

Introduction

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Introduction

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Sidney Tarrow wrote that "political scientists are likely to focus on 'protest,' sociologists to study 'movements,' and historians to write of 'riot,' 'rebellion,' and 'revolution.'"¹

Regardless of differences in terminology, acts of collective protest in society have attracted many social scientists and historians as subjects of research. Through the analysis of collective actions, we come to understand the nature of the social structure in the community, value systems and the patterns of behavior of major actors in the society, as well as the relations between social and political groups. We can also observe how networks work under which conditions, and how the masses are mobilized into certain movements. The dynamism of the society itself is revealed in the act of social protest.

We emphasize the terminological difference, however, between "protest" and "collective action" in general. The former can be applied to the collective action against a certain target, that is, against something related to authority—any kind of authority, whether it be political, social, economic, or cultural. We may find, in most cases of "protest," a situation which contains some form of unbalanced distribution of power, or hegemonic structure in society.

Representative cases can be seen in anti-colonialism movements in the third world. In the Middle East and Central Asia, resistances were led by local social forces that revolted against foreign rule (Western colonialist dominance over their territory and people) at the end of the nineteenth century and in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The revolts were often legitimized by traditional social moral frames such as religious or communal values, and people were mobilized through autonomous cohesion based on tribal and feudal relationships. The forms of protest also varied, with some taking the shape of peasants' revolts (in Egypt in 1919, for example), and others being perceived as resistances led by religious leaderships (the tobacco boycott movement in Iran in 1891, and the anti-British uprising in Iraq in 1920). Prior to these rather organized movements, a

number of so-called "primitive revolts," as Hobsbawm names them,² could be observed in the beginning of the Western invasion of the Middle East.

This kind of act of protest occurs not only in situations of pure colonial control. Cole points out that "colonies often existed before colonialism," especially in the Middle East, under what "has come to be called 'informal empire.'" This has much in common, he argues, "with twentieth century neo-colonialism, where the former colonial or dominant power continues to wield exaggerated influence even after desalinization and the establishment of an indigenous regime."³

The notion of "protest against foreign intervention" turned out to be a key source of legitimacy for nationalist movements in decolorized states. Slogans, ideologies and ethics in movements are important factors for mobilizing the masses to collective action. During the decades after the independence of the Middle Eastern countries, nationalist movements succeeded to some extent in molding proto-national or national sentiments among the population into national identity. Just as Cole classifies the revolution in Iran in 1979 as a revolt against the "informal empire" under the pro-Western Shah regime, most of the political protests against existing regime have been legitimized as "protests for national liberation against puppet regimes of Western imperialism."

Nationalist movements in the Middle East, however, lost their power to unify the masses after they succeeded in monopolizing the state apparatus in the 1960s. Most of the nationalist forces turned out to be authoritarian regimes, and they failed to establish systems for equal representation and political participation by the people. Their legitimacy of control decreased as the ruling elites formed a kind of new privileged class, especially in cases when power was transferred along hereditary lines. Consolidation among the ruling elites was mainly based upon traditional conjunctures, such as kinship ties and patron-client relationships. As they failed to establish the modern civil institutions required to mobilize the individuals, most of the nationalist regimes came to depend on the coercive measure for this purpose. They made full use of the "agents of social control," to use Oberschall's term,⁴ such as military or security forces.

It is often remarked that after the 1970s, Islamist movements replaced the nationalist movements as the major actors of social protests in the Middle East, and then gradually spread to Central Asia and other areas where Muslims reside.

Most social scientists understand that religion in general plays an important role in social movements. According to the recent scholars of

resource mobilization theory, the following elements are crucial for the success of social movements: political opportunity structures, mobilizing structures, the repertoire of contents, and the framing process. In each element, religion offers rich resources: religious beliefs and ethics can be easily used as reference for framing, i.e., generalizing a grievance, shaping collective identities, and showing a distinction between good and evil. Religious institutions often turn into centers of recruiting networks, which can be the basis for a mobilizing structure. Religious customs and rituals among communities of believers prepare a repertoire of protests. Just as Oberschall underlines the significance of the role of Catholic churches in the Eastern European revolts at the end of the 1980s,⁵ we can guess that Islam might play a similar role in social movements in the Middle East and Central Asia.

Even granted the general compatibility of religion with social movements, however, we cannot neglect historical structures in the role of Islam in acts of protest. Kato, in discussing the social characteristics of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, highlights the distinction between "Islamic" movements in the pre-modern era (before the latter half of the nineteenth century) and those of the modern era.⁶ He argues that the pre-modern social movements in Muslim communities were inevitably "Islamic" in their value systems, that their codes and patterns of perception were based on Islam, and that it is meaningless to distinguish whether they were Islamic or non-Islamic. Participants of the revolts during the beginning and the middle of the nineteenth century were mobs who joined simply because the basis of their life had been destabilized and undermined, and they did so according to their institutionalized unconscious value system—which was based on Islam—at that time.

However, acts of protest in the modern era, he continues, were different in quality from these collective behaviors in pre-modern times. This is because actors in the modern movements had to be fully aware and conscious of their socio-political position in relation to the surrounding political system and environment. The masses were mobilized onto the political stage, and were organized according to interest groups, or along ideological or ethnic lines. Islam, at this stage, appeared as one of the various political directions, and it was the Muslim Brotherhood that systematized and organized Islamic elements among the people in this sense. Here Islam meant popular Islam, or Islam as a daily experience, rather than elite Islam or Islam as an ideological system.

Kato emphasizes the presence of the masses as a characteristic of Islamic

social movements in modern times. Bayat, then, proceeds to analyze the differences in the ways of mobilizing the masses in contemporary Islamic movements.⁷ He conducted a comparative study of the Iranian revolution and Islamist movement in Egypt, concluding that the former was “political” and “revolutionary,” and that the latter had a “social” and “movement character.”

The biggest difference he perceives between Islamic activism in Iran and Egypt is the institutionalization and sustainability of the movements. The objective of Islamists in the Iranian revolution was to capture state power, and it was a “revolution without a strong Islamic movement”. He finds that Islamist activities in Egypt, on the contrary, constituted a social movement that “give[s] rise to social and cultural sub-systems which usually co-exist . . . within the dominant order,” and “brought about significant changes within the civil society,” providing “alternative social, cultural, and moral community.” He adapts Gramsci’s notion of “passive revolution” to the latter, presupposing the presence of civil society in Egypt; “a true revolution is not just winning the state power but winning the society by institutional, intellectual, and moral hegemony.”

The works of these three scholars—Cole, Kato, and Bayat—were the starting points for our project on “Social Protest and Nation-Building in the Middle East and Central Asia.” Sharing a common understanding of the role of Islam in modern and contemporary social movements in the Middle East and Central Asia, the authors of this book cast the basic questions as follows: if Islam as a religious value system played a major role in the formation of proto-nationalism and gave legitimacy to mobilizing protest movements against “foreign” rule, when did Islam give way to the secular nationalism as a core notion for community-building? When did “the foreign” become the target of popular protest? Do they protest against imperialist power, i.e., the external enemy, or against their own authoritarian regime, that is the enemy within? Or are the two merely different sides of the same coin? If contemporary Islamic movements mainly protest against the enemy within, what is the difference between the roles of Islam in the nineteenth century and contemporary Muslim societies in offering legitimacy to these protest movements? On what kind of social identities did and do they mobilize the masses into the movements? When challenged, on what principles do the regimes try to integrate their nationals? Does globalization affect the nature of social movements as well as that of the states?

It is obvious that the process of nation-building and the relation between the state and society plays a crucial role in the course of social movements. In the first part of this book, the scholars concentrate on ana-

lyzing the basic backgrounds which nurture social movements in the Middle East and Central Asia; i.e., the major political thoughts on community-building, social identities, state-society relationships, and cultural and ethnic authenticity in the local community. To understand the general environments which have generated various types of social movements, it is necessary to survey the historical development of modern political thoughts in the above areas.

In the first chapter, al-Charif casts the following fundamental question on Arab political thought: throughout the attempts at modernization, starting from religious reform and moving into Arab nationalism, what is it that prevented Arab societies from establishing the values of modernity? Answering this question, al-Charif insists that the Arab renaissance project stumbled because of the failure of the cultural revolution of the late nineteenth century, which was fostered by Arab enlightenment intellectuals such as al-Afghānī and ‘Abduh. He emphasizes the importance of the religious reform movement which came into being as a consequence of their contacts with the West and its modern civilization. In his opinions, however, these horizons were soon closed when Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā started to attack “those who are promoting European tradition.” On the other hand, he argues that the Arab nationalism, along with the Islamism and Marxism that were crystallized in the 1920s, denied these earlier attempts of cultural reform, and the Arab nationalists failed to secularize their demands. The Arab nationalists also neglected the significance of this religious reform when they focused only on the freedom of their fatherland, at the expense of civil freedom. According to al-Charif, they became incapable of distinguishing the “West” as enlightenment and rationalism from the “West” as imperialism, hegemony, and monopoly.

The controversial stance of Arab political elites on their relationship with “the West” can still be seen in contemporary Arab nationalists regimes. Yassin in the Chapter 2 describes this as a cultural crisis in the Arab world. He points out that the radical Arab regimes had based their legitimacy on achieving national independence and social equality, but that they entered into various internal battles with competing political forces, ending with their liquidation, as well as their defeat in the 1967 War against Israel. To save their eroding legitimacy, he argues, some regimes were inclined to introduce restricted political pluralism, while others adopted direct measures for the oppression of political groups, leading to the emergence of a pattern of authoritarian states. In this situation, political conflicts emerged both *between* the state and the emerging civil society, and *within* the civil society, i.e., between the secular democratic trend and the fundamental Islamic

trend. Here he emphasizes that the nature of the protesting Islamic movements was formed as a consequence of the erosion of the legitimacy of contemporary political systems. He shares the understanding with al-Charif when he notes the Islamic opposition's preference to overthrow the regime holding power before working in the enlightenment sphere to create a popular base.

In the post-Soviet states in Central Asia and the Caucasus, conflicts between nationalist authoritarian regimes and social protest movements are not as controversial as in the above-mentioned situation in Arab society. Uyama, in Chapter 3, describes the reasons behind the general weakness of social protest movements against the strong states of Central Asia. He ascribes it to the process of nation-building and to globalization. The present regimes have adopted the nationalistic agendas of the opposition, portraying themselves as the founders of the states to ensure that opposition forces could be easily absorbed, as this was a high priority of the nation-building for the newly-independent Central Asian states. At the same time, Uyama claims, the notion that globalization can threaten sovereignty has stimulated the defense of statehood and has been used to convince people of the negative effects of political and social protest against the statehood.

In Chapter 4, Shnirelman points out how, in order to consolidate statehood, state authorities mobilize and promote ethnic identity to legitimate both their territorial and political claims in the Northern Caucasus, especially through the process of introducing the ancient notion of the "Alan State" there. He focuses on the "views of the past" developed by North Caucasian intellectuals in molding their collective identities in the post-Soviet period, and how the official ideology has tried to promote its remote ethnic ancestry. Ethnicity served as a very important political resource, and authorities tried to gain legitimacy for their territorial control by referring to ancestors who lived at the area from time immemorial. This kind of the identity, however, can be reinterpreted and replaced. It is not, he highlights, different cultural values per se that cause ethnic conflicts, but rather the ideological and political leaders mobilize various cultural values to serve their own current interests; i.e., nation-building in their own way.

After painting a general picture of the backgrounds of the social protest movements and the role of the state in the nation-building process in the Middle East and Central Asia, we deal with case studies of social movements in each area and country. Kurita, in Chapter 5, deals with the Mahdist movement in the nineteenth century, the 1924 Revolution, and the revolutionary movement of the Communist Party in the twentieth century

in Sudan, examining them as continuous efforts of the people, with free will and decision, in search for a nation-state. While the Mahdist movement in nineteenth century Sudan has been treated as an Islamic movement because of the "Islam-ness" of the concept of the "Mahdi," Kurita emphasizes its characteristic as a protest against excessive taxation by the Ottoman-Egyptian regime, and the existence of various forces within the movement, looking especially at the role of the modern and urban social forces. From this point of view, she sees little discontinuity between the supporters of the Mahdist movement and those of the 1924 Revolution, which she understands as a missing link between the Mahdist movement and the Sudanese Communist Party in the twentieth century; both were national liberation movements against imperialism.

Protest movements in the form of Islamic movements against the "foreign invader" can also be seen in Central Asia in the early twentieth century. Obiya, in Chapter 6, analyses the anti-Soviet rebellions called Basmachi movements in Ferghana, Bukhara, Eastern Bukhara and Khorazm after the 1917 Russian revolution. These were negatively defined as anti-revolutionary bourgeois-nationalistic movements in the Soviet era, though since perestroika they have been re-examined as a national liberation movement. She emphasizes that the Soviet policy at that time was frustrating to the people, as it destroyed the traditional Islamic social system, and that the call to "protest Islam" meant restoring the traditional way of life in Central Asia.

Thus the proto-national protest movements in their early days often took the form of a mixture of religious-communal-national collective actions. However, whenever the primordial feelings of the local population against foreign rule developed into any form of ideology for state-building, contradictions tended to emerge between liberation theories and others hoping to use them as tools for national integration. Aoyama discusses the transformation of Arab nationalism in Syria through its process of politicization in Chapter 7, and attempts to find the reason for the inconsistency between the thoughts and realities of Arab nationalism. Through analyzing the ideas of Wahīb al-Ghānim, one of the eldest disciples of Zakī al-Arsūzī, the founder of the Arab Ba'ṯh nationalist movement, Aoyama tries to show how, in the 1960s, the mainstream of the Party came to see itself as a "vanguard" of the people and thus became intolerant of differing opinions. The more the Ba'ṯhists adapted themselves to the reality of politics in order to hold power, the more they came to rely on a series of coercive measures to consolidate their own rule.

When the state puts more emphasis on rapid and coercive state- or nation-building, than on representing local and national identities, social

protest movement tend to target the authoritarian state as an expansion of their struggle against "foreign rule." In Chapter 8, Yoshimura examines the protest movements in Iran during the days of Reza Shah (1925–41), which can be considered as acts of protest in the "informal empire," following Cole's terms. He analyses the nature of the Iranian protest movements at that time, taking the socio-economic situation into consideration, and focuses on the role of the Shi'i clergy, whose popular influence was the main obstacle for the Shah. Nevertheless, he admits, the social protest led by the Shi'i clergy lacked concrete state-building aims, and this not only prevented the spread of the movements to the national level but also accelerated its easy disintegration.

According to Yoshimura, the Islamic clergy can be a major social force against regimes, especially when they adopt coercive methods to undermine the social influences of local leaderships in order to introduce secular state systems. This is what happened in contemporary Iraq under the Ba'thi regime. In Chapter 9, Sakai focuses on the role of Islamic political parties in the countrywide uprising that occurred just after the Gulf War in 1991, and how they perceived the uprising, through analyzing the various discourses of the opposition forces against the regime. She examines the successes and failures of the mass mobilization along with the Islamic rhetoric, and ascribes the reason for the ultimate failure of the uprising to the lack of institutionalization and unified slogans among the masses. As a result, the uprising could be understood as a mere gathering of atomized individuals under the authoritarian regime. She also hints at the possibility for laying the base for a future civil society in rebuilding the communal networks based on religious customs after the uprising.

Confrontations between nation-building and social protest can be seen more vividly in Central Asia, and especially in Tajikistan, where Islamic movements have been active since the end of the 1980s. Olimova, in Chapter 10, describes how the Islamic movements there emerged as a part of the power struggle of the regional counter-elites against the newly established state elites, and as main actors for mobilizing the people rapidly, offering a new ideology for protest against the regime. She sheds light on the positive results of the Peace Accords between the states and Islamic groups, which created a way to include the Islamic movement into the secular political system of democracy.

In the above three chapters, the authors highlight the various social factors involved in challenging the state's role in nation-building, taking it for granted that the social identities, as well as ethnic/cultural/tribal cleavages in contemporary issues in the Middle East and Central Asia, may

function as significant factors in mobilizing social movements. Though the notion of the "nation" is a modern invention, it does work as a base for cohesion or segmentation when a territorial state launches the project of nation-building. People's perceptions of the identity of the nation depend deeply upon how the regime defines its nationalities. Oka, in Chapter 11, beginning from the premise of the existence of ethnic cleavages in Kazakhstan, reports on research regarding the reactions of intellectuals towards the government policy on nationalities, along ethnic segmentation lines. She recognizes that Kazakhstan's nation-building has been a policy directed from above and that the political parties and movements do not play an important role in its politics. Unlike the preceding examples from multi-ethnic or multi-sectarian countries, however, the discrimination felt by the ethnic minorities in the policy on nationalities has not led to protest movements against the regime. She expresses concern that the government policy may lead to ethnic tension in the future if the monopolization of state structures by the Kazakhs progresses further.

Through analyses of various case studies in the Middle East and Central Asia, this volume sketches a general picture of the social movements, their relations with the states and the role of Islam in these areas. Going back to the initial questions we posed in this short introductory essay, however, we have to admit that yet we have not answered them all; we need further studies, especially on the notion of "civil society," as some of the authors here recognize it as key argument for the future relation between the state and society. It is almost impossible to discuss contemporary social movements without examining the issue of civil society. It is worth remembering that there was an inspiring academic program on civil society in the Middle East, organized by Norton and other scholars from the United States and Middle Eastern countries during 1992–1995,⁸ followed by a number of seminars, symposiums, and publications on that subject.

Although scholars at that time expressed expectations for a flourishing of civil society against the authoritarian regime in the Middle East, it did not happen. Many of the chapters in this volume, indeed, point to the continuing strength of the authoritarian states and the weakness of society in the process of nation-building. We observe various cases that resulted in violent clashes between the state and social protests based on Islam, which did not develop as social forces in search of representation in the existing political structure. Some, in fact, ended up being alienated even from their social bases. This also relates to how we define Islamic movements in civil society. As Schwedler comments on Norton's project, we will blind our-

selves to the fact that the Islamists have been most effective in “challenging government authority and responding to citizens’ needs and concerns” if we exclude them from the sphere of civil society, and we “may overlook fundamental differences in political aspirations that even a categorical distinction between moderates and radicals does not fully capture,” if we include them.⁹

We may say that what is needed to solve this dilemma is to re-examine the dual roles of Islamism in its revolutionary and civil/social nature. In this way, our project on social movements in the modern and contemporary history in the Middle East and Central Asia can also contribute, I believe, to further study on civil society in the concerned area.

Notes:

- 1 Sidney Tarrow, *Struggle, Politics, and Reform: Collective Action, Social Movements, and Cycles of Protest* (Cornell Studies in International Affairs Western Societies Papers No. 21, Ithaca: Cornell University, 1991), p. 5.
- 2 E. J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels, Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959).
- 3 Juan R.I. Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt’s ‘Urabi Movement* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 3–13.
- 4 Anthony Oberschall, *Social Movements: Ideologies, Interests, and Identities* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1993), p. 151.
- 5 Anthony Oberschall, “Opportunities and Framing in the Eastern European Revolts of 1989”, in Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy & Mayer A. Zald eds., *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures and Cultural Framings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- 6 Hiroshi Kato, “Ejiputo Gendaishi ni okeru Musurimu Douhoudan” (Muslim Brotherhood in the Egyptian Modern History), in Yasushi Kosugi ed., *Musurimu Douhoudan—Kenkyu no Kadai to Tenbou* (Muslim Brotherhood: Purpose and Prospect of Its Study), (Niigata: Kokusai Daigaku, 1989).
- 7 Asef Bayat, “Revolution without Movement, Movement without Revolution: Comparing Islamic Activism in Iran and Egypt,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 40, No.1, January 1998, pp. 136–169.
- 8 Augustus Richard Norton, “Introduction,” *Civil Society in the Middle East* (Leiden/New York; E.J.Brill, 1995); Jillian Schwedler, “Introduction: Civil Society and the Study of Middle East Politics,” in *Toward Civil Society in the Middle East?* (Boulder, Colo.: L. Rienner 1995).
- 9 Schwedler, “Introduction”, p. 14.