INTRODUCTION

The Middle East and North Africa Beyond Classical Social Movement Theory

Joel Beinin and Frédéric Vairel

EVEN BEFORE THE ARAB POPULAR UPRISINGS OF 2011, the Middle East and North Africa had been catapulted from relatively unknown regions in Anglo-American intellectual and journalistic discourse to places that almost everyone "knew" something about. The conventional wisdom about these regions was that they are culturally defined by "Islam," that this culture has a strong anti-Western and antimodern component (or simply, "they hate us"), and that it is uniquely susceptible to irrational political radicalism, authoritarianism, and terrorism. This book offers a different view, emphasizing the contentious politics of the working classes, the dissident intelligentsia, and unexpected forms of Islamism: a complex collage of striking workers, unemployed university graduates demanding work, human rights and democracy activists, demobilized leftists and Islamists, and an Islamic movement encouraging women to expand their public roles and professional skills.

These phenomena challenge much of the conventional wisdom about the Middle East and North Africa and emphasize that they are regions rich with political contestations and mobilizations of all sorts, which, while not leading inexorably toward the expansion of civil society or democratization, do not necessarily degenerate into violence and social anarchy. Moreover, we argue that many of the contentious episodes described and analyzed in this book can be understood as social movements, although they do not necessarily resemble the paradigmatic movements—the civil rights movement in the American South (Morris 1984; McAdam 1982, 1986, 1988a), student activism (McAdam 1988) and the international feminist upsurge of the 1960s and 1970s (Evans 1980; Rupp and Taylor 1987), mobilizations for gay and lesbian rights (Engel 2001), the French revolutions and their aftermaths (Traugott 1985; Tilly 1986), or the Polish Solidarity trade union of the 1980s (Mason 1989)—that provided the original empirical basis for the development of Social Movement Theory (SMT).

We believe that the Middle East and North Africa can be understood using the tools that social science has developed for the rest of the world. And we argue that the Middle East and North Africa provide a complex and fascinating laboratory, not only to confirm the applicability of SMT but also to enrich our theoretical knowledge of social movements and other forms of political contestation.

The study of social movements reveals how the production of social sciences in European or North American contexts has proceeded mostly without reference to Middle Eastern and North African cases. Decades after its first formal articulations, Social Movement Theory is now a mainstream and often routinized subfield of social science. During the last ten years, SMT and the broader study of contentious politics have become internationalized—as the tables of contents of the journal *Mobilization* clearly demonstrate. But the Middle East has largely been on the sidelines of this intellectual trend. Again, the tables of contents of some of the outstanding social science journals are quite revealing. Even with an expansive definition of processes of mobilization—such as the definition adopted by McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001) over the last decade, which includes lobbies and interest groups and ranges from political parties to ethnic struggles, from peaceful social movements to revolutions—the disinterest of the dominant currents in comparative politics or sociology in collective action and social movements in the Middle East and North Africa is striking.[1]

Due to a combination of implicit or explicit exceptionalism, training focused on mastering difficult languages, and a sense that at least until September 11, 2001, these regions were on the margin of global developments (except for oil, which is usually not integrated into social analysis other than as an impediment to democracy), studies of the Middle East and North Africa that have employed SMT have usually limited themselves to using these regions as a source of case studies to validate the classical concepts of *political opportunity structure, collective action frames, mobilizing structures, and repertoires of contention*.[2] While the forefathers of SMT have been self-critically discussing the limits of their earlier formulations for over a decade (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Aminzade et al. 2001; Tilly 2008), this has had little impact on the limited literature on social movements in the Middle East and North Africa.

When deployed in the Middle East and North Africa, SMT has most often been used in studying modern Islamic social movements.[3] In the introduction to his influential edited volume, Quintan Wiktorowicz notes that "scholarship has tended to ignore developments in social movement research that could pro-

vide theoretical leverage over many issues relevant to Islamic activism" (2004, 3). The use of SMT in understanding Islamic activism is a salutary development in rendering the region legible using standard social science categories. This is all the more important because many of those whose work on Islamic activism is best known to nonspecialist audiences are uninterested in social science.[4]

However, the contribution of the authors in this volume, and others as well, to the interpretation and explanation of Islamic movements is paradoxical. They introduced a major methodological insight and broke with neo-Orientalism by empathically considering Islamic activists as "normal" social actors having resources, strategies, and practices that are comprehensible using the tools of social science. But their deployment of SMT is limited and instrumental rather than an effort to participate in the general discourse of social science.

The most common conclusion of SMT studies of modern Islamic activism is that the theory's classical concepts also "work" for the Middle East and North Africa. Consequently, despite their empirical richness and their aspiration to normalize the study of Islam in these regions—in particular by asserting the rationality of even the most violent actors—many such studies tend to limit themselves to the assertion that these cases confirm the theory's predictions. Thus, Janine Clark notes, "According to SMT/resource mobilization theory . . . these findings are confirmed in Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen" (2004a, 21, 25). Clark's book is based on excellent fieldwork and engages with SMT, but it does not aim to contribute to or to reformulate aspects of the theory by building on the strength of its important empirical observation, which we would characterize as the construction of an Islamic *mouvance* including the middle classes active in Islamic charitable institutions and the poor. Likewise, Wiktorowicz's edited volume (2004), whose contributors include most of those currently applying SMT to study Islamic movements, does not go beyond summarizing the literature on SMT and arguing for its applicability to Islamic activism. A similar limitation applies to Mohammed Hafez's comparative study, *Why Muslims Rebel* (2003). The book's ambition does not go beyond demonstrating the rationality of Muslim rebellions. It is helpful to point out Arab and Muslim rebels' rationality and their use of repertoires to mobilize and contest, just as European or North American contentious actors do. But Hafez's objective of normalizing these mobilizations is undermined by his focus on cases of violent uprisings only.

The conclusion that Islamic movements are rational is undoubtedly correct up to a point. But because the overarching purpose of most studies of Islamic movements is to demonstrate the applicability of SMT, many scholars, like Hafez,

tend to embrace uncritically aspects of the theory that do not adequately explain these cases and, we suggest, many others as well. This promotes the further routinization of SMT and misses an opportunity to contribute to the larger world of social science and historical scholarship through the study of the Middle East and North Africa. Moreover, the focus on specifically Islamic social movements has allowed even proponents of SMT who have encouraged expanding its geographic ambit to once again relegate the Middle East and North Africa to the margins of social science with the exceptionalist claim that these regions are a locus of "ugly movements" (Tarrow 1998, 8, 194, 203), although this judgment will likely be revised following the Arab popular uprisings of 2011.

The Iranian revolution of 1979 inspired three paradigmatic exceptions to this trend. Misagh Parsa (1989) proposes a structuralist explanation of the revolution, emphasizing the politicized and highly visible role of the state in capital accumulation. The rising price of petroleum allowed the state to invest in the modern sector at the expense of the bazaar. Rapidly increasing petroleum revenues led to inflation, which the state tried to stop through policies detrimental to the bazaar classes. Bazaaris mobilized, utilizing the national network of mosques to build a coalition including other adversely affected classes—industrial and white-collar workers and professionals—against the perceived injustices of the state (an example of resource mobilization). Parsa's analysis—emphasizing an emerging threat and the use of mosques as mobilizing structures—is both highly original and compatible with the Political Process Model (PPM) version of SMT.

Charles Kurzman's account of the revolution falls on the opposite end of the analytical spectrum. He adopts a social constructionist perspective emphasizing the agency and perceptions of contentious actors, even if their perceptions of their environment and their "self-understandings and activities" are counterintuitive and mismatch the "objective" situation and the balance of forces with state authorities (2003, 312). So despite their belief that no new opportunity was available and that the limited liberalizing measures of the regime were a sham, masses of Iranians followed the call of the revolutionaries among the leading clerics and joined the cycle of demonstrations that resulted in the fall of the Shah. Kurzman (2004, 2004a) calls this an "anti-explanation" because it rejects attempts to theorize general patterns in social life and foregrounds subjectivities, conjunctures, and accidents.

Mansoor Moaddel's (1992, 1993) account of the Iranian revolution emphasizes the "broad episodic context" (1992, 375) in which a revolutionary discourse

emerged and the specific character of revolutions as modes of mobilization. This can be understood as an effort to bring together structural and ideological factors. Moaddel's theoretical approach underscores the importance of detailed empirical work, knowledge of the relevant languages, and precise analyses of both historical and contemporary contexts. Indeed this is the necessary foundation that enables all three of these authors to normalize one of the most "exceptional" regimes in the Middle East as well as to contribute to the understanding of social movements and revolutions.

Most of the contributions to this volume belong to the relatively small body of scholarship on social movements in the Middle East and North Africa not framed in Islamic terms—clumsy terminology to be sure, but "secular" would be inappropriate. Disproportionately focused on Israel/Palestine, that literature includes the works of Alimi (2006, 2007, 2009), Marteu (2009), Norman (2010), and Pearlman (2011). While more analytical than the copious descriptive literature on social movements in Israel/Palestine, they are informed by the classical concepts of SMT without taking any distance from or critically engaging with them.

Pearlman's *Violence, Nonviolence, and the Palestinian National Movement* (2011), perhaps the most notable among these works, contends that "movement cohesion" is the key variable explaining whether movements can successfully employ nonviolent tactics. Greater discipline, cohesion, and a hegemonic leadership are necessary for nonviolence. While this apparently fits the cases of the "self-determination" movements she examines—Palestine, South Africa, and Ireland—it does not apply to most of the movements discussed in this book. The movements to overthrow the dictatorships in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, and Yemen were not characterized by a high degree of cohesion or formal institutionalization. This does not explain the difference between the relatively nonviolent uprisings in the former two and the violence in the latter. In Syria and Yemen the incumbent regimes first resorted to violence, as Reinoud Leenders and Laurent Bonnefoy and Marine Poirier demonstrate, while protesters devoted considerable energy to defining themselves as peaceful actors and demarcating themselves from armed actors.

"Social movements" and "movements for self-determination" are not homogeneous categories. Likewise, despite their temporal and thematic connections and common contextual factors—authoritarian rule, contempt for human dignity, economic misery, a growing gap between the rich and the poor, widespread corruption, and a youth bulge—the Arab uprisings of 2011 were not a single

movement. But the differences between the mostly nonviolent movements in Tunisia and Egypt and the protracted violence in Syria, Libya, and Yemen are due to factors more complex than the degree of movement cohesion. The length of the conflict, the modes of contentious interaction before the introduction of violence, the extent of repression or tolerance by the incumbent regime, and the origins and histories of the populations (urban, tribal) that join mobilizations should all be considered. We would suggest that good social analysis requires restraining the nomothetic urge.

BEYOND CLASSICAL SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY

Kurzman (1996) anticipated Goodwin and Jasper's (1999) radical critique of the structuralist bias of classical SMT and proposed a social constructionist approach to understanding emotions, perceptions, and the meanings of actors engaged in contention. Goodwin and Jasper are the primary critics of the concept of Political Opportunity Structures (POS), which they argue, along with many of the contributors to this volume, tends to have a rigid and objectivist understanding of contexts. As they put it, "An extraordinarily large number of processes and events, political and otherwise, potentially influence movement mobilization, and they do so in historically complex combinations and sequences. . . . Such opportunities, when they are important, do not result from some invariant menu of factors, but from situationally specific combinations and sequences of political processes—none of which, in the abstract, has determinate consequences" (1999, 36, 39).

In *Dynamics of Contention*, McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly acknowledge that they "come from a structuralist tradition" (2001, 22; see also Tarrow 2003). Although the original formulation of PPM tended to have a culturalist orientation (McAdam 1982), in their work from the 1970s through the 1990s, as well as that of many other SMT scholars whom they inspired in that period and beyond, there is no shortage of overly structuralist formulations of the concept of POS, suggesting that "opportunities" are confined to a closed list of variables relevant to any mobilization and are the most important factors in sparking contentious episodes that may develop into social movements.[5] Conceptualizations of POS tend to vary from one author to another, which is an indirect way of recognizing that contexts are never equivalent. For over a decade, Tarrow's own usage of the term has scaled back considerably its explanatory claims (Tarrow 1998, 200; 2011, 32–33). Similarly, mobilizing structures were often considered to be preexisting rather than dynamically created and appropriated;

collective action frames, a later addition to PPM, were sometimes regarded as concepts proposed by leaders to their followers rather than established through a dialectical interaction of leaders and followers by trial and error.

In response to the criticism of Goodwin and Jasper (1999) and others (Gamson and Meyer 1996, 275; Tarrow 1988, 430) directed especially at overly rigid understandings of POS, *Dynamics of Contention* repudiates structuralism and advocates transcending much of the research agenda and radically revising many of the concepts of classical SMT, and PPM as well (22, 41–50). In their place, McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly propose a "relational" perspective, which makes "interpersonal networks" central to a dynamic model of mobilization. Their new orientation emphasizes challengers' "perceptions of opportunities and threats" (Kurzman's point); "active appropriation of sites for mobilization" rather than preexisting mobilizing structures; dynamic construction of framing among challengers; innovation in repertoires of contention; the description and analysis of "contentious performances" rather than stable repertoires of collective action; and a broad processual understanding of mobilization and linkages of mechanisms rather than a search for the precise origins of contentious episodes.

This method is conceptually innovative and highly sophisticated, even if sometimes overly complex. One may or may not be convinced by the several technical distinctions introduced by the authors—for example, the difference between processes and mechanisms—and their high degree of abstraction. Designating processes and mechanisms as distinct concepts while leaving their explication and practical functioning underdeveloped is perhaps the salient weakness of this ambitious intellectual endeavor (Koopmans 2003, 117); Tarrow (2011) has recently attempted to rectify this lacuna with mixed results.

The authors of *Dynamics of Contention* appear not to have completely changed their minds about the categories they helped to establish. They transform, reuse, or adjust them by modifying their meaning (Tarrow and Tilly 2006; Tilly 2008, 88–115). Sometimes they more or less reassert them in synthesizing the common knowledge of the field (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2007; Tarrow 2011).

Nevertheless, McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly's revised conceptual model is far better suited to studying social and political mobilizations and contestations in the Middle East and North Africa than classical SMT and PPM. Most of the social movements examined in this volume operate in the interstices of persisting authoritarianisms that subject them to varying degrees of coercion and offer

them few openings for mobilization. Many of them have very limited resources and weak formal organizations. They typically rely on informal networks and innovative repertoires to mobilize. Several chapters in this book do discuss appeals to the absolute rights of autonomous individual subjects distinct from their social worlds, but in at least some instances it seems that deploying the discourse of human rights is merely instrumental. Therefore, studying social movements in these regions allows us to expand and enrich SMT by considering such cases.

The contributions in this volume demonstrate a variety of ways and contexts in which a more processual, dynamic, and historicized approach to social movements, mobilization, and contestation can be developed, building on Middle Eastern and North African cases, by analyzing the emergence and development of collective action in hostile and repressive contexts, including Bahrain, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen. In seeking to understand how Arabs and Muslims disobey and challenge authority, we self-consciously oscillate between the classical questions of comparative politics and comparative historical sociology: What can Middle Eastern and North African cases bring to mainstream social theory? And in turn, what new insights can such a discussion bring to our knowledge of these regions? We suggest that this inquiry can be developed by focusing on three axes: contexts, networks, and practices.

CONTEXTS

The so-called Arab spring of 2005 generated great excitement among many pundits who imagined it was "the first bloom of democracy in Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt, Palestine, and throughout the greater Middle East" (Krauthammer 2005). While Egypt and several other Arab states in which there were no popular democratic upsurges in 2005 enjoy somewhat more credible formal democratic procedures today than then, substantive democracy remains an aspiration. There have been no democratic transformations in the other states noted by Krauthammer: the "prospects for democracy" in Palestine, and arguably also Iraq, are worse than in 2005; Lebanon has seen no real change. What we can learn from this premature spring fever is the importance of detailed knowledge of local contexts. The Iraqi legislative elections of January 30, 2005, the demonstrations of the Egyptian intelligentsia for democratic reform, the mobilization, led mainly by Christians, to demand withdrawal of the Syrian occupation of Lebanon, and the victories of Hamas in the 2004–5 municipal elections in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip have only the most superficial similarities.

We should not reconstruct the meanings of the mobilizations (and demobilizations) analyzed in the first two parts of this edition of the book looking backward from the popular uprisings of 2011. This would distort the understandings of earlier episodes of political contention for both the insurgents and the incumbent regimes, neither of which anticipated the ouster of the autocrats in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Yemen. Those events, and the movements in Morocco, Algeria, Jordan, and Bahrain, which were contained, repressed, or did not achieve their goals despite their unexpected strength, have (once again) misleadingly been dubbed the "Arab spring" or the "Arab awakening"—as though these societies were frozen in a long winter or slumber during which there had been no history of social movements, mobilization, and contention in the region. What is required is a contextually informed and nonteleological understanding of politics in the Middle East and North Africa.

The first edition of this book proposed that these regions inspired the sociological imagination because they provided cases where mobilizations emerged in the absence of "opening opportunities" or when they were highly restricted or uncertain. "Tak[ing] protesters' beliefs seriously" (Kurzman 2004, 115), several of the mobilizations analyzed in this volume describe the development of collective action despite high risks and repression. The chapters by Amin Allal, Montserrat Emperador Badimon, Joel Beinin and Marie Duboc, Zeynep Gülru Göker, Reinoud Leenders, and Frédéric Vairel dealing with Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, Syria, and Turkey emphasize the importance of a perceived collective threat, rather than an "opportunity," as the impetus for action, another element in the revisionist positions of the leading lights of SMT (Goldstone and Tilly 2001).

The historical specificities that inform any situation are never entirely reproducible. Comparison is always a hazardous undertaking. Kurzman engages in a comparative step by systematically introducing a critical perspective into debates of the last decade—a contribution warmly welcomed by the most prominent figures of SMT and by their sharper critics. He also advocates an "anti-explanation" approach to social and historical phenomena, which makes comparison, and therefore understanding beyond the idiographic, difficult or impossible. We favor his comparative efforts and keep our distance from his more nominalist propositions.

Large-scale social and historical structures can be useful heuristic devices (Tilly 1985). But categories like "nation," "class," and even "Islam" have no "objective" existence or transhistorical essence. They are inherently problematic and should always be disaggregated, localized, and contextualized. Since sociological

concepts are produced in relation to a sociohistorical context, they are not automatically reproducible from one case to another (Passeron 1991; Kalberg 1994).

Insofar as the past and the present have any meaning, that meaning must be established through a dynamic exchange among social actors (living or deceased) and those who seek to understand them. There is no a priori prescription determining which social actors, and therefore whose perspective, should be privileged in understanding a place and a situation and how these change over time. But we believe that empathic foregrounding of social movements, networks, and contentious practices that are typically marginalized or demonized, combined with the intimate familiarity acquired through intensive original research and fieldwork, can yield new understandings that are relevant to those interested in SMT and contentious politics beyond the Middle East and North Africa as well as to specialists in these regions.

Determining useful categories requires detailed knowledge of cases and their historical formation. Taking this into account, the contributors to this book aim to provide precise descriptions of the contexts of the mobilizations they study. The contributions explicate the different matrices of constraints imposed on contentious activities, their diverse resources, and how both are perceived by the actors and their opponents. Such close attention to contexts comes from a strong belief in the importance of the historical dimension in understanding social and political processes.

NETWORKS

Snow, Zurcher, and Ekland-Olson (1980) were pioneers in arguing for the importance of networks for the mobilization of social movements. PPM emerged as a critique of the tendency of Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT) to focus only on formal organizational networks and emphasized the importance of social settings that were relatively free of state control (McAdam 1986, 1988a; Gould 1991). Several scholars have recognized the role of informal networks in contention, especially the role of micromobilization processes (Snow et al. 1986) and of "social movement communities" (Buechler 1990; Taylor and Whittier 1992). They move us away from the "'immaculate conception' view of [social movements] origins" (Taylor 1989, 761), reminding us that mobilizations never emerge in a state of social and political weightlessness. These approaches avoid the organizational fetishism of earlier RMT formulations by focusing on people, mutual knowledge, social ties, and informal organizational structures preexisting social movement organizations. Such informal factors always nur-

ture and shape mobilizations and help us to explain the evolving form of a social movement across time.

However, the notion of social movement communities tends to present a romantic view of collective action outside formal, institutionalized organizations (Fantasia 1988). While the notion "is potentially very useful in analyzing both how movements emerge within cycles of protest and how some movements maintain themselves beyond the decline of a protest cycle" (Staggenborg 1998, 181), it may overestimate the extent of shared interests, values, and goals inside a movement. By emphasizing common cultures and identities inside communities, this approach underappreciates the extent to which the definition of a movement, its public face, and its tactics are stakes in the struggle.

Attention to this range of phenomena is important for understanding politics in the global South, which often takes place below the radar screen of the formal terrain that political science usually studies. But it may still be inadequate to understanding the myriad silent refusals, bypassing of authority, day-to-day forms of resistance, evasion of power practices, or other behavior in the authoritarian states of the Middle East and North Africa that does not fit neatly into the binary categories of resistance or collaboration. These behaviors are more common than the open contestations that have typically been the subject of SMT and that are more common in the global North (Bayat 1997, 2010; Bennani-Chraïbi and Fillieule 2003; Robinson 2006; Zaki 2007). James Scott's (1985) conception of "weapons of the weak" can be used to explain not only the behavior of individuals but also certain social mobilizations in the South that seek to bypass, accommodate, or co-opt rather than openly confront constituted authority.

Guilain Denoeux (1993, 1993a) was among the first to apply SMT in Middle Eastern and North African contexts using the concept of "informal networks." This promising development was not followed up as energetically as it might have been. Diane Singerman's (1995) analysis of informal networks in Cairo was an important effort to redirect the study of politics to the only institutions that actually work and matter to most Egyptians—family and neighbors—rather than distant and ineffectual formal state apparatuses, political parties, and even many NGOs. Homa Hoodfar (1997) adopted a similar approach in her study of marriage in low-income Cairene households. Jenny White's (2002) exploration of neighborhood-level mobilizations in Istanbul relying on "vernacular politics" and Carrie Rosefsky Wickham's (2002) elaboration of the

"lumpen intelligentsia" as a social category and the carrier of the Islamist message (*da'wa*) are important insights that explain the success of Islamic mobilizations in Turkey and Egypt.

It is not only that informal networks and indirect or minimalist forms of contesting constituted authority are prevalent in the Middle East and North Africa. The character of informal networks and the social processes through which individuals become embedded in these networks and may be mobilized through them must be understood. All but one of the chapters of Diani and McAdam's *Social Movements and Networks* (2003) examine Western societies, where it may make sense to pose the question of joining a movement in terms of individual calculations and decisions (although even in these cases we are not entirely willing to concede this point). The exception in that volume is Broadbent's chapter, which argues that "thick networks" of social relations are key to understanding the mobilization of Japan's environmental protest movement. He avoids both individual rational calculation and explanations emphasizing Japan's "deferential political culture" and proposes that "the final necessary ingredient was a protest leader from within the community who enjoyed high status there" (Broadbent 2003, 225). Focusing "on the *social* aspect of power"—the social context of networks and the power relations they embody—can overcome the unsatisfactory options of individual rationality based either on material factors or on subjective, culturalist factors as competing explanations of mobilization.

Broadbent suggests that his emphasis on the "ontological context" and the central importance of "social hegemony via networks" may render establishing universal theories of social movements impossible. We do not believe that social theory must be universal to have value. Like Broadbent, we reject both the notion of the universality of "individual economic rationality" as well as any sort of Arab or Muslim cultural exceptionalism as explanations for social movements, mobilization, and contestation in the Middle East and North Africa. Instead we adopt a midrange approach, which takes context, more or less as Broadbent understands it, as central to understanding how informal networks in the Middle East and North Africa operate and how actors among them calculate, when they do so. The implication that Japan and the Middle East and North Africa may share comparable forms of local networking does not mean that there is an essential East/West divide on this or other matters. Rather, we suggest that the West may not be as rational and instrumentalist as many have imagined it to be. Boltanski and Thèvenot (2006) discuss the plurality of social

worlds and polities in which actors are involved and the plurality of modes of justification or criticism they use during various courses of action.

The particular character of informal networks, the forms of hierarchy and status they embody, and their social context matter. Montserrat Emperador Badimon shows how the self-limiting character of the mobilizations of Moroccan unemployed degree-holders protects them from certain forms of repression. Zeynep Gülru Göker demonstrates the power of silence and nonhierarchical feminine presence in diffusing repression of the Saturday vigils of mothers in Turkey. Joel Beinin and Marie Duboc explain how Egyptian workers' reliance on local networks simultaneously enables and limits the extent of their mobilization; it helps to sustain even protracted local strikes, while at the same time it impedes workers' coordination or unification on a national basis. The local character of the mobilizations also protected them from being perceived by the Mubarak regime as an intolerable threat. Amin Allal and Reinoud Leenders highlight that networks in different social milieus were differentially politicized in Tunisia and Syria. Such contextualizations of calculus are critical and highlight the importance of integrating history into the analysis of social movements.

We further propose that informal networks may be a key to understanding both the quotidian struggles for survival and social reproduction that absorb the energies of the vast majority of the population in the region, as well as how undercurrents of anger and dissatisfaction may be mobilized, the conditions that render mobilization possible, and why, despite the same levels of anger and dissatisfaction, mobilization is an episodic phenomenon and only in exceptional cases is sustained over a long period with a strategic objective like "democratization," "dignity," or regime change. The sustained mobilization of Egyptian workers persisted for over a decade without articulating a common strategic objective.

Conversely, through field research on Saudi Islamists and Egyptian leftists, Pascal Menoret and Marie Duboc show how persisting informal networks can facilitate subtle forms of disengagement. They explore the various reorientations actors give to their activism, converting it into diverse forms of commitment, without necessarily fully abandoning all forms of political activity. Here, networks are useful, not because they sustain or explain involvement but because changes in their form and density reflect and sustain the redirections of activism. Considering networks in this light allows us to examine the transformations of involvements in social movements in a way that avoids a binary understanding—involvement or apathy—of their functioning, one that usually relies on a switch-on, switch-off metaphor.

Finally, as Joe Stork, Zeynep Gülru Göker, Frédéric Vairel, and Jeanne Hersant note, throughout the Middle East and North Africa networks of former political activists, notwithstanding their past political positions, have adopted the global discourse of human rights, which both they and incumbent regimes perceive as a less direct form of contestation sanctioned by the neoliberal global order and which often, but not always, entails a lower risk of violent repression. The redeployment of networks of former political comrades in the arena of human rights advocacy suggests that under certain conditions—whether repression by authoritarian regimes or approval by NGOs based in the global North—networks can be reformed to pursue objectives very different from and even ideologically opposed to those for which they were initially formed.

CONTENTIOUS PRACTICES

McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly's *Dynamics of Contention* (2001) abandons the classical PPM approach to SMT in favor of investigating what people do when they protest and contest. By doing so, they return to a major insight of the late Charles Tilly (1986, 1995, 2008)—the study of repertoires of collective action. We embrace this development and seek to advance it through describing and explaining the internal structures of protest movements in the Middle East and North Africa and how they behave or conduct their affairs. These questions are related to the meaning of contentious action and to its very possibility. Contention is never self-evident, especially in authoritarian contexts.

Tilly's notion of a repertoire of collective action links best the logics of action and the logics of context. At any given time in a society there are a limited number of ways to have one's voice heard, consisting of "a rather small number of alternative ways to act collectively" (Tilly 1995, 26). However, over a longer time frame, the methods of protest are more varied: political struggles offer opportunities for learning and experimentation, as they provide the occasions for sedimenting these experiences. As Traugott (1995, 2) suggests:

> The metaphor of the repertoire allowed him [Tilly] to stress, without unnecessary teleological implications, both the great continuity that collective action exhibits over many generations and the sweeping changes in the accepted form of protest that occur only at long intervals.

Our interest in the repertoire of collective action is not only to underline the scarcity of methods of protest or the instrumental dimension of protest.