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# 1 Introduction: On the Interrelation of Gender and Protest

Gender and protest are both social phenomena and powerful historical determinants.<sup>1</sup> While the first is a socio-cultural construct, the second is usually an expression of social unrest, although the latter does not have to be shared by a majority of society. As gender is, to cite Judith Butler's classic work *Gender Trouble*, "culturally constructed"<sup>2</sup> and consequently "neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex,"<sup>3</sup> it is a fluid category, open to steady processes of redefinition depending on the society in question or the latter's representatives that formulate the respective categories. Since existent gender norms can be contested, re-defined, changed, and ultimately accepted or abolished, there is a lot of potential for protest formation within this process. One can therefore argue that the genesis of protest in relation to gender can have multiple reasons. It can be

- 1) a consequence of existent gender norms or roles that are considered unequal, insufficient, exclusionary, etc.,
- 2) a counter-reaction to demands to change these norms or, at the same time, to defend existent norms or gender-related roles within a specific society,
- 3) a more exclusive kind of protest based upon specific gender norms that are expressed through protest, or
- 4) a consequence of existent gendered environments or spatialities that stimulate a particular form of gendered protest.

In addition to these different forms of gendered protest formation, there are also protests that are perceived as gendered due to their participants, their aims and demands, or the respective reports about a specific kind of protest.

Since protest as such is usually stimulated, as Jacques Rancière emphasized, by the political exclusion of a part of society whose representatives demand access to

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1 The *Merriam Webster Dictionary* defines protest as 1) "a solemn declaration of opinion and usually of dissent," 2) an "act of objecting or a gesture of disapproval," and 3) "a complaint, objection, or display of unwillingness usually to an idea or a course of action." Merriam Webster, s.v. "Protest," accessed November 26, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/protest>. The contributions of the present volume refer to protest in most of these senses and therefore offer critical insights into a wide spectrum of protests in relation to gender.

2 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London/New York: Routledge, 1999 [1990]), 9–10.

3 *Ibid.*

the historical stage and equality with regard to political decision-making and the existent socio-political regulations,<sup>4</sup> it is hardly surprising that a link to gender as a protest-relevant factor can be identified. This, however, must also be understood in its intersectionality with other forms of protest like class struggle,<sup>5</sup> anti-racism, anti-colonialism, etc.<sup>6</sup> If a protest is related to gender issues or if these become part of a broader protest movement later depends on the specific process of protest formation.<sup>7</sup> Very often, larger protests combine different interest groups, and not all of them have to participate for the same reason.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, revolutionary transformation processes in particular have a strong gender aspect, e.g., the current revolutionary movements in Belarus or Iran,<sup>9</sup> although the history of revolutions has tended to neglect the role of female protest and only used women as revolutionary allegories while overlooking their historical contribution as important protesters of the first hour.<sup>10</sup>

While revolutionary transformations frequently promise the renegotiation and reconfiguration of existent gender norms and the break up of gender-related limitations for some, such transformative changes are often feared by those in power, e.g., the patriarchic elites, who tend to act in a counterrevolutionary manner to defend the existent order, from which they naturally profit in one way or

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4 Jacques Rancière, *Das Unvernehmen: Politik und Philosophie*, 7th ed (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2018), 44.

5 Vincent Streichhahn and Frank Jacob, eds., *Geschlecht und Klassenkampf: Die "Frauenfrage" aus deutscher und internationaler Perspektive im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Metropol, 2020).

6 Dana R. Fisher, Dawn M. Dow and Rashawn Ray, "Intersectionality Takes It to the Streets: Mobilizing across Diverse Interests for the Women's March," *Science Advances* 3, no. 9 (2017): <https://www.science.org/doi/epdf/10.1126/sciadv.aao1390>.

7 Debra C. Minkoff, "The Sequencing of Social Movements," *American Sociological Review* 62, no. 5 (1997): 779–799.

8 See Frank Jacob, *#Revolution: Wer, warum, wann und wie viele?* (Marburg: Büchner, 2022), 42–56.

9 For Belarus, see Fred Pleitgen and Mary Ilyushina, "Women in White Become Faces of Belarus Protests as Thousands are Arrested after Disputed Election," *CNN*, August 13, 2020, accessed November 15, 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/08/13/europe/belarus-protest-arrests-intl-hnk/index.html>; Andreas Rostek, Thomas Weiler, Nina Weller and Tina Wünschmann, eds., *Belarus! Das weibliche Gesicht der Revolution* (Berlin: Edition FotoTapeta, 2020); Alice Bota, *Die Frauen von Belarus: Von Revolution, Mut und dem Drang nach Freiheit* (Berlin/Munich: Berlin Verlag, 2021); Olga Shparaga, *Die Revolution hat ein weibliches Gesicht: Der Fall Belarus* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2021). For the current events in Iran, see Zachary B. Wolf, "Iran's 'Women's Revolution' Could Be a Berlin Wall Moment," *CNN*, October 7, 2022, accessed November 18, 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/10/07/politics/iran-women-protest-revolution-what-matters/index.html>; Soona Samsami, "Women Are Leading a Revolution in Iran," *The Washington Times*, October 11, 2022, accessed November 18, 2022, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/oct/11/iranian-women-are-leading-a-revolution-in-iran/>.

10 Jacob, *#Revolution*, 32–33.

another. The struggle for new gender norms is consequently often related to protest, although the latter is dependent on its perception as an act that could be considered as protest. The cover image of the present book suffices to highlight this precondition for gendered protest. When Inez Milholland Boissevain (1886–1916)<sup>11</sup> led the Woman Suffrage Procession in Washington, DC on 3 March 1913,<sup>12</sup> her riding a horse the way she did was understood as an act of protest, as it did not comply with the socially accepted norms in relation to the way women were supposed to ride or present themselves in public. Sitting on a white horse, facing forward, wearing a crown, and being dressed in a white robe was obviously an act that could only be perceived as out of the ordinary. Taking these aspects into consideration also makes it clear that gender norms can be essential to determine whether or not a particular action is perceived as a protest by the public or other interest groups.<sup>13</sup> This also means that interpretations of protest actions of the past, in particular when related to long outdated gender norms or roles, can change over time and depend on their place of perception, e.g., within the media,<sup>14</sup> and may today no longer be considered an act of protest but rather as nothing unusual. Throughout the ages, as the contributions of the present volume emphasize in relation to different time periods, forms of protest could change, very often in accordance with or as a consequence of the transformation of gender norms society accepted as valid. Protest could also be “gendered” in different ways,<sup>15</sup> as several different perspectives within the following chapters will show. In addition, the means to protest were very diverse over time and could be expressed by prominent political figures,<sup>16</sup> as well as by writers or artists.<sup>17</sup> However,

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11 Linda Lumsden, *Inez: The Life and Times of Inez Milholland* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004).

12 Woman Suffrage Procession, “Official Program Woman Suffrage Procession,” Washington, DC, March 3, 1913, accessed November 19, 2022, <https://www.loc.gov/item/rbpe.20801600/>.

13 Lee Ann Banaszak, Shan-Jan Sarah Liu and Neslihan Burcin Tamer, “Learning Gender Equality: How Women’s Protest Influences Youth Gender Attitudes,” *Politics, Groups, and Identities* (2021), doi:10.1080/21565503.2021.1926296.

14 Jilly Boyce Kay and Kaitlynn Mendes, “Gender, Media and Protest: Changing Representations of the Suffragette Emily Wilding Davison in British Newspapers, 1913–2013,” *Media History* 26, no. 2 (2020): 137–152.

15 Kyle Dodson, “Gendered Activism: A Cross-national View on Gender Differences in Protest Activity,” *Social Currents* 2, no. 4 (2015): 377–392.

16 Olympe de Gouges and Louise Michel, active during the French Revolution and the Paris Commune, respectively, are just two examples of many. Sandrine Bergès, *Olympe de Gouges* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022); Florence Hervé, ed., *Louise Michel oder: Die Liebe zur Revolution* (Berlin: Dietz, 2021).

17 See, for example, Jowan A. Mohammed, *Mary Hunter Austin: A Female Writer’s Protest Against the First World War in the United States* (Wilmington, DE: Vernon Press, 2021); Talesha Wilson and

usually, the possibility for such actions ultimately depended on the availability of resources, the accessibility of protest-related spaces, and the possibility of establishing an agency for a broader movement through particular acts of protest.

Most of the contributions to the present volume were initially discussed at a workshop at Nord Universitet in Bodø, Norway, organized by the editors in early December 2021. The aim was to bring together scholars from different disciplines working on varying perspectives of gender and protest within chronologically and geographically disparate contexts. Due to the broad variety within the presented cases of gender and protest, the chapters have been arranged chronologically. The publication of this volume in a full and free open access format allows interested scholars, students, and activists to read those parts that are most interesting to them. Nevertheless, the editors hope that the volume will provide one of the main advantages typical of such diverse anthologies: to stimulate further critical thinking about the categories of gender and protest, especially regarding their specific and reciprocal relationship. The latter seems to be particularly important again in the 21st century; revolutionary movements are frequently relying on forms of “gendered protest,” while conservatives fear another culture clash (*Kulturkampf*) due to the demands for more gender equality, which is also being expressed through language and addressed through affirmative actions.<sup>18</sup> Even today, protesting women or members of the LGBTQIA+ community are not only expressing a form of “gendered” protest but are at the same time being confronted with protests against their demands or claims. Therefore, counterprotest movements are forming themselves along the lines of “gendered” fears or constructed menaces. Consequently, the ways one can look at the amalgamation of the two social phenomena from the earliest historical times until today seem to be very broad and offer numerous critical insights.<sup>19</sup> Such insights shall be offered by

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Ethan Sharp, “Women, Art, and Hope in Black Lives Matter,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 134, no. 534 (2021): 434–443.

18 Oliver Maksan, “Woke Identitätspolitik: Die Kulturkämpfer der bürgerlichen Mitte blasen zum Angriff,” *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, November 8, 2022, accessed November 19, 2022, <https://www.nzz.ch/feuilleton/woke-identitaetspolitik-die-denkfabrik-r21-blaest-zum-kulturkampf-ld.1710978?reduced=true>.

19 Some recent works on these social phenomena in different contexts include, among others, Hannah Awcock, “New Protest History: Exploring the Historical Geographies and Geographical Histories of Resistance through Gender, Practice, and Materiality,” *Geography Compass* 14, no. 6 (2020): <https://doi-org.ezproxy.nord.no/10.1111/gec3.12491>; Eloisa Betti, Leda Papastefanaki, and Marica Tolomelli, eds. *Women, Work, and Activism: Chapters of an Inclusive History of Labor in the Long Twentieth Century* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2022); Sealing Cheng, “Feeding Hungry Ghosts: Grief, Gender, and Protest in Hong Kong,” *Critical Asian Studies* 54, no. 3 (2022): 327–347.

the following contributions, which allow an initial glimpse into a field of study that is much more extensive than can be considered here and yet offer many moments of enlightenment and a better understanding of the world in which we currently live.

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