The Experience of Contention: Tackling the Boundary Between Protests and Riots

Johan Gøtzsche-Astrup

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PhD Dissertation

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PREFACE

This report summarises the PhD dissertation: *The Experience of Contention: Tackling the boundary between protests and riots*. Apart from the report, the dissertation consists of the following six self-contained articles.

Paper A: A Sociological Perspective on the Experience of Contention

Paper B: The constitution of contention: Delineating protests and riots at the turn of the 18th century

Paper C: Contention and social order: The historical relation between political and social riot dispositives

Paper D: The political signification of riots: A dispositive perspective on the 2011 England riots

Paper E: A Cultural Model of Contention: How Do the Public Interpret the Repertoire of Contention?

Paper F: Becoming an Activist: Individualisation and a Democratic Contentious Ethos in 'How to Books'

1 INTRODUCTION

'We must always defend peaceful protest and peaceful protestors. We should not confuse them with those looting and committing acts of violence' (Kamala Harris 2020)

'[W]hen the looting starts, the shooting starts' (Donald Trump 2020)

'Reformers no Rioters' (London Corresponding Society 1794)

'Great complaints have been made of the seditious and riotous disposition of the people. With respect to riots, however, irregular they may be in their own nature, and however dangerous, it is impossible to prevent them in a country where the spirit of Freedom is predominant, if those who have the management of public affairs labour to pervert and to violate the laws of the land, and disregard the spirit of the constitution' (Towers 1769)

During the summer of 2020, protests and riots associated with the Black Lives Matter movement broke out in several major US cities following the police murder of George Floyd. Although most protests remained peaceful, the spectre of riots lingered (ACLED 2021). One FiveFirtyEight poll from 5 June found that 42 % of respondents believed that 'most protesters are trying to incite violence or destroy property' (Skelley 2020). This was mirrored, and partly created, by a violent police response. For example, Portland police and federal forces used less lethal weapons, such as rubber bullets, as well as arbitrary arrests and detentions in a bid to prevent and repress riots. When this backfired, violence increased (ACLED 2020). Although coming from different sides of the issue, then Senator Kamala Harris and President Donald Trump both attempted to make sense of these events by drawing a boundary between acceptable political protests and illegitimate and apolitical riots. This was, however, a difficult boundary to draw and was contested by others who argued that the rioters were closer to, if not exactly identical with, protesters (see Greenwald 2020).

In the UK, clashes between Black Lives Matter protesters seeking to take down racist statues and right-wing protesters trying to defend them led to riot police intervening. Boris Johnson tweeted that 'These marches & protests have been subverted by violence and breach current guidelines' (Johnson 2020). The protests were subverted by violence. They crossed a boundary and turned into something else. At the same time, however, it was difficult to disentangle the now violent riots from the protests that had preceded it (see Casciani 2020).

Such events are not unique, but rather a recurring feature in liberal democracies. In the past year alone, there have been protests and riots in Bristol in 2021 in reaction to a draconian protest policing act, the January 6 insurrection at the US capitol, and anti-lockdown protests and riots that have struck Copenhagen, London, and Berlin among many other places. These join a list of recent protests and riots such as those in Ferguson in 2014, Stockholm in 2013, London in 2011, Paris in 2005, and Northern England in 2001.

The aftermath of these events is often chaotic. Protesters blame the police, police blame protesters, some politicians denounce criminal thuggery and others try to isolate the message of the protests from the riotous violence. Political scientists and sociologists may also weigh in, drawing on explanations of the emergence of riots (e.g. King and Waddington 2005; Newburn 2015; Stott and Reicher 1998; Stott et al. 2018; Waddington et al. 1989) and the reactions to them (e.g. Bleich, Caeiro, and Luerhman 2010; Fording 2001; Gilham and Marx 2018; Newburn, Jones, and Blaustein 2018a; Piven and Cloward 1979). It seems to me that there is a current of unease running underneath many of these responses. This unease is about the meaning of what we just saw. What was it an instance of? More specifically, it concerns how we constitute the relation between protests and riots. Are riots distinct from protests or another manifestation of them? It is this unease, I think, that produces the 'paper riots' in the public that try to make sense of the physical riots (Body-Gendrot 2016). Most of the quotes at the opening of this chapter attempt to avoid the unease by creating a stable and solid boundary between riots and protests. Some scholarly reactions, while staying clear of this stark dismissal, share the unease: was it a political event (Badiou 2012), a political disruption (Gündoğdu 2017), a return to a previous mode of resistance against capitalism (Clover 2016), a tacit protest (Hörnqvist 2016), or a consumerist outburst of violence (Bauman 2011)?

This is not to say that these discussions are fruitless: they often deepen our understanding of protests and riots. However, I want to strike out on a different path here. Instead of analysing the actual protests and riots in order to dismiss or define away the unease, I want to stay in it. Or better, I want to take the unease itself as an object of analysis. As Joseph Towers' quote reminds us, this boundary is far from natural and stable but is historically changeable. Analysing the boundary helps us get at a series of fundamental political questions. Why is the relation between protests and riots so troublesome in contemporary liberal democracies? And what might this tell us about the way that liberal democracies practice contention and experience their ability to change?

1.1 The constitution of contention

This dissertation analyses the relation between protests and riots as a case of the constitution of contention. Throughout the dissertation, I move back and forth between the boundary and the general question of how contention is constituted in liberal democracies and in the United Kingdom and United States in particular. For now, we can think of contention as a collective and conflictual political practice (see McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Tarrow 2011), encompassing actions such as marching in the street, holding silent vigils or sit-ins, and, perhaps, riotous looting and destruction of poverty.

I situate my discussions inside a problematic concerned with the '*form* of society' (Lefort 1988: 11); with how society is constituted as an intelligible and divided space. More specifically, I am interested in making visible those conditions and assumptions that give shape to a boundary between protests and riots (see Foucault 2000a: 456). In doing so, I suggest that we can think of the boundary as delineating a particular experience of contention. By experience, I mean both subjective experiences of, say, protests and riots, and the practices in which these subjective experiences are embedded (see Foucault 2010: 5; O'Leary 2010). In the summary, I suggest that the boundary between protests and riots came to delineate a new experience of contention at the turn of the 19th century. Here, protest was an exercise of orderly public inquiry that became intelligible through the exclusion of riots. As a first approximation, then, an experience of contention is an experience concerned with collective and conflictual political practices. I will have much more to say about this experience in what follows. Here, I merely want to emphasise that I approach the boundary between protests and riots by asking *how the relation between protests and riots is constituted in a conventional experience of contention*.

Understanding experiences of contention in general and the unease concerning the boundary between protests and riots in particular is important. Experiences of contention describe different ways of making sense of conflict and change. They can be more or less open, generous, and democratic. That is, they can acknowledge and even celebrate the fact that societies are always open to change and to conflict. In this case, experiences are characterised by both an acceptance of struggle in its many forms and an openness to those whom you oppose (Connolly 2002a; Honig 1993; Lefort 1988; Wenman 2013). They can also try to close down this potential by downplaying conflict, narrowing its scope, or dehumanising opponents who stand in the way of complete social harmony (Mouffe 2005). I find the first option more appealing and, to use a Nietzschian phrase, more 'noble' (Nietzsche 2000: 475). Importantly, I think that the boundary between protests and riots, and the un-

ease associated with it, leads to a troubling closure in an experience of contention. It is exemplified by the repeated attempts to seal off intelligible protests from riots with which I began this dissertation. In giving a sociological account of the boundary, I hope to contest drives to closure and instead open up new ways of configuring the relation in a deeply democratic manner.

1.2 The structure of the summary

In pursuing my question, I engage in a dialogue between three major literatures: a sociology of contention (Della Porta and Diani 2020; Buechler 2016; McAdam et al. 2001; Tarrow 2011), a post-foundational approach to politics (Arendt 1998; Connolly 2002a; Lefort 1988; Mouffe 2005), and a Foucauldian inquiry into the emergence of experiences (Foucault 1997: 200; 2010; O'Leary 2010). The dissertation proceeds within the coordinates laid out by these. While I discuss the literatures in depth below, I sketch their interplay within the experience of contention perspective here. The sociology of contention is both based on and has called into question the distinctiveness of its object of analysis (see Buechler 2016). I show how post-foundational arguments may help clarify what is so distinctive about contention. Post-foundational political theory has, in turn, struggled with its social weightlessness and its fascination with fleeting moments of politics (McNay 2014; Volk 2018). I show how the sociology of contention and a Foucault-inspired concept of experiences may give it the sociological grounding that it needs. Finally, Foucauldian analyses of contention (Baumgarten and Ullrich 2016; Death 2010; 2016) have underestimated the extent to which contention is a normal and conventional practice in liberal democracies and not just a counter-conduct or oblique resistance. A more conventional sociology of contention and post-foundational political theory may provide a new way of thinking of contention, thereby contributing to a genealogy of critique (Boland 2019; Folkers 2016).

This dialogue underlies the summary, which works through both a theoretical, historical, and contemporary level. I outline this structure and the papers that inform each individual part in Table 1.1. First, a theoretical level on which I develop a sociological perspective on the experience of contention, drawing on paper A. We need such a perspective in order to engage with the constitution of contention, its boundaries, and its drives to closure and openness. In Chapter 2, I begin by asking how the extant sociology of contention has dealt with the distinctiveness of contention. If we are to understand the constitution of a particular boundary in contention, we need to understand what sets contention apart from other practices. I argue that the distinctiveness of contention has been central to the formation of a sociology of contention but has been put into question by recent developments in arena theory,

field theory, and in a newfound focus on practices. These broaden contention in a way that obfuscates its distinctiveness. We therefore need a new sociological perspective in order to tackle the question. In Chapter 3, I draw on post-foundational political theory and Michel Foucault's notions of experience and dispositive in order to develop my perspective on the experience of contention. I argue that experiences of contention are distinctive in two ways. They are distinct experiences, with boundaries to experiences of madness or crime, and distinctive because they express an ontologically necessary potential for conflict. We can analyse these experiences by analysing how they are formed by dispositives that dispose contentious practices and imbue them with an ontological meaning. The end of Chapter 3 and the whole of Chapter 4 are devoted to the question of the analytical strategies and methods that we can use in studying these experiences.

Second, I work on a historical level on which I ask how the relation between protests and riots took shape at the turn of the 18th century in England and London in particular. Here, I draw on papers B and C. In Chapter 5, I home in on a shift in the relation by tracing the twin developments of the movement for parliamentary reform and police reform. I show how one relation, in which protests and riots could be seen as exercises of public spirit or manifestations of corruption, was complemented and slowly gave way to a new relation. Here, protest was an exercise of public inquiry that was defined in opposition to riots. This opposition helped constitute a new experience of contention in which protests became intelligible through the exclusion of riots. Riots were cast into a no man's land, not quite political expressions nor social disorders.

Third, I work on a contemporary level, asking how the boundary helps constitute a conventional experience of contention today. In chapter 6, I analyse state practices in the United Kingdom, the public's interpretation of contention in both the United Kingdom and the United States, and activist guidebooks, using papers D, E, and F respectively. I argue that the control practices of states and the interpretative practices of the public work through a boundary between protests and riots. This boundary is strikingly similar to that found in the historical case, opposing intelligible protests with unintelligible riots. At the same time, protests and riots remain intimately connected because protests may turn into riots at any point. This is the rationale behind protest policing strategies that seize on protests in order to prevent their transformation into riots. When they do become riots, participants are confronted as enemies in a war. I conclude the chapter by suggesting that activist guidebooks may show us one way of reconfiguring the boundary by amplifying an already-existing ethos of agonistic respect and critical responsiveness.

What does the boundary between protests and riots mean for the role of contention in liberal democracies and is there an alternative? This is an ethico-political question that I take up in my final chapter. I first summarise the main arguments and contributions of the dissertation before turning to a concerted engagement with post-foundational political theory in general and radical democracy in particular. Drawing on the preceding chapters, I caution against a fascination with fugitive moments of disruption and subversion. This both misses the democratic importance of conventional contention and risks restaging the exclusion of riots. I suggest an alternative way of configuring the relation between protests and riots rooted in both the empirical analyses and post-foundational political theory. Instead of asking whether people were violent or disruptive, we might ask whether they were animated by public spirit. We can still oppose the violence characteristic of some riots without dismissing their intelligibility or public-spirited nature. This would help manage some of the unease surrounding the relation between protests and riots. Ultimately, it might open the way for a more open, generous, and therefore more democratic experience of contention.

Table 1.1. Overview of the dissertation

	Theoretical development	**Historical analysis**	**Contemporary analysis**
Core focus	I develop an experience of contention perspective through a dialogue between a sociology of contention, post-foundational political theory, and Foucault's notions of experience and dispositive.	I trace a shift in the boundary between protests and riots at the turn of the 19th century in England. Riots move from being inside an experience of public spirit to outside an experience of public inquiry.	I analyse the contemporary configuration of the boundary between protests and riots in state practices, among the general public, and in activist guidebooks.
Chapters	2-4	5	6
Papers	A	B, C	D, E, F

2 THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF CONTENTION

We can begin thinking about the constitution of contention and its boundaries by asking how the sociology of contention has dealt with it.[1] More specifically, how has this tradition specified the distinctiveness of contention - what is it, exactly, that is constituted? Because the relation between protests and riots is also a boundary that circumscribes a set of contentious practices, we need to understand what sets these practices apart if we are to understand the boundary. In this chapter, I first review a classical narrative of how the sociology of contention developed by wresting its object free of a reductionist Marxism and structural functionalism. In this narrative, it did so by specifying the distinctly political and rational character of social movements, protests, and contention in general. Second, I argue that this delineation has been put into question by a series of recent developments, most notably the development of arena theory, field theory, and practice theory in the sociology of contention. These otherwise welcome developments struggle to specify what, if anything, is distinctive about contention. Although the distinctive nature of contention is central to the sociology of contention, the tradition cannot by itself provide a perspective on the constitution of contention. In order to analyse the constitution of contention, I therefore argue that we need to develop a complementary sociological perspective on contention.

2.1 Constructing a contentious politics framework

As with most disciplines, the sociology of contention, especially in its US iteration, has a foundational narrative. We can find versions of this in the main introductory textbooks that give an overview of the field (e.g. Buechler 2016; Della Porta and Diani 2020; Tarrow 2011). I am interested in this narrative less for its accuracy and more for the way that it is oriented around the claim that contention is somehow distinctive.

The story often begins with either the French crowd theories of Le Bon (2006) and Tarde (1901) or Marx's (1977) recognition that conflict is normal and endemic in society (e.g. Tarrow 2011). Borch (2012) has shown how the

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[1] In speaking of the sociology of contention, I have in mind the tradition rooted in social movements studies (e.g. Buechler 2016; Della Porta and Diani 2020). I prefer the term sociology of contention because it focuses less on one specific type of contentious actor (social movements) and more on a particular type of practice (contention).

crowd tradition thrived in the first half of the 20th century in the works of Durkheim (1984), Freud (1949), the Chicago School (Park 1927), and in the collective behaviour tradition (Turner and Killian 1957). Although it is perhaps unproductively marginalised today (Borch 2012; Buechler 2004), it holds a key position in the conventional narrative of contention as an opponent against which a sociology of contention formed. The new generation of social movement scholars objected to the way crowd theories often coupled contention with an irrational psychology and abnormal societal processes (e.g. McAdam 1982: 36). For this new generation, contention was a rational, political, and normal practice.

If the crowd theories often function as neat negative boundary markers, the narrative treats the Marxist tradition in a more measured manner.[2] In singling out the progenitors of a sociology of contention, Tarrow (2011: 17-20) begins with Marx (1976) and moves through Lenin (1976) and Gramsci (1971) before culminating in Charles Tilly's (1978) polity model, which was strongly inspired by his previous Marxism. In the narrative, Marx and those who followed him broke new ground in foregrounding the rational and normal nature of conflict. In this way, the sociology of contention can be seen as a continuation of the previous Marxist tradition. However, it broke with this tradition because it refused any attempt to reduce contention to underlying social structural contradictions (Tilly 1978). Sociologists of contention were instead to focus on the political processes of contention (McAdam 1982).

The birth of a sociology of contention was facilitated by the insistence on contention as a distinctive political and rational practice. It could not be reduced to psychological strains and stresses, sometimes rooted in structural anomalies, or to underlying social conflicts and contradictions. It had to be studied and explained on its own terms. In Buechler's (2011: 111) apt phrase, social movements were no longer 'ontological orphans'. They were an object in themselves. This line of thinking was first systematically developed by the resource mobilisation perspective on social movements (McCarthy and Zald 1973; 1977) and articulated forcefully in McAdam's (1982) political process model. From the 1970s onwards, a paradigm for the study of social movements

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[2] A note of caution is in order here: I make no claim to survey the Marxist tradition itself – it is much too rich and multifaceted to be dealt with in this narrative. To take two examples: Walter Benjamin's (2003) writings on revolution and historical citation and Alain Badiou's (2012) on the event of riots are in some ways very close to the perspective that I set out in the summary as a whole. The same is true of the post-Marxism of Chantal Mouffe (2000; 2005) that I draw on explicitly in the following chapters. These texts can be read as giving philosophical answers to the meaning of contention. In this chapter, however, I am interested in the role that Marxism plays for sociologists trying to specify contention.

organised around this assumption took shape. The resource mobilisation perspective was joined by a focus on political threats and opportunities (Eisinger 1973; McAdam 1982; Meyer 2004), a collective identity perspective (Poletta and Jasper 2001; Jasper and McGarry 2015), a framing perspective (Benford and Snow 2000; Snow et al. 2014), and a focus on the repertoire of contentious tactics available to movement actors (Tilly 1977; 1995; 2008).

As this paradigm consolidated, there was a gradual broadening of the research object. McCarthy and Zald's resource mobilisation theory had tended to focus on established social movement organisations. This had walled off the new sociology of contention from crowd theories and Marxism but had neglected diffuse forms of contention (see Piven and Cloward 1992). Although the call for such a broadening was not in itself new (McAdam and Tarrow 2011), it picked up speed with the formulation of the contentious politics framework by McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001). While still firmly grounded in the paradigm that had emerged from the 1970's onwards, the framework stressed the need to study all dynamics of contention, including riots and revolutions, which had been marginalised in the extant literature. Contention, roughly defined as 'collective political struggle' (McAdam et al. 2001: 5), and not social movements was the fundamental research object (Buechler 2016: 200). However, although the research object was expanded, it did not break with the core assumption that had been put into place thirty years previously: contention should not be reduced to other dynamics but studied as a political dynamic in itself.

The contentious politics framework was not adopted wholesale (McAdam and Tarrow 2011). As I argue below, other perspectives gained ground, such as field and network theory, which also effected a broadening of the research object. For now, I want to briefly touch on a different strand of theorising, which sits uneasily alongside the US-based contentious politics framework: new social movement theories (e.g. Castells 1996; Melucci 1985; Touraine 1985). Alongside the slow sewing together of the contentious politics framework, continental European scholars argued that we saw new forms of social movements emerging in post-industrial societies that gave greater emphasis to issues of culture and rights than their supposedly materialist predecessors. This tradition was grounded in a different way of theorising that was less wary of coupling contention with systemic societal changes (e.g. Habermas 1987). Although new social movement theorists rarely shared the Marxist emphasis on class conflict, they nonetheless retained the connection between contention and systemic changes (Buechler 2016: 172). It was therefore not shaped around an assumption about the distinctive nature of contention, although it might be compatible with this assumption. From inside the narrative that I am rehearsing here, new social movement theory can be seen as yet another

indication that the sociology of contention needed to broaden its focus, to look beyond social movements as such to fields, networks, arenas and general social systems.

2.2 Questioning the distinctiveness of contention

The contentious politics framework marks a limit-case for how far the sociology of contention can broaden its object of research without shattering its own ontological foundations. In fact, Buechler (2016: 200) argues that it already did this by straying from the original focus on social movements. However, insofar as these foundations concern the distinctiveness of contention, it seems to me that they remained intact. This is not the case today. The broadening of the sociology of contention has begun to tear at the distinctiveness of contention. This is not an isolated feature of one theoretical perspective but a problem for the sociology of contention as a whole. Below, I give three examples of this: the development of arena theory, field theory, and practice theory. In each example, I show how the expansion of the research object has put into question the distinctiveness of contention.

Let us begin with the recent development of arena theory associated with Jasper and his collaborators (e.g. Jasper 2014; 2015; 2019). It relies on two primary concepts: players and arenas. Players are 'those who engage in strategic action with some goal in mind' (Jasper 2015: 10; see Jasper 2019: 2 for a more fleshed out definition). They can be both single individuals and compound players, such as organizations or even nations, and they overlap and flow into each other. For instance, protest players may also take part in party politics. An arena 'is a bundle of rules and resources that allow or encourage certain kinds of interaction to proceed, with something at stake' (Jasper 2015: 14). It is closely connected to the notion of a field but emphasises the physical contexts of interaction, such as law courts or actual meeting rooms (Jasper 2019: 2). That being said, it may also be more metaphorical: public opinion may be an arena and, crucially, compound players may be arenas for subplayers (Jasper 2015: 12). What is central for our purposes is that the player-arena framework is a framework for 'institutionalized strategic interactions [...] including markets, wars, diplomacy, electoral politics, sports, and more' (Jasper 2015: 27). Its great strength compared to previous approaches lies in its ability to couple contention with what goes on in markets, board room meetings, the charity sector and so on. Note, however, that this also means that the founding assumption about the distinctiveness of contention falls by the wayside: contention is just another form of strategic interaction between players in different arenas. Although the framework is typically used to analyse contention, it

is not strictly speaking a framework about contention but about players and arenas.

This shift is even more clear in the closely related field theory put forward by Fligstein and McAdam (2011; 2012). They present their theory as a synthesis of social movement studies and organisational studies. These should work together because they 'are interested in the same underlying phenomenon: collective strategic action' (Fligstein and McAdam 2011: 2). The concept of a strategic action field is strongly reminiscent of Jasper's arenas, although it has a more clearly articulated Bourdieusian bent (see Jasper 2019: 6-7). A strategic action field is 'a meso-level social order where actors (who can be individual or collective) interact with knowledge of one another under a set of common understandings about the purposes of the field, the relationships in the field (including who has power and why), and the field's rules' (Fligstein and McAdam 2011: 3). Contention holds a prominent place in this perspective. In all fields, there is a constant 'jockeying' over positions (Fligstein and McAdam 2011: 5). This may sometimes escalate into an episode of contention in which innovative actions, shared uncertainty over the rules of the field, and sustained mobilisation come together (Fligstein and McAdam 2011: 9). However, contention is explicitly not the core object of research. Fligstein and McAdam (2011: 22; 2012: 31) distinguish their theory from ordinary social movement theory because the latter has tended to be 'movement-centric' in its focus. This 'obscures a more fundamental and underlying reality' (Fligstein and Mcadam 2011: 2; see also Fligstein and McAdam 2012: 213); the reality, that is, of collective strategic action.

Now, the novelty of this field theory has been contested. Field theory and its close cousin network theory have deep roots in the sociology of contention (Crossley and Diani 2019). Crossley's (2002) field theory and the multi-institutional politics approach (Armstrong 2005; Armstrong and Bernstein 2008) cover much of the same territory. The novelty or lack thereof of Fligstein and McAdam's field theory is less important for us here. What is important is that their field theory clearly articulates a break in the sociology of contention. Contention is no longer the core research object but is an element of a deeper underlying social reality of collective strategic action.

Finally, I want to outline a recent turn to practice in the sociology of contention (e.g. Gillan 2020; Yates 2015). I do this for two reasons. It helps us see the potential but also the limitations of approaches that seek to broaden the research object while still retaining the core focus on social movements. What is more important, it begins to ask questions about the constitution of contention itself. Gillan (2020) is, to my knowledge, the first to explicitly use the term 'turn to practice' in the sociology of contention. It encompasses a series of studies that have all highlighted how contentious actors ascribe meaning to

their actions. These have tended to be alternative practices that are seen to challenge the framework of public contention, associated with the contentious politics paradigm. Thus, lifestyle movements (Haenfler 2019; Haenfler, Johnson, and Jones 2012), direct action practices (Graeber 2009), prefiguration (Maeckelberg 2011; Yates 2015), and riots (Tiratelli 2020) have all been studied from a practice perspective. In this way, they have put further pressure on the sociology of contention by undermining classical notions of what counts and does not count as contention.

In some ways, the turn is a particular instance of field theory and the multi-institutional politics approach. The latter also emphasises the different forms and strategies that social movements may take and follow (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008). However, the turn is distinctive in two ways. First, it remains explicitly movement-centric, focusing on how the contentious actors themselves understand their practices (Gillan 2020: 309). Thus, Yates (2015) is interested in how prefigurative practices are configured from the perspective of the autonomous actors he studies, and Haenfler (2019) in how abstinence pledgers understand their attempts to create social change through lifestyle changes. Second, although it is far from novel to analyse the meaning that certain practices have for movement actors (e.g. Doherty and Hayes 2019; Jasper 1997; Tilly 2008), the turn to practice inflects this analysis in a crucial way. As I read it, it is less concerned with, say, the ideological flavour of tactics (Jasper 1997) and more with how practices 'signal different understandings of the relation between action and change' (Gillan 2020: 310). That is, it is concerned with the question of how contention is constituted in different practices.

This is a promising line of questioning. By focusing on the second-order problem of constitution, it suggests one way of taking contention itself as the core object of analysis without denying its entanglement in arenas and field dynamics.

2.3 Remaining obstacles

The turn to practice helps dissolve the distinctiveness of contention. At the same time, it suggests that we can maintain this distinctiveness by shifting our analytical perspective to the constitution of contention itself. We can see the turn to practice reaching out, almost touching the question that we formulated in Chapter 1. However, I am not sure that the turn to practice can entirely reach this question for two reasons.

First, the turn has been less concerned with contention as such and more with uncovering alternative forms of contention. It has broken down boundaries without asking how we can actually study the constitution of contention

as such. Gillan (2020: 310) specifies the core object of research as 'the relation between action and change'. The problem with this definition is that change is endemic to all societal life. It is therefore not clear what distinguishes contention. We have to flesh out our understanding of contention if we wish to formulate a perspective centred on its constitution and, more specifically, the specific boundary between protests and riots. Second, the reason why the turn to practice might be able to avoid further specifying its research object is that it is avowedly 'movement-centric' (see McAdam and Boudet 2012: 3). All the practices it studies take place in the context of and are analysed from the perspective of social movements. There is nothing wrong with this. However, it will not do if we are interested in the general question of the constitution of contention. This is because contention is not only constituted by the contentious actors themselves but also by members of the public, media, companies, and states that interpret, create, and react to it. In the next chapter, I outline an experience of contention perspective that overcomes these two problems.

For now, let me take stock and review some of the criticisms that could be levelled at the discussion so far. I argue that the distinctiveness of contention has historically been at the heart of a sociology of contention. It was around this distinctiveness, originally centred on the rational and political nature of contention, that the sociology of contention distinguished itself from crowd theories and reductionist versions of Marxism in the 1970s. The next thirty years saw the gradual development of a new paradigm for the study of social movements and contention more generally, culminating in the contentious politics framework. This has lately been challenged by arena theories, field theories, and the turn to practice. All challenges push at the boundaries of contention, casting doubt on whether contention is really distinctive.

Of course, we might want to argue that contention is in fact *only* another form of strategic collective action. In a way, I sympathise with this view. It seems to me that the development of arena theory, field theory, and practice theory are real advances in the study of contention. They help us understand many of the dynamics and connections between contention and the broader society in which contention is embedded. However, I also fear that they foreclose the question posed at the outset of this summary concerning the form of society in which something like contention becomes circumscribed and intelligible. If we cannot give a more complete answer to the question, we risk not understanding the distinct significance of a core democratic practice. Now, I realise that this risk may seem worse to me than to some sociologists and political scientists who are sceptical of the post-foundational tradition that I draw on. Indeed, they could argue that I am imposing a question on the sociology of contention that they have no interest in answering. However, I am not sure that this argument is sustainable. The narrative shows that the sociology

of contention has an academic and a political interest in understanding what sets contention apart from other practices. And although this distinctiveness has tended to be framed in terms of the political and rational nature of the dynamics of contention and not its constitution, I think they both get at the same underlying intuition; that there is something ontologically distinctive about contention that should help orient our studies of it. The experience of contention perspective that I develop in the next chapter can therefore be seen as a continuation of and contribution to this sociology of contention tradition.

3 EXPERIENCES OF CONTENTION

The distinctiveness of contention is at the core of a sociology of contention. In beginning to think about the boundary between protests and riots, and the constitution of contention in general, we are reaching a crossroads as the tradition questions what this distinctiveness is actually about. In looking for new answers, it may do well to acknowledge that the sociology of contention is far from the only tradition that has wrestled with this question. I draw on a current in post-foundational political theory that has tackled the general question of what sets politics apart from other practices. It has found one answer in the relation between politics and the ontological premise of necessary contingency (Marchart 2007). In this chapter, I first outline this tradition in order to orient a new sociological perspective on contention. Drawing on Michel Foucault, I proceed to develop the concept of an experience of contention as a distinct way of practicing necessary contingency, helping us overcome the twin obstacles of the vagueness of contention and movement-centrism that we encountered in the turn to practice. In order to flesh out my perspective, I argue that experiences of contention emerge out of dispositives that dispose but do not determine contentious practices. This helps us understand both the regularity and flux of experiences of contention. I conclude by discussing the relation between this new perspective and other alternatives from the sociology of contention and social history.

3.1 A post-foundational ontology

If the extant origin story of the sociology of contention begins from Marxism and the collective behaviour tradition, the perspective that I set out here draws on a third source, one that influenced Marx (Hill 2006: 133) but is distinct from the Marxist perspective. This is a tradition in philosophy and political theory that runs from Machiavelli (1998), through to civic humanist (Pocock 1975) or neo-Roman (Skinner 1998) writers such as Sydney (1996), Bolingbroke (1967a), and Ferguson (1995), over Nietzsche (2000), Schmitt (2005), and Heidegger (2010), all the way to Arendt (1998), Lefort (1988), Mouffe (2005), and Connolly (2002a). While I cannot rehearse this tradition here, I use it to draw out three points that I discuss in turn; the ontological premise of this tradition, the role of politics within it, and its relation to a sociology of contention.

The premise of post-foundationalism is the absence of any ultimate foundation on which to ground society. Derrida (1978: 279-80, emphasis in original) lists some of the historical attempts to provide such a foundation in the

form of '*eidos, archē, telos, energeia, ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject) *alēthia*, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth'. The arguments against these attempts take different although interconnected forms, such as the genealogical argument associated with Nietzsche (2000) and Foucault (1998a), the deconstruction of Derrida (1978), and the difference between an ontological level of being and the ontic level of beings in Heidegger (2010). Here, I do not argue for the absence of such an ultimate foundation but take it as a given (for more contemporary arguments from a wide-ranging set of positions see Bevir and Blakeley 2018; Connolly 2002a; Marchart 2007; 2018; Tønder and Thomassen 2005). I do, however, wish to stress two points. First, I agree with Connolly (2002a: 66) that post-foundationalism should not be seen as the final or only intelligible ontological position. Although it may be logically valid for post-foundationalists to claim the necessary lack of foundations (Marchart 2007: 29), it is wise to forward post-foundationalism as merely one among a number of possible ontologies. Second, post-foundationalism is not anti-foundationalism. Claiming that there is no ultimate foundation does not mean that there are no foundations or that everything floats. There are contingent foundations. This means that post-foundationalism can make sense of stability as well as change.

The lack of ultimate foundations has implications for how we think of politics. Because all societal formations are necessarily contingent (see Connolly 2002a: 28 on contingency), they also hold a necessary potential for conflict. This potential cannot be eliminated because this would imply the construction of an ultimate foundation. We can think of the relation between politics and this necessary potential for conflict in two ways.

In its most radical sense, politics is an event that manifests the necessary potential for conflict. In other words, it is the event that reveals the impossibility of any ultimate foundations. This is what we can call 'the political' (Mouffe 2005: 9). We find variations of this notion in both Carl Schmitt's (2005) decisionism, in Walter Benjamin's (2003) Messianic interruption of history, in Alain Badiou's (2012) event, and Jacques Rancière's (1999) disruptive politics among many others.

However, I do not focus on the political here for two reasons. First, although the political is distinctive it is also everywhere and nowhere. The necessary potential for conflict suffuses all societal relations because all relations are necessarily contingent. Moreover, I am not sure that the political ever completely 'surfaces', so to speak. It describes an ontological level that we do not have direct access to but can only infer from its effects on the ontic level of beings and actual societal practices (see Marchart 2007: 174). Second, I am wary of the search for and supposed uncovering of the political in riots or other forms of transgressive practices, as I discuss at length in my final chapter. It

seems to me that this approach hinders rather than helps us in understanding and listening to actual contention. Foucault (2010: 159) hinted at this problem in his lectures on parrhesia: 'nothing seems more dangerous to me than that much vaunted shift from politics (*la politique)* to the political *(le politique)*, which in many contemporary analyses seems to me to have the effect of masking the specific problem and set of problems of politics'.

This is not to say that we should do away with the concept of the political. I think it is important to maintain a conceptual space for mysteries and experiences of transcendence (see Connolly 2011: 88). I also recognise that it may be useful to speak of the political logics of equivalence and difference in order to understand the institution and transformation of societal practices (Glynos and Howarth 2007: 141-145; Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Finally, we need the concept of the political if we are to grasp the actual practice of politics. What I do argue, however, is that the political is too unmanageable to give us a grip on the distinctive nature of contention.

While the political belongs to the ontological level, politics takes place on the ontic level of beings. It is sometimes thought of as a particular societal sphere, distinguished from the economy, the family sphere etc. (Lefort 1988: 11). Here, I think of politics as a distinct practice focused on conflict. In liberal democracies, it is both institutionalised through elections and takes extra-institutional forms such as contention (Mouffe 2005: 9; Urbinati 2014). Contention is a particular subset of these practices. However, it is not only a distinct practice in the way that economic practices are. Politics is also distinctive because it has an ontological depth that other practices do not. In a Heideggerian formulation, Marchart (2007: 175) puts it in this way: 'politics may serve as the "ontic" name for the political in the mode of enactment'. Politics sublimates the necessary potential for conflict, which may call the institution of society itself into question, in established contentious practices such as protest (Mouffe 2005: 21). Put in a more positive way, it is an expression of the necessary potential for conflict *as a conflict*. The term expression is chosen advisedly. It indicates that something changes from one level to another. Expression is a creative articulation and not a mere representation of the necessary potential for conflict (see Connolly 2011: 78; Taylor 1985: 35-38). Because politics is never a clean representation, there is a torsion between its ontic level and the ontological level of the political (Marchart 2007: 175). Politics is stabilised as an ontic practice but simultaneously undermined by its relation to the political. This introduces an ineliminable tension at the heart of all practices of politics.

It is through this concept of politics that the sociology of contention may gain a new way of understanding what sets contention apart from other practices. However, sociologists are not political theorists and post-foundational

political theory may sometimes appear oddly 'weightless' from a sociological perspective (see McNay 2014). We need to weave post-foundationalism into an analytical perspective that gives us a grip on the empirical constitution of contention and the tensions inherent in this constitution. I register a note of disagreement with parts of post-foundational theory here. Lefort (1988: 10-11) argued that political science and sociology are made possible by the suppression of such a perspective, by the obscuration of how politics is given meaning and staged. Likewise, Arendt (1990: 11) was sceptical of the 'debunking "sciences"' such as sociology that could not grasp the distinctiveness of political action. While this may be true for some approaches in the sociology of contention that proceed in a neo-positivist manner, this is clearly not the case for sociology as a whole, which is very much concerned with the constitution of societal practices. Indeed, sociology seems to me ideally suited for the kind of investigation that Marchart (2007: 32) calls for into 'how the *encounter* with contingency, for example in the form of paradoxes, of fortune, of freedom, of antagonism, of "democracy", is realized and accounted for or how it is dismissed and disavowed'.

3.2 The concept of experiences

So how do we actually take contention, understood as a case of politics, as an object of sociological analysis? Post-foundational political theory cannot meet this challenge on its own because it has tended to remain in the theoretical realm (Matijasevich 2019; Volk 2018). I suggest that we draw on Michel Foucault's notions of experience and dispositives to take this final step. These share the post-foundational ontology set out above, are spacious enough to facilitate a variety of research questions and methodological approaches, and provide the analytical heft needed. To be clear, I employ these concepts as analytical grids that help me get at a new object of analysis. In doing so, I draw on Foucault's own writings but also go beyond these, retailoring and reconstructing the concepts for my own purposes here. In this section, I first outline Foucault's notion of experience. I then proceed to develop my core concept of the experience of contention. Table 3.1 provides an overview of the argument.

Table 3.1. The experience of contention perspective

Conceptualisation	The contingent way of practicing the necessary potential for conflict as a conflict in the extra-institutional area of societal life.
Analytical approach	Experiences emerge out of dispositives. These are virtual, characterised by distinct visibilities, and may overdetermine actual practices. We can distinguish between contentious dispositives, which make the world visible as a conflict, and non-contentious ones.
Analytical domains	We can analyse experiences by analysing their boundaries, the way contention is indexed to truth, and the contentious ethea in them.
Changes to experiences	Experiences are in constant flux. We can see this partly as a result of the always-incomplete actualisation of dispositives, partly due to tensions inside and between dispositives, and partly because of the creative practices of situated actors.

Foucault's concept of experience is in some ways at the heart of his project but has been relatively neglected by the subsequent literature (Lemke 2011: 28). In developing this notion, I primarily draw on O'Leary's (2008; 2010) discussion of experience. Foucault used the concept multiple times in *History of Madness* (2006), culled it from *The Order of Things* (2002a) onwards, and seemed to rediscover it in the second volume of *History of Sexuality* (1990) and in a series of interviews and lectures. In his final years, Foucault reformulated his project as an investigation of 'focal points [*foyers*] of experience' (Foucault 2010: 5). He had aimed to get at the 'very historicity of forms of experience' (Foucault 1997: 200) by studying experiences of madness, disease, criminality, and sexuality.

What exactly did Foucault mean by experience? Foucault used experience in at least two senses (O'Leary 2008). Experience is, on the one hand, a form of ordinary, everyday experience. On the most general level, it seems to describe the ways that certain objects are seen, conceptualised, and felt in a particular area of human life during a historical period (Gutting 2002: 77; O'Leary 2008: 9; O'Leary 2010: 165). It is therefore quite close to the concept of problematization, which also picks out the way that objects become visible and are given to thought (Foucault 1990: 11). It is in this sense that Foucault speaks of 'a classical experience of madness' or an 'experience of sexuality'. Experience encompasses both subjective experiences, usually associated with phenomenology, and the practices in which these experiences are embedded (on Foucault's relation to phenomenology see Gutting [2002] and May [2005]). I agree with O'Leary (2010: 173) that this dual nature of everyday experience is

a strength of the concept and not a weakness. In our case, it suggests that the boundary between protests and riots is not only an objective boundary constructed in a set of practices. It is also an integral part of our subjective experiences of contention, something that we use when relating to protests and riots and that we can work on and change. I return to this point at the end of the dissertation. We should, of course, be clear on whether we are referring to the subjective encounter or the practices. In what follows, I focus primarily on the practices of contention. This notion of practices of contention remains rather general. While this is partly a strength of the perspective, making it possible to conduct a wide-ranging set of analyses from within it, the experience concept does direct our analysis to certain practices. As I suggest below, the experience of contention opens up an inquiry into the formation of boundaries in contention, the ways in which contention is indexed to truth, and the distinct relations that actors cultivate towards themselves and others in contention.

Foucault also used experience in order to designate limit-experiences that push at the boundaries of ordinary experiences (Foucault 2000b: 241; O'Leary 2008; 2010: 166). Here, Foucault draws on the polysemy of the French word *expérience*, which can mean both experience and experiment (O'Leary 2008: 19). Limit-experiences are potentially transformative, helping to set out new ways of being. It is in this sense that Foucault (2000b: 246) spoke of his own books as 'experience books' and, more radically, of singular experiences of transgression (Foucault 1998b: 72). For our purposes, such experiences are important because they may help us understand how the boundaries of ordinary experiences of contention are configured. As I shall suggest, riots are limit-experiences in this sense, both belonging to contention and transgressing its boundaries. In my final chapter, I suggest that we may use the limit-experience of riots in order to open up experiences of contention.

For now, let us draw the pieces together into a conception of the experience of contention. I define it as the contingent way of practicing the necessary potential for conflict as a conflict in the extra-institutional area of societal life. There are four elements to this definition. First, the experience of contention is a contingent phenomenon. Here, I evoke several senses of contingency (see Connolly 2002a: 28). It is non-necessary as there are many experiences of contention that co-exist and replace each other. Moreover, any one experience is always characterised by flux and unruliness. Second, it is the way that a necessary potential for conflict is practiced as a conflict. What I mean by this is that the practices are intelligible as political conflicts and not merely as social disorders or private outbursts of rage. In this way, contention is a subset of an experience of politics, which is invoked by much of post-foundational thought but rarely analysed as an experience in the sense used here (e.g. Arendt 1998:

26; Lefort 1988: 11). It is also this emphasis on the practice of conflict as such that sets the experience of contention apart from other recent Foucault-inspired studies in the sociology of contention that have tended to import ready-made concepts such as counter-conducts (Death 2010; 2016) or governmentality and discipline (Baumgarten and Ulrich 2016; Hayes, Cammiss, and Doherty 2021). It is closer to the object studied in the nascent genealogy of critique – which, however, does not focus on contention itself (Boland 2019; Folkers 2016). Third, it is a conflict in the extra-institutional area of societal life. This distinguishes contention from institutionalised politics such as elections, a familiar distinction in the sociology of contention (Tarrow 2011: 7; Della Porta and Diani 2020: 22) and in liberal democracies more generally (Connolly 1995: 101; Urbinati 2014: 23). I stress that this distinction is sensitising and not set in stone (Blumer 1954). There may well be societies that do not distinguish between institutionalised and non-institutionalised politics. The distinction is therefore itself a part in the contingent emergence of an experience of contention. Fourth, it is composed of practices. As I make clear below, this does not mean that we can only study contentious practices themselves. We have to understand how they are constituted in relations that extend well beyond these practices.

With the formulation of an experience of contention, we have therefore returned from the post-foundational excursus to the sociology of contention with a new perspective on what sets contention apart from other practices. The experience of contention is distinctive in two ways. First, it is distinguished from other societal practices, such as market practices, state practices, or friendship practices. This is a contingent distinction, which has arisen historically, and which we can trace. Second, it is distinctive because of its ontological depth. Contrary to other societal practices, contention is a practice of politics and is therefore caught up in the torsion between the ontic and ontological dimensions. This means that actual experiences of contention are characterised by a series of tensions particular to them. Now, although we have conceptualised the experience of contention as a distinctive experience it remains unclear how we as sociologists can actually study it. If it is to help us analyse the boundary between protests and riots, we need to consider how experiences of contention emerge in more detail.

3.3 The emergence of experiences in dispositives

In doing so, I draw on the notion of the dispositive. It was originally set out by Foucault, most notably in a series of lectures and interviews (1980; 2007), and has a reception tradition that runs through Deleuze (1988; 1992) and Agam-

ben (2008) to a recent exposition in organisational studies (Dean and Villadsen 2016; Raffnsøe et al. 2016; Villadsen 2019; 2021). It allows us to understand how experiences of contention emerge and change. I first lay out the concept of the dispositive itself. I proceed to distinguish between contentious and non-contentious dispositives, developing a distinction that cross-cuts Foucault's own distinctions between dispositives of law, discipline, and security.

In recentring his project around the concept of experience, Foucault (2010: 41) noted that he had analysed 'focal points' or 'matrices' of experience. These consisted of an articulation or correlation of the three axes of 'forms of knowledge (*savoirs*), the normativity of behaviour, and the constitution of the subject's mode of being'. Experiences emerge out of this articulation. This is undeniably vague. O'Leary (2010: 172) suggests that we can think of these focal points as dispositives of experience, although he does not unpack how the dispositive might help us to understand the emergence of experience. This is what I do below, by first outlining the general concept of a dispositive before highlighting three features that are especially relevant to our discussion here.

Raffnsøe and colleagues (2016: 277-278) set out the complex associations of the French term *un dispositif*, translated here as a dispositive. Etymologically, it derives from the Latin *dispositivus*, a substantive form of a verb that refers to actions such as 'to arrange', 'to form', and 'to dispose'. When used in a technical sense, such as in military contexts, it refers to the actual operation of a plan as opposed to the mere act of planning. It is a plan that is embedded in but can be extracted from the actual practices.

Foucault (1980: 194) used it in a very broad sense to designate 'a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, and philanthropic propositions'. Or, perhaps better, as the dispositionality inscribed in this broad ensemble (see Villadsen 2019: 3). Looking across the practices, we can retroactively construct a strategic imperative that they share and that loosely binds them together (Foucault 1980: 195). In his 1978 lecture series, Foucault gives the example of the disciplinary dispositive that is characterised by the imperative of normation, of bringing actions and people into accordance with a predefined norm (Foucault 2007: 57).

Later expositions have pulled the concept this way and that. Deleuze (1988; 1992) brings it 'comically' close to his own notion of assemblage (Legg 2011: 130) and something similar could be said of Agamben's (2009: 14) articulation of the dispositive as a way of capturing living beings. In what follows, I draw primarily on Deleuze (1988; 1992) and, especially, on the recent

exposition of the dispositive in organization studies (Raffnsøe et al. 2016; Villadsen 2019). Here, the dispositive is a way of understanding regularities in becoming (Raffnsøe et al. 2016: 278); that is, of understanding how a regularity emerges in practices that are never static. In other words, they help us understand the emergence of experiences.

I highlight three features of dispositives and intimate how these inform my analyses. They are virtual, characterised by distinct visibilities, and may overdetermine actual practices. Deleuze (1988) positioned dispositives in the virtual, a concept drawn from Bergson. Dispositives are real and inscribed in the actual without, however, being actual. In discussing the neighbouring concept of abstract machines, Rutzou and Elder-Vass (2019: 48) have dryly remarked that this is 'extraordinarily obscure' even by Deleuzian standards. I have some sympathy with this argument. I think, however, that the status of dispositives becomes clearer if we think back to how the French *dispositif* refers to a plan that is embedded in but not reducible to the actual practices. The plan disposes the actual practices but does not determine them. Moreover, we can analytically isolate the plan by analysing the practices. Looking across the actions on a battlefield, for example, we can uncover a plan that informs and disposes what is actually going on. Crucially, this uncovering is also an act of construction: we are extracting and naming a plan from a set of complex practices (Villadsen 2019: 3). In my analyses, I extract and construct a series of dispositives that are embedded in the actual practices of parliamentary and police reformers, as well as the state and the public.

In constructing a dispositive, we pick out their distinct strategic imperatives. These are characterised by different visibilities, different ways of making the world thinkable and amenable to action (Foucault 1980: 195). Deleuze (1988: 52) notes that visibility is not a matter of casting a light on something that is already out there but of constituting an object through this light. Foucault gives the example of changes in the object of scarcity in 18th century France; it moves from a legal dispositive, in which it was inscribed in a dichotomy of good and evil and to be prevented from ever occurring, to a security dispositive, in which scarcity is a normal phenomenon in the population and therefore not to be prevented (Foucault 2007: 30-44). The object of scarcity itself changes because it is inscribed in a different set of relations, at first connected to the Greco-Roman horizons of bad fortune and the Christian notion of fallen nature (Foucault 2007: 31) and later to new ideas of the global market and the population (Foucault 2007: 42). In my historical analyses, I show how the illumination of riots changes as it moves from an exercise of public spirit, related to a strong tradition of classical republicanism, to a subversion of public inquiry, related to a polite civil culture among other things.

Finally, dispositives co-exist. It is not the case that there are grand epochs dominated by a single dispositive. A legal dispositive is not replaced by a disciplinary dispositive, which, in turn, is replaced by a security dispositive (Raffnsøe et al. 2016: 284-285). Rather, there is a plurality of dispositives that traverse and overdetermine societal practices, although some may be more influential than others at different times (Dean and Villadsen 2016: 102; Villadsen 2019). Foucault's (1980: 195) own use of the concept of overdetermination was never clearly spelled out. However, Villadsen (2019; 2021) highlights the potential of this concept. It picks out the way certain practices can be inscribed in different dispositives at the same time (and sometimes the complex contradictions inside a dispositive). This may lead to conflicts between the strategic imperatives of the dispositives but may also result in relations of mutual support between them. In my analyses, I focus on how one form of overdetermination, in which riots could be either political exercises of public spirit or apolitical manifestations of corruption, gave way to another. In this new form, riots were caught in a liminal position, giving rise to the unease with which I began the summary.

Experiences therefore emerge out of dispositives that dispose but do not determine them, and that are characterised by distinct visibilities that may overdetermine practices. In bringing the dispositive concept to bear on the experience of contention, I suggest we distinguish between contentious and non-contentious dispositives. These are defined by distinct imperatives and ways of illuminating their objects. A contentious dispositive illuminates its objects, such as protests and riots, so they come to express the necessary potential for conflict as a conflict. Its light imbues its objects with an ontological meaning. The distinction that I am proposing crosscuts that usually made between legal, disciplinary, and security dispositives (Foucault 2007: 1-87; Raffnsøe et al. 2016). For example, the imperative of 'normation' (Foucault 2007: 57) in a disciplinary dispositive can be focused on ensuring that the poor are employed or on keeping a protest conflict peaceful.

In order to make this distinction clearer, we can briefly turn to Lefort's (1984: 69) discussion of '*le dispositif démocratique*' that keeps the place of power empty. Although we should not simply equate his use of the dispositive with that advanced here, I think there is a strong resonance between Lefort's (e.g. 1988: 218-219) conception of democracy as a form, a transformation in the 'flesh' of the social, that gives meaning to and stages social relations and the characteristics of the dispositive discussed above. For us, the important point is that he makes clear the underlying intuition driving my distinction: certain dispositives make the world visible as a conflict. What the democratic dispositive does is to legitimise this conflict. It contains an acknowledgement that 'division is, in a general way, constitutive of the very unity of society'

(Lefort 1988: 18). This is not to say that all contentious dispositives are democratic. There are clearly ways of making the world visible as a conflict between, say, friends and enemies in which conflict is not legitimised but something that must be overcome by defeating the enemy (see Mouffe 2005).

Lefort's notion of the democratic dispositive alerts us to the need to distinguish between contentious and non-contentious dispositives. Failing to do so would be to once again erase the distinctiveness of contention, this time from a Foucauldian perspective. At the very least, it would confine contention to those liminal practices of resistance, transgression, and counter-conducts usually discussed in Foucault-inspired literature (e.g. Death 2010; Foucault 2007: 357; Raffnsøe et al. 2016: 289; Villadsen 2019: 9). While such categories are useful, they underestimate the extent to which contention is a normal, everyday experience and not just a limit-experience. They cannot make sense of our 'social movement society' (Meyer and Tarrow 1998), much less the boundary between protests and riots in this everyday experience.

With the distinction between contentious and non-contentious dispositives, we have completed the conceptual scaffolding of the new sociological perspective. Experiences of contention emerge out of a set of dispositives that make the world visible as a conflict. This is not a deterministic process but characterised by unruliness and openness. Furthermore, certain practices may be overdetermined by multiple dispositives, some contentious and others not. As I shall suggest below, this helps us analyse practices, most notably riots, that lie at the boundaries of experiences of contention. Before turning to this problem, however, I wish to directly address two questions that the preceding discussion has raised. If dispositives are as heterogeneous as Foucault suggests, does the analysis not become unmanageable? And how do experiences of contention actually change?

3.4 Three domains of experiences

In one sense, the strength of the dispositive perspective lies precisely in its broad reach. Just like field analyses in the extant sociology of contention, it moves us beyond movement-centrism. Studying experiences of contention means studying not only contentious actors but also the public, the state, the media, and so on. I nonetheless suggest that we can tighten the analytical focus somewhat by highlighting three domains of experiences. I adapt them from Foucault's (1997: 202) own domains of forms of normality, knowledge (*savoir*), and relations to self. We can analyse the boundaries of contention, the ways in which contention is indexed to truth, and ethea of contention. It is the first that I am primarily concerned with in this dissertation.

All experiences are bounded, although these boundaries are never neat or clean (Connolly, 2002a; Derrida 1978). This also holds for the experience of contention. The repertoire of contention literature has amply demonstrated that there is a stock of tactics that contentious actors use in any given society at any given time (Tilly, 1977; 1995; 2008; Wada 2012; 2016). What the experience of contention perspective suggests is that this is not merely a question of what tactics are used but what practices are intelligible. That is, what practices express the necessary potential for conflict as a conflict instead of as a mere social disorder or as private outbursts. Moreover, it is a question of what shape the boundary itself takes. Is it a rigid boundary between, say, intelligible protests and unintelligible riots, with one opposed to the other, or is it rather the case that there is a continuum connecting them? This question is at the core of the dissertation.

The boundaries of contention are connected to the ways in which contention is indexed to truth. Practices that are unintelligible as contentious may be disqualified in the contentious games of true and false. Most contention references truth in one way or another (Beiner 2008: 130). This has usually been studied through a framing perspective, in which contentious actors make injustice claims that evoke and construct a moral truth in order to mobilise supporters and win over publics (Gamson 1992; Benford and Snow 2000). The experience of contention perspective takes a different approach by asking how contention produces truth. It centres on the practices of veridiction that undergird, say, the moral truths of injustice frames. For example, is truth tethered to a universal realm beyond contention (Alexander 2006), beyond 'agreement, dispute, opinion, or consent' (Arendt 1968: 240), or is truth embedded in contention itself, an example revealed in the direct actions of the contentious actors (Graeber 2009)?

Finally, how do contentious actors, as well as members of the public, relate themselves to contention? The collective identity literature in the extant sociology of contention has highlighted that contentious actors need to generate a sense of cohesion in order to act collectively (Flesher Fominaya 2010: 393; 2019; Melucci 1995: 55). It has also analysed how such an identity can be established around particular ways of practicing contention (Jasper 1997; Flesher Fominaya 2010; 2015; 2019). From the experience of contention perspective, this question concerns the domain of a contentious sensibility or, when generalised, ethos (see Connolly 2005: 47; 2008: 2; 2011: 85). A contentious ethos describes how contentious actors hold their particular conceptions of the good and, through this, relate to themselves and to others with whom they agree or disagree. For example, do contentious actors reify their moral identity as the only correct one, portraying dissenting others as evil? Or do they instead cultivate relations of agonistic respect, embedding a stutter and

a doubt in their relation to the good that makes possible an adversarial relation of respect (Connolly 2002a)?

These domains are intertwined but can be tackled separately in an analysis. Moreover, while all experiences of contention may be described in all three domains, some domains may be more important in any one given experience (see Foucault 1997: 202). In this dissertation, I focus on the question of boundaries, trying to tease out the formation of a new boundary between protests and riots that has come to shape one very influential experience of contention. However, I also suggest that a reconfiguration of this boundary may be facilitated by the amplification of an already-existing ethos of agonistic respect and critical responsiveness.

3.5 Transformations in experiences

In tracing this boundary, we run into the question of how experiences are transformed. I have stressed that dispositives describe regularities in becoming, implicitly connecting them to a 'process-oriented ontology' (Rutzou and Elder-Vass 2019: 402). However, I have not shown what this actually means for the ways that we understand changes to experiences of contention. In my analyses below, I have emphasised three interconnected drivers of change in experiences of contention: a general flux stemming from the only partial actualisation of imperatives, a set of tensions rooted in overdetermination and the uneasy relation to an ontological potential for conflict, and the situated agency of actors.[3]

At the most general level, a dispositive perspective is non-deterministic because the virtual existence of dispositives is never completely actualised. Dispositive analysis is a 'history of plans never realized' (Dean and Villadsen 2016: 110). There are always slippages and small changes in experiences.

However, this remains a very general source of change and flux. We can therefore also point to two types of tensions that characterise experiences and that may propel them forward. First, there is a tension rooted in overdetermination. Certain practices may be illuminated in different ways by different dispositives. This can create an instability and openness in any one experience. As I suggest below, riots were at one point overdetermined in an experience of contention centred on public spirit, being both exercises of public spirit and, potentially, manifestations of corruption and social disorder. This created a

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[3] To be clear, these are not the only drivers of change, but merely those that I have found useful in thinking about the concrete changes that I deal with in the dissertation. Villadsen (2021) gives us a much fuller overview of several ways in which dispositives may intermingle and transform themselves.

tension that was both productive and slowly gave way to a new overdetermination in which riots were caught in a liminal position between protests and social disorder. Second, there is an in-built tension in contentious dispositives due to their 'excess of potentiality' (see Dean and Villadsen 2016: 111; Villadsen 2019: 17 on a similar situation in the legal dispositive). This stems from the torsion between the ontological realm of the political and the practices of politics that we noted above. Dispositives of contention have a particular light through which they imbue certain practices with ontological meaning. At the same time, this light brings a tension because the political cannot be confined to these practices. The necessary potential for conflict is universal, characterising all practices and not just those contained in any one experience of contention. As I shall suggest below, the problematic position of riots in relation to an experience of contention centred on protest can be understood through this second tension. Their position on the boundary between intelligible contention and social disorder can be thought of as an ephemeral actualisation of this excess of potentiality.

I stress that these are sources of change. In order to understand how experiences of contention actually change, it is not enough just to identify these sources, although it is useful. We also have to understand how tensions manifest themselves in the actual dilemmas that situated contentious actors and others confront and try to resolve. Here, I draw on both the concept of dilemmas associated with Mark Bevir (Bevir 1999; 2011; Bevir and Blakeley 2018; Geddes 2019) and the recent pragmatist theory of repertoire change put forward by Jansen (2016). Dilemmas arise when situated agents are made to confront some of the tensions that I indicate above. Situated agents are agents who are formed by but not reducible to the practices in which they are embedded. Contrary to the strongly ideational bent of Bevir, I argue that a dilemma may be the result of conflicting beliefs but also of conflicting and often embodied practices (Geddes 2019). In responding creatively to these dilemmas, actors may actualise new aspects of a dispositive, articulating something that was only virtual or 'incipient' until then (see Connolly 2011: 78). The interactions among situated actors who creatively resolve dilemmas may also generate new dispositives (see Raffnsøe et al. 2016: 286). The emergence of a categorical boundary between protests and riots is precisely the result of situated actors, such as police reformers and parliamentary reformers, struggling to resolve concrete dilemmas. In a more contemporary case, we might wonder whether some Black Lives Matter supporters also struggled with and perhaps helped moderate the stark distinction between protests and riots over the summer of 2020 as they tried to make the riots more understandable and, perhaps, legitimate (see Gøtzsche-Astrup and Gøtzsche-Astrup 2021). To be clear, I am not arguing that actors are in any way unified or consciously try to

set out new experiences of contention. Rather, in struggling with concrete strategic problems, actors may modulate experiences of contention through processes of strategic elaboration (see Foucault 1980: 195) or, through their actions and interactions, give shape to new ones (see Raffnsøe et al. 2016: 286).

The experience of contention perspective is therefore about regularity in becoming. While we may sometimes want to give more emphasis to one of the two terms, the perspective encompasses both. We understand regularity in experiences through the dispositives but experiences always change because dispositives are never fully actualised and generate tensions and dilemmas to which situated actors creatively respond.

3.5 Positioning experiences in a crowded field

Let us take stock of the perspective and its relation to the extant sociology of contention. Analysing the experience of contention means analysing how a necessary potential for conflict is practiced as a conflict in the extra-institutional area of societal life. It is concerned with the constitution of contention itself and treats it as distinctive in two senses: an experience that is distinct from other experiences and one that has a peculiar relation to the ontological premise of a necessary potential for conflict. We can study the emergence, stabilisation, and transformation of this experience by asking how it emerges out of dispositives. These bind a heterogeneous set of practices together through a shared strategic imperative. Studying the experience of contention therefore means studying the actual practices of contention but also those of the state, the public, and the media that help constitute them. While this may threaten to become unmanageable, we can focus on three domains of practices in particular: those concerned with the boundaries of contention, veridiction, and contentious ethea. These practices are disposed but not determined by the dispositives. The dispositives illuminate the practices in different ways, with contentious dispositives imbuing practices with a distinctive ontological meaning. Finally, while dispositives reveal regularity, they also assume that experiences are always in a process of becoming. They are in flux, riven by tensions, and open to creative modulation by actors.

Now, this perspective allows us to overcome the dual obstacles of an unclear notion of contention and movement-centrism that I identified in the nascent turn to practice, which was also concerned with the constitution of contention. I recognise that this means shifting to an ontology that is somewhat foreign to the extant sociology of contention. Some might wonder whether this reorientation is really necessary. As is always the case, there are precedents in the study of contention that get at somewhat similar concerns. In concluding

the development of the experience of contention perspective, I want to position it in relation to some of these neighbouring perspectives. This should help us see both the way that the experience of contention perspective both is set apart from and connected to previous perspectives. Below, I touch on Turner's (1969) folk concept of social protest, Thompson's (1991) moral economy, social movement spaces (Matthieu 2019), modes of activism (Stammers 2015), and prospectus (Brown 2016).

Turner's (1969) theorisation of a folk concept of social protest might be the closest alternative to an experience of contention within the sociological tradition. This is notable because Turner formulated this approach prior to the consolidation of a sociology of contention. Turner argued that there was a folk concept of 'social protest' in American culture. This is the concept 'against which people judge whether what they see looks like social protest or not' (Turner 1969: 818). Like the experience of contention perspective, Turner was concerned with the constitution of protest in general and not just in social movements. However, he was focused on the concept of 'social protest' and not contention as such. As I read him through the experience of contention perspective, he focused on one particular experience of contention centred on protest. Although there is much to gain from going back to Turner, the experience of contention broadens Turner's argument in several ways. We inscribe protest in the larger category of contention and connect contention to the post-foundational premise. This, in turn, allows us to ask new questions about the emergence of protest, of its boundaries to other practices, and the existence of other experiences.

Turning from sociology to social and cultural history, E. P. Thompson's (1991) analysis of the 'mentalité' of the moral economy is also in some ways quite close to the experience of contention perspective. He was trying to understand 'the political culture, the expectations, traditions, and, indeed, superstitions of the working population in the market; and the relations – sometimes negotiation between crowd and rulers which go under the unsatisfactory term of "riot"' (Thompson 1991: 260). This concern, in one shape or another, characterises a lot of social and cultural history (see Archer 2000; Bohstedt 2010; Stevenson 1992, Randall 2006; Rodgers 1998; Rudé 2005) and influenced the sociology of contention, especially through the work of Tilly (1977; 1986; 1995; 2008). As will be clear in the following chapters, I have found much inspiration in these texts. However, there is a core difference between Thompson's mentalité and the experience of contention. His analysis of the moral economy is at root concerned with the political configuration of market relations and is a compelling critique of the political economy of the classical economists (Thompson 1991: 271). My perspective is concerned with the dis-

tinctiveness of contention, including what sets it apart from economic practices. It is guided by the post-foundational premise that politics, and contention, is a peculiar practice with an unstable relation to a necessary potential for conflict. In looking at riots, I am therefore interested in whether and how these express the necessary potential for conflict and not the norms on the market. This is also what sets the experience of contention apart from the work of more politically focused historians of riots and protests such as Nicholas Rodgers (1998). In short, the experience of contention belongs to a different theoretical problematic.

Turner's folk concept and Thompson's mentalité are the two concepts that come closest to that of experience, notwithstanding the turn to practice that I have already discussed. There are, however, also connections to some aspects of field theory (Matthieu 2019), the idea of a prospectus (Brown 2016), and a mode of activism (Stammers 2015). Matthieu (2019) has recently drawn on Bourdieusian field theory in order to formulate the notion of a space of social movements. Like a field, it is relatively autonomous (although less so than a conventional field) with its own logics (Matthieu 2019: 4). These logics might in some ways resemble experiences of contention without the post-foundational anchoring. A more important difference is that the space of social movements remains movement-centric, highlighting the skills and subjective understandings necessary for protest (Matthieu 2019: 10). While the space is connected to society at large, it is only made up of social movements. In this respect, the space of social movements is similar to the turn to practice and, therefore, faces the same obstacles in thinking about the distinctiveness of contention. I think the same holds for the concept of prospectus, which focuses on activists' subjective understandings (Brown 2016), and the notion of a mode of activism (Stammers 2015).

The experience of contention, then, gives us a new and nuanced grip on the distinctiveness of contention. It allows us to think through and analyse the question that framed this summary concerning the relation between protests and riots, as well as the constitution of contention in general. It is to this analysis that I turn below.

4 STUDYING EXPERIENCES OF CONTENTION

How do we actually study experiences of contention? Experience is, as I argued above, a broad concept. This means that it can be studied from a wide array of methodological orientations and through a diverse set of methods. In my dissertation, I have used both discourse analyses and quantitative survey methods. There is one caveat. We need to respect the underlying ontological premise of post-foundationalism. In this chapter, I first outline the broad-church approach to methodology that I follow here. Second, I discuss my case selection and, in particular, the relation between the historical and contemporary analyses. I argue that we should read the historical studies through a genealogical sensibility that may allow us to loosen the boundary between protests and riots characteristic of a conventional experience of contention. Third, I introduce the two concrete methods that I have found most useful: discourse analyses of intentionally sampled texts and quantitative analyses of surveys. I argue that they give us different but compatible entryways into experiences of contention and the dispositives underpinning them.

4.1 A broad-church methodology

The experience of contention is rooted in a post-foundational ontological premise. The notions of experiences and dispositives inflect the post-foundational premise in a Foucauldian and Deleuzian direction that stresses relationality and processes of becoming (Villadsen 2019; 2021). This is largely compatible with a wide assortment of methodological approaches, ranging from a classical post-structural approach (Glynos and Howarth 2007; Howarth 2013) to a more clear-cut Deleuzian assemblage approach (Delanda 2006; 2016; Legg 2011) and a more hermeneutic one (Bevir and Blakeley 2018; Taylor 1971). For example, I think we can study experiences of contention while subscribing to either a Derridean notion of différance or a more tempered belief in meaning holism. Here, I merely wish to draw out two features of my methodological approach that pertain more directly to the practical task of analysing experiences of contention: we can approach experiences through a variety of methods and explain them in two compatible ways.

As with most complex phenomena, there is no one single method through which to study experiences of contention or the dispositives underlying them. Rather, different methods illuminate different aspects of experiences of contention. For example, survey data may help map out overall regularities in

practices while in-depth discourse analysis gets at the strategic imperatives embedded in these. Although the experience of contention perspective does belong to a broadly interpretative genre, concerned with the ascription of meaning in a broad sense, it is therefore still possible to draw on quantitative methods. My underlying assumption here is that methods do not necessarily entail a specific ontology. Survey methods might be associated with an individualist and foundationalist ontology, but they do not have to be. Although I recognise that there are different positions on this issue, I therefore see methods as instruments 'that are always subordinate to the wider purposes of the researcher and do not dictate the philosophical commitments of the work' (Bevir and Blakely 2019: 90). To be clear, this is not to say that we can study the social world in an ontologically neutral manner, but rather that we can draw on a variety of methods as long as we make clear how they relate to our ontological position.

Before turning to my case selection, I wish to foreground two ways of explaining experiences. I have explained experiences by showing how they are disposed by dispositives. Drawing on Sewell (2005: 332), we might call this 'paradigmatic explanation'. To explain in this sense is to uncover the codes, rules, logics, schemas, or strategic imperatives that dispose practices. This is the form of explanation usually associated with post-structural approaches (see Glynos and Howarth 2007). It is a strong workhorse and lies at the centre of the articles in my dissertation. However, I also acknowledge that it has at least two dangers. First, it risks becoming deterministic, subsuming practices and human actions under rigid imperatives. In response, I emphasise that dispositives are (re)constructions, tools that we use in order to make sense of experiences that are always more complex and in a process of becoming (see Villadsen 2019). That being said, I do not think there is any neat solution to this problem. We need clarity and succinctness in setting out our analysis and we should also recognise that this clarity misrepresents the actual messiness and flux in our object of analysis. Connolly (2008: 85) calls this the 'paradox of political interpretation', suggesting that we adopt a double-entry orientation. We act as if explanation is possible only to contest the hubris involved in this assumption. If the papers in my dissertation are tinged with this hubris, the summary, I hope, softens it. Second, paradigmatic explanations have a synchronic bias (Bevir 2010; 2011), which sometimes drifts towards a reification that runs counter to the emphasis on becoming and process so central to experiences. In order to alleviate this, I have therefore also drawn on the narrative explanatory approach of Bevir (2010; 2011) and Bevir and Blakely (2019). To explain in this sense is to show how historical change comes about as situated actors resolve dilemmas, giving rise to new ways of disposing experiences of contention. This is an inherently diachronic approach to explanation. It is

used, although not extensively, in papers B and C and in this summary. I stress that the two modes of explanation are compatible: narrative explanations draw on paradigmatic explanations because the dilemmas faced by situated actors are rooted in the dispositives that shape experiences.

4.3 Selecting historical and contemporary cases

I analyse both historical and contemporary cases. I understand cases as specific constructions that the researcher gradually imposes on the empirical material through a dialogue between this material and a theoretical problematic (see Ragin 1992: 10).

My historical case, analysed in papers B and C, can be roughly specified as the experience of contention in England, and London in particular, from 1760 to 1800. As should be clear, both the synchronic and diachronic coordinates are approximations: I draw on texts and practices that break the time span on both sides. Contention in the United Kingdom in this period has been extensively studied (e.g. Archer 2000; Randall 2006; Rogers 1998; Rudé 2005; Tilly 1995; 2008; Thompson 2013). What all these studies suggest is that the period saw a transformation in the practices of contention. In this transformation, riots gradually declined in prominence, although they did not disappear as Tiratelli (2020) has recently shown. At the same time, we see the emergence of a new form of contention centred on social movements and protest politics (Tilly 1995; 2008). This dual movement of decline and emergence suggests a reconfiguration in the experience of contention and, more specifically, its boundaries.

It is the reconfiguration that interests me here. I make no claim to exhaustively map the changes to the experience of contention in the period, but rather to trace one line of transformation that may shed light on our contemporary experience of contention. In other words, the historical case is motivated by a genealogical sensibility. While I am not conducting a fully-fledged genealogy (Dean 1991; Foucault 1998a; Villadsen 2021), which would require a breadth of historical analysis that goes beyond the parliamentary and police reform movements that I highlight here, it does share the overall goals of such a genealogy in three ways. First, it is useful to the extent that it helps to denaturalise the boundaries between protests and riots. It reveals the contingency that besets all such boundaries and disturbs taken-for-granted distinctions (Foucault 1998a; Bevir 2008). Second, denaturalisation and disturbance, although often valuable in themselves, are rarely enough. I think Taylor (1985) was right in suggesting that the force of Foucault's genealogical critiques was not just due to this denaturalisation but also rooted in a positive conception of the

good. In our case, I find the historical transformation interesting not only because it reveals contingency but because the boundary between protests and riots seems to me deeply problematic. I wonder whether the relation prior to the formation of this boundary is not more appealing and, in some ways, more democratic. In this way, the analysis suggests that the 'cost' that we pay in constructing a boundary between protests and riots may be too high (see Foucault 1996: 355). Finally, the historical case allows us to cultivate a critical responsiveness to incipient experiences of contention in our own time that challenge the conventional experience and its boundaries (see Connolly 1993; 1995). This responsiveness is nurtured by disturbance but moves beyond it into an acceptance of ambiguity and a generous although not blithely accepting orientation towards rioters. Working through the historical transformation, we may come to see rioters as people with whom we might disagree but who act in politically meaningful ways. It softens without dissolving boundaries.

The historical case is effective through its relation to our contemporary experience of contention (see Foucault 1998a). This means that the historical case should not stand alone but should be complemented by analyses of contemporary cases. I have done this in three ways. First, I have used the case of the 2011 England Riots in order to analyse how riots are configured in relation to a conventional experience of contention centred on protests (paper D). Here, I focus on dispositives traversing the state. Second, I have sought to move away from this narrow focus on the state by asking how the public, in both the United Kingdom and United States, interpret contention and draw its boundaries (paper E). Third, I have asked how different ethea of contention, analysed through activist guidebooks, configure the boundary (Paper F). I combine these foci in my analysis of the contemporary experience. To be clear, I am not arguing that this is an exhaustive analysis of the contemporary experience or its boundaries. For one, it is confined to English-speaking liberal democracies, and it is likely that there are different experiences in, say, France, with its revolutionary tradition, and outside the global North. Moreover, transgressive contentious actors cultivate new experiences of contention that my analyses are blind to. What I do suggest is that it helps us understand how the boundary between protests and riots is shaped today and its implications for a general experience of contention.

4.2 Methods

Expositions of the dispositive approach are a tad shy on the concrete methods that we may use in analysing dispositives. Villadsen (2019) comes closest to

actual methodical advice in suggesting that we use Deleuze's (1992) four 'windows' to shape the analysis and employ a mix of discourse and interview analysis. My analyses resonate with some of these suggestions but draw on a wider range of methods. Most of my papers use some version of discourse analysis, applied to an intentionally sampled textual corpus. I have, however, also conducted surveys and statistical analyses in order to give a descriptive mapping of one aspect of an experience of contention. I discuss their contribution to an overall analysis of the experience of contention in turn.

I have first and foremost used a discourse analytical approach to get at the strategic imperatives that illuminate practices of contention in certain ways. Here, I see discourse as a particular practice that helps constitute the objects of which it speaks (Foucault 2002b: 54). In papers D and F on the 2011 England Riots and activist guidebooks, this strategy is at the centre of the analysis. In my historical papers B and C, it forms one part of a general analysis of the dispositives that dispose practices of contention and shape their boundaries towards riots. Now, I want to emphasise that dispositives are not only discursive. In analysing dispositives, one must attend to both the imperatives that are stated and those that seem to dispose what is actually done. In this sense, dispositives take us 'beyond' the binary division between the discursive and the non-discursive (Raffnsøe et al. 2016: 283-284).

That being said, I do think that discourses provide a privileged point of entry when making sense of dispositives and their strategic imperatives. It is in documents such as the London Corresponding Society's constitution or the British state's protest policing strategy that we can get a clear sense of the strategic imperatives of the dispositives and their different ways of illuminating contention. This is not to say that we can stop the dispositive analysis at this point. We have to show that the imperatives that we detect in the texts also dispose non-discursive practices, and we should be alive to the ways in which non-discursive practices may subvert the stated imperatives. As I read him, Villadsen (2021) recommends a similar approach that privileges discourse without focusing exclusively on it.

So, discourse analysis in one form or another is essential to the analysis of dispositives. I have collected my data for this analysis through intentional sampling processes (see Phillips and Hardy, 2002: 73; Villadsen, 2019: 11). I go into greater depth with the specific considerations surrounding this selection in the individual cases in my analyses and my papers. In analysing these texts, I have found Carol Bacchi's (2012; 2015) 'What is the Problem Represented to be' approach as well as Potter and Wetherell's (1987) discursive repertoire strategy to be especially useful. The shared Foucauldian heritage with

dispositive analytics means that especially Bacchi's analysis of problematizations translates almost seamlessly to the emphasis on visibilities and strategic imperatives in dispositives.

While discourses are central, they are not the only ways of getting at experiences of contention or the dispositives that are embedded in them. Dispositives also shape subjects, instilling embodied dispositions in their ways of practicing and interpreting contention (Foucault 2000c: 120). In paper E, drawing on recent developments in the sociology of culture and cognition, my co-author and I call these embodied dispositions cultural models of contention. We have conducted a series of surveys and survey experiments in order to get at these cultural models. In these, we present a representative sample of both the UK and US populations with a list of 41 actions that the sociological literature has seen as part of the repertoire of contention (Wang and Soule 2016). We then ask the individuals to indicate 1) to what extent these actions are legible as political protests and 2) to what extent they are acceptable to carry out. This allows us to construct a rough descriptive map of how members of the UK and US publics actually make sense of contention and, importantly, what counts and does not count as contention (see Bevir and Blakely 2019: 100; Sewell 2005: 350). For our purposes here, the surveys allow us to probe the extent to which the boundary between protests and riots, which I uncover through a discourse analytical approach, is actually spread across the societal realm and among the public. That is, whether this boundary is a 'branded' contingency in the bodies of the public (see Connolly 2002a: 176).

This is not a strict test of the boundary. The boundary is about a particular relation between practices of contention, whereas the surveys focus on the isolated legitimacy and political legibility of actions such as looting and marching in public. However, the regularity in interpretation that we see in the surveys, with looting and property destruction being both illegitimate and illegible, is the regularity that we would expect given the boundary between protests and riots. I discuss this in the analytical sections.

Discourse analyses of intentionally sampled texts and statistical analyses of survey data provide different but compatible ways of getting at experiences of contention and the shifting boundaries between protests and riots. In the analytical sections, I weave these together in order to present my overall argument. I begin with the historical analysis.

5 A NEW BOUNDARY EMERGES

If we want to understand and tackle the unease suffusing the relation between protests and riots, we need to understand its historical emergence. Here, I do so by following one line of transformation in an experience of contention: riots move from being potential contentious exercises of public spirit to being opposed to the contentious practice of public inquiry. I trace how this shift comes about through changes in the dispositives disposing both contentious practices themselves and their policing. The chapter is structured in three parts, building on papers B and C. First, I outline one experience of contention centred on the exercise of public spirit. This was exemplified by the 1760s Wilkes and Liberty contention. Here, riots were overdetermined by two dispositives. Riots could be manifestations of public spirit but also of corruption. Their contentious character was therefore open-ended. Second, I trace how this open-ended character slowly gave way in the police reform and parliamentary reform movements from the 1770s onwards. This was connected to a series of broader changes, such as the formulation of liberal forms of government, the consolidation of the British state and market, and the irruption of the 1780 Gordon Riots and the 1789 French Revolution. Third, while the status of riots in an experience of contention became increasingly problematic from the 1770s onwards, a new boundary separating riots from contention had yet to emerge. In order to see this boundary taking shape, I home in on two core examples: the London Corresponding Society, the most influential parliamentary reform organisation of the 1790s, and the police reformer Patrick Colquhoun, whose texts helped shape the formation of the 1829 New Police and the 1834 Poor Laws. In putting these together, we can see a boundary forming, characterised by a new overdetermination of riots. They were now neither quite contentious practices nor mere social disorders. I suggest that it is this uncertain status of riots that lies at the root of our current unease about the relation between protests and riots.

5.1 An experience of public spirit

Allan Silver (1967: 23) once remarked that the 'meaningless' status of his contemporary riots 'contrasts with the ability of the English elite, especially before it was severely threatened from the late eighteenth century on, to interpret the meaning of riotous behaviour'. Likewise, E. P. Thompson (1991) famously noted that 18th century bread riots were one part of a meaningful moral economy. More recently, Randall (2006: 313) has suggested that riots in this period were a part of 'dialogues of disorder, in which purposive statements from the

crowd were answered by responses from those charged with the paternalist care of these communities'. In our terms, riots were an intelligible part of an experience of contention. Here, I am interested in how they became visible as contentious practices and the tensions in this visibility.

5.1.1 Exercising public spirit

Let me begin with John Wilkes' 1768 return to England to stand for election to Parliament in the City of London and later Middlesex (Cash 2006: 204-209; see also Rudé 1962; Thomas 1996). Wilkes was a parliamentary reformer and an almost mythical rake, having got himself into trouble five years previously through the publication of a pamphlet and a satirical poem critical of the Crown, Parliament, and the clergy (Cash 2006: 171-172). During Wilkes' electoral bids, a series of riots broke out. His supporters had, among other things, stopped the coach of the French ambassador and forced him to toast 'Wilkes and Liberty'. While the French ambassador happily obliged, the Austrian one did not. As a consequence, he was lifted out of his carriage, upended in the mud, and had the Wilkite number 45 painted on his shoes. Forced illuminations, in which Wilkes' supporters smashed the windows of those who had not lighted candles for Wilkes, were also common (Cash 2006: 212) and co-existed with more peaceful forms of symbolism and petitioning (Brewer 1976: 181). Eventually, Wilkes was arrested and confined in the King's Bench Prison to be sentenced for his original crimes. Large crowds of his supporters regularly gathered outside demanding his release. This culminated in a tumultuous scene on May 10 when a group of soldiers murdered one William Allen in a case of mistaken identity (Cash 2006: 222). In response to the 'massacre of St. George's Fields', a series of riots broke out in the following days only to subside again. During Wilkes' final sentencing, Justice Sir Joseph Yates argued that Wilkes' pamphlets had produced 'that spirit of riot which has gone through the whole land'. The justice argued that 'If we are taught that resistance is a spirit of liberty, instead of submitting to the law, every attempt to overturn it will be called justifiable' (George III, Correspondence, ii, no. 630, quoted in Cash 2006: 226). As a response, Wilkes began to pick his teeth (Cash 2006: 226).

The Wilkes and Liberty episode exemplifies one particular experience of contention as well as the uncertainties and the tensions suffusing it. It was an experience in which contention was an exercise of public spirit. Here, riots had an open-ended position: they could be both exercises of public spirit opposed to corruption and manifestations of corruption. They were overdetermined by two dispositives.

The contentious dispositive of public spirit was rooted in a long tradition of classical republicanism.[4] In this tradition, the constitution prescribed a balance between the monarch, the aristocracy in the House of Lords, and the people represented in the House of Commons. Transforming the classical tension between the integrity of the city and Fortuna, history was defined by a tension between this constitutional balance and the corruption that would disturb it (Pocock 1975: 403). Balance was to be upheld by maintaining and exercising virtue among both the people and their rulers. Virtue, here, had many different inflections, such as 'public virtue, private virtue, public spirit, politick virtues, patriotism' and so on (Burtt 2006: 4). What is interesting for us is virtue as an exercise of 'public spirit', understood as a passionate concern and activity for the public good (Gunn 1983: 269; Pocock 1985: 41).

The possibility of such a public spirit was increasingly problematized in the 1700s. Mandeville (1970[1714]) sought to undermine the very idea of virtue, including public spirit, in his classic *Fable of the Bees*. Trenchard and Gordon (1995[1755]), otherwise sympathetic to the importance of virtue, argued in *Cato's Letters*, running in instalments from 1720 to 1723, that public spirit in the classical form was impossible. Instead, citizens could jealously resist corruption to maintain their own liberties (Burtt 2006: 86). However, public spirit remained a powerful idea, especially in its emphasis on the people's passionate defence of their liberties (Burtt 2006: 92). As such, it was expressed in both political discourse and, in one way or another, helped make contention visible.

Let me exemplify this using the early writings from the 1730s of Viscount Bolingbroke, a Court critic of the Whig government. In *A Dissertation upon Parties*, Bolingbroke spoke of a 'struggle between the spirit of liberty and the spirit of domination, which always hath subsisted, and that we may not flatter ourselves nor others, must always subsist' (Bolingbroke 1844/1967a: 90). The spirit of liberty is jealous and watchful. It is slow to act but once it does, it is with a 'warmth' appropriate to the concrete occasion (Bolingbroke 1844/1967b: 428). This warmth may sometimes be inconvenient but it is necessary. An imagined interlocutor in Bolingbroke's *Remarks on the History of England* emphasises this point:

> That some inconveniences must follow from keeping this spirit of jealousy and watchfulness always alive, seems to me very evident [....]. We must be content therefore to bear the disorder I apprehend from that ferment, which a perpetual

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4 This is also what Pocock (1975; 1985) terms 'civic humanism' and Skinner (1998) 'neo-Roman' thought. While these terms have slightly different inflections, emphasising the Greek or Roman heritage respectively, the differences are not relevant for my purposes here.

jealousy of the governors in the governed will keep up, rather than abandon that spirit, the life of which is the life of liberty. When the jealousy happens to be ill-placed, we may hope it will not rise to any great and dangerous height (Bolingbroke 1844/1967b: 301).

While Bolingbroke is quick to downplay the risk of disorder (more on this below), the point stands: disorders, such as riots, could be exercises of public spirit opposed to corruption.[5] They were part of an experience of contention in which the necessary potential for conflict was expressed as an exercise of public spirit.

I suggest that we see this exercise of public spirit as the strategic imperative of one contentious dispositive. It was embedded in the practices of contentious actors as well as those magistrates charged with their control. Returning to the Wilkes and Liberty contention, we can see how Wilkes' supporters made the riots visible through such a notion. Take Joseph Towers, who, in his pamphlet *Observations on public liberty, patriotism, ministerial despotism, and national grievances with some remarks on riots, petitions, loyal addresses, and military execution*, argues for the public-spirited nature of riots:

> Great complaints have been made of the seditious and riotous disposition of the people. With respect to riots, however, irregular they may be in their own nature, and however dangerous, it is impossible to prevent them in a country where the spirit of Freedom is predominant, if those who have the management of public affairs labour to pervert and to violate the laws of the land, and disregard the spirit of the constitution (Towers 1769: 11).[6]

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[5] This connection between virtue, public spirit, and riots is, of course, not limited to Bolingbroke. There is a long tradition going at least as far back to Machiavelli's (1998[1531]) *virtù* and his discussion of the conflict between the nobles and the plebeians in *Discourses on Livy*.

[6] To be clear, Towers was only one among a number of pamphleteers and rioters to express this. We see similar sentiments in pamphlets such as *Remarks on the Riot Act* (Anonymous 1768a: 19) and *A Letter to an August Assembly* (Anonymous 1768b: 5). More importantly, rioters, while leaving very few textual traces, seemed to understand their own practice in this way. Brewer (1976: 184) notes how rioters engaged in a 'deliberate act of mimesis' in which they acted in place of the authorities: they demonstrated how a public-spirited authority ought to act. I think it is the same idea that lies behind E. P. Thompson's (2013) riots as a defense of the rights of the 'free-born Englishman'. Lifting our gaze from the Wilkes and Liberty contention, Rogers' (1998: 135-136) discussion of the acquittal of Admiral Keppel in 1779 suggests that this connection between riots and public spirit was widespread.

Here, the Wilkes and Liberty riots are 'dangerous' but remain a meaningful way of exercising public spirit. There is a continuum of contention that contentious actors can move along, running from peaceful petitions to violent riots (Brewer 1976: 181; Randall 2006: 10; Tilly 1995: 188). In other words, the boundary in the experience of contention is not between protests and riots. Rather, it is between the exercise of public spirit and either slavish passivity or self-interested faction (Gunn 1983: 269).

It is important to stress that this boundary was not merely a construction of contentious actors themselves. As we have already seen, it was also characteristic of at least some currents of political thought in the period. Moreover, it influenced the way that riots themselves were to be governed. Bolingbroke, again, puts this clearly in arguing that government should peg itself to the public spirit of the people:

> …it is the duty of those who govern, to discern the spirit of the people, to consider even their passions, to have a regard to their weaknesses, and to show indulgence to their prejudices, and that ministers who punish what they might prevent, are more culpable than those who offend. (Bolingbroke 1844/1967b: 57).

In the case of the Wilkes riots, it meant that government should restore his seat in the House of Commons and remove parliament's dependence on the crown. In any particular riot, the magistrates charged with the control of riots should listen to the rioters and could on occasion even side with them (Reynolds 1998: 32). This is the suggestion behind Randall's (2006: 313) notion of a 'dialogues of disorder' between rioters and those charged with their control. In this way, the strategic imperative of public spirit helped bind together an array of practices, running from the contentious actors themselves to those charged with their control.

5.1.2 Tensions in public spirit

Riots could, therefore, become visible as exercises of public spirit. However, this visibility was rarely free of tensions. Riots were overdetermined in the experience of contention. While they could be illuminated by a contentious dispositive as an exercise of public spirit against corruption, they could also be seen as a manifestation of this corruption. Here, they were illuminated by a non-contentious dispositive whose strategic imperative was centred on securing social cohesion and integration.

Let us briefly return to Bolingbroke's imagined interlocutor, who acknowledged that we may sometimes have to accept disorder and inconveniences if the spirit of liberty is to be kept alive. While Bolingbroke does not deny this, he goes on to downplay this disorder. Some disorders spring from a spirit of

faction, linked to corruption, that has taken on the 'mask of liberty' (Bolingbroke 1844/1967b: 306). The problem is how to distinguish between riots that are truly public-spirited and those that only masquerade as such (see Rogers 1998: 19). Bolingbroke himself is quick to dismiss the difficulty in his current moment, but he alerts us to a tension in the way that the contentious dispositive illuminates riots.

We can understand this tension as one of overdetermination. The dispositive of public spirit is entangled with a non-contentious social dispositive. The social dispositive is not concerned with contention but rather with social cohesion and forestalling disintegration. In this way, it is inscribed in the same problematic that Castel (2003) traces in his genealogy of the social question. We see it most forcefully expressed in the many police reform tracts that run from Henry Fielding (1751) onwards.[7] 'Police', in this period, had a much broader connotation than today, often encompassing the notion of civil government as a whole (Dodsworth 2008: 589; for an overview of the changes to the foci of 'police' see Dean 1991: 63-66). Like the contentious dispositive, this one is also rooted in a classical republican idea of a constitutional balance (Dodsworth 2004; 2008; 2019). Here, riots are manifestations of a corruption in the morals of the lower orders. Fielding notes how trade

> ...hath indeed given a new Face to the whole Nation, hath in a great measure subverted the former state of Affairs, and hath almost totally changed the Manners, Customs, and Habits of the People. More especially of the lower Sort. The Narrowness of their Fortune is changed into Wealth; the Simplicity of their Manners into Craft; their Frugality into Luxury; their Humility into Pride, and their Subjection into Equality (Fielding, 1751: xxiii).

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[7] While I use Fielding to exemplify this discussion, there was a spurt of police reform tracts from Fielding onward that contained the same core imperative. These include *A plan for preventing robberies within twenty miles of London* (Fielding 1755), *An account of the origin and effects of a police* (Fielding 1758), *The defects of police* (Hanway 1775), *A plan of police* (Gilbert 1781), *Observations on the police or civil government of Westminster* (Sayer 1784), *Desultory reflections on police* (Blizard 1785), *Outlines of a ready plan for protecting London and its environs* (Anonymous 1785c), *An essay towards a system of police on constitutional principles* (Barrett 1786), *Hints respecting the public police* (Zouch 1786), and *A general plan of parochial and public police* (Godschall 1786). We also find similar inflections in treatises more specifically concerned with the suppression of riots through citizen militias following the 1780 Gordon Riots. These include *A plan of association on constitutional principles* (Williams 1780), *Observations upon the riot act* (Ramsay 1781), *A plan for rendering the militia of London useful and respectable* (Anonymous 1782d), and *An inquiry into the legal mode of suppressing riots* (Jones 1782).

This, in turn, generates 'wild Notions of Liberty that are inconsistent with all Government' (Fielding, 1751: xxx), eventually leading to riots. The crucial point here is that the movement for police reform, beginning from and often referring back to Fielding (Dodsworth 2004: 205; Hitchcock and Shoemaker 2015: 209), illuminated the riots as manifestations of corruption that had to be combated by morally reforming and reintegrating the lower orders.

While I have focused on the movement for police reform, this social dispositive was by no means confined to police reformers. For example, social and moral reformers in the low Anglican Society for Reformation of Manners in the early 18th century sought to prevent corruption and social disorderliness in the urban populace by prosecuting moral offenders (Burtt 2006: 39-63; Hunt 1999: 34-44). This can also be seen in the later reformation of manners movement in organisations such as the Proclamation Society and the Vice Society (Hunt 1999: 57-88; Innes 2009: 179-226). While the focus on corruption that I have stressed here was not the only strand in these movements, which were also strongly religious, it was central. Furthermore, many of the police reformers were themselves active members of the societies (Innes 2009: 188-189).

In this social dispositive, then, riots were not public-spirited exercises against corruption but manifestations of corruption among the people. There is a mutual exclusivity at play here, where riots can be either contentious or corrupt but not both. However, the overdetermination of riots was more complex than mere exclusivity because both dispositives referred back to the same underlying problem of corruption. As I note, the dispositive of public spirit opened up towards the police dispositive because there was always the risk that riots could become too excessive, revealing the people's corruption instead of their public spirit. We see a similar risk in the social dispositive. In preventing and repressing riots, the social dispositive could itself engender the constitutional corruption that it was meant to curb, leading to public-spirited opposition to it. This was most famously the case with the 1715 Riot Act, which gave magistrates new powers to quell riots (Nippel 1985), but it also haunted the attempts at police reform more generally (see Dodsworth 2004: 206; McCormack 2012; Reynolds 1998: 74).

Taking a step back, we see an experience of contention centred on public spirit. In this experience, riots could express the necessary potential for conflict as a conflict. They were intelligible as contentious practices of public spirit opposed to corruption. However, riots were overdetermined because they could also be apolitical manifestations of corruption. These two positions were mutually exclusive and opened up towards each other. What this meant was that any individual riot presented an ontologically indeterminate situation. When parliamentary and police reformers, alongside rioters and magistrates,

decided on the public-spirited or corrupt nature of riots, they were also negotiating the boundaries of contention. This situation is in some ways similar to our contemporary experience. Riots then, just as now, were an ontological problem. However, the shape of this problem differed considerably. We can see this by tracing the transformation of the boundaries of contention in the latter half of the 18th century.

5.2 Public spirit under pressure

The experience of public spirit came under increasing pressure from the 1770s onwards. There are many reasons for this. Tilly (1995: 365-366) noted that the development of a new repertoire of contention from the 1760s onwards was caused by a concatenation of structural changes such as population growth, market consolidation, and state consolidation alongside innovations among contentious actors themselves. Central events, such as the American Revolution, the Gordon Riots, and the French Revolution also meant that it became increasingly difficult to see practices such as riots as exercises of public spirit in defence of the constitution (Rogers 1998: 171; Reynolds 1998: 60). From the experience perspective, there was an exacerbation of the tension in an experience of contention. As we shall see, this resulted in a concrete dilemma for contentious actors such as the London Corresponding Society who wanted to mobilise the lower orders associated with riots.

However, the actual changes to the experience, and the boundary between protests and riots, was not contained within these structural changes and events. Rather, it was a consequence of parliamentary reformers creatively articulating a new practice of contention centred on public inquiry, and police reformers trying to regulate poverty through a new conception of civil society drawn from the Scottish Enlightenment. We can make this shift in the boundary clearer if we briefly trace the developments in contentious practices as well as in the police reform movement from Wilkes and Liberty onward.

Wilkes and Liberty saw the beginnings of a technique that would come to characterise the further development of both the parliamentary reform movement and contention more generally: political association (Black 1963; Goodwin 1979). It is clearly articulated in a series of texts on political association from the 1770s (e.g. Burgh 1775; Hulme 1771). Burgh developed the point in his *Political Disquisitions*. He argued that the parliamentary reform movement ought to establish 'a GRAND NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR RESTORING THE CONSTITUTION. Into this must be invited all men of property, all friends to liberty, all able commanders, &c.' (Burgh 1775: 428-429). The people must unite together in this association, directed by men of property, to present petitions to parliament and raise the strength of the nation

(Burghe 1775: 434). This technique is embedded in the general exercise of public spirit. Burgh (1775: 20) makes clear that:

> ...a distinction is to be made between a people incapable of free government, and a people among whom the spirit of liberty is got to so low an ebb, that they have not the courage to seize it, when put within their reach, or to resist the attempts of those who would.

Moreover, even though Burgh recommends the use of a national association, he does not categorically dismiss riots from the experience of contention: there is 'generally found, in a free people, a certain ferocity (the very cause of their being free; for kings and ministers are always ready to enslave all who will permit them)' (Burgh 1775: 65). Without directly approving riots, he notes that 'whenever a disturbance happens in the middle of a great town, which (such is the well-known good-nature and good understanding of the people of *England*) may almost always be quieted by a few civil words from any man, who is in favour with them'.

The technique of political association was put into practice most notably by the Yorkshire Association of the early 1780s, led by Christopher Wyvill and made up of members of the gentry, clergy, and freeholders. It pushed for economic reform, triennial parliaments, and the addition of a hundred country representatives to the House of Commons (Christie 1960). Political associationalism was also central to the anti-slavery campaign in the late 1780s, a campaign that helped cement the importance of mass petitioning (Tarrow 2011: 49-50). What we do not see in these developments is the emergence of a new relation between contention and riots. Although riots were clearly discountenanced, especially after the 1780 Gordon Riots, they were not reconfigured through a new boundary. Instead, members of the Yorkshire Association recommended that the Gordon Riots were to be countered through the formation of a public-spirited militia (Jones 1782). That is, they were to be countered through classical means of combating corruption. Among contentious actors, we see a development of a new technique of political association within a familiar experience of contention.

Turning briefly to the police reform movement, a similar picture emerges. Following Fielding, there is a steady growth in attempts at police reform, as well as a slow development of an institutional police force (Reynolds 1998). These developments, however, remained tied to the dispositive outlined above. That is, they still saw riots as manifestations of corruptions and pre-

vented them by preventing corruption among the lower orders (see Dodsworth 2004; 2008). We can see this clearly in the spurt of police reform tracts throughout the 1770s and 1780s.[8]

For our purposes, the important shift in these years took place further north in the development of a new perspective on civil society and political economy in the Scottish Enlightenment. This has been amply discussed by Foucault himself (2008) and those influenced by his analyses (Dean 1991; Neocleous 2000; Villadsen 2016). I merely wish to emphasise a change that will prove central to the movement for police reform: a new conception of civil society as something external to the state with its own dynamics, which government could and should peg itself to (Burchell 1996: 22-24; Foucault 2008: 312-313; Hindess 1996: 71). Adam Ferguson (1995[1767]) has been taken as exemplary of this approach (Foucault 2008: 298), but we can see similar ideas surfacing in, for example, Hume's political essays (2012[1772]).[9] It is as this argument becomes inflected in the attempts at police reform that we see a new way of overdetermining riots, one that generates a novel unease.

5.3 An experience of public inquiry

It is from the 1790s onwards that the technique of political association and emergence of civil society are inscribed in an experience of contention with a new boundary to riots. A contentious dispositive takes shape in the London Corresponding Society (LCS) in which riots are opposed to the exercise of public inquiry. The society provides us with a prism through which we can view the formation of this contentious dispositive. To be clear, the dispositive did not automatically spread throughout the societal body.[10] However, the LCS

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[8] See note 7.

[9] It seems to me that Adam Ferguson and his *Essay on Civil Society* is actually more complicated than the general Foucauldian tradition allows for. Following Foucault, civil society is usually seen as a new plane on which the economic subject of interest and the juridical subject of rights could coalesce. However, this downplays the strong republicanism suffusing Ferguson's writings (see Oz-Salzberger 2003: 173). The Foucauldian reading of Ferguson is in this sense indicative of a general marginalization of contention as an established practice. We may want to add a third subject in our reading of the emergence of civil society: the contentious subject of public spirit.

[10] One might ask to what extent the analysis of the LCS really allows us to talk of a dispositive, which connotes an ensemble of practices and not just the practices of self-government that I focus on in my analysis. When I talk about a dispositive here, it is to emphasise that the LCS constructed a new strategic imperative capable of spreading across the societal realm. In their practices, we see a tying together of a

were 'paragons of how radicals could seek to harness the power of crowds' (Davis 2015: 156). As public meetings increased in prominence from the 1810s onwards (Tilly 1995), the LCS therefore mark an important turning point in the experience of contention. At the same time as this contentious dispositive takes shape, a new social dispositive focused on indigence and not corruption slowly emerges among police reformers. Together, these dispositives give rise to a new boundary in an experience of contention. Here, riots are neither quite contentious nor just social disorders.

5.3.1 The process of inquiry

On 26 October 1795, the LCS held their latest in a string of general meetings in a field near Copenhagen House in Middlesex. Expecting a large turnout, they erected three platforms in the field from which speakers could address the crowd. Contemporary estimates of the eventual size of the crowd varies from 10,000 to 150,000 people – an impressive turnout no matter the exact number. The meeting was called to both push back against the increasingly repressive policies of the government and to generate momentum for the parliamentary reform movement (Davis 2002: 83). John Thelwall, who was the major intellectual figure in the LCS, titled his address *Peaceful discussion and not tumultuary violence the means of redressing national grievance*. The meeting was organised and executed accordingly, with a distribution of handbills urging orderly conduct in the numerous entrances to the meetings (LCS 1795: 87).

This emphasis on orderly conduct suffused the LCS as a whole (Davis 2008; 2015). Taking inspiration from the Sheffield Corresponding Society, the shoemaker Thomas Hardy established the LCS as a parliamentary reform association whose members were to be 'unlimited' (Hardy 1832: 16). That is, contrary to the Yorkshire Association, the LCS was also to include the lower orders (Thompson 2013: 162-172). This created a dilemma for the society, which grew from nine members in its first public meeting in January 1792 to a peak of several thousand members in 1795. Because riots had been so thoroughly delegitimised from the 1780s onwards, they had to find a way to conduct their contention in a way that maintained a distance from riots (Davis 2015). In its original constitution, which was to be revised several times throughout its existence, the LCS therefore emphasised that 'this Society do express their abhorrence of Tumult and Violence – aiming at Reform not Anarchy, Reason, Firmness, and Unanimity are the only aims, they themselves will employ, or persuade their Fellow Citizens, to exert, against Abuse of

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diverse set of techniques (e.g. political association) and discourses (e.g. polite culture, inquiry).

Power' (LCS 1792: 78-79). While there was always an undercurrent of revolutionary fervour in the society (McCalman 1988; Thompson 2013: 170), the LCS maintained this position throughout its existence (Davis 2008). Faced with increasing repression, it slowly declined after 1795, with some members peeling off into revolutionary underground groups (McCalman 1988). Others, such as the influential reformer Francis Place, continued to push for reform and helped to revive the parliamentary reform movement in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars (Flick 1971).

It was the need to distance themselves from rioters that helped generate a new strategic imperative that informed the practices of the LCS. While the emphasis on public spirit is by no means absent from their public or private addresses, it is refracted through a new imperative of public inquiry. John Gale Jones formulates the emphasis on inquiry clearly: 'with nations as with individuals, it sometimes happens that the *Hour of Danger is the Hour of Inquiry*' (LCS 1795: 69). The practice of inquiry is, of course, central to the emergence of a public sphere, with roots back in the polite civic culture of Addison and Steele at the turn of the 18th century (Cowan 2004; Habermas 1989; Klein 1994). The LCS therefore drew on this tradition and articulated it through a contentious practice organised in political associations. In the LCS, inquiry is a process that produces the truth of public opinion. It is embedded in a chain of differences where reason, inquiry, and truth are opposed to unreason, noise, and delusion. Crucially for us, it is explicitly defined in opposition to riots. In Thelwall's speech to the 26 October meeting, he argues that the people may 'plunge into tumult and violence before they can begin to speak, and when tumult and violence begin, the level course of reason and enquiry cannot properly flow '(Thelwall 1795: 16). Inquiry is partly constituted by the absence of riots (see Staten 1984).

Although such comments should to some extent be understood as framing devices that tried to protect the LCS from government repression, they cannot be reduced to frames. The practices of the LCS were also conducted by reference to this boundary between inquiry and riots (Davis 2015; Sheldon 2009: 66). It helped inform their divisional structure, which prevented large and tumultuous companies by splitting members into groups with around thirty members each (the exact number varied throughout the LCS' history) (Davis 2008: 39-40). It was also embedded in the way that private and public meetings were to be conducted. A committee for constitutional change in the society gives us an example of how severe this focus could become:

> When decision is taken by a shew of hands every member shall give his vote silently by shewing one hand: The practice of shewing both hands, or of calling all! all! or other such exclamations are tumultuous, indecent, and utterly unwarrantable (LCS, 1794: 338).

This is a new strategic imperative, one that slowly began to inform the self-governing practices of contentious actors before spreading across the societal realm. The necessary potential for conflict is not made visible as an exercise of public spirit against corruption. Rather, it is a process of public inquiry in which the truth of public opinion is produced in private and public meetings. This is conditioned on the absence of riots. While riots could be integrated inside a dispositive of public spirit, this is not the case with the dispositive of public inquiry. The latter helps shape a new experience of contention characterised by a boundary between intelligible contention and unintelligible riots. As I show in paper B, this boundary has clear implications for how contention is experienced. It now takes place within a contentious space of truth, a progressive temporality, and is conducted by orderly subjects who work on themselves through political education.

5.3.2 An uneasy boundary

However, this boundary is not free of tensions. Understanding these tensions may help us understand the unease that suffuses our contemporary boundary between protests and riots. I think we can identify two tensions in this new boundary: a tension of overdetermination and one between the ontological potential for conflict and the ontic practice of inquiry. I discuss these in turn.

There is a tension of overdetermination. The dispositive of public inquiry is not the only one illuminating riots. For our purposes, we can trace how changes in the police reform movement resulted in riots attaining a new liminal position. The Glasgow merchant turned London police magistrate and reformer Patrick Colquhoun exemplifies these developments. He was strongly influenced by both the Scottish Enlightenment and the new science of political economy (Barrie 2008) and was also active in the moral reform movements (Hunt 1999: 69). His seventh edition of *A treatise on the police of the metropolis* and *A treatise on indigence,* both from 1806, are with good reason core reference points for genealogists of police and poverty (Dean 1991: 194-199; Neocleous 2000: 52). My discussion of Colquhoun should be seen in the context of these general genealogies. That is, I am interested in how the overall shifts in the regulation of poverty produced a new way of making riots visible.

To Colquhoun (1806a: 8), police can be considered

> ... a *new Science*, the properties of which consist not in the Judicial Powers which lead to *Punishment*, and which belong to Magistrates alone; but in the PREVENTION and DETECTION of CRIMES, and in those other Functions which relate to INTERNAL REGULATIONS for the well ordering and comfort of Civil Society

We recognise the idea of civil society from the Scottish Enlightenment as a realm external to the state with its own dynamics. The police of the metropolis are tasked with the regulation of these dynamics as they relate to 'the Morals of the People' (Colquhoun 1806a: 8). The crucial aspect here is that the social realm is made visible through a distinction between poverty and indigence, which can also be found in Bentham around the same time (Dean 1991: 175-176). For Colquhoun (1806b: 7), '*Poverty* is that state and condition in society where the individual has no surplus labour in store, and, consequently, no property but what is derived from the constant exercise of industry'. This is a necessary state in society because it is the source of wealth. Indigence, on the other hand, is 'that condition in society which implies *want*, *misery*, and *distress*. It is the state of any one who is destitute of the means of subsistence, and is unable to procure it to the extent nature requires' (Colquhoun, 1806b: 8).

It is from indigence that both public felonies – under which Colquhoun includes riots – and private offences spring (Colquhoun 1806a: 36). The relation between riots and indigence is complex. On the one hand, riots are rooted in indigence. On the other hand, riots also mark a break with indigence. Colquhoun distinguishes the indigent from 'another numerous class, rendered noxious, offensive, and even dangerous, in consequence of depraved morals and criminal turpitude' (Colquhoun 1806b: 33). Rioters and other criminals belong to this latter class who had broken away from the community in which poverty could result in indigence. Instead, they were 'at war with the Community' (Colquhoun 1806: 510). Riots became a liminal object in this social dispositive focused on indigence (see Rose 1996).

Even though Colquhoun's own proposals for the construction of a new police that should regulate indigence were never put into practice (Dodsworth 2019: 170), they influenced both the Poor Law of 1834 and the New Police of 1829 (Dean 1991: 145; Neocleous 2000: 66-68). Chadwick, who helped formulate both, shared Colquhoun's emphasis on the need to regulate the dynamics of poverty. In a review of the police of London, he argued that 'The statesman must be blind indeed who cannot forsee the dreadful catastrophe which must ultimately ensue from the indefinite increase in the number of the people unaccompanied with a corresponding increase of employment and subsistence' (Chadwick 1829). The statesman must make sure that poverty does not result in indigence, the loss of the means of subsistence. This is the imperative behind both the construction of the new police and, in particular, the Poor Law of 1834 (Neocleous 2000: 66-68).

Taking a step back from the social dispositive, we can see how the overdetermination of riots results in a new boundary in an experience of contention

focused on public inquiry. Riots were liminal figures in both a contentious dispositive of public inquiry and a social dispositive of indigence. They mark a break with the process of inquiry and the state of indigence. This is very different from the previous relation of overdetermination in which riots could be *either* contentious exercises of public spirit against corruption or manifestations of corruption. Now, they are *neither* a part of a contentious public inquiry or a state of indigence, although they are related to both. They are, so to speak, put in a no-man's-land between intelligible contention and social disorders.

This new liminality of riots not only results in a tension of overdetermination. As I suggest in the next chapter, it also means that riots come to take on a new ontological meaning. Precisely because they both originate in inquiry and indigence and break from them, they can call the boundaries of the experience of contention themselves into question. They may reveal that the necessary potential for conflict cannot be confined to a delineated set of ontic practices. Thinking back to the post-foundational distinction between politics and the political, the event of riots may suggest the irruption of the political. To be clear, this is not because the riots themselves are inherently political but rather because of the new boundaries of an experience of contention.

As we trace the emergence of a new experience of contention at the turn of the 19th century, we therefore see a reconfiguration in the position of riots. While they were not free of tensions in the experience of public spirit, they nonetheless presented an open situation in which they could be understood as political expressions. The experience of public inquiry is marked by a new liminality of riots. I have sought to trace the emergence of a boundary in a new experience of contention. I do not argue that it completely displaced the previous experience; much less that it came to dominate in the period that I have discussed. Rather, it slowly gains traction throughout the 19th century and 20th centuries, as the dispositives of inquiry and indigence spread. The boundary between intelligible contention and riots becomes central to contentious actors themselves, as suggested by Tilly's analyses of the orderliness and worthiness of protesters (1995; 2006), and also slowly to the police forces charged with their control (Reiner 1998). Protest policing as we know it today shares the imperative that protest should be regulated in order to prevent riots (e.g. McPhail et al. 1998; Mitchell and Staeheli 2005; Stott, Scothern, and Gorringe 2013). Likewise, the dispositive of indigence helps carve out a new regulation of poverty that we can still recognise (Dean 1991). It is with the transformations in the experience of contention at the turn of the 19th century that we can begin to understand our contemporary unease.

6 THE CONTEMPORARY BOUNDARY

It is time that we take a closer look at the contemporary unease about protests and riots. In the last chapter, I argued that the experience of public inquiry saw the installation of a new boundary in which riots became a liminal phenomenon, caught between a proper contentious practice and a state of indigence. I briefly suggested that the dispositives out of which this experience emerged slowly diffused, travelling into the state and across society. In this chapter, building on papers D, E, and F, I seek to uncover the current state of the boundary in two ways. I first discuss the strategic imperatives through which the UK state made the 2011 England Riots visible and contextualise them in relation to previous studies of protest policing, community engagement, and riots (paper D). I argue that riots become visible as a liminal phenomenon between a contentious dynamic of protest escalation and a social dynamic of community disintegration. It is from this liminal position that they are reconfigured as enemies that should be engaged in a relation of war. Second, I ask whether this boundary is confined to the state or spread throughout the public (paper E). Here, I draw on a series of survey studies of how the US and UK publics interpret actions that are usually associated with the repertoire of contention. In these studies, we see a distinction emerging between proper protest tactics and unacceptable and illegible riotous ones. I suggest that the boundary between protests and riots has become embedded in the cultural models of contention through which individual members of the public make sense of contention. I conclude the chapter by giving a broader perspective on the contemporary experience of contention. Although I have focused on the boundary between protest and riots, I emphasise that the experience of contention perspective gives us an analytical grid that is fruitful beyond the question of boundaries. In fact, this broader perspective may help us reconfigure the boundary. I exemplify this through a study of contentious ethea in 'how to become an activist' books, which instruct individuals in how to turn themselves into activists (paper F).

6.1 Tracing strategic imperatives in the state

The dispositives that took shape outside the state among parliamentary and police reformers at the turn of the 19th century have shifted, mutated, and travelled into the state. I hinted at the slow beginning of this process in the 1829 Metropolitian Police and the 1834 New Poor Laws. I make no claim to completely trace the dispositives from the beginning of the 19th century to the present day, nor to argue that there is a simple continuity (see Reiner 1998 for a

useful historical survey of protest policing in the United Kingdom). However, I would suggest that the boundary they carve out between protests and riots has helped orient a set of state institutions, most notably protest policing and community cohesion policies. This is perhaps especially the case following the development of a 'negotiated management' protest policing strategy (McPhail et al. 1998) and growing interest in government through community from the 1960s onwards (Garland 2001: 123; Rose 1996). Drawing on paper D, I use the case of the 2011 England Riots as a prism to study how riots are made visible in protest policing and community cohesion strategies, connecting the discourses articulated around the particular event with the general trends. I first introduce the case of the 2011 England Riots before outlining the liminality of the riots. I conclude the section by showing how this liminality caught riots in a relation of war in which they were both inside and outside society. This makes it possible to ascribe a radical political meaning to the riots – not, as some would have it, because the riots were inherently disruptive but because of their position in an experience of contention.

Between 6 and 9 August 2011, a series of riots broke out following the police shooting of Mark Duggan. What had begun as a peaceful protest outside Tottenham Police Station turned violent and spread across thirty-six areas of England. People looted, attacked the police, and started fires. The riots themselves have been the subject of intense public and sociological discussion (e.g. Bauman 2011; Hall and Winlow 2014; Newburn 2015; Newburn et al. 2015; Newburn et al. 2018b), asking how they arose, progressed, and what motivated the rioters. Others have asked about the media and state reactions to the riots (Newburn et al. 2018a; Morgner 2018), paralleling analyses of the reactions to other riots (e.g. Bagguley and Hussain 2008; Bleich et al. 2010; Body-Gendrot 2016; della Porta and Gbipki 2012; Fording 2001).

From the experience of contention perspective, the riots and the state discourses surrounding them serve to answer a slightly different question: they provide a prism through which we can study how the boundary between protests and riots is configured. This resonates strongly with the studies of protest policing strategies and police knowledges (della Porta and Reiter 1998; della Porta et al. 2006), although I am explicitly concerned with the boundaries of an experience of contention whereas protest policing scholars tend to focus on the institution of the police. I get at these boundaries by sampling and coding seven reports written just before or in the aftermath of the riots. Although the reports' recommendations were rarely put into practice (Newburn et al. 2018a), they were embedded in long-running traditions of protest policing, community engagement, and police militarization. That is, the strategic imperatives that I uncover in the reports are not just free-floating discursive constructions but embedded in actual state practices.

I argue that the riots are caught in a liminal position, which is similar to the one that I traced in the previous chapter. Riots are connected to a contentious protest dynamic. They were a consequence of a dynamic of protest escalation, a dynamic that is foregrounded in *Adapting to Protest*, the 2009 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary review of protest policing. The imperative is to 'ensure the safety of the public and the preservation of the peace within a tolerant, plural society' (HMIC 2009: 27). In the review, the police achieve this by managing the often conflictual dynamics in this plural society, negotiating and dialoguing with 'key stakeholders or influencers within the protest community, the wider community and any group(s) opposed to the protest event' (HMIC 2009: 77). This attempt to govern protests through negotiation belongs to an established practice of negotiated management and dialogue policing (Baker 2014; McPhail et al. 1998; Mitchell and Staeheli 2005; Stott et al. 2013). Although it has been supplemented by more forceful practices in reaction to a series of transnational protests (della Porta et al. 2006; Gilham, Edwards, and Noakes 2013; Noakes and Gilham 2006), it has not been displaced. Riots are, therefore, at the endpoint of a contentious dynamic of protest escalation, which has to be managed by managing the conflicts thrown up by this dynamic.

Riots are also connected to a social dynamic concerned with community disintegration. It forms part of a long tradition of community interventions, which can be traced back to the 19th century (Osborne and Rose 1999). Its emphasis on disintegration also reaches far back, through the dispositive of indigence, to a social problematic emerging around the fear of the vagabond in pre-industrial Europe (Castel 2003). It was articulated explicitly as 'the social question' in connection to pauperism in the 1830s (see Case 2016). The particular instantiation focused on community cohesion and disintegration was put front and centre under New Labour (Worley 2005) following the northern town riots in 2001 (Bagguley and Hussain 2008: 120-121). In the final report from the Riots Communities and Victims Panel, the riots are seen to originate in communities that were falling apart due to a series of overlapping processes such as the failure to develop individual 'grit', despondency due to unemployment, and a lack of trust between the police and communities (RCVP 2012: 6). The strategic imperative is to prevent these disintegration dynamics through governmental interventions in the community. This intervention is both necessary and risky – it cannot issue commands to the community but must work through the dynamic of disintegration itself, seeking 'wherever possible to avoid top down prescription, instead looking for ways to support locally accountable and responsible institutions that respond to the wishes of residents, parents and businesses' (RCVP 2012: 4).

Riots are therefore made visible inside both a contentious and a non-contentious dispositive. In the former, they are connected to a contentious dynamic, which must be managed through dialogue and negotiation in order to prevent riots. In the latter, they are connected to a community dynamic of disintegration, which must be managed by supporting the community and building community cohesion and resilience. From a Foucauldian perspective, we are dealing with two distinct dispositives of security that govern through already-existing dynamics in a realm outside the state (see Foucault 2007: 19; 2008: 301; Raffnsøe et al. 2016: 282). What is crucial is that the actual outbreak of riots is not embedded in the protest or community dynamics but breaks with them. In the contentious dispositive, this becomes clear when the risk of riots becomes too great to manage. Banning protest 'may be the only option where there is a clear likelihood of serious disorder or violence' (HMIC 2009: 48). Riots mark a decisive break in the contentious dynamics. In the dispositive focused on community cohesion, this break revolves around an active opposition between communities that resist the event of riots, which becomes external to the community itself. The reports often speak of 'riot heroes – who mobilised communities to action' (RCVP 2011: 88). Action, that is, against the riots, which may originate in communities but are simultaneously opposed to them. This is also implied by the emphasis on building community resilience, which describes the ability to spring back after an external shock: the riots.

This liminality of riots, in which they are both inside and outside contentious and community dynamics, are integral to the dispositives' strategic imperatives. It is because riots are connected to contentious and community dynamics that the state must intervene in and manage these. However, government can work through the dynamics because riots are also distinct from them. We see that riots occupy a liminal position in both of the dispositives, one that evokes (without exactly mirroring) the one we saw emerging in the previous chapter. While the dispositive of public inquiry made it possible for contentious actors to conduct themselves in order to prevent their inquiry from escalating into riots, the contentious dispositive that we trace here works through protest and police dialogue in order to prevent this escalation. And while the dispositive of indigence focused on how to manage and prevent the descent from poverty into indigence and, subsequently, riots, the community dispositive focuses on the dynamic of disintegration inside communities, which may lead to riots. What is crucial, however, is that the dispositives erect and operate through the liminality of riots. Riots are connected to but also categorically distinct from protest and community dynamics.

The case of the 2011 England Riots therefore suggests that the liminality of riots has spread and become integrated into the major dispositives through

which the state governs protests and communities. It also helps us understand what this means for the political status of riots. This is because the 2011 England Riots were not only a liminal phenomenon. They were also opposed to society as a whole. We see this in the public order discourse that followed the riots. It is itself embedded in a long-running trend towards the militarization of police forces in many liberal democracies (e.g. Gilham and Marx 2018; Jefferson 1990; Kraska 2007; Reiner 1998). It is an example of a legal dispositive or, better, a dispositive of sovereignty (see Foucault 2007: 6; Schmitt 2005). Here, the rioters are not protesters or community members led astray but instead enemies that are outside society and must be confronted. The police engage in the struggle against the rioters 'to protect the public from looting, arson or violent attacks' (HMIC 2011: 5).

We see a complex overdetermination of riots in three dispositives. They are both products of society, through contentious and community dynamics, and opposed to society. This overdetermination means that riots may manifest the necessary potential for conflict in society. They may attain a radical political significance. This is not because of their inherent nature but a historically contingent boundary in a conventional experience of contention. Riots are an antagonistic disruption that originates inside society and opposes it. Depending on how exactly the political is conceptualised, riots may come to manifest this – or at least draw very close to it. For Mouffe (2000; 2005) in particular, riots reveal the antagonism that can never be eliminated but only sublimated. For Badiou (2012), they have the potential to become an event precisely because they come from but break away from society. For Rancière (1999), riots may be an irruption of politics. I take up the ethical and political implications of this argument in the next chapter, where I argue that the analysis cautions us against readings that try to radicalise the disruptive quality of riots.

For now, I only want to emphasise that the liminality that we saw emerging at the turn of the 19th century in the previous chapter has travelled into and become embedded in a series of state practices such as protest policing and community policies. While I have focused on one individual case, the 2011 England Riots, I think the argument applies more broadly. As I have stressed, the connection to and distinction between protests and riots is central to a negotiated management style of protest policing. Studies of police knowledge, 'the police's construction of external reality, collectively and individually' (della Porta and Reiter 1998: 9) have shown that the police tend to operate through a dichotomous view of protesters, distinguishing 'good protesters' from 'bad protesters' (Gorringe and Rosie 2013: 205; Waddington 1994: 112-113). Furthermore, police ideas about the 'crowd' are also often split: the crowd can either be purposive and rational, one with which it is possible to talk and negotiate, or irrational on the verge of becoming a riotous mob (see

Hoggett and Stott 2010; Schweingruber 2000; Waddington and King 2005). Likewise, the community is a core object for a series of social interventions, reaching beyond the problem of riot prevention to other problems such as petty crime and unemployment (Bulley and Sokhi-Bulley 2014; Garland 2001: 123; Roffe 2018; Rose 1996). While there are significant differences in the way that communities are configured in these, the emphasis on governing through communities remains central, as does the blend of individual and community responsibilisation. Finally, the repressive state response to riots is also a recurring reaction across many liberal democracies (Fording 2001; Piven and Cloward 1993), no doubt made easier by a paramilitary turn in policing (Gilham and Marx 2018).

The 2011 England Riots, therefore, are a prism through which we can observe what these changes mean for the boundary between protests and riots. I have focused on the state. This has the advantage of facilitating an in-depth analysis of the liminality of riots. However, dispositives are not confined to the state. I therefore also want to ask whether we find a similar boundary emerging in the general public. In order to get at this question, I shift my analytical focus away from discourses and towards the interpretative practices of the public.

6.2 Studying the boundary in the public's cultural model of contention

I study these practices by engaging with both the repertoire of contention literature, which has mapped the stock of tactics available to contentious actors, and a burgeoning literature on the public perceptions of protest, and by drawing on recent developments in the sociology of culture and cognition. I first introduce and discuss the concept of cultural models of contention, arguing that it helps us get at the embodied aspects of dispositives. I then present a series of survey studies from the United States and the United Kingdom, which seem to indicate that the public also interpret contention by drawing a boundary between tactics associated with protests and those associated with riots. I conclude the section by registering two limitations with this approach and suggest how they may be ameliorated.

In paper E, my co-author and I argue that the public's interpretation of contention is structured by a cultural model. Drawing on the sociology of culture and cognition (Lizardo 2010; 2017; Rotolo 2021), cultural models describe a set of embodied and taken-for-granted assumptions about the world. They are one form of non-declarative personal culture. They are personal because they are internalised in individuals. They are non-declarative because they are acquired through slow processes of enculturation, forming a kind of

practical knowledge that may not be immediately accessible to individuals. Now, this conceptualisation is from a different theoretical tradition than the ones that underpin the experience of contention perspective. However, I think they are compatible. In fact, the notion of a cultural model helps us get at one way in which subjects are 'dispositioned' (see Villadsen 2019: 8). It shows us one way in which processes of subjectification function at the level of the embodied subject, installing a particular way of seeing and being in the world (see Connolly [2002b; 2011: 48] for a similar argument about the imbrication of neural associations and dispositives). In studying cultural models of contention, we are therefore studying one relay for dispositives in the bodies of the public, which helps give rise to a particular experience of contention.

There are many ways of studying this model. We map it by studying the interpretation of distinct actions. If we saw a distinction emerging between those actions associated with protest and those associated with rioting, this would be strong evidence that the boundary between protest and riots is embodied in the public. In order to map the cultural model through survey studies, we had to first model the dimensions of interpretation. We did so through the dimensions of legitimacy and legibility. As Luhmann (1995: 147) reminds us, accepting and understanding communication are distinct selections. The literature on the public perception of protest has primarily been concerned with the question of legitimacy (e.g. Andrews et al. 2016; Hall, Rodeghier, and Useem 1986; Park and Einwohner 2019; Rodeghier, Hall, and Useem 1991). However, the boundary between protests and riots is not only a boundary of legitimacy. As I have argued, it is also a boundary between what counts and does not count as political. This is what the dimension of legibility captures, evoking Turner's (1969) classical discussion of the 'folk concept' of protest.

In operationalising this concept, we needed a sample of possible actions for our respondents to reflect on. We drew on the actions in the Dynamics of Conflict (DOC) dataset given in Wang and Soule (2016). These are based on 23,000 *New York Times* articles about protest events in the United States between 1960 and 1995. We slightly modified these actions and added a few modern actions such as posting opinions on social media.

We operationalised the two dimensions by presenting the actions as possible reactions to a shooting. This gave context to the actions but was otherwise neutral in terms of the political or apolitical nature of the context. We asked the respondents whether the actions were acceptable to carry out and whether the actions were political protests. They could indicate this on sliders running from 0, indicating that the actions were not acceptable or not political protests, to 100. We did this in two survey studies in the United States, one of which was population representative on age, gender, race, and education. We

also recently replicated these results in the United Kingdom. Figure 6.1 presents the results from the US representative study and figure 6.2 for the UK study. While there are differences between the figures, most notably a greater variation in the dimension of legibility, the overall picture is strikingly similar across the two countries.

For our purposes, we can read the figures by following the diagonal running through the first and third quadrants. In the first quadrant, we see tactics that are both acceptable to carry out and legible as political protests. These include what might be called conventional protest tactics such as petitioning, having public discussions, and holding signs. These are, incidentally, all actions that were used by the London Corresponding Society in the 1790s. In the third quadrant, we find actions that are neither acceptable nor legible as political protests. These include damaging property, looting, and physically attacking someone. That is, they include those actions usually associated with riots.

What do these results indicate? In terms of the argument pursued here, they show us that there is a distinction between actions associated with protests and those associated with riots among the general public. This distinction is not merely about whether certain actions are acceptable or no; it also seems to concern their political nature. Moreover, this distinction seems to be relatively independent of context. In the US study, we embedded a series of experiments that manipulated the political or apolitical context of the actions in the surveys, telling the respondents that the actions responded to a political or private shooting. There were few statistically significant differences between the contexts, and none of the actions associated with rioting had a significant shift in legibility. I think this is strong evidence for the existence of a boundary between protests and riots in the cultural models of the general public.

Figure 6.1. Means for Legibility and Legitimacy in the US, Nat. Rep. Study
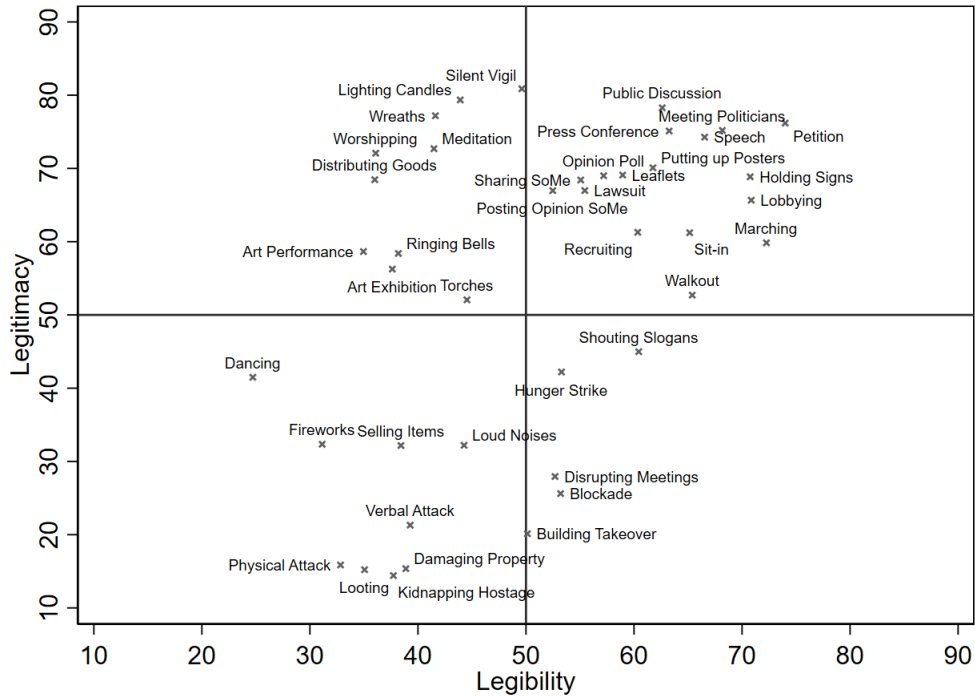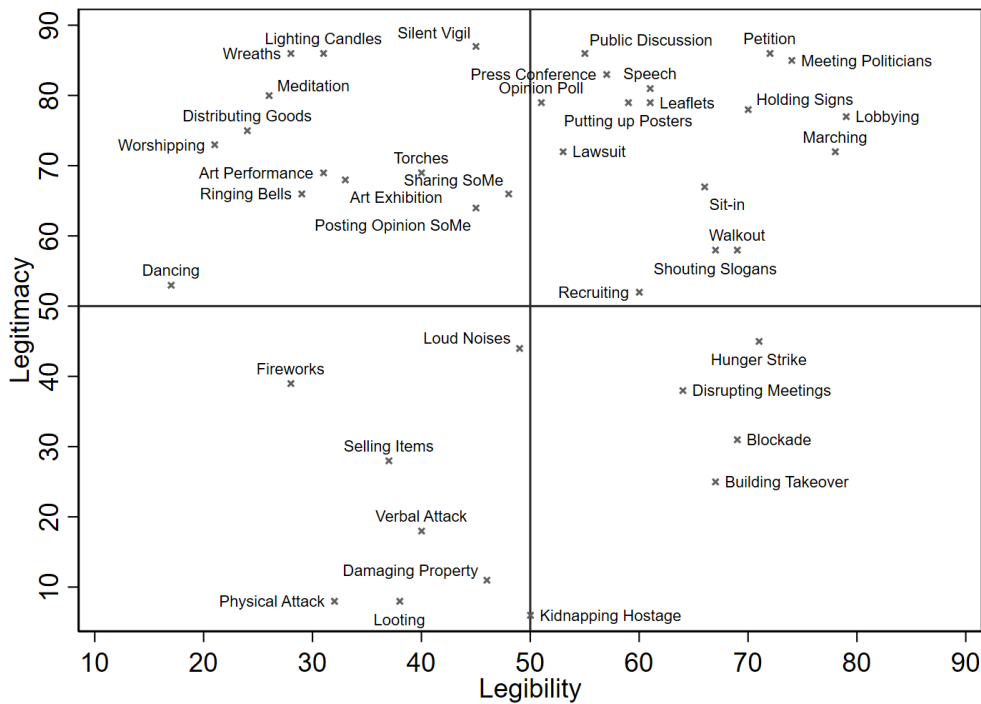(*N* = 1033)

Figure 6.2. Means for Legibility and Legitimacy in the UK, Nat. Rep. Study
(*N* = 800)

There are, however, also limitations to this approach. The most jarring is that we cannot be sure about the exact shape of the boundary. Boundaries are relational phenomena. In our case, we have traced the shape of a particular relation between protests and riots where riots are both connected to and distinct from protests. Surveys such as ours are atomistic, concerned with the individual actions and not the relations between the actions. We therefore need to be careful in interpreting the results. They strongly suggest the existence of *a* boundary but perhaps not the boundary that I have discussed above. This leads to a second limitation. In order to operationalise legibility, we asked our respondents whether the actions were political protests. There seems to be an underlying concept of political protest guiding these responses. If this were not the case, the responses would not be patterned but randomly distributed. However, we do not know what this concept is. For us, this means that we do not know to what extent the concept of political protest is related to the conflict that makes experiences of contention distinctive. My own expectation is that the ordinary language meaning of 'protest' likely incorporates a reference to conflict, but I want to stress that this is an open empirical question. It should be investigated (and we are in the process of doing so) through a series of interview studies and concept-association tasks that get at the ordinary language meaning of 'protest' (see Hunzaker and Valentino 2019; Schaffer 2006).

Setting these limitations aside for the moment, the surveys help us extend the historical analyses as well as the discourse analyses of the boundary between protests and riots. They suggest that the boundary that we trace in these is also rooted in the embodied interpretative practices of the public. In Connolly's (2002a: 176) apt phrase, the boundary seems to have become a 'branded or entrenched contingency'. That is, the boundary that we saw taking shape among parliamentary and police reformers has spread, mutated, and shifted into the hearts of the state and, possibly, the public.

6.3 Shifting from boundaries to ethos and back again

I have focused on the boundary in the state and among the public. There are, clearly, other important sites, most notably the media. While the media representation of riots has been extensively studied (Budarick and King 2008; della Porta and Gbipki 2012; Nijjar 2015), these could be revisited from the experience of contention perspective. However, I want to conclude the chapter by broadening the analytical focus even further, ostensibly shifting away from the question of boundaries to the problem of ethea in experiences of contention. As I note in Chapter 3, a contentious ethos describes how we relate to ourselves and others in pursuing our ideas of the good in contention. I focus

on these here because I think they may contain one way of moderating the boundary between protests and riots. To the extent that the boundary is embodied, changing it means working on ourselves, cultivating an ethos that inserts a moment of doubt about such hard boundaries. I want to suggest that this ethos is actually already a part of a widespread experience of contention. That is, it is one way in which we may relate to ourselves and others, including rioters. This connects the empirical studies with the ethical and political discussion in the following chapter. If the previous analyses sometimes gave the impression of a hard and fixed boundary, the shift to ethea modulates this. I first introduce the empirical material and analytical strategy that I use. I proceed to outline three ethea of contention, reading them in a slightly different way than I do in paper F. While my paper focuses on the distinct relations to the good, I argue here that these relations also have implications for how contentious actors and the broader public draw and may rework the boundaries of contention. Two of the ethea amplify the boundary between protests and riots. The third, however, works through the cultivation of agonistic respect and critical responsiveness. Insofar as this ethos is also widely diffused in the public, it presents us with an opportunity to reimagine the boundary.

There are, of course, many ways of getting at contentious ethea. I do so through a blooming genre of 'how to become an activist' books. These instruct individuals in how they should turn themselves into activists, exemplifying a general individualisation process in liberal democracies (Bauman 2000; Beck 1992; Dawson 2012; Giddens 1991; Rasborg 2017). These are practical guides that work on a prescriptive level, shining a particular normative light on the question of how to become a contentious actor. In doing so, they also carve out a series of individualised contentious ethea. Because I was interested in the configuration of contemporary ethea, I confined my sample to books written after 2015. I also focused on books written by UK and US authors. This served both the practical purpose of delineating my sample and of recognising that a lot of contention is transnational. In the books, this is clear in the internal cross-references between UK and US authors and movements. I ended up with a sample of twenty books. While I read these and mapped the dominant ethos in the books, I also wanted to conduct a more focused discourse analysis, selecting eight particularly influential books, which I list in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2. Final book sample and authors.

Book title	Author
The Purpose of Power: How We Come Together When We Fall Apart (2020)	Alicia Garza is an American civil rights activist and co-founder of Black Lives Matter.
How to Change It (2020)	Joshua Virasami is a British activist who has been involved with both Occupy London and Black Lives Matter.
Make it Happen: How To Be An Activist (2021)	Amika George is a British feminist activist and founder of Free Periods, an organisation working to ensure equal access to education and to destigmatise menstruation.
How To Resist: Turn Protest to Power (2017)	Matthew Bolton is a British living wage campaigner and Executive Director for Citizens UK, an organisation focused on community organising.
Youth to Power: Your Voice and How To Use It (2020)	Jamie Margolin is an American climate justice activist and co-founder of Zero Hour, a youth lead climate change organisation.
How To Make a Difference: The Definitive Guide From The World's Most Effective Activists (2019)	Kate Robertson is the co-founder and CEO of the UK based charity One Young World, a forum for young leaders. Ella Robertson is its managing director.
Do Something: Activism for Everyone (2020)	Kajal Odedra is a British activist and Executive Director for change.org UK, a petition platform.
Five Rules for Rebellion: Let's Change the World Ourselves (2020)	Sophie Walker is a British activist and co-founder and former leader of the Women's Equality Party.

I trace three ethea of contention in the final sample. They are also present within the broad sample of twenty books. These ethea sometimes work to amplify, sometimes to undermine the boundary.

First, an ethos concerned with connecting to a truth. This shares many of the themes of the historical public inquiry. Like public inquiry, it is concerned with a pursuit of the truth, a pursuit that involves the individual working on themselves in order to educate themselves. It reconfigures this pursuit as rooted in the individual's own urge to question the world around them. This reconfiguration, however, keeps the boundary between protests and riots in place because the contentious actor relates to the good by exercising their 'ability to call BS, speak truth to power, and expose the powerful for who they are' (Margolin 2020: 86). This means staying peaceful: 'If your action turns violent, it loses its power because the whole point of these actions is to arouse the conscience of a society' (Margolin 2020: 109). Activists lose their connection to the truth by becoming violent. The ethos maintains a hard boundary

between protests that are able to speak the truth and riots that do not. It makes it difficult to see rioters as contentious actors.

Second, an ethos of passion in which individuals turn themselves into activists by discovering a passion that already exists somewhere deep inside them. In finding and expressing this passion, there is an injunction to be 'authentic' (George 2021: 77; Odedra 2019: 15; Robertson 2019: 76), to use your 'inner voice' (George 2021: 17), to voice 'your truth' (George 2021: 122; Robertson and Robertson 2019: 71) and similar tropes. Activists convey this passion through stories that get others who are equally passionate to join them:

> When you are being your authentic self you are more concerned with truth than other people's opinions. Your testimony and ability to hold a mirror up to society is your most basic but powerful way to create change and make a difference. When you tell your story, your honesty can become your legacy. It's not the words or the means that matter – it's the story (Robertson and Robertson, 2019: 76).

The proper activist subject is the one who is able to express their passion in stories. This both modulates and amplifies the boundary between the riotous and truth-speaking subject that we noted above. It modulates it because truth is reconfigured as a personal expression, refracting it through an ideal of expressive self-articulation that emerged in the Romantic imagination (Taylor, 1989: 390; 1991: 25-26). Contentious actors are not engaged in a struggle aiming at the truth but rather in an expression of their own truth. It amplifies the boundary, however, because it maintains a distinction between the proper contentious actor who is able to express their passion through stories, through their 'voice', and those who cannot. If this is the way in which we relate to ourselves and, crucially, others in contention, rioters remain on the other side of legibility. They are not contentious subjects because they cannot engage in a proper self-telling (see Skeggs 2005).

These two ethea, therefore, constitute ways of relating to the good in contention that make it difficult to soften the boundary between protests and riots. However, the final ethos works against this gloomy conclusion. It cultivates a relation to the good that is based on contextualisation and doubt. Now, the books tend to focus on the need to 'become open to new ways of seeing and interpreting our world' (Garza 2020: 228), accepting that this may make you 'uncomfortable' (Walker 2020: 105). That is, they focus on how to relate to different substantial ideas of the good and not practices such as riots. However, this openness to difference and disturbance may also make possible a different way of relating to the disturbance caused by riots and not just conflicting ideas of the good. This is, in fact, the way that the Black Lives Matter founder Alicia Garza narrates the Ferguson riots (or 'rebellion'): 'it helped

open up a new political space through which we could explore the pervasive nature of anti-Blackness and internalized white supremacy among Black communities' (Garza 2020: 136). The unease caused by the riots was not shut down but used to open up a new political space that was responsive to the rioters as contentious actors. Put differently, the final ethos is an ethos of agonistic respect (Connolly 2002a: xxvi) and critical responsiveness (Connolly 1995: xv-xix). It may allow us to modulate the boundary between protests and riots precisely because it does not shy away from but dives into the unease caused by riots. It remains open to the possibility that riots could be intelligible practices of contention.

There is a contemporary experience of contention with a boundary between protests and riots, one that evokes but does not completely replicate the boundary that took shape at the turn of the 19th century. We can see this boundary clearly in state practices, and suggestions of it in survey studies of the US and UK public. It is also amplified by some of the contentious ethea through which we relate to ourselves and others in contention. So far, I have left to one side the question of how we might deal with this boundary and the unease it provokes. In my final chapter, I want to tackle this question directly through an engagement with radical democratic theory. I suggest that the experience of contention perspective not only helps us understand the boundary but that it also provides resources through which we might reconfigure it.

7 TOWARDS A DEMOCRATIC EXPERIENCE

There is an unease in the relation between protests and riots. I have sought to think through this unease in three interconnected ways. I wanted to construct a perspective on contention that was able to grapple with the unease and apply this perspective to both the historical formation of the boundary between protests and riots as well as its contemporary shape. In this final chapter, I take stock of the argument so far and suggest some of the core theoretical and empirical contributions that it makes. I proceed to discuss the ethico-political implications of the argument. I do this by engaging with post-foundational political theory, and radical democratic theories in particular, bringing the experience of contention perspective to bear on a theoretical tradition that is sometimes empirically weightless. While I agree with the overall thrust of the arguments for radical democracy, I also caution against the emphasis on breaks, fugitive moments, and disruptions that has characterised much of the recent work in this field. I do this on two counts. If politics is primarily seen as disruptive, it becomes difficult to think through the democratic significance of a conventional experience of contention centred on protest politics. Moreover, I want to ask whether it might be better to see riots as a part of an experience of contention and not a disruption of it. Instead of asking whether riots are the right or wrong kind of disruption, we can try to soften the boundaries between riots and a conventional experience of contention.

7.1 Taking stock

This dissertation spans a theoretical and an empirical level. Theoretically, I enter into a dialogue between a sociology of contention, post-foundational political theory, and a Foucault-inspired notion of experience and dispositives. Empirically, I add a new dimension to a classical narrative about a shift in contention at the turn of the 19th century and help us to understand how both the state and the public configure contemporary contention and its boundaries. I discuss these points in turn.

In paper A, I present my overall theoretical perspective. In thinking through the relation between protests and riots, we brush up against the general question of the distinctiveness of contention. Because the relation is also about a boundary that sets contention apart from other societal practices, we need to think through what this distinctiveness consists of. This question is, in fact, central to the broader sociology of contention, which formed around

the assumption that there was something distinctive about contention (Buechler 2016). Lately, however, this assumption has been called into question by the incorporation of arena theories (e.g. Jasper 2014; 2015; 2019) and field theories (e.g. Crossley and Diani 2019; Fligstein and McAdam 2011; 2012). These tend to treat contention as part of an underlying social reality of collective strategic action. I think they are in many ways right to do so. However, this does not mean that we should dismiss the distinctiveness of contention. Taking a cue from the turn to practice (Gillan 2020), I argue that we may want to develop a new perspective that asks about the constitution of contention as such. This is what the experience of contention offers to the sociology on contention: a new way of thinking about the distinctiveness of contention, which generates a new object of analysis.

I have sought to develop my perspective by drawing on post-foundational political theory; more specifically, the way in which this theoretical perspective ties the distinctiveness of contention, and politics in general, to an ontological lack of foundations. However, there is a certain weightlessness to post-foundational political theory. It lacks a sociologically informed theory of contention (McNay 2014; Volk 2018). I think my perspective may provide, if not a theory, then at least a way of thinking through what contention might mean from a post-foundational perspective. There is a caveat here. I have tended to treat post-foundational political theory in very broad strokes. I did so because I was primarily interested in its background assumptions, which are broadly, although not universally, shared. In discussing the ethical implications of the argument in this chapter, I also work against this homogenising tendency in my previous chapters and situate myself more clearly inside a particular post-foundational perspective. The experience of contention perspective treats democracy as a regime (Arendt 1998; Lefort 1988; Marchart 2007) and not merely a disruption (Badiou 2012; Chambers 2013; Rancière 1999; 2001). I discuss this argument at length below.

In order to give analytical heft to my perspective, I draw extensively on Michel Foucault's concepts of experience and dispositives. I am aware that my particular folding of post-foundational political theory into the concept of experience may seem too schematical and ahistorical for some Foucauldians, as it insists on the ontological distinctiveness of contention. My account draws on Foucault without necessarily being Foucauldian. That being said, I do think that it is compatible with his implicit ontological position of necessary contingency. More importantly, it holds a contribution to a nascent genealogy of critique (e.g. Boland 2019; Folkers 2016). Contention can be seen as one form that such a critique takes in liberal democracies, and the experience of contention perspective allows us to think through and analyse this form. Not, as some Foucault-inspired perspectives suggest, through the notion of disruptive

counter-conducts (Death 2010; 2016), but by seeing contention as a deeply embedded experience with a particular set of boundaries. Put differently, contention is not only something that extends and perhaps destabilises dispositives (e.g. Villadsen 2019; Raffnsøe et al. 2016), but an experience that is itself disposed by dispositives. As I suggest below, recognising the solidity of this experience is not only analytically but also ethically important.

In thinking through the relation between protests and riots, I have sought to construct an experience of contention perspective by entering into a dialogue with and contributing to these three literatures. However, I want to stress that its main use for me is that it makes possible an empirical analysis of experiences of contention and the boundary between protests and riots. My historical and contemporary analyses can be seen as examples of how we might do this.

In papers B and C, I trace the emergence of the boundary between protests and riots through the prism of parliamentary and police reform movements in England at the turn of the 19th century. I argue that we see a shift from an experience of public spirit, in which riots could be seen as an exercise of this spirit, to an experience of public inquiry, in which riots were opposed to the process of inquiry. They were in a liminal state in which they undermined and disrupted the truth, time, and subjectivity of contention. The shift from an experience of public spirit to an experience of public inquiry resonates with a strong tradition in social and cultural history, which has focused on the changing status of riots (e.g. Archer 2000; Randall 2006; Rogers 1998; Rudé 2005; Stevenson 1992; Thompson 1991; 2016); the repertoires of contention literature, which traces the emergence of a 'modern' protest repertoire (e.g. Tarrow 2011; Tilly 1995; 2008; Wada 2012; 2016); with histories of ideas focused on the shift from classical republicanism to liberalism (e.g. Burt 2006; Pocock 1975; 1985; Skinner 1998); and with genealogies of police and the social (e.g. Dean 1991; Dodsworth 2004; 2008; 2019; Neocleous 2000), among many other traditions. Put very succinctly and very roughly, these traditions have focused on either the decline of riots, the development of protest, the emergence of new schools of thought, or the crystallisation of a new realm of the social outside the state. My analyses highlight how these developments were caught up in and shaped the construction of a new relation between protests and riots, which marked the boundaries of a new experience of contention. While I emphasise that we cannot merely generalise this analysis beyond the movements concerned or draw a straight line from it to today, I do think it helps us get a grip on one important shift in the relation between protests and riots that continues to be influential.

My contemporary analyses in papers D, E, and F give us a snapshot of how this relation is configured today. Crucially, it suggests that the liminality of

riots, which we saw expressed in the dreams of police and parliamentary reformers, has travelled into the hearts of the state and the public. It is integral to the way that riots are rendered visible by the state. Riots are both connected to and distinct from protest and community dynamics and have to be directly opposed when they break out. This is not just an accidental liminality. It helps constitute the way in which protests are rendered visible and governed by the state. That is, it helps shape a particular experience of contention. The argument presented here gives us a new perspective on the (by now ample) literature on contemporary riots and their political meaning by shifting from an analysis of the actual grievances or actions of rioters to an analysis of the dispositives that shape how riots can be ascribed political meaning. As I stress in my introduction, I do not mean to dismiss those analyses that explain and bring out the grievances and actions of actual rioters (e.g. King and Waddington 2005; Newburn 2015; Waddington, Jones, and Critcher 1989). Rather, I am thinking through a different problematic, getting at a different but related question concerned with the constitution of a contemporary experience of contention and its relation to riots.

This thinking through is especially important because the liminality of riots is not just confined to the state. The public in both the United States and the United Kingdom seem to have a cultural model of contention that works through a distinction between political protests and riots. In mapping this cultural model and this distinction, I engage with the burgeoning literature on the public interpretation of contention (Andrews et al. 2016; Hall et al. 1986; Park and Einwohner 2019; Rodeghier et al. 1991; Wouters 2019) by showing how a particular way of making sense of contention, a particular interpretative practice, is embodied in the public. I have also suggested that this boundary is both held in place and called into question by the ways in which we cultivate a relation to ourselves and others in contention. Now, this is by no means an exhaustive analysis of the contemporary relation, much less of the experiences of contention. However, I do want to suggest that it has implications for how we might try to cultivate a democratic experience of contention today. I finish the summary by tackling this question to develop an ethico-political front that I have hinted at but not yet systematically unfolded.

7.2 Cultivating a democratic experience of contention

In my introduction, I confess an ethico-political faith in democratic experiences of contention. It is time to show how this faith might be, if not vindicated, then at least informed and given substance by the theoretical perspec-

tive and empirical analyses that I have developed. I do this by turning the tables on the drift of the argument so far. The argument has been informed by a series of background assumptions drawn from post-foundational political theory but has not directly engaged with it. Here, I seek to draw this theoretical tradition to the foreground. More specifically, I want to ask what the arguments might mean for how we can relate to riots and cultivate a democratic experience of contention. I first outline some of the key and admirable aspirations in post-foundational notions of radical democracy. I proceed to caution against an emphasis on breaks and disruptions that characterises some of the post-foundational literature. I do this through two arguments that correspond to the two sides of the boundary between protests and riots: we need to be better at thinking through the democratic meaning of conventional protest and to reconsider the valuation of disruption in the case of riots. I suggest that a sociologically informed version of radical democracy might want to develop the experiences of contention that we already have, broadening and opening them up. Instead of emphasising disruption, we can soften boundaries. Or better, instead of asking whether riots are the right or the wrong kind of disruption, we can work on the unease and disruption that they cause in ourselves. We can seek to understand it and thereby reconsider practices such as riots that drift below the realm of political intelligibility.

Post-foundational political theory is commonly associated with the notion of radical democracy. Although the tradition is not monolithic, as we shall see below, there are some widely shared themes and aspirations across it (see Lloyd and Little 2009; Wenman 2013).[11] I briefly outline three of these. First, a post-foundational ontology in which conflict cannot be eradicated that I have already discussed. Second, given that we cannot change this, we should find a way to live with, acknowledge, and perhaps even celebrate it. Democracy becomes a way of doing this through a politics of paradox (Connolly 2002a), agonism (Mouffe 2005), dissensus (Rancière 1999), or dissolution of the markers of certainty (Lefort 1988). Third, we should cultivate an attentiveness to inclusion/exclusion dynamics. This might mean cultivating an ethos of critical responsiveness to new identities and demands (Connolly 1995; 2005; Norval 2012) or highlighting moments of rupture that reconfigure the boundaries of

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[11] I treat radical democracy as an overall category that encompasses writers as diverse as Jacques Rancière, Chantal Mouffe, and William Connolly. For an opposing argument that we should distinguish the radical democratic focus on events and revolution from the agonistic democratic argument for augmentation see Wenman (2013). While I think this unnecessarily confuses terms, as agonistic democrats also call themselves radical democrats, the distinction does get at an important divergence.

political intelligibility (Rancière 1999; 2001; Chambers 2013). My discussion takes place within the space marked out by these themes.

Recent employments of radical democracy, especially in the realm of contention, have tended to bend these themes in a certain direction. They emphasise democracy as a rupture in and disruption of the existing order. Jacques Rancière has perhaps been the most prominent proponent of such a view, especially in terms of analysing contention. I therefore foreground his texts in what follows.

What is important for my argument here is that democracy or politics, which are synonymous for Rancière, is explicitly not a regime and does not have an ethos associated with it (Rancière 2001). Instead, democracy is a disruption of the existing 'police' order that hierarchically organises society without remainders or supplements. Politics is carried out by and calls into existence the part of those who have no part in this order in a way that assumes and verifies their equality (Rancière 1999: 9). In this way, politics makes 'heard a discourse where once there was only place for noise' (Rancière 1999: 30). It redraws the boundaries between those with intelligible speech (*logos*) and those who, having no part in the existing order, produce mere unintelligible noise (*phōné*) (Rancière 1999: 1-2). On this definition, politics is a rare event and not something that is consolidated in societal practices, much less formally institutionalised (Rancière 1999: 17). Although this emphasis on fugitive moments has been moderated by playing up the inscription of politics in the police (Norval 2012) or their mutual imbrication (Chambers 2011; 2013; Gündoğdu 2017; Prentoulis and Thomassen 2013), the dismissal of democracy as a regime remains in place.

Viewed from the lens of Rancièrian democracy, contention therefore becomes a particular form of disruption to hierarchical police orders. In contention, the part of those who have no part, those who are not accounted for in the police ordering of society, become political subjects through an assumption and verification of equality. In the last decade, the square occupations have become almost paradigmatic cases of such a democratic moment in which 'the people' disrupted the existing police order, forming a new mode of subjectivation by laying claim to an equality that they had been denied (Basset 2014; Karaliotas 2017; Lorey 2014; Myers 2016). While Rancière has been particularly influential in the analysis of these contentious square occupations, his ideas have also been used to understand the Black Lives Matter movement (Havercroft and Owen 2016), queer activism (Chambers 2013), and riots (Gündoğdu 2017; Hanson 2014).

Now, while Rancière's writings are in many ways *sui generis*, his emphasis on disruption is not. Rather, the valorisation of events and fugitive moments of democracy is emblematic of a general trend in radical democratic theory

(Volk 2018). For all their differences (Bassett 2016), we find it in Badiou's (2012: 70) emphasis on the event as 'a break in time' which has to be organised as 'an outside-time in time' as well as in Wolin's (1994) 'fugitive democracy'. Even radical democrats such as Connolly (1995; 2002a; 2005) or Mouffe (2000; 2005), who remain sceptical of the singular emphasis on breaks, can be read in ways that foreground disruptions and ruptures (Matijasevich 2019). I think a similar tendency to play up the fugitive or transgressive moments of politics holds for the recent Foucault-inspired studies of contention, which employ his ideas of resistance and counter-conducts (e.g. Death 2010; 2016).

To be clear, I do not argue that this is the only way of reading the radical democrats or that it is simply wrong to emphasise disruptions. Rather, I want to suggest that the experience of contention perspective and my analyses of the boundary between protests and riots might push us to reconsider and re-configure the emphasis on disruption. Here, I join and seek to boost those who, drawing on Arendt (1998) and Lefort (1988), emphasise the need to understand democracy as a regime, an experience, and not just a disruption (Honig 2001; Marchart 2007; 2011; Wenman 2013). This has the added benefit of answering critics who identify a certain social weightlessness in radical democracy, a fixation on ontology that obscures actual empirical dynamics (McNay 2014). I think we can draw out two major arguments from the previous chapters that would favour such a reconfiguration.

First, conventional experiences of contention cannot be thought through using the radical democratic emphasis on disruption. The historical analyses traced a shift from an experience of public spirit to one of public inquiry, which was characterised by a new boundary between proper contention and riots. The contemporary analyses outlined a similar boundary between legible political protests and illegible riots in both state practices and the interpretive practices of the public. The cultural model of contention in the public gives us a clear insight into just how normal protest politics is. It is not a disruption, but instead an acceptable and legible practice. However, it is not clear how we can think about this normalisation inside a radical democratic focus on disruption. The conventional experiences are not disruptions, but neither are they non-political. In the Rancièrian jargon, they might be called a parapolitical domestication of politics (Rancière 1999: 70-80), but this ultimately ends up equating them with the non-political police order.[12] Even attempts to describe the experiences as a contamination of two opposing logics of police and

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[12] Many Rancièrians draw attention to the underdeveloped distinction between 'worse' and 'better' police orders, which would perhaps open the way for an acknowledgement that some police orders are more open to politics (Chambers 2013: 72; Rancière 1999: 31). However, Rancière (1999: 31) notes in the same paragraph in

politics (see Chambers 2013; Prentoulis and Thomassen 2013: 181-182) would downplay the conventionality and spread of this experience.

Instead, I think my analyses make an empirical case for the call to focus on democracy as a regime (for a similar argument drawing on the social movement society thesis see Volk 2018: 15). That is, we need to take seriously the ways in which democracy is already embedded in societal practices that express a necessary potential for conflict as a conflict (see Lefort 1988; Marchart 2007; 2011). Crucially, this does not mean falling back into some sort of 'pure' spherical conception of politics, which Rancière and others associate with Arendt (Chambers 2013: 46; Rancière 2001). The experience of contention is, as I have stressed repeatedly, full of tensions stemming both from overdetermination and the relations between an ontological and ontic level. Rather, it means focusing on the democratic import of a series of conventional experiences so as to understand both the dangers and opportunities that these present.

Second, I have traced how riots moved from a possible part of a conventional experience of contention to a disruption of it. From being potential exercises of public spirit, they became a distortion of truth, a break in progressive temporality, and a denial of proper subjectivity. They were positioned at the borders of political intelligibility, where they remain today. In some ways, this liminality provides fertile ground for radical democratic discussion. Rancière argues that the disruption exemplified by riots such as the 2011 England Riots or those in the French *banlieues* should not be equated with a political event. For Rancière they are revolts that do not assume and verify equality (see Gündoğdu 2017; Rancière 1999: 12-13).[13] Other radical democratic readings, sometimes working through Rancière himself, discover a political meaning in the disruptive quality of the riots (Gündoğdu 2017; Hanson 2014). I think that my analyses introduce a certain hesitancy about this broader dis-

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which he introduces the distinction that 'Whether the police is sweet and kind does not make it any less the opposite of politics'. I am therefore not sure that there is a conceptual space in Rancière for thinking this opening to politics in police orders (see Myers 2016: 56). That being said, Rancière's idea that police orders are a '*partage du sensible*' is very close to the notion of dispositives that I employ here (see Chambers 2013: 125). There are therefore possible rapprochements between the two perspectives.

[13] We find similar sentiments expressed by figures such as Badiou (2012: 16-25), for whom the 2011 England Riots were not political because they ultimately lacked a relation to an Idea, and Žižek (2011) who found in them only an 'abstract negativity'.

cussion. In focusing on the nature of the disruption, it in fact accepts and reproduces the liminality of riots.[14] The problem for radical democrats becomes whether it is the right kind of disruption and, if not, how it might be radicalised (e.g. Boonen 2020). My analyses suggest a different way of tackling riots. Instead of demanding of rioters that they be disruptive in the right way, something that I worry is likely to fail, we can ask how we might integrate riots into a conventional experience of contention. Instead of radicalising the rupture of riots, we can try to cultivate an experience in which they become intelligible political practices.

I think the experience of contention perspective and my analyses caution us against the emphasis on disruption, which obscures a conventional experience of contention and risks reproducing the liminality of riots. This is not to say that it is wrong to focus on disruptions, but that we should not only do so (Wenman 2013), especially in the case of riots. What is the alternative? I want to suggest that the task of radical democracy is also to develop and modulate the experiences of contention that we already have. This resonates with the growing insistence on the need to integrate institutions inside radical democracy, although I focus less on formal institutions (Howarth 2008: 189; Michelsen 2019; Myers 2016; Volk 2018; Westphal 2019), and provides an underpinning in the form of the experience of contention perspective. In the case of riots, we can try to open up these experiences and soften their boundaries so that riots may find expression in them. Doing this would help us live with and acknowledge the torsion in contention and may make us more responsive to those people who actually riot. In short, it would help us follow the aspirations of radical democracy.

A softening of boundaries could take the shape of a rearticulation of the experience of public spirit. We should try to soften the distinction between riots and protests because both may be exercises of public spirit. This would not be a miraculous resurrection of a long-dead experience. The analysis of the contentious ethos focused on agonistic respect and critical responsiveness shows us that it may be possible to amplify an ethos that is already present by coupling it to an experience of public spirit.[15] This might, in turn, allow us to reconfigure the boundary.

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[14] This point holds more broadly: Foucauldian approaches to contention share a stress on disruption, as I suggest in Chapter 3, and Marxist readings of riots (Clover 2016) all begin with the premise of liminality.

[15] There is, in fact, a strong connection between ideals of agonistic respect and the classical republicanism in the experience of public spirit (Honig 1993; Wenman 2013).

I recognise that such an approach carries with it certain dangers from a radical democratic perspective. To writers like Chantal Mouffe, it might exemplify a resigned acceptance of antagonism instead of sublimated agonism. The antagonism of riots risks undermining a democratic regime (Mouffe 2013). I am not convinced by this argument for two reasons. It seems to rest on the assumption that riots are 'really' disruptive, that they are 'really' antagonistic. However, I have sought to show that this disruptive and antagonistic quality also stems from the way in which they are made visible by a series of dispositives that construct the boundaries of a particular experience of contention. Riots are multifaceted and contain strands that are also moderate and discriminatory in their violence, as countless sociological analyses have shown (King and Waddington 2005; Newburn 2015; Piven and Cloward 1979; Waddington et al. 1989). Furthermore, coming to see them as potential exercises of public spirit does not mean that we should accept riots *tout court*. Rather, it means that the rioters are allowed to cross the threshold of political intelligibility, that we become more attentive to their demands and identities. On reflection, we may want to oppose these and the violence associated with them (for a republican attempt to justify coercive disobedience see Aitchison 2018; see also Pasternak 2019). I think Rancière himself shows us what is at stake here: 'If there is someone you do not wish to recognize as a political being, you begin by not seeing them as the bearers of politicalness, by not understanding what they say, by not hearing that it is an utterance coming out of their mouths' (Rancière 2001).

Such a project rests on a sociology of contention because it requires us to understand the actual experiences of contention that suffuse society and ourselves. In this way, my argument goes directly against the caricature of social science propagated by some of the core post-foundational theorists where sociology, turned into a positivist bogeyman, becomes an opponent of politics (e.g. Arendt 1998; Lefort 1988; Rancière 2001). In doing so, it also meets an influential critique of radical democratic theory that sees it as socially 'weightless' (McNay 2014). In asking about the actual experiences of contention out there and in seeking to expand their boundaries, we move away from an abstract focus on ontology towards a series of questions that concern who are actually constituted as intelligible political actors and who are not. Although this is not the class perspective that McNay (2014) calls for, it does have the kind of sociological underpinning and attentiveness to marginalisation that she argues is missing in radical democratic theory.

Finally, I want to note that the onus of change and responsibility shifts from this perspective. It moves from the rioters to the rest of us. That is, it does not somewhat futilely demand that those who riot should riot differently, but rather that we (and this is an inclusive 'we') should attempt to cultivate a

more generous ethos when responding to them (see Norval 2012; Connolly 1995; 2005). Foucault (2000d: 452) put this intuition well:

> One does dictate to those who risk their lives facing a power. Is one right to revolt or not? Let us leave the question open. People do revolt; that is a fact [...] No one is obliged to find that these confused voices sing better than the others and speak the truth itself. It is enough that they exist and that they have against them everything that is dead set on shutting them up for there to be a sense in listening to them and in seeing what they mean to say.

To me, this means that we should not exactly dismiss the disruption of riots but find it in a different place: inside the unease that riots cause in our own experiences of contention, the fact that riots are limit-experiences for us. We can use this unease as a wedge to open ourselves up so that we begin to listen to the sometimes-confused voices of rioters without demanding that they speak in the name of equality or any other pure ideal. I realise that this may sound terribly naïve. Is it really possible to change the ethos underpinning our response to contention and riots in particular? Perhaps not. However, I think it is less starry-eyed than it may appear for two reasons. The alternatives are even more unrealistic. We cannot make riots disappear and we cannot persuade rioters not to riot. The outbursts of riots in one form or other are, notably, much more historically constant than the experiences of contention that I have analysed. Furthermore, the generous ethos that I am calling for is already present, as I have suggested, in the public culture. It is not a question of creating this ethos *ex nihilo* but of amplifying it. And while this ethos is not going to reach everyone, it can become one of the major ways in which we respond to riots and make sense of the unease associated with them. The analyses that I have conducted here and those made possible by the experience of contention perspective may help us to hold such an ethos. The unease in the relation between protests and riots makes possible a deepening of a democratic experience of contention.

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SUMMARY

Protests and riots are a recurring feature in liberal democracies. The aftermath of these events is often chaotic. Protesters blame the police, police blame the protesters, some politicians denounce criminal thuggery and others try to isolate the message of the protests from the riotous violence. Political scientists and sociologists may also weigh in, trying to define and explain what just happened. There is often an unease running underneath these reactions. This unease concerns the relation between protests and riots. Are riots distinct from protests or another manifestation of them? Are riots political expressions or mere social disorders? Most public and academic reactions try to dispel this unease by defining riots as either political or apolitical. In this dissertation, I opt for a different approach. Instead of dispelling the unease, I take it as an object of analysis in itself. More specifically, I ask *how the relation between protest and riots is constituted in a conventional experience of contention*. I thereby get at a series of fundamental questions about the role of contentious practices such as protests in liberal democracies. Tackling these questions may help us understand how liberal democracies constitute their own potential for conflict and ability to change.

I answer the question in three steps. First, I work on a theoretical level in order to develop a sociological perspective on contention, which is able to grapple with the boundary between protests and riots. I argue that the extant sociology on contention has struggled to define what is distinctive about contention. This is problematic because the boundary between protests and riots is precisely a boundary between what counts as intelligible contention and what does not. I therefore develop a new experience of contention perspective by infusing the sociology of contention with post-foundational political theory and a Foucault-inspired analysis of experiences.

Second, I employ this perspective in a historical analysis of the emergence of the boundary between protests and riots. Here, I take the case of England at the turn of the 19th century. I uncover one experience in which contention was constituted as an exercise of public spirit. This exercise could include the orderly practices that we associate with protests but could also be riotous. Riots were, at least potentially, intelligible practices of contention. I argue that this experience was slowly supplanted by a new one, which emerged alongside the consolidation of protest politics. In this experience, contention was constituted as a process of orderly public inquiry. Riots were positioned outside the bounds of intelligible contention as a threat to this inquiry. However, they were not merely external to the process of inquiry but also a consequence of

an inquiry gone wrong. Riots were both opposed and connected to intelligible contention.

Third, I suggest that this relation helps drive much of the contemporary unease about protests and riots. I substantiate this argument in a series of contemporary studies, spanning discourse analyses of UK governmental reports on riots, population representative survey studies of the US and UK public, and discourse analyses of how-to books focused on activism. I argue that state practices, the ways that individual members of the public interpret contention, and the cultural constructions of activists are informed by a boundary between protests and riots that resembles the one analysed in the historical case.

I conclude the dissertation by arguing that this boundary leads to a problematic closure in our relation to riots. We may want to reconfigure this boundary and the experience of contention it circumscribes by reimagining the historical experience of public spirit. This would ultimately lead to a more democratic experience of contention, one in which we can recognise the political aspects of riots without necessarily condoning their violence.

DANSK RESUMÉ

Protester og optøjer er velkendte fænomener i liberale demokratier. Deres efterdønninger er ofte næsten lige så kaotiske som begivenhederne selv. Demonstranter skyder skylden på politiet, politiet skyder skylden på demonstranter, nogle politikere langer ud efter 'kriminelle' deltagere, mens andre politikere prøver at beskytte protestens budskab fra at blive korrumperet af optøjernes vold. Politologer og politiske sociologer deltager også tit i debatten i et forsøg på at definere og forklare, hvad det var, der skete. Der er ofte en usikkerhed, der gemmer sig under disse reaktioner. Usikkerheden handler om, hvordan vi kan forstå relationen mellem protester og optøjer. Er optøjer kategorisk forskellige fra protester eller en bestemt form, som protester kan tage? Er optøjer meningsfulde politiske udtryk eller blot social uro? De fleste offentlige og akademiske reaktioner prøver at undertrykke usikkerheden ved at definere optøjer som enten politiske eller apolitiske. Jeg vælger en anden tilgang i denne afhandling ved at tage usikkerheden som et analyseobjekt i sig selv. Det vil sige, at jeg spørger *hvordan relationen mellem protester og optøjer er konstitueret i en konventionel stridserfaring*. Jeg kommer dermed i kontakt med en række fundamentale spørgsmål omkring, hvilken rolle praksisser såsom protester og optøjer spiller i liberale demokratier. Mit spørgsmål er i sidste ende en måde, hvorpå vi kan reflektere over, hvordan liberale demokratier konstituerer deres eget konfliktpotentiale og forandringsevne.

Jeg besvarer spørgsmålet i tre skridt. Det første skridt er teoretisk. Her udvikler jeg et nyt sociologisk perspektiv på strid ("*contention*"), som er i stand til at belyse grænsen mellem protester og optøjer. Jeg argumenterer for, at eksisterende sociologiske perspektiver har haft svært ved at definere, hvad der specielt kendetegner strid i form af for eksempel protester. Det er problematisk, fordi grænsen mellem protester og optøjer adskiller stridspraksisser, der er politisk meningsfulde, fra praksisser, hvis politiske aspekter er uklare. Jeg udvikler derfor et nyt erfaringsperspektiv ved at trække på politisk teoretiske argumenter om nødvendig kontingens og en Foucault-inspireret analyse af erfaringer.

Det andet skridt er historisk. Her spørger jeg, hvordan grænsen mellem protester og optøjer opstod ved at undersøge England ved overgangen til det 19. århundrede. Jeg afgrænser en erfaring, hvori strid var konstitueret som en bestemt måde at udøve *"public spirit"*. Denne udøvelse kunne tage fredelige former, som vi forbinder med protester, men den kunne også manifestere sig som optøjer. Optøjer var derfor potentielt meningsfulde politiske stridspraksisser. Jeg argumenterer for, at denne erfaring langsomt blev erstattet af en ny erfaring, der opstod i takt med, at protestpolitik blev konsolideret. Denne nye

erfaring var kendetegnet ved en bestemt proces: "*public inquiry*". Optøjer var ikke politiske her men i stedet en trussel mod den ordentlige og fredelige politiske proces. De var dog en bestemt form for trussel, der kunne opstå inde i selve den fredelige proces, når den løb af sporet. Optøjer var både sat i modsætning til og dybt forbundet med meningsfuld politisk strid.

Det tredje skridt er nutidigt. Jeg foreslår, at den komplekse relation, der opstod i slutningen af 1700-tallet i England, er med til at forme usikkerheden i relationen mellem protester og optøjer. Jeg underbygger argumentet i en række diskursanalyser af britiske statspapirer, repræsentative spørgeskemastudier af den amerikanske og britiske befolkning og diskursanalyser af guidebøger om aktivisme. Statspraksisser, offentlighedens fortolkningsmønstre og den kulturelle konstruktion af aktivister lader alle til at opstille en grænse mellem protester og optøjer, der minder om den komplekse relation, som jeg fandt i min historiske analyse.

Jeg afslutter afhandlingen med at argumentere for, at grænsen fører til en problematisk lukkethed i vores relation til optøjer. Vi kan gentegne grænsen ved at trække på historiske erfaringer, der ikke skelnede skarpt mellem protester og optøjer, såsom den jeg har analyseret. Dette kan være med til at skabe en mere demokratisk stridserfaring, hvori vi kan anerkende de politiske facetter ved optøjer uden nødvendigvis at billige deres vold.