
Discourse, Power, and Governmentality. Social Movement Research with and beyond Foucault

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Foucault and the rich field of theoretical and empirical work inspired by his thinking currently play a prominent role in the social sciences. It is therefore more than surprising that, with a few exceptions (e.g. Death 2010; Sandberg 2006; Ullrich 2008, 2010; Baumgarten 2010; Heßdörfer et al. 2010; Ullrich and Keller 2014; Snow et al. 2014), this research tradition has scarcely impacted on the mainstream of research into social movements and protest until recently.¹ In this article we outline some ideas on how protest research can be stimulated, enriched, and reformulated out of the vast quarry of (post-)Foucauldian thinking.

It is Foucault's analysis of power, not least his concept of power as a productive force, that helps to bring societal macrostructures back into social movement research, helping to improve our understanding of the boundaries and sometimes even the non-appearance of protest. Power cannot be easily located in certain actors or institutions. Power creates knowledge and forms subjects who are restricted as well as enabled by its omnipresent force (Foucault 1979). Social movements are actors that by definition challenge power (Raschke 1991).

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Consequently, developments in the scientific conceptualization of power are especially important for the study of social movements. Foucault's concept of power is central to his studies of discourse and governmentality. The two concepts will be discussed in connection with various questions raised by the study of social movements, protest, and contentious politics. From this vantage point it is possible to highlight non-strategic aspects of protest, such as its discursive and subjectifying preconditions and the world views of (potential) social movement actors. It contradicts the idea of rational movement actors, focuses on long-term processes and pays more attention to the diverse aspects of the action context of social movements than mainstream social movement research does. These new perspectives also engender several new research questions.

Following the development of Foucault's thinking, we first broach the issue of the knowledge–power complex. The social movement researcher, asking with Foucault what societies consider to be “normal” (or not), what they are able to communicate (or cannot even imagine) due to the discursive regulation of knowledge production, gains new insights into the discourse in which social movements are embedded and thus into the context of their ideational processes. Yet, later—our second main issue—Foucault combined this interest in the social production of knowledge with another perspective. Analyzing neoliberalism, Foucault and others showed how knowledge and related practices are spread and maintained by “governmental” or “biopolitical” techniques of subjectification and especially through techniques of governing the self. Thus, we propose a specific link between micro and macro levels, or between structure and subjectivity.

With discourse, power, and governmentality, we focus only on the aspects of Foucault's complex and disparate opus that we consider particularly fruitful for social movement research, necessarily ignoring other facets. We will go beyond Foucault's theory, drawing on the vast field of governmentality studies, Boltanski's sociology of critique, and the concepts of cultural opportunity structures.

At least four types of processes can be analyzed from a Foucauldian perspective (see Fig. 1) within the common distinction of macro (society), meso (movements, networks), and micro levels (individual constituents and bystanders).

1. Discourses define the boundaries of what can be thought of and communicated at a given time in a given society. The suffragettes of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, for example, did not demand equal distribution of childcare between men and women, because at that time it was still generally unthinkable. They did, however, call for equal political rights, e.g. the right to vote.

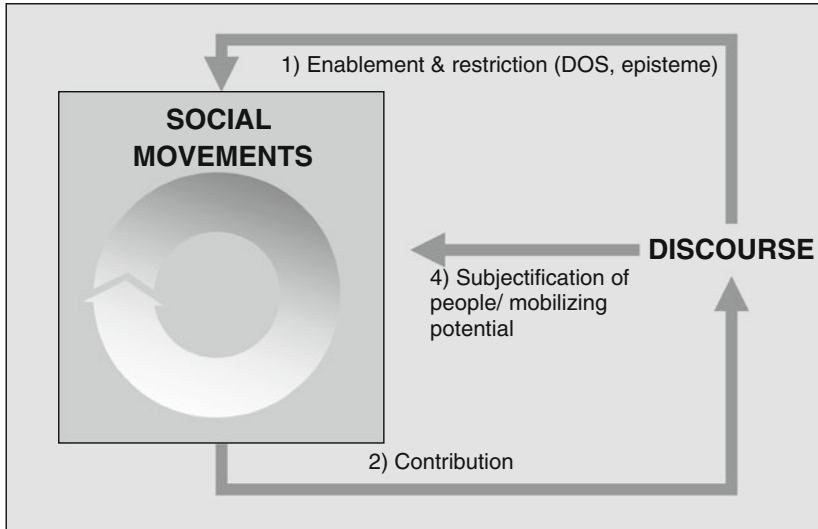


Fig. 1 Connecting social movement and (post-)Foucauldian concepts. *Source:* Figure by the authors

These claims fit well into the historical context of institutional reforms that extended the franchise.²

Discourse as a *room for maneuver* for social movements thus restricts and enables specific worldviews. Social movements not only observe discourse and strategically shape their communication accordingly. They *are* the product of discourse, too.

2. Within the boundaries of what is generally conceivable we can analyze framing efforts of social movements and how they contribute to the *discourse*. The resonance of frames depends not only on cultural factors but also on the arenas and the roles of speakers. In a long-term perspective we observe shifts in discourse and in how movements' communication strategies relate to these shifts. We can observe *how movements* influence the boundaries of what is generally conceivable, either by promoting thinking that is not established in

²The first substantive parliamentary debate on women's suffrage in England took place in May 1867, when women supported by John Stuart Mill insisted that women's suffrage should become part of the electoral reform agenda (Offen 2000, p. 142). But only in 1919 were British women (over the age of 30) granted the vote (Offen 2000: xxvi).

the mainstream discourse or is even antagonistic to it, or by creating new issues and concepts through their practices. One example is the partial success of post-structuralist feminism and queer theory with their ideas of (social) gender and many biological sexes (Butler 1993) in challenging the hegemonic idea of only two (biologically determined) sexes.

3. Furthermore, there are internal communicative practices of movement knowledge generation. These can be seen as a set of both productive and restrictive discursive regularities, which emerge at the movement level in the course of a movement's history. Such a sociology of knowledge approach to discourse regards the communication of social movements, e.g. their leaflets, symbols, not merely as goal-oriented, instrumental action, but as expressing their identity and thus their internal system of knowledge (Ullrich 2013; Ullrich and Keller 2014). It is important to point out that internal discourses are more than strategic power games played by actors within a movement. Movements develop their own specific discursive mechanisms that enable but also restrict the framing of actors within these movements. To capture the nonstrategic aspects, it is important to reconstruct the development of internal discourse over time.
4. Discourses and other practices in power regulation, such as practices of government and the government of the self, shape the subjectivity of the people. In Foucauldian terms, they shape the individual's relations to her-/himself and thus affect the mobilization potential of social movements. With regard to governmentality studies, we show how rationalities of advanced liberal government influence the likelihood of social critique and protest through subjectification processes. These processes are initiated through discourses that see the social in economic terms only, individualize responsibility, and which may thus form subjects that see all plight as individual fault—which delegitimizes protest.

Although we distinguish these *four* basic processes (and respective layers of analysis), our detailed discussion will be *bisected* in accordance with the two focal points of Foucault's thinking:

- Section 1 focuses on the first three points mentioned above. It links the *communication of social movements* with the concept of discourse. For this purpose we borrow from earlier works by Foucault (1974, 2002).
- The subsequent Sect. 2 deals with the fourth point mentioned. It reflects on Foucault's work from the late seventies onwards and its lively reception over the past two decades under the heading "governmentality studies." Addressing the discursive formation of subjects, it gives insight into the *emergence, strength, or absence of protest*, thus providing a link between the macro and micro level.

1 Social Movements and Discourse

A constructivist approach is the basis of Foucault's oeuvre. He was interested in how knowledge is generated. Among his most basic questions were: What is considered "normal" and what is not? What can be thought of and communicated and what cannot? What (discursive) practices produce these restrictive as well as enabling structures? According to Foucault, modern societies create "regimes of truth": in particular times and spaces something is considered as true and this is the result of discourses—systems of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements. Every society thus has its own "police"—mechanisms that distinguish "true" from "false" statements (Foucault 1980, p. 38). Within this Foucauldian view, one specific locus for this "police" cannot be identified. Discursive formations concern *all* actors. They nevertheless result in some actors resonating better than others. In what follows, we argue that discourse should be considered an action guidance for social movements. Actors do not reflect on most of the aspects of the discourse guiding their action, and some things are beyond their imagination. To some extent, however, a movement can relate its framing to discourses in a rational way. This applies for aspects of the discourse that movement actors reflect upon. We refer to Foucault's (1974) "Archaeology of Knowledge" and a number of his ideas in "The Order of Things" (Foucault 2002) as useful for social movement scholars in specifying relations between movement communication and their framework conditions (including its effects on the actor) and thus in overcoming some of the shortcomings of research on social movements. We argue that Foucault helps specify the concepts of cultural/discursive opportunity structure or "discursive contexts" (Ullrich and Keller 2014) and provides strong arguments against the existing bias in social movement research that favors a rational actor concept (Ullrich et al. 2014, see also Schnabel and Roose in this volume).

1.1 Discursive Mechanisms

Foucault investigated long-term processes in the development of discursive structures in search of regularities that affect all statements in a discourse—discursive formations (Foucault 1974). Discursive formations break the concept of the discourse down into different aspects and thus draw our attention to aspects of the discourse that are often omitted in analyzing a social movement's context of action. In "The Archaeology of Knowledge" Foucault distinguishes four discursive

formations that help us understand the power of discourse to create what we consider truth: the formation of (1) objects, (2) enunciative modalities, (3) concepts, and (4) strategies (Foucault 1974). “Objects” are what talking is about. The formation of objects describes rules for shaping objects, e.g. their initial creation, the authorities responsible for the objects and their relation to other authorities, their classification and their relation to other objects. “Unemployment” for example is an object that did not emerge in Germany until the late 19th century. It was simply not regarded as a problem until the beginning of industrialization and the population growth that led to an increased number of people without a job that created a need for political action. So there was a growing need for political measures dealing with unemployment. The definition of the “problem” is important, because the way the problem is treated differs according to the concepts of unemployment (e.g. foundation of workhouses or implementation of unconditional basic income). Thus who is regarded as unemployed and how to deal with unemployment have been very controversial and have changed over time and from area to area (Zimmermann 2006).

The “formation of enunciative modalities” refers either to the speakers or the arenas where discourse takes place or to the position of the subject. The status of speakers is particularly important, as it authorizes speakers to have their say in a specific way and determines the issues that can be raised. Discourse arenas and speakers’ roles are closely connected. A hospital, for example, authorizes a doctor to speak about an illness in a specific way (Foucault 1974, pp. 50–55) and it has become a commonplace that the status of a professor enhances the impression of expertise. Thus far, these Foucauldian insights add nothing new to the field of social movement research (Ferree et al. 2002; Gerhards 1992, 1995), but Foucault’s analysis of discourse goes beyond this observation. He also analyzed the “formation of concepts,” which addresses the question of how statements are connected: their dependence on rhetorical schemata of combining statements, how things are ordered in other discursive fields, and the field of presence (all statements that have been made in the past) (Foucault 1974, pp. 56–63). It includes, for example, the dominant way of describing and specifying objects at a certain time and place. In recent years, to give an example, the unemployed were mainly discussed in terms of activation, and debates on the welfare state were dominated by economic rationality (Baumgarten 2010). This way of discussing the problem authorizes speakers to participate in the debates on unemployment who are experts in macro-economic conditions but not interested in the problems of the unemployed themselves (e.g. the employers organizations) (Lahusen and Baumgarten 2010).

The concept “formation of strategies” describes the mechanisms that connect the grand theories of a society. We can observe, for example, that many grand

theories are today strongly influenced by the concept of the rational individual. The idea of divine providence instead has lost its importance in Western Europe. We thus find the concept of the rational individual not only in many scientific theories, resulting in a turn which excludes incompatible other models. It has also diffused to everyday knowledge. We thus consider discursive formations to be important factors within the episteme. Episteme are the historical a priori of discourse (including the grand theories), allowing for a certain structure of knowledge and basic modes of thinking in a certain epoch, e.g. the establishment of science over and against a pre-scientific level. They affect the thinking of subjects, but their impact does not have to be reflected on a conscious level (Foucault 1974, pp. 189–192). These concepts remind the social movement researcher of social movements' embeddedness in their time and culture. Some ideas of modern social movements where unthinkable in the past, as historical studies of social movements show.

Discursive formations delimit the totality of all possible statements—the archive (Foucault 1974). But there is room for maneuver within the limits set by discursive mechanisms. To capture how these mechanisms exert power, Foucault chooses a long-term perspective. For analytical reasons, he proposes to look for *points of diffraction of discourses, points of incompatibility*, and alternatives that are both equivalent and incompatible (Foucault 1974, p. 65). Diffractions point to societal change and alternatives to the dominant worldviews.³

1.2 Implications for Research on the Communication of Social Movements

The communication of social movements is predominantly examined by framing approaches. Such approaches have been developed to highlight the importance of interpretation processes (often in a strategic sense) within social movements to explain mobilization (Snow 2004, pp. 382–384; Snow and Benford 1988, p. 198). Framing processes are always situated in a specific context, which is specified in various ways. One crucial methodological question is how to connect the discourse level of context (macro) with the framing of social movements at the meso level (Sandberg 2006). In research on social movements the level that we call the

³In some cases social movements are able to alter what can be imagined: E.P. Thompson, for instance, although he did not work in a Foucauldian tradition, showed how the concept of the working class was created by the worker's movement. The idea of such a collective had not previously existed. It was spawned by the expression of common interests (Thompson 1968).

“discourse level” is usually taken into account as a cultural or discursive opportunity structure (both concepts derived from “political opportunity structures”, McAdam 1994; Snow 2004, p. 403) or discursive context (Ullrich and Keller 2014).⁴ Culture in framing research is conceptualized in various ways, but mostly not systematically specified (Hart 1996, p. 88; Swidler 1986; d’Anjou and van Male 1998; Benford and Snow 2000; McCammon et al. 2007; Ullrich et al. 2014). The concept of discursive opportunity structures builds on the concept of culture as a toolkit: opportunities for mobilization are seen as deriving from cultural factors, such as dominant values or ideological contradictions (McAdam 1994; Koopmans and Olzak 2004; Ferree et al. 2002; Roose 2014). Discursive or cultural opportunity structures function as incentives for, or restrictions on, choosing frames. Regrettably, the terms tend to be used as underspecified catch-all expressions and are thus not very useful.⁵ Furthermore, the strong bias towards rational action inherent in this concept is criticized (Pettenkofer 2010, p. 48; Ullrich and Keller 2014). In what follows we take the concepts of discursive and cultural opportunity structures as a starting point and show how the study of social movement communication can be elaborated in Foucauldian terms.

- (1) Foucault contributes to explaining why some frames are more resonant than others.

In order to be successful, most social movement researchers argue that a movement’s framing has to be “culturally resonant,” e.g. in correspondence to a “master frame” (Swart 1995, p. 466),⁶ by addressing central values, or

⁴Following Ullrich and Keller (2014) we prefer the term “discursive context” over “opportunity structure,” because the latter has a strong strategic bias and is mainly interested in analyzing movement success, while the former notion neutrally covers formative conditions in the discourse movements are embedded in and it allows us to ask all kinds of questions about movement culture, discourse and effects—outcomes and “success” only being two aspects among many.

⁵Approaches of this kind limit the context to some selected factors favorable to mobilization. Benford and Snow, for example, list the following aspects as important contextual factors for social movements: “counter framing by movements’ opponents, bystanders, and the media; frame disputes within movements; and the dialectic between frames and events” (Benford and Snow 2000, p. 625). McCammon et al. (2007) speak about legal and traditional gendered discursive opportunity structures to describe aspects of the discursive opportunity structure that were important for the success of the US women’s movement.

⁶Some researchers in the field of radical movements, however, stress that radical movements are successful because of their radicalism (Fitzgerald and Rodgers 2000). The degree of radicalism of action and rhetoric versus resonance necessary for success and the definition of success differ in the literature.

through the social position of its actors (Benford 1997, pp. 418ff.). The criteria for the selection of macro phenomena considered important for framing remain largely obscure (Pettenkofer 2010, pp. 71–74). In research practice, the connection between movements' strategies and discursive opportunity (or context) structure is drawn without specifying the broader range of possible structures. Framing processes are often investigated at the movement level and then placed in relation to selected macro level phenomena, solely relying on the plausibility of the established connection (Ferree et al. 2002; Gamson 1988; Gusfield 1996; Neidhardt 1994; Oliver and Johnston 2005; Snow 2008).⁷ Foucault does not provide factors decisive for the cultural resonance of a movement. However, his analysis of the formation of concepts, the formation of strategies, and his concept of episteme, which we have described above, helps to specify the context that contributes to framing success, e.g. a specific structure of knowledge or specific ways of connecting statements, etc.

- (2) The analysis of discursive opportunity structures can profit from Foucault by considering power relations and dispositives.

A thorough description of the discursive mechanisms for a given time and space is one possibility for embedding a social movement's framing in this specific context of action.⁸ Although it is impossible to describe in detail social movement actors' room for maneuver, Foucault helps us to define some important structures that are usually left out of consideration. It contributes mainly to the question of legitimacy of a speaker's position and could thus be used in addition to other approaches structuring opportunity structures (e.g. Ferree et al. 2002). Taking Foucault's concept of discourse, context analysis in social movement research could be guided by the following questions: (1) what can be adequately stated, (2) by whom, (3) in what discursive arena, and (4) how. The communication of a social movement may influence and be influenced by all four aspects. Movements can, for example, shape an issue to fit the discourse, avoid aspects of an issue that have no chance of positive response, or provoke other actors by raising non-adequate issues. They can focus on their speaker position, for example by claiming

⁷In many empirical studies the framing as well as the context is restricted to the media discourse (Gusfield 1981; Gamson 1988; Gerhards 1992; Donati 1992).

⁸Discourse according to Foucault is a macrostructure in its own right. This contrasts with the concept of ideology, which is basically (though in a dialectic relationship) understood as an expression of an underlying (e.g. economic) structure, which it conceals or interprets from a particularistic perspective. Discourse does not conceal reality—it is reality.

expertise or by increasing their threat potential. They can adjust the framing of their claims with regard to the arena, e.g. a demonstration or a congress. They can choose the arenas for placing their claims but they are often also denied access. Thus using Foucault also helps to understand why movement actors are sometimes excluded from certain arenas. By specifying the context of framing this way, Foucauldian approaches help empirical research into framing across movements, time, and space (Marullo et al. 1996; Mooney and Hunt 1996; Ellingson 1995). Shifts and national differences can be observed in a more structured way with regard to the four aspects mentioned above (Baumgarten 2014). Integrating Foucault in the mainstream research on framing this way seems quite unproblematic. It is just a way to specify different aspects that determine success of a movement's communication efforts. The movement itself might even be conceptualized as a strategic actor if we use Foucault only with regard to the discursive opportunity structure this way. Following Foucault's concept of discourse, however, we should be aware of the shortcomings of such a strategic actor concept.

- (3) The notion of episteme and Foucault's stress on structural elements point to the strong constraints on actors' freedom.

The framing approach has been criticized for not taking seriously enough the cultural constraints of movement framing, the influence of the context on the actors' worldviews, and the actors' interpretation of this context (Swidler 1986; Hart 1996; d'Anjou and van Male 1998; Crossley 2002, pp. 139–142; Ullrich et al. 2014). Owing to the strategic bias of most social movement research, movements' ideologies and framing are seen as outcome-oriented variables. As a result, cultural opportunities are mostly conceptualized as something interpreted and used strategically by a rational actor. This conception is criticized because actors cannot freely choose how they perceive the world (Steinberg 1999; Sandberg 2006; Ullrich and Keller 2014). In the light of this objection, it is worth asking what frames have a chance of being selected because of their cultural or discursive roots. This shifts attention to the conditions for forming movements' world views and not their success. Steinberg, for example, uses the concept "discursive fields" (Steinberg 1999: 748). He systematically contextualizes frames with reference to Foucault's ideas. His discursive fields are framework conditions comprising cultural factors and the actor constellation. Actors create and shape meaning within the boundaries of these framework conditions. Social movement actors also largely take for granted what can be adequately stated, by whom, in what discursive arena, and how.

Following Foucault we must also keep in mind that social movements are not only driven by the expected success of their claims. Social movements as a field with its own inner dynamics in producing world views has largely been neglected (see Kern in this volume for a different approach on this subject). Such a movement is nevertheless also a knowledge system based on specific societal conditions that emerge from and develop during discussion of contested issues (Spillmann 1995, p. 139; Wuthnow 1989, p. 13). With reference to Foucauldian concepts, Ullrich (2008, 2013) shows how different discursive opportunity structures in Germany and Great Britain led to different frames regarding the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. These frames—far from being strategically adapted to the movements’ aims—are highly disputed and contradictory within the German left (as is the mainstream discourse due to its interconnectedness with the discourse on the German past) while there is relative unanimity within the British left, where no other discourse causes ruptures. Foucault thus directs our attention to internal processes of movement communication that follow from their society’s discursive structure.

The following chapter deals with another aspect of social movement research, namely changes in the mobilizing potential of a movement due to changes in discourse. There is no smooth linearity in Foucault’s thinking between the concepts dealt with in the next section and this section. The two chapters belong to two different phases of his work, which he has not connected explicitly. There is some continuity, however, due to the notion of productive power and there are further arguments against the strategic bias. We argue that research can gain new insights and ask new questions with the aid of Foucauldian approaches that show how protest movements are embedded in societies’ episteme owing to subjectification of their constituents under given circumstances. Thus, with Foucault, we propose a specific link between the micro and macro levels of the social, or between structure and subjectivity.

2 Governmentality and Subjectivity, or: Why (not) Protest?

Among the most thriving fields of research heavily influenced by Michel Foucault apart from discourse analysis there are the so-called governmentality studies with their concern for the *strategies, techniques, programs, and rationalities of*

*government and the respective subject positions.*⁹ It is surprising that governmentality studies have not yet had much impact on theorizing social movements and protest.¹⁰ The popularity of governmentality as a part of the “Foucault industry” has hardly been reflected in mainstream movement and protest research. The occasional mention of the term governmentality in protest-related literature mostly refers to a very general idea without elaborating the concept’s specific implications. Yet the governmentality perspective helps us to see the strong interconnectedness of movements and power. Consequently it facilitates overcoming the presupposition implicit in the mainstream literature on protest and social movements that the contestator and the contested in the field of protest be separated as two distinct or antagonistic social entities. In this we rely upon the notion presented above that the discursive structures of a society have a strong impact on social movements.

Studies in modern governmentality are strongly interested in programs promoting subtle techniques of government. They recently note the growing importance of self-governing in modern neo-liberal, advanced-liberal (Rose 1996), or neo-social (Lessenich 2008) societies, which most likely affects grievances, critique, and mobilization.¹¹ In the following sub-section we discuss the concept of governmentality from its origins in Foucault’s notion of panoptism to the lively post-Foucauldian debate on the subjectifying processes of “governing the self”. The subsequent section analyses implications for protest research, especially the potential of neo-social subjectification processes for hindering protest. We especially posit that specific modes of subjectification may infringe upon the likelihood of protest by creating subjects trained to attribute the causes of problems to the individual rather than to society. These subjects thus tend to forego social critique and making demands on society.¹²

⁹It is important to note that Foucault’s analyses concentrated on the governing aspects, while the (post-)Foucauldian governmentality studies increasingly valued the subjectivity aspects, which were part of Foucault’s thinking, but not so much of his thorough analysis.

¹⁰Cf. Rose et al. (2006, p. 100); for the few exceptions see the reader by Heßdörfer et al. (2010; especially Ullrich (2010), where the perspective presented here was outlined for the first time) and Death (2010).

¹¹To mark the difference from the classic neo-liberalism of the Chicago school and to make clear that the societal changes observed are not a withdrawal of the (welfare) state but an enormous restructuring of state activities, we follow Lessenich’s (2008) recommendation for calling this “neo-social”, although “neo-liberal” is a common attribute in this discourse.

¹²We will not focus on governmentality within movements. In our view this runs the risk of overstressing the meaning of the term and weakening its inherent relation to government.

2.1 Governmentality and Subjectivity: Two Key Concepts

The concept of governmentality should be traced back to Foucault's (1979) groundbreaking work "Discipline and Punish." In this book he describes the panoptic principle of the unequal distribution of seeing and being seen as a core mechanism by which modern societies provide discipline. As prototypical for this he considers Jeremy Bentham's *Panopticon*, an architectural solution for optimizing surveillance. The disciplining effects of the tower-like structure, designed for prisons as well as factories, hospitals, or schools, stems from its regime of visibility. The prisoners under surveillance are situated in cells located in a circle around a tower in the building's center. While prisoners are unable to look into the tower, the surveillant situated there is able to look into the cells. In such a setting round-the-clock surveillance is not necessary to establish discipline, Foucault argues, because of the implicit uncertainty of the object of surveillance whether it is momentarily under surveillance. It is this uncertainty that makes inmates reflect on the potential costs of misbehavior, leading to the slow incorporation of the surveillant's gaze and thus discipline.

Although Foucault is preoccupied in this book predominantly with understanding discipline in the modernizing societies of the 18th and 19th centuries, he also provides the conceptual basis for more recent forms of (self-)control to which he later turns his attention. The Panopticon produces a somewhat active, reflexive subject that functions properly. (Reflexive) panoptic discipline needs to be distinguished from the older sovereign power as well as from discipline achieved by direct force or threat. In a way, what later became governmentality studies—with its broad concept of government analyzing the "linkages between abstract political rationalities and empirical micro-techniques of everyday life"¹³ (Lemke 2000, p. 31)—examines the generalization of this principle (to govern the people with their taking an active role in it) in modern societies.¹⁴ This important role of the governed individuals' reflexivity and incorporation of the social is described by the term subjectivity—the second central concept of governmentality studies and

¹³Own translation (PU).

¹⁴Governmentality studies' scope of interest reaches much farther back in history. Foucault analyzed political thought from ancient times and government back to feudal regimes to specify its modern form. Within this field he was particularly interested in the development of liberalism, the development of the policy, the emergence of the reason of state and the newly discovered problem of population. Here we rely more on the post-Foucauldian shape that governmentality studies took from the early nineties, focusing on techniques of governing at a distance and governing the self (Rose et al. 2006, p. 89).

the other side of government. Foucault argues against the older philosophical discourse on subjects that there is no substance or universal form of the subject which, on the contrary, has to be conceived as historically contingent. It is the practices of an epoch that make the specific subject type.

For Foucault, subjectification is always subjection, too. His research hence concentrated on the power relations in which the subject's body and soul are formed (Foucault 1998).¹⁵ For governmentality studies it is central to explore the forms of subjectivity that are produced in accordance with changing forms of power regulation, whether these subjectivities are conventional and conformist, resistant, or perhaps hybrid in this respect. And this is where social movement and protest research comes in. The governmentality studies' concept of subjectivity provides a micro–macro link between social structure and/or change on the one hand and motivation to protest—or not—on the other.

There is a lively scientific discourse on *current modes of government* among scholars strongly affected by Foucauldian thinking, which is relevant for protest research. Following Foucault's analysis of the rise of neo-liberalism, much effort was invested in analyzing government of contemporary Western societies, which are characterized by the ever-increasing commodification of the social,¹⁶ the retreat of the welfare state from formerly guaranteed social spending, obeisance to the free market, and orientation on the principles of activation, responsabilization, autonomy, and (self-)management, thus tapering developments Foucault had already observed.

Current processes of subjectification can no longer be completely explained by the panoptic model, because it represents a relatively fixed arrangement. Subjectification today corresponds to a more subtle, more incoherent, more complex, more infinite, indeed more productive type of government and regime of visibility. Neo-social governmentality creates subjects that consider themselves managers of their market performance or, as Bröckling put it, enterprising selves (Bröckling 2005). On the state level, the transformations observed signify changes *within* welfare states, changing their character fundamentally. The character of state intervention changed from a mode of guaranteed provision oriented on solidarity to intervention focusing on activating citizens to feel responsible for their own well-being, and incorporating mid-level regulators as relatively autonomous agents

¹⁵For a detailed elaboration of Foucault's subject theory see Foucault (1982), Paulus (2009), and Lembke (2005).

¹⁶Foucault describes this liberal rationality as "the inversion of the relationships of the social to the economic" (Foucault 2008, p. 240).

(though still also acting in heteronomy, because they are governed “at a distance” (Miller and Rose 1990, p. 9).

Many current governmental measures are inherently ambiguous, comprising both choice and force.¹⁷ For this reason such modes of government have been described as “governing through freedom” (Rose 1996). Subjects are free to take decisions (and bear the consequences) and are sometimes even left in relative uncertainty about the demands of power (cf. Heßdörfer and Bachmann 2009), which again aims to make subjects think and act on their own—enabled by a higher level of reasoning, the incorporation of the demands of power and the obligation to be free (Rose et al. 2006, p. 89). These logics of governing through self-government are exactly what much of governmentality studies is concerned with. For protest research, this basically poses the question of how much of the power side (in the traditional “power vs. contestator” view) is to be found on the side of movements and activists themselves.

2.2 Implications for Protest Research

If such specific neo-social subjectification forms exist as a reflection of specific forms of current governmentality, it is necessary to investigate their implications for protest. Drawing on the rich work outlined in Sect. 2.1, protest research will find many aspects likely to affect protest. The task is to link the observed forms of governmentality, related subjectivity or their development, enforcement, and change with protest motivation, behavior, likelihood, and success.

In a certain manner, the new perspective we would like to suggest here ties in with older currents in social movement research. Despite tremendous theoretical disparities scholars often focused on macro societal conditions to explain protest, notably its emergence. This holds true for analysis of movements as phenomena of mass societies, the break-down model, structural functionalist, Marxist and collective behavior approaches. They all emphasized the current social structure or social change as causes for the existence of social movements, which was often

¹⁷Typical examples are the British and German unemployment regulation and healthcare reforms following the activating “rights and responsibilities” paradigm of the Blair/Schröder Manifesto of 1999. Many measures contain disciplinary measures (= negative incentives): cuts and restrictions of services in general and all the more in the case of non-compliance, as well as extensive control mechanisms on the one hand, and activating strategies like rewards for good behavior (= positive incentives), expanding rights of information access, co-determination, further education, training programs, etc. on the other.

seen as grounded in social grievances, dissatisfaction, or anomie (Buechler 2004). The New Social Movement (NSM) debate (esp. Tourraine, cf. Buechler 1999; Roth and Rucht 1987) was particularly interested in the subjectivity of (potential) protesters. This debate was constituted by the emergence of movements that made their subjectivity the reason per se for protest and that seem to have come into being in reaction to cultural conflicts in (post-)industrial societies. This focus on subjectivity as a way to perceive and handle structural change, hence a way to link structure and agency, provides a link to the governmentality approach.

However, governmentality studies draw our attention to different questions. They highlight specific aspects of the structural context of a social movement and not only help find answers to why protest developed but may also help us understand why protest is weak or even absent.

It seems obvious that current societal transformations give rise to much discontent, especially in global justice movements or the anti-austerity movements, protesting against privatization and cuts in the welfare state. And there have been eruptions of protest when aspects of neo-social reforms have lacked public legitimacy. In Germany, for instance, a wave of protest emerged in 2004 against new unemployment legislation that suddenly imposed severe cuts and accelerated the regime of control and activation (Lahusen and Baumgarten 2010). On the other hand, the protest quickly ebbed. Are the causes also to be found in the social conditions against which protest was directed? Can governmentality studies help understand this?

To begin with, our proposal to link governmentality studies with protest research opens up a perspective for examining social movements together with conditions for protest. Yet, several kinds of relations are conceivable between neo-social government of the self and the field of protest, yielding various and even opposing effects.

- (1) *Neo-social governmentality infringes on the likelihood of protest by undermining one of its elementary preconditions: the existence and legitimacy of social critique (Boltanski and Chiapello 2001) and the legitimacy of addressing it vis-à-vis society.*

Neo-socially activated subjects who see all their conduct as an investment in their future performance may prefer the economic question whether their wishes are affordable or realizable to whether they are worth pursuing. The question required to generate protest of “what is wrong in society” may to some extent have been replaced by the question “what have I done wrong”. Heteronomous and often excessive demands for prevention and activation may be internalized and taken personally by people who are exposed to a

discourse that stresses the need of individual effort. Workfare, activation programs, fitness training, healthy food, lifelong learning, active ageing, etc., illustrate this shift. Crucially, little of this is perceived as imposed upon actors, because it is presented as being in their own interest, as an investment in the personal self.¹⁸ Protest and critique, in the Foucauldian sense of affirming negation (Pickett 1996, p. 451), would have to transcend this economic framework that is the underlying principle of modern governmentality. Yet, the specificities of the liberal, and even more so the neo-social relationship between government and the governed, make this difficult.

- (2) *Neo-social governmentality might be a source of dissatisfaction and low-level forms of protest.*

Never-ending demands for prevention, activation, and responsabilization may also breed protest if these demands are perceived as excessive. But the high degree of control and self-control as well as the individualization associated with precarious work and living conditions give such protest a specific form. These multiple reactions, more likely situated on the sub-movement level, have been analyzed under the Foucauldian term counter-conduct (Hechler and Philipps 2008; Kastner 2008). They may be resistant or even just hesitant behavior. Philipps (2008) reports such tactics by people obliged to work in workfare programs. For example, they worked extremely slowly or did not dress properly (they were not provided with work wear) and thus could avoid outdoor work in bad weather. Counter-conduct is the resistant behavior that appears on the borders of the governed space. It is the form of protest still possible despite the regime of control.

- (3) *Protest can even be a source of and support for neo-social transformations.* Boltanski and Chiapello (2001) showed the share autonomist “artistic” critique of the protest movements had since the seventies in the precarization of working conditions through the production of an individualizing “freedom discourse” that was taken up by the managerial discourse and helped in delegitimizing social critique.¹⁹ Especially sobriety and healthy living

¹⁸See, for example, Ullrich (2010) for a more detailed account of the subjectification effects of medical preventionism or Bröckling (2003) on contemporary feedback techniques and how these discourses undermine social critique. See Bröckling (2005) for the general perspective of the enterprising self.

¹⁹Though from a different theoretical background than Foucault, Boltanski, and Chiapello share a common interest in the question why people find the state of modern capitalist society legitimate or even desirable (Boltanski and Chiapello 2001, pp. 462, 463; Lorey 2006; Kastner 2008, p. 50).

movements come into one's mind as an example (although they may have more characteristics of lifestyles than of movements). Community policing and vigilante groups such as the self-organized anti-immigration Minuteman border patrols may be another expression of such neo-social governmentalization from below (Walsh 2008). This perspective raises the question of the presuppositions of society and those who do (not) protest to change it. "Prevention", for example, is one of the most salient facets of neo-social governmentality and decisive for its subjectifying powers (Ullrich 2010). Yet, social movements—at least those not primarily aiming to redistribute material goods or life chances, like the environmental and the peace movements—often use the same (preventive) rhetoric. They are thus clearly designated as sharing that episteme of their context society and reiterate or even strengthen it.

All three aspects need further theoretical and empirical elaboration. There are protest-theorizing approaches with which they can be linked. This applies especially for the "discursive" or "cultural opportunity structure", which take into consideration the impact of deeply rooted cultural patterns on protest and their change over time (Ullrich 2008). Although he does not mention the term governmentality, Goldberg (2001) gives us ideas about how to link questions of governmentality with protest through opportunity structures. In his case, neo-social subjectification caused empowering group coherence and had an impact on the perception of workers' rights. Goldberg investigated the regulation of unemployment in New York, which had shifted from welfare to workfare. The older welfare system had been based on the distinction between workers and welfare recipients. The transformation challenged this common distinction because of the growing dependence of the city on "non-workers" and because of a change in their self-perception. Although workfare staff were poorly paid and equipped in comparison with normal workers, their fields of operation have tended to converge, enhancing the self-esteem of workfare staff. They have hence increasingly felt legitimized to organize in their interest. This example shows that neo-social governmentality (of which workfare is a central feature) does not necessarily only hinder protest. It depends on concrete conditions whether protest is caused or hindered. But it is obvious how important a role legitimacy plays for organizing protest and it is highly probable that changes in governmentality can have a significant effect on the perceived legitimacy of protest.

It seems practical and fruitful to investigate the emergence and non-emergence of protest under neo-social governmentality in limited spaces as demonstrated by

Goldberg (2001).²⁰ But it is much more challenging to investigate the general macro-level hypothesis of neo-social governmentality as a condition for hindering protest by undermining the legitimacy of social critique.²¹

One empirical problem of such a macro perspective is the isolation of neo-social governmentality as a cause within the variety of social developments. This holds especially true due to the structural ambivalence of these changes composed of liberation and discipline. The continuous uncertainty of governmental demands also makes uniform reactions in the field of protest unlikely. So this question is more of the nature of a theoretically inspired perspective to be applied in a variety of research designs. Within its scope, research on the individual level of activists and non-activists is necessary. Researchers would have to explore to what extent the subjectivities promoted by neo-social governmentality (to be measured through internalized values) correlate with sympathy for and the disposition to protest. Discourse-oriented or reconstructive designs also come into question, investigating changes in movement discourse in the way that Boltanski and Chiapello (2001) have examined modes of critique in management literature. It has to be investigated whether social critique is losing ground compared with individualized artistic critique, as was shown for specific social movements (cf. Neumann 2008 for an account of the alternative economy movement). Elements of neo-social governmentality (and resistance to it) can be traced within movement discourse, while the timing and conditions of their appearance need to be scrutinized. Another approach would be to organize interviews or group discussions with activists to reconstruct changes in their activist lives that reflect governmental subjectivities and the changing (self-)perception of protest legitimacy. New fields of research or at least different perspectives on existing ones come into focus. Of special interest seem to be subjectification processes in confrontation with surveillance, taming, delegitimization, and repression (see for example Boyle 2010; Leach and Haunss 2010; Ullrich and Wollinger 2011). New control technologies, such as video surveillance of demonstrations, bureaucratization of the right of assembly, spatial policing strategies, data retention, mobile phone tracking, anti-terror lists, and many more have to be explored in this fashion. With Foucault and his disciples, society can be brought back into social movement research, and this can be achieved in a manner

²⁰The same applies for Tullney's (2010) analysis of the individualizing and protest-hindering effects of workplace surveillance.

²¹Such a hypothesis turns our attention to a possible counter-development to Rucht's and Neidhardt's (2002) analysis of the "movement society." While they have strong conceptual and empirical evidence that social movement activities are structurally stabilized on a high level, tendencies that may weaken movements must be taken into consideration, too.

that links macro phenomena with subjects on the micro level and addresses the effects on the meso (movement) level.

3 Conclusion

Social movement research and especially discursive opportunity structure approaches can profit from reading Foucault. Foucault's concepts help to specify the context of framing processes and remind us to analyze social movement outcomes in a more long-term perspective. Foucault should be interpreted as a warning to not rely too heavily on the idea of a rational actor with a high degree of freedom to act. Besides strategically influencing discourse, contentious subjects are always influenced by governmental rationalities and the discourses themselves. Thus they cannot freely use discourse as a toolkit. As outlined in this text, Foucault observed that knowledge is always structured by power relations and that the scope of what can be imagined is limited. Social movement actors are embedded in these structures, which enable but also restrict their claims. We can think about such processes of restriction/enablement within the rational paradigm: movement actors shape their claims with an eye on discursive mechanisms: for example placing the right claim in the right arena and trying to positively influence the movement actors' speaker position. But Foucault particularly points to processes that cannot be explained by a rational actor model. Discourse also restricts/enables a movement's possible claims and frames: claims and frames outside the room for maneuver are not thought about at all by movement actors. These claims and frames may have been excluded by the movement's internal communicative practices or by the discursive structures in which the movement is embedded.

Governmentality studies are especially helpful in investigating the relation between discourse/societal practices and the formation of subjects and thus the very conditions for the possibility of protest. Currently, society can be conceptualized as being shaped by an economic rationality producing "enterprising selves." Depending on the specific context, these new ways of governing the self can either prevent the subject from mobilizing or cause changing protest behavior.

There is indeed much more to say about Foucault, social movements and protest than the scope of this article allows. This is partly because Foucault was not only a theorist but also an upright political activist. And although he did indeed spend much more time writing about power, resistance in various forms was always among his concerns. Even more, it was an object of his embrace (Pickett 1996). The various forms of resistance he contemplated (spirituality, contestation, transgression, revolution, resistance, counter-conduct, etc.) have been inspiring for

movements themselves and political philosophy. This has led some scholars to analyze the “boundaries of power” (Hechler and Philipps 2008) on the basis of Foucauldian concepts, as well as the more subtle forms of contestation or “counter-conduct” they enable on the fringes, despite the mutually constitutive relationship of power and resistance (Death 2010). Our examples have permitted us to show that, by drawing on Foucault, research on social movements can gain new perspectives worth exploring, while certain approaches to social movements need to be reassessed and more Foucauldian perspectives for social movement research can be developed in the future.

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