, and the 'third estate', on the other, did not actually matter much to contemporaries because the

[1] We could extend that view of acts of communication to every historical phenomenon, as proposed in: Stollberg-Rilinger, 'The Impact of Communication Theory', p.313.

consensus effect of public opinion always considered the lower orders and put pressure on the authorities. Politics, even international politics, was conducted with a popular element in mind. That popular element could either be the representation of the consensus – which contemporaries seemed to see the people as 'useful' – or the representation of dissent – when the commons were seen as 'harmful' to politics. These two characterisations coexisted – the former helping contemporaries to construct the consensus effect of public opinion, while the latter to characterise popular perspectives – and together they put a persistent discursive pressure on the governments of late medieval England. In Chapter II we explored the facets of popular speech that were more commonly 'harmful' than 'useful' by surveying the vocabulary of rumours as part of the communication system studied throughout the thesis. I argued that psychology and sociology help to understand the shifts in public preoccupation with crises that, in turn, explained the origin of rumours. Moreover, I also argued that widespread rumours created an anxiety loop that affected both the people and the authorities: they were natural responses to periods of uncertainty and crisis, but they were read by the authorities as deliberately malign, conspiratorial or seditious. An important implication of Chapter II is that the unprecedented changes of the 1530s generated particularly high levels of rumour and therefore of popular pressure on the political system. The new 'repressive' measures and legislation that followed, therefore, can thus be seen as a response to the anxiety loop caused by the same wave of rumour-mongering. In other words, the radicalism of government policy in the 1530s was also rooted in and responded to popular rumour-mongering about the king's marital problems and what accompanied these discussions – the Reformation and the Cromwellian regime. Contemporaries knew that rumours caused division and it could ruin the ambitious policy set out by Cromwell and his circle of reformers.

The findings of Chapter II suggest changes of degree rather than type in both popular opinion and government policy, as both the levels of rumour-mongering and the official responses were part of common reactions to alarming circumstances. Similar conclusions about intensity were reached in Chapters III and IV. The third chapter undertook an analysis of the treatment and contents of popular language that contextualised the conclusions of Chapter II. It first revealed that the treatment of abusive language that branched out from the treatment of rumour-mongering also sheds light on the circumstances of the statutes passed in the 1530s. For one thing, the content of seditious language demonstrated that popular criticism had a purpose and intended to be politically persuasive. The common people acted as 'freely' as possible and intended to contest the hegemonic voices of crown and church, so their expressions normally lacked deference because that was how they typically managed to make bolder political statements. For another, we saw that the crown was continually concerned with seditious speech – and in its own right, not purely because it seemed to lead to disorder but also because it grew side by side with rumours. Consequently, the answer to high levels of rumour-mongering and seditious speech was always something that could reposition public speech as consensus. That could mean more political communication and forms of dialogue that we saw in Chapter V, but it could also mean more legislation and attempts of control as happened in the 1530s. Therefore, the second objective of Chapter III was to suggest that the Henrician Reformation was not inherently authoritarian by ideology, but was reactive to this public pressure that was seeking to break the hegemonic discourses violently – with aggressive comments – and dangerously – while discussing the succession, traitors, the king's death, or the new doctrine. In all, I argued that popular language was indeed more easily labelled as sedition and treason, but the stereotype of the people as 'harmful' to politics does not explain everything as popular language was mostly genuine and not merely miscast by authorities as seditious.

One reason why popular language resorted to violent statements and disrespect most of the time was that the commons themselves were almost invariably reacting to what they saw as different kinds of oppression. The significant continuities and shifts in popular language explored in Chapter IV indicate, then, that reactions to oppression underlay most of the evidence analysed in Chapter III. Commoners defended the crown, the 'common weal', and later the 'commonwealth' because that was the only way they could be reassured that the structures of oppression were not going to prevail over justice and their wellbeing. When, in the sixteenth century, the common people had the impression that oppression was increasing – including the oppression of their speech – they reacted sharply in both criticism and tone. From the government's perspective, such public pressure that amplified the fear of turmoil could only result in more prosecution of popular speech, leading to more charges of treason. Therefore, this interactive relationship is a crucial feature that adds further explanation for the new measures of the 1530s towards seditious and treasonable language. In this way, we come back to the points made at the beginning of this thesis: the interactive relationship between popular expressiveness and official repression fits neatly into the idea of a shared communication system which recognised both the positive and negative features of popular vocality.

Following from this, Chapter V has sought to close this sequence of arguments by stressing that communication between rulers and ruled was indeed increasing as a result of pressure – regardless of the unequal power of those involved. What this means is that Chapter V explored more clearly how the government behaved as if it was creating the consensus effect that other commentators re-used in Chapter I. This last chapter first outlined how the government's tropes matched the people's language and were interested in political dialogue. Subsequently, Chapter V demonstrated how the government engaged in various forms of 'pretended dialogue' to either impose its own values by restructuring public knowledge, or

by enforcing obedience to achieve the appearance of unity and harmony. Overall, we might say that just as the people re-used the tropes of the Wars of the Roses and were seemingly always reconsidering who should be their rulers, the governments were constantly seeking unity to distance themselves from the shadows of civil war and rebellion. Arguably, these problems had to be faced by all monarchs, but this thesis has explored the communication system of those who experienced two of the most troublesome periods before the Civil War of the seventeenth century – the Wars of the Roses and the early Reformation.

We might want to ask now, what is the significance of public opinion and seditious language in this specific period for the broader understandings of late medieval and early modern history? First of all, it suggests that even within the constraints of contemporary communications, a rich and interactive political culture was possible well before we might expect. This is not to suggest that we must identify the origins of the 'public sphere' in the Wars of the Roses, but it is clear that it existed in some form or another during this period; that it often included the views and discourses of the common people; and that it was neither wholly 'rational' nor merely 'free'. Depending on the subject matter of public discussion and the means deployed to publicise it, it could take a long time for people and rulers to 'respond' to each other, but it is important to notice that they did eventually respond and that they clearly understood one another because they shared values and exchanged speech acts full of political meanings and, sometimes, symbolic violence. Thus, because no social phenomenon can make sense in isolation, we cannot understand anything in the public realm if we only look at the popular voices or the official perspective: we have to look at crown and people together as they contrast, contradict, and contest each other. Secondly, a study of public opinion and seditious language between the Wars of the Roses and the Pilgrimage of Grace is one that demonstrates plenty of continuities between periods that are treated as 'medieval' and 'early modern' respectively. Paradoxically, it is only by acknowledging these

continuities that it is possible for us to comprehend the subtle changes in public pressure and choices of vocabulary. It is only by understanding that reaction to oppression always rules popular language, for example, that we can perceive why popular criticism seemed to increase sharply when people realised more oppression not only of themselves but also of others, such as the case of Queen Catherine of Aragon, Princess Mary, and – in the case of the northern rebels in 1536-7 – the traditional church oppressed by the royal supremacy. Thirdly, this study suggests that public opinion and pressure profoundly influenced not only taxation, policy, local politics, and international campaigns, but also the promulgation of new important laws as those of the 1530s and later. They did so not directly, but by shaping the attitudes and interests of political actors within these regimes and ultimately contributing to definitions of sedition, treason and heresy. After all, it was only the existence of cases of sedition and treason that entitled the crown to pass new statutes.

Consequently, later-sixteenth-century governments reacted in the same way to their public pressure, and while they faced 'new' challenges, they had to re-use these key concepts in order maintain their appearance of control over public opinion, dissent and the consensus effect.[2] The vocabulary used in the statutes of Philip and Mary, and those of Elizabeth I, was surprisingly similar to that of the previous centuries: these statutes aimed at controlling the same 'false news', and 'seditious news and rumours' in 1554 and 1558; they wanted to specify punishments to each offence involving the spreading of seditious rumours, printing, writing, and prophecies in 1580; and in 1592 they treated the Puritans in the same way that the Lollards had been treated in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, i.e. as 'seditious movements'.[3] After looking at the overview of this thesis and the dynamic and dialectical relationship between the public and the government that it has sought to propose,

[2] See a recent contribution to this debate in: D. Coast, 'Speaking for the People in Early Modern England', *P&P*, 244 (2019), pp.51-88.
[3] *St.R.*, 1-2 Ph. & Mary, c. 3; 1 Eliz. I, c. 6; 23 Eliz. I, c. 2; 35 Eliz. I, c. 1.

these later statutes cannot be merely seen as new rules and laws that only confirm the traditional view of a more authoritarian early modern state trying to constrain popular speech. Rather, these later definitions and refinements were all seeking to achieve the same things that previous governments were, that is, to maintain the consensus effect of an obedient public opinion as opposed to any divisive voices of sedition and treason. Public opinion, from this perspective, is a never-ending discursive struggle in which both sides of the struggle – the people and those seeking to fabricate consensus – resort to a particular language system either to impart or challenge power. That is partly why governments kept losing control: public authorisation was important to them and drove them to always interact with the public with information and persuasion, but the results of their activities simultaneously generate (and almost license) comment, reaction, and misunderstanding.

In seeking to contribute to discussions and understandings of the relationship between public opinion and the governments of late medieval and early modern England, this thesis has brought together several areas of the study of popular speech in late medieval England as well as combined different methodologies to fill in a gap in the field. In particular, it has attempted to outline and broaden the understanding of public opinion in order to escape from the illusion that it is a simple combination of several opinions that automatically put pressure on governments. On the one hand, this objective has been achieved by treating public opinion as fabrications made by popular activists, commentators, and governments either to recycle the consensus effect for particular ends or to use it as a tool to dampen the possibilities of sedition and discursively enforce unity and obedience. On the other, by analysing the particulars of the language system in which public opinion was fabricated and contested, we have revealed that popular opinion offered the possibilities of sedition more often because it was more plural and critical. Moreover, given the multiple voices of rumours and seditious language, what authorities saw in popular speech was the imminent threat of

breaking the consensus. This broad picture is perhaps the most valuable contribution of this thesis to the field: a structure of how public opinion worked in late medieval England, how it sought to maintain its unity, how it could disintegrate, how it was contested, and how governments sought to keep control over it not only by engaging with and trying to shape the discourses of the period but by approving more legislation when public pressure increased. The central theme underpinning each of these elements of my analysis is undoubtedly that there was a dialogic interaction between rulers and ruled which seemed as important to these governments as to other political actors, and one in which both parties made moves in response to the other. It is hoped, therefore, that this thesis has paved the way for the integration of late medieval and early modern approaches to public opinion and popular speech, and that it can be seen not only as a summary of discourses in play in this period but also as a new way of looking at the problem with a combined theoretical framework.

What has not been fully revealed in this analysis is the extent to which the local politics replicated the discourses of public opinion, how people contested politics at the local level, and how this evidence would fit in the broader discourses in play. While we have encountered local evidence throughout this thesis – in particular, seditious language against local officers and cases of riots –, there was no room for exploring it widely, and, examined further, these records might reveal other trends as well as confirm the ones seen here.[4] There is certainly room for further research on this issue, which would involve a significant empirical study of local sources. Dialogue between rulers and people was just as present in cities, towns, parishes and villages as at the broader level of the kingdom, and a study of its features could be carried forward by surveying city records – as Christian Liddy has already

[4] See Appendix 3 below for the variation in the volume of these records.

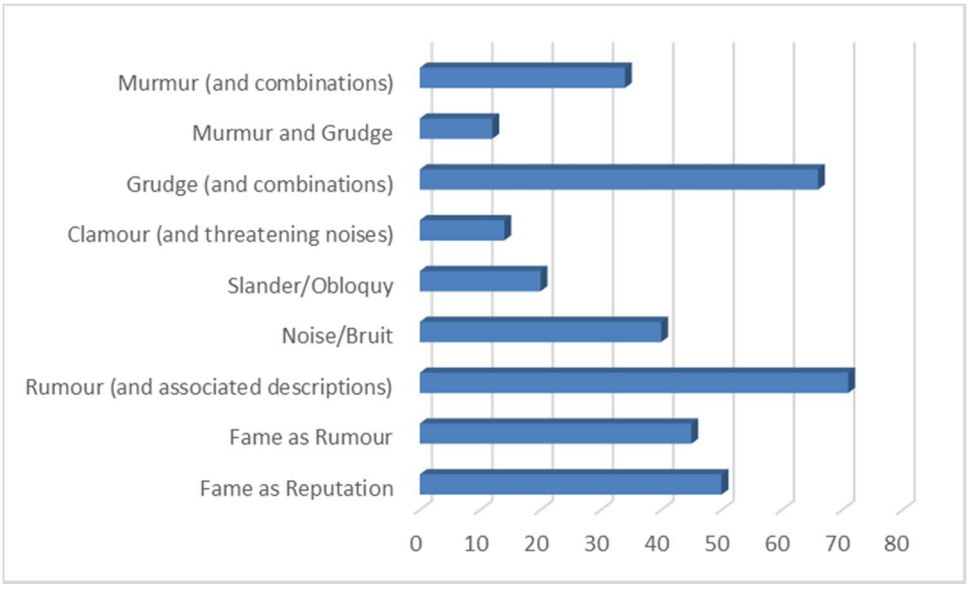
demonstrated[5] – and the local and ecclesiastical courts – as in the work of Ian Forrest.[6] While it would be impossible to replicate the structure of this work in a local context – as we do not have as many 'commentators' to survey – future work could compare the stereotypes and discourses surveyed here and achieve a better understanding of popular perspectives in places that have not been widely studied. Lastly, future works might profit from replicating the techniques and concepts employed by this thesis to periods and places that have similar coverage of chronicles, letters, indictments, proclamations and other types of sources.

In the current state of historical research, in which avenues of investigation invariably become fragmented into highly specialised niches of activity, I believe it is highly valuable to establish and publicise relevant connections and long-term trends. I hope that this thesis has advocated this belief. On top of the striking similarities between fifteenth- and sixteenth-century England, any coincidence between the 'fake news' of our current political situation worldwide and the 'false rumours and seditious words' of the late medieval period – not to mention the ancient goddess Fama that haunted Greek and Roman public figures – may well serve to connect us with the otherness of distant periods and societies that, in certain aspects, were more similar to us than they were different.

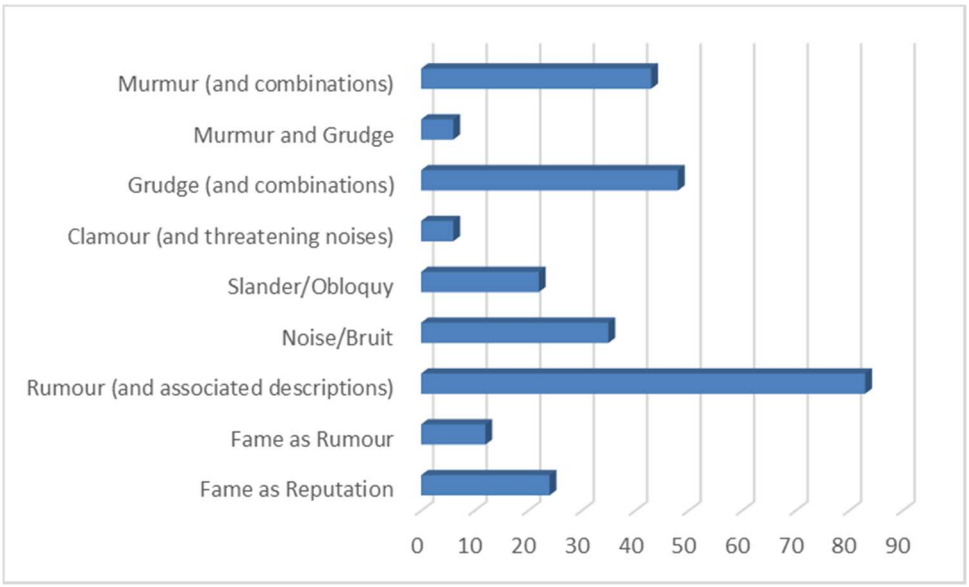
[5] More recently, and especially, in his: *Contesting the City*, ch.5.
[6] Forrest, 'The Transformation of Visitation', pp.21-30; I. Forrest, *Trustworthy Men: How Inequality & Faith Made the Medieval Church* (Oxford, 2018).

APPENDICES

1. Distribution of the Vocabulary of Chapter II, 1461-1525

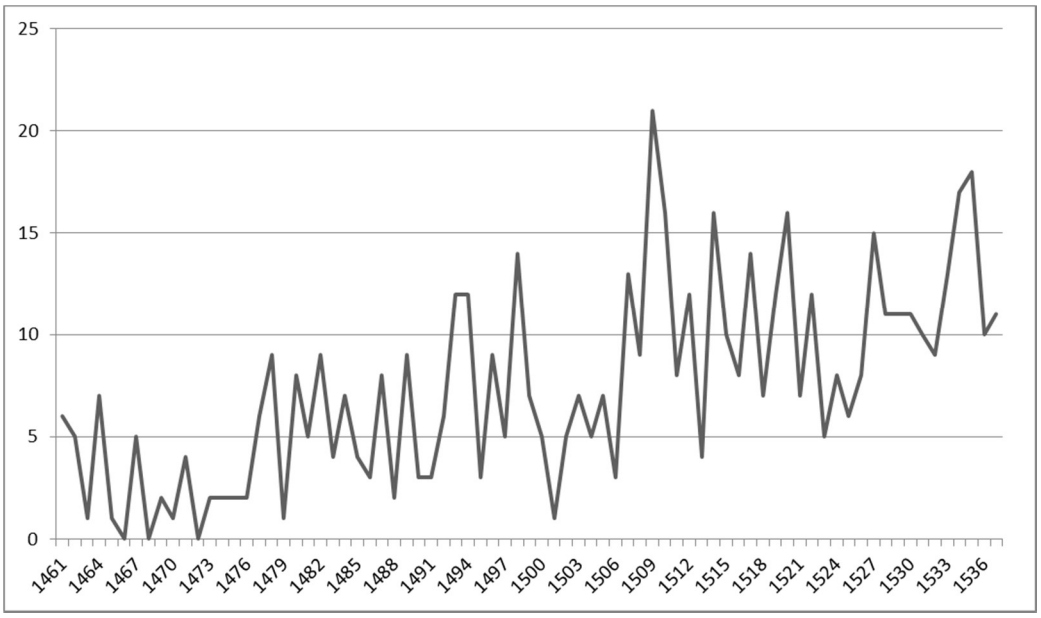


2. Distribution of the Vocabulary of Chapter II, 1526-1537



3. Variation in the Records of Local Complaints

This figure represents the miscellanea of evidence encountered during this study that could not be considered in the main chapters. It includes both the evidence of some kind of misdemeanour against royal, civic or cleric authorities as well as the evidence of what I consider to be revealing of 'local' public opinion – such as cases of defamation, vagrancy, accusations of heresy, and many other charges. Broadly speaking, these cases were recorded in the King's Bench, the Star Chamber, the Consistory Court of Norwich, the Ecclesiastical Court of London, and the records of Coventry, York, Leicester, Nottingham, and others. Tenths of such cases were found among the Chancery bills, but given the impossibility of dating them, only a few were included in this data.



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DL 5 – *Duchy of Lancaster: Court of Duchy Chamber, Entry Books*.

KB 8 – *Court of King's Bench: Crown Side, Baga de Secretis*.

KB 9 – *Court of King's Bench: Ancient Indictments*.

KB 27 – *Court of King's Bench: Crown Side, Coram Rege Rolls*.

SC 1 – *Ancient Correspondence*.

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