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# Introduction: Prevent and tame

Ideas for a New Perspective on Social Movements and Protest

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## Introduction: Prevent and Tame. Ideas for a New Perspective on Social Movements and Protest

This book is a product of a conference on »Shaping Europe in a Globalized World. Protest Movements and the Rise of a Transnational Civil Society« which took place in Zurich in the summer of 2009. It brings together some of the empirical and theoretical papers presented in two panels, entitled »Preventionism and Obstacles for Protest in the Era of Neoliberalism—Linking Protest Research and Governmentality Studies« (organized by *Peter Ullrich*) and »Taming Protest: The Rituals of Violence« (organized by *Andrea Pabst*). The scope of these panels and the interconnectedness of the addressed issues are expressed in the book's title.

This book can also be seen as a result of our attempts to find new perspectives for researching social movements and protest in light of recent developments in social theory. No matter how different these perspectives and their subjects are in detail, they follow a similar analytical intuition that is spelled out in Foucault's concepts of ›governmentality‹ and ›subjectivation‹. They aim to overcome the common dualistic approach that predominantly sees movements and power (the state, government and others) as independent antagonists and thereby often ignores their entanglement. This assumption leads to an approach to understanding protest that departs from the usual questions of »Who are they?«, »What do they want?«, and most importantly »What are the most successful movement strategies?«. To these, we would like to add »To what degree can aspects of power, the state, and the structures of government also be found within movements themselves?« This perspective, we think, enables us to see movements more as part of the societal whole than as the ›other‹ or ›outside‹.

With this book we do not claim to offer a comprehensive overview of all of the implications which governmentality and subjectivation studies may have for protest research, but all of the papers collected here do, in one way or another, try to establish and conceptualize such a link. Given that commonality, however, one can distinguish among these contributions quite a range of different starting points and foci of analysis.

Of course the state still is a core actor. On this level, the demarcation between legal/illegal is still the primary mode shaping basic forms of conduct. Criminalization is a basic tactic for dealing with unwanted behavior like protest. This strongly affects activists' opportunities, behavior, and thinking, thereby fundamentally changing the interrelatedness of activism and power. The paper by *Andrej Holm* and *Anne Roth* describes a case of the criminalization of protest by constructing associations between left wing activists and terrorism. The allegations in this case could not be sustained, but gave authorities the chance to conduct extensive investigations into the left wing scene, generating intelligence to be used for the further

policing of protest. As *Holm/Roth* make remarkably clear, what the alleged ›terrorist‹ activists had to go through while being subjected to massive police surveillance, imprisonment, and interrogation is hard to overestimate and will leave a lasting imprint in their minds. Besides the repressive aspects one must also ask what preventive effects such practices may have. To what degree will this constant threat of ›special treatment‹ inhibit activists from engaging in protest and activism in the future?

*Michael Shane Boyle* analyzes the criminalization of the VolxTheaterKarawane following their participation in the demonstrations against the 2001 G8 summit in Genoa, Italy. As part of a carnivalesque activist tour for migrant rights, the group had been performing in Europe for a month prior to being arrested just outside of Genoa. Similar to the case described by Holm and Roth the group was charged with forming a criminal organization and subjected to indefinite detainment, harsh interrogation, and even torture by Italian authorities.

While criminalization is clearly a very authoritative act of governmental institutions, there are ›softer‹ or more subtle techniques, especially different forms of surveillance, the use and effects of which are important to recognize. Compared to open criminalization, practices of surveillance work not only on the state level but by spreading pandemically throughout the social body, into public space, workplaces, the media, and our homes. Based on this diagnosis, *Florian Heßdörfer's* paper sketches a fundamental link between the process of subjectivation and experiences of visibility. While visibility plays an increasingly important role in the social field—from media technologies to public security efforts—protest actions and strategies also transform themselves according to the changing conditions of visual culture. But on this spectacular field protest/movements tend to conceptualize themselves as a mediatized public event and are in danger of forgetting about their work of negation and its articulation.

While this can be read as an unintended consequence of taming the potential powers of protest, the book also deals with more specific forms of subtly hindering resistance. This is the focus of *Marco Tullney's* contribution. He shows that surveillance technology in the workplace is not only a means of effectively organizing production and optimizing the workforce. It *can* also be used to hinder employee protest, and it is *intended* to have this effect. Most importantly, workplace surveillance *is perceived* by employees as a means of suppressing their labor rights and thereby limits their opportunities to organize.

The preventionist aspects of protest policing have a social background that goes far beyond the field of political activism. Prevention, *Peter Ullrich* explains in his initial paper, has become an issue in all areas of life, especially in the health care sector. Gaining legitimacy from this field, preventive thinking (e.g. »Have I gotten enough exercise this week?«), supported by extensive apparatuses of surveillance and control, has a tendency to infect all areas of life with an instrumental rationality aimed at optimizing the personal self. One major effect of this rationa-

lity is that it makes people think that their grievances result from individual misbehavior rather than social structures. This, *Ullrich* argues, may have the effect of delegitimizing protest by undermining one of its basic preconditions: the legitimacy of social critique.

The preventionist perspective can also be incorporated by social movements themselves. *Darcy K. Leach* and *Sebastian Haunss* trace the implicit impact of criminalization in the context of two multi-day protests in Germany, specifically actions against a nuclear waste transport to Gorleben in March 2001 and against the G8 meetings in Heiligendamm in 2007. In their two case studies they analyze how the »violence question« affects the capacity for cooperation among diverse movement groups. The spotlight is thus not on criminalization strategies by state officials or journalists but on the question how activists, in navigating complex debates about the (il)legitimate use of violence, activists themselves often attempt to tame other factions/groups within their own movement. In examining these processes, *Leach/Haunss* demonstrate the effects of intra-movement taming rituals and highlight conditions that facilitate sustainable cooperation among diverse activist groups, despite the state's efforts at criminalization.

Against the background of these developments, the aims and means of protest seem to change. But perhaps the whole logic of acting against something should be called into question? This at least is the concern of *Nick Montgomery's* contribution. He focuses on the recent actions and discourses around the 2010 Anti-Olympics Movement in Canada and analyzes two major approaches taken in this oppositional field: the »classic« one of civil disobedience and the one of counter-hegemony following the work of Gramsci and Laclau/Mouffe. In analyzing the Anti-Olympics movement, the author recognizes the emergence of new forms of protest that cannot adequately be conceptualized within the framework of these two logics of protest, and suggests that we transcend them. Building on the concept of »minoritarian politics« proposed by Deleuze and Guattari and Richard Day's notion of a »politics of the act«, Montgomery asks if the framework and focus of »prevent and tame« simply ignores modes of resistance that exist outside of this governmentality, such as that which Foucault terms »counter-conduct«.

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