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Rival Kurdish Movements in Turkey

Transforming Ethnic Conflict

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Introduction

We used to think that people who were not with us were truly the enemies
of Islam. Even if they were Muslims. We soon became afraid of even our
own wives. It's because we were living in a system where everybody was
a suspect. Yet, thank God, compared to the past, we can gather more
people (around us) and help them nowadays. If you ask me what has
changed in me, I would tell that I have come to realize that words are
more powerful than weapons and I never take up a gun anymore ... In the
past, we used to take action against our enemies with guns; but now and
then, we respond to them with ideas, books, conferences, and meetings.

These are the words of a Kurdish Hizbullah member speaking to a journal-
ist about Hizbullah's transformation in the past decade.[1] As the activist
clearly points out, the master strategy of Hizbullah has changed. Armed
revolutionaries, formerly lodged underground, would now seek a place
within the civic sphere on democratic grounds. In 2004, the very year
Hizbullah released its first publication ever, interesting civic initiatives
were taking place among militant leftist Kurds as well. A guerilla com-
mander explained why the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) undertook
such a radical transformation:

After thirty years of struggle and changes in the world, we also changed.
As a result of the Kurdish freedom struggle we had to leave behind the
struggle based on one class and nation. We have accepted Öcalan's de-
fense writings for the (European) Human Rights Court as a manifesto for
us. The manifesto calls for democratic civilization and an understanding
of the history of human beings. We have a new organization, the Demo-
cratic Ecological Society. When we don't clash directly with the state but
disagree with them, this leads to a more democratic approach. By doing
this, the basic aim is to develop a democratic mentality in the society.
In the Middle East, there is a reality of religious/nationalist clashes. In
this perspective, members of Kongra-Gel [the new platform of the PKK
movement] try to solve their problems within the Democratic Ecological
Society in a democratic manner.[2]

1   Çiçek 2008: 58-59.
2   Interview with David Romano in the PKK camp in Iraq's Qandil Mountains, see Romano
2006: 145.

Hizbullah and PKK militants both attest to the fact that Kurdish politics in Turkey have undergone a great transformation over the past decade. On the eve of the new millennium, the Turkish State was still openly denying the existence of Kurds, calling them "mountain Turks," and Kurdish-populated cities were ruled under martial law. Kurdish politics in Turkey was largely dominated by violent PKK guerillas in the Qandil Mountains. Less than a decade later, the PKK's total war with the Turkish State had all but ended, and Kurdish political movements of numerous stripes had emerged. The Turkish State even introduced an official Kurdish language TV channel. How did this rapid change occur?

Imagine that Herbert G. Wells' time machine exists and you are transported to 1990s Diyarbakır, the key city for Kurdish political activism. Before your trip, people repeatedly advise that you be careful and stay inside at night. After your arrival, you hear stories of death, kidnapping, interrogation, and torture every day. Some Kurds blame Hizbullah for this violence while others charge the PKK. Most Kurds do not report the events to the police, fearing that the perpetrators might actually be the Turkish Armed Forces' unofficial intelligence unit, JITEM. Living at this moment, you would quickly notice that the PKK and Hizbullah militants are engaged in a bloody fight against each other. The death toll reaches tens of thousands, comparable to the notorious dirty wars in modern Spain and Argentina.

However, this is not the look of the Diyarbakır of 2016. The anarchic atmosphere of the 1990s is long gone. The PKK's larger platform, the Kurdistan National Congress (KCK), encourages its dedicated followers to join pro-Kurdish political activism. Hizbullah members open new civic centers each year, control numerous media outlets, and run for office in the name of their new political party, the Party of God (HÜDA-PAR). The pro-Islamic Gülen movement's Kurdish activists have no fear of establishing educational centers in slums where PKK recruitment is high.

Why do radicals change? How do militant pro-ethnic actors such as PKK and Hizbullah members become moderate social movement activists? I argue that pro-ethnic activists may find their interests are best served by constructing a non-violent competition culture for the sake of gaining material as well as symbolic resources such as legitimacy, reputation, and prestige. This book explores the conditions that encourage this non-violent engagement and explains the mechanisms of social movement competition in emerging civil societies. It is a study of *conflict transformation* in ethnic politics.

1   Ethnic Conflict and Social Movements

A Multi-Institutional Politics Approach

"In the next decades," wrote Robert Rubinstein in the afterword of a recent volume on conflict resolution,

> [I]t will become increasingly important for peace and conflict scholars to understand the dynamics of actors 'below the level of the nation state'; that is, of citizens acting as individuals and in groups to effect change. Increasingly, citizens at a variety of levels of organization, from small voluntary associations through larger, more formally organized groupings, like nongovernmental organizations and activist organizations, are involved in defining the scope and nature of conflicts in the contemporary world. As a result, it is especially important that peace and conflict scholars develop frameworks for understanding how local groups project political authority, and how they gain standing among large groups of people and articulate these understandings through the political process.[1]

Rubinstein's call for attention to grassroots activism is especially important for ethnic conflict studies, which increasingly address the questions of identity and belonging. As globalization provides an impetus for the revival of local identities,[2] we begin to witness a resurgence of identity based ethnic clashes which are the most difficult conflicts to transform positively.[3]

Pro-ethnic grassroots activism and social transformation, however, is understudied by scholars. Dominant paradigms of ethnic conflict prioritize either structural forces, such as the nation state building,[4] or socio-psychological dynamics, such as boundary-making and out-group demonization.[5]

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1   Rubinstein 2008: 283-84.

2   The literature on resurgence of local identities under globalization grows fast. For prominent works from European and American scholarship respectively, see Castells 1997 and Olzak 1992, 2006. For a comprehensive review, see Bernstein 2005.

3   For more on challenges of ethnic divisions in conflict transformation, see Ross 2007, 2009; Smithey 2011.

4   See Gellner 1983 and Aktürk 2012.

5   For the boundary-making approach, see Sahlins 1989, Brubaker 1992, Wimmer 2008, 2013. For more on socio-psychological approaches, see Volkan 1998, 2006; Boudreau and Polkinghorn 2008.

Despite their useful insights, these two perspectives suffer from significant deficiencies in attempting to explain transformations in ethnic conflicts. Explaining changes in ethnic politics by the pure factuality of state policies, the former falls into the trap of what Alberto Melucci calls "action without an actor."[6] Likewise, the latter depicts an "actor without action"[7] by overstating the role of emotions in conflict transformation. Thus, there is an ever-growing need to link these two distinct paradigms in analysis.

Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly aptly criticize the surprising disconnection between ethnic conflict literature and social movement scholarship. The detachment is due to an increasing "scholarly specialization" that "has left many ethnic conflict scholars largely uninformed of recent advances in social movement theory," whereas on the other hand, "social movement theorists from the West have generally chosen more bounded, less volatile movements to study than those based on ethnicity and religion."[8]

In this book, I utilize a multi-institutional politics approach to study ethnic conflict transformation (see Table 1.1).[9] A multi-institutional politics approach rejects the notion that power is solely vested in the nation state; instead, it regards power as dispersed across social institutions including religion, economy, civic initiatives, and cultural norms.[10] Unlike structuralist accounts of social movements,[11] this account analyzes ethnic mobilizations in their own local dynamics and historical contingencies. In this view of society, the nation state is certainly an important actor in ethnic politics because it has remarkable resources to shape other social institutions; however, the role of the nation state should be understood within the larger multi-institutional environment. Pro-ethnic activists challenge not only the nation state but also cultural norms, legal institutions, science, religious authority, fiction, and institutions of education. Moreover, their activism targets not only institutions but also activists from other pro-ethnic movements who compete for the same constituents, resources, and goals.[12]

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6   Melucci 1988: 329.

7   Ibid.

8   McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 1996: 21.

9   For the Multi-Institutional Politics perspective, see Armstrong and Bernstein 2008, Gürbüz and Bernstein 2012, Steinman 2012, Bernstein 2013.

10   Armstrong and Bernstein 2008: 82.

11   For path-breaking works in this tradition, see Tilly 1978 and McAdam 1982.

12   An exclusive focus on the relations between the PKK and the Turkish state, for example, would depict a single insurgent ethnic movement under the forces of a semi-authoritarian regime. In this "incumbent vs. challenger" perspective, state repression appears to be an explanatory cause for the PKK insurgency, and thus, we can expect that more democratic

As seen in Table 1.1, one of the key research questions in the multi-institutional politics perspective asks why challenges take the forms that they do. The structuralist paradigm explains "movement form" by political opportunity structures.[13] Robert White, for example, argues that it was primarily state repression that led the Irish Republican Army to employ violent methods.[14] Vincent Boudreau maintains that political opportunity structures directed many democratic movements toward a militant course, especially in authoritarian settings.[15] In his analysis of protest waves in El Salvador, Paul Almeida suggests that state sponsored repression causes violent forms of resistance.[16]

A multi-institutional politics approach remains cautious about the aforementioned structuralist explanations of movement forms. In crafting their political strategy, pro-ethnic activists found themselves in a "multi-organizational field" with multiple targets.[17] State policies, therefore, should be considered in the specific local context when it comes to analyzing movement forms. Ali Mazrui, for example, finds that the cross-cutting nature of ethnic and religious divisions might reduce ethnic violence in certain contexts.[18] In this regard, Jeff Goodwin's study of categorical terrorism is noteworthy. Goodwin indicates that socio-cultural elements such as religion, language, and territory are remarkably significant in shaping the type of violence that insurgents use. Categorical terrorism, he argues, is "most likely where there has been little such interaction or cooperation, resulting in weak political alliances between the revolutionaries and complicitous civilians," for instance "where the revolutionaries and complicitous civilians speak different languages, practice different religions, claim the

reforms would lead to moderation, especially after the PKK's total defeat in 1999. And yet why did the PKK decide to retake up arms right after the implementation of pro-Kurdish reforms in 2004? As Güneş Tezcür (2010b) points out, the pro-Islamic AKP emerged as a competitor for Kurdish votes, and thus, organizational competition led to the PKK's rearmament. Similarly, why did the pro-Kurdish party, frequently victimized by official closures of political parties, reject constitutional reform that would minimize political party closures in Turkey? Again, this apparent contradiction could only be explained by examining the role of pro-Islamic actors such as the AKP and the Gülen movement in Kurdish politics. Political opportunities, thus, should be examined within the larger multi-institutional environment where local actors and cultural dynamics play a key role. For a conceptual discussion based on various local contexts, see Goodwin and Jasper 2011.

13   McAdam 1996: 29.
14   White 1989: 1277.
15   Boudreau 1996: 185.
16   Almeida 2008.
17   Curtis and Zurcher 1973: 53.
18   Mazrui 2000: 37.

same land, and/or are territorially segregated."[19] Goodwin's broader account of socio-cultural elements, which are tied to a variety of social institutions, goes beyond the traditional literature on state repression and provides a better understanding of insurgent movement forms.

A multi-institutional politics perspective offers insight not only into structuralist social movement theories but also into structuralist approaches within ethnic conflict literature. The cross-cutting power of religion over ethnicity or vice versa, for example, is often disregarded or omitted in ethnic conflict studies.[20] Research questions are often shaped along structuralist lines such as "does Islam solve the Kurdish question?" and "did Catholicism support the Basque separatism in Spain?"[21] A multi-institutional approach to ethno-politics, instead, would locate religious institutions in a larger field of ethnic political contestation and thus provides better insights about transformations in ethnic conflicts.

Along these lines, Philip Gorski and Gülay Türkmen-Dervişoğlu rightly argue that one should investigate "whether ethnicity trumps class or vice versa, which ethnic categories are central and which are peripheral, are not fixed or given but continually up for grabs"; therefore, we need to understand that "ethnicity and nationalism are not structures but processes, not entities but relations, not things but events."[22]

The complex relationship between religion and ethno-politics, thus, moves scholars to go beyond the sphere of formal governance. Unlike the structuralist perspective that defines ethno-politics within the boundaries of the formal political arena, the multi-institutional politics perspective locates ethno-politics within the broader power struggles in the society as it manifests in the state, other key institutions, and culture (see Table 1.1). This broader definition of ethno-politics challenges the traditional definition of "pro-ethnic" movements in the mainstream literature.

Structuralist accounts would locate pro-ethnic movements vis-a-vis the state, defining their identity against the established order. Thus, by definition, ethnic movements "incite conflict against other ethnic groups, make claims to authorities demanding the end of discrimination, or make demands for expanded rights of geographical autonomy, separatism, or statehood that are not being met."[23] This view, however, does not consider

19   Goodwin 2006: 2027.
20   For a comprehensive criticism of this omission in the current literature, see Gorski and Türkmen-Dervişoğlu 2013.
21   For the Kurdish case, see Çiçek 2008 and Sarigil 2010. For the Spanish case, see Molina 2011.
22   Gorski and Türkmen-Dervişoğlu 2013: 203.
23   Olzak 2006: 13.

Table 1.1   Comparing structuralist and multi-institutional politics perspectives

	Structuralist		Multi-Institutional Politics	
Model of society and power	a.	Domination organized around the state	a.	Domination organized around the state, other institutions, and culture
	b.	Culture as secondary	b.	Culture as constitutive
Goal of pro-ethnic movements	a.	State as target	a.	State, other institutions, and/or culture as targets
	b.	Seeks policy change, new benefits, or inclusion	b.	Seeks policy change, new benefits, inclusion, cultural change, or changes in the rules of the game
Definition of ethno-politics	a.	Related to governance, formal political arena	a.	Related to power, as it manifests itself in the state, other institutions, or culture
Key research questions	a.	Under what conditions do pro-ethnic movements originate, survive, and succeed?	a.	Why do pro-ethnic movements take the forms that they do? What does the interaction between challengers and target tell us about the nature of domination in society? Under what conditions do challenges originate, survive, and succeed?

Adapted from Armstrong and Bernstein 2008: 76

hybrid social movements that utilize ethnic repertoires against pro-ethnic players as well as those actors aiming to transform the "rules of the game."[24] As Susan Olzak notes, "different layers of cultural difference expressed as ethnicity" complicate the issue.[25] Moreover, consciousness along ethnic lines changes over time, especially with the diffusion of global human rights ideologies. Thus, "the persistence of any gap in human rights, income, well-being, minority treatment, etc., among ethnic groups" is now conceived primarily in terms of ethnic identity issues.[26]

The multi-institutional politics perspective enables researchers to understand ethnic conflicts in a broader context, and therefore it suggests useful insights on conflict transformations. The definition of ethno-politics

24   Armstrong and Bernstein 2008: 76.
25   Olzak 2006: 30. For an in-depth discussion on this particular point, see Brubaker and Cooper 2000.
26   Olzak 2006: 12.

and ethno-political actors is expanded to include hybrid movements such as religious mobilizations. Consider for example the presence of Hizbullah in Southeast Turkey. Based on an Islamic worldview, Hizbullah's Kurdish activists support both pro-Kurdish rights and Islamic brotherhood in the region. Should this be considered a pro-ethnic movement? Since the movement is not a challenge to the Turkish State, the mainstream structuralist perspective would answer in the negative. In the multi-institutional politics perspective, however, we might consider Hizbullah as a pro-ethnic movement. In a region where ethnic identity and Islamic identity are not easily separable, pro-Islamic and pro-Kurdish identities blur in Hizbullah activism. The same logic applies to the pro-Islamic Gülen movement's Kurdish activists whose identities blend religion and ethnicity in strong ways. The Gülen activists aim to change the rules of the game in Kurdish politics, and they systematically challenge the PKK and Hizbullah. That is why the Gülen activists are primarily perceived as "pro-ethnic" activists: ironically, they are seen as "pro-Turkish" in the eyes of their rivals in the region but portrayed as "pro-Kurdish" among others.

Hence, considering hybrid religious movements as important "pro-ethnic" players, we can define the field of Kurdish politics more broadly, as suggested by the multi-institutional politics perspective. A broader perspective of ethno-politics will enlighten the processes of conflict transformation.

What Makes a Kurdish Activist

David Romano's book *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement* remains an essential study in conceptualizing various pro-Kurdish struggles through the lenses of social movement theory. Romano explains how Kurdish activist identities are formed as freedom fighters not only in Turkey but also in the larger Middle East.

Romano's theoretical synthesis pays specific attention to (a) political opportunities, (b) resource mobilization, and (c) cultural framing. Unlike earlier work on Kurdish nationalism that either prioritizes opportunities or resources,[27] Romano regards culture and framing seriously as they are in constant relation with structural factors. The PKK insurgency was not a simple extremist reaction to state oppression but a strong mobilization

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27   Most essential works on Kurdish nationalism are Olson 1989, van Bruinessen 1992, McDowall 1997, and Wadie Jwaideh's (2006) seminal doctoral dissertation in 1960 published as a book after four decades.

effort in mundane life. PKK activists called on ethnic Kurds in Turkey to join the "freedom fight" by narrating that

> (1) their problems were not theirs alone, but rather shared by all Kurds; (2) these problems resulted from a system perpetuated by foreign (non-Kurdish) colonizing and exploitative governments; (3) the Kurdish nation should and could mobilize together to challenge the system; and (4) the movement presently organized and bringing them this message was the most available, suitable, credible, and legitimate vehicle for such mobilization.[28]

Romano also explains how numerous technological advances in communication were utilized in the PKK's framing efforts. He rightly captures that the PKK insurgency has become greater than its main components, and thus, the nature of guerilla tactics has changed.

"If Kongra-Gel or other Kurdish challenger groups," argues Romano, "could successfully portray themselves simply as citizens demanding more democracy and recognition, the Turkish State's capacity to exclusively pursue a campaign of repression might well reach its limit."[29] According to the author, the PKK has in fact pursued such a strategy since 1995 but has never achieved a substantial outcome. By the time Romano's book was published, however, competition among nationalist and Islamic Kurdish groups was nascent and Öcalan's thesis of *Türkiyelileşme* [co-existence in a democratic Turkey] did not yet form an organizational body within the larger ethno-nationalist movement.

Following Romano's social movement perspective, a number of scholars have provided rich descriptions of pro-Kurdish activist identity in transformation. Nicole Watts's *Activists in Office*, for example, highlights the need for a relational perspective to grasp how Kurdish activists seek to evoke pro-Kurdish identity:

> Conceptualizing movements as part of a relational dynamic encourages us to explore the variety of ways that movement activity may affect different movement goals and sets of relations. It also discourages us from the common tendency to conflate ethnic communities with ethnopolitical movements by explicitly disentangling this relationship ... Ethnopolitical movements ... don't just seek policy changes from the target state but are also often involved in nation-building projects themselves. Like

28 Romano 2006: 173.
29 Romano 2006: 179.

nationalizing states, they seek homogenizing categorizations (e.g., "Kurds are persecuted," or "The Irish want a united Ireland") and try to evoke generalizations to create a more firmly delineated "we." Despite the very real sacrifices activists make to further their movements, this creates deeply ambiguous and often conflicted relations with the communities affected by such activities, as well as with authorities, who are competing with movement activists for authority over the same population.[30]

Examining pro-Kurdish municipalities in Southeastern Turkey, Watts brilliantly describes how Kurdish activists utilized electoral politics in order to gain access to legal and administrative resources that were unavailable through armed contention. Akin to Watts, Emre Uslu employs a social movement perspective to explain both the PKK's transformation and politicization of Kurdish Islamic identity.[31] According to Uslu, tribes and religious networks are also mobilized by pro-ethnic entrepreneurs similar to the PKK movement. Uslu's examination of Hizbullah in particular is remarkably rich.

Another notable study is Cengiz Güneş's recent book *The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey* in which symbolic resources of PKK mobilization are closely analyzed. For Güneş, reinvigoration of Kurdish culture and music was crucial in the PKK's appeal to the masses. Popular nationalist myths such as Kawa the Blacksmith, who claimed to lead Medes' liberation war against the Assyrian empire, are reconstructed in narration of the PKK's rebellion in the modern era. Thus, the Medes are not only constructed as ancestors of Kurds but also pioneers of the PKK guerilla fighters.[32] Likewise, Güneş describes how the myth of *Newroz* was reinvented as "Kurdish" new year despite its celebration among Persians, Azerbaijani Turks, and other nations in the Middle East on 21 March, the spring equinox:

> The PKK reactivated the myth of *Newroz* to construct a contemporary myth of resistance centered primarily on the PKK inmates' resistance in the Diyarbakır Prison during the early 1980s and its ongoing struggle. The PKK's construction of a temporary myth of Kurdish resistance to represent its struggle and the romanticizing of its guerilla war against the state enhanced its hegemonic appeal by bringing the myth of resistance into reality.[33]

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30   Watts 2010: 11.
31   Uslu 2009.
32   Güneş 2012: 77.
33   Güneş 2012: 34.

According to Güneş, the PKK's engagement with Kurdish cultural reper-
toires has paved the way for ideological and discursive transformation in
the Kurdish nationalist movement.

A common characteristic of the aforementioned studies is their applica-
tion – whether explicit or implicit – of the "dynamic mobilization" model,
introduced by Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly in their
most ambitious work, *Dynamics of Contention.* This scholarship is worth
discussing at length here as it remains the dominant perspective among
scholars who combine Kurdish studies and ethnic mobilization.

"We come from a structuralist tradition," wrote McAdam, Tarrow, and
Tilly in *Dynamics of Contention*, "(B)ut in the course of our work on a wide
variety of contentious politics in Europe and North America, we discovered
the necessity of taking strategic interaction, consciousness, and histori-
cally accumulated culture into account." The authors go on to develop this
thinking along lines of the interpersonal:

> We treat social interaction, social ties, communication, and conversa-
> tion not merely as expressions of structure, rationality, consciousness,
> or culture but as active sites of creation and change. We have come to
> think of interpersonal networks, interpersonal communication, and
> various forms of continuous negotiation – including the negotiation of
> identities – as figuring centrally in the dynamics of contention.[34]

Such a move toward a relational, dynamic view of social action is encourag-
ing, especially for those who criticize the structuralist bias in the study
of mobilization.[35] McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly highlight their approach to
collective identity as relational because humans "actually live in deeply
relational worlds," and they argue, "If social construction occurs, it hap-
pens socially, not in isolated recesses of individual minds."[36] The authors'
discussion of Hindus and Muslims in Pakistan is in congruence with the
emerging *boundary-making approach* in ethnic politics,[37] which aims to go
beyond the essentialism vs. constructivism debate.

In chapter 6, "Transformations of Contention," McAdam, Tarrow, and
Tilly discuss the issues of violence and conflict. They criticize competing

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34 McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001: 22.
35 For thorough criticisms of the structuralist bias, see Polletta 1999; Goodwin and Jasper 1999.
36 McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001: 131.
37 For applications of the *boundary-making approach* to ethnic politics, see Wimmer 2008;
2013.

paradigms of rationalist and historical institutionalist perspectives in their approach to the role of individual incentives and institutional compromises in bringing social change. "(B)oth accounts largely ignore the enormous amount of contentious politics that preceded and accompanied each episode, as well as the mechanisms of political change and conflict that created new actors and new identities, and transformed institutional politics."[38] The authors suggest focusing on episodes of contention through useful meso-level processes (what they call "mechanisms") such as brokerage, identity shift, radicalization, and convergence.

The most valuable aspect of the dynamics mobilization model is its explicit recognition of deficiencies in the classical social movement agenda. For example, political process theory explains radicalization, moderation, and other political orientations as "by-products" of political opportunity structures. As Andrew Walder notes, structuralist accounts consider collective violence "a product of the organization of the regime and the strategies and organizational capacities of the two sides."[39] The structuralists, thus, neglect some crucial meso-level dynamics such as the activist perception of social structural elements,[40] cross-cutting cleavages that impede or encourage ethnic violence,[41] ideological/religious commitment to non-violence,[42] and movement activist "know-how" or "taste" for defiant tactics.[43] Although *Dynamics of Contention* does not offer substantive solutions to problems in structuralist perspectives, its serious attention to social and relational processes is noteworthy.

Perhaps the major problem with the dynamic mobilization model is its state-centered assumptions. Contentious politics are primarily regarded as episodes of contention with the state. "By contentious politics we mean," the authors elaborate, "episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claims."[44]

A critical reader observes that this definition would purposefully exclude studies of contention "between a social movement and a countermovement (with the government as a third party), or an interaction between a social

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38 McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001: 161.
39 Walder 2009: 404. See, for example, White 1989, Boudreau 1996, and Almeida 2008.
40 For this line of criticism, see Kurzman 1996; Goodwin 2006.
41 For impediment, see Mazrui 2000; for encouragement, see Fox 2002.
42 See, Nepstad 2004, 2008.
43 Two significant works in this growing literature are Jasper 1997 and Crossley 2003.
44 McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001: 5.

movement and its wider social environment."[45] This negligence is a serious oversight for a framework that claims a relational approach. It also raises the question whether the authors really go beyond the traditional structuralist assumptions that plague political process theory. Armstrong and Bernstein rightly contend that "challenges directed at states may not reveal general social processes or mechanisms but processes and mechanisms that are specific to a particular institution or type of institution."[46]

Consider, for example, the mechanism of *certification* which is introduced as a "powerful selective mechanism in contentious politics because a certifying side always recognizes a radically limited range of identities, performances, and claims."[47] One would be tempted to apply this notion in studying revolutionary activists' reputation work to get validation in the larger society. By definition, however, *certification* refers to "validation of actors, their performances, and their claims by *external authorities*," putting the state at the core in power relations.[48] This, of course, does not mean that the mechanism is not useful; instead, we are still in need of finding and explaining similar mechanisms wherein the state is not central to the analysis.

For this very reason, for example, competing PKK and Hizbullah activists' subversive strategies cannot benefit from the discussions in *Dynamics of Contention* which rely on a "polity model" similar to earlier structuralist approaches. As Jack Goldstone reminds us, the polity model erroneously "emphasizes conditions relating to states" and neglects the crucial role of "counter-movements, allied movements, critical economic conditions, global trends and conjunctures, and various publics."[49] A feasible alternative is to search for "a model of society and power that renders challenges to nonstate institutions comprehensible."[50]

Despite deficiencies in *Dynamics of Contention*,[51] the leading social movement scholarly orientation toward the relational approach is promising.

45 Rucht 2003: 114. For similar criticisms, see Taylor 2003: 124.
46 Armstrong and Bernstein 2008: 80.
47 McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001: 158.
48 Ibid. Emphasis added.
49 Goldstone 2004: 356.
50 Armstrong and Bernstein 2008: 80.
51 A number of critics severely questioned if the "dynamic mobilization" model goes beyond the structuralism, finding *Dynamics of Contention* "reads like it was written by a committee that is not quite sure of its agenda" (Oliver 2003: 120), "not totally clear to whom" it is addressed (Diani 2003: 112), "unfinished" (Koopmans 2003: 116) and "confusing" (Goldstone 2010: 363). Moreover, the authors' peculiar definition of "mechanisms" was found dubious. See Koopmans 2003 and Oliver 2003.

In fact, the later works of Charles Tilly show his most recent shift toward relational sociology. Calling for a "relational realism," Tilly's recent books develop a new perspective that is "close to a kind of nonteleological dialectic, akin to American pragmatism or to the dialogic theories of the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin."[52] *Why* and *Credit and Blame* are most engaged with the emerging literature on the processes of social boundary-making, inter-actor competition, and reputation work in politics.[53] In *Trust and Rule* and *Democracy,*[54] Tilly argues that trust networks should "be integrated into public politics through a relatively open state structure" because "local us-them boundaries are potentially compatible with democratization."[55] Studying the role of trust in a relational perspective would properly place "communication, including the use of language, at the heart of social life."[56]

Following Tilly's advice, this book examines the role of Kurdish activists' reputation building, among other factors, in making up the trust networks. Charity organizations of competing Kurdish activists, for example, are not simply driven by electoral competition – as political clientelism theory would suggest –; instead, it is a "group-making" strategy that aims to gain the "trust" of the constituency. These organizations not only benefit moderates who participate in institutionalized politics, but they also affect the radical flanks.[57]

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52   Krinsky and Mische 2013: 17. According to John Krinsky and Ann Mische, this is why Charles Tilly's later works draw heavily upon examples from political ethnography as a method that best fits with the relational approach. They aptly quote Tilly (2006b: 410): "Ethnography engages the analyst in looking at social processes as they unfold rather than reasoning chiefly from either the conditions under which they occur or the outcomes that correlate with them."

53   Tilly 2006a, 2008. His latest articles, "The Blame Game" and "Another View of Conventions," posthumously published in *The American Sociologist*, also engaged in similar themes (Tilly 2010a, 2010b).

54   Tilly 2005, 2007.

55   Cited in Krinsky and Mische 2013: 17.

56   Tilly 2005: 24. Jack Goldstone (2010: 365) nicely captures Tilly's critical shift in these works: "Tilly also recognized that the relations in trust networks can weaken and segregate in times of crises, and that states can react with coercion as well as consultation. Thus he notes that there can be both democratization and de-democratization depending on circumstances. Democratization is thus not an inevitable march across categories of government, but the outcome of multi-level negotiations among diverse actors. By developing this theory of how democracy comes not from capitalism or urbanization or other large impersonal processes, but from the gradual building of trust between citizens and state actors, Tilly seemed determined to turn his earlier work upside down."

57   Similarly, we cannot examine *trust* without paying sufficient attention to emotions, which are largely ignored in the dynamic mobilization approach. For a comprehensive review and criticism, see Jasper 2011a. Consider Kurdish Hizbullah's demonstrations in the wake of the Danish cartoon controversy. It was the first mass protest in Diyarbakır organized by an Islamic movement, mobilizing hundreds of thousands into the streets. Among the protestors were a

The Argument of the Book

In this book, I explore how grassroots activists transform an intractable ethnic conflict from a culture of violent enmity to a culture of polite competition. The activists under study are not from a single pro-ethnic movement; instead, they belong to different social movements that have rigid boundaries and histories of severe clashes among them. In what follows, I provide a new conceptualization of these social movements as "rivals," defining their relations as "rivalry."

Existing literature characterizes the relations among social movements as friends or enemies. Some scholars note that a variety of movements can form a "movement family," i.e. "a set of coexisting movements that, regardless of their specific goals, have similar basic values and organizational overlaps and sometimes even join for common campaigns."[58] This type of friendship was evident in the alliance between abolitionist and suffrage movements as well as relations among leftist progressive movements in the 1960s and 70s.[59] Studies on movement-counter-movement dynamics, on the other hand, indicate how opposing mobilizations could engage in brutal violence and the slaughter of adversaries.[60] Notable examples include the adversarial relationship between the Christian Right and the LGBT movements as well as the pro-choice and the pro-life movements.[61]

large number of supporters of the PKK-led Kurdish movement. How could we make sense of Hizbullah's pro-Islamic protests with respect to Turkey's Kurdish issue? As chapter 5 argues in detail, Hizbullah's public demonstrations provided them with an identity re-construction from violence to non-violence, with the aim of partly redressing their public image. At a time when many members of the group were still behind bars in Turkish prisons, these attempts at public symbolism were indeed forms of reputation work to establish *trust within the movement* as well as *trust in the larger public*. As Hizbullah activists seek their place in the emerging civil society, these demonstrations have become a collective ritual, repeated each year in the name of commemorating the Prophet. In the larger picture, Hizbullah's search for its soul as it moves toward moderation has influenced the PKK's ideological shift as well as the Turkish state's strategic engagement with a multifaceted Kurdish movement containing Islamic and ethnic elements. These exchanges have been significant in the construction of a competition culture, and thus, they have helped to transform the ethno-political conflict. For elaboration and discussion, see chapters 4 and 5.

58   Della Porta and Rucht 1995: 232.

59   For the connection between abolitionist and suffrage movements, see DuBois 1978. For the leftists movements' collaborations, see McAdam 1988; Meyer and Whittier 1994.

60   See, for example, Turner and Killian 1972; Mottl 1980; Zald and Useem 1987; Meyer and Staggenborg 1996.

61   For an in-depth account on the adversarial relations between the Christian right and the LGBT movements, see Fetner 2008. On the fight between the pro-choice and the pro-life movements, see Munson 2009.

I suggest a third possibility – that is *rivalry*, as a construct of the inter-movement relationship. I use the term "rival movements" to mean two or more social movements that are actively engaged in challenging the dominant power structure as well as one another.[62] The rival movements neither try to exterminate each other as seen in opposing movements nor do they show elements of friendship in their relations. Instead, they engage in a fierce competition for material and symbolic resources.

Competition is a key dynamic among social movement activists. Despite the lack of attention to inter-movement competition, intra-movement competition is well studied in the literature. Social movement scholars point out how social movement organizations compete for the distribution of resources such as money, time, energy and skills.[63] Activists within the same movement also compete for allocation of symbolic resources such as prestige.[64] Scholars analyze how competition among social movement organizations is influenced by macro-level changes,[65] intra-class struggle,[66] and religious affiliation.[67] The existing literature on intra-movement competition would provide insights in conceptualizing inter-movement rivalry.

My definition of rival movements is a symbolic interactionist classification. Rival social movements are neither innately nor permanently "rivals." When Kurdish ethno-nationalists and Kurdish Islamists, for example, were locked in deadly violence and rage against each other during the 1990s, their relationship was more likely to be of the opposing movement type (i.e. movement versus countermovement) where elements of enmity dominate. As demonstrated in this study, they transformed their relationship into a competitive one in the past decade: that is, they have accepted each other's right to exist in the Southeast region and have started to open competitive civic organizations in order to shape the views of the Kurdish public. In other words, friendship, enmity, and rivalry among movements do not refer to definitive roles or qualities that social movements attribute to themselves. Following Alexander Wendt,[68] I treat different roles that

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62   The term "rival movements" was first employed by Charles Tilly (1999: 268). Yet, in this short article, Tilly did neither define nor develop the term conceptually.

63   See Zald and McCarthy 1980; McCarthy and Zald 1977; 2001.

64   See Benford and Zurcher 1990.

65   Minkoff 1995, 1997, 1999; Olzak and Ryo 2007.

66   Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin 2003; Stepan-Norris and Southworth 2010.

67   Trejo 2009.

68   Alexander Wendt's (1999) *Social Theory of International Politics* remains one of the most cited works in the field of International Relations. Wendt analyzes how the nation state system is socially constructed through three cultures of anarchy, i.e. friendship (Kantian), enmity (Hobbesian), and rivalry (Lockean).

social movement activists take as property of a social structure, instead of identifying various roles as properties of agents. Thus, friendship, enmity, and rivalry are three distinct interpretive systems in which various roles dominate culturally.

How Does Meaning-Making Matter?

Social movement scholars have become better equipped to acknowledge the significance of interpretive processes, especially after the cultural turn in the social sciences. In the introduction to the second edition to his path-breaking study, Doug McAdam notes the following:

> The ongoing interpretation of events by various collectivities shapes the likelihood of movement emergence, as it shapes all of social life. Indeed, these continuous processes of sense-making and collective attribution are arguably more important in movements insofar as the latter require participants to reject institutionalized routines and taken-for-granted assumptions about the world and to fashion new world views and lines of interaction. And yet, for all their importance, these crucial interpretive dynamics are largely absent from our theories of the origins of movements and other forms of contentious politics. There is virtually no mention of these processes in the theoretical work on ethnic conflict, or the dominant structuralist approach to comparative revolution. One is left, in both cases, with the distinct impression that structural changes … give rise to contention without regard to these intervening interpretive processes.[69]

Although his primary focus is on social movement emergence, McAdam's criticism is applicable to the literature on inter-movement relations. We know, for example, movement vs. counter-movement hostilities increase when the state enables but does not satisfy challengers.[70] However, we are still in need of grasping what McAdam calls "intervening interpretive processes." Structural changes and political opportunities matter, but we also need to know how these changes are impacting local contexts through cultural mechanisms and interpretive processes. Regarding the Kurdish case examined here, changes in the Turkish political context after the

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69 McAdam 1999: xxi. Emphases added.
70 See Meyer and Staggenborg 1996.

European Union reforms are crucial in explaining rival movements' ability to compete with one another, though they are not enough to explain which mechanisms, processes, and activists engage with their rivals.

Although there is a growing literature that challenges the dominant structuralist research paradigm in social movement theory,[71] processes of meaning-making among activists are under-examined. As Charles Kurzman nicely captures,

> While the cultural turn conquered social movement studies, some of its most radical implications were lost in the process. Meaning-making was assimilated into an analytic framework of causes and effects that was built for earlier conceptual tools. In effect, meaning-making has been turned into a set of independent variables. Does a group have a strong sense of solidarity? Check. Does the movement have a message that resonates with core values? Check. Does the repertoire of protest match the structure of political opportunities? Check.[72]

This book analyzes how the process of meaning-making is in constant play when social movement activists compete for recognition, prestige, and political power.

Committed to an interpretive approach, I argue that inter-movement rivalry, like all patterns of social movement relations, is socially constructed, inter-subjectively understood, institutionally supported, and collectively reproduced among movement activists. The patterns of movement relations cannot be reduced to individual activists' perceptions and behavior; instead, they become an interpretive system that shapes agent behavior.[73]

As readers will notice in the following chapters, by giving up brutal violent engagement, the movements under study have constructed a culture

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71   Most notable works include Polletta 1997, 1999, 2004, 2006; Goodwin and Jasper 1999; Goldstone 2004; Mees 2004; Van Dyke, Soule, and Taylor 2004; Armstrong and Bernstein 2008; Bernstein 2008, 2013.

72   Kurzman 2008: 10.

73   The assumptions are well supported by scholars of social movements. Russell Curtis and Louis Zurcher (1974), for example, explained why social environments are significant for the operation of social movements. Despite their somewhat mechanical description, the authors make a distinction between "a hostile environment" and "a reinforcing environment." Building on their study, Bert Klandermans (1990) introduces the concepts of alliance and conflict systems to underline the importance of social movement activists' environment. Donatella Della Porta and Dieter Rucht (1995) further support these classifications and find that cooperation and competition appear to be major strategies for activists in an alliance system; whereas, bargaining and confrontation are basic strategies for activists in a conflict system.

of rivalry after democratic reforms implemented by the Turkish government (2002-2004). As Alexander Wendt notes:

> The Lockean culture has a different logic from the Hobbesian because it is based on a different role structure, rivalry rather than enmity. Like enemies, rivals are constituted by representations about Self and Other with respect to violence, but these representations are less threatening: unlike enemies, rivals expect each other to act as if they recognize their sovereignty, their "life and liberty," as a *right*, and therefore not to try to conquer or dominate them.[74]

The Kurdish case corroborates Wendt's claim. Although some hostilities are still ongoing, Kurdish civil society has become an open space for competition, and it is by no means comparable with the martial law era of the 1990s when the Kurdish ethno-nationalists and Hizbullah were involved in a violent struggle. Both sides have come to an inter-subjective respect for each other's right to exist.[75]

I suggest that engagements of rival activists constitute a pattern of social relationship that helps transformation of violent conflict. Rival movements construct competition zones, what James Jasper calls "arenas," in order to enhance their influence on the larger society.[76] I identify three primary mechanisms, which I call "processes of rivalry." These processes are *resemblance*, *niche building*, and *strategic subversion*.

Resemblance, the first process introduced in the book, refers to development of similar organizations that are run by the competing movements in the civil society. As rivals become aware of the new opportunities to expand their influence, they develop similar civic initiatives, and therefore, they resemble each other in the long run. David Meyer and Suzanne Staggenborg observed a similar process between opposing movements. The authors rightly argue that "once a movement enters a particular venue, if there is a possibility of contest, an opposing movement is virtually forced to act in the same arena."[77] In Turkey's predominantly Kurdish Southeast region, the rival movements primarily resemble each other through charity organizations, all of which were established about the same time (i.e. soon after pro-Kurdish reforms in 2004).

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74   Wendt 1999: 279.
75   See, for example, the public statements of Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of *Kurdistan Workers' Party*, about Hizbullah and the Gülen movement *HDN* 2010; *Bugün* 2011.
76   See Jasper 2004, 2006.
77   Meyer and Staggenborg 1996: 1649.

The second process, i.e. *niche building*, which occurs simultaneously, seems to contradict the first one. *Niche building* refers to the rival activists' efforts to specialize in certain fields that are not easily available to their competitors because of (a) lack of material resources, (b) an ideological misfit, and/or (c) reluctance to be represented in the particular field due to what I call *activists' phronesis*. In fact, through the lens of a strategic perspective, a niche building strategy never contradicts the processes of resembling. Instead of a structuralist perspective that assumes a direct link between available resources and organizational niche building,[78] a multi-institutional politics perspective would locate these social movement organizations and available material resources within the larger cultural engagements they develop over time.

As James Jasper rightly notes, "(F)rom the structural perspective, it is sometimes difficult to see how players move among arenas, trying to enter those where their capabilities will yield the greatest advantages, or to see how new goals emerge and inspire players to form around them."[79] Thus, neither access to the fields of competition nor resources should be taken for granted. Activists' constant interpretation of their positioning vis-à-vis their rivals suggests a *relational sociology* framework that defines the ontological stance of the multi-institutional politics perspective.[80] *Niche building* provides activists further visibility in public and strengthens a social movement's positioning vis-à-vis its rivals, and even, at times, generates resources. Women's associations of the Kurdish ethno-nationalists, religious public events of Hizbullah, and education centers of the Gülen movement are examples of niche building efforts in the region.

Finally, social movements challenge their competitors through symbolic activism, or what I call *strategic subversion*. *Strategic subversion* refers to activists' collective attempt to claim symbolic resources such as religious repertoires and local historical figures in order to both strengthen their own prestige and harm the reputations of their competitors. Activists' moral performance and emotional strategies are crucial in symbolic contestation.[81] Moreover, building a moral authority is especially significant in ethnic politics. Through strategic subversion processes, the pro-ethnic activists become what Gary Alan Fine calls "reputational entrepreneurs."[82]

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78   See, for example, Minkoff 1999; Levitsky 2007.

79   Jasper 2015: 12; see also Jasper 2011b.

80   For "relational sociology," see Emirbayer 1997; Mische 2011.

81   For moral performance, see Eyerman 2006. For a comprehensive review of emotions and social movement strategies, see Jasper 2011a.

82   Fine 2006: 405.

Overall, the aforementioned processes together have shaped the nature of the intractable ethnic conflict in Turkey's Southeast. Pro-ethnic actors' strategies as well as identities are changed. As they engage in civil competition, their perception of "other" has become altered. Their relations have become visible to the public eye for the first time in modern Turkey's history, and this very reflective consciousness has paved the way toward a conflict transformation.

Organization of the Book

The book consists of nine chapters including this introduction. Putting the Kurdish issue in national and global perspective, Chapter 2 aims to give readers a historical background of the pro-ethnic actors under study, namely the Kurdish ethno-nationalist movement, Hizbullah, and the Gülen/ Hizmet movement. Chapter 3 analyzes critical events that have radically shaped Kurdish politics since 1999: (1) the capture of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan (2) initiation of Turkey's European Union membership negotiations, (3) the events of 9/11 and the War on Iraq, and (4) the rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and its electoral victory in 2002. These two chapters set the stage for the ethnographic analysis to follow.

Chapter 4 outlines how rival Kurdish activists have constructed civil society competition and thus planted the seeds of conflict transformation in the region. The competition "arenas" in the emerging Kurdish civil society are linked with social movements' resources, ideological boundaries, and Kurdish activists' phronesis (practical know-how). In arenas where competition is feasible, rival activists resemble each other in their strategic path. If the competition is restrained in certain arenas, it enables some Kurdish activists to carve out their niche. When actors are in a symbolic fight, they engage in subversive techniques to construct their self-image through delegitimizing their rivals. I call these processes *resemblance*, *niche building*, and *strategic subversion*, which are examined in later chapters.

Chapter 5 explores how the PKK, Hizbullah, and the Gülen movements resemble one another through charity organizations while they strongly emphasize their differences through niche building. Criticizing mainstream approaches, such as with political clientelism theory, I argue that rival charity activism should be analyzed as a mechanism of *reputation work* in claiming Kurdish civil society. At the same time, the rivals are especially active in certain fields that are not easily available to their competitors. Each movement has different emphases in the civil society competition: the

PKK privileges its women's organizations, Hizbullah focuses on religious associations, and the Gülen specializes in educational institutions.

In Chapters 6, 7, and 8, I examine how rival activists transform Kurdish civil society as a result of their reputation work in the symbolic realm. I specifically discuss the importance of "symbolic localization" in transforming the conflict. As an overarching concept, symbolic localization refers to the process of identity change as local, cultural repertoires are embraced by radical activists. The PKK's increasing engagement with Islamic culture and Hizbullah's localization through Kurdish language are remarkably significant developments. These three chapters describe how rival activists have become involved in *strategic subversion*, a process in which the claiming party reconstructs its identity through de-legitimizing its rivals' identities.

Chapter 6 analyzes the competition to define "Kurdish Islam" in the region. This chapter demonstrates how the PKK has experienced a discursive as well as ideological transformation in its relationship with local Islamic culture. Local Islamic figures such as Said Nursi have become cultural spaces for contestation among rival Kurdish activists. Chapter 7 sheds light on pro-Islamic activists' various projects involving the Kurdish language and the increasing "war on words" in the civic sphere. Kurdish ethno-nationalists, as a reaction, call for mass protests for education in the mother tongue. This type of civil society competition has brought more transformations for pro-Islamic actors as they further localized in their ethnic tone.

Chapter 8 examines competing narratives of the Turkish "deep state," also known as *Ergenekon*. The Ergenekon investigation has initiated a public awareness of the illegal state operations in the region. As victims of the secularist military regime, the pro-Islamic AKP and Gülen supported the investigation, and thus, Turkish citizens have begun to hear intriguing stories about so-called "terrorists" for the first time. Having roots in both Turkish and Kurdish constituencies, these pro-Islamic actors have diminished the long imposed official "narrative violence" on the Kurdish issue. From Hizbullah's novels to the PKK's public memory projects, pro-Kurdish narratives were an essential part of reputation work: rival activists re-constructed their self-image through "distinction" among other Kurds. This chapter shows how narratives play a remarkable role in symbolic localization of competitor Kurdish activists.

In Conclusion, I discuss how a *Multi-Institutional Politics* (*MIP*) approach provides better conceptual tools compared to classical approaches in studying ethnic mobilization, violence, and conflict transformation.