Life as Politics

HOW ORDINARY PEOPLE CHANGE THE MIDDLE EAST

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In memory of Eric Hobsbawm, historian par excellence.

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PART 3 REVOLUTIONS

Life as Politics

1 THE ART OF PRESENCE

THE ARAB SPRING NOTWITHSTANDING, powerful views, whether regional or international, suggest that the Middle East has fallen into disarray. We continue to read how the personal income of Arabs is among the lowest in the world, despite their massive oil revenues. With declining productivity, poor scientific research, decreasing school enrollment, and high illiteracy, and with health conditions lagging behind comparable nations, Arab countries seem to be "richer than they are developed."[1] The unfortunate state of social development in the region is coupled with poor political governance. Authoritarian regimes ranging from Iran, Syria, Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco to the sheikhdoms of the Persian Gulf and chiefly Saudi Arabia (incidentally, most with close ties to the West) have continued to frustrate demands for democracy and the rule of law, prompting (religious) opposition movements that espouse equally undemocratic, exclusive, and often violent measures. These conditions have at times caused much fear in the West about the international destabilizing ramifications of this seemingly social and political turmoil.

Thus, never before has the region witnessed such a cry for change as it did in the late 2000s. The idea that "everywhere the world has changed except for the Middle East" assumed a renewed prominence, with different domestic and international constituencies expressing different expectations as to how to instigate change in this region. Small (Marxist and militant Islamist) circles hope for a revolutionary transformation through a sudden upsurge of popular energy to overturn the unjust structures of power and usher in development and democracy. If the Iranian Revolution, not so long ago, could sweep aside a long-standing monarchy in less than two years, why couldn't such movement

be forged in the region today? This indeed did happen. The Arab world witnessed a most momentous wave of revolutions in 2011. Yet, as usual, these revolutions came as a surprise. It is doubtful that revolutions can ever be planned.[2] Even though revolutionaries do engage in plotting and preparing, revolutions do not necessarily result from prior schemes. Rather, they often follow their own intriguing logic, subject to a highly complex mix of structural, international, coincidental, and psychological factors. We often analyze revolutions in retrospect, rarely engaging in ones that are expected or desired, for revolutions are never predictable.[3] On the other hand, most people do not particularly wish to be involved in violent revolutionary movements. People often express doubt about engaging in revolution, whose outcome they cannot foresee. They often prefer to remain "free riders," wanting others to carry out revolutions on their behalf. Furthermore, are revolutions necessarily desirable? Those who have experienced them usually identify violent revolutions with massive disruption, destruction, violence, and uncertainty. After all, nothing guarantees that a just social order will result from a revolutionary change unless revolutions turn into a prolonged process of social struggle to achieve original goals. Finally, even assuming that revolutions are desirable and can be planned, what are people under authoritarian rule to do in the meantime?

Given these constraints and the uncertain futures of revolutions, an alternative view would postulate that change should be instigated by committing states to undertaking sustained social and political reforms. Such a nonviolent strategy of reform requires powerful social forces—social movements (of workers, the poor, women, youth, students, and broader democracy movements) or genuine political parties—to challenge political authorities and hegemonize their claims. Indeed, many activists and NGOs in the Middle East have already engaged in forging movements to alter the current state of affairs. However, while this may serve as a genuinely endogenous strategy for change, effective movements need political opportunities to grow and operate. It is hoped that postrevolutionary states in Egypt, Tunisia, or Yemen may offer such opportunity. However, indications already point to certain intolerance by these new regimes, most of which are likely to assume electoral democracy of an illiberal type. How are social and political movements to keep up when authoritarian polity exhibits a great intolerance toward organized activism, when the repression of civil-society organizations has been a hallmark of most Middle Eastern states? In addition, what is the subaltern to do when the states, even if respecting electoral democracy (as in Turkey or Indone-

sia), fall short of providing an effective mechanism to respond to economic deprivation, social exclusion, gender imbalance, or violation of individual rights?

It should not, therefore, come as a surprise that until recently growing segments of people, frustrated by the political stalemate, lamented that although most people in the Middle East suffered under the status quo, they remained repressed, atomized, and passive. Popular activism, if any, went little beyond occasional, albeit angry, protests, with most of them directed by Islamists against the West and Israel, and less against their own repressive states to commit to a democratic order. Since there was slight or no agency to challenge the ossified status quo, the argument went, change should come from outside, by way of economic, political, and even military pressure. Even the *Arab Human Development Report*, arguably the most significant manifesto for change in the Arab Middle East, was inclined to seek a "realistic solution" of a "western-supported project of gradual and moderate reform aiming at liberalization."[4] Still, the perception that the Middle East remained "unchangeable" had far greater resonance outside the region, notably in the West and among policy circles, the mainstream media, and many think tanks. Indeed, a strong "exceptionalist" outlook informed the whole edifice of the "democracy promotion industry" in the West, which pushed for instigating change through outside powers and did not exclude the use of force.[5]

The idea of Middle Eastern exceptionalism is not new. Indeed, for a long time now, change in Middle Eastern societies has been approached with a largely western Orientalist outlook whose history goes back to the eighteenth century, if not earlier.[6] Mainstream Orientalism tends to depict the Muslim Middle East as a monolithic, fundamentally static, and thus "peculiar" entity. By focusing on a narrow notion of (a rather static) culture—one that is virtually equated with the religion of Islam—Middle Eastern societies have been characterized more in terms of historical continuity than in terms of change. In this perspective, change, albeit uncommon, may indeed occur, but primarily via individual elites, military men, or wars and external powers. The George W. Bush administration's doctrine of "regime change," exemplified in, for instance, the occupation of Iraq and the continuous inclination to wage a war against Iran, represents how, in such a perspective, change is to be realized in the region. Consequently, internal sources of political transformation, such as group interests, social movements, and political economies, are largely overlooked.

The Arab Spring shook the foundations of such perspectives somewhat, although without terminating them. These perspectives continue to prevail, particularly in the mainstream media, getting a boost from the ascendancy of religious parties in the postrevolution general elections in the region. But a historical outlook gives a different picture. In fact, the Middle East has been home to many insurrectionary episodes, nationwide revolutions, and social movements (such as Islamism), and great strides for change. Beyond these, certain distinct and unconventional forms of agency and activism have emerged in the region that do not get adequate attention, because they do not fit into our prevailing categories and conceptual imaginations. By elaborating on and highlighting these latter forms, or what I call "social nonmovements," I wish also to raise a number of theoretical and methodological questions as to how to look at the notions of agency and change in the Muslim Middle East today. Indeed, conditioned by the exceptionalist outlook, many observers tend to exclude the study of the Middle East from the prevailing social science perspectives. For instance, many narratives of Islamism treat it simply in terms of religious revivalism, or as an expression of primordial loyalties, or irrational group actions, or something peculiar and unique, a phenomenon that cannot be analyzed by the conventional social science categories. In fact, Islamism had been largely excluded from the mode of inquiry developed by social movement theorists in the West until recently, when a handful of scholars have attempted to bring Islamic activism into the realm of "social movement theory."[7] This is certainly a welcome development. However, these scholars tend largely to "borrow" from, rather than critically and productively engage with and thus contribute to, social movement theories. Indeed, it remains a question how far the prevailing social movement theory is able to account for the complexities of socioreligious movements in contemporary Muslim societies, in particular when these perspectives are rooted in particular genealogies, in the highly differentiated and politically open Western societies, where social movements often develop into highly structured and largely homogeneous entities—possibilities that are limited in the non-Western world. Charles Tilly is correct in alerting us to be mindful of the historical specificity of "social movements"—political performances that emerged in Western Europe and North America after 1750. In this historical experience, what came to be known as "social movements" combined three elements: an organized and sustained claim making on target authorities; a repertoire of performances, including associations, public meetings, media statements, and street marches;

and finally, "public representations of the cause's worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment."[8] Deployed separately, these elements would not make "social movements," but some different political actions. Given that the dominant social movement theories draw on western experience, to what extent can they help us understand the process of solidarity building or the collectivities of disjointed yet parallel practices of noncollective actors in the non-western politically closed and technologically limited settings?[9]

In contrast to the "exceptionalist" tendency, there are those often "local" scholars in the Middle East who tend uncritically to deploy conventional models and concepts to the social realities of their societies, without acknowledging sufficiently that these models hold different historical genealogies, and may thus offer little help to explain the intricate texture and dynamics of change and resistance in this part of the world. For instance, considering "slums" in light of the conventional perspectives of urban sociology, the informal communities in the Middle East (i.e., *ashwaiyyat*) are erroneously taken to be the breeding ground for violence, crime, anomie, extremism, and, consequently, radical Islam. There is little in such narratives that sees these communities as a significant locus of struggle for (urban) citizenship and transformation in urban configuration. Scant attention is given to how the urban disenfranchised, through their quiet and unassuming daily struggles, refigure new life and communities for themselves and different urban realities on the ground in Middle Eastern cities. The prevailing scholarship ignores the fact that these urban subalterns redefine the meaning of urban management and de facto participate in determining its destiny; and they do so not through formal institutional channels, from which they are largely excluded, but through direct actions in the very zones of exclusion. To give a different example, in early 2000 Iranian analysts looking uncritically at Muslim women's activism through the prism of social movement theory—developed primarily in the United States—concluded that there was no such a thing as a women's movement in Iran, because certain features of Iranian women's activities did not resemble the principal "model." It is perhaps in this spirit that Olivier Roy warns against the kind of comparison that takes "one of the elements of comparison as norm" while never questioning the "original configuration."[10] A fruitful approach would demand an analytical innovation that not only rejects both Middle Eastern "exceptionalism" and uncritical application of conventional social science concepts but also thinks and introduces fresh perspectives to observe, a novel vocabulary to speak, and new analytical tools

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to make sense of specific regional realities. It is in this frame of mind that I examine both contentious politics and social "nonmovements" as key vehicles to produce meaningful change in the Middle East.

CONTENTIOUS POLITICS AND SOCIAL CHANGE

A number of remarkable social and political transformations in the region have resulted from organized contentious endeavors of various forms, ranging from endemic protest actions, to durable social movements, to major revolutionary mobilizations. The constitutional revolution of 1905–6 heralded the end of Qajar despotism and the beginning of the era of constitutionalism in Iran. The Egyptian Revolution of 1952, led by free officers, and the Iraqi Revolution of 1958 terminated long-standing monarchies and British colonial rule, augmenting republicanism and socialistic economies. In a major social and political upheaval, the Algerians overthrew French colonial rule in 1962 and established a republic.

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 galvanized millions of Iranians in a movement that toppled the monarchy and ushered in a new era, not only in Iran, but in many nations of the Muslim world. Some twenty-five years earlier, a nationalist and secular democratic movement led by Prime Minister Muhammad Mossadegh had established constitutionalism, until it was crushed by a coup engineered by the CIA and the British secret service in 1953, which reinstated the dictatorship of the Shah. In 1985 in Sudan, a nonviolent uprising by a coalition of students, workers, and professional unions (National Alliance for National Salvation) forced President Jaafar Numeiri's authoritarian populist regime (born of a military coup) to step down in favor of a national transitional government, paving the way for free elections and democratic governance. The first Palestinian intifada (1987–93) was one of the most grassroots-based mobilizations in the Middle East of the past century. Triggered by a fatal accident caused by an Israeli truck driver, and against the backdrop of years of occupation, the uprising included almost the entire Palestinian population, in particular women and children, who resorted to nonviolent methods of resistance to the occupation, such as civil disobedience, strikes, demonstrations, withholding taxes, and product boycotts. Led mainly by the local (versus exiled) leaders, the movement built on popular committees (e.g., women's, voluntary work, and medical relief) to sustain itself, while serving as an embryonic institution of a future independent Palestinian state.[11] More recently, the "Cedar Revolution," a grassroots movement of some

1.5 million Lebanese from all walks of life demanding meaningful sovereignty, democracy, and an end to foreign meddling, resulted in the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon in 2005. This movement came to symbolize a model of peaceful mobilization from below that could cause momentous change in the region. At almost the same time, a nascent democracy movement in Egypt, with Kifaya at its core, mobilized thousands of middle-class professionals, students, teachers, judges, and journalists who called for a release of political prisoners and an end to emergency law, torture, and Husni Mubarak's presidency. In a fresh perspective, this movement chose to work with "popular forces," rather than with traditional opposition parties, bringing the campaign into the streets instead of broadcasting it from headquarters, and focused on domestic issues rather than international demands. As a postnational and postideological movement, Kifaya embraced activists from diverse ideological orientations and gender, religious, and social groups. This novel mobilization managed, after years of Islamist hegemony, nationalism, and authoritarian rule, to break the taboo of unlawful street marches, and to augment a new postnationalist, secular, and nonsectarian (democratic) politics in Egypt. It galvanized international support and compelled the Egyptian government to amend the constitution to allow for competitive presidential elections. More spectacularly, the nonviolent Green Wave mobilized millions of Iranians against the Ahmadinejad's hard-line government (accused of fraud in the presidential elections of June 12, 2009) pushing for democratic reform. The Green movement was to become a prelude to the spectacular Arab uprisings of 2011, reminiscent of the revolutionary waves of 1848 and 1989 in Europe. The monumental revolts in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and Libya toppled longstanding dictators; and those in Syria, Bahrain, Morocco, Jordan, and Algeria shook the foundation of autocratic regimes or compelled political reforms (see Chapter 13).

Movements like Green Wave, Kifaya, and especially the Arab revolutions emerged against the background of, and indeed as alternatives to, the more formidable Islamist trends in the Muslim Middle East, which grew on the ruins of secular Arab socialism—a mix of Pan-Arabism and (non-Marxist) socialism, which wielded notable impact on political ideas and social developmental arenas in the 1950s and 1960s but declined after the Arab defeat in the Six Day War with Israel. Islamist movements posed perhaps the most serious challenge to secular authoritarian regimes in the region, even though their vision of political order remained largely exclusivist and authoritarian. They

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expressed the voice of the mainly middle-class high achievers—products of Arab socialist programs—who in the 1980s felt marginalized by the dominant economic and political processes in their societies, and who saw no recourse in the fading socialist project and growing neoliberal modernity, thus charting their dream of justice and power in religious politics. The influence of Middle Eastern Islamism has gone beyond the home countries; by forging transnational networks, it has impacted global politics on an unprecedented scale. Yet the failure of Islamism to herald a democratic and inclusive order has given rise to far-reaching nascent movements, what I have called "post-Islamism," that can reshape the political map of the region if they succeed. Neither anti-Islamic nor secular, but spearheaded by pious Muslims, post-Islamism attempts to undo Islamism as a political project by fusing faith and freedom, a secular democratic state and a religious society. It wants to marry Islam with individual choice and liberties, with democracy and modernity, to generate what some have called an "alternative modernity." Emerging first in the Islamist Iran of the late 1990s (and expressed in Mohammad Khatami's reform government of 1997–2004), post-Islamism has gained expression in a number of political movements and parties in the Muslim world, including Egypt's Al-Wasat, the Moroccan Justice and Development Party, the ruling Turkish Justice and Development Party (AK Party), and the Tunisian al-Nahda. This trend is likely to continue to grow as an alternative to undemocratic Islamist movements.[12]

Parallel to the current post-Islamist turn, Islam continues to serve as a crucial mobilizing ideology and social movement frame. But as this book demonstrates, Islam is not only a subject of political contention, but also its object. In other words, while religious militants continue to deploy Islam as an ideological frame to push for exclusive moral and sociopolitical order, secular Muslims, human rights activists, and, especially, middle-class women have campaigned against a reading of Islam that underwrites patriarchy and justifies their subjugation. Indeed, the history of women's struggle in the Middle East has been intimately tied to a battle against conservative readings of Islam. Throughout the twentieth century, segments of Middle Eastern women were mobilized against conservative moral and political authorities, to push for gender equality in marriage, family, and the economy, and to assert their social role and ability to act as public players.[13] While the earlier forms of women's activism, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, focused primarily on charity work, the 1940s saw women collectively engaged in

anticolonial struggles, while protesting against polygamy and advocating female education. Women's campaigns were galvanized in associational activism, which in this period flourished in Egypt, Tunis, Morocco, Lebanon, Sudan, and Iraq.[14] In the meantime, the nationalist and leftist political parties and movements wished to strengthen women's rights; yet issues relating to gender equality took a backseat to political priorities, in particular the broader objective of national liberation. It was largely in the postcolonial era, when women's presence in education, public life, politics, and the economy had been considerably enhanced, that women's organizations dedicated their attention primarily to gender rights. Yet the tide of conservative Islamism and Salafi trends since the 1980s has posed a new challenge to efforts to decrease the gender gap in Middle Eastern societies.[15] Many women are now in the throes of a battle that aims to retain what the earlier generations had gained over years of struggle. The desire to play an active part in society and the economy and to assert a degree of individuality remains a significant women's claim.

If, historically, women used charity associations to assert their public role and other gender claims, in recent years, the professional middle classes (teachers, lawyers, pharmacists, engineers, and doctors) have deployed their fairly independent syndicates both to defend their professional claims and to carry out political work, since traditional party politics remained generally corrupt and ineffective. Thus, it is not uncommon to find professional syndicates to serve nationalist or Islamist politics—a phenomenon quite distinct from labor unions. Unlike the professional syndicates, the conventional trade unions remain engaged chiefly with economic and social concerns. Despite corporatism and governmental pressures, trade unions in the Middle East have spearheaded defending workers' rights and their traditional social contract. While Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, and Turkey have enjoyed more or less pluralist and relatively independent unions, in the ex-populist countries of the region, such as Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Tunisia, and Syria, unions remained in the grip of corporatism. But even such corporatist unions have been used by the public-sector workers to fight against redundancies, price increases, and traditional benefits. The cadres and the rank and file from the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT) broke rank from the regime and played a key role in the revolution. Similarly, the widespread workers' strikes in support of the revolution in Egypt severely undermined the resiliency of the Mubarak regime. Clearly, unionism covers only a small percentage of

working people, organized in the formal and public sectors. Where trade unions have failed to serve the interests of the majority of working poor, workers have often resorted to illegal strikes or mass street protests.[16] Thus, the Economic Reform and Structural Adjustment Program (ERSAP) has, since the 1980s, coincided with a number of cost-of-living protests in many cities of the region, protests with little or no religious coloring. Indeed, the 2006, 2007, and March–April 2008 spate of mass workers' strikes in Egypt's public and private sectors, in particular among the textile workers of Mahalla al-Kubra, was described as the most effective organized activism in the nation's history since World War II, with almost no Islamist influence.[17]

It is clear that contentious collective action has played a key role in the political trajectories of the Middle Eastern nations. These collectives represent fairly organized, self-conscious, and relatively sustained mobilizations with identifiable leadership and often a particular (nationalist or socialist) ideology or discourse. However, this type of organized activism does not develop just anywhere and anytime. It requires a political opportunity—when the political authorities and the mechanisms of control are undermined by, for instance, a political or an economic crisis, international pressure, or infighting within the ruling elites. For example, the Cedar Revolution in Lebanon resulted from the slaying of Prime Minister Hariri, which offered a political and psychological opportunity to forge a broad anti-Syrian movement. Alternatively, an opportunity may arise when a sympathetic government or a faction within the government comes to power (e.g., as a result of an election), which then diminishes risk of repression and facilitates collective and organized mobilization; this was the case during the reform government under President Khatami in Iran (1997–2004). Otherwise, in ordinary conditions, the authoritarian regimes in the region have expressed little tolerance toward sustained collective dissent. The Freedom House reported in 2003 that while only five states in the Middle East and North Africa region allowed some limited political rights and civil liberties, the remaining twelve states allowed none.[18] In Iran in 2007 alone, thousands of activists—journalists, teachers, students, women, and members of labor, civil, and cultural organizations—were arrested and faced court charges or were dismissed from their positions.[19] Dozens of dailies and weeklies, and hundreds of NGOs, were shut down. An Amnesty International report on Egypt cites police violence against peaceful protestors calling for political reform, the arrest of hundreds of Muslim Brothers members, and the detention, without trial, of thousands of others suspected of supporting

banned Islamic groups. Torture and ill-treatment in detention continued to be systematic.[20] Restriction of political expression was, by far, worse in Saudi Arabia and Tunisia. The following report about a group of young Egyptians launching a peaceful campaign gives a taste of the severe restrictions against collective actors:

> July 23, 2008. Under the scorching sun on a beach in Alexandria, Egypt, a few dozen political activists snap digital pictures and chatter nervously. Many of them wear matching white T-shirts emblazoned with the image of a fist raised in solidarity and the words "April 6 Youth" splashed across the back. A few of them get to work constructing a giant kite out of bamboo poles and a sheet of plastic painted to look like the Egyptian flag. Most are in their twenties, some younger; one teenage girl wears a teddy bear backpack. Before the group can get the kite aloft, and well before they have a chance to distribute their pro-democracy leaflets, state security agents swarm across the sand. The cops shout threats to break up what is, by Western standards, a tiny demonstration. The activists disperse from the beach, feeling hot and frustrated; they didn't even get a chance to fly their kite. Joining up with other friends, they walk together toward the neighborhood of Loran, singing patriotic songs. Then, as they turn down another street, a group of security agents jump out of nowhere. It's a coordinated assault that explodes into a frenzy of punches and shoves. There are screams and grunts as about a dozen kids fall or are knocked to the ground. The other 30 or so scatter, sprinting for blocks in all directions before slowing enough to send each other hurried text messages: *Where are you? What happened?* Those who didn't get away are hustled into a van and two cars. The security men are shouting at them: "Where is [the leader] Ahmed Maher ?"[21]

In the absence of free activities, the political class is forced either to exit the political scene at least temporarily, or to go underground. All of the region's guerilla movements, whether the Marxist Fedaian of prerevolutionary Iran, the nationalist Algerian resistance against the French colonialism, or the more recent Islamist al-Gamaʿa al-Islamiyya of Egypt and the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) of Algeria, resorted to subversive revolutionism largely because open and legal political work was limited. The sad truth is that the dissident movements of this sort are likely to spearhead undemocratic practices. Surveillance and secrecy disrupt free communication and open debate within a movement, leading either to fragmentation of aims and expectations—a

recipe for discord and sedition—or to outright authoritarian tendencies and a cult of leadership. Still, while only a handful of revolutionary activists would venture into such perilous subversive operations, others would find recourse in street politics, expressing grievance in public space and engaging in civic campaigns, or resort to the type of "social nonmovements" that interlock activism with the practice of everyday life.

STREET POLITICS AND POLITICAL STREET

The contentious politics I have outlined so far are produced and expressed primarily in urban settings. Indeed, urban public space continues to serve as the key theater of contentions. When people are deprived of the electoral power to change things, they are likely to resort to their own institutional clout (as students or workers going on strike) to bring collective pressure to bear on authorities to undertake change. But for those urban subjects (such as the unemployed, housewives, and the "informal people") who structurally lack intuitional power of disruption (such as going on strike), the "street" becomes the ultimate arena to communicate discontent. This kind of *street politics* describes a set of conflicts, and the attendant implications, between an individual or a collective populace and the authorities, which are shaped and expressed in the physical and social space of the streets, from the back alleyways to the more visible streets and squares.[22] Here conflict originates from the *active use* of public space by subjects who, in the modern states, are allowed to use it only *passively*—through walking, driving, watching—or in other ways that the state dictates. Any *active* or *participative* use infuriates officials, who see themselves as the sole authority to establish and control public order. Thus, the street vendors who proactively spread their businesses in the main alleyways; squatters who take over public parks, lands, or sidewalks; youth who control the street-corner spaces, street children who establish street communities; poor housewives who extend their daily household activities into the alleyways; or protestors who march in the streets, all challenge the state prerogatives and thus may encounter reprisal.

Street politics assumes more relevance, particularly in the neoliberal cities, those shaped by the logic of the market. Strolling through the streets of Cairo, Tehran, Dakar, or Jakarta in the midst of a working day, one is astonished by the presence of so many people operating in the streets—working, running around, standing, sitting, negotiating, driving, or riding on buses and trams. These represent the relatively new subaltern of the neoliberal city.

For the neoliberal city is the "city inside-out," where a massive number of inhabitants become compelled by the poverty and dispossession to operate, subsist, socialize, and simply live a life in the public spaces. Here the outdoor spaces (back alleys, public parks, squares, and the main streets) serve as indispensible assets in the economic livelihood and social/cultural reproduction of a vast segment of the urban population, and, consequently, as fertile ground for the expression of street politics.[23]

But "street politics" has another dimension, in that it is more than just about conflict between authorities and deinstitutionalized or informal groups over the control of public space and order. Streets, as spaces of flow and movement, are not only where people express grievances, but also where they forge identities, enlarge solidarities, and *extend* their protest beyond their immediate circles to include the unknown, the strangers. Here streets serve as a medium through which strangers or casual passersby are able to establish latent communication with one another by recognizing their mutual interests and shared sentiments. This is how a small demonstration may grow into a massive exhibition of solidarity; and that is why almost every contentious politics, major revolution, and protest movement finds expression in the urban streets. It is this epidemic potential of street politics that provokes authorities' severe surveillance and widespread repression. While a state may be able to shut down colleges or to abolish political parties, it cannot easily stop the normal flow of life in streets, unless it resorts to normalizing violence, erecting walls and checkpoints, as a strategic element of everyday life.

Thus, not only does city space serve as the center stage of sociopolitical contentions, it at the same time conditions the dynamics and shapes the patterns of conflicts and their resolution. Cities inescapably leave their spatial imprints on the nature of social struggles and agency; they provoke particular kinds of politics, of both micro and macro nature. For instance, revolutions in the sense of "insurrections" not only result from certain historical trajectories, but are also shaped by certain geographies and are facilitated by certain spatial influences. Thus, beyond asking why and when a given revolution occurred, we should also be asking *where* it was unleashed and why it happened where it did. Why have spaces like Cairo's Tahrir Square or Tehran's Revolution Avenue acted for years as grids of revolutionary contention? How has Tehran, as the capital of the Islamic Revolution, defied for more than three decades the pressure to be "Islamized"? What is in such spatiality that subverts totalizing ideologies and authoritarian governmentality? As sites of the concentration of

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wealth, power, and privilege, cities are as much the source of epidemic conflicts, social struggles, and mass insurgencies as the source of cooperation, sharing, and what I like to call "everyday cosmopolitanism"—a place where various members of ethnic, racial, and religious groupings are conditioned to mix, mingle, undertake everyday encounters, and experience trust with one another. Cosmopolitan experiences in cities, in turn, may act as a spatial catalyst to ward off and contain sectarian strife and violence. In this book, I examine how, for instance, Muslims and Coptic Christians in Cairo experience an intertwined culture, shared lives, and inseparable histories—a social intercourse that subverts the language of clash, one that has dominated the current "interreligious" relations around the globe. And yet, along with providing the possibility for mixing and mingling of diverse ethnic and religious members, modern cities—due to density, advanced media, high literacy, and communication technologies—can also facilitate swift and extensive forging of sectarian, albeit "distanciated," communities along ethnic or religious lines. Such collective feelings, grievances, and belonging have no better place for expression than urban streets. In other words, urban streets not only serve as a physical space where conflicts are shaped and expressed, where collectives are formed, solidarities are extended, and "street politics" are displayed. They also signify a crucial symbolic utterance, one that goes beyond the physicality of streets to convey collective sentiments of a nation or a community. This I call *political street*, as exemplified in such terms as "Arab street" or "Muslim street." *Political street*, then, denotes the collective sentiments, shared feelings, and public opinions of ordinary people in their day-to-day utterances and practices that are expressed broadly in public spaces—in taxis, buses, and shops, on street sidewalks, or in mass street demonstrations.

The types of struggles that characterize the societies of the Middle East are neither unique to this region nor novel in their emergence. Similar processes are well under way in other parts of the world. The integration of the Middle East into the global economic system has created socio-political structures and processes in this region that find resemblance in other societies of the global South. Yet the continuing authoritarian rule, the region's strategic location (in relation to oil and Israel), and the predominance of Islam give the politics of dissent in the Muslim Middle East particular characteristics. Notwithstanding its characterization as "passive and dead" or "rowdy and dangerous," the "Arab street" exhibited a fundamental vitality and vigor in the aftermath of 9/11 events and the occupation of Iraq, despite the Middle East's

regimes' continuous surveillance of political dissent. However, much mobilizational energy was spent on nationalistic and anti-imperialist concerns at the expense of the struggle for democracy at home. Even though street politics in the Arab world assumed some innovations in strategy, methods, and constituencies, it remained overwhelmed by the surge of religio-nationalist politics. Yet it is naive to conclude a priori that the future belongs to Islamist politics. The fact is that Islamism itself is undergoing a dramatic shift in its underlying ideals and strategies. Thus, while Islam continues to play a major mobilizational role, the conditions for the emergence of Iranian-type Islamic revolutions seem to have been exhausted. I suggest that the evolving domestic and global conditions—namely, the crisis of Islamism, the tendency toward legalism and reformist politics, individualization of piety, and transnationalization (both the objectives and the actors) among radical trends—tend to favor not Islamist revolutions, but some kind of "post-Islamist refo-lutions," a type of indigenous political reform marked by a blend of democratic ideals and religious sensibilities. Iran's Green movement and the Arab Spring reflect such a political project. If authoritarian rule continues to curb organized and legal opposition movements, the social *nonmovements* of fragmented and inaudible collectives may play a crucial role in instigating such a transformation.

SOCIAL NONMOVEMENTS

What are the "social nonmovements"? In general, *nonmovements* refers to the collective actions of noncollective actors; they embody shared practices of large numbers of ordinary people whose fragmented but similar activities trigger much social change, even though these practices are rarely guided by an ideology or recognizable leaderships and organizations. The term *movement* in the concept implies that social nonmovements enjoy significant, consequential elements of social movements; yet they constitute distinct entities.

In the Middle East, the nonmovements have come to represent the mobilization of millions of the subaltern, chiefly the urban poor, Muslim women, and youth. The nonmovement of the urban dispossessed, which I have termed the "quiet encroachment of the ordinary," encapsulates the discreet and prolonged ways in which the poor struggle to survive and to better their lives by quietly impinging on the propertied and powerful, and on society at large. It embodies the protracted mobilization of millions of detached and dispersed individuals and families who strive to enhance their lives in a lifelong collective effort that bears few elements of pivotal leadership, ideology, or structured

organization. More specifically, I am referring to the mass movement of rural migrants who, in a quest for a better life-chance, embark on a steady and strenuous campaign that involves unlawful acquisition of lands and shelters, followed by such urban amenities as electricity, running water, phone lines, paved roads, and the like. To secure paid work, these migrants take over street sidewalks and other desirable public spaces to spread their vending businesses, infringing on and appropriating popular labels to promote their merchandise. Scores of people subsist on turning the public streets into parking spaces for private gains, or use sidewalks as sites for outdoor workshops and other businesses. These masses of largely atomized individuals, by such parallel practices of everyday encroachments, have virtually transformed the large cities of the Middle East and by extension many developing countries, generating a substantial outdoor economy, new communities, and arenas of self-development in the urban landscapes; they inscribe their active presence in the configuration and governance of urban life, asserting their "right to city."

This kind of spread-out and encroachment reflects in some way the non-movements of the international illegal migrants. There exist now a massive border check, barriers, fences, walls, and police patrol. And yet they keep flooding—through the air, sea, road, hidden in back of trucks, trains, or simply on foot. They spread, expand, and grow in the cities of the global North; they settle, find jobs, acquire homes, form families, and struggle to get legal protection. They build communities, church or mosque groups, cultural collectives, and visibly flood the public spaces. As they feel safe and secure, they assert their physical, social and cultural presence in the host societies. Indeed, the anxiety that these both national and international migrants have caused among the elites are remarkably similar. Cairo elite lament about the 'invasion of fallahin' (peasants) from the dispersed Upper Egyptian countryside, and Istanbul elite warn of the encroachment of the 'black Turks,' meaning poor rural migrants from Anatolia, who, they say, have altogether ruralized and transformed the social configuration of "our modern cities." In a strikingly similar tone, white European elites express profound anxiety about the 'invasion of foreigners'—Africans, Asians, and in particular Muslims—who they see as having overwhelmed Europe's social habitat, distorting the European way of life by their physical presence and cultural modes—their hijab, mosques and minarets. Truth is, rhetoric notwithstanding, the encroachment is real and is likely to continue. The struggles of such migrant poor in the Middle East or those of the international migrants constitute neither an orga-

nized and self-conscious social movement nor a coping mechanism, since people's survival is not at the cost of themselves but of other groups or classes. These practices also move beyond simple acts of everyday resistance, for they engage in surreptitious and incremental encroachments to further their claims. Rather, they exemplify a poor people's nonmovement.

It is often claimed that radical Islamism in the Middle East voices the interests of the poor as the victim of the urban ecology of overcrowded slums, where poverty, anomie, and lawlessness nurture extremism and violence, of which militant Islamism is a variant. But this view finds less plausibility when it is tested against the general reluctance of the urban poor to lend ideological support to this or that political movement. A pragmatic politics of the poor, one that ensures tackling concrete and immediate concerns, means that political Islam plays little part in the habitus of the urban disenfranchised. The underlying politics of the poor is expressed not in political Islam, but in a poor people's "nonmovement"—the type of fluid, flexible, and self-producing strategy that is adopted not only by the urban poor, but also by other subaltern groups, including middle-class women.

Under the authoritarian patriarchal states, whether secular or religious, women's activism for gender equality is likely to take on the form of nonmovement. Authoritarian regimes and conservative men impose severe restrictions on women making gender claims in a sustained fashion—establishing independent organizations and publications, lobbying, managing public protests, mobilizing ordinary women, acquiring funding and resources, or establishing links with international solidarity groups. In the Iran of early 2007, for instance, women activists who initiated a "million-signature campaign"—to involve ordinary women nationally against misogynous laws—encountered constant harassment, repression, and detention. Many young activists were beaten up, not only by morals police, but in some cases by their own male guardians. Recognizing such constraints on organized campaigns, women have tended to pursue a different strategy, one that involves intimately the mundane practices of everyday life, such as pursuing education, sports, arts, music, or working outside the home. These women did not refrain from performing the usually male work of civil servants, professionals, and public actors, from carrying out chores such as banking, taking cars to mechanics, or negotiating with builders. They did not stop jugging in public parks, climbing Mount Everest, or contesting (and winning) in male-dominated car racing, despite unsuitable dress codes. So, women established themselves as public actors,

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subverting the conventional public–private gender divide. Those who did not wish to wear veils defied the forced hijab (headscarf) in public for more than two decades in a "war of attrition" with the public morals police until they virtually normalized what the authorities had lamented as "*bad-hijabi*"—showing a few inches of hair beneath the headscarves. In their legal battles, women challenged courthouses and judges' decisions on child custody, ending marriages, and other personal status provisions.

These mundane doings had perhaps little resemblance to extraordinary acts of defiance, but rather were closely tied to the ordinary practices of everyday life. Yet they were bound to lead to significant social, ideological, and legal imperatives. Not only did such practices challenge the prevailing assumptions about women's roles, but they were followed by far-reaching structural legal imperatives. Every claim they made became a stepping-stone for a further claim, generating a cycle of opportunities for demands to enhance gender rights. Thus, women's quest for literacy and a college education enabled them to live alone, away from the control of their guardians, or led to a career that might demand traveling alone, supervising men, or defying male dominance. The intended or unintended consequences of these disparate but widespread individual practices were bound to question the fundamentals of legal and moral codes, facilitating claims for gender equality. They at times subverted the effective governmentality of the state machinery and ideology, pushing it towards pragmatism, compromise, and discord. Women activists (as well as the authorities) were keenly aware of the incremental consequences of such structural encroachment and tried to take full advantage of the possibilities it offered both to practical struggles and to conceptual/discursive articulations.

What about the nonmovement of youth? Indeed, similar processes characterize Muslim youth activism. Very often "youth movements" are erroneously conflated with and mistaken for "student movements" or "youth chapters" of this or that political party or political movement, so that, for instance, the youth chapter of the Baʿth party is described as the "youth movement" in the Iraq of Saddam Hussein. I suggest that these categories should conceptually be kept separate, for they speak to different realities. Broadly speaking, a youth movement is about reclaiming youthfulness. It embodies a collective challenge whose central goal consists of defending and extending youth habitus—defending and extending the conditions that allow the young to assert their individuality, creativity, and lightness and free them from anxiety

over the prospect of their future. Curbing and controlling youthfulness is likely to trigger youth dissent. But the different ways in which youth dissent is expressed and claims are made determine whether the young are engaged in a fully fledged youth movement or a nonmovement.

A cursory look at the Muslim Middle East would reveal that the claims of youthfulness remain at the core of youth discontent. But the intensity of youths' activism depends, first, on the degree of social control imposed on them by the moral and political authorities and, second, on the degree of social cohesion among the young. Thus, in postrevolutionary Iran the young people forged a remarkable nonmovement to reclaim their youth habitus—in being treated as full citizens, in what to wear, what to listen to, and how to appear in public, and in the general choice of their lifestyle and pursuit of youthful fun. Indeed, the globalizing youth more than others have been the target of, and thus have battled against, puritanical regimes and moral sensibilities that tend to stifle the ethics of fun and joy that lie at the core of the expression of youthfulness. "Fun"—a metaphor for the expression of individuality, spontaneity, and lightness—therefore became a site of a protracted political contestation between the doctrinal regimes and the Muslim youth, and a fundamental element in youth dissent, especially in the Islamic Republic of Iran. This remarkable dissent emanated partly from the contradictory positionality of youth. On one side, the young were highly valorized for their role in the revolution and the war (with Iraq), and, on the other, they remained under a strong social control and moral discipline by the Islamic regime. This occurred in a time and place in which the young people enjoyed an enormous constituency, with two-thirds of the total population being under thirty years of age. But this dissent was not a structured movement with extensive networks of communication, organization, and collective protest actions. As in many parts of the Middle East, the young in general remained dispersed, atomized, and divided, with their organized activism limited to a number of youth NGOs and publications. Youths instead forged collective identities in schools, colleges, urban public spaces, parks, cafés, and sports centers; or they connected with one another through the virtual world of various media. Thus, theirs was not a deliberate network of solidarity where they could meet, interact, articulate their concerns, or express collective dissent. Rather, they linked to one another passively and spontaneously—through "passive networks"—by sensing their commonalities through such methods as recognizing similar hairstyles, blue jeans, hang-out places, food, fashions, and the pursuit of public fun. In

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sum, just as with women and the poor, theirs was not a politics of protest, but of practice, a politics of redress through direct action.

While the battle over "fun" brings the globalizing urban youth to the center stage of political struggle against fundamentalist movements and regimes, youth nonmovements as such—those whose major preoccupation revolves around reclaiming youth habitus—should not necessarily be seen as the harbinger of democratic transformation, as it is often hoped. Youth may become agents of democratic change only when they act and think politically; otherwise, their preoccupation with their own narrow youthful claims may bear little impetus for engaging in broader societal concerns. In other words, the transforming or, in particular, democratizing effects of youth nonmovements depend partly on the capacity of adversarial regimes or states to accommodate youthful claims. Youth nonmovements, just like women's nonmovements, follow a strong democratizing effect primarily when they challenge the narrow doctrinal foundations of the exclusivist fundamentalist regimes.

LOGIC OF PRACTICE IN NONMOVEMENTS

How do we explain the logic of practice in nonmovements? Social movements, especially those operating in the politically open and technologically advanced western societies, are defined as the "organized, sustained, self-conscious challenge to existing authorities."[24] Very often, they are embedded in particular organizations and guided by certain ideologies; they pursue certain frames, follow specific leaderships, and adopt particular repertoires or means and methods of claim making.[25] What, then, differentiates the type of nonmovements that I have discussed here so far? What are the distinct features of nonmovements in general?

First, nonmovements, or the collective actions of noncollective actors, tend to be action-oriented, rather than ideologically driven; they are overwhelmingly quiet, rather than audible, since the claims are made largely individually rather than by united groups. Second, whereas in social movements leaders usually mobilize the constituencies to put pressure on authorities to meet their demands, in nonmovements actors directly practice what they claim, despite government sanctions. Thus, theirs is not a politics of protest, but of practice, of redress through direct and disparate actions. Third, unlike social movements, where actors are involved usually in *extraordinary* deeds of mobilization and protestation that go beyond the routine of daily life (e.g., attending meetings, petitioning, lobbying, demonstrating, and so on), the

nonmovements are made up of practices that are merged into, indeed are part and parcel of, the *ordinary* practices of everyday life. Thus, the poor people building homes, getting piped water or phone lines, or spreading their merchandise out in the urban sidewalks; the international migrants crossing borders to find new livelihoods; the women striving to go to college, playing sports, working in public, conducting "men's work," or choosing their own marriage partners; and the young appearing how they like, listening to what they wish, and hanging out where they prefer—all represent some core practices of nonmovements in the Middle East and similar world areas. The critical and fourth point is that these practices are not carried out by small groups of people acting on the political margins; rather, they are *common* practices of *everyday life* carried out by *millions* of people who albeit remain *fragmented*. In other words, the power of nonmovements does not lie in the unity of actors, which may then threaten disruption, uncertainty, and pressure on the adversaries. The power of nonmovements rests on the *power of big numbers*, that is, the consequential effect on norms and rules in society of many people simultaneously doing similar, though contentious, things.

Precisely because they are part and parcel of everyday life, nonmovements assume far more resiliency against repression than the conventional activisms. Suppressing nonmovements would mean curtailing a certain flow of life—a measure that would require a spectacular surveillance with cameras, checkpoints, and everyday detentions. How, then, are nonmovements distinct conceptually from the flow of life as such, like shopping or doing one's daily chores? The distinction lies in the fact that nonmovements involve essentially contentious and often extralegal practices that subvert governing norms and laws and infringe on power, property, and public.

What effect do "big numbers" have? To begin with, a large number of people acting in common has the effect of normalizing and legitimizing those acts that are otherwise deemed illegitimate. The practices of big numbers are likely to capture and appropriate spaces of power in society within which the subaltern can cultivate, consolidate, and reproduce their counterpower. Thus, the larger the number of women who assert their presence in the public space, the more patriarchal bastions they undermine. And the greater the number of the poor consolidating their self-made urban communities, the more limited the elite control of urban governance becomes. Second, even though these subjects act individually and separately, the effects of their actions do not of necessity fade away in seclusion. They can join up, generating a more

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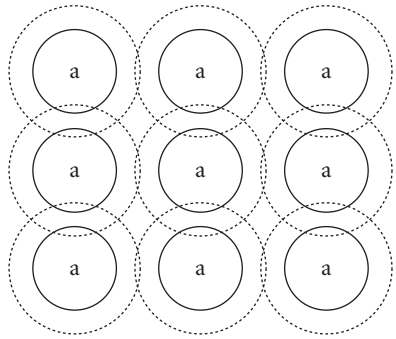

Figure 1.1. Power of big numbers: Exponential outcome of merging individual acts.

powerful dynamic than their individual sum total. Whereas each act, like single drops of rain, singularly makes only *individual* impact, such acts produce larger spaces of alternative practices and norms when they transpire in big numbers—just as the individual wetting effects of billions of raindrops join up to generate creeks, rivers, and even floods and waves (Figure 1.1). Thus, what ultimately defines the power of nonmovements relates to the (intended and unintended) *consequences* of the similar practices that a "big number" of subjects simultaneously perform.

By thinking about nonmovements in this fashion, are we not in a sense conjuring up Hardt and Negri's concept of *multitude,* which they define as "singularities of social subjects that act in common"? At first glance, the enormous magnitude as well as the fragmentation of social subjects associated with *multitude* reminds one of nonmovements and the "power of big numbers." But the resemblance stops there. Unlike the categories of *working class*, *people*, or *mass*, which are marked by sameness and shared identities, *multitude* is made up of "singularities," or dissimilar or nonidentical social subjects, a mix of different social groups, gender clusters, or sexual orientations that are ontologically different (Figure 1.2). Their apparent similarity, in Hardt and Negri's view, lies in their producing "immaterial labor" and standing opposed to the "empire."[26] Thus, whereas *multitude* is assumed to bring together singular and ontologically different social subjects (men, women, black, white, various ethnicities, etc.), nonmovements galvanize members of the same, even though internally fragmented, groups (e.g., globalizing youth, Muslim women, illegal migrants, or urban poor), who act in common, albeit often in-

dividually. While in nonmovements, collective action is a function of shared interests and identities within a single group, especially when confronted by a common threat, in a multitude, it is not clear precisely how the singular components are to come and act together, and how these different groups (e.g., men and women, native working class and migrant workers, or dominant and subordinate ethnicities) avoid conflicts of interests between them, let alone act in common.

If, unlike in a multitude, common identities are essential for agents of nonmovements to act collectively, how are these identities forged among fragmented and atomized subjects in the first place? And why do they act in common if they are not deliberately mobilized by organizations or leaders? Collective identities are built not simply in open and legal institutions or solidarity networks, of which they are in general deprived due to surveillance. Solidarities are forged primarily in public spaces—in neighborhoods, on street corners, in mosques, in workplaces, at bus stops, or in rationing lines, or in detention centers, migrant camps, public parks, colleges, and athletic stadiums—through what I have called "passive networks." The passive networks represent a key feature in the formation of nonmovements. They refer to instantaneous communications between atomized individuals, which are established by tacit recognition of their commonalities directly in public spaces or indirectly through mass media.[27] Thus, the poor street vendors would recognize their common predicaments by noticing one another on street corners on a daily basis, even though they may never know or speak to one another. Female strangers neglecting dress codes in public spaces would internalize their shared identities in the streets by simply observing one another; those confronting men and judges in courthouses would readily feel their commonly held inferior status. On street corners, at shopping malls, or in colleges, the young identify their collective position by spontaneously recognizing similar fashions, hairstyles, and social tastes. For these groups, space clearly provides the possibility of mutual recognition (Figure 1.5)—a factor that distinguishes them from such fragmented groups as illegal immigrants, who may lack the medium of space to facilitate solidarity formation unless they come together in the same workplaces, detention centers, or residential compounds. These latter groups rely often on mass media, rumors, or distanciated networks—that is, knowing someone who knows someone who knows someone in a similar position—a process that facilitates building "imagined solidarities" (Figure 1.3).[28]

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The new information technology, in particular the current social networking sites such as Facebook, can bypass the medium of physical space by connecting atomized individuals in the world of the Web, and in so doing create a tremendous opportunity for building a mix of both passive and active networks. The Egyptian April 6 Youth Movement built on such media to connect some 70,000 people, most of them young, who then called for the support of textile workers' strikes in April 2008 and protested against the Israeli aggression in Gaza in 2008–9.[29] Later, the young activists of Iran's Green movement and then the protagonists of the Arab uprisings deployed this medium in earnest to mobilize hundreds of thousands of people. Mediums such as Facebook facilitate a combined active/passive network where participants do not know each other directly yet are connected indirectly through a page administrator (Figure 1.6). This mobilizing venue certainly possesses the advantage of linking very large numbers of people while substantially reducing the cost (security, resources) of political work. But, unless it is extended, social media remains limited largely to young, literate, and well-to-do groups, whose mobilization of this kind can descend into a sort of "chic politics" of ad hoc and short-lived interventions. More important, this channel is too exposed and contained, and thus vulnerable to police surveillance, when compared to the fluidity and resiliency of "passive networks."[30] Yet it remains far more resilient against the state crackdown than the conventional organizations. In the war of unequals, the weak will certainly lose if it follows the same rules of the game as those of the powerful. To win an unequal battle, the underdog has no choice but to creatively play different, more flexible, and constantly changing games.

At any rate, what mediates between passive networks and possible collective action is a common threat. In other words, while making gains in nonmovements takes place individually through direct practices, the defense of gains often takes place collectively, when a common threat turns the subjects' passive network into active communication and organized resistance. Thus, women who individually defy authorities by disregarding dress codes are likely to come together when they encounter morals police in the streets. The urban poor who usually carry on building illegal homes quietly and individually often resist a government's demolition efforts collectively. The massive public demonstration of illegal migrants in Los Angeles on March 26, 2006 to demand a legislation to protect them represents perhaps a more striking potential of episodic collection protest of the otherwise atomized agents of non-

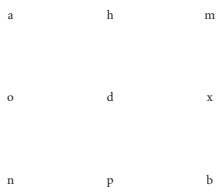

Figure 1.2. No network: Atomized individuals without a common position.[31]

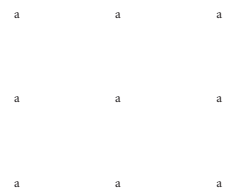

Figure 1.3. No network: Atomized individuals with a common position.

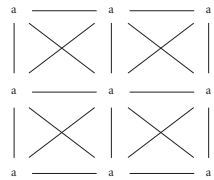

Figure 1.4. Active network: Individuals with similar positions brought together deliberately—association with an active network.

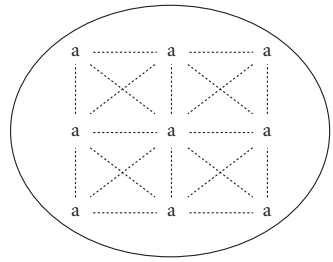

Figure 1.5. Passive network: Atomized individuals with similar positions brought together through space.

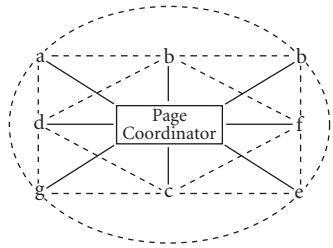

Figure 1.6. Passive/active network: Dispersed individuals with mixed positions connected together through social media.

movements. Of course it is always possible that the subjects may, instead of engaging in immediate confrontation, rationally choose to resort to the "war of attrition"—a temporary compliance in times of constraint while carrying on with encroachments when the right time arrives. Unlike women, the young, or the poor, illegal immigrants cannot resist state action unless they begin to

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deliberately organize themselves, since the markers through which they can readily recognize their shared predicaments in public are limited (see Figure 1.4). But people with limited visible markers may still connect through shared sound (e.g. chants of "Allah Akbar" on Tehran's rooftops or youngsters setting off firecrackers at nighttime) and symbols (like identical colors, headbands, or t-shirts).

These dynamics already point to the questions of how and when nonmovements may turn into contentious politics and social movements. Indeed, actual (even though quiet and individualized) defiance by a large number of people implies that a massive societal mobilization is already under way. This may develop into contentious collective politics when opportunity for organized, sustained, and institutional activism becomes available—for instance, when states/regimes gripped in infighting, crisis, international pressure, or wars become weaker; or when a more tolerant and responsive government ascends to power. But the transformative effect of nonmovements should not be judged merely by their eventual elevation into organized social movements. Nonmovements, on their own, can have significant transformative impact if they continue to operate in society. They can diminish or impair a state's governmentality, for states rule not as an externality to society through mere surveillance but rather weave their logic into the fabric of society, into norms, rules, institutions, and relations of power. The operation of nonmovements by establishing different norms challenges that logic of power. The states may conceivably attempt to offset nonmovements' subversive practices by, for instance, submerging them into their logic of power. But this may not be so easy, for the incremental disposition of claim making in nonmovements is likely to diminish the states' ability to neutralize their effects. Should a state ultimately accommodate the claims of nonmovements, it would in effect be a notable reform of the state itself.[32]

The struggle of nonmovements of this sort can be seen as a struggle for citizenship. It is citizenship de facto when the nonmovements make their gains despite the state opposition; they become citizenship de jure when the gains are formally recognized in the state law books. The advocacy groups, social movements, or legal activists can productively mediate to turn these subalterns' citizenship de facto into de jure.[33] By now it should be clear that the concept of nonmovements is substantially different from the type of "everyday forms of resistance" that James Scott describes in his seminal work *Weapons of the Weak*; their key similarity pertains to the largely individual

(rather than collective) nature of the practices. But they depart in that the nonmovements do get involved in collective resistance when their gains are threatened; they may even turn into organized social movements in opportune political climates, or move back to the more individual encroachments when the cost of organizing collective movements rises, or when the adversaries fail to respond to their collective pressure. But are the individual encroachments among these subaltern groups not tantamount to politics of rational choice and individual self-interest? In truth, the nonmovements often espouse rights-based claims, where the gain of each individual, far from harming the other subaltern individuals, in fact consolidates the group's collective gains. An individual woman's gain in winning a court case over child custody would contribute, rather than jeopardize, the women's fight for gender equality. The "individual" in individual encroachment is not a value; it is a tactic to get around the hostile or nonresponsive state. The subalterns' resort to collective resistance, when their gains are threatened, point to their valuing of solidarity.

Why are nonmovements the prevalent form of activism in particular social and political settings, such as in the Muslim Middle East? The first factor relates to the fact that authoritarian states do not tolerate any independent and organized dissent. So, they tend either to fragment the subaltern, especially the political class, or to subsume them under their own populist institutions. But the fact is that subaltern classes themselves are also experiencing new dispositions. The growing fragmentation of labor, informalization, the shrinking of public sectors, and "NGOization"—all associated with the neoliberal restructuring—further curtail the popular capacity for organized activism in the form of, say, traditional trade union organizations. Yet such a subaltern is confronted by states that are remarkably incapable of or unwilling to fulfill their social and material needs and expectations—ones that are swelled up by the escalating urbanization, educational growth, media expansion, and citizen awareness—thus pushing the populace to take matters into their own hands. When the states cannot provide adequate housing or jobs for the poor (and when the possible conventional legal channels, like lobbying, to achieve these goals are not trusted or get frustrated by state bureaucracy), the poor resort to direct squatting on land or shelters, or illegally spreading their street businesses. When the authorities fail to recognize gender rights or youth demands, women and youths may defy the official authority by directly executing their claims in the areas or institutions with least surveillance or

otherwise appropriating and overturning those that enjoy official sanction. These may explain why nonmovements (notably of the urban poor) may operate not only under the authoritarian rule but also in the multiparty democracies—such as Turkey, India, or Brazil—where the actors may perceive the state bureaucracy frustrating their collective efforts or may see individual encroachment less costly to make their claims than forging a social movement.

At any rate, such encroachments become possible—and this is the third point—because the authoritarian regimes, despite their omnipresent image, preside over the states—"soft states"—that lack the capacity, consistency, and machinery to impose full control, even though they may wish to. Consequently, there exist many escapes, spaces, and uncontrolled holes—zones of relative freedom—that can be filled and appropriated by ordinary actors. The genius of subaltern subjects—nonmovements—lies precisely in discovering or generating such escapes. In other words, I am speaking of the agency and perseverance of millions of women, young people, and the dispossessed who, notwithstanding their differences, understand the constraints yet recognize and discover opportunities, and take advantage of the spaces that are available to enhance their life-chances. The case of a physically small Iranian woman driver—her determination to take part, and to win, in male-dominated car racing—is only one example of how women find spaces where they can decisively subvert the dominant ideology that regards them as second-class citizens. This example illustrates what I have called the "art of presence"—the courage and creativity to assert collective will in spite of all odds, to circumvent constraints, utilizing what is available and discovering new spaces within which to make oneself heard, seen, felt, and realized. The art of presence is the fundamental moment in the life of nonmovements, in life as politics.

The story of nonmovements is the story of agency in the times of constraints. The concept is both descriptive and prescriptive. On the one hand, by bypassing the rigid dichotomies of 'active'/'passive,' 'individual'/'collective,' or 'civil'/ 'political' resistance which have limited our conceptual horizons, it opens up wholly new possibilities to explore unnoticed social practices that may in fact be harbinger of significant social changes. It helps uncover the logic of practice among dispersed and distant collectives mostly under the conditions of authoritarian rule when free association and active communication are suppressed. It tells us how people manage, resist, and subvert domination through widespread collective (if fragmented) practices. On the other

hand, the concept is prescriptive, in that it challenges the ideas and excuses that justify exit and inaction under conditions of surveillance. It help us to recognize, indeed gives us hope, that despite authoritarian rule, there are always ways in which people resist, express agency, and instigate change, rather than waiting for a savior or resorting to violence.