MOBILIZING FOR RIGHTS

Part 2
During the 1970s and 1980s human rights, as a cause distinct from partisan political agendas, became a rallying point of opposition to dictatorships allied with the United States in Central and South America, having great effect in delegitimizing those governments as well as Washington’s support for them. The principal Middle East instance was Iran’s 1978–79 revolution. Human rights activism also played a substantial part in the demise of communist rule in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and similarly contributed to the rise of a global human rights agenda.

In the 1980s and 1990s some opposition political activists in the Middle East and North Africa concluded that their goals of far-reaching political change might best be advanced by embracing the framework of human rights. Participants and observers alike often refer to these activists and the organizations they have established as a movement. However, it is not clear to what extent the phenomenon constitutes a social movement, even where activism has been operational for years. Moreover despite the universalism claimed by the discourse of human rights, the activities, constituencies, and focus of human rights work in various countries, and even within countries, are quite differentiated.

Organizations and networks of human rights advocates nevertheless do have a social movement dimension consistent with some of the expectations of Social Movement Theory. Perhaps most saliently, they have succeeded in reframing the political discourse of both secular and religious oppositional forces, as well as incumbent regimes. Susan Waltz, writing over a decade ago, referred to the emergence of human rights “as a master frame of social protest” (1995, 160). The United Nations-based human rights covenants, conventions, and mechanisms have been the primary framing resources for human rights activists in the region.3

In the countries discussed here—Bahrain, Egypt, Morocco, and Turkey—the leading activists have access to resources. They are professionals who have
skills, financial security, and jobs, such as lawyering and teaching, that permit them to devote time and money to the cause. The organizations they lead have collaborative and sometimes contentious relationships with local political parties and trade unions as well as international rights organizations.

In many cases these activists can access funds from foreign governments and foundations. International human rights organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have collaborated with groups in the region, and Amnesty has had local chapters in several countries. In Turkey the local Helsinki Citizens Assembly has been a major player in the human rights movement. While not without its problematic aspects locally, this international dimension augments the social movement claims and aspirations of Middle Eastern and North African actors (An-Naim 2000, 2001).

With the exception of Turkey and to a lesser extent Morocco, political participation in these countries is restricted and the options for organized and effective opposition political parties remain extremely limited. However, there is great diversity in state responses to human rights discourse across the region and over time. The ubiquity of this discourse leads us to ask whether human rights activism did not merely respond to “political opportunities” but actively played a role in producing political openings. And why has the frame of human rights and its associated repertoire of contention been more effective in some authoritarian states than others?

Most governments in the region have been actively hostile to human rights organizations, particularly when their activities go beyond trainings and they attempt to monitor violations and hold local authorities accountable. Egypt and Bahrain have association laws that greatly restrict the autonomy of NGOs; those that do not officially register or are not allowed to do so remain vulnerable to harassment and even closure. Morocco’s law is more reasonable, requiring simple notification, but local officials often subvert it in practice by refusing to provide the receipt that proves a group has satisfied this condition. Human rights activists in Turkey, particularly those working on issues in the heavily Kurdish areas, have been the targets of official harassment and deadly assaults by shadowy vigilante elements having possible links to the state.

In Bahrain and Morocco networks of local rights activists have impacted state human rights practices and demonstrated a capacity to withstand state hostility. How well they may withstand state strategies of co-optation and marginalization is an open question. These networks share some similarities in recent political history—most obviously the scenario of a harsh and repressive regime
of a ruler-father giving way to reforms by a ruler-son. More significant structurally, perhaps, is that human rights activism first took root among families and comrades of persons persecuted by the ancien régime—arbitrarily arrested, commonly tortured, forcibly exiled (Bahrain) or “disappeared” (Morocco). Organizations and sustained campaigns drew support from émigré and exile compatriots. In Bahrain a sense of widespread and institutionalized discrimination against the majority Shi’a community has given human rights activism there great resonance among that community, while many Sunnis view human rights as merely a sectarian concern. In both countries, the main organizations have relied on their leading activists for leadership staffing and core financial support and have been relatively less dependent on outside funding.

In Turkey rights activism also emerged out of campaigns by relatives and comrades of political prisoners aimed at combating widespread torture in detention. The movement there shares many structural features with those of Morocco and Bahrain. The governing Justice and Development Party (AKP), with its conservative, Islamic orientation, has been receptive to many human rights concerns. Nonetheless human rights activism appears not to have had the same impact on society and politics as in Morocco and Bahrain, perhaps because rights activism in Turkey has been complicated by the armed conflict in the mainly Kurdish-populated southeast between the state and the Partiya Karkaren-e Kurdistan (PKK).

Many activists regard that conflict as Turkey’s premier human rights problem, and Kurds have been prominent in the largest organizations’ leadership. Consequently, for many Turks the rights movement reflects a pro-Kurdish agenda. Yet Turkey has Mazlum-Der, one of the very few organizations in the region dedicated to promoting human rights among observant Muslims. There are also rights groups working on behalf of the sizable Alevi minority, and recently a growing movement on behalf of lesbian and gay rights. And Turkey, like Egypt, Morocco, and Bahrain, has a range of activists and groups promoting women’s rights. Turkish rights groups have benefited from government liberalization regarding freedom of association as a result of pressures from the EU.

Egypt has numerous human rights organizations. But paradoxically their activities do not appear to constitute a social movement. Human rights activism in Egypt did not emerge out of prisoner solidarity networks. Instead leftist students and journalists, especially members of the Communist Workers’ Party, initiated rights-based activism in response to state repression of political and labor militants, many of them still holding leading organizational positions. Neil Hicks
observes “a disequilibrium between the high receptivity of international bodies to various types of advocacy, campaigning, and promotion of human rights in Egypt on the one hand, and the low capacity of domestic structures in Egypt to channel this energy into constructive pressure for human rights change on the other. As a result, too often, foreign pressure became counterproductive and was used to discredit the domestic human rights movement” (2006, 79).

Would-be social movement entrepreneurs in Egypt have been unable to build a movement despite their access to resources. The increased number of activists in human rights groups after two decades of work reflects more an entrepreneurship in response to the availability of foreign funding than the political demands and moral support of society. Despite access to resources, and a political opening in 2004–06 that continues in an attenuated form, the frame of human rights has not attracted a base of popular support in Egypt, although both the government and much of the media have adopted human rights discourse and framing.

The following discussions by country draw mainly from interviews over the past several years with key human rights activists in Bahrain, Egypt, Morocco, and Turkey. They reflect on the impact of rights activism on political parties, government practices, legislative reforms, and the media; on intersections with other movements; and on the varied organizational forms that this activism has taken.

BAHRAIN

Bahraini rights activism emerged from the crucible of struggle between the state and leftist and Islamist opposition forces. Before Bahrain’s formal independence, in 1971, (illegal) parties and trade unions issued political and economic demands reflecting their communist and Arab nationalist backgrounds. Awareness of human rights as an issue developed after 1975, when the ruling Al Khalifa family shut the partially elected parliament, suspended electoral and due process provisions of the constitution, and imprisoned or drove into exile left-nationalist opponents. Repression intensified in 1981, when the authorities uncovered a plot by pro-Iranian Islamists to supplant the Al Khalifa with a theocratic state.

Extreme repression left no space for political participation. After the 1990–91 Gulf War, the limited liberalization in Kuwait’s political order inspired a broadly based Bahraini “petition movement” calling for restoring the constitution and parliamentary elections. The Shi’a community also demonstrated against unemployment and social inequity. In late 1994 continual clashes erupted between
security forces and street protesters in Shi’a neighborhoods. This “intifada” continued until 1999, when Shaykh Hamad succeeded his father and undertook substantial reforms that partially responded to human rights demands of the opposition (Human Rights Watch 1997).

The petition movement and the intifada deployed the language of human rights extensively, reflecting the prominence of this discourse among political exiles. One exponent was Abdulnabi Alekry, who later worked closely with the Bahrain Human Rights Society (BHRS), the first independent human rights group to acquire legal recognition (in June 2001). In the mid-1970s he was an exiled member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Bahrain. There he “was responsible for following the cases of those arrested in different parts of the Gulf—in Kuwait, Bahrain, the [United Arab] Emirates, Oman. We had only two channels: Amnesty International and the International Committee of the Red Cross. I didn’t consider this my number one job, and at that time I was not aware of the potential of human rights.”

In the late 1970s Alekry moved to Beirut, but the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon forced him to evacuate to Damascus, where the rival National Front for the Liberation of Bahrain was based. “For the first time the exiled [leftist] opposition was together in one place. We established jointly the Committee for the Defense of Human Rights in Bahrain, but it was very difficult [to operate] from Syria. One comrade had asylum in Denmark, so they applied for and received permission to operate in Copenhagen. This facilitated networking with international rights groups. By contrast, repression in Syria and other Arab countries made it difficult to communicate with like-minded activist elsewhere in the Arab world.”

Alekry acknowledges that the political tradition from which he emerged “didn’t have much use for human rights.” In Beirut and Damascus he had access to international rights groups. “There was the need to address the problem of the detainees, more than solidarity statements from political organizations. I don’t say that everybody in the front was convinced of the utility of [my human rights focus], but they said, OK, you want to work on this, go ahead.”

For Alekry this work “gave a human rights dimension to the uprising. We made links with the lawyers [in Bahrain] who took the cases and made dossiers on Security Court cases. Some [lawyers] would come outside; we’d meet and collect information that we’d take to international venues.” Alekry is certain that the human rights movement “contributed to the change in policy, when Shaykh Hamad took over in 1999, that enabled us to come back home [in 2001].”
Another key Bahraini human rights activist, Abdul-Hadi al-Khawaja, left Bahrain in the late 1970s to study; he could not return because of his political association with the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain. When the government arrested hundreds of Islamic Front supporters in 1981, al-Khawaja and others started the Committee to Defend Political Prisoners in Bahrain. “We took the issue of detention and torture. We had lots of details. Then we took the families who were deported because of their Persian origin. But we couldn’t work independently because the Islamic Front is a political organization. We wanted to take cases of all prisoners, not only the Islamic Front. We thought having an independent organization was essential, while the Islamic Front saw the committee as part of the organization, serving its agenda. Through our work with the UN and Amnesty and other organizations, we became more familiar with human rights mechanisms and [in 1989–90] we started the Bahrain Human Rights Organization.” The BHRO received training in human rights monitoring standards from the Danish Center for Human Rights. “From Copenhagen the BHRO played an effective role during [Bahrain’s] intifada in the 1990s, advocating for human rights on an international level.” After al-Khawaja returned to Bahrain in 2001, the BHRO became the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR).

For al-Khawaja the genesis of human rights activism out of work around political prisoners was not surprising. “It’s the common ground between political activism and human rights. When we think, how can we defend them when we can’t act locally—the only way is to use human rights mechanisms and speak about it internationally.”

When al-Khawaja and others tried to register the BCHR, the authorities at first refused, claiming it would “duplicate” the work of the BHRS. Some BHRS leaders were content with this favoritism, a stance that Alekry, who worked closely with the BHRS, contested. The authorities finally did extend recognition. But in September 2004 the government closed the center and confiscated its assets after al-Khawaja publicly criticized the prime minister for corruption and human rights abuses and called on him to resign. The BCHR remains illegal, and its most active members are routinely harassed; but it continues to operate.

The proliferation of Bahraini groups adopting a rights framework reflects an organizing strategy that encourages sector-specific committees. Today there are committees of the unemployed, of families of martyrs and victims of torture, the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights, and so on. These committees mostly articulate the grievances of the Shi’a, especially around issues of discrimination.
In Bahrain government arrests of leading rights activists—usually for criticism of high officials or holding a demonstration without permission—have prompted sizable public demonstrations demanding their release. Bahrain may be the one country, al-Khawaja said, “where human rights is a little bit popular.” This reflects the highly polarized character of Bahraini society, and the success of Shi’a activists in mobilizing their community around human rights demands.

The strategy of mobilizing using a human rights frame in the 1990s led to concrete improvements after 2001. “When we speak about real political reforms, I don’t think we’re there yet,” al-Khawaja said. “But today the human rights situation is very different. We don’t have systematic torture; there are not large numbers in exile or in jail. We as activists have some means to defend and protect ourselves. We annoy the government by pressuring them, but when they try to do something they have to think about the international reaction and the internal reaction. It wasn’t the same in the old days.” At the same time, he said, “[regional] governments have more experience in dealing with these organizations, how to penetrate them, establish GONGOs [government-controlled NGOs].”

Al-Khawaja also observed that governments and political movements try to exploit “the differences between human rights as a culture and Islam. There are some differences, and some people try to focus on these differences with an agenda of separating people from human rights.” For example, “When the family law question came up, people started finding differences. We campaigned to introduce the CEDAW [Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women] to show people, yes, there are some differences, not minor, but few. Most rights do not clash with Islam. We succeeded, especially with the women Islamists. When it comes to civil and political rights, they don’t see any differences. The activists—be they Islamists or secularists or leftists—all speak about human rights.”

Al-Khawaja acknowledges that the BCHR is a rare example of a human rights group emerging out of an Islamist political movement. “I don’t meet many others when I attend regional conferences. As an Islamist, I do my prayers, and some of my Arab colleagues are surprised. A human rights activist doing his prayers! This is something not very familiar.” This reflects, in his view, a regrettable detachment of human rights activists from society at large. “We’re supposed to be working with the people, to know their problems. But how many of us are really connected with people on the ground? How can you inform people about human rights and defend them if you don’t have real re-
lations with them. [Colleagues] used to look at our Bahrain experience as special. ‘Not everything you do in Bahrain can be done in our countries,’ they say. I don’t know. I see the mission of the human rights movement to be social change, and the dissemination of a human rights culture. It’s not enough to speak about human rights in the press, or go to the United Nations. It’s about changing peoples’ way of thinking. Here we rely on international support and popular support. If you don’t have the popular support, how can you confront the political authorities? If people don’t move to defend themselves, how can you make change? I know the human rights movement isn’t necessarily a popular movement, but if you are not well-connected with the people, you can’t do the work, you can’t make the change.”

The future of human rights activism in Bahrain is far from assured, al-Khawaja feels. Hundreds of people have gone through trainings, but “we don’t see people monitoring trials, or demonstrations. Not many are engaged in daily human rights work. The popular committees are . . . engaged, a few hundred—but these are not the ones with training. The people who are working on the ground need training, while the people who are trained need experience. The university is a forbidden zone for human rights as well as political activity.”

Abdulnabi Alekry agreed that the popular committees distinguish Bahrain’s human rights activism, and he cites the Committee for Martyrs and Victims of Torture, the Committee for the Homeless, and the Committee of the Unemployed. “They are linked together and they insist on demonstrations and protests, even though there are a lot of risks. There is strong solidarity among those people who feel they are discriminated against, marginalized, their basic rights denied. This network is there. And they see that pressure works—to get Abdul-Hadi released [from detention], for instance.”

Bahrain’s organizations depend very little on foreign funding. Groups with legal standing, like the BHRS, receive free office space from the state, for instance. Others, like the BCHR, depend on the time and financial resources of the most active members. Both organizations are members of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH).

EGYPT

Israel’s invasion of Lebanon and siege of Beirut in 1982 prompted human rights to take organizational form in Egypt. Saad Eddin Ibrahim recalled how Arab governments failed to come to the defense of besieged Palestinians. When Ibrahim and others organized a peaceful demonstration outside Cairo’s al-Azhar
mosque, he later wrote, “We were brutally beaten and dispersed. To compound the pain, the only public Arab demonstration allowed at the time was in [Algiers] not over the fall of Beirut, but to protest a Belgian referee’s unfair ruling vis-à-vis the Algerian football team in the Mondiale [World Cup] that year. And to compound the irony, a half million Israeli demonstrators marched in the streets of Tel Aviv protesting the aggression of their own government against Lebanon” (Ibrahim 2003).11

Hani Shukrallah had been a student activist in the 1970s. For him the global developments of the 1970s and 1980s led to an “epistemological break with dogmatic leftist thinking. I started to see how democracy and human rights were essential for human emancipation—which was the reason I had been a Marxist in the first place.”12 Shukrallah and Ibrahim were among the founders of the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR) in April 1985. “At that time the human rights movement was really an outsider,” said Shukrallah. “The existence of the movement was put in question not just by the government but by the intellectual and political elites, including the political parties, legal and illegal.” The EOHR founders were a disparate group, united in aspirations but having little concrete knowledge about how to go about the work. “The aim of course was a more humane society, but what human rights work involves—there was no grasp of these issues,” said Muhammad al-Sayyid Sa’id, another EOHR founding member. “No one had any experience collecting information, checking the quality of testimony, while advocacy was very rhetorical and general.”13

The government refused to register the EOHR as a legal entity, almost ending the effort before it began. Many on its first board, discouraged and feeling threatened by the failure to gain legal standing, urged that the organization disband. Bahey el-Din Hassan, then a journalist at al-Gumhuriyya, an official government daily, insisted that a human rights group worthy of the name had to stand up for its own right to exist. The board responded by appointing Hassan as secretary-general. Sa’id recalled it a bit differently: “We formed an executive group by default at that point, and were elected only later to the board.”

A second moment of crisis turned into opportunity came in August 1989, when workers occupied the large state-owned Iron and Steel Company in Helwan. Security forces stormed the plant, killing one worker, injuring a hundred, and arresting hundreds more (Posusney 1997, 161). “We didn’t have much staff then, so we rotated monitoring responsibilities, and the Helwan workers came up on my watch,” Sa’id said. “We started getting lots of complaints that we
had to check out. A number of us were arrested, including myself, and Hisham Mubarak.”14 Sa‘id, Mubarak, and another EOHR board member, lawyer Amir Salim, were detained for several weeks and tortured (Rodley 2007).15

The Helwan strike experience also broadened human rights activism beyond the EOHR. Kamal ‘Abbas was among those arrested and tortured. Several months later he became one of the founders of the Center for Trade Union and Workers Services (CTUWS), in Helwan. Aida Seif al-Dawla, who later helped to launch the Nadim Center for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence, recalled the iron and steel workers’ strike, and the torture inflicted on Sa‘id, Mubarak, and ‘Abbas, as “what got me into human rights work.”16 Amnesty International had a chapter in Egypt at that time; Amnesty’s “own country” rule meant that Egyptian members could not address Egyptian violations directly. But the chapter’s existence contributed to the human rights “conversation” prompted by Helwan.

The activists who laid the foundations of human rights activities in Egypt had previously mostly been associated with (often illegal) parties of the left, energized by the 1970s’ student movement. Bahey el-Din Hassan, Muhammad al-Sayyid Sa‘id, Hisham Mubarak, and others had been active in the Communist Workers’ Party, which the government smashed in the early 1980s. Some leftist parties saw the EOHR as territory to conquer. “The left underground tried to jump on whatever avenues were left open,” recalled Amal ‘Abd al-Hadi, an early activist with the EOHR and later director of the New Woman Center. “They jumped on the Cairo Cinema Club, for instance, issuing statements about this and that—everything except cinema! When the EOHR began confronting the government, the left saw this as a new forum to take over.”17 The EOHR board instituted a rule that prominent party leaders could not have decision-making roles in the organization.

Still, Bahey el-Din Hassan rejects the view that human rights groups were initiated only because these parties went into decline. “I don’t entirely agree. The failure of the parties had been evident for a while, and those who supported human rights had left a while before. There wasn’t a direct link between the decline of the parties and the move to human rights, and human rights was never a cover for political activity. Every day that goes by their political motivations count for less and less and human rights ideals are the governing factor.”18 Muhammad al-Sayyid Sa‘id concurs: “To be frank, most of us were not really Nasserists or Marxists any more. We had these roots, but we no longer defined ourselves that way.” But Sa‘id acknowledged that human rights did engage in
political activity, even if not linked to a particular party. In 1994 Sa‘id and Hassan left the EOHR and started the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies. “The more important human rights work is to actually have an initiative to restructure society and really democratize,” Sa‘id said.

Politics can influence how a human rights organization shapes itself. One model involves a large and active membership that sets policies and priorities. Such organizations typically rely on members as volunteers to carry out their work. Another organizational model emphasizes a paid staff having professional skills in monitoring, advocacy, and provision of services like legal aid. In practice, given limited human and other resources, most organizations find themselves developing in one or the other direction. This structural issue precipitated and reflected major struggles inside the EOHR.

Bahey el-Din Hassan recalled that after he became EOHR secretary-general in 1988, the organization amended its bylaws to state that international standards constituted the sole reference for determining human rights violations and remedies. “We preempted all proposals to include other sources, like the Egyptian constitution,” he said. But clarifying the EOHR’s mission did not foreclose struggles among political factions to control the group. Differences came to a head at a general assembly of the EOHR in 1994, when Nasserists within the leadership of the organization recruited other members of the party to join and ensure the election of a pro-Nasserist board.

A number of Islamists were EOHR members in the early 1990s, mainly key figures from the Muslim Brotherhood and lawyers who represented detained members of armed groups like Islamic Jihad and the Jama’a al-Islamiyya. They competed for seats on the board, but the core activists kept them at arm’s length. “We didn’t welcome them as board members because we witnessed their efforts to gain hegemony in several syndicates,” Hassan recalls. “We would have worried about information we received from them. If we receive it as representatives of victims, we check it. But if we receive it as a rights staffer, this is something else.” This concern about possible manipulation had some basis, another activist said. “Armed Islamists, when they did an operation would [immediately] send . . . a press release to the human rights groups so that the rights groups would come and do field research on the government crackdown and report on that.”

But Islamists were key to the growth of the movement in one important way: they were the primary victims of state abuses. “The government abuses of the Islamists were so much greater [than Islamist abuses of others], so they
gained on balance from human rights reporting,” Gamal Eid said. An American activist who lived in Egypt at the time recalled that the Islamists “realized they were getting a better deal using organizations [like EOHR] that weren’t tainted by Islamist associations, rather than trying to build Islamist human rights organizations that the state would just crack down on anyway.”

Bahey el-Din Hassan said the EOHR “advocated all the time for the rights of individuals, including suspects from these [armed Islamist] groups, but condemned their acts very strongly.” These were the years when Islamists assassinated secularist writer Farag Foda, and their threats forced Nawwal El Saadawi and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd to flee the country. “I remember receiving threats from their lawyers at the same time they were asking us to defend them,” said Hassan. “They rejected the [human rights] discourse but recognized it had [positive] implications for them.” Muhammad al-Sayyid Sa‘id said it was “never a question” of not addressing state violence against Islamists, “to the point where the police accused us of complicity with the terrorists. We defended [the Islamists], we attacked them. It looked funny but it was honest human rights work.”

The EOHR was a key source of public information on the major crisis in Egypt in the 1990s: the Islamist insurgency and the government crackdown. “This was the first time that we had detailed reports about the situation in prison, torture in police stations,” one journalist recalled. “Both the opposition press and the state press were discredited. There was no serious investigative journalism. EOHR was a source of reliable information that didn’t exist at that time on these human rights issues.” President Mubarak indirectly confirmed the importance of the EOHR when he complained that “most of these [international] human rights organizations abroad get their information from a so-called human rights organization here, which is controlled by members of the former [Nasser] regime, and is stacked with people from the Muslim Brotherhood” (Weaver 2000, 166). Bahey el-Din Hassan recalled that in 1994 Osama al-Baz, a top adviser to President Mubarak, arranged a meeting with the human rights groups only to tell them that if they wanted to solve their problems with the government, they had to “stop, totally stop, our work on the ‘Islamic terrorists.’”

Egyptian rights activists remain concerned about how to persuade Islamists to adopt a human rights culture. The Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies sought to “bridge the gap between the dominant culture in the region and international [human rights] principles. Islam is the main component of this culture.” Muslim Brothers and other Islamists participate in most of the institute’s seminars and working groups, he said. “This doesn’t mean that human rights
organizations have illusions about the Muslim Brotherhood’s agenda or their commitment to human rights, or the added value of the so-called new Islamic discourse. I’m afraid the discourse has been the main development,” said Hassan.

Ahmad Sayf, a defense lawyer who had been imprisoned and tortured on account of his leftist political activities, heads the Hisham Mubarak Law Center, which has taken up cases as wide-ranging as insurgent labor leaders, Islamists, and men charged with “depravity” for consensual sex with other men. In his view the major accomplishment of Egyptian rights activists is that human rights are now inextricably on the agendas of the state, political parties, the growing independent media, and the Islamist opposition. “There is a social consensus against torture,” he said. “Ten years ago, Communists would say, secretly, it doesn’t matter if Islamists are tortured, and Islamists would say, why not torture Communists. Today you don’t hear this from anyone.”24 But he added that it is individuals, not political groups, who are committed to human rights. In the Muslim Brotherhood, he said, the leadership and midlevel cadres are staunchly conservative, “but among the young members we can see something happening. The Internet has played a role, promoting freedom of expression.”

When the EOHR began, recalled Hani Shukrallah, Islamists regarded human rights advocacy as “the adversary.” “It’s not that [today] they have genuinely accepted human rights, but they deal with it without feeling the need to attack it.” Muhammad al-Sayyid Sa’id recalled, “In the 1970s, women’s education was a major issue for Egyptian Islamists; now not at all. Work, yes, but not education. You have to look long term, and work to entrench new values.” Amal ’Abd al-Hadi sees movement also but cautions that “the human rights movement in Egypt will never be a popular movement; there are too many things working against that—women’s rights, freedom of belief.” Abdullahi An-Naim (2001, 721), discussing the Egyptian government’s refusal for many years to grant legal recognition to many human rights groups, observed that “the ability of these organizations to operate openly in the country all this time clearly indicates a level of acceptance and credibility at the practical level.”

Several activists summed up the state of human rights activism in Egypt today as a paradox. On the plus side, human rights has become an inescapable frame of reference for the media and political parties. The government also,— “[e]ven as it has taken steps to systematically eliminate an independent local human rights movement . . . has been moving forward with programs that create a formal place for international human rights norms within governmental activities” (Hicks 2006, 87).25 The authorities recently prosecuted police officers
for torture, and the number of persons arbitrarily detained under the emergency law has dropped from more than fifteen thousand to less than five thousand over the past several years, in part thanks to the work of the human rights groups. Nonetheless systemic problems remain, such as the emergency law and the stifled right of association. “Even press freedom, the most notable achievement, is relative and reversible,” observed Bahey el-Din Hassan.

**MOROCCO**

The human rights movement in Morocco emerged out of the activism of families of political prisoners in the late 1970s. In the view of Susan Slyomovics (2002, 216), prison experiences were formative and prison-writing “underpins current human-rights activism” in Morocco. Driss al-Yazami, a Moroccan rights activist who now sits on the official Advisory Council for Human Rights, gives particular credit to the families of the prisoners. “The prisoners themselves were mainly Marxists then, and for them human rights was a bourgeois issue,” he recalls.26 “But the mothers and sisters organized demonstrations, went to the UN office in Rabat, went to the universities, talking about the prisoners’ hunger strikes—many of the prisoners then were students.”

A second component of the movement was the lawyers, Moroccan and European, who came to observe trials and conduct fact-finding missions. The European lawyers who came to defend prisoners’ rights were often themselves affiliated with ultraleft parties, complicating what was then a reflexive leftist dismissal of human rights.

The third component was Moroccans abroad, in France, Belgium, and the Netherlands, who were affiliated with the same political factions as their compatriots in Morocco. According to Larbi Maaninou, one of the students who formed the Association de Défense des Droits de l’Homme au Maroc (ASDHOM) in Paris in 1985, most of those who were prominent in the human rights organizations came from radical left tendencies. “We were surprised to see ourselves talking about individual rights, and all that it implies about the need for the state to establish structures and rules,” he said. “This globalization of human rights was subconscious. We needed to get our people out of prison and free from torture, and we didn’t have any language except sacrifice and martyrdom.”27

Al-Yazami was also a student in France in the 1970s. Because of his activism around migrant worker issues, he was expelled in 1975. On his return to Morocco authorities arrested him and held him incommunicado for three months. His brother was active in the Ila al-Amam underground Marxist group. After
his release, al-Yazami agreed to hide one of the group’s leaders for a year. When his brother and others were arrested, he escaped and returned to France, in 1978, and received political asylum. His time in prison was a turning point. “I knew there was lots of repression in Morocco, but to spend these three months in an unknown place, blindfolded and shackled twenty-four hours a day, seeing people who were in there for ten years. After they’re finished with you, you are two persons.”

This was when mothers and sisters of the political prisoners began their activities. In France al-Yazami and others set up solidarity committees for individual prisoners in Morocco. This involved regular contact with Amnesty and other groups. “For me it was clear, at least since 1979, that human rights was a strategic matter that had to be independent from the political parties, working on concrete issues, and in the proper way,” he recalled. “When you’ve been one year living underground in Casablanca it’s easy to see we had no network in Morocco. I was helped by the French teachers in Casablanca. That was my main network.”

One of the first Moroccan human rights organizations was the Association Marocain des Droits de l’Homme (AMDH), established in 1979.28 By the mid-1980s, thanks to the synergy of Moroccan activists in Morocco and Europe and the attention of international organizations like Amnesty International, human rights had become a domestic and foreign relations problem for Hassan II. However, the political affiliations of many activists, and the competition of the leftist parties for hegemony over the organizations, meant that the visibility of the human rights issue was not matched by professional competence. Infighting between adherents of the Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires (USFP) and those to its left led to a period of paralysis in the mid-1980s. Some Socialists left the AMDH and formed the Organization Marocain des Droits de l’Homme (OMDH) in 1988.

The AMDH is membership-based, having branches in many parts of the country, while the OMDH’s organizational presence is limited to major cities (Waltz 1995, 164–65).29 As one OMDH founder, Abdelaziz Nouaydi, put it, “the AMDH believes that the fight for human rights should not be the work of the elite but has to mobilize the masses. The OMDH made another choice, to mobilize people who can give something to the movement—expertise, money, time.”30

In May 1990 King Hassan II established the Consultative Council on Human Rights (CCDH) in order to “complete the state of law and to put an end to the critiques of the human rights situation in Morocco” (Nouaydi 2000, 5).31
The palace retained control of the mandate, methods, and membership of the CCDH—even of those “independents” who were not themselves state officials.\textsuperscript{32} The king took further but similarly cautious steps to “close the books” on decades of human rights horrors by amending the preamble to the constitution in 1992 to “reaffirm” the kingdom’s “attachment to human rights as they are universally recognized” (Slyomovics 2005, 31, emphasis added). “The king realized that the old way of ruling was no longer possible,” said Sion Assidon, who was imprisoned from 1972 to 1984 for publishing leaflets and newspapers. “His objective was the survival of the monarchy, and for that he needed to make peace with his old opposition in order to confront the new opposition—the Islamists.”\textsuperscript{33} Around 1992, officials suggested that the state had razed Tazmamart, perhaps Morocco’s most notorious dungeon, an unacknowledged and illegal detention site where prisoners had been “disappeared” in some cases for several decades.\textsuperscript{34} In 1999 the CCDH issued a report that for the first time acknowledged the phenomenon of enforced “disappearances” but “in effect would reduce 40 years of authoritarianism to a list of 112 cases” (Vairel 2008, 233).

Mohamed VI succeeded his father in July 1999 and a month later set up a panel within the CCDH to determine compensation to victims (or their surviving families) who had been forcibly “disappeared” or arbitrarily detained (Human Rights Watch 2004, 9–14). In response, in November 1999 former political prisoners (some of them now human rights activists well aware of previous efforts of this sort in Chile and Argentina) established the Moroccan Forum for Truth and Equity (Vairel 2008). Slyomovics (2005, 29–32) characterizes the forum’s first executive committee of ten men and three women as “a microcosm of the postcolonial history of mass political trials and forcible disappearances.” In late 2002 the palace restructured the CCDH, enhancing its powers and independence and recruiting longtime former political prisoner Driss Benzekri as the secretary-general.

In 2003 the CCDH proposed establishing an Equity and Reconciliation Commission (ERC) to produce a historical record of official repression between 1959 and 1999; in January 2004 the king agreed (Vairel 2008, 212). The ERC mandate prevented it from naming perpetrators, thereby limiting its ability to address directly widespread impunity. This limitation was publicly challenged by victims and their families at several of the hearings (Vairel 2008, 238; Waltz and Benstead 2006, 181). Still, this was by far the most serious effort anywhere in the region to recognize and make amends for grave human rights violations.\textsuperscript{35} The ERC had at least two signal achievements. First, the state formally
acknowledged to the victims its responsibility for their unlawful arrest, forcible disappearance, and torture. As former prisoner Fatna el-Bouih put it, “I advocate for real truth and justice to be put in place for all. I personally am not greatly interested in trials. I can forgive if I know la yatakarraru hadha [never this again]” (quoted in Slyomovics 2005, 33). Second was the extensive reparations program to individual victims of repression and their families and to larger communities. Susan Slyomovics (2009, 97) documented this phenomenon and concluded,

What might appear as top-down, state-imposed indemnification arrangements intersected with vibrant Moroccan grassroots movements that managed over time to enlarge the pool of potential claimants, earn them the label of “victim,” achieve some monetary demands, and insist on larger moral considerations (e.g., improved countrywide structural developments and institutional transparency).

During this same period Morocco’s Islamists entered the human rights arena organizationally, with groups like the Moroccan Center for Human Rights and Karama (Dignity), which has links to the Justice and Development Party (PJD). As with their leftist predecessors, prisoners were the catalyst. Abdellah Laamari, himself among seventy-one Islamists imprisoned in 1984 for “thought crimes” (Group 71) and subsequently a defense counsel in trials of Islamists, put it this way: “Political prisoners are like wood. When they start to burn, the machinery of human rights turns.”

Al-Yazami’s assessment of Morocco’s human rights movement is mixed. In Rabat and Casablanca there are numerous human rights organizations. “And it’s more democratic than in many other countries in the region,” he claimed, pointing to elections and rotating leadership. “After twenty years it’s mostly the same players, but you have a real civil society in the country today, with thousands of small NGOs working in villages, working on human rights, even though they are not talking about human rights.” Mustafa Soleih, who was active for years with Amnesty International’s Morocco branch and now does human rights training workshops around the country, agrees: “If there is a success here today, it is in small towns. Most city meetings draw maybe a dozen, but protests in small towns get lots of people out.” The attraction may be the lack of alternative outlets of activity rather than the human rights cause, but it is a growing phenomenon. Sion Assidon pointed out that human rights groups like the AMDH sparked widespread organized activism around issues like the cost of living and microcredit availability.
The problem, in al-Yazami’s view, is that people lack skills. “They know about the international covenants, but they can’t manage a budget.” The challenge, he added, is to establish coherence. He and others see women’s organizations like the Association Democratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM) as the exception. Their organizational and political competence was reflected in the way they implemented a decision to establish a national platform comprising some seven hundred national and local NGOs linking urban areas and small rural towns to implement the revised family code issued in 2004. Adala, which works on issues relating to the independence of the judiciary and other matters relating to the administration of justice, also stands out for its professionalism.

Human rights improvements since the 1990s have been uneven and qualified: newspapers have grown bolder in criticizing government policies, but journalists are still jailed for stories judged to “disrespect” the king, and the Western Sahara remains a “red line”; the new family code has been promulgated, but its implementation and enforcement have been partial. Morocco’s chief distinction in the region is that the state’s efforts to “close the books” on the era of fierce repression set in train a dynamic that compelled it to acknowledge many severe violations for which it was responsible. When King Hassan II created the CCDH in 1990, he declared that its mandate was to “put an end to allegations . . . [in order] to close this dossier” (Human Rights Watch 2004, 11). Eight years later the council issued a first, tentative acknowledgment of 112 “disappearances.” The king then gave the Advisory Council the impossible task of devising a plan to resolve all outstanding human rights issues within six months. The council published its report in April 1999. Human rights groups as well as families of the “disappeared” quickly derided its claim to have “closed the file” on this horrific abuse, claiming that there were at least six hundred actual cases of “disappearance,” many of which they had documented themselves.

The Advisory Council proved to be only the first in a series of still-evolving steps by the authorities to address past human rights crimes. Between 1999 and July 2003 the Arbitration Panel created by King Mohamed VI paid out nearly four thousand claims. In addition, entire regions, such as the region around Tazmamart, received reparations in the form of development projects and infrastructural investments. Moroccan civil society pressed on, leading the palace to set up the Equity and Reconciliation Commission (ERC) and instruct it to make “recommendations and proposals for breaking once and for all with the practices of the past . . . and restoring and reinforcing confidence in the rule of law and respect for human rights.” The ERC held hearings throughout
the country, many of them televised. It also established a website for receiving complaints and discussing different approaches to resolving those complaints. These efforts continued until the ERC issued its final report at the end of 2005.39

There were two significant shortcomings to the process as it has unfolded. First, human rights activists were not able to make the issue of torture—which was pervasive and remains a serious problem—part of an accountability agenda, although the ERC did include torture as one of a number of criteria in determining the amount of compensation. This is quite unlike the situation in Bahrain, Egypt, and Turkey, where authorities have frustrated efforts at promoting accountability but where torture has been central to the debate. In Assidon’s view, one factor may be that torture affected so many thousands of Moroccans, beyond the universe of opposition political activists who suffered long-term detention and forcible “disappearance,” that it represented a constituency the palace was keen to neutralize as an opposition. The king was less willing to see the door of accountability opened, since it went beyond the political actors he was most determined to co-opt. Assidon recounted that after he and other political prisoners escaped from a hospital, the authorities rounded up and tortured the nurses, who were not implicated in the escape. “For their trouble, [the authorities] got five or six different versions of how we got out, but it also gives you an idea of how many victims there are.”

The other shortcoming in the process is that until now the state has refused to countenance any steps for holding accountable those individuals responsible for systematic violations and atrocities. The ERC’s final report tried to push the envelope: one of its major recommendations was to adopt and implement a “national strategy to combat impunity” that is based on international standards. But to date the authorities have taken no steps to follow up on this recommendation. The Moroccan state, like others in the region, continues to pose as the authoritative voice on the state of human rights in the kingdom, most recently with the appointment of Ahmed Herzenni, a former leftist political prisoner having no particular record of human rights activism, as head of the CCDH, on the death of Driss Benzekri.

What remains unique in the region is the way Morocco’s human rights community—the formal organizations, the surviving victims and the families of victims, and the fledgling human rights activists among Islamists—has leveraged the king’s initial gestures into an expanding and deepening (though still incomplete) process of public reckoning, of compensation for a terrible record of abuse. Accountability, however, remains unaddressed.
Moroccan human rights activists, particularly women, have also left their mark in another area, not explored in this chapter; namely, reform of family and personal status law.

TURKEY

The human rights movement in Turkey also emerged from efforts of families and political comrades to address mass arrests and widespread torture of prisoners following the September 1980 military coup d’état. In the subsequent four years, more than 178,000 persons were detained, of whom 64,000 were charged and 42,000 convicted. Three-quarters of those arrested were leftists, and many of the rest were “separatists”—Kurds, that is (Pope and Pope 1997, 152–53). Murat Belge, a prominent literary critic and rights activist, who did jail time in the 1970s, explained: “The prisons in the 1980s were horrid. My experience was a summer camp in comparison. Clearly the military decided they would break the dissidents, even if the cost was wasting a generation or two.”

He and others discussed the need for an organization “above and outside” the political groups to raise these issues with the public and the authorities. After one of the radical groups, Dev-Sol, co-opted this idea and set up their own “families of victims” group, Belge recalled that he and others suggested an organization oriented to human rights generally, not just to prison conditions. The result, in 1986, was the Human Rights Association (IHD). The organization was officially registered, but authorities objected to a sentence in its statement of purpose that said the organization was established to defend human rights. “The state objected, saying the government was already defending human rights,” recalled Yusuf Alataş, a defense lawyer who joined the IHD board in 1989 and later headed the organization. “They made us take that sentence out.”

Human rights remain highly politicized in Turkey. According to one activist, in the IHD’s early years, at least, the Istanbul chapter was “serious and non-partisan,” but the Ankara branch “chose to play the more orthodox left game.” The Diyarbakir branch “was basically a front for the PKK,” and “there was nothing Istanbul could do about it.” In 1990 the Human Rights Foundation emerged out of the IHD, focusing solely on torture issues—documentation and rehabilitation—and opening offices in several major cities. In 1991 Mazlum-Der (short for Human Rights and Solidarity with the Oppressed) emerged, bringing a devout Muslim dimension to the human rights mix. Yılmaz Ensaroğlu, president of Mazlum-Der for many years, had been arrested in 1980. At the time, he was associated with a right-wing religious organization. “After September 12 [1980],...
anyone with political ideas was put in jail,” he said. “They focused on me because of the articles I wrote in our journal.”

Turkey’s security services and nationalist media quickly targeted the IHD as an adversary. Particularly in Diyarbakir and other predominantly Kurdish areas, persons thought to be operating on behalf of the security services assaulted and assassinated IHD leaders with impunity. At one time or another most of its branches were forcibly closed. According to Hüsnü Öndül, a founder of the IHD who served as its president from 1999 to 2004 and again after September 2007, in recent years “we have seen a heavy legal, judicial repression rather than physical.” As of September 2007, he said, fourteen IHD leaders had received jail terms.

Öndül was a young lawyer “with Marxist opinions” at the time of the 1981 military coup and immediately began defending political detainees. “To be very honest, my personal objective was not purely advancing human rights when this movement began. All of us who established the movement were dissidents, leftists. Human rights was one more means of fighting the state. This is how I used to think.” Eventually, he said, he developed a more “objective assessment; we realized it was not only leftists who were persecuted by the state.”

Öndül sees human rights priorities in Turkey as twofold. First, “there is the issue of peace. This means the Kurdish issue.” Second is the need to reform the constitutional system imposed by the military after the 1980 coup. He urged the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP) to address this. Judicial independence is a particular priority. “The judges and prosecutors who have internalized human rights can be put in key positions in critical cities.” He also saw some support coming from Turkey’s bourgeoisie: “It took them a while, but at the end of the day they saw the connection between democracy and selling more shirts,” alluding to the EU accession process. “Turkish society is more advanced than their rulers. People’s awareness about their rights has developed a lot compared to ten or twenty years ago, a result of the human rights groups and the EU process.”

The armed conflict in the southeast makes Turkey one of those places—like Israel and Palestine, and Iraq—where human rights groups had also to address international humanitarian law (or laws of war) violations. According to Öndül, the IHD decided in October 1992 that it would hold the warring parties to Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, which prohibits torture and summary executions, among other things, for armed groups as well as states. This was controversial in the membership. Yusuf Alataş, a defense attorney,
IHD board member, and a Kurd, said, “When the Kurdish question erupted, we realized that most leftists [in the IHD] were [Turkish] nationalists.” In any case, the IHD’s initiative may have been one factor that prompted the PKK to claim that it abides by the Geneva principles. The state, however, wanted the IHD to label the PKK as terrorists, and interpreted the group’s refusal to do so as an indication of support for the PKK.

Mazlum-Der, like the IHD, also took on issues of arbitrary detention and torture but prides itself as the one human rights organization promoting freedom of religion. The organization has been involved in the campaign against the ban on women wearing headscarves in universities and other public institutions. It also promoted legislation to protect the property rights of Armenian, Greek, and Jewish religious foundations as well as Muslim ones.

Both the IHD and Mazlum-Der are membership organizations and depend on members’ volunteer labor; they have branches in cities around the country. Each struggles against dismissive public perceptions of them as Kurdish or Islamist, respectively. Some rights activists see this as reflecting a gap between the leadership and the base. In both cases, said one, “the leadership understands the problem [of public perception], but the membership is still forcing them to act on political grounds.” Their areas of influence are limited, outside of Istanbul and Ankara, to a few regions. The most active branches are in the (heavily Kurdish) southeast. In the west, in central Anatolia, and in the Black Sea region, the human rights groups have little if any presence.

A freedom-of-expression campaign triggered by the January 1995 indictment of prominent novelist Yaşar Kemal, after he criticized the state’s policies towards Kurds, may be the most impressive display of the social movement aspect of human rights in Turkey. The campaign engaged the established groups but originated with writers and publishers, who published and republished manifestos and books that violated laws prohibiting “insults” of the state, the judiciary, the military, and so forth. By the end of 2002 the campaign had engaged nearly eighty thousand persons, according to Şanar Yurdatapan, one of its founders. Another instance is the campaign featuring silent demonstrations by mothers and other relatives of persons “disappeared” by security agencies.

**HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST: A SOCIAL MOVEMENT?**

This review of four countries having a significant human rights organizational presence and history indicates that there is no precise or uniform answer to the question. Morocco’s human rights community has perhaps the strongest...
claim to being “part of a large social movement” (Slyomovics 2005, 203–4). It has had notable achievements in the key areas of state accountability and family law reform, and seems to have impact outside the main cities. In Bahrain, the case is less clear. Rights activists constitute a highly visible part of a fragmented oppositional political society. In Bahrain and in Morocco, human rights activism emerged out of political-prisoner solidarity and defense networks. These shared origins seem to have lent both movements a relatively high degree of organizational coherence. Although Turkey’s human rights movement also grew out of political-prisoner solidarity activism, the impact and social movement status of human rights organizations there is less discernable.

Egyptian human rights groups enjoy less social resonance or political weight than that of groups in Bahrain or Morocco. Unclear is the extent to which this derives from more effective state suppression of civic associational life. Of these four countries only Egypt has no human rights organization with ties to communities of practicing Muslims. However, Egypt’s independent print media and the pan-Arab satellite channels regularly and conspicuously use human rights framing in their reporting, reflecting a social impact that makes organizations more dispensable as framing agents.

All four states publicly proclaim to support human rights. But actual policies in Bahrain and Egypt are quite inimical to freedom of association for human rights or any civic organizations. National human rights commissions are now global phenomena, and UN experts have developed protocols (the “Paris Principles”) setting out standards for their independence and effectiveness. Morocco and Egypt have such commissions; Morocco’s has had far more impact. The Turkish government reportedly drafted legislation to establish an official human rights council.48 In early 2010 Bahrain announced the establishment of an official National Human Rights Institution, but the extent to which it will function independently of the government remains to be seen.

Some activists in Egypt and in Morocco have agreed to serve on their national human rights commissions; others refuse to have anything to do with them. In Bahrain very few were asked by the government to do so. From initial appearances, Bahrain’s national institution will likely resemble Egypt’s, where it is an instrument for establishing state hegemony over the interpretation of its human rights record: many Egyptian rights activists have shunned it for that reason. However, to maintain any measure of credibility, the Egyptian commission’s reports have had to officially confirm the prevalence of torture, for instance. The commission secretariat also takes up, and sometimes resolves
satisfactorily, individual cases and grievances with the Ministry of Interior, and has also operated where there is some division in ruling circles to promote certain rights—a recent example being full citizenship rights for adherents of the Baha’i faith (Cardenas and Flibbert 2005; Stacher 2005).

Finally, as Quintan Wiktorowicz (2004, 17) observes, “[s]ocial movements . . . are embedded in a field of multiple actors that often vie for framing hegemony.” Hanny Megally, an Egyptian who has worked with a number of major international rights organizations, sums up the challenge as “the perception that human rights is a foreign concept and that their activism lacks support and legitimacy in the region” (Megally 2006, 107). In the countries discussed here, the most significant framing competition is between the state and Islamic activism, broadly understood. In Bahrain, Morocco, and Turkey, some Islamists have become engaged as human rights proponents. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood has adopted human rights framing for its own purposes. But no Egyptian human rights organization has emerged with a project of explicitly fusing international human rights standards and Islamic values, although the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies has devoted considerable resources to hosting discussions and debates that bring together prominent Islamist thinkers and Arab human rights activists from across the region and beyond.

States have consistently posed the most intractable challenge to human rights, articulating, when it suits them to do so, an “Islamic values” argument, but equally often framing human rights claims as affronts to national sovereignty—an argument that resonates in societies that perceive themselves to be under religious, cultural, and national assault (for example, Egypt on the Palestinian issue). States also use national security to dismiss human rights concerns, arguing that threats to security override concerns for human rights. One might say this is the trump card in the regional states’ repertoire of framing devices.
The dynamics of collective action represent a classic polemic in the sociology of social movements, particularly concerning the life cycle of collective action: its emergence, development, and decline. Here I focus on the practical reality of collective action in social movements. This includes the organizational structure and practices, as well as their relationship to the life-cycle stage of a social movement. My analysis of these dynamics flows from a series of questions: How does a contentious actor frame its public discourse? Which conditions inform the actor’s strategies? These questions become especially critical in a repressive setting like Morocco, where the considerations informing contenders’ tactical and organizational choices are crucial due to the high risk associated with involvement in social movements. In a setting where participation in a collective action can trigger violent police reactions or public defamation, considering variables that take into account relational and pragmatic dimensions is integral to understanding the shape of a given social movement.

In Morocco since the early 1990s, unemployed undergraduates, graduates, and postgraduates have been engaging in protests to demand employment in the civil service. Groups formed by holders of high school diplomas and bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees often seize public spaces as a form of protest. They are commonly known as diplômés chômeurs.¹ When collective recruitments to public sector posts are announced, these groups quickly disappear. Within these groups divisions stemming from differences in educational attainment overlap with different styles of contentious activity and uneven institutionalization trajectories. Street demonstrations have become the most common activity of unemployed graduates and take up most of their time. Since these groups do not have legal status, they are treated by law enforcement agencies as unauthorized organizations and are very often subjected to repression. During the first years of mobilization, in the early 1990s, the threat of detentions and torture was very real for activists. Nonetheless
the number of contentious diplômés chômeurs’ groups has continued to increase in Rabat.

Certain features specific to the mobilization of the Moroccan unemployed have become standard: (1) a closed-shop system classifies adherents according to their commitment, using a scoring system in nominal lists that are used during negotiations with authorities. When a recruitment agreement is achieved between the protesters and the public decision makers, jobs are distributed according to members’ rankings; (2) the framing discourse focuses on the right to a job and the notion of the unemployed as a priori victims; and (3) the unemployed are detached from political markers. These features of “limited action” became even more prominent during the February 20th pro-democracy movement of 2011 organized by a coalition known as the “Freedom and Democracy Platform” and named for the date of its first national march. The unemployed graduates sought to clearly differentiate their actions from those of the February 20th movement by “going out in the street” before or after pro-democracy rallies, occupying different spaces in the town or, whenever the action implied a momentary union, distinguishing themselves by visible elements (colored jackets, exhibiting their diplomas, and so forth).

Unemployed graduates’ tactical choices, infused with a normative sense of righteousness, constitute temporary criteria for positioning oneself within the space of mobilization (Mathieu 2004) in interaction with other groups and the public authorities. The final incarnation of the group depends on activists’ profiles and the perceptions they hold about the feasibility of protest and the opportunities for success. During the time of my research most of the groups I monitored had reached a consensus on an “apolitical,” pragmatically oriented, and self-limiting style of contention.

The choices underlying methods of protest, as well as the interactions between activists and state actors or other contentious actors, are standard topics in Social Movement Theory (SMT). Here I propose an explanatory framework based on empirically grounded variables: activist memories, their representations of politics (and therefore their definitions of collective interest and its virtuous expression), and perceptions of the coercive setting (and therefore the “rationality” and efficacy of proposals). These variables arise from my fieldwork and form a framework that allows us to understand the particular way activists execute their struggle. A relational element should also be considered; for instance, the insertion of mobilization into a multisector society (Dobry 1983), which could contribute to the modification of perceptions of actors and thus...
impact their calculations. Thinking in terms of a relational dimension and activist memories might allow us to grapple with the shifting nature of rules and the a priori “transgressions” of normative conventions. This reasoning also allows us to overcome the trap of perceiving only a normative resistance/collaboration binary within social movements, which can confuse our perception of the practices and interactions between contentious actors and authority figures.

My research addresses both empirical and epistemological issues arising from this framework. Why do mobilizations of the unemployed manifest themselves in these particular ways, and how do they vary? In this chapter I first elaborate on the landscape of the diplômés chômeurs mobilizations. Second, I address the specific features of collective action among the Moroccan unemployed. Third, I introduce an explanatory framework elaborating on the strategies and practical choices for protest among unemployed graduates. I will try to discover the relationship between my variables—the memory of the challenges and opportunities of contentious action, and the concept of mobilization in a multisector space—and “specific” features of the movement, namely, scoring systems, political detachment, and demonstrations as the most common activities.

LABOR MARKETS UNDER NEOLIBERAL RESTRUCTURING

According to Maghraoui (2002, 25), since its independence in 1956 Morocco has had three cycles of economic restructuring. After a period of monetary stabilization (1965 to 1983), a structural adjustment program conceived by the International Monetary Fund was implemented between 1983 and 1992, followed by a program of mise à niveau (or upgrading) that was intended to restructure Moroccan firms to increase their capacity and competitiveness in preparation for free trade with Europe. Similar economic restructuring processes occurred in Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen during the 1990s. Since the beginning of the 1980s, “most paths of autonomous national development adopted by African regimes have been undermined, the global economic crisis has deepened and mounting debts have driven governments to seek external flows of capital” (Seddon and Zeilig 2005, 16). Importantly the reasons behind these reforms may not have been exclusively economic.

Structural adjustment programs “typically involved privatisation, an end to subsidies and price controls, and the lowering of trade barriers” (Maghraoui 2002, 26). As Karen Pfeifer (1999, 25) shows for Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, and Jordan, adjustment reforms “always exacerbate unemployment and poverty because reductions in public spending and anti-inflation efforts induce economic
recessions.” Morocco’s labor force shrank during the most intensive period of adjustment, 1988–92. Ultimately the reforms aim to substitute the previous principal recruiter of labor—the state—with private investment, which it is claimed will provide new job opportunities. Consequently from 1982 to 1983 public sector hiring dropped from fifty thousand to five thousand recruits a year (Akesbi 2003). In the following years job creation gradually increased and stabilized, though it has never reached the levels of the 1970s. There was a secular increase in unemployment rates for university graduates (who had previously benefited the most from jobs in the public sector), from 6.5 percent in 1982 to 26 percent in 1991, 43 percent in 1997, and 40 percent in 2002. The newly “unburdened” state (Hibou 1998) was charged primarily with management responsibilities, while the private sector was supposed to become the largest job provider. However, this ambition was never realized, and consequently the number of unemployed, especially graduates, increased (Mellakh 1999).

The adjustment programs sought to “remove general subsidies for commodities like basic foods, fuel and transportation” (Pfeifer 1999, 26). The effects of these policies “fell disproportionately on the popular classes” (Seddon and Zeilig 2005, 16), who protested against the social consequences of the reforms. This was the broad economic context in which the first initiatives calling for a “return” of the state as a primary employer appeared. They followed the 1983 and 1984 bread riots and the 1991 general strike. Increasing political tension permeated the country with the historical opposition led by the Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires (USFP), which represented the voice of popular discontent. The regime soon proffered the possibility of institutional change, which would later materialize in the 1998 government of Alternance—the nomination of a historic leader of the socialist opposition to the regime as prime minister, involving no power sharing between the king and his opposition.

**CLASSICAL EXPLANATIONS OF COLLECTIVE ACTION OF THE UNEMPLOYED**

Classical SMT might a priori appear to be an interesting tool for analyzing unemployment as a rallying factor in sustainable collective action. In this theoretical framework the onset of mobilization is linked to a framing of issues through the prism of injustice (Snow and Benford 1988) by experienced movement entrepreneurs (McCarthy and Zald 1987). The formation and reproduction of groups is further encouraged by incipient political liberalization (McAdam 1988) and through the existence of ties linking activists together even before their employment status has changed (Oberschall 1973; Diani and McAdam 2003).
Unlike previous generations, when a diploma used to guarantee almost automatic employment (Ibaaquil 1999), during the period of structural adjustment the graduates of mass public universities were suddenly confronted with the contraction of the labor market. This exacerbated an already volatile situation triggered by the simultaneous reduction in public expenditures. In an attempt to avoid criticism of this new policy and curry favor with the middle class (Saaf 1999; Bouderbala 2003), King Hassan II created the National Council of Youth and the Future (Conseil national de la jeunesse et de l’avenir, or CNJA). The role of the institution was to quantify the problem and explore the possibilities of employment for university graduates. The public eruption of the crisis created a “window of opportunity” (Gamson and Meyer 1996) for initiatives associated with the unemployment problem. How can it be theoretically determined whether the establishment of the CNJA was an actual threat or an opportunity? Its creation could also be interpreted as limiting the problem-formulation process to a restricted space composed of public authorities and scholars. Following this logic, I interpret the first organized protests as a reaction to the hijacking of this issue by the state (Goldstone and Tilly 2001).

The pioneers of the Moroccan unemployed movement were former activists from university student unions and clandestine leftist organizations who also faced unemployment at the end of their university education. Some were former political prisoners, whose previous activism rendered them suspect for state authorities. By the end of the 1980s many questioned the viability of revolutionary ideology as a suitable form of social and political mobilization. Decades of repression, combined with the ascendance of Islamists in the academic arena, necessitated the reevaluation of activists’ practices regarding new contentious issues (Vairel 2005a). The first association of unemployed diploma-holders, the National Association of Unemployed Graduates of Morocco (al-Jama‘iyya al-wataniyya li’il-hamilay al-shahadat al-mu’attalin, or ANDCM [the French acronym]), was founded in 1991. Activists’ expertise garnered from previous run-ins with the state facilitated the institutionalization of the group.

However, previous experiences also act as counterexamples for the organization of a new cause. Therefore this new cause prides itself on being detached from traditional politics and shies away from explicit ideological references and alliances with political groups. The framing of the “right to work” is based on a powerful notion of graduates having the right to a job in the public sector. The image of the diploma as a channel for social promotion has been solidly anchored in the collective imaginary and used to orient education-related choices.
MOBILIZING FOR RIGHTS (Mellakh 1999; Vermeren 2002). However, the persistence of the issue of unemployment without a solution on the horizon renders “graduates’ right to work” dubious as an acceptable symbolic frame. The recurrence of collective action has stimulated a dynamic of discrediting (by politicians, journalists, and so on), which requires actors to permanently justify their movement. But despite the erosion of graduates’ self-representation, the number of groups continues to increase, and they are engaging in ever-more visible protest activities.

The reception of the ANDCM by the political elite can be interpreted in several ways. I argue that institutional changes emerging at the beginning of the 1990s stimulated collective action. The constitutional reforms of 1992 and 1996 offered a semblance of a political opening, sanctioned by the negotiation of the 1998 government of Alternance between the Palace and the parties of the National Movement, and by the amnesty of political prisoners. The possible change of governmental élites will likely affect the evolution of the diplômés chômeurs cause: opposition parties welcomed the initiative of the unemployed, seeking to renew their links with the rank and file and recruit new members in the context of increasing opportunities for parties to play a role in public affairs.

The institutionalization of the international regime of human rights (Feliu 2004) goes along with a growing tolerance vis-à-vis the development of associations (Roque 2001; Desrues and Moyano 2001). However, grassroots associations are possible only when they do not call into question authority’s fundamental interests (Tozy 1994). The ANDCM will never be authorized, and the lack of official recognition “justifies” repressive and calculated measures on the part of the government—although this does not exclude the possibility of negotiations. Always illegal, demonstrations are subject to relatively unpredictable police intervention and management. Moments of tolerance by security forces are linked to activists’ self-censorship. Selective incentives, in an Olsonian sense—such as a closed-shop system allocating a certain number of points for participation in each protest action, and ranking group members according to their “activist” involvement—and social sanctions, such as loss of friendship or respect, seek to alleviate uncertainty about the efficacy of personal commitment. Other factors offer better explanations of mobilization in the face of inherent risk: activist memories of constraints, experiences of previous successes, and the mutual shaping of perceptions of the feasible and the effective.

By “activist memory” I refer to the accumulation of experiences of constraints, opportunities, and general perceptions regarding the political field. Memories serve either as a repository of skills required to carry out collective
action or as a transmission channel of perceptions allowing actors to calculate the pertinence of their actions. They also channel a certain representation of politics and the virtuous defense of collective interests. Activists take all of these elements into consideration as they plan their actions. Memories take on a life of their own by transformative events, which have a major effect on the construction of perceptions. Thus a wave of collective job recruitments consolidates the idea that the mobilization is an effective way to obtain a professional job. Alternatively arbitrary repression introduces uncertainty, which renders a previous notion of efficacy relative. These elements also explain why one tactical choice is prioritized over the other in an ostensibly static context.

BUILDING A “PROFESSIONAL” MOBILIZATION

Beginning in September 2006, when I started fieldwork, unemployed groups of chômeurs holding master’s and doctoral degrees carried out demonstrations up to four or five times per week in Rabat over a period of two years. Between five hundred and one thousand people participated in each action. In villages and small towns with ANDCM sections, protest activities tallied a higher number of participants, although public decision makers did not seem very attentive to protesters’ claims. Are the diplômés chômeurs devoted to the cause that ties them together? A pragmatic explanation for their ties appears more suitable: activists are linked to the group by strict rules of involvement that “force” them to participate actively; failing to do that runs the risk of punishment because participation in assemblies, demonstrations, and press conferences is rewarded with points that determine eligibility for jobs during negotiations with authorities.

Reducing free riding is not the only objective of this point system. The system is also a form of standardization that aims to simplify participation because it reduces the need for creative involvement. Technical difficulties associated with group creation are minimized when it takes place within the cycle of mobilization. For example, the statutes might be copied from a previous group; or “migrant” activists (who might have been excluded from previous groups) might bring their organizational expertise to the new structure. But are these selective incentives (Olson 1971) systematically adopted?

Activists’ official justification for action and mobilization is not ambiguous: the impossibility of achieving valuable professional employment through academic capital renders contention the “unique” alternative for those who do not possess “personal” connections (piston or wasṭa, as activists say in French or Moroccan Arabic). Graduates’ “protest vocation” originates with the experi-
ence of unemployment—a very urgent experience since it implies an “injustice” vis-à-vis the “rights” the diploma supposedly confers. However, this explanation based on students’ relative frustration cannot account for involvement that takes place over a longer biographical/activist trajectory (Fillieule 1997).

The organized unemployed in Morocco are almost exclusively high school and university graduates. Combining degree levels within a single group is successful only when a coherent ideological base ties the activists together. When involvement is founded on pragmatic motivations, activists avoid such combinations, pointing to the loss of cohesion, tactical power, and so on. The relative uniformity of groups according to the academic degree held distinguishes the Moroccan case from those where mobilized populations are more heterogeneous.

Thus degree level has gradually become a major factor for coherence among subcategories of activists. It partly eliminates the difficulty of defining a collective identity, which has been highlighted as a central obstacle for the collective organization of the unemployed (Fillieule 1993). But the use of the diploma criterion to give coherence to a group must also be connected to the symbols that framed the actions of the pioneers of the movement. The university unionism of the 1970s and 1980s was influenced by Marxism-Leninism, an ideology still adhered to by a remarkable proportion of unemployed activists. Marxist-Leninist university student unionism defined students who came from proletarian backgrounds as the “vanguard” of the revolution, and their natural space of political intervention was the university. Within this ideological frame, the mobilization of the unemployed represents to the graduates the same thing that unions formerly represented to the students.

Thus the paradigmatic unemployed graduate activist in Morocco differs from the prototype of unemployed activists identified in Western research. The typical Western activist has less academic and political capital (fewer skills, fewer connections, no political experience, and so on) and is thus dependent on external social movement entrepreneurs (Bagguley 1991). The perception of the unemployed as a subaltern category is discussed by recent research (Maurer and Pierru 2001). In the Moroccan case the paradigmatic activist is fully skilled: educated, politicized, experienced in collective action, and so on. When competencies are lacking, the group is supposed to intervene to ensure their development.

The diffusion of the scoring system is linked to the evolution of activist space and also to authorities’ response to protests. The first successes of the
ANDCM at the beginning of the 1990s attracted a growing number of adherents in local sections. They soon faced an unexpected situation: more members than jobs to distribute. The scoring system solved this distribution problem. The development of sections was based on the arrival of pragmatic activists, who lacked political experience. The profile of this type of activist was different from the typical union member, for whom staying abreast and networking was a powerful motivation for involvement, perhaps even stronger than the issue of unemployment itself. The secondary import of the scoring system is that it transcended the inequalities among activists, such as differing ideological backgrounds and varying political skills.

The codification of involvement represents an effective system for successfully opening the groups to a broader array of individuals from nontraditional backgrounds without damaging the internal coherence of the group. However, the new generation of graduates did not experience the same political socialization or activist memories as the older, more traditional ANDCM activists. Thus although the codification and set of coercive rules are, from an Olsonian perspective, necessary to ensure individual involvement, they are not that “effective” in a situation where ideological or biographical commonality between activists is lacking or where the efficacy of collective action is dubious.

**WITHOUT MEMORY, NO INCENTIVE IS USEFUL**

Postgraduate degree holders provide the new rank and file for the unemployed graduate field, since the ANDCM and the disability groups are numerically relatively stable. A life cycle can be identified in the twenty-year history of the movement of *diplômés chômeurs*. A new group is usually born on the initiative of graduates sharing their knowledge of previous experiences (either because they were in contact with activists in their faculties, or because they were themselves members of a former group). The new group thus inherits and selectively adopts the internal rules of a previous group. After an increase in the number of activists and an implicit recognition by authorities, usually expressed through the reception of group representatives by public negotiators, the group begins street actions. Demonstrations quite frequently become a compulsory stage in the activist cycle, despite not necessarily representing an organic part of the process. Contentious actions do not work as a tangible resource (Dobry 1983). That means that their impact is determined mostly by the evolution of other sociopolitical activity: union unrest pushing for a mass recruitment of teachers; the approaching of elections; and so on. After a period,
negotiations with decision makers can lead to the recruitment to the civil service of the entire group or a portion of it. The vacuum is then quickly occupied by new actors.

Does the codification of practices make the reestablishment of groups easier? The internalization of “technical” procedures allows for a quick organization of groups. However, this learning process and remobilization are possible only if they are perceived as useful. The belief in the effectiveness of participation becomes central when there is no other ideological mechanism that binds members together or constitutes a target of involvement on its own. The perception of effectiveness is built on memories of previous experiences; every success incites a new wave of groups because it informs prospective members about the reasonableness and the pertinence of involvement. Many activists would articulate sentiments similar to the remarks of one whom I interviewed in October 2008: “I used to be against these demonstrations. But then I realized that people who went out into the street were hired in the public sector. What am I going to do then? Sit down and wait at home?”

Consequently introducing uncertainty into activists’ calculations is an important element of the state’s management of opposition. Its impact is disheartening for mobilization. The apparently arbitrary logic of police repression confuses activists’ perceptions regarding the coherence of state strategies vis-à-vis opposition. This is combined with the planting of contradictory information in group circles, which stimulates competitive relations within the group and blurs the link between protest and job recruitment that activists channel through memories.

THE LOGICS OF INHIBITION, TRANSGRESSION, AND POLITICAL DETACHMENT

Contentious actors are not external to their environment. On the contrary, they are inserted in a social space and driven by varying strategies and interests. Still, interaction between contentious actors and their environments may be so constricted that it would be misleading to consider that structural or contextual elements necessarily exert a unilateral influence over mobilization. However, a particularity of mobilization of the unemployed is their detachment vis-à-vis traditional political markers: ideological identification, party or union membership, or participation in other contentious fields besides protesting unemployment. What are the practical implications of this detachment? What distinctions within the space of the mobilization does this allow?
The collective’s detachment from political markers has implications for the forms and possibilities of collaboration with other collectives. It is either assumed by other activists to be “appropriate” or exercised only pragmatically and expediently. The collective discourse is focused on job attainment and a sense of job seekers as victims. The groups publicly claim a desire for ideological detachment. This is not unique; other mobilized groups have also claimed legitimacy by trying to remain autonomous from partisan politics (Mathieu 2002). However, the frontiers of what is feasible under this principle are extremely unstable. “Detachment” can “justify” a wide range of practical, and even transgressive, actions and be used among actors as a criterion of legitimacy. For example, during an electoral campaign, mobilized unemployed graduates may vote, boycott, or run as candidates. Whatever option is chosen will be “justified” as the most legitimate way to act, while rivals’ choices will be systematically criticized.

Since its inception, the ANDCM has been located in the interstices of the political and trade union fields. The ANDCM is linked to both spheres by resources, networks, and expertise. Indeed veteran members of the association always remember this while recalling the origins of the group: “All the opposition parties and unions, along with partisan [political] newspapers, attended the constitutive assembly of the group, in 1991” (interview, May 2005). Fifteen years later the pamphlets of the association still call for the solidarity and support of all “the democratic forces.” But nowadays, unlike in 1991, similar calls are answered only by specific oppositional ideological streams, which are not represented in parliament. According to the official activist discourse, participating in unemployed mobilizations constitutes an explicit rejection of corruption, nepotism, and uneven access to civil service jobs based on personal relations, as strategies of attaining employment. Unemployed graduates also call for the support of “democratic forces, political actors, unions and associations.”8 Ultimately only unions and human rights groups responded to this call. What has happened during these years? How can the call for support from political forces be combined with the principle of political neutrality?

The appearance of receptiveness toward party and union spheres has two targets. First, it reduces the risks of being accused of having ideological or organizational affiliations. Second, it preserves the possibility of receiving resources from the political arena. The positive interest shown by opposition parties in the creation of the ANDCM in 1991 can be understood in a context of institutional change. Enlargement of the rank and file and construction of an image of prox-
imity to social problems were salient for parties that were expecting increased possibilities of participation in government. For its part the ANDCM did not want to prevent members from joining because of their party membership or ideological orientations.9 From then on, involvement in the ANDCM (and in all groups of unemployed activists) would be based on “what unifies at the expense of what divides” (Bennani-Chraïbi 1996, 132). However, the composition of the ANDCM’s central committees reveals an attempt at political balance, including representatives of all opposition forces. A secondary effect is the institutionalization of a sort of elitism within the executive organs: although the discourse emphasizes ideological “indifference,” active political belonging has become a central criterion for reaching positions of responsibility. There are other explanations for the absence of independents in the leadership: independents lack resources; political partisans are better known and have more know-how and experience. Thus political detachment does not mean the democratization of the leadership bodies but rather a nonpartisan framing of action.

The belief in detachment’s righteousness is also circumstantial. The evolution of parties’ positioning within the political field and the recurrence of mobilizations of the unemployed modify the relations between protesters and parties. Since 1998 the ANDCM has evolved toward an overrepresentation of extraparliamentary left activists within the group. That year opposition parties entered the Alternance government headed by Abderrahmane Youssoufi, a historic socialist leader. This incorporation into state affairs encouraged the new decision makers to honor some of the promises they had extended to the unemployed graduates: members of mobilized groups who were close to governmental parties were the primary beneficiaries of the new public jobs manna. The effect on those movement members who were excluded was to reorient them toward support of extraparliamentary leftist organizations and a reanimation of contentious politics.10

In the evolution of unemployed graduates’ mobilization, the holders of postgraduate degrees seizing the leadership of the movement has especially catalyzed change. Involvement in ANDCM has proven less conducive to realizing activists’ demands than has membership in groups organized on the basis of the specific higher degree held. ANDCM adherents spend on average a much longer time in their group than do holders of higher degrees. The style of participation in ANDCM’s local sections does not demand constant attendance.

Postgraduate degree holders’ groups manage their membership differently. They organized independently in 1995, evoking a double refusal. One was ideo-
logical: a reaction against the ambitions of a political ANDCM effectively monopolarizing the field. The second was strategic: decrees 888/99 and 965/99 of the Ministry of Civil Service stipulating that postgraduate diploma holders are exempt from entrance examinations were perceived as an asset that would make these degree holders’ issue easier to resolve. Every new wave of unemployed degree holders is progressively detached from the political experiences of the leftist National Student Union of Morocco and other clandestine organizations for generational reasons or because of the presence of other social networks.

Postgraduate degree holders’ groups have inherited the mainstream perception of party-style government during the Alternance: dissolution of opposition discourses, docile policies, search for private interest, and so on. Representative institutions and ideological adherence are widely discredited by citizens (Bennani-Chraïbi 1996) and perceived as mere tools for resource exchanges. Thus “apolitical” action came to be perceived as the virtuous way to act. Still, those who claim to have political experience must negotiate the framing discourse of mobilization with those from other ideological streams more visible in the university (Islamists), or with pragmatic activists. Consensus is reached on a collective framing discourse that minimizes ideological references.

The rapid development of groups makes it difficult to establish skill-transfer systems. Involvement itself is, on the contrary, quite standardized. A primary goal is neutralizing conflicts that divided activists during their university days, in order to keep together adherents who display an aversion toward ideologically oriented involvements. This rationale reveals a conception of political space as being highly predatory and manipulative. Expressing an ideological orientation is perceived by some activists as dangerous, a “red line” that can render the mobilization susceptible to repression. For others politicization is associated only with partisan calculations. Both perceptions influence each other, converging in a “disciplined” attitude that makes unemployed activists more predictable, potentially useful for state operations, and less subversive (Foucault 1975). The representation of politics based on memories of repression and political manipulation has progressively created a belief about the “righteousness” (both morally legitimate and protective) of docile, nonsubversive action.

This rhetorical style acts as a valorization of activist activity as a whole; the same happens with ideological or organizational affiliations. Thus for the extreme left the diplômés chômeurs represent a renewal of militant practices: the ANDCM is considered the paradigmatic form of vanguard activism as opposed to groups organized around the degree held, which they consider
easy to manipulate because of their “nonpoliticization.” However, according to the groups of postgraduate degree holders, the danger of manipulation lies in the evolution of the unemployed mobilization toward a project of complete transformation of the existing social order. The difficulty in describing postgraduate groups’ ideologies makes them a suspicious community with regard to partisan mobilization enterprises. In fact no party with governmental aspirations risks becoming too narrowly committed to the protesters. But this fact does not prevent the mobilization from being at the heart of several dynamics arising in the political arena.

MOBILIZING IN A COMPLEX SOCIETY

There is no line of causality between forms of protest and job recruitment: the impact of contentious activity on protesters’ recruitment or nonrecruitment into jobs depends on what happens in other social sectors. This mobilization is immersed in a complex context, formed by several autonomous social sectors that are linked through interdependent relations. For example, demonstrations will more easily break down public authorities’ resistance during an electoral period, when public officials are interested in showing themselves to be socially concerned candidates. Or decision makers will be more responsive if actions of the unemployed are magnified by trade union or journalistic support committees. Thus it is necessary to analyze the multifaceted context where the mobilization arises in order to understand its “results.”

Mobilization arises in a complex social space; therefore, it is not external to its environment. Activists might be involved in multiple endeavors or be motivated by stakes of different natures (political party stakes, cultural stakes, and so on). But mobilization is also a place for the production of politics (where elites or framing discourses are created, for example), and it can be used as a tool in the competition among parties, unions, public decision makers, and so on. Union support committees have proven very effective in provoking a response from authorities. These committees imply a nonroutine convergence of interests across groups (the unemployed and trade unionists) that alters the normal collusive transactions between the state and social groups—especially trade unions. But such committees are possible only when union members identify their interests as consistent with a resolution of the issue of unemployment.

Elections are another event that highlights the overlapping interests of unemployed activists and other actors in the political arena. An election is considered a suitable moment to inflect—in a positive or negative direction—
negotiations with authorities. Party activists play the card of proximity to voters. They are sensitive to the critical discourse that unemployed groups deploy against their electoral promises. Elections also lead to a reordering of priorities for actors engaged in multiple discourses. The ANDCM and its members have adopted different attitudes toward elections (boycotts, participation as candidates, no position at all), depending on power struggles and the attitude of their allies in the electoral field. Beyond its electoral utility, the issue of the unemployed is used in the political field by public figures trying to build up an image of proximity to voters and reasonableness. This demonstrates the extent of insertion of the unemployment issue into the political field, and the possibility of converting activist capital to a political resource when the evolution of the political arena (the need to attract disappointed voters) allows full advantage to be taken of the features of unemployed graduates.

GOING OUT IN THE STREET OR STAYING AT HOME

If rhetoric is used as a tool of distinction, the practice of demonstrations is consensual among unemployed graduates. Demonstrations are considered the most effective way to provoke a reaction from authorities. Although they occur almost every day in Rabat, they are the result of temporary tactical choices and are just one among many types of action included in a larger repertoire, such as mailing letters to newspapers, organizing trade union support committees, hunger strikes, and participation in social forums. The choice of the form of action verifies the hypothesis contained in the notion of repertoire (Tilly 1978), which considers that the set of forms of action available to protesters is limited by material and cognitive possibilities and constraints, all of which are historically determined.

Demonstrations are the most valued method by the contentious collective to achieve visibility. There is a gap between the limited rhetoric and the subversive staging of the protest. Through street occupations, the function of public spaces as defined by state authorities is temporarily called into question. The form adopted by this challenge changes depending on protesters’ perceptions of their limitations. There is a permanent process of tactical innovation, a fact that challenges Tilly’s claim that there is a restricted repertoire of contentious action. While the notion of repertoire remains very useful, it dismisses somehow the potential for creative agency of the subalterns, who are innovating tactically within the perceived constraints.

Until 2000, demonstrations organized by the ANDCM mobilized hundreds of local section members for several days at a time in Rabat. Activists from
outside Rabat used to stay in the Union Marocaine du Travail (Union of Moroccan Workers [UMT]) offices during these “days of struggle.” After the dispersion of a sit-in organized by the ANDCM that lasted several days in 2001, the UMT directors banned activities in the headquarters of the union—which implied spending nights there—making it excessively difficult for unemployed people coming from distant regions to participate. The demonstration scene in Rabat was then occupied by the unemployed postgraduate degree holders. They either applied the ANDCM model (like hunger strikes, which were inherited from the repertoire of regime opponents) or engaged in unprecedented actions, like sit-ins in front of the parliament lasting for several days. Police tactics toward contention evolved: sit-ins lasting for several nights were forbidden. The shifting boundaries of constraints led to abandoning this form of action and adopting more direct ones, such as massive but short gatherings and occupations of party headquarters or public buildings. Constraints channeled by activist memory mean that the spatial deployment of activists depends on the perceived “red lines.” Most of the unemployed who are detained are charged with “offense to the royal family.”

What explains why a group whose organization has not significantly changed over time implements a variety of actions at different times? What kind of link can be established between the type of action implemented and a political environment where no shift in the supposed “opportunity (or constraint) structure” has occurred? No demonstration has the value of a calculable resource by itself. The state’s reaction is unstable, and the severity of repression depends on what is going on in other spaces, as well as the échange de coups (moves and counter-moves) in other fields of activity (Dobry 1990). I propose thinking about “memories” and “interactions across social sectors” to better understand these tactical choices. The ultimate choice stems from a calculation that takes into account several variables: personal dispositions of activists, security constraints, and the efficacy credited to actions that are perceived through the prism of activist memories and the positioning of the group within the complex environment. The sequence of moves between protesters and authorities constantly modifies their mutual perceptions of what is feasible. This accounts for the shifts in the types of action implemented. The eventual occurrence of “transformative events” (McAdam and Sewell 2001) such as a collective recruitment for civil service jobs or unprecedented repressive measures is a moment of seminal reconfiguration in perception among groups. These events reveal to the protesters that demonstrations can lead to recruitment or that, on the contrary, they are a risky choice.
A relationship between the profile of the group and the practice of demonstrations can be outlined. Large groups requiring a high level of commitment (like postgraduate degree holders’ groups in Rabat since the second half of the 1990s) tend to prioritize intense street actions over a short period of time. These groups must optimize the compulsory presence of their adherents in the capital by doing the most in the least time possible. Street demonstration is considered the most efficient way to question authorities at a low cost. Its technical difficulty is low compared with other forms of action that demand cooperation between unemployed and other actors (unions, associations, authorities). When the small size of the group and the low level of personal involvement do not allow the organization of daily demonstrations (for example, the sections of ANDCM in the provinces), the practice of demonstrations follows a reactive scheme: they are used to deflect the perception that negotiations are taking too much time.

Associations that have other ways to ensure their contact with authorities—for instance, through personal links—may renounce demonstrations as a tactic. However, emerging from silence and engaging in demonstrations has become a common behavior, especially since the “street” has become a legitimizing resource among contenders. This pathway to action often means reacting to stagnant negotiations, or it reveals the need for transcending a state-imposed calendar.

Adopting the tactic of demonstrations implies a set of conditions: assembling a sufficient number of activists to minimize the effects of eventual repression; the perception of demonstrations as being “natural” and “legitimate”; and a certain idea about the relationship with the authorities that activists claim to establish, and an estimation of its efficacy. In order to become “natural” or “normal,” the demonstration has to be tolerated. Authorities’ tolerance of insurgents is linked to the latter’s self-limitation tactic and mastering of the technical tricks of demonstrations. The staging of demonstrations has to take into account a set of possibilities, such as the need to protect demonstrators from the state coercive apparatuses and the need to provoke a response from the authorities. Thus demonstrations of the unemployed use shifting tactics of contention, which combine elements of submission (absence of demonstrations on national holidays; highly censored language) and subversive modalities of deployment in the public space, which question state authority or even compete with it. The discursive frame of “apoliticism” is a form of self-limitation, either unconscious or planned, which aims to consolidate a certain margin of
state tolerance for demonstrations. Slogans usually restrain themselves to a presentation of the unemployed graduates as victims. In October 2008 a group (Shu’ala’) started a march in Rabat with the following chant: “We are Shu’ala’, the flame, the courage, the country’s elite. We are against the hiring policy of the government. You want to work in Rabat or in Casablanca. But they will send you far away from home. Tell us? Where are the human rights?” (fieldwork observations). However, an important stage in a demonstration is when protesters compete with policemen for the “(dis)order” of traffic. They partially or totally block the streets, or replace policemen in their traffic-controlling function (fieldwork observations of several demonstrations, 2006–9).

The recurrence of a type of action consolidates a positive perception of its feasibility and of the state’s tolerance for the activity. Standardizing the execution of such activities facilitates their geographical diffusion. However, uncertainty is always channeled by the memories of experienced repression. The demonstration is never fully “learned,” nor is the image of state tolerance envisioned by activists completely reliable; the possibility of repression is always real. According to statistics compiled by the Tajammu’ group, security forces were responsible for 950 wounds between November 2007 and July 2008. Most of the injuries affected the extremities (47 percent) and the back (35 percent); genitals were also frequently attacked. Two miscarriages occurred as a result of multiple concussions.

The pattern of interactions between the diplômés chômeurs groups and other actors also affects the calculation of what is feasible and of its efficacy. The results of a demonstration depend on the stakes within other sectors, whether they converge on the interests of the unemployed or not. When the unemployed are not closely linked to political parties, trade unions, or grassroots organizations, their actions do not reverberate strongly. But at certain moments the party, executive, and journalistic arenas, to name but a few, pay increased attention to the cause of the unemployed. Then the mobilizations of the unemployed constitute a convertible resource in other fields of activity. Thus they can influence the resolution of protests (Dobry 1995). However, much of the unemployed graduates’ constituency preferred to stay on the sidelines of the February 20th movement.

Unemployment appeared in the discourse of the February 20th movement as part of its call for democracy. But the self-perception of the unemployed protestors as belonging to a larger subaltern population excluded from elite circles of privilege did not imply their automatic adoption of a discourse placing the “right to work” in the context of broader social and economic demands.
The principle of political detachment contributed to this attitude, whether it signified a formal disagreement with the February 20th vision or pragmatic, risk-avoiding behavior of the unemployed. This was especially pronounced for the postgraduate groups, which did not join the movement and stopped their protests during the first months of the February 20th mobilization.

The logic behind the periodic recognition of unemployed postgraduates’ claims, undermined the evolution of a discourse demanding the “right to a job” toward a broader demand for a “right to work.” However, the ANDCM was more inclined to join forces with the new movement, since its antiauthoritarian rhetoric struck a cord with its own ideological roots.

CONCLUSION

The consolidation of what have progressively become the “rules” of Moroccan unemployed graduates’ mobilizations (restriction of the contentious category to graduates, scoring systems, standardized forms of action, a collective discourse focusing on victimization) has taken place concurrently with the shifting character of these features, the uncertainty of their very often “transgressed” parameters. I have tried to provide an explanatory framework for the wide and ambiguous range of protesters’ attitudes between “contestation” and a “plea to the prince,” based on activist memories and the analysis of mobilization in a complex setting. Memories, historical trajectories, experiences of public action, and the coercive setting define the practices of contention. The outcome of a negotiation (whether it is self-controlling, pragmatic, or a subversive outbreak) is contingent on an unstable consensus between contenders, public decision makers, union and association activists, and so on. The plasticity of the “rules” constitutes the very nature of unemployed graduates’ “way of protest,” where conventions are (re)calculated at every moment.

Protest incorporates within its dynamic the stakes of competitive contentious fields. Mobilization is “used” in other fields, for example, as an evaluating criterion of activist practices, as a source of legitimacy for public policies, or as a space of political elite formation. At some point the “unemployed cause” becomes a stake within other spaces. The unemployed are aware of this possibility; thus, the opportunity to translate mobilization into a resource valuable in other social sectors affects perceptions regarding the feasibility and the efficacy of unemployed degree holders’ contentious actions.

To sum up, the way in which the unemployed act contentiously depends on the horizon of feasibility of protest and the need to produce a response from
the political elite. Self-control seems to be the basic principle because the un-
employed shape contention on their experiences of public action. Public action
has trained its opposition, and in some cases it has even “convinced” it of the
righteousness of a pragmatic, apolitical mobilization. But that should not lead
us to neglect the fact that tensions between different perceptions of “correct”
collective action constantly arise within the activist groups themselves.
PRESENCE IN SILENCE

Feminist and Democratic Implications of the Saturday Vigils in Turkey

Zeynep Gülru Göker

Can we talk about democracy and democratic engagement in a context where the institutionalization of basic rights is incomplete, where social movements risk violent repression, and where military institutions and discourses often come before efforts for democratic opening? Democratic theory rarely discusses such themes; political science in general leaves the discussion of such cases to the democratization or the transitions literature. Through a discussion of the Saturday Vigils held from 1995 to 1999 in Turkey by the relatives of the “disappeared under arrest,” this chapter argues that we need to expand our understanding of the “political” to see how political subjectivities and openings are created in ways that are often overlooked in discussions of democracy and in places often neglected by Social Movement Theory (SMT). A gendered analysis of the vigils, whose participants were mostly women and called Saturday Mothers by the media, not only promises such an expanded notion of the political but also suggests the possibility of constructing gendered responses to the militarization of everyday life. What started as the actions of a small group of mostly women, often considered to do politics with a small *p*, turned into a four-year-long presence in the public sphere. The vigils not only claimed physical and symbolic space but also created an opportunity to realize the significant place of women’s actions and conceptions of gender in the makeup and continuation of militarist discourses, which determine and constrain the experience of democracy and democratic citizenship in Turkey.

The literature on democratic theory often discusses democracy in the abstract, while the discussion of concrete cases where democratic institutions are vulnerable largely takes place within the area studies and transitions literature. Democracy, when defined with a set of bullet points, gets taken for granted as a quality some countries possess while others only struggle to achieve. On the basis of her study of Islamist parties in Jordan and Yemen, Schwedler (2006, 6) argues that the problem with the transitions-to-democracy literature is that it
treats political change as progression on a teleological continuum and under-
mines the complexity and dynamism of political change. This understanding
misses the very historicity of democracy and some of the ways people create
opportunities in authoritarian structures or unconsolidated democracies.

Only when we think of democracy as a practice, rather than simply the name
of a regime, can we capture its historicity. In contemporary democratic theory,
either in deliberative accounts, which understand democracy as a process in-
volving the public deliberation of citizens (Benhabib 1996; Bohman and Rehg
1997), or in agonistic accounts, which focus on the centrality of agonistic inter-
action of social groups to democracy (Connolly 1995; Mouffe 2005), attention to
political practice becomes key. Although fixing a meaning to democracy or fully
institutionalizing it is impossible (Mouffe 2005), the very struggle to achieve it is
still important, because democracy is the productive tension between the con-
stant struggle for the expansion of rights and freedoms, and the necessary mo-
mements of closure in defining the demos (Keenan 2003). Democracy requires the
formation of democratic subjectivities (Norval 2007), and one place to look for
democratic engagements is social movements. When we think about democracy
as a practice—what Rancière (2006) describes as the process between man and
citizen—we have to take contentious action seriously, even and especially when
it takes place in authoritarian environments. Thus Wedeen notes the importance
of everyday political practices, like qat chews in Yemen, where ordinary people
as well as politicians and administrators visit while engaging in political conver-
sations that recall Habermas’s seventeenth- and eighteenth-century coffeehouse
public spheres. Here democratic subjects are formed through discursive prac-
tices in the absence of a formal framework of democracy—what Wedeen (2007,
61) calls “democratic practice in the absence of a democratic regime.”

Diani (2000) describes social movements as practices that usually take place
outside the institutional spheres and the routine procedures of everyday life;
this is also a characteristic of women’s movements. Women have been inte-
gral to various social movements (Teske and Tétreault 1999), many of which
have been inspired by women’s everyday concerns and practices, which for a
long time were considered “private” rather than “political.” Using a gender lens
to analyze contentious politics is useful. As Ferree and Merrill (2004, 261) sug-
gest, “gender deeply permeates the discourses, ideologies and frames that so-
cial movement studies have offered as analytical tools.” Moreover it has been an
aim, and outcome, of feminist theory and women’s movements to challenge the
boundaries of the political. The role of women’s activism in Turkey’s history of
social movements is especially important because at a time when “politics had ended,” after the 1980 coup d’état (Tekeli 2004), women helped enliven contentious action using ad hoc, nonhierarchical, informal ways of organizing (Tekeli 2004). They have created significant political openings and challenged the gendered makeup of democratic citizenship via innovative or learned practices and international solidarities they have formed. Saturday Vigils, considered by many of their participants to be one of the first examples of civil disobedience in Turkey, created a space where people came together in their differences to create solidarities and networks in an unmediated, nonhierarchical way. This was a democratic space that promises to be a foundation for the construction of a critical stance against the militarization of everyday life.

THE SATURDAY VIGILS

In Turkey the problem of disappearance under arrest as a systematic phenomenon began to receive public awareness in the aftermath of the 1980 military intervention, especially in the southeastern Kurdish areas, when security forces arrested thousands of people to “restore public order.” Violence between the security forces and Kurdish organizations escalated after 1983. The first known case of disappearance after 1980 was Hayrettin Eren, arrested in November 1980; twelve more persons were reported as disappeared by 1990, and the numbers steadily increased in the 1990s, reaching 345 people in 1994 and 1995 (Günçikan and Ertem 1996, 15–16). Most of the reported cases were from the state of emergency (OHAL) region, the southeastern provinces of Turkey. Hasan Ocak’s disappearance in 1995 in Istanbul brought his family and many others together. Frustrated by the state’s lack of response, the family and supporters started hunger strikes and marches in various cities, during which Emine Ocak, Hasan’s mother, who is by now the well-known face of mothers of the disappeared, served jail time. Hasan Ocak’s tortured, dead body was found in a graveyard of the unidentified fifty-five days after his arrest; around the same time another disappeared, Rıdvan Karakoç, was also found dead.

The Ocak campaign came to an end, and reported cases of disappearance steadily increased. So, a group of former activists, mostly women who were already acquainted with one another from an ad hoc campaign they had initiated, started discussing what could be done. Such early acquaintances created an environment of political trust and friendship (Koçali 2004). Nadire Mater, who as a journalist had closely followed the Ocak campaign, stated that she was frustrated by the conditions in which Hasan Ocak had been found, and started
thinking about “new spaces where the frustration could be expressed.”\(^3\) A group of activists immediately got together to discuss what could be done. The Argentine example of the mothers and grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo was on the table as a source of inspiration.\(^4\) Kayılı (2004, 350), one of the few men in the initial group, states that they wanted to take an action in which anyone could participate; where continuity would be the key to creating awareness. Their claims had to be simple and clear: ethnic, religious, and cultural identities or the political leanings of the disappeared should not be the issue; what mattered was that they were disappeared (Kayılı 2004, 350). As Hüsnüye Ocak, Hasan Ocak’s sister, stated in a recent interview:

All of us families are saying if our children, our brothers were guilty they should have been put in to jail. We would not have anything to say to that. At least then we would have a place to go to look for them; now people do not have anywhere to go. Of course we know that some people have reactions. We understand them, but we hope they do not experience what we experienced. Think about it, you are driven mad when your child comes home only an hour late; these people are waiting for their children to return for years. (Milliyet, February 16, 2009)

Kayılı (2004) states the necessity of having a simple and legitimate claim in order to prevent manipulation, and classifies the action as “naked disobedience,” defined by nonviolence and noninstitutionalization. They decided not to use slogans or banners so that anyone could easily join in the publicization as an individual, having left institutional and political affiliations behind. As Nimet Tanrıkuşlu (2003, 279), one of the initiators of the vigils and a member of the Human Rights Association Commission Against Disappearances, states, “They used silence to have their voices heard.” Kayılı (2004) also mentions the difficulties they expected to encounter, and particularly laments a general dislike of dissonance in Turkey, which causes many to approach any act of contention with distrust. He recalls a concern about leftists, who were usually unfamiliar with civil disobedience and more inclined to transform and claim the leadership of any action (351). Nevertheless, without much serious preparation, they decided to go public in the form of a weekly vigil to be held on Saturdays at noon in Galatasaray Square in the Taksim district—a visible spot in a central neighborhood.

It had to be Saturday because everyone is on the street; 12 p.m. to 1 p.m. because then journalists can easily come and write about it. They should sleep a little,
go to Galatasaray, write about the vigil and have it published the next day. Where would it be? Galatasaray, because it’s a central area; thousands pass by the square all day. So we decided to go on with it, but actually we did not know what we were going to do. Okay, we would be going there, but what would the police do? It was not a demonstration that got permission. I want to state this in another friend’s words: “We wanted to sit so that everyone stands up.” (personal communication with Mater, June 9, 2009)

The first vigil in Galatasaray was held on May 27, 1995. Around thirty people, mostly women, went to the meeting point and sat down holding a poster board with two pictures and a text attached, which read:

Hasan Ocak was taken under custody, hundreds disappeared and found dead. We want the murderers. Rıdvan Karakoç was arrested, disappeared like the hundreds of them and found dead. We demand the murderers (Bianet, February 17, 2001)

Excited, they went and sat; the police did not know what to do, because back then Galatasaray was not accustomed to hosting protests. Mater recalls that police officers, who probably had not seen the poster, came to ask what they were doing, and the activists replied nervously, “We are tired, so we sat down.” The activists realized immediately that an hour would be too long, so they dispersed after half an hour and met in a teahouse to discuss what to do for the following week. They continued to go to Galatasaray for four years. At first the police did nothing. As Sebla Arcan, a member of the Human Rights Association’s Commission Against Disappearances, wrote:

Our number was low and we did not make any noise so we were treated as the “Saturday Fools.” But the arrests started when our actions started to take effect. (Milliyet, February 16, 2009)

When the police tried to disband the vigil, participants would defend themselves on the basis of the constitution; from time to time famous people, activists, and artists would join in support. As Mater indicated in the interview, after half an hour of sitting they would meet up in the “cheapest teahouse” for discussion and division of labor. The immediate aim of the vigils was twofold: to stop the disappearances and to learn the whereabouts of the already disappeared. Vigil participants started to write press releases about the disappeared and had a participant read them at the end of vigils.
Only Ocak’s and Karakoç’s families were present at the first vigil, as it was an ad hoc action in which people informally notified one another; but in time other relatives joined, some traveling to Istanbul from their hometowns. More people had started talking about the vigils, and soon Galatasaray was filled with journalists. The name Saturday Mothers was chosen by the media, although the participants insisted on calling themselves Saturday People. In time they started to call themselves Saturday People/Mothers, which indicated the two groups—the activists and the relatives (although the latter weren’t all mothers). Some had already found their relatives dead; others had no clue of their whereabouts but hoped to find them, alive or dead. The Ocak family was almost ashamed to have a grave they could visit as long as others did not know what to expect (Tanrikulu 2003).

The relationship between the Saturday People and the Mothers was one of mutual trust and empathy. Tanrikulu says, “Even though we had no relatives who were disappeared the relatives sensed our sincerity, and in a way we were equal with them” (Bianet, May 17, 2002). Mater describes the People’s role as “carrying out the struggle in their name,” meaning giving support and help to the relatives. Unlike the Argentinean mothers and grandmothers, who were mostly educated middle-class women and already politicized when they started their vigils, the mothers in Turkey were mostly from rural, lower-class backgrounds. Most of the Kurdish women did not speak Turkish. Hence the Saturday People would take on tasks such as writing press statements and establishing connections. Yet Mater underscores the fact that the activists never intended to speak in the name of the relatives; no one would speak for another. After half an hour of sitting, mothers would start talking to the journalists themselves. Mater says, “There is no such thing as learning to talk; if a person is in such pain, she will manage to express it, and no one else can do it better than her” (personal communication with Mater, June 9, 2009). She adds that the presence of non-Kurdish activists also showed the police that the Kurdish women were not alone; the joint presence made the vigils a long-term activity. According to Mater, the vigils would otherwise have been associated with alleged illegal terrorist action and soon repressed. Thus they had to make clear that they had no political affiliations, since as Mater argues, people had doubts about all kinds of institutions, but they had none about the people who sat in Galatasaray as individuals. There were no elections, and decisions were taken together. Activists who worked the hardest and took responsibility came to be those who were listened to the most, and this was also true for the...
relatives (Koçali 2004). The absence of hierarchies and the lack of organizational affiliations allowed people from different backgrounds to come together in Galatasaray (Tanrikulu 2003).

We did not call this an organization—it was not an organization—but we cannot say it was disorganized. There was no hierarchy. Let’s say there is this ten people: each week one would take on the task of thinking about the week after and call the other ten; one would prepare the press statement; one would let the press know that we would be in Galatasaray again next week, etc. Those were the kinds of things we did. We could say we were organized without an organization. (personal communication with Mater, June 9, 2009)

International media and human rights organizations were quick to take notice of the vigils. In 1996 the Habitat Summit took place in Istanbul; hence hundreds of foreigners joined the vigils. The same year Bernard Debord made an award-winning film about the vigils, “The Mad Women of Istanbul.” People in cities such as Paris, Sidney, and London held vigils in support; and mothers came from Argentina to sit in Galatasaray. Sezen Aksu, a famous Turkish singer, made a song about the mothers, which sold out the magazine that distributed the album. In December 1996, Saturday People/Mothers were awarded the Carl Von Ossietzky Human Rights Award by the International Human Rights League. Mater says these international interactions were extremely important and helpful; thus she and another mother attended the biannual Voix de Femmes festival in Brussels to participate in the working group on enforced disappearances. The fact that organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch followed the vigils—and the violations the participants faced—gave the issue a significant place in Turkey’s human rights record. As Mater recalls, when the prime minister traveled abroad, the first thing she was asked to talk about would be the Saturday People/Mothers.

The attention the vigils received in such a short time not only caused the police to become violent but also made Galatasaray popular. People who in Kayılı’s terms wanted to “revolutionize” and “ politicize” (in the traditional ideological sense) the vigils came to Galatasaray (2004, 353). Galatasaray had become a space of hope at a time when Turkey was not short of human rights violations. According to Tanrikulu, it was mostly young people who had difficulty adapting to the form of silent protest (2003, 291). The Saturday People/ Mothers had to keep warning those who wanted to shout slogans and otherwise give the police an opportunity to repress the vigils. In our interview Mater
argued that everyone wished to claim the quick success the vigils achieved in creating awareness and stopping the disappearances.

In 1998, a critical year in which PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan was found in Italy—an event spurring ultranationalist sentiments and everyday violence in Turkey—police started to take extreme measures to prevent the Saturday People/Mothers from going to Galatasaray. The participants were beaten, dragged on the streets, and arrested every week. The legitimacy of the vigils was no longer an issue; it was already established by their persistence. The officially announced reason for repression was the allegation that the vigils were a cover for illegal terrorist organizations. The participants insisted that they had no institutional affiliations other than with the Human Rights Association (IHD), which acted only as a communication center, as Mater states. The police arrested anyone who “looked suspicious,” even before they arrived at the square. Vigil participants started feeling helpless, since what had started as an action that anyone could join had turned into something that only those who could risk violence and arrest could dare to join. “The environment of terror that hundreds of police officers with masks, cops, dogs created every week had changed the face of our action beyond our will” (Koçali 2004, 358). They had to risk their jobs and health. Those with young children had other fears: what “if something happens to the rest of their children”? (358). Nevertheless they insisted on going to Galatasaray, because for them it was more than a place to protest: the square had turned into a space of commemoration; it was a graveyard where they could remember and share. When asked if she was happy to see the vigils resume in 2009, one of the relatives, Doğan, answered:

Very much . . . my deceased mother would run to these vigils. She would forget her pain when she saw others. It was like that for me too. It happened so many times that when I saw a photograph of a disappeared person in someone’s hands I dropped mine on the ground. (Milliyet, February 16, 2009)

On the two-hundredth week, Saturday People/Mothers collectively decided to suspend the vigils because of the sharp increase in human rights violations that had occurred over the previous thirty weeks: 431 people arrested and sometimes kept in custody as long as five days; forty put on trial. Hanım Tosun, a Saturday wife, says, “if the Galatasaray Vigils could have continued maybe there would be no new disappearances,” referring to two new disappearances in 2001 (Bianet, February 19, 2001). Mater believes that the first set of goals—
bringing down the number of disappearances and creating awareness about the issue—was realized to a great extent. Moreover the vigils went on for four years, becoming the longest-lasting act of civil disobedience in Turkish history. She explains that success by their ability to form international solidarities, by their novel form of action, and by their resistance of institutionalization.

Ten years later, in February 2009, the Saturday People/Mothers started meeting in Galatasaray once again. Today Galatasaray is much different; police always guard the square, and as Mater jokingly says, “You almost have to make reservations on Saturdays to protest in Galatasaray.” Most of the initial participants still try to be present every Saturday. IHD’s Commission Against Disappearances has helped organize the vigils and bring relatives together, some of whom have founded their own organizations in the meantime.

Ten years have changed the political landscape in Turkey. There have been democratic openings due to the EU candidacy process, while the Ergenekon trial investigates coup d’état plots and contra-guerilla organizing among social, political, and military elites and has brought the issue of disappearances onto the agenda again. The goal of the vigils today is still to discover the whereabouts of the disappeared but also to demand judgment of those responsible. The Saturday People/Mothers have a list of names to be brought to account, among whom are prominent political figures such as the prime minister and president who held office when most of the disappearances took place. Mater believes that activists should push for Turkey to sign the Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance adopted by the UN General Assembly and signed by eighty-one countries since 2007. She argues that institutionalization is necessary at this point; only a legal institution, which devotes itself full-time to the cause, can handle such a task (personal communication, June 9, 2009).

EXPANDING THE POLITICAL

Identifying any movement as a sign of the rise of civil society and uncritically associating it with democratization is misleading, since much of political practice in the Middle East takes place under the auspices of an authoritarian state (Norton 1995). Rather than treating the state as an all-powerful entity, which has clearly demarcated boundaries, following a Foucauldian notion of power as dispersed and productive, anthropologists have studied the state through its effects (Abrams 1988; Mitchell 1991). The effects of the state as they pertain to the everyday level make the study of public rituals, celebrations, and mourning
necessary (Navaro-Yashin 2002) and the treatment of any contentious practice as part of an autonomous civil society misleading. We have to see the ways in which certain norms purported by the state are challenged but also embedded and reproduced in public actions.

In contrast to the ideal of transparency in liberal democracy, Taussig (1997) talks about a circle of secrecy that surrounds the state. The secrecy around the kidnapping and disappearances in Turkey, the so-called deep state, refers to the multiple levels of connections within the state among political, economic, and military elites and paramilitary groups. When the Saturday People/Mothers gathered in public space to direct attention to the disappearances, they were at once calling the state into action and opening its actions up to question. What is seen in the actions of the confused police officers, at once trying not to harass the participants, thinking that as mothers they are “deserving protection and respect,” but also beating and accusing them of not being “proper mothers,” reflects Brown’s (1995) notion of the state becoming an object of ambivalence. An uncanny feeling surrounds the state as violence and paternalism, force and intimacy are conflated. The longing for a paternalistic state goes hand in hand with the frustration felt towards its inaction (Aretxaga 2003, 397) or meaningless action, such as the “bus of the disappeared”—an initiative of the Ministry of Interior whereby a bus would park in Galatasaray and well-dressed female officers announced that relatives should report the disappeared, even though they had already done so several times—or the Istanbul chief of police suggesting a new, significantly less central meeting point for the Saturday People/Mothers, as if all they wanted was a place to get together.

The relationship between the state and citizens is inflected by differences in class, gender, and ethnicity. At the margins of the polity in particular, encounters with the state are more intimate and closer to the skin (Aretxaga 2003, 396). The Saturday Vigils brought the everyday into confrontation with the state, hence challenging that very boundary, as women brought what is considered to be private—their emotions and bodies—into the public sphere as political tools. Arat (1998) argues that the mothers revolutionized the traditional maternal role by insisting that the state be responsible for and accountable to its citizens.

In challenging the homogeneity of Habermas’s notion of the public sphere—the discursive realm of public engagement—Fraser (1992) talks about counterpublics as alternative publics from which counter-discourses emerge. While the vigils formed potential enclaves for counter-discourses, it would be a mistake to overlook the ways in which they also contained and perpetuated certain norms.
While constituting an alternative to the popular displays of statehood and citizenship, the norms and traditions that describe the proper role of women and mothers were simultaneously reproduced. Mater states that it was never their intention to present the vigils as mothers’ events; the media coined the name. Yet on a pragmatic level this label helped gain wider acceptance and empathetic responses. We cannot overlook the fact that this particular presence of women in the public sphere can also be interpreted as women doing what is natural to them—mourning. Thus we should not think merely about bringing the private into the political but rather question that very dichotomy and uncover the ways in which the private and the political are constructed through relations of power and essentialist understandings of gender; and question too the very association of emotions with femininity.

Baydar and Ivegen (2006) argue that the category of motherhood, or the media’s and the state’s choice to focus on the maternal identity, was an effort to turn attention away from the political character of the vigils and to take emotions as central. However, drawing a distinction between the political character of the vigils and emotions is not useful since the emotions constitute the political character. We cannot think of the participants’ claims as separate from the yearning, the sorrow, and the narratives they brought to the square every Saturday. This is exactly why feminists criticize the dominant public sphere theories for proposing gendered understandings of the public sphere and communication (Young 2002). Passions, desires, emotions, and narratives are political, yet they are not exclusively feminine: that is the lesson to be learned from the vigils. It is possible to take a critical stance against any essentialist understanding of gender or maternal identity while thinking of emotions as part and parcel of democratic engagement. In fact fathers also publicly displayed emotions during these vigils, overriding traditional gender roles (Baydar and Ivegen 2006). Tanrikulu (2002) argues that although people usually find it difficult to share in such intense situations, vigil participants shared and developed solidarities in friendship and love, a point that is overlooked in the press accounts but is among the most important gains of the movement.

Emotions also rarely find their place in analyses of democracy, although they have become an important element of these engagements. SMT for the most part takes emotions to be part of a framing technique. However, what we see in this case is not a coming together of leaders to figure out the best way to mobilize people (Tarrow 1998, 111–12) but a group of people reaching consensus without necessarily conducting a rational discussion about the best frame. The
vigils exemplify the interaction of the personal, the political, and the emotional, and challenge the dichotomy of reason and emotion. Moreover analysis of this movement cannot simply take into consideration the decrease in the number of disappearances while overlooking the friendships and solidarities that were formed and sustained by these vigils—relationships that are critical for the formation of long-lasting bonds of political trust and friendship. Mater observes that even after the vigils were suspended, the Saturday People and the Mothers kept in touch on collective or individual levels.

The Saturday Vigils were not women-only actions, but it was mostly women who participated. It would be a mistake to overlook the participation of men, but it would also be inappropriate to characterize the vigils as mixed-gender actions. Mater explains this with women’s success in pushing for “small things,” while men are more occupied with “high politics”:

In this interview I answered your questions. If another friend were to be here, she would only fill in the gaps and not repeat the same things. Whereas most men, even if they have nothing new to say, always come to the fore and speak. Women are generally not like that. There are such women as well, but generally they are not; they are practical. We were practical during our meetings. We would sometimes meet in each other’s houses, drink wine, and do everything together. I could explain this as the difference between “high politics” and “low politics.”

Kaylı (2004, 352) explains the presence of more women than men in the vigils by what he believes to be the ability of women to relate to pain and solve conflicts:

They were able to understand and share the mothers’ pain better than anyone. Also, the soft solutions they found in all conflict situations, their intention to avoid displays of power and their rationalism had naturally put them to the fore.

We see many gendered notions at work here. Kaylı seems to adhere to a traditional association of women with emotions and pain, although we could very well explain women’s presence in peace and antimilitarist activism as due to their having a greater stake in change and to their different experience of war and militarism (Cockburn 2007; Enloe 2000). Both accounts also show a difference in the perception of women’s relationship to language and politics; women are associated with practical thinking and the avoidance of unnecessary displays of power. Mater explains it as the difference between what is considered “high politics” and “low politics.” The irony in the turning of what is
considered “low politics” into a long-lasting act of civil disobedience proves how important it is to expand our notion of the political. The simple act of a half-hour silent sitting had the potential to challenge borders of legitimacy and subjectivities beyond the expectations of the subjects themselves (Kaylı 2004, 356). We see in the vigils the formation of political subjectivities in the practice of politics, what Cockburn (2007) calls “doing politics.” The expansion of the political however does not mean valorizing one form of doing politics over others. At first it was a surprising sight to see women sitting on the street, especially those whom Yurtsever (2009, 14), a member of the IHD Commission Against Disappearances, describes as traditional women coming from villages, who found themselves “in the middle of politics.” But as Mater states, it would be wrong to call these women apolitical, since most of them came from the OHAL region or from an environment in which the Kurdish issue is a daily reality.

While taking into consideration the construction and transformation of political subjectivities, it is necessary to avoid discrediting life outside the public sphere—for instance, perceiving the movement as one of poor homemakers turning into heroic activists and transforming themselves; or favoring the heroic woman making a speech over the woman who is silently sitting on the ground. Such an account would not only limit our understanding of the ways in which people do politics but also run the risk of reenacting gender associations of citizenship, such as identifying publicly-acting women as becoming masculine.

The subtitle of McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly’s (2001) seminal study on social movements is What Are They Shouting About? The Saturday People/Mothers sat silently in Galatasaray and rejected shouting slogans, which enabled a longer presence in the public space than they could otherwise have had. Silence was part of their way of making claims, which shows how silence is a part of discourse and language rather than the antithesis of communication (Foucault 1990; Kurzweil 1981).9

Silence is very important. Thinking about our initial worries, if we were to allow noises then it would be hard to perceive what would be voiced there. Silence actually shouts the action you want to make in a better way. (personal communication with Mater, June 9, 2009)

Silence can be a form of protest, a radically democratic deconstruction of hierarchies of speech (Norton 1988), a listening openness (Corradi Fiumara 1990; Ihde 2007), or a choice to avoid conflict (Bickford 1996). Saturday Vigils and the silence of the participants reflect all of these. Women in Black (WIB)—a
group of women in Israel who started holding weekly vigils against the occupation after the outbreak of the first Palestinian intifada, and have since become a global peace network—have also designed their actions as silent vigils. Women in various peace and antimilitarist movements have found holding vigils to be a powerful form of action to claim public space and of doing democracy at a distance from the power structures that are usually associated with democracy (Cockburn 1998, 216). Vigils create persistence and a sense of responsibility, as silence constitutes a powerful response to militarism.

We chose not to speak excessive words, and therefore we think that it is important to express and experience these feelings and experiences with silence. With silence like a protest here from where the war is waged, a visible silence like a cry and a warning. With silence and black we also want to speak shame and compassion. (WIB Belgrade, 2002, 62)

The Saturday People/Mothers had a mutual agreement to be in Galatasaray every week, and during the rare times when they couldn’t make it, they would let each other know beforehand (Koçali 2004). A long-lasting act of civil disobedience (which was not originally conceived as such—Mater only realized that their actions fit the criteria of civil disobedience after reading Thoreau) is only possible with wholehearted commitment to the issue. As Mater argues, it was not easy to go to Galatasaray every week for four years, especially for the elderly. The persistence and visibility of women from different socioeconomic, geographic, and ethnic backgrounds also created a contrast to the opacity of the state as well as to the symbolic presence of women in politics.

GENDERED RESPONSES TO THE MILITARIZATION OF EVERYDAY LIFE

During their active presence in Galatasaray for two hundred weeks, the Saturday People/Mothers did not talk about militarism or consider themselves feminists; in fact their actions can be interpreted as both challenging and perpetuating traditional gender norms. We can still look for the unprecedented consequences of their actions since actions have consequences which, while they are available to those who narrate and judge, do not necessarily reveal themselves directly to their authors (Arendt 1958). Hence I have proposed to study the vigils as they constitute gendered responses to the militarization of everyday life and promise the construction of an antimilitarist discourse. There was no antimilitarist stance taken during the vigils. In fact, as Mater argues, although most of the initial Saturday People were antimilitarists, it is harder to talk about antimilitarism in the
context of the mothers, since most of them came from the state of emergency (OHAL) region, where militarism in all forms constituted a daily experience. Enforced disappearance is part of a militarist discourse and a form of everyday violence. Considering that all forms of violence, whether enforced disappearances, police violence on the street, or the violent atmosphere in the southeast, are interrelated in women’s lives, considering the role of the Saturday Vigils in the construction of antimilitarist discourse becomes even more pressing.

When talking about Turkish democracy, we have to take account of the institutional presence of the military in “democratic” politics as well as the presence of military discourses in everyday public and private life. Enloe (2000, 3) defines militarization as “a gradual process where a person or a thing becomes controlled by the military and depends on militaristic ideas.” This process becomes successful when it achieves normalcy and goes unquestioned. Gender relations is a front where the relationship between militarism and democracy portrays itself, marking women’s relationship to the state and their citizenship as distinct from men’s. Militarization acquired normalcy in Turkey in the 1930s, when the soldiering discourse required a nationalist, racist notion of Turkishness that saw all Turks as soldiers (Altınay 2004). This distinguished between the relationship of men and women to the state, as well as between some men and others, because soldiering was understood to be compulsory for healthy, heterosexual males. One of the indirect relationships through which women belong to the nation-state is motherhood, which is also a central tenet of nationalism and militarism. Najmabadi (1977) discusses soldiering as backed up by a discourse that defends itself in the name of protecting the honor of women and the eroticized (feminine) nation. A mother is perceived as one who is in dire need of protection, and soldiers must be ready to die for this cause. In fact during the same time Saturday Vigils started to occupy the attention of the public gaze, another group of mothers in Turkey was also establishing a visual presence in the public sphere. They were the mothers of the martyred—soldiers martyred during military combat in the southeast. They were portrayed by the media as “Friday Mothers,” as they met in cemeteries on Fridays.

The families of the martyred and the organizations they have created retain close relationships to the army. Militarization needs the collaboration of soldier-mothers to legitimate soldiering (Enloe 2000, 237). Death for these mothers has to be acceptable death so that they do not question it. They are expected to direct their fury to those people or institutions, “the enemy,” who caused the death of their sons (Sancar 2001). Ruddick (1998) talks about the
mother of sorrows, *mater dolorosa*, as a potential peace figure. However, there is no single “maternal” identity. For instance, during her study of infant deaths in shantytowns of Brazil, Scheper-Hughes (1998, 229) observes another rhetoric of motherhood, one that regards death as “inevitable, acceptable, and meaningful—which shows that the conventional view of women as peacemakers is not true. This rhetoric of “letting go” is strikingly similar to military thinking and the discourse of martyrdom (Scheper-Hughes 1998). However, just as it would be an error to treat the Saturday People/Mothers as a homogenous group, it would also be a mistake to neglect alternative voices within the mothers-of-the-martyrs group. In fact they are allowed to speak only as long as they do not constitute alternative discourses to militarism; those who do speak in ways that threaten the dominant discourse are dismissed and labeled as traitors or propagandists of illegal organizations.11

The Saturday Mothers and the Friday Mothers were counterposed as rivals by the mainstream media. The two groups of women were presented as confrontational; martyr mothers’ grief was sacralized and portrayed in ways to delegitimize the suffering and the presence of Saturday People/Mothers. Similarly “Peace Mothers Initiative,” another mothers’ group, consisting mostly of Kurdish women, has been portrayed as rival to the mothers of the martyred. The image of the pained mother, and the political propaganda that feeds on this image, turns the pain into a justification for militarism. In fact the confrontations have even worked to some extent to strengthen such discourses, as one type of motherhood was privileged over others and motherhood became a new source for nationalist politics (Koçali 1996).

Rather than considering women as passive, vulnerable symbols of politics and mothers as of secondary importance to militarism, a feminist analysis should build on the realization of the centrality of women’s actions and gendered ideas to militarism. Only then can the real sources of the pain women are expressing be investigated to see where and how they overlap in order to construct shared spaces and struggles. The Saturday People/Mothers have proven, through their actions and in the awareness they have created, their central role in politics and their ability to bring about change without waiting for “high politics.” They constituted a model of democratic engagement, as did the mothers and grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo, who created a democratic movement out of women’s social needs rather than abstract political visions (Bouvard 1994); or Women in Black, who challenged gendered meanings of citizenship as they did “politics through the backdoor” (Berkowitz 2003).
Although I am stressing the need to avoid arguments such as the "moral authority of mothers" (Cockburn 2007) or the reproduction of traditional gender norms in such actions, any social movement runs that risk. This is the productive tension between the openness and closure of democracy, which is also reflected in feminism (Zerilli 2005). Thus these movements have to be studied, for they promise the construction of alternative discourses while safeguarding against essentialist, homogenous definitions of subjectivities. Neither the Saturday People/Mothers nor the Friday Mothers is a homogenous group; yet it is possible to construct a feminist discourse through their differences and bring the two groups together for a critique of militarism and the forms of violence it generates in women’s lives. Men are not exempt from this struggle. The very acknowledgment that mothers have a central role to play in militarism rather than a peripheral one is the first step towards creating such an alternative discourse. Studying the vigils as social movements and vis-à-vis democratic theory to see how women actually “do democracy” and how people create significant change in ad hoc, direct actions, even in authoritarian settings, is another step. Whether the recently restarted Saturday Vigils can effect such an understanding and construct such a practice remains to be answered.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the Saturday Vigils shows how important it is for democratic and Social Movement Theory to take seriously political practice outside of the northern-industrialized world, not simply to enrich the set of examples studied but to rethink the theories vis-à-vis historically and politically contextualized analyses of the global South. The vigils I have analyzed here show how an action that started out as the ad hoc, silent protest of a small group of (mostly) women turned into a long-lasting social movement that brought awareness to the issue of disappearances. Becoming the longest-lasting act of civil disobedience in Turkish history, the Saturday Vigils opened up an important space in contentious practice and paved the way to constructing new political subjectivities and solidarities. Hence they offer an expanded understanding of the political, and significant insights into the role that conceptions of gender and women’s actions play in contentious practice and the experience of democracy.

The Saturday People/Mothers present an example of direct, unmediated democratic action that expanded rights and freedoms and challenged gendered limits of citizenship, ideas about women’s role in politics, and the militarization of everyday life. As seen in the media-produced rivalry between the
Saturday Mothers and the mothers of the martyred, militarization needs the active collaboration of women and gendered notions of citizenship. The democratic coming-together of people in their differences before a similar goal can constitute a strong response to the militarization of everyday life. Gender relations is one arena in which a strong militarist discourse constrains the practice of democracy. Therefore an analysis of the links among gender, militarism, and democracy must be undertaken in discussions of contentious action and social movements.
MOBILIZATIONS FOR WESTERN THRACE AND CYPRUS IN CONTEMPORARY TURKEY
From the Far Right to the Lexicon of Human Rights

Jeanne Hersant

This chapter raises the issue of the symbolic and political role of migrants from the Balkans in the (re)definition and promotion of contemporary Turkish nationalism. My research deals mainly with the mobilization of associations representing the “Turks” from Western Thrace (Greece) who are living in Turkey. They are designated as “Bati Trakyalı” (Western Thracians) in colloquial Turkish, and I too will use this term in order to avoid any confusion between those who are Greek citizens and Turks from Western Thrace now living in Turkey who are Turkish citizens (Hersant 2008).

In the 1960s and 1970s these associations, along with ultranationalist movements, contributed to the revival of the myth of the Ottoman Empire’s “lost territories” owing to a “chauvinist and aggressive” political context, which was also marked by claims on Cyprus (Tunçay 1976, 12–16). “Lost territories” refers to the National Pact adopted in 1920 by the dissident National Assembly in Ankara under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal. This assembly rejected the transfer of territories to European countries, which had been negotiated by the Ottoman government in Istanbul and confirmed by the Treaty of Sèvres. Three years later, however, the Ankara Parliament ratified the Treaty of Lausanne, which delineated the borders of contemporary Turkey and recognized Western Thrace as a Greek province. The compulsory population exchange between Greece and Turkey was organized by an addendum to the Lausanne treaty, from which the Muslim population of Western Thrace and the Orthodox population of Istanbul (and of the Turkish islands Bozcaada and Gökçeada) were exempted. They were officially defined as minorities and granted specific rights by international law for the first time.¹

Strictly speaking, the above-mentioned National Pact did not make any claims on Western Thrace. But nowadays it is commonplace to read in Turkish newspapers that the region is “a part of our National Pact.” Neither was Cyprus an issue at the end of the Ottoman Empire, whereas it is the very embodiment
of contemporary nationalism based on the “Turkish world”: namely, the Balkans, the Caucasus, central Asia, Iraq (Kirkuk), and Cyprus. Moreover the success of the mobilization of the Turks of Western Thrace seems to stem from their success in the 1970s in linking this issue with that of Cyprus. The EU has become an arbitrator in this issue since Bati Trakyalı, whose representatives in Greece recognize Turkey as a “kin state,” became European citizens in 1981.

This chapter recounts the different stages of a mobilization that accompanied the reappropriation by official ideology, after the 1980 coup d’état, of the “Turkish world” issue, which was traditionally promoted by far rightist movements. I will first describe how organizations that represent the “Turkish world” gained the status of official interlocutor, in spite of Turkish authorities’ strong distrust toward any expression of local cultural identities. Indeed the latter are considered to be a kind of “separatism,” particularly in reference to Kurdish cultural demands (Hersant and Toumarkine 2005). The Western Thrace Turks Solidarity Association (Bati Trakya Türkleri Dayanışma Derneği, or BTTDD) will be presented as a case study. The aim is to recount the interactions and negotiations that are linked to the construction of a public issue in a “praetorian regime,” in which, especially since the 1960s, the military, supported by the high-ranking civil bureaucracy, has exercised “independent political power, either by using force or by threatening to do so” (Hale 1994, 305)—most notably in the three coups between 1960 and 1980. In addition, “the military also intervenes in politics via its constant presence in the public sphere on the part of the highest reaches of the military hierarchy” (İnsel 2008, 3).

As a state-approved association, BTTDD has been granted financial and political support by all Turkish governments since its founding. Its leaders’ rhetoric, claiming it is a “civil society organization,” should not lead us to substantiate social science theories in vogue nowadays, according to which “civil society” is a factor of Europeanization and democratization challenging “official” political power (Diez, Apostolos, and Kaliber 2005). Neither is BTTDD simply a cog in the machine: the interactions between its representatives and Turkish officials are complex and consist of constant negotiations, as well as divergent opinions. On the one hand, from the 1960s onward it went beyond its stated purpose (namely, assisting the government in taking in and settling migrants) and succeeded in making the Western Thrace issue a part of the Turkish political agenda with regard to the “national struggle” (millî dava). On the other hand, in the 1970s and 1980s the association’s connections with several extreme rightist organizations represented a challenge to the state’s authority, as does its ob-
vicious connections today with the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), which is considered by the military—and a great part of the civil bureaucracy—to be a threat to Turkish secularism.² Associations of migrants from the Balkans and Caucasus grouped together as federations and confederations, forming a “competitive arena” of “Turks from abroad” articulated with the political one.³ Thus it is not exact to state that the delegitimization of militant commitments after the 1980 coup d’état has confirmed the “separation between formal politics dominated by parties, and civic groups” (Kubicek 2002, 770).

This chapter will then examine the definition of an international and European strategy for promoting the Western Thrace issue in the 1990s, in consultation with state representatives. I will emphasize the de facto supervision by the Turkish state over Western Thrace Turks’ mobilizations in different scenes (mainly Germany and Western Thrace), and their abandoning contentious arguments and practices for others based on lobbying for human and minority rights. The purpose of this contribution is neither to fit into one of the dominant schools in the study of social movements—the structuralist (or Political Process Theory), or the social constructionist—nor to apply the analytical tools of “civil society” and Political Opportunity Structure, the “uses and abuses” (Navaro-Yashin 1998) of which have been discussed for several years (Leca 2003; Morris 2004; Fillieule 2005). I am in sympathy with Goodwin and Jasper, who ask, “Is the political process approach still a progressive research program, or has it begun instead to constrain intellectual discovery? Where are the frontiers of theory and research in this vital area of sociology?” (2004, ix). I am inclined to believe that the approaches of classical Social Movement Theory can lead to misreading the object of study.

Unlike the conventional approach to analyzing how conflicts are “Europeanized,” which contrasts institutionalized European lobbies with “ordinary Europeans” who protest outside the framework of such institutions (Tarrow 1995, 224), I stress that protest and lobbying might coexist within a single repertoire of actions and that a social movement might transform into a lobby while turning its back on grassroots mobilization. I also stress the learning and use of a European repertoire of actions (Tilly 1984, 99) by actors close to state representatives in order to promote Turkish national interests in Western Thrace. Moreover far from considering the Europeanization of conflict solely as a reaction to European-level decision making, as Tarrow does (1995, 224), I will consider the state representatives as mobilization entrepreneurs as well. Lastly “Europe” refers here not only to the EU: norms dealing with human rights...
standards were first defined by the Council of Europe and organizations such as the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights before becoming a full part of the *acquis communautaire* in the 1990s. Consequently “Europe” has become part of the vocabulary framing political struggle in the Greek-Turkish rivalry. In order to address the problematic of importation of norms, I will approach highlighting the way norms and discursive categories are exploited and how they fit into local or national dynamics (Ragaru 2008). Thus I follow a methodological approach aimed at “clarifying the nature of links between protagonists, specifying what leads actors and organizations to internationalization, and studying the possible transformation of protest forms,” or their renunciation (Siméant 2005).


**Institutionalization of Hosting Refugees from Former Ottoman Provinces**

Like the various associations of “Turks from abroad,” BTTDD (until 1969 called the Western Thrace Migrants Mutual Aid Association) was created in 1946 to organize the settlement of migrants and refugees who had fled World War II and the Greek civil war. In 1954 along with other mutual aid associations for Balkan migrants, BTTDD created the Federation of Turkish Migrants and Refugees Associations, which became a state-approved organization in 1960. This federation embodied pan-Turkist nationalism vis-à-vis provinces ruled by communists and Greeks. In this respect the Turkish migratory policy regarding Western Thrace has always been ambivalent: as Western Thrace was considered a “Turkish province” since the end of the Ottoman Empire, official immigration from the region disappeared from the record books in the 1960s, though clandestine population movements continue to take place. From the 1970s onward, the privileged relationship between BTTDD and police headquarters had been illustrated by the publication—in journals connected to the association—of precise information dealing with illegal immigrants, namely, their exact place of origin in Western Thrace, the point where they entered Turkey, and a list of persons who were granted Turkish citizenship every month.

Created in 1967, *Batı Trakya* (Western Thrace) was the first journal to promote the Bati Trakyalı cause and BTTDD activities, without explicitly being the latter’s organ (although its owner and chief editor, Selahattin Yıldız, led the BTTDD twice in the 1970s and then led the Federation of Turkish Migrants and Refugees Associations in the 1980s until its dissolution in 1987). The BTTDD
is now a member of the Rumelian Turks Federation together with the Rumelian Turks Association and the Georgian Turks Association. In this journal, and also in the scope of protest actions, Bati Trakyalı activists appropriate themes that conform to the official historiography but that are also promoted by far right organizations such as the Association for Struggle Against Communism or the National Union of Turkish Students (see Can 2000). Bati Trakya reproduced their rhetoric and related their actions, which are sometimes organized in common with BTTDD members. One has to keep in mind the context of the 1960 and 1970s, where political life was strongly polarized between far right and leftist movements, which led to a quasi civil war only ended by the 1980 coup d’état.

**Redefinition of the “National Struggle”**

In the same vein as the pan-Turkist rhetorical flaying of the “enemies of the Turkish nation,” Bati Trakya’s content was virulent toward Armenians and “Rum” (Greek-speaking Orthodox Christians) whether they were from Istanbul, Cyprus, or Greece. During the 1960s, a decade of “fragmentation and radicalisation,” the Kemalist doctrine was “challenged by new ideologies and social projects” (Bozarslan 2004, 56). In 1969 the Party of Nationalist Action (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, or MHP) was founded by Alparslan Türkeş, who popularized the idea of a “Turco-Islamic synthesis”—a nationalist ideology considering Islam as an integral part of the Turkish identity—and a Turkish nation transcending contemporary Turkey’s borders. His movement clearly influenced the identity mobilization of Turks from Western Thrace, both in Turkey and Germany, in the 1980s.

In this journal there were various ways of linking the issues of Western Thrace and Cyprus. First, Bati Trakya reprinted official petitions signed by BTTDD leaders and addressed to the president of the republic, the prime minister, or military authorities. In 1967, for instance, after the military junta came to power in Athens, the Association of Immigrants from Western Thrace (later BTTDD) petitioned President Cevdet Sunay to have “Western Thrace and Cyprus saved together.” After the 1974 Cyprus crisis, similar telegrams were sent to the prime minister and military officers in order to denounce Greek retaliatory measures against Turks in Western Thrace. Indeed Turkish military staff seemed to show a growing interest in the Western Thrace issue. Since the 1970s and 1980s, staff officers’ interventions as experts in BTTDD journals or in conferences on the “Turkish world” have become commonplace. Appeals
for military intervention then became clearer in the journal *Batti Trakya*, as illustrated by an article published in January 1975, “The Western Thrace Front in Cyprus’s Peace Operation.”8 Second, narrative and semantic processes were used in order to connect events that occurred in Western Thrace and in Cyprus, such as simultaneously occurring deaths, even if no true link existed between them.9 The national press in Turkey also tended to conflate these two situations when the junta came to power in Athens.10

However, a separate semantic process aimed at appropriating the expression “national struggle.” It was first used in reference to Cyprus by Prime Minister Adnan Menderes in the 1950s and has since become a constant and preponderant element of the official rhetoric on that issue (Alpkaya 2002). The “national cause” or “struggle” (which can also mean “trial” in Turkish) adopted by BTTDD leaders concerning Western Thrace is omnipresent in *Batti Trakya*’s writings from the 1970s onward and also in the interviews I conducted with the association’s representatives. The consequences of the 1974 conflict in Cyprus actually did, in a way, back up *Batti Trakyalı* militants in Turkey because the Turkish invasion of northern Cyprus had strong repercussions on Western Thrace Turks’ everyday life: considered a threat, for several months they were subject to a curfew, and their hunting weapons were seized.

**Protest Action in the Wake of the Far Right**

At its beginning *Batti Trakya* merely recounted the demonstrations organized by nationalist rightist groups, such as the National Union of Turkish Students (a radical pan-Turkist nationalist group that promoted the “Cyprus is Turkish” movement before joining the Islamist National Salvation Party in 1969), which advocated military intervention in Cyprus.11 These articles’ titles and content often refer to the Kemalist vulgate establishing youth as the guardian of the “Eternal Chief’s” heritage. That vulgate had been appropriated by the military officers who undertook the 1960 coup and in the following decade by the different rightist and leftist factions confronting the civil government’s political and economic mediocrity (Bozarslan 2004, 53–64).

According to *Batti Trakya*’s archives, a turning point occurred on April 13, 1974, when several *Batti Trakyalı* took part in such a demonstration for the first time. Nevertheless BTTDD was not officially involved in this demonstration, which was organized by the National Union of Turkish Students and aimed at “warning Greeks” while the situation in Cyprus was becoming worse.12 The report’s author notes that he met several acquaintances whose “national con-
sciousness” was “finally born.” Three days earlier, against the background of a breakdown in negotiations over Cyprus and adopting a mode of action that would be frequently used in the 1980s by BTTDD leaders, the National Union of Turkish Students’ leader placed a funeral wreath in front of the Greek consulate in Istanbul, which bore the following inscription: “Have you forgotten September 9th?” This was a reference to the date of the capture of Izmir in 1922, the symbol of the Greek presence in Asia Minor, after Mustafa Kemal’s army had defeated the Greek invasion on August 30. Afterward the crowd stood and sang the national anthem—and then scattered. In the accompanying picture one can see a group of persons wearing hoods: they were allegedly young Battı Trakyalı of Greek citizenship, who feared retaliation against themselves or their families if Greek authorities learned of their participation in this meeting.13

This statement could not be fully verified, but interviews conducted with Battı Trakyalı of Greek citizenship who studied in Turkey—be it in the 1970s or in the 1990s—rather suggest a desire to avoid political mobilization in order not to draw the attention of either the Greek or Turkish authorities. One of my interlocutors had to interrupt his studies in the 1970s after he was expelled from Turkey for publicly claiming his sympathy for extreme leftist movements. Until recently, studying in Turkey was for most of this population the sole path toward social mobility. Besides, political issues related to Turkey often do not make sense for people who have grown up in Greece. In any case the aforementioned demonstrations do not seem to have been designed to mobilize Battı Trakyalı students or residents. In the classic manner of collective action, they were very likely organized to show the positioning of the associations of “Turks from abroad” within extreme right movements, and to negotiate the latter’s high profile in the Turkish political arena.

**Institutional Mobilization and Emergence of Specific Demands**

These affirmations are reinforced by the fact that BTTDD leaders seem to have favored establishing close relationships with state representatives, to the detriment of protest actions. They would in particular send delegations to Ankara to address the prime minister or the Ministry for Foreign Affairs about the situation of “Turks” in Western Thrace. Behind the rhetorical facade designed to appeal to Turkish interests in the region, the association’s purpose was to heighten government awareness of Battı Trakyalı settled in Turkey without being blamed for promoting cultural identities at the expense of national unity.
The first of these delegations, recounted in the journal *Batti Trakya*, in 1968, was dismissed by both the minister of foreign affairs and the minister of the interior. This failure may illustrate the government’s caution toward an association whose political commitment was obvious, whereas an important agreement providing for teacher exchange in minority schools was to be signed with Greece the same year. Yet BTTDD representatives succeeded two years later: they were received by Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel and the person in charge of the Balkans committee in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Those visits became a kind of ritual aiming at reaffirming Batti Trakyalı’s allegiance toward Turkish governments: one of them occurred on the pretext of congratulating Bülent Ecevit’s government when it took office in 1974. After establishing such ties, demands shifted from the situation of “Turks” in Greece to the one of Bati Trakyalı living in Turkey: securing the right to purchase property in Turkey and to have an activity in trade and business sectors and easing the procedures for gaining Turkish citizenship.

A few months before the 1980 coup, even though there had been no significant Bati Trakyalı immigration to Cyprus, the Cyprus and Western Thrace Turks Solidarity Association was founded in Nicosia. This was BTTDD’s twin organization and led by Fikret Alasya, an ultranationalist Cypriot intellectual close to Rauf Denktaş. After the 1974 “peace operation,” he became the representative in Cyprus of the Turkish Ministry of Defense. Many of my interlocutors among BTTDD representatives deny that such an association existed. The legitimacy of Bati Trakyalı’s political and (Turkish) identity speech is indeed based on the assurance that such an identity claim will never open the door to secessionist thought or to any Turkish territorial demand concerning Greece. It is all the more important that Turkey’s presence in Cyprus is considered a military occupation from the point of view of international law. After the 1980 coup, unlike most political parties and associations, BTTDD was not banned but had to leave its activities in abeyance. In the following months, in accordance with a decision of General Kenan Evren, some six thousand Bati Trakyalı who were living in Turkey—many of them illegally—became Turkish citizens. Taking advantage of the favorable context for the “Turks from outside,” BTTDD claimed the creation of a “directorate general” dedicated to them and attached to the prime minister. It is a fact that currently there is not only a vice prime minister but also state secretaries and state representatives at the local level who are in charge of the “Turkish world” (Özgür-Baklacıoğlu 2006).
SINCE 1980: A STATE-SPONSORED MOBILIZATION
TOWARD THE MUSLIM WORLD AND THE EU

Disowning the Ultranationalist Right and the “Official” Demonstrations in the 1980s

Despite the fact that after the 1980 coup the movements that had been involved in the violent riots of the previous years were banned and the extreme right leader Alparslan Türkçeli was imprisoned, the Turco-Islamic synthesis he had promoted became a quasi ideology of the state. At the same time, the cult of Mustafa Kemal was strengthened (Copeaux 1997, 81), and “Turks from abroad” was henceforth officially recognized as a “national cause.” Consequently the BTTDD’s ideological line evolved during the 1980s. Allegiance rituals to Atatürk were scrupulously observed, and there was a shift in symbolic meanings: in the past BTTDD meetings were sometimes punctuated by a reading from the Koran as well as occasional expressions of homage to Atatürk; this subsequently disappeared, and the placing of a spray of flowers at the feet of a sculpture of Atatürk became part of the meeting rituals.

The military returned power to civilians in 1983 after writing a new constitution allowing officers to exercise power in political life and over citizens’ personal freedom, especially concerning the right to demonstrate. At that time BTTDD officially took part in street demonstrations that were obviously state-approved. On March 21, 1985, a demonstration was organized in Istanbul by several associations—including the BTTDD—representing different “Turkish nations,” in support of the Turks in Bulgaria. This demonstration, reportedly gathering two hundred thousand persons, had received approval from the police headquarters, which had forwarded the application to the First Army and Martial Law Commander. Considering the way Turkish authorities apply Law 2911/1983 on meetings and demonstrations—most of them are actually illegal—one may assume that the demonstrations they permit are welcomed by the government (Uysal 2005, 36). In contrast to street demonstrations in the former period, this time BTTDD leaders walked at the procession’s head, and Battı Trakya’s editor in chief, also president of the Federation of Turkish Immigrants and Refugees Associations, led the demonstration’s organizing committee.

In these demonstrations the contentious dimension is often the least important one, as the following examples show. In 1989 the BTTDD organized a sit-in in front of the Ípsala bridge-border between Greece and Turkey to protest the measures taken by Greek authorities to prevent Battı Trakyaı living in...
Turkey from voting in general elections. This protest action remained symbolic: after a declaration from the president of the BTTDD, thirty-five persons sat down for a time before leaving. To put it differently, although protest actions are organized in retaliation against Greek policy toward “Turks” in Western Thrace, they actually address Turkish authorities. Along with the laying of funeral wreaths, a protest action that was often referred to in *Bati Trakya*, some protest practices confirm the will of the Bati Trakyalı to place their struggle against the “Greek oppressor” within Turkey’s republican heritage, thereby avoiding any interaction with Greek authorities. In November 1989, for instance, during Sadık Ahmet’s trial in Thessaloniki, the procession’s target in Istanbul was not the Greek consulate, as it usually was, but rather the monument dedicated to the republic’s glory in Taksim Square. This highly symbolic monument celebrates the day Allied troops left Istanbul in 1923 and can be reached only by demonstrations approved by authorities.

Strikingly, the “ruder” a demonstration is, the less it addresses the authorities. When violent means are used, it is not against Greek or Turkish authorities but rather against Christian Turkish citizens, who are considered enemies of the Turkish nation by people in nationalist milieus. For five days in 1991 demonstrators laid siege to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate. The BTTDD instigated the demonstration; its aim was to protest the promulgation of a new law in Greece that canceled the provisions of Law 2345/1920 concerning the election of muftis in Western Thrace. Although not officially sanctioned, the demonstration was reportedly accepted tacitly by police headquarters. Policemen contented themselves with preventing Grey Wolves activists from approaching the Patriarchate and refused to scatter demonstrators who blocked the Patriarchate’s entry. The police chief of the Fatih District—where the Patriarchate is located—is said to have supported demonstrators (Aarbakke 2000, 519). The BTTDD president wanted the patriarch to denounce the Greek law; he exhorted him to cooperate and prove he could be a good citizen—in other words a loyal Turkish citizen—even though he was Christian (520). My interlocutors justified the connivance with policemen, arguing that they were fighting for the “national cause,” which was acknowledged by police headquarters. As a matter of fact the protest action was not motivated by the defense of Bati Trakyalı rights in Greece but was rather the reaffirmation of Turkey’s far rightist credo in reaction to an attempted assault on the “Turkish” minority’s status as it was defined in 1923. The quasi-official character of those demonstrations is confirmed by the banning of another demonstration planned by the BTTDD in
Istanbul, in January 1988, to protest the Davos bilateral conference that aimed at sealing friendship between Greece and Turkey. This demonstration was supposed to take place to echo one organized in Western Thrace on January 29 as a protest against the court decision banning associations that bore the adjective “Turkish” in their name (Oran 1991).

Throughout the 1980s the various protest actions listed here began to be organized in reaction to precise events occurring in Western Thrace, rather than in accordance with political parties or other organizations of “Turks from abroad.” During this period connections strengthened within the Bati Trakyalı network between Germany, Western Thrace, and Turkey, leading to a broader convergence of agendas and modes of action (Hersant 2007). This is related to the definition of a European strategy, to which I will return below.

**Appeal to the Islamic Conference Organization**

Before turning to the EU, Western Thrace promoters appealed for support from “Muslim and sister countries.” In the official lexicon this expression refers to a hierarchy and a degree of proximity with neighboring “peoples” or “countries” according to whether they adhere to Islam (in that case they are “friends”) or belong to the “great Turkish family” (in which case they are “sisters”). Until 1983 and the revival of BTTDD activities, the Cyprus and Western Thrace Turks Solidarity Association was in charge of the defense of Bati Trakyalı’s cause. It seems that its efforts were particularly dedicated to the strategy of internationalization and at first mainly directed toward the Islamic Conference Organization (ICO). That was association president Fikret Alasya’s idea, in accordance with the credo of Turkey’s ruling figure, General Kenan Evren. Linking together Turks of Cyprus and Western Thrace—both of whom were portrayed as victims of the Greeks—was a way of making acceptable the 1983 proclamation of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) and the island’s de facto partition for the Turkish government. But the ICO is concerned only with Muslim populations, and the organization would find it out of the question to promote the “Turkish world.” Worse, the ICO never officially recognized the TRNC (Bertrand 2004, 239).

However, at the end of 1980s BTTDD leaders became aware of the European dimension of the Western Thrace minority issue thanks to the ties they developed with Bati Trakyalı associations in Germany. The semantic register of human rights was gradually superimposed on that of Turkish nationalism, both in official speeches and in those of the BTTDD.
Adoption of the Language of Human Rights and Expertise in the EU Framework (1990s)

The European strategy was defined by Bati Trakyalı actors in Turkey at the end of the 1980s. It coincides with the launching of the BTTDD’s new journal, Batti Trakya’nun Sesi (The voice of Western Thrace), in 1987. Considering the erratic publication of Batti Trakya between 1987 and 1989 before it died out, as well as the tone and content of some of the last articles published, it seems that its owner was gradually disavowed by the BTTDD leadership. This, coupled with the banning of a rival journal, Yeni Batti Trakya (New Western Thrace), illustrates the ambivalence of the BTTDD’s political line. Created in 1983, the latter journal became the BTTDD’s instrument, as the publication of official information from police headquarters—previously published in Batti Trakya—suggests. This journal’s owner, Süleyman Sefer Ciahn, was a member of the BTTDD board from 1981 to 1984, when he was dismissed, apparently because of his sympathies with extreme rightist movements.37

Batti Trakya’nun Sesi was created in 1987 as the BTTDD’s official publication after the infighting between the two former journals. It displays an intellectual ambition to break—at least formally—with the militant rightist line of Batti Trakya and Yeni Batti Trakya. After finding resources in the 1960s and 1970s thanks to radical rightist organizations’ rhetoric and know-how, the BTTDD was thereafter forced to maintain a nonpolitical stand. The new journal’s tone is far less virulent compared to former publications, and its articles concentrate on Western Thrace, relinquishing the Cyprus issue and denunciation of the Turkish nation’s “inner enemies.” With the launch of the new journal even Batti Trakya stopped mentioning the Cyprus and Western Thrace Turks Solidarity Association, although Fikret Alasya was one of its regular columnists throughout the 1980s. As for Rauf Denktaş, president of the TRNC between 1983 and 2005, he remains an honorary member of the BTTDD.

This turning point was illustrated by what Kemal Karpat wrote in the first issue of Batti Trakya’nun Sesi as a member of its academic board. The famous historian encouraged the Bati Trakyalı to publish abundantly in Greek and English, and to address their claims not only to the Turkish people. He suggested that they resort to international organizations: “One has to choose precise and influential targets: Amnesty International, European Parliament, OECD, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights . . . just as the Bulgarian Turks did.”38 Karpat also encouraged the Bati Trakyalı to invest themselves in academic conferences and research centers specializing in Southeastern Europe, which were emerging in
Europe and the United States. Throughout the 1980s the BTTDD did indeed invest heavily in creating expertise in this field, although mainly from the “Turkish world” perspective (Hersant 2007).

The underlying logic was to shift the Batı Trakya issue from Turkish nationalism to the framework of human and minority rights. For example, journalist Mümütaz Soysal, at a conference on the “Turkish world” organized by the BTTDD, lamented the fact that “we pay dearly for not using in due time, according to our own point of view, such a fashionable theme [as minority rights] that entered the world by our door.”39 These words allude to the suspicion engendered in Turkey by human rights, the promotion of which is closely connected to minority rights, for several reasons. First, historically, “national liberation” struggles by Christian minorities that weakened the declining Ottoman Empire were supported by European countries—especially France and Britain—that hoped to take control of strategic Ottoman provinces (Akçam 2003). Now these struggles took place in the name of political liberalism and the rights of minorities (Akçam 2002). Second, the minorities issue in Turkey became internationally oriented from 1984 onward with the establishment of the guerrilla party PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party), which opposes the Turkish army. Furthermore, the protection of “ethnic” or “national” minorities has become one of the EU’s main systems of reference, along with state law, since the collapse of the former Yugoslavia and the revival of the “Balkan powder keg.” As a matter of fact, influenced by the repercussions of the 1990 Helsinki Watch report on Western Thrace (Whitman 1990), the EU has come to acknowledge Batı Trakya actors’ claims and now advocates the recognition of a Turkish—not Muslim—minority by Greece in Western Thrace. This European injunction led to the redefinition of the political lexicon and to an evolution in the repertoire of actions used within the Batı Trakya identity movement.

Abandoning the Language of Protest

At the beginning of the 1980s the political language of human rights had not yet been developed or mastered by Batı Trakya associations in Turkey, whereas the actions implemented by associations in Germany opened up new forms of mobilization and a new semantic register, that of the EU. In the 1980s and 1990s these associations organized several demonstrations and, in parallel, sent delegations to the European Parliament in Strasbourg. After the violent events in 1990 in Komotini, in which rightist Greek activists ransacked Turkish shops, mosques, and houses in the wake of street demonstrations, there were no more
demonstrations for the rights of the “Turkish” minority in Greece. Between 1982 and 1997 six street demonstrations in Germany, one in Great Britain, and one in France (Strasbourg) occurred. They were all organized in response to events in Western Thrace, except for one in 1986 that was organized by a “Turkish organization” to protest against Bulgaria’s policy toward its Turkish minority. This mobilization was organized in cooperation with the identity movement in Western Thrace and soon came to be seen as a good means to promote “Turkishness” there. Moreover, since the end of 1980s Turkish authorities and the BTTDD actors have gradually become involved in associations in Germany by choosing or co-opting their leaders (Hersant 2007).

The movement away from protest actions was enunciated during the Fourth Western Thrace Turks International Conference, which took place in June 2000 in London. The goal was to put the Western Thrace Turks Federation in Europe in the forefront rather than the BTTDD, whose members are mainly Turkish citizens. The BTTDD and Turkish officials were nevertheless well represented; the symposium’s proceedings were printed by the BTTDD main branch in Bursa, and the rhetoric linking Cyprus and Western Thrace was reaffirmed. The means of action recommended during this conference emphasized a lobbying strategy toward the EU. Whereas the Greek state was blamed by Turkey and the United States for offering PKK militants protection and logistical support—especially after PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan was arrested in February 1999 in the Greek embassy in Nairobi, where he had sought asylum—the strategy adopted by Bati Trakyalı actors stressed the nonviolent and sophisticated character of their own demands. The representative of the Helsinki Monitoring Committee in Greece, also a representative of the Turkish identity movement, argued that “we shall not demonstrate and shout in the streets any more; otherwise the Greek media will condemn us as a fanatic group.”

The abandonment of the language of protest coincided with shifting the European mobilization’s center toward Western Thrace. Such an evolution is linked to the changes in the social characteristics of the identity movement’s entrepreneurs in Western Thrace and their cooperation with second-generation migrants in Germany. Unlike the first-generation migrants who launched the European mobilization, these tend to be young people who have graduated from Turkey’s universities and sometimes even hold master’s degrees obtained in Germany or Great Britain. They speak perfect English (and Greek for youth in Western Thrace) and have skills related to the field of human rights intervention: they have considerable knowledge of international norms concerning
the rights of minorities, know-how of lobbying techniques, and an understanding of the various European institutions. They are also well integrated in the forums dedicated to the promotion of the rights of minorities. In fact they are both experts and militants of their own cause.

In 2000 the Western Thrace Turks Federation in Europe was granted a consultative status in the UN Economic and Social Committee. And the Association of Graduates from the Muslim Minority in Western Thrace has conducted several projects with Minority Rights Group (MRG) in London, for example, writing an English-language “UN guide for minorities.” This guide was then translated into Turkish and distributed both in Western Thrace and Turkey. This second part of the project did not involve the MRG but rather the Turkish consulate in Komotini, one of the most powerful, although there are no Turkish citizens in Western Thrace. Unlike former protest actions, the lobbying strategy that has been implemented for the last ten years systematically bypasses Greek authorities: it addresses European representatives, never members of the Hellenic Parliament or Greek members of the European Parliament.

**CONCLUSION**

In this study of the politicization of the Bati Trakyalı issue—namely, its reformulation into a public issue, first in the Turkish national framework and then on a European scale—I have emphasized how the character of the Bati Trakyalı movement challenges the conventional approach to social movements, which opposes “ordinary people” to authorities or to “powerful opponents” (Tarrow 1998, 2). In this case it seems that the more access activists have to state institutions, the more aggressive their demonstrations are and the less they address Greek authorities. In a similar manner the category of “transnational social movements” fails to distinguish between contentious actions and lobbying, which can be intertwined (Siméant 2005). That is why it seems more appropriate to consider Bati Trakyalı activists as a “transnational network of militants” (Tarrow 2000, 208) or as an “advocacy coalition” (Sabatier 1998), in which NGOs or state administrations can be involved as well.

As for the appropriation of the human rights lexicon, it might at first sight appear as the illustration of the first step in the “norms socialization” process as stressed by Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink (1999, 5)—namely, “instrumental adaptation and strategic bargaining.” But this model, as well as the distinction on which it is based, between “Western” and “liberal” states on the one hand and states that do not respect human rights on the other, is just not relevant.
It stresses the external pressure on states due to “domestic opposition” resorting to “international human rights NGOs/organizations” and to “Western powers” (19). Notwithstanding the fact that “NGOs” and “transnational advocacy networks”—which are supposed to bypass state authority (Keck and Sikkink 1998)—are often totally or partially state-sponsored organizations (Siméant 2005), like the BTTDD, this schema does not fit here. In their desire to “evaluate” human rights practices, these authors do not take into account the uses or bypassing of international norms, even by states that claim to uphold international law (Hersant 2008a).

More relevant is Sikkink’s and Dezalay and Garth’s analyses stressing the emergence of human rights between 1970 and the 1990s as a central element of US foreign policy (Sikkink 2004) and therefore as a universal reference in the “international field of practices” (Dezalay and Garth 2002). From this point of view the process of European construction involved both prescriptive and ideological aspects: it was able to prescribe a common and relatively stable perception of values such as democracy, human rights, a state of law, and citizenship. Besides, the process of Greece’s European integration has often been considered to be a moment in the country’s “democratic transition,” following which it has reached “Western standards.” This is the reason the Turkish state, although not an EU member, makes good use of European norms dealing with national minorities in order to legitimate its sovereignty over the “Turkish” minority in Western Thrace. Consequently it has succeeded in promoting its own interests concerning a European territory (Western Thrace), whereas its military occupation of northern Cyprus has been strongly opposed by the European Union.