



Edited by Frédéric Volpi and James M. Jasper

Microfoundations of the Arab Uprisings

Mapping Interactions
between Regimes and Protesters

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Microfoundations of the Arab Uprisings

Protest and Social Movements

Recent years have seen an explosion of protest movements around the world, and academic theories are racing to catch up with them. This series aims to further our understanding of the origins, dealings, decisions, and outcomes of social movements by fostering dialogue among many traditions of thought, across European nations and across continents. All theoretical perspectives are welcome. Books in the series typically combine theory with empirical research, dealing with various types of mobilization, from neighborhood groups to revolutions. We especially welcome work that synthesizes or compares different approaches to social movements, such as cultural and structural traditions, micro- and macro-social, economic and ideal, or qualitative and quantitative. Books in the series will be published in English. One goal is to encourage non-native speakers to introduce their work to Anglophone audiences. Another is to maximize accessibility: all books will be available in open access within a year after printed publication.

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*Edited by
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*For all those who have fought, and sometimes died,
for their rights and dreams*

Table of Contents

Preface	9
<i>Frédéric Volpi and James M. Jasper</i>	
Introduction	11
Rethinking Mobilization after the Arab Uprisings	
<i>James M. Jasper and Frédéric Volpi</i>	
1 The Social Life of Contentious Ideas	41
Piracy and Unruly, Translocal Appropriation in the Arab Uprisings and Beyond	
<i>John Chalcraft</i>	
2 Routines and Ruptures in Anti-Israeli Protests in Jordan	67
<i>Jillian Schwedler</i>	
3 Shaping Contention as a Salafi Movement	89
The Rise and Fall of Ansar al-Sharia in Post-Revolutionary Tunisia	
<i>Frédéric Volpi</i>	
4 Contingency and Agency in a Turning Point Event	111
March 18, 2011, in Daraa, Syria	
<i>Wendy Pearlman</i>	
5 It Takes Two (or More) to Tango	135
The Local Coproduction of the Alexandrian Revolutionary Moment	
<i>Youssef El Chazli</i>	
6 Violence, Social Actors, and Subjectivation in the Egyptian Revolution	159
<i>Farhad Khosrokhavar</i>	
Conclusion	183
Unruly Protest	
<i>Charles Kurzman</i>	
Index	193

Preface

This book originated in a roundtable discussion at the annual convention of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA), in Washington, DC, in November 2014. The roundtable itself was an attempt to apply social movement theory to the 2011 Arab uprising, as well as to bring the Arab uprisings into social movement theory. Charlie Kurzman and Frédéric Volpi were the initial instigators, soon joined by Jim Jasper, Jeff Goodwin, Farhad Khosrokhavar, and Wendy Pearlman.

The lively and productive dialogue at the MESA conference encouraged us to develop this project further. The roundtable revealed the widespread dissatisfaction – among both speakers and the audience – with the way that crude structural models of social mobilization were commonly invoked to explain protest mobilization during and after the Arab uprisings. This initial dissatisfaction turned into an effort to outline more useful alternative approaches.

While not all of the participants to the roundtable were able to contribute to this edited volume, other scholars who had not attended the initial conference came on board, namely Jillian Schwedler, John Chalcraft, and Youssef El Chazli.

Through our joint efforts, we hope to provide signposts for theories of mobilization that ground themselves on microinteractions between pro- and anti-regime actors. The contributions to the book thus capture and analyze very specific episodes of contestation in different parts of the Middle East since 2011. While the book explicitly seeks to deepen the relationship between social movement perspectives and Middle Eastern specialism, it is also designed to show the general conceptual and analytical relevance of these perspectives for the study of social mobilization and political change.

To stress the multifaceted relevance of this microinteractionist approach, the chapters were not compiled as a systematic account of protest events in the countries of the Middle East at the time of the Arab uprisings. Instead, we selected different types of protest mobilization, whether successful or not, by different types of players, within and across the countries of the region.

Rather than provide a review of significant protest movements in the Middle East, we sought to illustrate and analyze how social mobilization was constructed (and deconstructed) by the players in different political arenas. We illustrate the dynamics of how authoritarianisms were challenged by both strategic and accidental interactions between multiple players during the crisis events that constitute the Arab uprisings.

Frédéric Volpi and James M. Jasper

Introduction

Rethinking Mobilization after the Arab Uprisings¹

James M. Jasper and Frédéric Volpi

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Abstract

This introduction critically reviews the insights provided by mainstream social movement theory on the mobilization processes of the Arab uprisings. To address their limitations, the chapter outlines an interactionist perspective grounded in the relationship between pro- and anti-regime players across different arenas. This focus on the microfoundations of political action documents how the different players involved viewed their actions and that of others. In this perspective, addressing the interactions between players requires considering a wide range of factors, from emotional reactions to confusion, that shape strategic choices. Constructing an explanation from the ground up enables us to explain more systematically the patterns of social mobilization and state responses observed during such waves of protests.

Keywords: social movement theory, players and arenas, microfoundations of political action, Middle East politics, Arab uprisings

“Opportunities multiply as they are seized.”

– Sun Tzu

¹ We thank John Chalcraft, Jan Willem Duyvendak, Teije Hidde Donker, Charlie Kurzman, and Jillian Schwedler for comments on earlier drafts.

The protests that spread across North Africa and the Middle East in 2011 were one of the great explosions of political activity in modern history, comparable to 1848 or 1989. The world watched as regimes were overthrown in four countries, and extensive protests occurred in a dozen more. Hopefully dubbed the “Arab Spring,” most of these movements have been deeply disappointed and some violently repressed. Even today several countries continue to be devastated by civil wars. The democratic transition in Tunisia is the only clear political advance so far.

The world’s fascination is proven by hundreds of articles and books, published in dozens of languages, about the uprisings and their outcomes. Many are broad overviews, often written in the first flush of excitement in or after 2011, which tried to make sense of events by placing them in grand metanarratives of history or general theories of social change and revolution. Most of the early work was written by popular journalists, or by scholars writing popular journalism. Outside observers initially attributed the uprisings to broad structural developments such as food insecurity (Harrigan 2014), overeducated and underemployed youth (Murphy 2012), neoliberalism (Talani 2014), or information and communication technologies (Hussain and Howard 2013).

Enough time has passed for us to dig deeper, using the research tools of social science to pinpoint specific causal dynamics of the uprisings. Careful interviews, surveys, and ethnographic immersion can be linked to sophisticated theories of human action and politics. In most cases, fine-grained micro-level descriptions can and should replace crude macro-level correlations (Schwedler 2015). Historians of political science will recognize echoes of the behavioral revolution of the 1950s, although that effort was limited by the crude theories of emotion, cognition, and culture available at the time (Dahl 1961). Revolutions in each of those fields have provided us with a wealth of new conceptual tools for understanding the microfoundations of political action.

The evidence obtained during or just after the Arab uprisings can shed light on scholarly theories of protest, revolution, and democratization. Every great wave of activity forces us to refashion our theories. Just as 1848 gave us crowd theories, fascism inspired mass-society theories, and 1968 suggested new-social-movement theory, so scholars must pour over what we know about the Arab uprisings in order to revise our own theories of politics. We hope this book can at least cheer on that long process, pointing in some directions it is already taking.

From Structures to Arenas

Twenty years ago there was more consensus, at least in the United States, over how to study protest and political contention. The political-process paradigm of social movements reached its peak in 1996, with the publication of Doug McAdam, John McCarthy, and Mayer Zald's edited volume, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*. Resource-mobilization and political-opportunity theories coalesced, with culture thrown in as well, to establish the main outlines of an "emerging synthesis" of how scholars would henceforth explain social movements and related phenomena. The three basic building blocks were political opportunity structures, which summarized what was important about the external political environment, mobilizing structures, which were the networks and other factors that helped people to assemble, and cultural frames to acknowledge some subjective element.²

Although this structural framework inspired vast quantities of research – continuing today – cracks in the edifice appeared immediately. In the volume itself, David Meyer and William Gamson (1996) wondered if the concept of political opportunity structures had not been overextended to cover too many diverse phenomena, soaking up all the explanatory power in many models. Goodwin and Jasper (1999) soon attacked the entire paradigm as overly structural, ignoring strategic, emotional, and most cultural dimensions of protest. Two years later McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001), the leading architects of political process theory, retreated to the concept of mechanisms in an effort to breathe more dynamism and culture into what they now admitted had been overly structural theories.

Efforts to rethink the idea of political opportunity structures have taken three main forms. One was to acknowledge the cultural work that goes into opportunities: they are not objective moments when structures open up, regardless of people's ideas about them; instead, protestors can create them with the right interpretive work, including emotions. They are subjective openings that need to be imagined, and they depend on decisions made by all the players in several arenas (Goodwin and Jasper 2012; Kurzman 2004a).

A second frequent response to criticism was to distinguish different types of opportunity structures, such as discursive opportunity structures,

2 In line with true structuralism, political opportunity structures were supposed to be entirely objective. McAdam insisted that the "kinds of structural changes and power shifts that are most defensibly conceived of as *political* opportunities should not be confused with the collective processes by which these changes are interpreted and framed" (1996, 25-26).

emotional opportunity structures, legal opportunity structures, or corporate opportunity structures. This proliferation was a tacit recognition of the other players in the environment for protestors: corporate opportunities were actually the goals and strategic moves of corporations; legal opportunities were changes in formal laws or their interpretations; and so on. The structural language was kept, limiting the analysis of these other players as players. Other players' decisions and actions were still merely external "opportunity structures" for protestors.

A third approach was to specify political structures in more detail. Amenta (2006) offered a political mediation model in which strategies must be matched to specific arenas, replacing the language of political opportunity structures with concepts more familiar in political science such as electoral laws and the goals of coalitions of legislators (Amenta et al. 2002). Bloom (2015) argues that political opportunities favor some *tactics* over others, rather than favoring particular *groups*, while Boudreau (2004) suggests that regimes often choose between repressing certain groups or repressing certain tactics (with the aim of "crafting" nonthreatening forms of political contention).

McAdam traded in the language of political opportunity structures, which he had largely promulgated (McAdam 1982), for that of fields (Fligstein and McAdam 2012). Borrowed from Bourdieu, who used the idea mostly to analyze intellectual production rather than directly political interactions (Bourdieu 1993), the term "field" focuses on competition among individuals, but also recognizes that there can be different kinds of players in the same field. This was a useful step beyond the image of a social movement facing its structural environment, allowing us to view that environment as populated by many different types of players.

Fields are social structure, not political structure, and run some risk of circularity: social structure is meant to explain patterns of behavior, yet social structure consists of those patterns of behavior. Bourdieu avoided circularity through the idea of types of capital, which players can bring with them from the outside, and with habitus, the dispositions and skills they deploy in their fields. But often the social skills useful in a field are specific to that field, returning to a kind of circular model. Formal rules are mostly imposed from the outside in Bourdieu's fields, by the state. Fligstein and McAdam try to build more rules into their idea of a field, but in the end it remains social structure: any interaction between two players is its own field, they say, with the result that there are millions of fields in a society.

Fields share many of the limitations of the concept of institutions, a more traditional attempt to describe at the same time patterns of action

and the norms and rules that govern them. In the hands of Talcott Parsons, institutions were the embodiment of underlying values through the norms and roles that apply them to concrete situations. According to his critics, such as Philip Selznick and Alvin Gouldner, there is less consensus over those values than Parsons assumed, and in fact institutions are frequently riddled with conflict. These scholars shifted from institutions to formal organizations to show that not all organizations are well institutionalized in the sense of having shared norms.

The next swing of the intellectual pendulum brought neo-institutionalism, which restored some of the consensus that Parsons had posited, while replacing its basis; it was no longer grounded on some mysterious moral values, but on shared cognitive understandings (DiMaggio and Powell 1991). This was in line with the cultural turn in the social sciences (Meyer and Rowan 1977).

The terminologies of fields and institutions were naturally combined in “institutional fields.” As Verta Taylor and Mayer Zald (2010, 307) put it, echoing Fligstein and McAdam, “The institutional field in which a social movement mobilizes includes a large array of actors held together by common cultural understandings, practices, and rules, but it may also be driven by conflicting logics and beliefs about how practices and roles tied to the institution ought to be enacted.” The institutional tradition emphasizes those common understandings and practices, while the field tradition highlights conflict (although that conflict is often seen as occurring alongside many shared understandings). In our view, we need to distinguish the rules and traditions of arenas from the norms and expectations of players, who often break the rules or create new arenas. Subalterns, hoping to remake arenas to their own liking, may follow different norms than elites, and the new arenas may reflect different institutional traditions.

A vocabulary of players and arenas has emerged in recent years as a commonsense effort to integrate insights into political structure derived from process and field theory with cultural insights into the construction of players and their goals, while not conflating the two (Duyvendak and Jasper 2015; Jasper and Duyvendak 2015). Arenas are *designated physical places where decisions are made*, with a variety of objects ranging from quotes chiseled into the walls to doors and seats, but also with formal rules, informal expectations, and supportive technologies, as well as with something at stake in the decisions made. (Although some authors use the term more metaphorically, or as an aggregate, such as public opinion or the media as arenas (Duyvendak and Fillieule 2015).) The players need not be copresent, as decisions can be made via the internet in a dispersed fashion. Arenas contain players with different roles and different strengths:

there is no assumption of fairness or equality among them. (There are also backstages where important preparation or morale building takes place, such as fundraisers or pep talks, but they do not involve interaction with other players.)

Players consist of individuals or groups *who have some sense of a shared identity, some shared goals, and who cooperate in at least one arena* (usually several arenas at the same time, and sometimes in different roles: as spectators in some arenas, direct players in others, judges and referees, advisors, and so on (Amenta, Caren, and Tierney 2015)). Both players and arenas reflect the weight of history: of past decisions, accumulations, understandings and expectations, physical stockpiles – an interactive approach does not assume that each interaction starts from scratch, ready to be defined and negotiated willy-nilly.

By reflecting history, both arenas and players contain some structural influences, but they bring these to bear on concrete interactions. Resources such as money are distributed according to laws, coercion, and past interactions (or the vague term “capitalism”), but they only matter when players use them to do things, to pay off other players for instance. Players have the capacities (including not only their physical capacities but their social skills, knowledge, network ties, and so on) that they do because of social and political structures. Arenas’ rules also reflect how they were established, through strategic interactions which had relative winners and losers. Some players were excluded from the founding engagements, while others were included but lacked much influence on the arenas created.

This cultural-strategic – and interactive – framework separates the moving parts in our theories instead of conflating or combining them. It gives equal weight to players and to arenas, and acknowledges a number of different kinds of players. Although we may focus on one player, the approach discourages us from reducing the other players to the status of structures or a static environment. Another advantage is that it reflects the everyday language that players themselves often use.

A corresponding drawback is that the term “player” seems to attribute too much unity to groups of protestors and to states. Players are constantly shifting, dissolving, and recombining. Considerable research has observed looser connections, such as networks and communities, that enable mobilization and which tie protestors together. Because players are never in full agreement, we need to be able to analyze them also as arenas in which decisions are made: to look at their internal operations. The temporary unity attributed to players at a given time or place is an analytical device to cope with such multiplicity in rapidly evolving political situations. (Arenas

also change constantly, and provide considerable flexibility within their apparent rules.)

The overall trend in these theoretical shifts has been away from vague macro-level structures that are posited by the observer but are otherwise invisible, toward concrete micro-level phenomena that are commonsensical and visible to anyone (Jasper 2010, 2012). You can see an arena, but not a political opportunity structure. You can sit down and read a law, but not a value. In many ways this change is in line with what is known as assembly theory or actor-network theory (Latour 2005): social action consists in bringing together individuals, objects, places, symbols and ideas, and more, in a way that accomplishes something. References to “the social,” whether it is Durkheim’s social facts, institutions, values, fields, or other imagined causal influences, are discouraged in this model. Only causes that can be observed concretely in a setting are valid ingredients in our descriptions, and once we have thick, fine-grained descriptions, we have already pretty much explained the actions. When we concatenate chains of these interactions together, we may be able to account for macro-level outcomes (Collins 2004).

Representing Social Movements in the Middle East

This trend toward micro-level details has helped scholars to recognize, criticize, and avoid various forms of essentialism, be it Middle Eastern, Arab, or Islamic. In the 1990s, regional specialists tackled the issue of the so-called “exceptionalism” of the region and of Islamist movements in particular. Decisively in the last two decades, scholarship on social movements and mobilization in the region has rejected most of the assumptions of exceptionalism about regional players and movements.³ Accepting the main tenets of mainstream social movement theory, regional specialists deployed conventional approaches to explain social and political mobilization in the Middle East, showing that Islamist movements are not inherently different from American and Western European movements. Structural approaches at the time usefully combated orientalism.

Regarding the most studied movement in the region, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), Munson (2001) used traditional notions of political opportunity structure to explain its early trajectory. Wickham (2002) emphasized the political opportunity lens to explain the resilience of the organization,

3 An early account “normalizing” the behaviors of Iranians during the Islamic revolution is Kurzman’s (1996) article on the 1979 Islamic revolution.

and resource mobilization theories to account for the evolving structure of the movement. In a more interactionist perspective, Clark (2004) also used these frameworks to examine the structural and strategic dynamics of the middle-class activists joining MB charities in Jordan, Egypt, and Yemen. Clark tested the boundaries of the structural perspectives on social mobilization by detailing the strategies of the different players involved, but her analysis ultimately remained focused on these models.

Wiktorowicz (2004) helpfully brought together authors using these prevailing theoretical perspectives to map the dynamics of Islamist movements across the Middle East. In addition to more conventional forms of mobilization, armed Islamist groups were also explained through resource mobilization, political opportunity structures, and ideological framing. In addition, contributors to the book's sections on cultural framing and on networking provided insights into the mechanisms of strategic (re)formulation of ideological and political orientations among and between Islamist movements. They corrected the latent tendency of identity-focused accounts of social mobilization, particularly in the case of Islamists, to overstate the structuring power of culture and ideology. Yet, in the comparative politics and security literature, there remained a pronounced tendency to rely on the salient identity traits of the Islamists to account for their strategic orientations and behaviors in the face of stable authoritarian regimes.

Beinin and Vairel (2011) complained just before the Arab uprisings that regional specialists and studies did not contribute to general theoretical debates on contemporary social movements. They noted, on the one hand, a "disinterest of the dominant currents in comparative politics or sociology in collective action and social movements in the Middle East and North Africa" (2011, 22) and, on the other hand, how little empirical research on social movements in the region contributed to challenging or revising the main approaches in social movement theory. A better dialogue between Middle East studies and social movement theory seemed to be needed, and the Arab uprisings provided just that opportunity.

The continuing inability of social movements (including violent movements) to change governance in the Middle East remained a puzzle to be solved through regional analyses of social mobilization inspired by the perspectives on social movements developed in a "Western" context. In the 2000s, once the issue of (non)"exceptional" mobilization had been resolved, the problem of political stasis became a central challenge. The longer the "exceptional" authoritarian resilience of Middle East regimes lasted, the more social movements were deemed to be structured by authoritarian bargains producing spaces and modes of contestation that

could not directly challenge the state.⁴ At best, the slow transformation of Turkey's social and political scene could be portrayed as a situation where traditional social movement activism appeared to have influenced governance (Tuğal 2009). Alternatively, normalization could be linked to the growing assertiveness of some of the better organized women's organizations making inroads into policy making (Moghadam 2001; Moghadam and Gheytauchi 2010) – even though the interactions between Islamist and feminist movements made it difficult to account for these developments in a linear narrative (Salime 2011). More often, before the 2011 uprisings, regime resilience allowed so-called Islamic exceptionalism to reappear in a new form.

The apparent tension between explaining the “normality” of social mobilization in the Middle East and the “abnormality” of its political outcomes led Asef Bayat to propose an alternative approach to activism in an authoritarian regional context where formal activities are continuously repressed by “hard” states. Throughout the 2000s Bayat progressively downplayed the specific relevance of Islamist activism, which he labeled post-Islamism to stress its ideological and political pragmatism, and increasingly emphasized instead the impact of more informal social networks (Bayat 2005, 2007). In *Life as Politics*, he coined the term “nonmovements” to refer to the “collective actions of noncollective actors” (Bayat 2010, 20). Because authoritarianism discouraged explicitly political movements in the region, Bayat argued, nonmovements “embodied shared practices of large numbers of ordinary people whose fragmented but similar activities trigger much social change, even though these practices were rarely guided by an ideology or recognizable leaderships and organizations” (2010, 15). In this perspective, contemporary Middle East politics created an exceptional social movement dynamic.

But positing the existence of a nonmovement without explicit structure or even collective identity requires considerable interpretative liberty. Regional specialists had investigated these grassroots networks before without bundling them together as a type of social movement (or nonmovement) (Singerman 1995). In addition, considering the strategic interactions between different players from the urban lower classes, Ismail (2006) noted that, individually and collectively, they could join forces to oppose state policies, but they could also side with the authorities in order to gain some

4 Scholarship on social movements in the Middle East before the Arab uprisings is similar to most comparative politics and sociology on the region at the time, which approached their subject matter in a context of political stasis. See, for example, Posusney and Angrist (2005).

advantage over their neighbors. If we look hard enough we can usually see players pursuing advantages in different arenas.

From Environments to Players

The environment for protestors includes not only structured arenas but also the other players at work in them. In more structural traditions players are less important than the arenas, and are typically seen as derived from those arenas: when a new arena arises, players with an interest at stake will almost automatically appear in order to take advantage of the arena. The basic insight is sound, but the automatic quality of the process cannot be taken for granted except perhaps under rational-choice assumptions of pure rationality based on objective interests. In the real world, it takes work to coordinate, identify, and mobilize a new player, or to redirect existing players to new arenas. As we saw, political opportunity structures have moved – partly – in the direction of incorporating players.

John Krinsky and Ann Mische (2013) have traced Charles Tilly's efforts to grapple with the question of players, and shown why he mostly avoided it. They quote from the manual he wrote in 1966 for coding disturbances in France: "Sets of participants belong to distinct formation to the extent they act collectively, communicate internally, oppose other sets of participants and/or are given specific identities meaningful outside the disturbance itself" (2013, 4). This could be a definition of players. But in his published work he was more deterred by what Krinsky and Mische call the paradox of actors, namely that they are constantly changing through interaction with others. Tilly followed actions rather than actors, defining the latter through their engagement with other actors, in a view heavily influenced by Marxism and in reaction against the institutionalism of Talcott Parsons. Identities shape action, but action can also shape identities.

In one version of the structural paradigm, waves of protest movements were seen as forming cycles, in which one phase helps to bring on the next phase, driven by shifts in political opportunities (Tarrow 1998). When windows of opportunity open, such as a decrease in repression, new movements quickly appear with their own demands. Early riser movements are joined by others, which eventually overwhelm the political system and close down opportunities. Again, only if interests are assumed to be simple, such as inclusion in the polity or material benefits, and these are assumed to be universal, can we assume that players are already there,

“classes in themselves” that easily turn into “classes for themselves” when opportunities appear.

If the political wing of process theory ignored the process of player formation, the economic (resource mobilization) wing had a place for it in the form of moral entrepreneurs who recognize where public opinion would favor new issues and might provide sufficient resources to launch social movement organizations. Because McCarthy and Zald (1977) saw social movement sectors and industries as parallel to markets, they expected competition among players. The formal organizations that were the main unit of analysis in their theory are relatively persistent and well-defined players. Regional specialists looking at cycles of social unrest in the Muslim world easily saw such moral entrepreneurs in Islamist leaders, but also in other influential religious, ethnic, or tribal players.

A great deal of the cultural turn in social-movement studies has aimed to show how players form. Foremost is the extensive research on collective identity, which shows that organizers and ideologists must work hard to label and delineate most movements before they can enter any arenas. There are different bases of identity. Although the paradigmatic image is an identity based on demographic categories of race, class, gender, or sexual orientation, identities can also form around favored tactics, organizational membership, the goals of a movement – or ideology and religion (Jasper 1997). Collective identities yield a range of benefits but also risks to groups as well as to individuals: any given identity fits some participants more comfortably than others (McGarry and Jasper 2015). Melucci (1996) saw identity processes and struggles as the core of social movements.

The role of changing identities in the recent wave of social mobilization in the Middle East remains understudied.⁵ Often, the Arab uprisings have been viewed primarily as the outcome of a long structural undermining of authoritarianism, leading to a situation in 2011 when protestors seized what was then an objective opportunity – even if regional experts did not see it coming – that corresponded to overdue rearticulations of power (Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds 2015). Such explanations see the identity of these players as predefined in relation to the existing authoritarian order, and they sideline the role of the protest events in shaping new political views, practices, and identities. Yet detailed analyses, such as Allal and Pierret’s (2013) collection, as well as those found in this book, highlight the relevance

5 More broadly, scholars have increasingly challenged the social and economic categories commonly used to box in social players in explanations of a long structural undermining of authoritarianism (Tripp 2013; Amar 2013).

of the transformations of identities and their attendant practices for the emergence of revolutionary players in 2011. For example, in Syria, informal social networks were important, but new structures and behaviors emerged alongside these preexisting entities, as previously distinct networks merged into one another when the unrest and then conflict gained momentum (Leenders 2012; Leenders and Heydemann 2012).

Identities can and usually do change through strategic interactions. Repeatedly in the region, the common diagnostic and prognostic framing derived from Islamism required substantial reframing. Motivational framing through Islamist lenses lost some of its relevance during the uprisings and the early post-uprisings period, when transnational, armed Islamist networks were unable to impose themselves as leading political players. This observation dovetails with accounts of armed Islamist mobilization produced before the uprisings that indicated how theories repeatedly prioritized the role of ideological framing at the expense of the role played by situational positioning and interactive processes of frame articulation (Snow and Byrd 2007). Other forms of Islamist motivational framing advocating electoral participation gained prominence, particularly in those situations of open multiparty competition, as in Tunisia. While cultural and political identities shaped protest in situations of rapid deinstitutionalization, these strategic rearticulations were themselves shaped by the trajectories of the protests. The 2011 uprisings did not take hold in Algeria because a sharp divide persisted between secularist and Islamist opponents of the regime, which was not in this case superseded by new protest identities (Volpi 2013).

Other cultural work has built on this basic idea of identities, showing how individuals are recruited via the right frames, how identities are sustained or redirected through new narratives, how friends and foes are built out of the raw materials of villains and victims and heroes. Even groups that claim to oppose collective identities deploy labels such as the 1% or the 99%. But identity work never ends, leaving identities forever open to contention. The very category of “Islamist movement” was reshaped after the uprisings as individuals and groups redefined what an Islamic identity meant in these new circumstances (Lacroix and Shalata 2016). The “Islamic identity” card could thus be played as much by pro-regime players as by different types of Islamist organizations to entice, frighten, or neutralize the competition.

If we can incorporate multifaceted accounts of players in our theories, we can better explain decision-making – and vice versa. Players are never entirely unified, homogenous actors. Even when they appear that way from the outside, when you look inside them they are arenas as well: places

with various procedures for disagreeing and for generating decisions. Every player can be analyzed into its subplayers – all the way down to individuals. An interactionist perspective can help us understand how meetings produce decisions, for which we need to know things such as who is at the meeting, who speaks, who is listened to, how leaders operate, and what affective loyalties are present (Haug 2013).

If the concept of arenas helps pull together some of the best structural insights, the concept of players draws on many cultural and interpretive insights. Arenas and players are constantly changing, often as the result of strategic efforts, but they offer enough stability at any time for us to use them in our explanations. (“Structures,” after all, are simply components that we choose to accept as fixed for the purpose of our current explanation.) And their very transformations are something to be explained. But in the end, we need to put the players in motion, engaged with each other in various arenas.

Strategic Interaction

The shift from stable, inert structures to active players in changing arenas reflects a desire to build more dynamic models that reflect agency, choices, dilemmas, and contingency. Dozens of scholars have tried to push beyond static models, with varying degrees of success.

McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001) acknowledged the need for more dynamics in the political-opportunity approach by calling for “mechanisms”: small causal links that, when triggered, flip the situation from one state to another with predictable regularity. Chains of these mechanisms could be put together to explain broader processes or macro-level results such as revolutions. Unfortunately their use of mechanisms was widely criticized (e.g., Koopmans, 2003; Oliver, 2003; Taylor, 2003). Too many types of causes, ranging from the psychological to the macrolevel, were included, partly because the authors rejected the standard usage of a mechanism as dropping down to the psychological or social psychological level in order to explain institutional outcomes (Elster 1999; Hedström 2005, 8-9), preferring instead Merton’s treatment of mechanisms as middle range theory. In McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001), mechanisms remain mechanistic, lacking the contingency or nuance that most analysts seek.

Applying McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly to the Middle East, Beinin and Vairel (2011) gave priority to structural dimensions of arenas over players’ perspectives. They conceptualized contexts comparatively as structured political cultures that shape interactions among players – be they workers’ unions, bar

associations, human rights networks, and so on. Regarding networks, and particularly informal networks and processes of micromobilization, they deemphasized the role of hierarchical structure and cost-benefit analysis for individuals. Contentious practices rested on the logics of action and the logics of situation during exchanges between regime and opposition that led to the construction and utilization of particular repertoires of contention. But despite Beinin and Vairel's best efforts to deal with the limitations of the *Dynamics of Contention* framework, this theoretical framing imposed a structuralist slant on their examinations of regional contexts, networks, and practices. Beinin and Vairel embraced Kurzman's (2004a) suggestion to take protesters' beliefs seriously, but they limited themselves to articulated beliefs. Yet, not only voiced beliefs but also emotional states associated for example with anger, fear, revenge, or confusion can directly shape action.

The Arab uprisings generated arenas of contention in which, instead of prestructured players interacting with state players under a known set of rules and expectations, unstable situations encouraged both anti- and proregime players to redefine their tactics, strategies, and identities. In this light, Bennani-Chraïbi and Fillieule (2012) suggested a reconsideration of the relationship between structural and interactionist factors in explanations of social processes in the region. This changing regional context favored those perspectives giving a more salient role to framing and prioritizing players' (micro) views over structural (macro) conditions (Kurzman 2008, 2012).

Strategic tradeoffs, dilemmas, and decisions force players into choice points in some cases, or encourage them to actively ignore options at other points, as game theory observes. But few political engagements can be summed up accurately in neat games with clear endpoints, from which decision-makers can calculate backwards. Instead, politics is an endless series of actions and reactions, so subtle and complex that players only anticipate one or two moves ahead. Prediction is almost impossible, unintended outcomes are always present. A number of scholars have called for an interactionist and strategic alternative (Oliver 2003; Maney et al. 2012).

Duyvendak and Fillieule (2015) refer to the players and arenas framework as the "strategic interaction paradigm," in order to highlight its moving parts: individuals, compound players, rules and expectations, physical arenas, other settings, the actions that lead to other actions, and so on down long chains. It is a "dispositionist interactionism," they say, since it recognizes the cultural baggage that players carry with them. They do not begin each interaction from scratch, subject only to the definition of the situation that emerges or which is imposed by the various players. Individuals are key players, partly independent of the organizations to

which they belong and capable of long and complex careers outside those organizations (Fillieule 2010). This argument dovetails with Dobry's (2009) theory of fluid conjunctures, which examines the repositioning of actors and practices within preexisting structures during crises. Personal and institutional histories do matter, but crisis situations are precisely moments when such baggage can be reoriented toward different objectives – past experiences and practices are not so much negated or forgotten, as they are put to new uses.

The interactionist perspective answers what we might call the “Kurzman challenge.” In a book on Iran, Kurzman (2004b) assessed the dominant theories of revolution – political, organizational, cultural, economic, and military – and found them all wanting, even in combination. They all posited initial conditions from which analysts – retrospectively – believed that the 1979 revolution followed. Instead, the revolutionary movement created its own conditions for success out of a mass of confusion, in particular building a sense of itself as a viable political player that could and would win. By digging into participants' own points of view, Kurzman could see how this viability was created, and how the movement created the organizational, political, and other factors that it needed for success. He even mentions that emotions and strategic choices were part of this story (Kurzman 2004b, 169). Revolutions and other political outcomes must be traced through micro-level, cultural, and strategic interactions, because initial conditions are never enough.⁶

Culture and Emotions

We have suggested several ways that the new interactive approach must take seriously the points of view of players, reinforcing the role of culture and psychology. Players act through their cultural lenses and expectations and a variety of emotions. We saw the crucial role of collective identities in forming players and guiding their actions. Innumerable social-movement scholars have also examined frames and framing processes, stories and narratives, and a wealth of other carriers of meaning (for a summary see Jasper 2007). Social psychologists have reasserted the importance of motivational processes, long banished by the structural school (Klandermans 1997; Pinar 2011; Jasper 2017). Culture has been rethought as knowledge and tools

6 For a similar anti-structural argument see Jasper (1990), who argues that nuclear agencies and industries in France managed to create the very conditions that were then used to justify the country's nuclear commitment.

that change in response to circumstances (and help players react), rather than a fixed set of traditions – as a much-criticized orientalist tradition once viewed culture in the Middle East (Lockman 2004; Volpi 2010). Decisions are very much part of culture, as are emotions.

An older view of emotions dismissed them as irrational upwellings from deep inside individuals that tend to derail coordinated or sustained actions. Recent research demonstrates that most of the time, instead, emotions help us continue paths of action and cherished projects. They shape our goals as well as the actions taken to obtain them. They attach us to allies and tie us into social networks (although those networks may discourage political activity as well as enable it). In the form of moods they give us the energy to participate (or take that energy away). Emotions connect us to our physical and social worlds as well as to our own bodies. Our emotions send signals to ourselves and to others about how well we are doing in relation to our projects and values. Emotions are a good example of open-ended, micro-level mechanisms (Elster 1999; Jasper 2018).

As traditional repertoires of contention break down in arenas characterized by unusual interactions between players, emotions can become in specific locations and at specific times an important element in the reconstruction of new repertoires of action. This does not mean that protestors in those arenas are abnormal players, rather that emotionally grounded action corresponds to a possible logic of action (Pearlman 2013). During the Arab uprisings, interactions between regimes and demonstrators repeatedly facilitated the emergence of arenas of contestation in which these responses seemed appropriate. From the riots that followed Bouazizi's self-immolation in Tunisia to the armed clashes in Libya's Benghazi, ad hoc violence by pro- and anti-regime players surprised by the turn of events escalated the confrontation and created new repertoires of contention (Volpi 2017).

Jon Elster (1999) uses emotions as mechanisms to get at choices and uncertainty. Emotional pathways may have several possible directions: a small number, but not an infinite number. Traced carefully, we can understand the emotional steps taken to action, to interaction, and eventually to broader outcomes. By watching individuals interact with each other, and by understanding the psychological makeup they carry with them to those encounters, we can understand the interactions better without lapsing into overly determinate models.

The study of gender has been closely tied to that of culture, in that masculinities and femininities are deeply cultural and emotional, as well as obviously embodied. Extensive work on the gender dynamics of Western movements has been adapted to the Arab awakening. Women activists often

play different roles in movements than men, for instance keeping social networks and communities intact or bridging between networks (Al-Ali 2012; Salime 2011). Women's bodies often become a target for repression and violence (Johansson-Nogués 2013; Hafez 2014). The status of women can also be taken as an indicator of Westernization and liberalization – whether that is framed as a good or a bad thing (Sjoberg and Whooley 2015). Glib theories of frustrated masculinity, according to Paul Amar (2011), have been used to simplify and dismiss much of the protest, in an orientalist echo of crowd theories that leapt too easily from deep psychological motivations to collective action. In practice, women's networks, as complex players, have developed complex interactions over time with pro- and anti-regime actors; and the Arab uprisings provided new opportunities and constraints for these players to strategically engage with new social and political processes in order to achieved multilayered objectives (Khalil 2015).

Players and arenas, identities and tactics, decisions and emotions, all set in a cultural perspective that acknowledges how we attribute meaning to the world around us and act by means of those meanings: this is a new explanatory sensibility that has emerged in Europe and the United States in the last decade or two (Jasper 2010, 2012). It thrives on micro-level details, but it can also deal with macro-level players, arenas, and outcomes. Like any new perspective, it allows us to rethink the concepts of the older structural paradigm without losing its insights.

The Cultural-Strategic Rethinking of Structure

The cultural-strategic vision does not reject the insights of older theories, but incorporates them by reimagining the entities and processes about which they taught us so much (Jasper 2007, 89-95). We can begin with crowds, which were once dismissed as automatic mechanisms for demagogues to impose their will on participants, but which we can now see as extended interactions that express cultural understandings but also allow the creation or reinforcement of emotions such as indignation. Gatherings and other events such as protests have their own open-ended, interactive logics that represent an alternative to the overly organizational models of the structural paradigm (Oliver 1989; Collins 2004).

Networks once seemed the paradigm of the “mobilizing structures” that allow movements to form (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996). But networks include emotions and cultural meanings, which they help to transmit; in many cases these are more important than a movement's ideology in drawing

recruits (Munson 2009). Plus a new appreciation of agency suggests that new networks can be created when necessary. Bloc recruitment and biographical availability, other factors that were given a structural interpretation, also depend on considerable cultural work: having young children is a constraint on some potential recruits, but others bring their kids as part of their performance. Bloc recruitment depends on persuading the leaders of those blocs, such as religious leaders with loyal congregations (which represent almost the only examples of bloc recruitment). Even those Islamist networks that had previously been seen as the main orchestrators of contentious politics in the Arab world showed their limitations during the Arab uprisings, as anti-regime mobilization repeatedly bypassed them (Clarke 2014).

In the structural vision, resources were taken as hard and fast; even their distribution was largely assumed to be given. But of course a large part of strategy is to mobilize resources, especially to grab resources from the other side whenever possible. Although describing soccer hooligans fighting the police, Buford (1991, 291) shows how easily many resources can be rethought and repurposed.

One inspired little scientist discovered that, with such a strong Mediterranean breeze coming off the port, he had only to step to one side of the brown cloud issuing from the canister on the pavement, grab it from behind – as if picking up a lobster – and throw it back at the very people who had fired it at him. It was like a revelation inverted: in an instant, the canister lost its mystery and power. It also lost all significance, except one: it became a new thing to throw at the police.

During the 2011 Libyan uprisings most dramatically, as crowds overwhelmed local security forces in many locations in the east of the country, protestors found themselves in possession of the military arsenals left behind. The weapons that the Kaddafi regime had stockpiled throughout the country became an important resource for the protestors as unrest turned into more systematic armed confrontation between the regime and its opponents.

Repression often seems like a structural factor, based on available resources. In the case of Egypt, how could billions of dollars in US military aid not constrain the protestors of 2011? This seems like an obvious background condition, continued for decades both before the Arab uprisings and after el-Sisi's coup. Yet there are several problems with this apparently structural constraint. First, any army's possession of extensive weaponry still requires a decision to put it to use before there is direct coercion (although there may be some threat of coercion, but even in that case the army must decide to

parade its tanks and troops through the streets). Decisions to use or not to use resources are strategic, not structural.

Repressive actions by state security forces are also, like protest actions, susceptible to the situational logic of particular episodes of contention (with all their emotional responses and contingencies within the chain of command). It may well be that some security apparatuses are generally more structured and functional than others, but that does not guarantee that they will effectively repress an uprising of a kind they have never faced before (Goodwin 2011). Most retrospective explanations of why the Tunisian and Egyptian military behaved as they did involve rationalization of the behavior of the different players in order to make the outcome appear the most rational course of action for all those involved.

In addition, sophisticated military hardware is not especially relevant to the repression of protest. Egypt may have the largest, best equipped military in the Arab world, but it does not need all that equipment to put down protestors. An air force of F-16 fighter jets is unlikely to be used against Egyptian civilians. Out of desperation both Kaddafi and Assad indeed used fighter jets against their own populations, but these – at least at first – proved blunt instruments that discredited the regime as much as they cowed protestors. Almost all states are capable of killing peaceful protestors if they wish; they do not need advanced weapons from the US, Russia, or other international munitions producers. Only when those protestors develop into armed insurgents and protest events into a civil conflict, processes that take time, does the balance of arms begin to matter.

Structures don't do much by themselves; they always depend on cultural understandings and strategic decisions. These understandings and strategies can be emotionally induced and coincidental, especially in situations of severe deinstitutionalization, when a lack of reflexivity does not make them any less consequential. Even the most structured arenas can be changed and interpreted. Resources can be captured or repurposed. Only through dynamic, interactive, and micro-level models can we fully grasp how this happens.

Back to the Macro Level

The challenge for a cultural-strategic approach, or any approach grounded in micro-level interactions, is how to “scale up” to broad outcomes such as national movements, regime changes, and policy impacts. Ideally we would trace long chains of interactions. For protestors, these might begin

with conversations around kitchen tables, move to exchanges between neighbors, proceed out into the streets, and then on to central sites like Tahrir Square. We would love to trace similar sequences for the police and militaries: from a private conversation among commanders to their instructions to the troops, and on out to the engagements on the streets. And with politicians: from private interactions to public debates, and finally to parliamentary or executive decisions. We would follow compound players back and forth as they turn into arenas making choices, then as they try to implement those choices in their engagements with other players.

So much for the ideal. Methodologically, there are a lot of interactions to which we will never have access; all strategic players have some moments they wish to keep secret. State players have great advantages in doing so. This is why it is so easy to reduce them to black-box structures, a bit mysterious from the outside. But we should not make a methodological limitation into a theoretical assumption.

Social science offers two shortcut methods for linking the micro to the macro. The more common is to aggregate the microactions. Market prices result from many, many individual transactions, providing a model for economists to understand all sorts of social outcomes and to describe paradoxes in which those outcomes are not the intent of any of the players. Voting is also a form of aggregation, although in this case with rules and resources that generate a macro-level outcome. Most often, social scientists must sample some population to get the raw materials they need to aggregate; this is the point of surveys for instance. Such techniques usually assume that the individuals are interchangeable, or that their idiosyncrasies average out in the aggregate. They are not so good at grasping the influence of salient symbolic and decisive individuals or events.

The second solution is to insert microdynamics into structural models through scope. When George W. Bush decided to go to war against Saddam Hussein, a great deal then happened in both their countries (and others) due to their organizational positions, which allowed both men to direct resources and personnel to pursue their projects. Although there needs to be a structural component in our strategic story, the story begins with a tiny group of individuals talking with one another in a small number of meetings: Bush, Cheney, and a handful of advisors (a shockingly small number, for such a momentous decision).⁷

7 An astute reviewer for the press pointed out the long history of US involvement in the region as a key structural factor. But Bush had to decide how (and perhaps whether) to continue that tradition. Another president – Clinton or Obama – might have made a very different decision.

The implementation of their decisions also occurred through a chain of personal interactions in several government agencies, in several armed forces, and within those forces, at the level of each corps, division, brigade, company, and platoon. Sometimes it is useful for an analyst to assume that organizational structures will respond the way they are supposed to, but in some cases it is not. Regime change during the Arab uprisings was precisely the result of these “dysfunctions” within various chains of command (military, political, and so on). A full explanation would cover how compliance is achieved or not achieved, by following the chains of microinteractions (which for methodological reasons we may need to sample selectively).

The Chapters to Follow

In the first chapter, John Chalcraft addresses the question the volume poses about the configuration of new, “revolutionary” actors: their origins, emergence, identities, goals, practices, interactions, relative stability, and structure. The chapter makes a pitch for the relevance of a form of appropriation called “piracy”: the unruly, translocal, and often cross-border appropriation of “unpatented” contentious ideas in triggering, shaping, and fortifying the mobilizing projects of early riser activists. The chapter considers some central forms of appropriation across borders in the Arab uprisings of 2011, including frames, such as bread, dignity, and freedom; identities, such as that of the rights-bearing people; goals, such as overthrowing the regime; networked styles of organizing; and strategies and tactics, such as continuous occupations and pitched battles with police. It argues that piracy offers new lines of collective action for those undergoing hegemonic disincorporation, bringing – amid uncertainty and risk – a guide to mobilization, a basis of cohesion amid new connections, and an asymmetric strategy for new and previously fragmented and weak collective actors. Piracy of this kind has a long history in the Middle East and North Africa. Chalcraft challenges more structural studies of diffusion, faulting them for their overly mechanistic focus on media of transmission, and their use of metaphors rooted in economic forms of causation. The piracy metaphor draws attention to political explanatory logics and mechanisms, and brings into clearer view the importance of unruly appropriation (including search, seizure, and translation), and the role played by the situated political struggles of adopters. In so doing, it can help explain the velocity, selectivity, many-headed-ness, and utility of the translocal life of contentious ideas, and shed new light on the rapid constitution of new and transgressive collective actors.

In Chapter 2, Jillian Schwedler examines the anti-Israeli protests at the Kaluti mosque before and after the outbreak of the Arab uprisings, in order to bring to light dimensions of the protests that are often overlooked in situations of regime stability. In one reading, the low turnout for the Million Man March might be read as evidence for the failure of a mass uprising to emerge in Jordan. But in another reading, that event was part of a set of protests that, although small, did considerable political work other than to just pressure the regime to change a policy. This chapter examines the latter reading. In the first section, the chapter briefly examines how scholars study protests in general and the Arab uprisings in particular. It illustrates how attention to micropractices can reveal political work done through protests that is often overlooked by analytic frameworks that prioritize generic questions pertaining to social movements or uprisings. The chapter then turns to the specific dynamics of the Kaluti protests that took place prior to the 2011 uprising, paying close attention to the interactions between various participants and security agencies over the course of the protests. Having attended 21 such protests, Schwedler is able to identify routines as well as innovations, and to share insights from participants about what they understand to be happening. Finally, the chapter examines the post-uprising Kaluti protests, noting few innovations or deviations from the familiar script until July 2014, more than three years after the uprisings began. By focusing on the microdynamics of a limited set of protests, the chapter reveals the ways in which protests can do a wide range of political work, beyond that of building a movement, making a claim against a regime (or some other power), or, on the part of the state, displaying a willingness to either permit or repress dissent.

In Chapter 3, Frédéric Volpi shows how political revolutions can generate revolutionary actors. In Tunisia, a highly visible aspect of grassroots activism after the 2011 Arab uprising was Salafi religious, social, and political mobilization. Ansar al-Sharia (AST), a movement with no previous history as a mass-based organization, became a serious challenger for both state institutions and established social movements. The chapter traces how new individual and collective identities crystallized into a religious and political activism, which broke down after a couple of years when the new Tunisian regime declared AST a terrorist organization. It investigates Ansar al-Sharia first as a player competing against other social and political players to shape arenas of contention and governance in post-uprising Tunisia, and second as an arena of contention over the meaning and practice of Tunisian Salafism. Between 2011 and 2013, AST embodied a tentative consolidation of new identities and contentious practices during an episode

of deinstitutionalization and reinstitutionalization of the Tunisian state. This process and its outcomes were not “predefined” by already existing Salafi discourses and practices, and their (in)compatibility with democratic institutions. Instead, the interactions between the grassroots sympathizers inspired by a “revolutionary” praxis and more established Salafi leaders made it difficult for the cadres of the movement to impose a political discipline. In turn, this set of interactions increased over time the level of the strategic confrontations between AST and other players of the Tunisian democratic transition. Finally, the strategic confrontation between pro-state players seeking to entrench the formal arena of a liberal-democratic political order and AST players challenging these state-imposed boundaries eventually led to the collapse of AST as a unitary player.

In Chapter 4, Wendy Pearlman illustrates that while structural factors were critical in shaping the motivations and opportunities that drove Syrians to revolt, we must also examine localized decisions and actions to understand when, where, and how the uprising began. Original interviews with participants in the first mass street demonstration in Daraa, Syria offers a complement to structural models, making three contributions to understanding revolts. First, scrutiny of decisions in context reveals how easily they can be derailed, calling attention to the consequential contingency infusing events. Second, scrutiny of sequences of actions reveals both premeditation and spontaneity, the relative roles of which are puzzling under repressive regimes that make prior planning for protest both more difficult and more necessary. Third, examination of participants’ understandings of their own choices uncovers the microfoundations of macropolitical phenomena, illustrating the varied ways that instrumental rationality, values, and emotions guide behavior.

In Chapter 5, Youssef El Chazli shows that, while revolutions might well be national events, they still emerge from locally constructed configurations. Understanding what happened in Egypt in early 2011 requires us to look at local strategic interactions between different actors (protestors, political parties, security apparatuses, and “ordinary people”), and not only in the capital city Cairo. The case of Egypt’s “second capital,” Alexandria, is of great interest in this respect. During the year 2010, it witnessed a protest dynamic that was quite different from Cairo’s, and was recognized afterwards as one of the main “revolutionary cities.” By delving into the bundles of interactions between the different actors in the lead up to January 2011, we can see how a decentered approach focusing on local interactions in the “periphery” provides an alternative story about political crises and revolutions; about their contingency and

indeterminacy; and how tactics, strategies, and actions result from these various interactions.

In the final chapter, Farhad Khosrokhavar investigates how Arab revolutions promoted nonviolence (*selmiyah*) and the dignity of the citizen (*karama*) at their outset. These mottoes were formulated in gestures that involved body language, slogans, collective “emotionalism,” and attempts at building new concrete communities, especially at Tahrir Square. These mottoes could not resist the violence of the Deep State, the intolerance of the revolutionary actors, and geopolitics (with the exception of Tunisia). The chapter analyzes violence during the transitional period, from the ousting of President Mubarak in 2011 to the el-Sisi takeover in 2013, stressing the significance of affects, in situ actions and reactions, and the effervescent atmosphere of the demonstrations and sit ins. During this period, violence resulted as much from the moods from below as the widening gap between the larger society and the newly empowered Muslim Brotherhood.

Charles Kurzman concludes the book by contrasting the cold, simplified explanations that social science offers for shocking moments like the Arab uprisings with the lived experience of those making them. We do not always know how to put all the small pieces together, but we cannot ignore them. People have emotions, make decisions, and try to make sense of the world around them. In the process, they create that world.

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