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Black Blocs Transparent – Experiences of Black Bloc Protesters in Germany

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ABSTRACT

The events at the G20 summit in Hamburg in July 2017 briefly made the so-called Black Bloc, a protest tactic that often takes a violent course, a number one news topic. Despite having been around for at least thirty years in Germany, so far little research has been conducted on the motives and experiences of those protesting in the Black Bloc. This research was focussed on obtaining and analysing those accounts in the context of autonomous groups both on the far left and the far right, with the latter one having just recently adopted the Black Bloc strategy. To do so, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with eight German protesters and one riot police officer experienced in policing Black Bloc protests. The qualitative data were analysed, taking into account the representation of Black Blocs in the media in the context of the G20 summit. From this data, motives for the participation in Black Blocs as well as differences and similarities between the protesters from the political far left and far right were identified. Considering the perspective of policymaking, the usefulness and limitations of the gained knowledge for policing such protests were discussed. This dissertation argues, that Black Bloc protesters should be recognised as individuals with different motivations and opinions. Thus, overgeneralising approaches are not suitable for the study of Black Blocs.

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INTRODUCTION

The recent G20 summit in Hamburg on July 7th and 8th produced some unwelcome images of masses dressed in black, throwing stones and bottles at police officers, setting fire to bins and cars, pillaging supermarkets and Apple stores alike. Those black masses are also known as the 'Black Bloc'. Black Blocs are not a new phenomenon in Germany. In fact, they are a German invention: developed by the left autonomous movement in 1980s West Berlin as an action-based protest form (Shantz, 2011), they are now a worldwide protest tactic applied by political activists where 'individuals retain their anonymity thanks in part to their masks and head-to-toe black clothes.' (Dupuis-Déri, 2013, 2). They are ad-hoc constructs, formed for single actions by individuals rather than groups, usually a protest march, and are followed by the mass of 'ordinary' protesters.

While they are not necessarily violent, these formations have the reputation of being associated with disorder and clashes with police and political opponents. Hamburg has, again, shown that the Black Bloc as a phenomenon is not to be disregarded. Despite the government having put in place countless safety measures and ordering police units from all over Germany and neighbouring countries, the Black Bloc still became media topic number one. However, the Black Bloc rarely is more than that. Even though now being omnipresent at anti-globalisation protests in the US and Canada, at G8 or G20 summits in Europe, or small demonstrations in German towns by local activists alike, not much research has been done on that

subject so far (Thompson, 2010). This is especially true for the actual experiences of protesters in Black Blocs (Thompson, 2010) and the recent adoption of both the protest tactic and the protesters' style and slogans by right-wing activists in Germany (Pfahl-Traughber, 2014). This development is of particular interest as, in the German society, there is usually a clear dichotomy between the 'evil, obscure far right'[1] and the 'provocative, radical far left'.

This dissertation engages with the question why individuals participate in these activities and the relationship (if any) between political affiliation and reasons for participating in Black Blocs, with the findings mainly being based on experiences and accounts of protesters. The central research questions are:

1. What are the motivations for the participation in Black Blocs? Are they the consequence of strong political opinions or a mere outlet for violent or adrenalin-seeking members?

2. Do left and right wing autonomous groups differ in their motives and experiences of being part of a Black Bloc, and, if so, what are the reasons for those differences?

3. And finally, can the analysis of motives and experiences of autonomous groups participating in Black Blocs impact on policymaking?

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[1] A common slogan used by varying groups, like bands or political organisations, in Germany is 'Nazis? Nein, danke!' ('Nazis? No, thank you!').

The last question was added with the intention to not only increase the knowledge about the phenomenon Black Bloc and the experiences of protesters from opposing political camps, but to also offer the possibility of real-life application of the research outcomes. To provide a base for this dissertation's topic, the following literature review will outline the general concepts and ideas regarding Black Blocs, autonomous groups, political violence and protest, and related areas. The literature here will stem from varying backgrounds, such as criminology, sociology, social psychology and policing studies. A description and discussion of the chosen methodology, including the ethical issues arising when researching political, potentially violent, fringe groups will be provided afterwards. Subsequently, the findings will be presented, analysed and critically debated.

The main arguments will be that Black Bloc protesters come from different backgrounds, are usually politically motivated, even though to different extents, and share similar experiences when protesting in the Black Bloc. It will also be argued that far right and far left Black Blocs can differ in the way they organise and perceive themselves which can be seen as a consequence of the antithetic historical and ideological roots. Overall, the Black Bloc as a distinct phenomenon can and should be studied as such and not necessarily from a political perspective as most differences between left and right protesters might be due to individual factors rather than ideological ones. Finally, it will be argued that, while it can be helpful for policymakers to learn about motives and experiences of Black Bloc protesters, there

is no actual, direct impact of having such knowledge on those in charge as there are

deep divisions between protesters, police and policymakers.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

This literature review will provide an overview over Black Blocs as debated in criminological and non-criminological literature with the focus on gaps and shortcomings in the study of Black Blocs and their protesters in Germany. Starting with some basic literature on the development and political roots of the Black Bloc, the specific literature on Black Blocs will be addressed in relation to the three research questions named in the introduction. This will be followed by a review of several criminological and non-criminological approaches and their applicability to the study of Black Blocs. The literature review will then be concluded with a more general discussion of the existing knowledge, the need to incorporate literature from several disciplines and the contribution of this dissertation to – not only but notably - criminology.

THE HISTORY OF THE BLACK BLOC

THE 'ORIGINAL' AUTONOMOUS MOVEMENT

The origins of the Black Bloc lie in the German autonomous movement, a left-wing political orientation rooted in the student protests of the late 1960s (Pfahl-Traughber, 2014). Based on consensual decision making and a refusal of hierarchy (Pruijt and Roggeband, 2014), the *Autonome*[2], are also often associated with the so-

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[2] The domestic intelligence service of the Federal Republic of Germany estimates that, in 2016, there were 6,800 *Autonome* in Germany (Federal Ministry of the Interior, 2017).

called 'anti-lifestyle'. Here, their political positions consist of the rejection of social problems; thus, their topics include anti-capitalism, anti-sexism, anti-fascism and so on (Pfahl-Traughber, 2014). However, which issues are relevant for a member of an autonomous group is an entirely individual decision and cannot be generalised (Dupuis-Déri, 2013; Höwe, 2010; Meyer-Plath, 2010). This individualism makes describing and classifying political activists much harder. Pfahl-Traughber (2014, 31) voices this concern when he writes that 'because the *Autonome* are not members in a permanent organisation with a clear programme, the question arises to what extent descriptions of them [...] can be representative'. This might be one reason why there is not much in-depth literature on the autonomous movement; in the context of Black Blocs the *Autonome* and their political positions are, while usually being mentioned briefly, not widely discussed. A notable exemption is Dupuis-Déri (2013) who offers an extensive examination of the roots of the Black Bloc.

THE RIGHT AUTONOMOUS MOVEMENT IN GERMANY

Almost entirely unexplored is the newly emerged *right* autonomous movement[3], the so-called *Autonome Nationalisten* (Autonomous Nationalists). Apart from some governmental research (Brandenburg Ministry of the Interior, 2010) and a few individual scholars, not much research has been conducted yet. Right autonomous groups, that are largely responsible for the formation of right-wing Black Blocs, first appeared in the early 2000s in Berlin (Peters, 2011). They copy the looks, tactics and

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[3] The domestic intelligence of the Federal Republic of Germany does not explicitly state how many right-wing autonomists are currently active in Germany. However, for 2016, they estimate that there are roughly 8,500 subcultural far right affiliates, which includes the autonomous movement (Federal Ministry of the Interior, 2017).

slogans of the left, predominantly anti-capitalism, while still holding onto their nationalist – and often even national-socialist - ideologies (Schedler, 2011; Schlembach, 2013; Pfahl-Traughber, 2014; Virchow, 2004; Wamper et al., 2011). This results in them being hardly distinguishable from their left counterpart. Schedler (2011 and 2014) and Häusler (2011) also describe that development as a subcultural youth phenomenon with high fluctuation amongst the members, making it a less stable one compared to the left. In the context of the Black Bloc, those differences and especially similarities have barely been addressed. For Pfahl-Traughber (2014) and Backes (2008), this is, thus, one of the most significant and relevant research topics.[4]

THE BLACK BLOC IN ITS GERMAN CONTEXT

The same lack of research can be observed when it comes to the aims of the Black Bloc protesters in the recent political environment in Germany. With Germany being an economically and socially strong country, it makes one wonder which aims the protesters, both from the left and the right, are pursuing. Indeed, Black Bloc protesting in Germany has, from what can be taken from the limited sources, not much to do with austerity and personal deprivation. Heiland et al. (2013), who interviewed teenagers active in far-left groups, asking for their political motivation, allow the deduction that it is usually not the personal situation that drives protesters but the social injustice that others face, thus focussing on a meso- or macro-level

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[4] Backes (2008, 9) notes: 'As of now, there has barely been any research [...] on the obvious interactions and interdependency of militant right- and left-wing extremists.'

rather than the individual micro-level. For instance, the issues at stake include food shortage in Africa or poverty among the elderly in Germany and are generally based on the political beliefs, including anti-capitalism and criticism on globalisation. Overall, it can be assumed from those accounts and the general political aims of the autonomous movements that the societal context is a broad one and not based on the struggles of the protesters.

THE BLACK BLOC LITERATURE

This broad context is frequently addressed in the specific Black Bloc literature which is rather diverse in terms of disciplines involved and the way the investigation of Black Blocs is approached.

GOVERNMENTAL AND ACTIVIST LITERATURE

Most publications on Black Blocs usually remain very descriptive, shallow or stereotypical in offering explanations or in-depth analyses of Black Blocs and the protesters involved. Exemptions are the work of Dupuis-Déri (2013) and Thompson (2010), representing the activist literature. Those two authors published entire books on left-wing Black Blocs as a worldwide phenomenon and offer very rich insights into the protesters, using interviews, observation and ethnography to study Black Blocs. However, Black Bloc literature, irrespective of the origin, must be provided with a caveat on partisanship as it often tends to take one-sided perspectives. Partisanship will be discussed in the following methods chapter in context with the issue of

reflexivity. Examples for stereotypical representations of the Black Bloc in the media include Lünenborg (2017) who calls the protesters 'idiots' and 'violent criminals' and BILD (2017), Germany's daily newspaper with the highest circulation, labelling them as 'slobs', also quoting the German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution which sees Black Blocs protesting as a mere action of self-fulfilment. Such statements, thus, dictate the perception of an, in fact, multifaceted phenomenon in the public.

THE MOTIVES OF BLACK BLOC PROTESTERS

The protesters and their motives, which cannot be described as homogenous, are a complex field of study. While the literature agrees on the fact that most of them are young white men (Dupuis-Déri, 2013; Thompson, 2010), their backgrounds can vary widely with having students and teachers standing side by side with unemployed. When asked for motivations and underlying reasons for joining Black Blocs, the literature offers several accounts: activists mainly emphasise societal and political aims, such as the wish for revolution and the use of Black Blocs to increase the visibility of non-violent protesters and sometimes also personal reasons, like frustration (Dupuis-Déri, 2013; Eppelsheim, 2007). Despite all coming from different backgrounds, some writing as activists, some as jurists and some as agents of the German intelligence service, the tactical usefulness of the Black Bloc and the emotional aspect of that are the main arguments. Thus, these are the most discussed motivations.

Albertani (2010), Limmer (2010) and Meyer-Plath (2010), for instance, highlight the emotional and non-political function of Black Blocs with increasing 'fighting spirit [...] and solidarity' (Albertani, 2010, 583). The ability to bring members of different groups, that often have conflicting stances on certain topics, together (Höwe, 2010; Meyer-Plath, 2010; Virchow, 2007) and expressing militancy and strength (Limmer, 2010) are other frequent themes. In that context, van Hüllen (2010) identifies the use of the Black Bloc as an instrument to gain new and young, originally unpolitical members to join a social movement. However, while the motives of Black Bloc protesters are frequently described, the protesters' individuality is usually not taken into account. This is reflected by the fact that, apart from the activist literature, the protesters themselves have not been asked for their motivation in any of the other publications.

COMPARISONS BETWEEN LEFT AND RIGHT BLACK BLOCS

The last argument brought forward by van Hüllen (2010) regarding the acquisition of new protesters through choosing a new and innovative action-based protest form, can mainly be observed within the far right autonomous movement (Schedler, 2011). This indicates that the Black Bloc is not a homogenous phenomenon. Pfahl-Traughber (2014), as referred to above, thus calls for research to specifically focus on the Black Bloc from a right-wing and a left-wing perspective. This is certainly a necessary step, as the far right Black Bloc has not been compared to the far left Black Bloc so far. The only publication touching upon this issue was published by the

Brandenburg Ministry of the Interior back in 2010. Since then, there has apparently been no scholarly interest in that field of study.

POLICING BLACK BLOCS

The same can be said of the questions regarding the policing of Black Blocs, especially when interested in the perspective of police officers. While there are statistics and media reports on police forces injured at political protests[5] as well as narrations of confrontations with the police and descriptions of escalation caused by the police in the activist literature (Depuis-Déri, 2013; Thompson, 2010), so far, no study has explored how police officers experience the Black Bloc and what measures could be taken to ease the relationship between the two parties.

THEORETICAL DISCOURSE ON BLACK BLOCS AND RELATED PHENOMENA

INTRODUCTION

What the previous analysis of Black Bloc literature has shown, is, that this field of study is, overall, little researched. This proves particularly true for the German context where the Black Bloc is no longer a left-only tactic and the policing of Black Blocs, aside from protester accounts, is a blank canvas. Most importantly, the gaps within the existing literature also include a theoretical framework of Black Bloc protesting in Germany. As of now, no thorough study has been conducted that includes a comprehensive theoretical analysis of the motives and experiences of the protesters involved. While, as will be shown, multiple theoretical approaches from a

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[5] See, for example, the 2016 Annual Report on the Protection of the Constitution (Federal Ministry of the Interior, 2017).

diverse set of academic disciplines can, at least partially, contribute to the understanding of that protest tactic, those all lack the necessary specificity.

CRIMINOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF BLACK BLOCS: HOOLIGANISM

The criminological literature has not yet commenced research on Black Blocs and the motives of the protesters involved. However, various fields of study within criminology have engaged with similar phenomena. Some interesting and helpful elements can be taken from studies on hooliganism. For example, Armstrong and Harris (1991) emphasised that hard core fans were simply more dedicated than other fans, thus arguing that something positive – dedication – made them do what they did. This is particularly interesting as there is no research on why some members of autonomous groups in Germany form Black Blocs and others do not. Some parts of the literature, mostly the activist authors, conform to that point made by Armstrong and Harris: in their opinion, protesters act according to strong political opinions rather than being just mindless thugs or rioters (Dupuis-Déri, 2013; Thompson, 2010). Others, like the media or some government reports (Brandenburg Ministry of the Interior, 2010; Lünenborg, 2017), do not follow that argument and build their reports mostly on stereotypes rather than actual knowledge. For example, Höwe (2010, 16) argues that the Black Bloc is used by the activists to 'live out violent fantasies', basing that conclusion on investigations of the intelligence service rather than protesters' accounts.

Armstrong and Harris (1991), as well as Frosdick and Marsh (2005), also refer to criminological theory in that context, namely the concept of 'moral panics'. 'Moral panics' describe a fear amongst the population, caused by the behaviour of a certain social group, that leads to the introduction of harsher policies (Tierney, 2010). However, Black Blocs are neither used by state agencies nor suitable for the creation of a moral panic. Black Blocs appear at protests with distinct topics and those protests are also limited in terms of people and areas affected. This can, of course, also be said about hooligans, however, when those travel to and from matches with thousands of football fans attending, there is a much higher risk of ordinary people being affected than at a protest with a Black Bloc consisting of only few activists that are scattered to the four winds as soon as the protest is over. Thus, the Black Bloc is unlikely to create a moral panic.

Another criminological approach, the so-called factorial approach, is brought forward by Armstrong and Harris (1991) in the context of hooliganism. According to that concept, factors like poverty, being based in an urban setting and social deprivation cause violence and criminal behaviour. The authors, as well as Dunning et al. (1988), state that most hooligans stem from a lower working class background. The living conditions associated with that class could make those young men engage in violent hooliganism. Bodin and Robène (2014), however, criticise that approach for neglecting the interactions between the parties involved and how the hooligans make sense out of their actions. Radmann (2013 and 2014), also puts his focus on the neglect of the complexity of the phenomenon and the adherence to simple attempts to

explain it; those are certainly the major drawbacks of the application of criminological works on hooliganism onto Black Blocs. For instance, own deprivation and experiences of social injustice are rarely indicated as motives for joining the Black Bloc. As outlined earlier, usually bigger issues, like sexism, capitalism or globalisation are the dominant reasons instead (Dupuis-Déri, 2013). Hence, the criminological literature on hooliganism is, overall, not generally applicable to Black Bloc protesting.

APPLYING ESTABLISHED CRIMINOLOGICAL THEORY

Other well-established criminological theories too lend themselves to the application on the study of Black Blocs. However, relevant criminological approaches often come in at just very minor aspects of the whole complex phenomenon here. For instance, Reicher et al. (2004), as well as Schweingruber (2000), Gorringe and Rosie (2008) and Clement (2016), argue that interactional processes between protesters and police often turn into self-fulfilling prophecies, where the treatment of protesters as potentially dangerous and violent as consequence of previous encounters with Black Blocs, causes them to act the way they do. This resembles labelling theory, where interactional processes between the 'deviant' and another party lead to the 'deviant' seeing themselves in accordance with the label attached to them by the other party (Tierney, 2010).

These approaches offer an interesting perspective and are used to explain rioting and crowd behaviour. As Black Blocs are frequently confronted with generalisations distributed through the media and some government reports, they do

seem applicable. However, one can also argue that Black Bloc protesters make conscious decisions based on tactical considerations and political aims (Dupuis-Déri, 2013) rather than as consequence of being seen as deviant by the police. This is not to say that labelling, particularly by the police, does play no part in aggravating existing emotions. Reicher et al. (2004), for instance, see the stereotypical treatment of rioters as major reason for escalation. Overall, established criminological theory can add some interesting perspectives to the study of Black Blocs. However, criminological accounts can, due to the specificity of the Black Bloc only lend themselves to comparisons of phenomena rather than offering a suitable theoretical background for the research of Black Blocs in Germany.

RIOTS AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: NEW PERSPECTIVES FOR THE STUDY OF BLACK BLOCS?

The criminological and, mostly, non-criminological literature on riots and social movements is overall more promising. Riot studies often engage with violent behaviour so that these parts can best be applied to *violent* Black Bloc protests and escalations, like those in Hamburg on the 6th and 7th of July 2017. This is largely due to riots and social movements being based on complex interactions as well as both collectivity and individualism (della Porta and Diani, 2006; Scott, 1990). Scott (1990), coming from a social movement research background, recognises and highlights the importance of taking into account the complexity of such phenomena. Della Porta and Diani (2006), in their work on social movements, engage with those interactions and peculiarities of Black Blocs and, thus, provide the reader with a, while not

extensive, differentiated description and analysis of Black Bloc tactics, the protesters and the symbolism of Black Blocs.

The research on rioting and policing dissent also offers rich debates on theoretical explanations. For instance, in the context of the 2011 London riots, the criminological literature on riots adds a particularly interesting dimension: the dispute between Akram (2014) and Treadwell et al. (2012) highlights the discussion as to what extent riots can be political acts. Akram (2014) describes the rioters as mostly poorly educated, with an ethnic minority background, often unemployed and with little perspective. She recognises the political element that lies in rioting and looting as an outlet for the structural inequality experienced in everyday life (Akram, 2014; Clement, 2016; Hellmann, 1997). Other authors, like Bowman (2014), Dubiel (2001) and Ruggiero (2006) have made similar observations before. Treadwell et al. (2012), on the other hand, deny the existence of a political element. While the background of the rioters is addressed, they emphasise that rioters fell for their lust for consumerism instead.

What is so interesting about this discussion is the proximity to the Black Bloc protest and the following riots and looting at the G20 summit in Hamburg in July 2017. The pictures in the news were almost the same and those two perspectives, giving a political meaning and blaming the greediness, were also part of the discourse. However, despite appearing to be a similar phenomenon, the London riots and Black Bloc protests are entirely different: autonomists usually reject capitalism which

makes looting for the sake of acquiring more goods unlikely. Also, while the protesters have concrete political beliefs, they do not fight against the structural inequality they struggle with but, most of the time, as explained earlier, the suffering of others who cannot stand up for their rights. This makes the starting point a different one. Comparing the criminological literature on riots with the Black Bloc is, thus, particularly helpful in highlighting the uniqueness of the Black Bloc.

David Waddington's (2007) 'flashpoint model' is another example of theoretical debate (Fernandez, 2008). It aims to overcome the outdated theories of public disorder that are based on Gustave Le Bon. In 1895, he argued that people within crowds lose their ability to make conscious decisions as this feature is suppressed by the uncivilised and cruel so-called 'group mind' (Reicher et al. 2004; Waddington, 2007, 38). D. Waddington (2007) instead proposes a model that puts the individual actors into the context of the protest, without neglecting other relevant factors that influence decision making prior to the actual crowd situation. The flashpoint model is a tool for the analysis of past protests and consists of six levels of analysis that can sometimes shade off into each other. The following levels are involved: structural (like exclusion or political deprivation), political or ideological (how the protesters are dealt with by the responsible agencies), cultural (the development of subcultures), contextual (relevant communication processes), situational (symbolic factors) and, lastly, interactional (interactions between the police and the public) (Jordan, 2015). The last three levels are the ones most relevant

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in the context of Black Blocs, as they can be applied to the relationship between the protesters and the police officers present at the scene.

Criticised for its methodological flaws (Waddington, P., 2000), adapted to new developments (King and Waddington, 2005) and appraised for its usefulness (Newburn, 2016), the 'flashpoint model' is subject of a fruitful discourse. Discourse can then lead to the development of middle-range theories rather than 'holistic approaches' (Scott, 1990, 5; Nassauer, 2015) that do the complexity of the phenomenon no justice. Those approaches are often lacking in the literature on Black Blocs.

THE EXISTING LITERATURE: SHORTCOMINGS, GAPS AND SOLUTIONS

From the previous remarks, it can be understood that the literature on Black Blocs is deficient in in-depth analyses that take on recent developments in Germany. A special focus put on criminological contributions revealed that criminology has neglected the Black Bloc altogether. Also, the application of criminological theory was limited to individual aspects of the phenomenon only. Ruggiero (2005), who did research on a violent Italian autonomous movement, likewise, claims that criminology has neglected political violence or, too often, taken sides and should, therefore, adopt concepts from other disciplines, namely the sociology of social movements. As argued above, the literature on social movements proves helpful when researching Black Blocs as the activists forming the bloc are, essentially, but with exemptions, social justice activists and, thus, typically engage in social movements.

The peculiarity of political activists, in contrast to 'normal violent perpetrators', is that violent forms of activism are perceived as self-help, with the state provoking violent responses to the repression and injustice stemming from it (Dupuis-Déri, 2013; Fernandez, 2008; Ruggiero, 2005 and 2006; Starr, 2006; Stott and Reicher, 1998). This, again, makes the application of many established criminological theories difficult, for they are typically not targeted at explaining self-defence. Kersten (2007, 214), in the related context of extremist youth groupings in Germany, calls this 'the failure of mainstream theorizing'.

In his study, Ruggiero (2005) thus adapts, complements or even replaces criminological theories with social movement theories that often have a different approach, sometimes even a converse one. For example, while strain theory understands deviant behaviour as reaction to deprivation, social movement theory apprehends deprivation and frustrations as resource that allows for people to stand up and fight. While the one approach sees deprivation as the ill, the other uses it to explain empowerment. Ruggiero shows that there are other ways of thinking about the mechanisms and processes of decision making amongst protesters. Social movement theories – as well as theories from other disciplines – can add a new dimension to the criminological point of view. The same concept is pursued by Nassauer (2015) who explains the emergence of violence during protests through an integrated approach combining criminology, sociology, social psychology and neurosciences.

CONCLUSION: THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THIS DISSERTATION

Overall, there is a general lack of research and suitable theoretical framing for the complex, diverse and individualistic tactic that is the Black Bloc. This dissertation, thus, aims to provide a base for further research through incorporating the most suitable perspectives from different disciplines. Such combined approaches are necessary for studying, and eventually understanding, the different and complex facets of autonomous Black Bloc protesters in Germany and the way they are dealt with by the state. The Black Bloc has not been explored from that angle. Furthermore, the less researched issues around motivation, the comparison between left and right Black Blocs and the policing of Black Blocs will be addressed. This dissertation, thus, contributes to and expands existing knowledge.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

This research project is based on interviews conducted with former and active members of right- and left-wing autonomous groups that have experiences of forming a Black Bloc. An interview was also carried out with a police officer serving familiar with policing Black Bloc protests. The interviews were conducted in Germany in July 2017.

SELECTING AND APPROACHING THE PARTICIPANTS

The participants were selected based on their political orientation and membership in autonomous groups in Germany. They were also expected to have previous experiences of Black Bloc participation. In total, 8 protesters were interviewed, with equal distribution amongst the different political camps. Gender, age and education were recorded throughout the interviews but these factors were not a focus of this dissertation. The expert interview was conducted with one leading police officer from the Free State of Thuringia employed in the riot police, the only unit that routinely deals with Black Blocs. The Bavarian riot police, which is subordinate to the Bavarian Ministry of the Interior, agreed to participate in the interviews but the Bavarian Ministry of the Interior did not approve of my application as they prefer students to use publicly available data. Contact was made through several channels: police staff had to be approached via email. Activists were either

approached through snowball sampling with an acquaintance, familiar with left autonomous groups, serving as gatekeeper, or with the help of EXIT. EXIT, a German charity supporting right-wing extremists with leaving that political and extremist environment, acted as contact and transmitter for both the researcher and the participants.

DATA COLLECTION

The data collection process was based on the following three pillars: first, the experiences and motives of Black Bloc protesters from autonomous groups in Germany were researched through semi-structured qualitative interviews. Second, semi-structured qualitative interviews were also conducted with an expert in the field of policing such protest actions. The third pillar was based on social and news media analysis. After having heard about experiences and motives from both activists and police, social media and other sources available online, such as newspaper reports and blogs, were analysed to supplement some of the concepts and themes formed after both the literature review and the interviews had been performed. While the first and the third pillar were also employed in the work of Schlembach (2013), Schedler (2014) and Leach (2009), police experiences have, so far, only been present in quantitative government reports on violence against police officers and media reports. The method triangulation is especially useful in the present context, where not much research has been conducted yet and in-depth accounts on the phenomenon researched are lacking (Hoffmann-Holland, 2010), and, as Schedler

(2014, 241) puts it, 'to get an insight into the beliefs and motivations [...] activists and supporters, as well as to understand how these groups work'.

Interviews were conducted in three different ways: either face-to-face, as it was the case with left-wing protesters, in the setting of a local youth centre; or via telephone which was the preferred method when talking with the police officer, due to the temporal flexibility. Lastly, right-wing activists agreed on undertaking correspondence interviews where they were sent a set of questions, most of them open-ended and asking for experiences and feelings, rather than just facts. As EXIT's strict data protection regulations did not allow for personal contact as this would potentially bear the risk of identifying the former extremists, this method was chosen. The media analysis focused on images, tweets, and blog posts, as well as media coverage of relevant incidents and groups in the context of the G20 summit in Hamburg in July 2017.

DESIGN AND DATA ANALYSIS

Choosing a theoretical framework and an appropriate methodology for this research project was rather challenging. Despite being clear about the research questions and having certainty about the methods to be employed, there were still several options left. Grounded theory seemed suitable at first, but the very strict data collection and analysis process were too limiting. Furthermore, it is the purpose of grounded theory to develop theory from data (Bryman, 2016; Cho and Lee, 2014). Having a rather small and not representative sample size, it seemed too ambitious to

generate a valid theory. With the research questions being centred around the experiences of individual Black Bloc protesters in Germany as well as those of police officers policing such protests. Through the social media analysis - where it was attempted to reconcile the experiences and reports shared –, combined with the accounts given by the interviewees, a balanced and multi-faceted picture was drawn. This lead to the decision that this research was best built on an interpretative approach. Creswell (2013, 24-5) defines this approach in the following way: '[...] individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live [...]. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences [...]. These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views [...].' Merriam and Tisdell (2016) also point out that constructivism is often used in combination with a phenomenological approach which is solely based on the experiences of people and how they make sense of it. It is especially suitable in cases where intensive experiences and emotions are researched (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

Those considerations resulted in choosing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as methodology guiding my research process. IPA, coming from psychology but also used in criminology and sociology (Morrison, 2016), uses both descriptive and interpretative elements (Pringle et al., 2011). Morrison (2016) emphasises that IPA is not about receiving objective information, but about the personal perception of events. He also points towards its usability for gaining information about decision processes and motives, which is helpful for answering the research questions set out in the introduction. During the data analysis stage, the

researcher not only has to make sense of what the participant told them throughout the interview but also has to consider that the participant has already undergone such a process of making sense as well. This is referred to as the 'double hermeneutics' of IPA (Pringle et al, 2011) and demonstrates that IPA is not an uncritical methodology: Pringle et al. (2011) note that it is part of IPA to question the narrations. In terms of the aims of IPA, creating theory is – due to the small sample size - not one of them (Pringle at al., 2011). Instead, an in-depth picture that is as complete and accurate as possible is painted (Pringle et al., 2011). This does, however, not mean that IPA is not usable for the creation of theory: instead, the researcher has to ensure, through rigorous and intensive data analysis, possibly based on method triangulation, that the findings are transferrable (Pringle et al., 2011). This could eventually lead to the development of middle or lower range theories (Bryman, 2016; Reid et al., 2005).

The actual coding process will be conducted as thematic analysis, where the data is searched for emerging themes and concepts and grouped together accordingly (Bryman, 2016). IPA will, however, be more detailed, using direct quotes as foundation for the findings (Pringle et al., 2011). For the media analysis, where IPA is not as suitable due to the lack of personal, in-depth narratives shared with the researcher, the data will be analysed through qualitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis is a flexible approach to the systematical analysis of qualitative data as based on the research questions (Cho and Lee, 2014). It is suitable here, as was originally designed for media analysis (Cho and Lee, 2014). Due to the vast amount of appropriate data available on blogs and other social media channels as well as in

newspaper articles, the data sampled for this research was confined to those in the context of the G20 summit as most recent event in Germany featuring several Black Blocs. Posts on Twitter, Blogs or newspapers about experiences and motives were chosen based on the themes that had already evolved throughout the coding process. Those categorized media posts were then used as additional support for the findings made earlier. They are not meant to be either representative or exhaustive. Rather, they should be seen as small multipliers or even antipodes for the interviewees' accounts.

LIMITATIONS AND ETHICAL ISSUES

LIMITATIONS

The chosen approach is, even though the most suitable one for the specific research project under the given conditions of a master's dissertation, not free from criticism. To begin with, the findings are not representative. Time and workload constraints limited the number of interviewees to a maximum of five interviewees per side. This research does, however, provide an account of information not collected prior and is, thus, a first step towards more in-depth studies of the phenomenon and the activists involved. Another weakness evolving from the research design is the limited depth of the correspondence interviews. The interviews here were still based on open-ended questions and left room for more extensive answers. However, the researcher's flexibility was limited and body language could also not be included. This resulted in a different research experience with, sometimes, less rich data.

Consequently, my research can be described as slightly imbalanced in terms of depth reached throughout the process of interviewing.

Moreover, when it comes to data analysis, it cannot be precluded that prior knowledge has influenced the analysis. This is one of the major risks when conducting qualitative studies, and especially when employing IPA (Pringle et al., 2011). Reflexivity, as used in this context, means methodological reflexivity where the researcher keeps an eye on the impact of the research design on the validity of the findings, but also being aware of one's own precognition and underlying potential bias (Bryman, 2016; Davies and Francis, 2011). Especially in the context of this dissertation's topic where the starting point for the research was based on media reports, official statistics, and prior information through political education, it is necessary to ensure that the analysis is strongly rooted in what the interviewees *in fact* have to say. This can be achieved through a rigorous and structured data analysis process.

ETHICAL ISSUES

In terms of ethics, much energy needed to be invested beforehand. Due to the need to gain insight into Black Bloc protesters through interviews, the research project had to be classified as high risk according to the guidelines issued by the School of Social and Political Sciences Ethics Committee, as there was a risk of protesters revealing severe criminal offences. There were also issues of confidentiality and anonymity, together with the problem of gaining access to the groups researched,

and the dangers of lone fieldwork. To keep negative consequences for the participants at a minimum, several safety measures were introduced: for instance, no interview was taken without the prior distribution of a participant information sheet, a verbal introduction to the research and the participant's rights, and, lastly, the signing of a consent form. As a precautionary measure both the information sheet and the introduction to the interview stressed the limited guarantee of confidentiality in cases where severe criminal acts, either planned or already committed, were revealed to me. Moreover, the participants were explicitly asked not to tell me about such acts as they were not part of the research project and, thus, there was no need for them to talk about these. This ensured informed consent. The invasion of privacy was to be minimised through stressing that the participation was voluntary and that questions could be left out if the participant did not feel comfortable answering it. For both privacy and consent, covering anonymity and confidentiality, the interviewees were asked to choose a pretend name, so that they had to share as little personal data as possible. However, if desired, the real names could be used.

A special case were the interviews conducted with the help of EXIT. The cooperation with EXIT meant that very strict data protection mechanisms had to be put in place as the former protesters supported by EXIT were in a position where absolute protection was required for their safety; hence, it was decided that correspondence interviews with former right-wing demonstrators had to be conducted, offering them complete anonymity. The information sheet, the consent form and a set of questions were, thus, sent to EXIT; they distributed those

documents to suitable interviewees and provided the answers and signed documents. Via EXIT, the interviewees could get in touch at all times.

Lastly, minimising harm in general was one of the major concerns: in asking the interviewees to share their experiences of being in Black Blocs but also of being confronted with the police, it was possible that these questions could cause distress in the participants. Trying to avoid this, pauses were offered and it was made sure that an eye was kept on the participants' body language and facial expression, looking for signs of discomfort. An information sheet with contact details for mental health services was also provided. Overall, the number of procedures introduced, along with the guaranteed data protection in accordance with the University guidelines, addressed the main issues around ethics and was approved by the Ethics Committee. For me as a researcher, I tried to keep myself safe by always carrying a charged mobile phone, providing family members and my supervisor with my interview schedule, calling in after an interview, and meeting only in public places during day time. I also offered the possibility of telephone or Skype interviews, thus reducing the risks of lone fieldwork altogether. For the media analysis, only publicly accessible online sources were used; information available from non-organisational social media users was not incorporated.

THE MEANING AND RELEVANCE OF PARTISANSHIP FOR DOING RESEARCH

One major issue that came across when evaluating the existing literature on Black Blocs was that of partisanship and bias. Bias, as described by Hammersley (2000, 155), is a 'systematic and culpable error [...] that the researcher should have been able to recognise and minimise'. This presumes that bias is something unintentional or, at least, subconscious. Partisanship, on the contrary, is more of a wilful decision to incorporate own or certain values into the research (Hammersley, 2000). The literature on Black Blocs covers both elements: for instance, while Limmer (2010) solely based her analysis on secret service and media reports and does not question their validity, activist literature, like Dupuis-Déri (2013) and Thompson (2010) are openly partisan, with secret service reports sometimes more on the side of bias. The Black Bloc as phenomenon is one that splits society. While the activists and their affiliates are convinced that they are justified in what they are doing, the other side condemns the activists for being violent and mindless. Both sides claim to stand on the side of morality. All groups of authors, regardless of their position, were prone to oversimplify the phenomenon or display it in a stereotypical way.

The question here is whether those biased or partisan contributions to the study of Black Blocs lose their relevance due to their lack of value-neutrality. To answer that question, one must ascertain to what extent value-free or value-neutral research can in reality be undertaken. This classic debate started in 1967 with Becker's 'Whose Side Are We On?': here, Becker debated whether value-neutral research was possible and, by denying that, concluded with stating that, eventually, it was about

choosing with whom to take sides instead. But Becker did not see this as an excuse to simply step on the side of the underdog – instead the promoted a way of doing research that lets go of sentimentalities and concentrates on solving problems instead of avoiding the confrontation due to being committed to one perspective only. Gouldner (1975) highlights another consequence of taking a partisan standpoint: for him, objectivity gets lost when the person researched and the researcher's standpoint become one. This results into the loss of the valuable 'outside standpoint' which 'is probably the only way in which we can even recognize and identify the participants' standpoint.' (Gouldner, 1975, 57). He argues that '[i]t is only when we have a standpoint somewhat different from the participants' that it becomes possible to do justice to their standpoints.' (Gouldner, 1975, 57).

While Becker and Gouldner do not follow the same approach, they both acknowledge that researchers are not free from personal beliefs and values, as is no one. What they also bring out is that it is only beneficial for the research if the researcher tries to remain mentally open and, best, to step aside and look at the issues at hand from an outsider perspective. As set out previously, much of the literature available on Black Blocs did not take that to heart which is comprehensible as most of them followed an agenda that relied on the presentation of the Black Bloc in a certain light. Nonetheless, those accounts still prove helpful for this dissertation. Liebling (2001), on reflexivity in prison research, argues that what makes a sophisticated analysis is the inclusion of all relevant perspectives and the resulting sharpening of the researcher's focus. Hence, reading those partisan and biased pieces

of literature and making sense of it was a valuable preparation for the interviews that also dealt with opposing accounts. Instead of having a blank canvas to start with, the canvas was already an exuberant artwork that just needed some more simplicity and structure.

This dissertation aimed to stay away from clichés, personal sentiment and simple answers – both during the interviewing process and the data analysis. Being also confronted with partisan and biased literature raised the awareness that a complex phenomenon, involving individuals and interactions between individuals on so many levels, also needs to be studied from a more neutral stance. Even though it had to be acknowledged that a researcher is never able to leave own political positions and ethics behind, seeing the accounts of the participants as mere data that needs to be analysed and put into a context, was certainly helpful. Also, with having no affiliations with either of the political groups it was possible to take a more neutral position, at least when compared to the interviewees who all had resentments against the other groups involved. When Lumsden (2012), thus, claims that researchers will take sides even if they do not want to do so, this might be right in scenarios where the researcher studies an 'underdog'. For this dissertation, however, it can be said that there was no underdog. All participants shared stories of power, struggle and solidarity. All of them were potential victims and potential offenders.

CONCLUSION

Overall, while this research is based on sometimes less rich data and a small, not representative, sample, and had to combat ethical and practical issues, its methodology and methods can be justified. Through ensuring that the research process was accompanied by reflexivity and close scrutiny to data analysis, significant contributions could be made that might serve as starting point for further research.

CHAPTER 3: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

The findings chapter, based on the qualitative interviews and supported by the literature on issues like hooliganism, political violence, rioting and social movements, as well as additional media and social media posts regarding Black Blocs in Germany, will be structured according to the three main research questions set out in the introduction to this dissertation. As the data analysis was predominantly coined by the methodological approach of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the focus lies on the participants' original accounts and the process of making sense out of what they say and what this possibly means when it comes to understanding motives and experiences of Black Bloc protesters in Germany. The research questions will be addressed referring to the themes developed through coding; ensuring that the participants' identities are protected, they will be referred to by pseudonyms, the police officer from the riot police will simply be called 'Police Officer'.

BACKGROUND FOR THE ANALYSIS: THE PARTICIPANTS AND THE 'TYPICAL' BLACK BLOC PROTESTER

This section will briefly provide some background information on the participants and the information on the composition of the Black Bloc that was given by them throughout the interviews. It will not only focus on their age, gender and educational background but also on how they see other activists. This will form a solid

foundation for the analysis of Black Bloc protesters and their accounts. It will also provide a broader insight into the individualism of the activists.

The four interviewees on the right political spectrum were aged between 25 and 46 years, three of them were male, one female (Thea). All of them were either self-employed as car dealer (Christian) and non-medical practitioner (Thea) or worked for an international charity organisation (Felix) as well as in child care (Ibram). First experiences with political activism were usually made in the early or late teenage years, with some starting quite early (Christian) and others settling in a political ideology just in their late 20s (Thea). When asked for the typical composition of the Black Bloc at protests, they all agreed on most of the protesters being male and rather young, with the average age span ranging from 16 to 25 years. However, Thea widened the spectrum to up to 60 years. Christian highlighted that, compared to ordinary right-wing protests, Black Blocs attracted substantially more women, with guessing that around 40 % of all protesters were female. Generally speaking, one knew each other in the Black Bloc – while the protesters often changed, there was always a hard core present at the protests, with the occasional international participants. Christian, who just participated in the Black Bloc for tactical reasons and not due to following an autonomous lifestyle, which includes, as explained in the literature review, consensual decision making and the rejection of hierarchies in everyday life, described the protesters as 'uneducated', 'hooligans', 'roughnecks' and 'slobs'.

On the left side of the spectrum, some differences could be observed, however, not so much when looking at the biographies and backgrounds of the interviewees: again, three men and one women (Mia) were interviewed, aged between 25 and 33 years. Interestingly, one of them was also a child care worker in training (Phillip), with the others working either as mechatronic technician (Knister), gardener (Esra) or operator (Mia). None of them had a university degree, which is contrary to the popular belief, also shared by the police officer interviewed, that all 'leftists' were socialised in a university setting. However, Phillip had attended university for one year before deciding to do some practical social work instead. The starting age for political discourse and protest was between 14 and 21 years, similar to that on the right. They also agreed that most protesters were male, Phillip, nonetheless described a historical development: 'I think that, in the past, there were more men – but now you also see a lot of women. There are many issues coming into public discourse, like feminism, and women realise that they can act too.' In terms of age, all groups were represented, ranging from the 16-year-old 'punk kids' (Phillip), having a go at protesting, to the 70-year-old granddad, politically socialised in the student movement of the 1960s.

From what the protesters tell, the Black Bloc is dominated by younger males. Nonetheless, women and people of all ages are also represented. So are people from different educational and working backgrounds. Political socialisation usually starts early, but sometimes later and can last a lifetime. Also, the fact that someone protests in the Black Bloc does not mean that other protesters are known or accepted by that

person. This is something to keep in mind when analysing the accounts given by the protesters, as those personal relations can impact what and how something is said.

THE MOTIVATIONS FOR PARTICIPATING IN BLACK BLOCS

INTRODUCTION

As argued in the literature review, even though both public agencies and the media regularly give space to the issue of Black Blocs in reports and general news coverage[6], the motives of protesters are rarely properly researched (Dupuis-Déri, 2013; Thompson, 2010). The assumptions range from protesters as 'concerned people expressing legitimate concerns' (Schweingruber, 2000, 371) to 'violent criminals' and 'idiots' (Lünenborg, 2017) to people longing for a civil war (Widmann, 2017). However, while there might be a grain of truth in each of these simplifications, the reality is way more complex and consists of different motives ranging from tactical considerations over achieving political change to securing one's personal freedom. Those sets of motives, developed throughout the process of coding, will, thus, be analysed more in depth. A table at the end of this chapter (p. 54) will display the motives referred to most frequently by the interviewees.

All the interviewees had, to some extent, strong political opinions that made them, in the first place, join the autonomous networks and subsequently the Black Bloc. Protesting within the Black Bloc, however, was not always a political decision but mostly a tactical one. The interviewees also agreed on the observation that

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[6] See, for example, in the context of the G20 summit in Hamburg in July 2017 Lünenborg, Teevs and Widmann.

motives for joining the Black Bloc vary widely, which is, too, supported by the academic literature applicable to this topic (Della Porta and Diani, 2006; Reicher et al., 2004) and that there are negative examples of protesters using it just for fun, adrenaline and violent rioting. Those were usually described as professional rioters[7] or very young protesters that were not yet (fully) politicised (Backes, 2008).

POLITICAL MOTIVATION AS FOUNDATION

To start with, generally, the decision to participate in Black Blocs is strongly politically motivated: for instance, all but one of the interviewees had been politically socialised in autonomous or other political groups prior to participating in Black Blocs. When asked if they were actively engaging with the theoretical and historical foundations of their political convictions, they often extensively laid out their personal beliefs and backgrounds, how they engage with debates and why the Black Bloc is suitable or even necessary for implementing different political systems. Those beliefs, of course, varied widely amongst far left and far right protesters, despite them classifying themselves as autonomous. While the left, which – in Germany – can be understood as a more radical version of the social democrats, leaning towards Marxism or communism, occupies the topics introduced in the literature review (anti-capitalism, anti-fascism etc.), the right only partially engages with those core issues (Häusler, 2011). Instead of, like the left, coming from a social justice background where equality on a local and global level and repression through the state are the main issues, the far right in Germany is often equated with neo-Nazism and anti-

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[7] 'Krawall-Touri' – literally translated as 'affray tourist' - is an expression frequently used by the protesters to describe the phenomenon of travelling to protests just to riot.

migration agendas. The traditional far right comes from a retrospective national-socialist ideology and stresses the importance of protecting the 'Volk' (the German people) (Weaver, 1997). The right autonomists share this background but, additionally, adopt some topics like anti-capitalism or environmental protection (Scharf, 2011) – however, not from the stance of creating justice but to make Germany 'flourish'. From what the interviewees, overall, reported on Black Blocs, political motivations are apparently the crucial spur to generally get active.

Getting active and changing the circumstances of a capitalist, fascist or unjust system – many of the participants named those reasons as motivation for forming a Black Bloc. Esra and Mia simply stated that they were hoping to be able to achieve more in a Black Bloc. 'More', in that context, can be understood in comparison to normal political participation, for example through voting, or political protest that abstains from action-based forms of protest (Starr et al., 2011). Both right-wing and left-wing activists shared that hope:

> *Felix:*   *'At that time we wanted to make change. [...] As a member*
>
>   *of an autonomous group [...] you just had the hope to be able*
>
>   *to make a difference.*[8]

Here, Felix explicitly connects his political affiliation with the autonomous movement with the general political aim to change the existing structures which demonstrates how closely linked the Black Bloc is with the autonomous concepts.

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[8] All interviews were transcribed verbatim and literally translated from German into English.

> *Phillip:*   *'Yeah, but why do you go to a protest: because you've got a*
>
> *prospect of a better world.'*

Phillip, from the political left, expresses his belief that protesting is always a political decision. Together with Mia, Phillip and Felix stressed the importance of actively contributing towards their political and societal aims.

Schlembach (2013, 300) cites a group of autonomous nationalists from the German town Salzgitter who sum that up quite nicely in a right-wing context: 'We aren't simple-minded thugs with skinhead, bomber jacket and combat boots up to the knee. We are young people like you, from the heart of our country. We carry pride in our hearts and hope in our eyes. We fight to ensure that the future will be better than the conditions we have now. Germany will sparkle like fresh dew in the morning.' But it is not just about fighting for change by themselves, it is also about motivating others to join them: Mia, for example, highlighted that it was important for her to 'bring across a message'. Phillip also explained that they employ various forms of direct action, including the distribution of leaflets and talking to people around the protest area. Leach (2009, 1063) supports this urge to win over others for their cause and to create a revulsion: 'If the Autonomen have a utopian vision, it is that this process of being and becoming autonomous will produce collective learning that, over time, will have a revolutionary impact [...].' Overall, the theme of change

and hope was frequently brought up and, thus, should be seen as a dominant factor in the political motivations for protesting in the Black Bloc.

TACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND SOLIDARITY AS MAJOR MOTIVATION

However, the motivation can also – to some extent or even solely – be based on the efficacy of the technique. Often, the participants referred to the importance of mummery, stressing different reasons why it was so important to the protesters. This finding resonates well with the literature: King and Waddington (2005), as well as Della Porta and Diani (2006), point towards the Black Bloc as a tactic that combines both knowledge and strategy and is, thus, very much favoured by protesters over other forms of political expression of opinion. Van Hüllen (2010) even argues that the tactical component is more important than the actual ideology of the demonstrators, thus, the attractiveness of such a protest formation would also attract unpolitical youths.

The tactical usefulness of the Black Bloc is, thus, a unifying element for the diverse participants. The first reason why the Black Bloc is praised amongst activists, is the intimidating effect on the police and the political enemy. 'Scaring the opponent', as Peter Marsh in Dunning et al. (1988, 19) sees it, is a form of symbolic violence. Showing weapons and undertaking threatening actions without actually using force is meant to intimidate the opponent. Also, both left-wing and right-wing protesters agree on the usefulness of plain black clothing in consternating the police. The police officer interviewed confirmed that 'whether there is something anarchistic

on [the button] or 'anti-Antifa'[9] – that's relatively difficult, distinguishing the type, which political camp the persons fit in.'. This concept can even result in quaint incidents where smaller groups of protesters meet each other but start a pursuit as they do not know which group the others belong to. Eventually, they recognise each other as both being left through t-shirts worn underneath the black hoodies and jackets, as Mia reproduced a story frequently shared amongst the Black Bloc protesters in her area.

Being dressed all in black, with ski masks over the face or a scarf up to the eyes, a brick in one hand and a Molotov cocktail in the other hand – all that can be reality of the Black Bloc, but it does not have to be like that. Those stereotypes combine the element of intimidation through militancy and the element of anonymity or self-protection that is also very common amongst Black Bloc protesters. Both left-wing and right-wing activists frequently referred to them throughout the interviews. Esra explicitly stated that, for him, the Black Bloc was about 'intimidating and discouraging the police and the enemy', Thea wrote that she wanted to make it 'harder for the police to recognise political affiliation'.

Besides, mummery – which means covering one's face with sunglasses, scarfs, balaclavas or hoods – was seen as very important for several reasons: first, to not get recognised by police or political opponents and, thus, not get prosecuted. Second, because they wanted to reduce the personal risks like job loss as a consequence of

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[9] 'Anti-Antifa' is a slogan used by right-wing activists to mirror the typical left-wing 'anti-attitude'.

being recognised as a protester. Overall, mummery and the all black 'anonymous mass' (Mia, Knister and Police Officer) are about self-protection and, for the protesters, the essential element in the fight against repression.

Repression, through the state and its ally – the police -, is a very common theme in autonomous ideology. It is, however, not a particularly German phenomenon; rather it is based on personal experiences or stories told by friends that increase the feeling that the state is trying to oppress the people. Those experiences are rarely some auf austerity and economic problems, as it was the case with the 2011 London riots. Instead, most of the time, it will be the stories of confrontations with the police that have an influence on the protesters. This will be discussed in more depth throughout the findings regarding the impact on policymaking. The Black Bloc as 'organised self-defence' can, thus, be described as one main theme of left and right autonomous protesters.

The other one is all about solidarity and the group as reference. While most of the interviewees stressed the importance of solidarity during the protest and solidarity with other protesters even as motivation for *joining* the Black Bloc, there was also an element of peer pressure, putting the activists into a position where they were expected to come into the Black Bloc. This was a particularly interesting and, from what the literature review has shown, unique observation, at least for left-wing activism. Here, Knister narrated the following: '[The Black Bloc] forms itself out of umpteen movements. There's Attac, there is anti-globalisation, just so many, this is

what the Black Bloc is made of and they solidarise with each other – they expect you to join them and so on.' While this can certainly be seen as a moral duty rather than real peer pressure (Zeskind, 1998), it gets more mandatory amongst right-wing activists. Ibram, for example, became a permanent Black Bloc protesters just because his group was particularly active, friendships only lasted as long as there was the same ideology. Thea wrote about the network of protesters, where the inner circle 'made sure that there were enough protesters'. While those examples do not necessarily imply that there was a real peer pressure to join the Black Bloc, they make apparent that, despite all the autonomy and individualism that usually builds the core of Black Bloc protesters, there is still an element of external motivations in the sense of being motivated by the hope for social interaction.

The literature on hooliganism deals with those or similar mechanisms under the key phrases of 'social recognition' (Bodin and Robène, 2014) and 'finding solidarity' (Frosdick and Marsh, 2005). Backes (2008) on left and right extremism in Germany connects those group and solidarity related decisions with the search for one's own identity. This can clearly be seen in the case of Ibram, who was looking for friends and belonging when he first joined the autonomous group and who, later, had to realise that the friendship was solely based on ideology and support for the cause. Solidarity as a true, internal feeling, will be discussed more, when it comes to the experiences of protesters. Here, the work of social movement theorists, like Scott (1990), and crowd psychologists, such as Reicher et al. (2004) will contribute to a better understanding of the processes.

Finally, there is one last group of motives that was brought up by the interviewees: the non- or not-yet-political youths, professional rioters and hooligans who just do it for the adrenaline and the fun. One interviewee, Thea, even revealed that, in her group, they used to order such hooligans and violent skinheads as additional Black Bloc participants, if needed. This, however, seems to be a rare scenario as all the other interviewees spoke of those professional rioters in a rather dismissive way. What they named, though, was that they perceived those 'protesters' as people 'looking for stress' (Mia) or 'roughnecks and slobs' (Christian). King and Waddington (2005) describe two types of protesters, the fluffy and the spiky ones. Certainly, some protesters are particularly spiky ones, as they often come to destroy and hurt. Despite those spiky strangers, that are usually not affiliated with the political protesters, the Black Bloc as a tactic attracts protesters for other reasons, too. For instance, Ibram explained that for him the Black Bloc was just more exciting and modern, compared to the old and boring neo-Nazis.

Mia, Phillip and the police officer also highlighted that often young boys simply thought that it was cool – just like young hooligans, they are proud of their actions and love sharing them with peers afterwards (Radmann, 2013). Schedler (2014) also notes that the feeling of being successful is particularly important for unpolitical youths who find a stage for that at Black Bloc protest. Additionally, several interviewees talked about the moments of joy, sometimes even like a party atmosphere (Esra), that can occur. Also, the image of both the protesters as

autonomous individuals fighting for the good and the black clothing in a militant style, made protesting within the Black Bloc more of a lifestyle (Phillip) and part of pop culture (Police Officer). In the context of social movements, Della Porta and Diani (2006) and Scott (1990) highlight the importance of such movements in terms of their social and cultural elements, where lifestyle matters. All in all, motivations are still truly individual. So are the decisions and experiences made by the activists.

CONCLUSION

It has been argued that there are three different key areas of motivation for Black Bloc protesters: political motives form the foundation for the decision to become politically active. The tactical usefulness of the Black Bloc is, however, the main motivation to join it. With this come side-effects, like increased solidarity experienced in the Black Bloc, that increase the willingness to repeatedly get active in it. Totally apolitical reasons for Black Bloc protesting are mostly associated with youngsters or riot tourists. However, the protesters did highlight the emotional aspect of being in the Black Bloc as another reason for joining it.

Motives	Left	Right
Political	Anti-lifestyle (anti-fascist, anti-sexist, anti-capitalistic etc.); being able to do more this way; urge to change something (better world); anger; previous negative experiences at other protests	Hoping to make a change; being active without having to join a political party; distancing oneself from parties and skinheads; new impulse for the movement
Tactics	Intimidating and discouraging effect on the police and the enemy; organised defence (building chains against repression); self-protection; anonymity; protecting other protesters; solidarity; know-how	Group more effective in achieving change; faster, easier action; just a means to an end; anonymity; minimising risk of state prosecution; solidarity; large, well-functioning network
Unpolitical	Some just want to produce stress; being cool; Black Bloc part of pop culture; riot tourists just coming for the fun	Friendship and camaraderie; Black Bloc more modern and exiting; thrill

Tab. 1:   Common motives as phrased by the participants according to their political orientation.

COMPARING THE MOTIVES AND EXPERIENCES OF FAR LEFT AND FAR RIGHT AUTONOMOUS BLACK BLOC PROTESTERS IN GERMANY

INTRODUCTION

While one can assume that motives and experiences generally vary widely and are often independent from the political profile of a Black Bloc protester, one can still observe some differences between left-wing and right-wing activists. Most interestingly, the experiences amongst right-wing protesters were more varied than those of left-wing activists. This is particularly interesting as, traditionally, the left was seen as a multifaceted and very quarrelling political orientation (Jaschke, 2006; Leach, 2009). For instance, Knister explained: 'There are different opinions within the

left [...], everything is divided, everyone is doing their own thing.' However, the right now also seems to be a less unified movement with more room for individualism and dissenting views (Virchow, 2011).

Jaschke (2006), describes the four different types of right activists, including the ideologically and politically motivated actor; the youth, following group dynamics leading to violence; the criminal youth; and, finally, the wrapper searching for an own identity. Most of these different types of political activists could also be observed amongst the four participants: Christian, a firm believer in the right ideology from his early youth on, represents the politically motivated activist, just as Thea; she, however, moved from more traditional roots and party membership towards an autonomous lifestyle and the related political concepts. Felix can also be grouped together with Thea. Ibram, then, represents the last type: searching for friendship and camaraderie, the political ideology came only second in terms of motivation. He even turned away from his group when he found out that they were not just political radicals, but deeply rooted in traditional national-socialist (NS) ideology.

With those different backgrounds on the right and the left, it seems likely that the reasons for the following differences have their roots in the history of those movements and the differing underlying core concepts that form them. Also, attention must be paid to the fact that those groups consist of individuals, thus differing motives and experiences are less surprising and should not simply be ascribed to the political orientation. The following differences and similarities were,

to a large extent, derived from the observations made by the police officer interviewed, as he often made a clear distinction between the two political camps. A table summarising his accounts can be found on p. 67.

DIFFERENCE 1: ORGANISATION VS ANARCHY

While conducting the interviews, the following differences between Black Bloc protesters on the left and the right came up: First, right-wing protesters repeatedly stressed the importance of organisation, order, rules and hierarchy which stem from the original national-socialist ideology of the Third Reich. For instance, Christian explained his motives for joining his particular group by stating that 'I stood for an ideal and value system [...]: discipline, honour, loyalty, pride, strength and so on. [...] stability and order were more important than personal freedom [...].' He later gave a detailed account of all the processes involved in planning and conducting a Black Bloc protest, including the production of a demo-protocol. These accounts do – to some extent - not match with police reports on right-wing Black Bloc protesters. The police officer stated: 'Well, I believe that, if one looks at the right scene, [autonomous groups] are a counter movement within the right movement; they can't cope with that idea of "chastity [in the sense of acting in strict accordance with rules] and orderliness" and thus they say that this is not the way to go for the right scene, the battle is fought on the streets [...].' Here, the police officer's observations of the developments within the right-wing political groups clearly do not find support in Christian's statement but resonate with the other three interviewees. The police officer continues by pointing towards the fact that those autonomous activists are still

motivated by that traditional right-wing ethos; what makes them different from other, not autonomous far right groups, though, are the means chosen.

This supports the previous argument: while autonomous right-wing groups seemingly tend to be repelled by the traditional right[10], they are still based on the same ideological foundations as those cannot be simply erased from one's identity (Schlembach, 2013). Comparing right-wing to left-wing groups in that regard, orders, hierarchies and rules are widely rejected by the left. Knister, for instance, describes the situation during a protest where the Black Bloc breaks down into several Black Blocs with different opinions on how to proceed: 'Finding consensus for that demonstration... no one wants to say, "this is how we have to think about it..." and so on [...].' He continues by explicitly stressing that there are no rules amongst left-wing protesters: '[...] marching [compared to just *walking* at a protest], that's where you have rules, that doesn't exist with us.' Of course, there are still some guidelines among left activists regarding what to bring to a protest, how to behave and dress – but those are not mandatory and, often, those guidelines are for the protesters' own protection which certainly makes them less of a rule but more of a safety measure. Together with the autonomous and often anarchist mind set, this is a clear difference between left and right Black Bloc protesters, originating from the historical and ideological foundations of the very contrary movements.

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[10] See also Thea: 'The attitude, respectively the demeanour, of the NPD [National Democratic Party of Germany] and the skinheads was outworn for me, primitive and reduced to a couple of dumb paroles [...]'.

Going hand in hand with the previous argument, more differences became apparent when interviewing both right-wing and left-wing protesters: while both camps are partly based on solidarity, togetherness and camaraderie, and, on the contrary, as autonomous movements stress the importance of the individual, there was also an element of suspiciousness and caution that accompanied right-wing protests. Christian, for example, mentioned that they used to watch each other, looking for misbehaviour.

Also, right activists were described as more confrontational, unpredictable and violent by both the police and left-wing protesters, an assumption also made by Brodkorb (2011), who sees a higher violent potential on the right. In this context, the accounts of the police officer, coming from an observational perspective, are particularly helpful:

> *Police Officer:*   *'[...] those [right-wing] autonomous groups distance themselves from [the typical neo-Nazi], I think there's also more disposedness to use violence – I don't want to speak of willingness. [...] they are also looking for physical confrontation, not just out of the crowd at a demonstration but also through targeted actions; and that makes them, in my opinion, a bit more unpredictable.'*

He explicitly made the distinction between left and right here. However, that does not make the left a less violent or dangerous participant in Black Blocs. During the interviews, though, the interviewees – for their own safety – remained quite vague when it came to the use of violence. They usually referred to it in the context of professional rioters or escalation provoked by the police; sometimes they denied the personal use of it all together. As the left interviewees were more cautious here, the assessment of the right being more violent cannot be generalised.

DIFFERENCE 4: SELF-REFLEXIVITY

Finally, the left is generally seen as more self-reflexive which is also – to some extent – true for protesting in Black Blocs. While the right-wing activists – in the written interviews – demonstrated less pondering when it came to the means used while being in the Black Bloc, some of the left-wing interviewees questioned some of the methods used. For example, Phillip criticised one fellow protester for shouting at an old-age pensioner for having a small swimming pool in his garden. 'I asked myself: is this where the class-struggle starts?' Also, one protester heavily disagreed with two other interviewees who mostly – in his opinion – sugar-coated the experiences within and meaning of the Black Bloc. For him, the Black Bloc was just a tactic, but a dangerous one. All the interviewees agreed on the fact that not everything could be justified – even though they often still tried to do so –, and they were mostly against the negative side-effects of protesting in the Black Bloc where innocent bystanders,

mainly those from the working class, where affected. As Esra puts it: 'One can rant about the Black Bloc but it is too diverse to condemn it.'

SIMILARITY 1: EXPERIENCES OF POLICE REPRESSION

Overall, the experiences and motives of Black Bloc protesters, as told by the interviewees, regardless of their political affiliation, often had a lot in common. One of the most frequently brought up theme was that of police repression before, throughout and after the protests. The following examples shall allow for an insight into how protesters perceive repression and prosecution through the police:

> *Ibram:*   *'Police was always very aggressive and limited us heavily, especially in terms of clothing. That ranged from not being allowed to wear black or them not letting us walk in orderly chains. In return, they gave the counter protesters clearance, they were allowed to completely cover themselves or they were quite negligently prevented from attacking our demonstrations, what made us even more brutal.'*

This is a typical example of a Black Bloc protester confronted with the police. The perception that the political opponents are favoured by the police is frequently voiced by both far left and far right protesters. P. Waddington (2007), on riots, sees such constructions of the aftermath of a riot as coined by all sides telling and believing the

story *they* favour regardless of what really happened. This is a characteristic way of making sense of one's own actions.

> *Phillip:*   'It's always the police's main aim to, before the protest starts or even before people meet, control those who are dressed in black, erecting bafflers. [...] What I experienced at a protest against Nazis, when there were violations through the police [pepper spray] and I had to flush out somebody's eyes [...] that was a gross experience.'

What Phillip describes here, is how experiences with the police can be so grave and almost traumatic that they then dictate the perception of the police as an organisation. This is a common process: negative personal experiences or the experiences of friends become representative for a repressive state failing to guarantee the right to protest and voice criticism.

The police officer, coming from the opposite perspective, has the following to say:

> *Police Officer:*   'When we expect the protest to be violent we ask for more, specialised, support much quicker. What you can feel with those groups [the Black Bloc protesters] is the power of solidarity. This force can be felt amongst the whole group... then the violence against

police officers, not necessarily coordinated but definitely so elementary that it makes it even harder for the police. Their will to hinder police actions leads to a police reaction which then leads to people raising their voices and physically confronting the police which then, again, leads to the police acting even more consequent which is, in the end, a spiral of violence where it is hard to stop that on both sides.'

The last half-sentence is the most important here: the police officer acknowledges the complex processes that lead to escalation throughout protests and does not come to his own profession's defence when he explains that, once these processes start, it too becomes difficult for police officers to keep control and act appropriately. Dunning et al. (1988), on hooliganism, explain that spiralling effect leading to more violence as the consequence of third parties participating or invading without knowing the rules. Black Bloc protesters certainly agree on the part of invasion; however, it can be argued that both political opponents and the police are usually familiar with the processes that lead to escalation; nonetheless, they often still decide to act the way they do.

Along police repression, protesters often felt mistreated or shared stories about them being beaten up by the police, confined in captive collecting points with little or no water provided or having the federal police searching their flats and computers. Those experiences were more often made by left-wing protesters.

However, it remained unclear whether the accounts given were exaggerations, true stories or something that was experienced like that but would probably be assessed differently from the outside. With those memories in mind, anger and aggression often play a huge part in the decision to demonstrate in the Black Bloc. Emotions, however, range from joy, excitement and thrill to fear, anger and tension. While all protesters described such feelings, right-wing protesters put slightly more emphasis on aggression and tension, with left-wing protesters speaking more about their fears.

SIMILARITY 2: PROVISION OF JUSTIFICATIONS

Another major similarity that became apparent throughout the data analysis process was the constant provision of justifications. Both political camps are not short of justifications. Here are some examples from the interviews:

> *Thea:*   *'The route [for the demonstration] was usually known beforehand or we made suitable plans in case we needed to escape or defend ourselves. In that context, I remember a protest where we took up some cobbles from the street and struck back.'*

The way this was written by Thea was rather detached, almost like stone throws directed against the police were expected to be necessary anyway and an inevitable action in response to policing. Knister also sees the protesters in a position where self-

defence is necessary and, thus, justified. However, he does claim that he would usually ponder on a case to case base whether an action was justified or not.

> *Knister:*   *'In the media it always gets told that the left has a certain*
>
>   *violent potential and is looking for rumpus. But they never*
>
>   *mention that [...] rumpus gets caused by the police; [...] in*
>
>   *principle: crimes committed [by neo-Nazis] are much more*
>
>   *severe [...]. [...] the cops have now [G20 summit in Hamburg]*
>
>   *created a climate against them, and I have no sympathy. If*
>
>   *the cops had acted in a fair way I might had pondered that,*
>
>   *but so – no.'*

Phillip was actively looking for explanations and justifications for looting. While he was critical of looting for the sake of capitalism, he simply assumed that Black Bloc protesters also engaging in looting would do so to support the poor and underprivileged. By doing so, he can morally justify an otherwise unethical action:

> *Phillip:*   *'There exists a debate on violence – I mean: what is violence?*
>
>   *Violence against things, looting [...]. I read about an Apple*
>
>   *store being looted in Hamburg. And then I think: if they are*
>
>   *beating each other up just for some iPhones – smashing*
>
>   *[irony]. But it depends, maybe they're selling the phones and*
>
>   *support another cause with the money. Or if you empty the*

shelves in the supermarket and give everything to the

homeless or refugees, that won't hit the licensee.'

Ruggiero (2005), in the context of the Brigate Rosse, an Italian autonomous movement, assesses the usefulness of the so-called techniques of neutralisation as developed by Sykes and Matza in 1957. He states that the activists make use of the denial of the victim, the condemnation of the condemner and the appeal to higher loyalties. The first of these techniques is applied when the victim is portrayed as the culprit by the actual offender. This can frequently be observed amongst Black Bloc protesters: police are seen as the executor of a fascist or repressive state and, thus, challenging them on the street is an act of self-defence. Condemnation of the condemner takes the same line 'through the association of the enemy with the "imperialist state [...]"' (Ruggiero, 2005, 302). Finally, some activists referred to higher loyalties, usually the socialist revolutions in Southern America, Greece or Spain, the Zapatistas or, rarely expressed verbally but as a part of the ideology, the National Socialist movement of the Third Reich. Ruggiero (2005) highlights the importance of such defensive strategies for building a collective identity and mobilising new activists. This can be confirmed from what could be understood from the interviews as all, especially left-wing, protesters used identical or similar justifications that can also be found on relevant social media channels (AntikapKollektiv, 2017; G20 to Hell, 2017). This familiarity with justifications can be seen as a way of making meaning of one's own actions; it is also an easy way as there is no need for constant reviews of motivations and justifications (see also Apter, 1997).

CONCLUSION

It has been argued that left and right are – in the context of political activism and especially in the context of Black Blocs – not always the most suitable categories; as could be shown, the Black Bloc and its protesters are often motivated by similar issues and share similar experiences; that is why it is preferable to just look at the Black Bloc as a distinct phenomenon instead of focussing on the different political sides. While there are obviously enormous differences between left-wing and right-wing activists, in terms of Black Bloc protesting they share more similarities than differences and both groups are not wholly consistent in themselves anyway. Jaschke (2006) acknowledges that the distinction between left and right can be useful, however, he also argues that 'right, middle, left all mingle into new forms, they adapt new themes and let go of others. [...] the extreme forms of right and left still have validity within the political discourse, just no longer in the unconditional and camp-bound form [...].' Hence, it is more useful to research the Black Bloc in an inclusive way, not just from a left or right perspective, but from a perspective that understands that the Black Bloc is mostly just a technique and not something exclusively left.

Left and Right Black Blocs	Congruent	Divergent
Police assessment	Participation as conscious decision based on ideologies and values; lower risk of attracting attention; minimising risk of state prosecution through consternating the police; Black Bloc as part of pop culture; mostly male and young; different people with different beliefs; little to no communication possible between protesters and police; police seen as favouring the other side; police as representative of the state; escalation as consequence of police intervening	Distancing oneself from other groups within the movement (right only); right Black Blocs more violent and unpredictable (also outside of Black Blocs); left protesters more intellectual; right Black Blocs usually much smaller than left ones

Tab. 2: Similarities and differences between left and right Black Bloc protesters as perceived by the police officer interviewed.

THE IMPACT OF RESEARCHING BLACK BLOCS ON POLICYMAKING

INTRODUCTION

When looking at whether the analysis of motives and experiences of autonomous protesters participating in Black Blocs can have an impact on policymaking, one has to differ: there are two elements to this; first, the direct impact on policing such protests, and second, the general impact on policymaking that is less immediate and more long-term and should also be based on the experiences made with policing Black Blocs. It will be argued that the complexity of the interactional processes between police and protesters makes communication almost impossible

and that, hence, there is only little chance for de-escalation and the reduction of clashes between the parties involved.

To start with the policing of protest, it is helpful to go back to the theoretical background framing the argument made in this dissertation: as outlined in the literature review, there is much debate on how to police social movements, dissent and riots. That debate is nicely demonstrated through the disputation between David Waddington and P. A. J. Waddington on the so-called 'flashpoint model', developed by David Waddington and analysed in the literature review (Waddington, D., 2007; Waddington, P. A. J., 2000). King and Waddington (2005) applied the flashpoint model to the anti-globalisation protest, which is a suitable model for the protest settings Black Bloc protesters find themselves in. The flashpoints, 'potentially disorderly incidents' (King and Waddington, 2005, 255), can consist of stone throws or, quite common amongst Black Bloc protesters, the arrest of an affiliate 'without any reason', leading to general actions of defence. Thus, the data obtained from both protesters and police officers shall also be examined based on the various levels introduced by David Waddington's flashpoint model.

From the interviews, two main problem areas could be identified: first, that activists do not or barely communicate with police. Second, that escalation often leads to a spiral of violence that cannot be stopped. Starting with the first issue, all interviewees but one declared that they usually do not talk to police officers:

Phillip: *'There could be some communication [with the police] …*

but I think many don't prefer that. Because you don't want

to talk to the police, they're the executors of the state.'

Protesters see the police as not trustworthy and, thus, avoid communication that could fall back on them later on. This resonates with the accounts of autonomous movements as voiced online: 'G20 to Hell', responsible for the organisation of the largest Black Bloc at the G20 summit in Hamburg in July 2017, for example, informs about the expected harassment through police officers on its website (G20 to Hell, 2017). This foundation of mistrust, and even hate and aggression, often forbids any dialogue (Trum, 1987), especially as activists are usually told not to speak to the police and activist even regularly upload visual reminders on their websites and social media accounts, stating that protesters should use their right to refuse to give evidence (G20ea legal team, 2017a and 2017b; Rote Hilfe e.V., 2016).

Fig. 1: Information distributed by the G20 Ermittlungsausschuss ('committee of inquiry') on their Twitter account @EA_hh (G20ea legal team, 2017a).

Fig. 2: Pictogram shared by the G20 Ermittlungsausschuss ('committee of inquiry') on their Twitter account @EA_hh (G20ea legal team, 2017b).

This observation is also supported by the account of the police officer interviewed: 'Access [in the sense of starting a conversation with autonomous activists] is hard or even impossible.' He, however, draws an interesting differentiation: while the same protester might be accessible at an anti-nuclear energy protest, communication would be declined at an anti-fascist demonstration. Therefore, he concluded that preventive actions against Black Bloc protesters, like checking whether they had black clothes or mummery with them, was the only way of preventing escalation at certain protests. Preventing escalation on an interactional level is, in his opinion, not doable. Insofar, the knowledge obtained from this research cannot be directly applied to the policing of protests.

The second issue stated previously can be subsumed under the phrase 'self-fulfilling prophecy' (Jordan, 2015; King and Waddington, 2005; Reicher et al., 2004; Shantz, 2011). Very commonly, it is one incident that is perceived as rather brutal, unjustifiable and a sign of repression that causes escalation; those incidents will, subsequently, be those portrayed in the media, almost solely determining the image of the Black Bloc. The incidents range from having to wait too long at the ID control to experiencing police violence.

> *Knister:*   *'It escalates in 99 % of the cases where the riot police come*
>
> *in and start to stop demonstrations haphazardly or try to*
>
> *prevent us from even starting to walk, or try to find a reason*
>
> *why not to let us walk, to harass us. Yeah, those are the*

things that lead to scuffles, and scuffles become bottle throws, then stone throws, that's how it usually goes. [...] If the [protest] is about repression the atmosphere is of course much more heated. If it's against repression, the cops are automatically more aggressive and you have to go in resolutely, then you're more nervous. A kind of fear, not of getting hurt, but of being confronted with backlashes. Whether you're getting caught or not.'

Here, again, the interactional factor, the communication, verbal and non-verbal, between police and protester is key. The situational and contextual levels, too, are extremely important as they shape the experiences that both protesters and police make; these determine the actions in the following protests. Thus, it can certainly be helpful for the police to learn about how their style of policing impacts on activists and might unintentionally reinforce the spirals of escalation. The same can, however, be said of the protesters who might reflect upon their actions, but often see themselves justified in what they are doing.

CONCLUDING REMARKS ON POLICING BLACK BLOCS AND THE IMPACT ON POLICYMAKING

Understanding each other is certainly key when it comes to the impact of this research on policymaking. The police officer interviewed affirmed that he would like to know what motivates Black Bloc protesters, one left-wing interviewee suggested conducting an interview together with the police so that they could have a discussion, and another left-wing participant told me about his interest in learning what makes right-wing autonomists join the Black Bloc. Those accounts clearly confirm that there is a lack of understanding among the relevant actors. Looking at underlying issues, however, and learning about why people go onto the streets and act the way they do, could be one step to a clearer differentiation and a more individual approach when handling those issues. For instance, this could influence the way governments, secret services, the media and other agencies deal with activism, political or even violent protest.

As of now, besides from the individual police officer acting at a protest who is not in the position to politically assess a demonstration, none of the parties referred to above, apparently, put much effort into singling out the relevant topics and trying to address those. Instead of analysing the Black Bloc as a phenomenon that is, usually, the result of political decisions perceived by the activists as misuse of power, the Black Bloc is, often, simply labelled as extremism and protesters are denied of their political intentions. Taking Black Bloc protesters serious – not just as a security problem but as political actors – could be a sound step here. Overall, however, it seems like there

is only a small chance to achieve change through knowledge. The state versus autonomous Black Bloc protesters is a battle based on mistrust, stereotypes and a lack of give-and-take on both sides and, thus, each side will continue to walk the beaten path.

Regardless of the practical problems arising when policing Black Blocs, there is still a place for knowledge on motives and experiences of the protesters in police work and policymaking; this is especially true in the context of left and right autonomous groups, if the argument made by Reicher et al. (2004, 566), and, previously, della Porta (1998, 241), is followed by the relevant agencies: '[G]roups act on the basis of social identities, [...] therefore it is of great practical importance to educate oneself about the social identities of the various groups in a crowd: their values and standards, aims and goals, their sense of what is right and proper, their stereotypes and expectations of other groups, their history of interaction with these groups [...].' Knowing the counterpart can, therefore, help with the assessment of crowd behaviour.

CONCLUSION

Black Blocs transparent – a broad claim has been employed as a title for this dissertation. Achieving complete transparency of a phenomenon that is based on complex interactions and individual processes of decision-making is, however, virtually impossible. What has been accomplished throughout this study, though, is the portrayal and analysis of motives and experiences of all the parties involved in Black Bloc protesting. Giving a voice to both protesters and police, hearing about backgrounds, hilarious and horrific incidents and learning about their very own perspective on a clearly debatable issue provided new insights and indications for further research. As intended, the chosen approach with just four interviewees on either side of the political spectrum is not suitable for generalisation. Thus, the above findings must be understood as individual accounts that do not necessarily conform with the existing literature on Black Blocs and related phenomena in criminology and other areas of study.

The main argument regarding the motives of Black Bloc protesters in Germany, derived from the interviews, the literature and reports and posts available online, was that political aims and ideologies are the foundation for the decision to participate in a Black Bloc. Tactical considerations and the resultant power of solidarity are other important reasons for doing so. Totally unpolitical motivations, like the thrill that comes with a Black Bloc protest, were described as either a secondary incentive or no incentive at all. Generally, riot tourists or juveniles were associated with such motives.

Motives and experiences of Black Bloc protesters from the far right and the far left, overall, did not differ widely. Differences could be traced back to the different ideologies and political positions rather than fundamental discrepancies of the use of the Black Bloc as a tactic. This lead to the conclusion that the Black Bloc as a phenomenon should be studied only as such – the political orientation of the protesters is an interesting but not overly relevant issue here. This is, however, slightly different when taking the perspective of a riot police officer policing such a protest as it is important for them to distinguish different political groups to prevent confrontation and subsequent escalation of protests. Policing such constellations might then result in a spiral of violence (see Starr, 2006) where both protesters and police find themselves in the roles of victims and offenders.

Therefore, the third research question engaged with the practical usefulness of gaining knowledge about Black Bloc protesters. Here, it was argued that there is only a slight chance for dialogue between the parties as, traditionally and, also reiterated in the interviews, activists generally avoid communicating with the police. Nonetheless, it could be shown that it is still worth studying the Black Bloc and the interactional processes with the police and political opponents.

To conclude, this dissertation aimed to give an overview of the Black Bloc as a phenomenon, focussing on the protesters that are based in an autonomous setting. This overview is only a glimpse on an issue that is multifaceted, topical and largely neglected in academia. It should, thus, best be understood as the call for more

research and less speculation. Finding the ultimate truth in the social science research is, as most argue, impossible. Showing an interest in people, listening to them, opening their universe to a broader audience, is, on the contrary, a strength of social science. Black Blocs transparent? Not quite, but maybe a bit.

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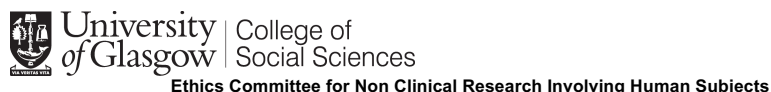
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APPENDICES

LETTER OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

University of Glasgow | College of Social Sciences

Ethics Committee for Non Clinical Research Involving Human Subjects

NOTIFICATION OF ETHICS APPLICATION OUTCOME – UG and PGT Applications

Application Type:	New	**Date Application Reviewed:** 26/5/17
Application Number:	SPS/2017/824/SOCIAL SCIENCE	
Applicant's Name:	Daphne Goetz	
Project Title:	Black Blocs Transparent – Experiences of Black Block Protesters in Germany	

APPLICATION OUTCOME

(A) **Fully Approved** ☐ *Start Date of Approval:* *End Date of Approval:*

(B) **Approved subject to amendments**
If the applicant has been given approval subject to amendments this means they can proceed with their data collection with effect from the date of approval, however they should note the following applies to their application:

Approved Subject to Amendments without the need to submit amendments to the Supervisor	☒
Approved Subject to Amendments made to the satisfaction of the applicant's Supervisor	☐

The College Ethics Committee expects the applicant to act responsibly in addressing the recommended amendments.

(C) **Application is Not Approved at this Time**

Amendments must be made to the satisfaction of the School Ethics Forum (SEF)	☐
Complete resubmission required. Discuss the application with supervisor before resubmitting.	☐

Please note the comments in the section below and provide further information where requested.

If you have been asked to resubmit your application in full, send it to your supervisor who will forward it to your local School Ethics Forum admin support staff.

Where resubmissions only need to be submitted to an applicant's supervisor.
This will apply to essential items that an applicant must address prior to ethics approval being granted. As the associated research ethics risks are considered to be low, the applicant's response need only be reviewed and cleared by the applicant's supervisor before the research can properly begin. For any application processed under this outcome, it is the Supervisor's responsibility to email socpol-ug-ethics@glasgow.ac.uk with confirmation of their approval of the re-submitted application.

APPLICATION COMMENTS

Major Recommendations:

Minor Recommendations:

Please change School of Social and Political Sciences Ethics Officer to Prof Keith Kintrea, Keith.Kintrea@glasgow.ac.uk

Optional – it may help participants understanding to explain further what is meant by 'personal data' and 'research data' in the Participant Information Sheet.

CONSENT FORM

University of Glasgow | School of Social & Political Sciences

Consent Form

Project Title

Black Blocs Transparent – Experiences of Protesters in Black Blocs in Germany

Name of Researcher

Daphne Götz

Please tick the boxes as appropriate

☐ I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

☐ I understand that my participation is **voluntary** and that I am free to withdraw **at any time**, without giving any reason.

☐ I understand that I do not have to answer a question if I do not want to.

☐ I confirm that I have been informed that my interview will - in the case of in-persona or Skype interviews - be audio-recorded. I consent to interviews being recorded.

☐ I confirm that I have been informed that notes from the interview will be typed up on the researcher's password protected laptop, in a secure data file.

☐ I understand that the researcher may use some of my words in her research report and in the presentation of her findings. I understand that these will be anonymised and it will not be possible to identify me.

☐ I understand that the interview will last for about 30 – 60 minutes. The interview can be shorter or longer than this, depending on my wishes.

☐ I acknowledge that copies of transcripts will be returned to participants for verification.

☐ **I agree to take part in this research study**

Name of Participant …………………………………………… Signature …………………………………………………….

Date …………………………………………

Name of Researcher …………………………………………… Signature …………………………………………………….

Date …………………………………………

University | School of Social
of Glasgow | & Political Sciences

Participant Information Sheet

Study title

Black Blocs Transparent – Experiences of Black Bloc Protesters in Germany

About the researcher

Hello, my name is Daphne Götz and I am currently a Masters student at the University of Glasgow in Scotland. I first studied law in Germany and now I am about to finish my Master's degree in 'Transnational Crime, Justice and Security'. This research project is for my dissertation, which will be completed in September 2017.

> You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me or my supervisor (contact details below) if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.
>
> Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of the study?

With this study, I would like to examine the phenomenon of 'Black Blocs'. I am interested in the motives of participants – why they decided to join that protest form and what experiences they made there. My focus lies on autonomous groups, how they organise themselves and why some members join the 'Black Block' and others don't. These questions are particularly interesting to me as no one has researched them before.

Why have I been chosen?

I have asked you to help me with my research because you have already made some valuable experiences with Black Blocs and autonomous groups during your professional career. You know how they organise themselves, how Black Blocs are composed and how they act etc. During the conduct of my study I will also talk to other experts in the field as well as former and active members of autonomous groups.

Do I have to take part?

No. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be asked about your experiences as a member of an autonomous groups and Black Blocs during demonstrations. This might involve questions about your reasons to join them, but also how your political views affected your decision to do so. However, the interview will

be very open. If you don't want to answer a particular question or you want to add something that we hadn't covered, feel free to do so.

You will also be asked to sign a consent form so that I know you agree to take part. You can, however, still change your mind at any point.

I will audio-record the interview and take additional notes. This is to make sure I have an accurate record of what you have to say.

The records will be written up, and some of the words you say may be used in my dissertation. I will make sure, that it is impossible to identify you. If you wish, you can choose a pretend name for yourself.

The interview itself will take around 30 – 60 minutes, depending on your wishes. We can take breaks at any time.

The interview will take place at a public place of your choice or your workplace. It can also be conducted via Skype.

<u>Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?</u>

All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will be identified by a pretend name or an ID number and any information about you will have your name and any other contact details removed so that you cannot be recognised from it.

> Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.

<u>What will happen to the results of the research study?</u>

Personal (your name, age, gender etc.) and research data (all the documents I accumulate in the process of research, such as notes I take or the recordings of interviews) will be secured on password protected devices. When the research project is finished, it will be stored for up to two (personal data) respectively ten (research data) more years. It will then be deleted/destroyed.

The results will be part of my dissertation. If you are interested in seeing the final results, I will provide you with an electronic copy of my dissertation.

You will not be identified in any publication.

<u>Who is organising the research?</u>

I am currently studying at the University of Glasgow, School of Social and Political Sciences.

This is also where my research will be supervised.

If you have any questions, you can ask them to:

Me, the researcher, Daphne Götz

      2278538G@student.gla.ac.uk

Or my research supervisor: Dr Alistair Fraser

      Alistair.fraser@gla.ac.uk

This research has been approved by the University of Glasgow Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of this research project, you can contact the School of Social and Political Sciences Ethics Officer, Prof Keith Kintrea (Keith.Kintrea@glasgow.ac.uk).

Thank you for your participation!

University | School of Social
of Glasgow | & Political Sciences

Participant Information Sheet

Study title

Black Blocs Transparent – Experiences of Black Bloc Protesters in Germany

About the researcher

Hi, my name is Daphne and I am currently a Masters student at the University of Glasgow in Scotland. I first studied law in Germany and now I am about to finish my Master's degree in 'Transnational Crime, Justice and Security'. This research project is for my dissertation, which will be completed in September 2017.

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Why have I been chosen?

I have asked you to help me with my research because you are or were member of an autonomous group in Germany and are familiar with the structures within those groups. As someone who has been marching in Black Blocs you can probably help me with understanding the reasons why some join them. Along with you, I will most likely interview around 10 other former or current members of autonomous groups in Germany.

Do I have to take part?

No. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be asked about your experiences as a member of an autonomous groups and Black Blocs during demonstrations. This might involve questions about your reasons to join them, but also how your political views affected your decision to do so. However, the interview will

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You will also be asked to sign a consent form so that I know you agree to take part. You can, however, still change your mind at any point.

In the case of in-persona or Skype interviews I will audio-record the interview and take additional notes. This is to make sure I have an accurate record of what you have to say.

The records will be written up, and some of the words you say may be used in my dissertation. I will make sure, that it is impossible to identify you. If you wish, you can choose a pretend name for yourself.

The interview itself will take around 30 – 60 minutes, depending on your wishes. We can take breaks at any time.

The interview will take place at a public place of your choice (café, community centre etc.). It can also be conducted via Skype.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will be identified by a pretend name or an ID number and any information about you will have your name and any other contact details removed so that you cannot be recognised from it.

> Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.
>
> To be very specific: I will not ask you to disclose past or future criminal activities. If you tell me about such incidents nonetheless, I might have to report them to the police. Please also understand that I cannot guarantee confidentiality in cases where criminal justice agencies ask me to hand my research data over to them as I might otherwise render myself liable to prosecution.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

Personal (your name, age, gender etc.) and research data (all the documents I accumulate in the process of research, such as notes I take or the recordings of interviews) will be secured on password protected devices. When the research project is finished, it will be stored for up to two (personal data) respectively ten (research data) more years. It will then be deleted/destroyed.

The results will be part of my dissertation. If you are interested in seeing the final results, I will provide you with an electronic copy of my dissertation.

You will not be identified in any publication.

Who is organising the research?

I am currently studying at the University of Glasgow, School of Social and Political Sciences.

This is also where my research will be supervised.

> If you have any questions, you can ask them to:
>
> Me, the researcher, Daphne Götz
>
> > 2278538G@student.gla.ac.uk
>
> Or my research supervisor: Dr Alistair Fraser
>
> > Alistair.fraser@gla.ac.uk

This research has been approved by the University of Glasgow Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of this research project, you can contact the School of Social and Political Sciences Ethics Officer, Prof Keith Kintrea (Keith.Kintrea@glasgow.ac.uk).

Thank you for your participation!

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INTERVIEW PROMPTS
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For use after information sheet has been read, consent form signed, and there has been an opportunity to ask questions.

The following themes could be included in the interviews I aim to conduct with both experts in the field and members of autonomous groups:

PROTESTERS (GENERAL THEMES AND PROMPTS FOR INTERVIEWS)

Hi [name], my name is Daphne!

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my research project. Just a quick reminder: on the Participant Information Sheet I gave to you earlier I stressed the limited guarantee of confidentiality when it comes to the disclosure of past/future criminal activities. Please keep in mind that I am not asking you to tell me about such activities. If you still decide to do so, I might be obliged to pass that information on to the police.

To start with, I'd like to know a bit more about you. Do you mind telling me about your age, where you're from and what you do for a living?

Thanks! Now, when we first talked/texted you told me that you're a member of [name of the group]. When did you join them and what were the reasons to do so back then?

Ok, great. Well, as you know, I'm looking at protesters experiences in Black Blocs. This is a quite general theme, so maybe we can break this huge topic down a bit...

<u>Prompts</u>

- ➢ Motives
    - ▪ Why the Black Bloc?
    - ▪ What is it that makes you want to go there?
    - ▪ Isn't this dangerous?
    - ▪ Why you and others not (related to members of the same group)?
    - ▪ To what extent does your political position impact on your decision to join the Black Bloc?
- ➢ Experiencing the Black Bloc
    - ▪ How often have you been in Black Blocs so far?

- What is the whole procedure before, during and after such a protest?
- (How) Do you prepare yourself?
- What is it that you experience there?
  - Community
  - Adrenaline
  - Aggression
  - Anger
  - Fear
  - Power
  - …
- How do you feel about the policing of Black Blocs?
- What do Black Blocs normally look like?
  - Age
  - Gender
- Do you know the others?

➢ General
- What means 'Black Bloc' to you? (associations etc.)
- What means 'autonomous group' to you?
- Anything else that you would like to share with me / that could be helpful or interesting?

Fantastic. Thanks so much – you've been a great help.

So, I think that's it. Was that okay for you? If you've got any questions or want to add something, just let me know.

Thanks!

Correspondence interviews are slightly different as they do not allow for that much flexibility. Hence, I would opt for a limited set of open-ended questions there. I would also stress again that I am asking them not to talk about past or future criminal activities.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my research project. Just a quick reminder: on the Participant Information Sheet I sent to you earlier I stressed the limited guarantee of confidentiality when it comes to the disclosure of past/future criminal activities. Please keep in mind that I am not asking you to tell me about such activities. If you still decide to do so, I might be obliged to pass that information on to the police.

To start with, I'd like to know a bit more about you. Do you mind telling me about your age, where you're from and what you do for a living?

You are a member of [name of the group]. When did you join them and what were the reasons to do so back then?

<u>Motives</u>

- ➢ While being a member of that group you also decided to protest in so called 'Black Blocs'. What were your reasons for joining them?
- ➢ Did you feel like your political position influenced the decision to protest in 'Black Blocs'?
- ➢ If so, to what extent did your political stance play a role?
- ➢ In your experience, if you compare yourself with other members of your group that do not engage in 'Black Blocs': how would you describe them compared to yourself?

<u>Black Blocs</u>

- ➢ How often/frequently did you participate in 'Black Blocs'?
- ➢ Can you explain what the 'Black Bloc' usually looks like? (Age, gender, familiar faces or people from other areas/countries etc.)
- ➢ Can you give an example of what a typical day would look like for you when preparing for and participating in such a protest? You can give examples for the procedures and schedule that was typical for yourself.

- ➢ How did you experience the actual protest?
- ➢ What emotions do you associate with being part of a 'Black Bloc'?
- ➢ When it comes to policing 'Black Blocs', what were you experiences with that and how did the way the 'Black Blocs' were policed make you feel?

General

- ➢ What means 'Black Bloc' for you? Are there any particular memories or associations that you would like to share?
- ➢ From your experience, was being part of an 'autonomous group' important for making the decision to join the 'Black Bloc'?
- ➢ Is there anything else that you would like to share with me or do you want to add something of which you think that it might be relevant?

Fantastic. Thanks so much – you've been a great help.

If you've got any questions or want to add something, just let me know. If you want to you can also give me some feedback on how you felt during answering those questions.

Thank you!

Hello [name], my name is Daphne Götz!

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my research project.

To start with, I'd like to know a bit more about you. Do you mind telling me about your job? When did you become a police officer and what are your duties right now?

Thank you. Now, from our previous email exchange I know that you have spent quite some time at protest scenes in Germany. My research focuses on the experiences of Black Bloc protesters in Germany with a special interest in autonomous groups. Well, I understand that this is a vast area, so maybe we should break it down a bit...

<u>Prompts</u>

- ➢ Autonomous groups
  - ▪ From your experience, what are autonomous groups?
  - ▪ How do they, in general, behave at protests?
  - ▪ Do you see differences between left and right autonomous groups?
  - ▪ Would you say that some age-groups or one gender is more dominant (in general and specifically at protests)?
  - ▪ Are they all violent/more violent that other groups/violent at all?
  - ▪ Motives for joining the Black Bloc
  - ▪ From your experience, why do some join the Black Bloc and others don't?
  - ▪ How might they differ from other members of those groups (age, politically)?
- ➢ Black Blocs
  - ▪ What are your experiences from policing Black Blocs and protests that involved autonomous groups?
  - ▪ Different from other protests?
  - ▪ What do Black Blocs look like?
  - ▪ How do they organise themselves? Are they consistent groups or ad-hoc formations?
  - ▪ Is there a difference between left and right Black Blocs?
  - ▪ How do you feel when policing Black Blocs compared to other protests?
- ➢ Policing/Policymaking
  - ▪ How do police forces in general handle Black Blocs?

- o Procedures
- o Safety measures taken in advance
- o Researching planned activities?
- What are some problems in policing Black Blocs?
- How could knowledge about the motives and experiences of Black Bloc protesters help in addressing Black Blocs during protests?
- ➢ General
  - Anything else that you might want to share with me?

Fantastic. Thank you so much – that was very informative and helpful.

So, I think that's it. Was that okay for you? In case you have any questions or want to add something, please don't hesitate to contact me.

I really appreciate your help, thank you.