Challenging the Ba'th Party

A Study of Two Episodes of Popular Contention in Syria

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Abstract

The authoritarian Ba'th regime in power in Syria since 1966 has been challenged twice by popular contention. In the first case, "The Islamic rebellion", the episode of contention erupted into violence, in the second case, "The Damascus Spring", it did not. In both cases the challengers changed strategies and methods of contention adapting to their counterparts and the external environment.

This study argues for theoretical "primacy of process" when investigating changing strategies and methods of popular contention in authoritarian settings, with the starting point in Social Movement Theory. Scholars in the same propose a variety of analytical dimensions and mechanisms in order to offer explanations to processes of popular contention, and these make up the bulk from which a symbiotic model is constructed in this paper.

Attempting to explain first how actors attribute opportunities and threats to their context, and second how that results in strategy formulation, the most important element of the analysis is focus on interaction. The analysis identifies interactions between mechanisms of polarisation, nature of state repression, mobilising structures, internal identity shifts, perceived access to the political system, and ideological, political and religious frames. These interactions shape the episodes of contention, which in turn interacts with the external environment of international politics as well as leaves footprints on future political climate.

Key words: Popular contention, Syrian politics, Social Movement Theory, Islamic rebellion, Damascus Spring.

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1 Introduction

The authoritarian regime of the Syrian Ba'th Party has twice been challenged by movements of popular contention to its politics and de facto monopoly on power. In the first case contention erupted into violence, in the second it did not. Both challenges were met with repression, effectively diminishing the opposition, but not until longer episodes of changing strategies and methods of contention had occurred. What explains these expressions of contention and the changes in strategies and methods?

This study drawing from Social Movement Theory will examine changes in the actors' attributions of opportunities and threats linking it to formulation of new strategies, in an attempt to explain the dynamic processes of interaction between the regime and its challengers in contentious politics.

The first episode of contention, the "Islamic revolt" took place between 1976-1982 and eventually turned into a regular armed uprising seriously threatening the regime before it was violently crushed. The second episode of contention, the "Damascus Spring" surged after long-term president Hafez al-Asad died and the ground was being prepared for the inauguration of his son Bashar al-Asad in the later half of 2000. This episode included various unprecedented civil society activities until 2001 when it ended in arrests of many of its key figures.

I attempt to distinguish analytical dimensions of interactive processes drawing from and modifying the work of important scholars such as Doug McAdam, Charles Tilly, Sidney Tarrow, Quintan Wiktorowicz and Mohammed Hafez.

1.1 Aim and Query

The aim of the paper is twofold: 1) to explain the processes of the changing contention in the two episodes, and thereby to contribute to the understanding of Syrian domestic politics. 2) To test a model of analysis that focuses on interactive processes, and drawing from Social Movement Theory to propose a synthesis of different scholars proposals to dimensions of analysis of interactive processes in the study of popular contention, and thereby to contribute to the field of studies examining processes and episodes of contention. This leads to the research questions:

- *What were the processes of popular contention in the "Islamic Rebellion" and the "Damascus Spring "?*
- *How can the differences between the two cases be explained?*

1.2   Demarcations

This study focuses on interactive processes of transgressive contentious politics occurring in two episodes of modern Syrian history limited to periods of time according to an understanding of the events based on the source material. The focus on processes suggests the primacy of some over others. The processes and mechanisms used as analytical tools in the study are not claimed to be exclusively contributing to the understanding of transgressive contention in Syria, however it is argued that they are the most relevant.

1.3   Outline

Proceeding chapter 2 explains the theoretical framework and research method of the study. The two episodes of contention are presented in chapter 3 and 4 respectively. The episodes are described in a series of phases, which are presented and followed by an analysis of every particular phase. The analysis is presented together with the phases instead of in a separate chapter, in order to attain a high level of accuracy. Conclusions about the cases and the research design are presented in chapter 5.

2 Theory and Research Design

In the first section of this chapter the theoretical framework and the key concepts are developed. In the second section the research model is presented.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The focus of this paper is to examine processes of contentious politics in an authoritarian political system that restricts the possibility of institutional contention. The theoretical starting point is Social Movement Theory (SMT), by some claimed to offer a middle ground between Rational Choice theories and classical structural theories based on grievance (Gurr "Why Men Rebel" 1970, among others) or later more complex models (Skocpol "States and Social Revolution" 1979, among others) in regard to emphasis of agency or structure. SMT in contrast to perhaps stylised perceptions on rational choice theory emphasises the interpretation of actors, and in contrast to structuralist theories put emphasis on interactive process (Robinson 2004:114ff).

2.1.1 Contentious Politics

McAdam et al defines contentious politics as "episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claim and their objectives when (a) at least one government is a claimant, and object of claims, or a party to the claims and (b) the claims would, if realised, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants" (McAdam et al 2001:5).

Two types of contentious politics can be distinguished: contention within a political system and contention outside of the established system. These different types have sometimes been described as institutional or non-institutional contention, but they may instead be distinguished as contained or transgressive. The point of using this distinction instead is that challenges to the political system's norms and practices may well be conducted within the system, e.g. transgressive politics can be conducted within a bureaucracy if for example challenging corrupt practices within the same (McAdam et al 2001:7ff).

The focus is on transgressive contentious politics that break with and/or challenges the ruling norms and practices of the political system. Contention that makes demands on the authoritarian regime, demands which would, if realised, affect the regime and the political system.

Any analysis of contention should include the government's actions as an integral part of the analysis. Lawson argues that contention is in most cases a response or reaction to a government's changing policy (Lawson 2004:91, Almeida 2003:345).

2.1.2 Primacy of Process

The focus on process suggests what Mohammed M. Hafez calls theoretical "primacy of process over structure" (2003:21) when explaining transgressive contention. This means that political struggle – rather than as an outcome of fixed circumstances – is best explained as a dynamic interaction between actors and context which involves subjective interpretations of this context, formulation and reformulation of strategies depending on intended and unintended consequences, actions and reactions (see Hafez 2003, McAdam et al 2001, Wiktorowicz 2004, Rosefsky Wickham 2002). It recognises that actors do make the choices, but not in a vacuum outside of changing contexts and relations.

Focusing on dynamic processes when explaining political change is in no way new in political science, for example Dankwart A. Rustow argued in 1970 that a dynamic model focusing on interaction as opposed to structural requisites was needed to explain political change, in that case the focus was on democratic transitions (Rustow 1970, see also Waterbury 1999, who takes this argument even further).

In this paper a the underlying understanding of dynamic interaction is based on the view that actors are collective, interpret their contexts, and act according to strategies. They attribute threats and opportunities and formulate strategies, following changes in strategy may be a change in behaviour, and that change in behaviour could cause related actors to re-define their respective attribution of threats and opportunities and formulate new strategies to counter the new situation.

2.1.3 Strategic Actors

Strategic actors should not be interpreted as rational actors in a stylised rational choice theory model. The strategic actor used here is based on Colin Hay's discussion on "context versus conduct", and the actor interprets available information about its environment according to a set of changing preferences, knowledge, culture and other factors in relation to other actors (Hay 2002:59-89). This gives a myriad of possible interpretations of the same structure. The actor formulates a strategy to maximise influence over politics based on this subjective attribution of opportunities and threats, and depending on resources and interactions attempts to act accordingly (Meijer 2005:281).

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2.2   Research Design

The first step in the study is to determine the different angels, or analytical dimensions, from which the cases are viewed. The dimensions in turn are the basis from which the analytical tools, in this study mechanisms, are specified. The dimensions, with the exception of an additional one, are suggested by Mohammed Hafez, as noted below, and the mechanisms are selected from a growing body of literature. The research model is built on a combination of work from different scholars because only a very limited number of similar studies have yet been made. Most of the literature on mechanisms in social movement theory has so far been focused on theoretical arguments for what is the basis of this study –primacy of process and interaction in these processes – rather than employing the very same in extensive studies and empirical material. There are, however, some exceptions, and from these I have drawn the different parts of the research design as explained and motivated below. The methodology in this paper should be seen an attempt to meet the challenges pointed out by McAdam et al concerning the study of mechanisms, to specify and integrate the mechanisms and their interactions into a model of analysis (McAdam et al 2001:315).

2.2.1   Analysing Strategic Actors in processes

The strategic actor interprets the context, formulates a strategy, and tries to motivate it. The interpretative element is often characterised as calculation of opportunities and threats presented by the context (Wiktorowicz 2004:13ff). To emphasise interpretation and relations between actors this process will be termed "attribution of opportunity and threat", following McAdam et al in their description of a dynamic model of analysing contentious politics. They argue that no opportunity will invite mobilisation unless it is 1) visible and 2) accepted by the movement as an opportunity (McAdam et al 2001:43). "Opportunity" is defined according to Tilly as "the likelihood that challengers will enhance their interests or extend existing benefits if they act collectively". In contrast "threat" is defined as "denotes the possibility that existing benefits will be taken away or new harms inflicted if challenging groups fail to act collectively" (quoted in Almeida 2003:346).

The analysis will be conducted along four analytical dimensions: external environment, internal structure, mobilising structures and framing contention. These dimensions are modifications of three dimensions proposed by Mohammed Hafez (2003:21ff) for reasons explained below. Figure 1 below summarises the model.

The figure below describes actors A and B who receive input to their attribution of opportunities and threat from an external environment. This input is interpreted

according to frames and may lead to a change in strategy. Mobilising structures and frames determine how that strategy is translated into action. The phases are interactive, meaning a struggle over frames, attribution of opportunities and threats in relation to other actors, and actions that influence the other actors.
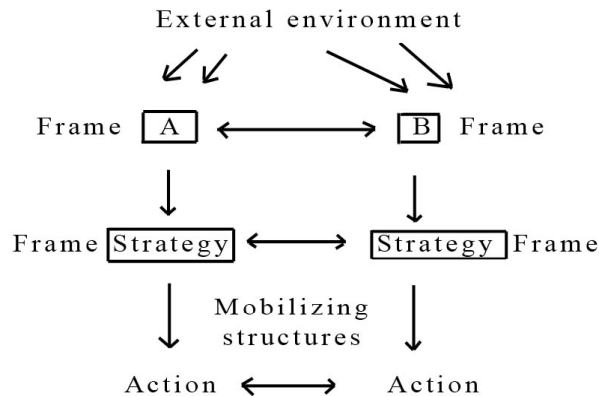
Figure 1

2.2.1.1. External Environment

Hafez first proposed dimension of analysis is "political environment". To emphasise the importance of other factors such as cultural, ideological and social factors, *external environment* is the first dimension in this study (Hafez 2003:21ff).

2.2.1.2. Internal Structure

Hafez doesn't take into account the internal structure of the collective actor in his three dimensions. An organisation may not only change organisational structure, gain or loose resources, change leadership; it may also undergo an identity change when redefining itself in relation to other actors. This may well lead to a new interpretation of the context. (McAdam et al 2001:91ff).

2.2.1.3. Mobilising Structures

When opportunities and threats have been attributed, the next step is formulation of a strategy of mobilising supporters of the contention. This is analysed in Hafez second dimension *Mobilisation structures*, and includes organisation structure, channels to reach potential supporters and sites of mobilisation (Hafez 2003:21ff).

2.2.1.4. Framing Contention

The third dimension suggested by Hafez, *ideological frames*, is defined as "conscious strategic effects by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivates collective action" (Hafez 2003:156). When examining framing of the contention, the purpose is to examine how meaning is produced, articulated and disseminated. Wiktorowicz describes the task of frames as threefold: 1) Diagnose a condition as a problem 2) Propose a particular solution in tactics and strategies 3) Provide a rationale to motivate support and collective action (2004:15-16). Once again, to offer a modification of Hafez dimension this dimension is broadened to include not only strictly ideological frames but also religious frames.

Part of the contentious politics can be viewed as a struggle over framing the contention. This doesn't take place only between the principal actors, but also within e.g. regimes and movements (ibid).

2.2.2 Analysing Processes by Employing Mechanisms

Sociologists have long focused on mechanisms when trying to explain social processes. McAdam et al describes a process as "a sequence of mechanisms that produce similar transformations in different situations". Mechanisms are "bits of theory about entities at a different level (e.g. groups) than the main entities being theorised about (e.g. societies) which serve to make the higher-level theory more supple, more accurate, or more general", or in other words "events that alter relations among a specified set of elements on closely similar ways over a variety of situations" (McAdam et al 2001:25). They continue by explaining that this means that an analysis of processes must identify and specify mechanisms that link variables, rather than as in quantitative social science and causal modelling to measure the strength of correlations between variables. The mechanisms in turn interact with each other (McAdam et al 2001:24ff).

Following the logic of these arguments the process of change and the differences in processes should be seen as explained by the different combinations of mechanisms. It once again points at the importance of interaction.

2.2.3 Specifying Mechanisms

The mechanisms I will focus on are not claimed to be exclusive, but I do claim that they explain the different processes of contentious politics in the two cases of my analysis, by linking "attribution of opportunity and threat" and "formulation of strategy" to change in transgressive contention.

Robinson emphasises the need to be specific in Social Movement Theory, in order to avoid the risk that the output of the analysis simply being a "laundry list"

loosing theoretical rigor and clarity. The mechanisms need to be specified as well as their suggested function as a link between variables (Robinson 2004:116ff).

The analysis will be based on the mechanisms presented below, and are identified by scholars of popular contention. Note that they interact with each other.

McAdam et al argues that attempts to categorise mechanisms and distinguish between e.g. mobilising and framing mechanisms, is counterproductive as the mechanisms appear in many different stages in the trajectory of contention (McAdam et al 2001:306). The reservation needs to be considered during the analysis, but I will still present the mechanisms in different categories for the purpose of a quick overview, but this is not to argue that certain mechanisms only link a very limited number of variables.

2.2.3.1. External Environment Mechanisms

Pre-emptive state repression – denies the activists the opportunity to build-up, and spreads cautiousness in supporters, isolates militant and stops them from developing the necessary bond of trust to potential recruits and supporters and thereby decreases contentious mobilisation (Lawson 2004:89, Wiktorowicz 2004:13-14, Hafez & Wiktorowicz 2004:40).

Reactive state repression – increases mobilisation since 1) movement already command resources to fight back 2) trust and bonds to supporters and potential recruits are already developed 3) movement may rise to protect hard-earned accumulated resources, and to protect possibility to future activity. The cost of not reacting to repression gets higher when movements have resources to loose (ibid).

Selective state repression – decreases contentious mobilisation as it raises the relative cost of contention when it signals that only the "trouble makers" will be targeted (ibid).

Indiscriminate state repression – increases likelihood of contention as it decreases the relative cost of contention since it does not distinguish between activists and non-activists (ibid).

Exclusionary political system – increases likelihood of transgressive contention and radicalisation. Affects "perceived reformability of the state" (Hafez 2003:27ff).

Inclusionary political system – increases likelihood of moderation and contained contention (ibid).

Stability and institutional strength of regime – stability of perceived strength of the regime affects the calculation of "empirical credibility of revolution" (ibid).

2.2.3.2. Internal Structure Mechanisms

Identity shift – the movement's identity is changed, and with it the attribution of opportunity and threat to the external environment (McAdam et al 2001:244ff).

Object shift – the object of contention is changed. The contention could be moved to focus on a regional or national level from a local level and also changes attribution of opportunity and threat (ibid).

2.2.3.3. Mobilisation Structure Mechanisms

Exclusive organisational structure – the movement's organisation mobilises support in exclusive networks and in restricted sites, which increases likelihood of what can be called a "spiral of encapsulation" as movement loose contact with "reality" and become more emotionally than strategically driven, which may lead to radicalisation and violent contention (Hafez 2003:109ff).

Inclusive organisational structure – the mobilisation of contention occurs in wider structures and broader range of sites. It increases the likelihood of internal debate, moderation and non-violent contention (ibid).

Coalition formation – different elements and interests are incorporated and it affects mobilising structures towards broader and more inclusive structures (McAdam et al 2001:127ff).

Category formation – creates new identities as different sites for contention are bundled together (ibid).

2.2.3.4. Framing Mechanisms

Polarisation – affects radicalisation or moderation of the contentious movement (ibid).

Certification – evidence or arguments are provided that strengthen the legitimacy of movements or regime (ibid).

Decertification – evidence or arguments are provided that weaken the legitimacy of movements or regime (ibid).

Social appropriation – changes norms of what is right, acceptable, necessary etc (ibid).

2.2.4 Two Episodes of Contentious Politics

This study analyses two cases of popular contention in Syrian post-independence history (see Almedia 2003 for a similar case selection). They are quite different in character as the first episode 1976-1982 resulted in armed uprising and the second 2000-2001 was a short period of unprecedented civil society activities. The reasons for choosing these cases are twofold. First, the contexts of contention in terms of political system are very similar since the Syrian political system has remained remarkably intact under Hafez al-Asad's regime (George 2003). This suggests a focus on contentious processes, rather than focus on structural strains or grievances, in order to explain the different trajectories of contention. Second, since the episodes of contention are very different they pose a challenge to any theoretical model attempting to explain contentious politics. A theoretical model that can be used successfully to explain both episodes satisfactory holds a high explanatory strength and analytical flexibility according to principles of the "most different" research design (Mahoney 2007:134, Esaiasson et al 2004:114-115).

The scope of the theoretical model of the analysis is limited to transgressive contentious politics performed by collective actors, but within that scope I argue that all episodes can be examined and explained using this model of analysis.

2.2.5 Outline of the Analysis

The analysis of the two cases will be conducted in different phases of contention. This means that in every phase a description of events is followed by a short analysis of the phase in question. The cases are also presented with a background. The reason for dividing the analysis over the different phases is that it gives greater opportunity for accuracy in and requires specific analysis of the mechanisms.

2.3   Source Material

The source material used in this study is mainly secondary academic and journalistic material covering Syrian affairs. The usefulness of official government statistics regarding the episodes is widely considered limited to at

best rhetorical analysis. It is the habit of the Syrian authorities to produce wildly biased material. The studies that I base most of my analysis on are made of well known and long time experts on Syrian affairs. However, it is difficult to estimate how reliable these supposed neutral sources are, due to what Esaiasson et al calls "the shield of neutrality" (Esaiasson et al 2004:308ff). I have tried to overcome this problem by using information about events that is mentioned in multiple sources to the best of my knowledge independent of each other.

3 The Islamic Rebellion

3.1 Background

The Syrian society experienced significant internal tensions; secularism versus Islamism, urban versus rural, centralisation versus regional power, and struggles between lower, middle and higher socio economic classes. These tensions were framed by a deepening economic crisis during the seventies.

3.1.1 Secularism and Islamism

The political climate in which Hafez al-Asad gained power in an intra-regime coup in 1970, was very unstable partly due to no less than seven military coups since Syrian independence 1946. The Ba'th party came to power in 1966 with a radical socialist, modernist and pan-Arabist ideology, and developed a radical secularism that challenged the role of Islam in politics. The attempts to marginalise Islamism provoked a series of reactions in forms of strikes and demonstrations met by regime with hard repression (Zisser 2001:198). Hafez al-Asad attempted to reconcile with the conservative Ulama (religious scholars) to contain the more extreme religious elements, but the reactions were varying, depending more or less on which groups in society the Ulema represented or originated from, and if increased influence over official Islam could be generated by supporting the regime. The most critical Ulama were those of humbler origin linked to the *souq* (traditional marketplace) (Batatu 1999:260).

3.1.2 Historical Ethnic Struggle and a Divided Sunni Majority

Syria's ethnic mix consists of minorities of Alawis, Druze, Ismai'ilis, Christians and Kurds, and a large Sunni majority in which Islamism had support, but the support was not monolithic. The Ba'th regime has its roots in the rural minorities of Syria, and it later turned to the old dominant class of Damascus to widen its support. The main group excluded in these arrangements was the Sunni urban lower- and middle class, and it was in these groups that the Muslim Brotherhood gained its support. (Hinnebusch 2001:193-203). The intimate relation between Islamism and the urban middle and lower class small scale merchants and artisans

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in the souq is not unique for Syria, but significant in many countries in the whole region[1]. Lower level Imams could very rarely live of their wages from the mosque and were also supporting themselves in the souq combining religious work with handicraft or trading (Batatu 1982:15).

The support for the radical Islamism was concentrated to the Northern parts and correlates with the winners and losers of the regime's centralisation of power, land reforms that gave rural populations more freedom from urban landowners, and nationalisation of industries that threatened small scale industries. (Hinnebusch 2001:193-203, Batatu 1999:260). As Nasserism as an ideology was discredited in the Arab world supporters turned to either Islamism or towards the official Syrian Nationalism (Hinnebusch 1990:289).

3.1.3 The Sectarian Character of the Ba'th Regime

The initial radicalism of the Ba'th party dictatorship faded when Hafez al-Asad took power and turned the regime more populist, and mass organisations were established to widen the support base. The regime also became increasingly based on patrimonial networks that grew stronger at the expense of party and state institutions, and increased corruption and patronage turned the regime more conservative in its focus on maintaining power and access to state resources. The politics resulted in a embourgeoisement of a new elite dominated by the Alawi minority, of which Hafez al-Asad belongs, who were controlling the military and security services (Hinnebush 1999:317ff).

The Alawi sect is somewhat a religious mystery. It is according to Patrick Seale an offspring from the Shi'a branch of Islam, and the roughly 12 % of the Syrian population is of Alawi origin and divided in four larger rivalling tribes, and within those smaller clans. Historically they were a rural mountain people that at times were oppressed by the Sunni majority. During French rule mainly Alawis, but also other minorities, were recruited to the armed forces that fought nationalist uprisings and from then on they, also due to few other opportunities, turned to the army for employment, which gave an overrepresentation of minorities, and especially Alawis, in the army which later turned into dominance in the armed forces at first and then of course the country (Seale 1989:3-14).

Though branded as an Alawi regime, the Asad government did include Sunnis at high positions, but they all had strong personal bonds to Asad from early years in the military service, and held little power of their own, They were checked by Alawis mostly from Asad's own tribe or family, who made up Asad's safeguard for power. The regime was based more personal patronage and tribal origin than strict Alawi sectarianism and there is little evidence that policies gave relatively more benefits to Alawis than Sunnis or other groups (Batatu 1999:226-9).

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[1] For example the cadres for the Islamic revolution in Iran 1979 came from an alliance between the "bazaar" and Imams.

3.1.4 Economic Crisis and Government Mismanagement

The Syrian economy was during the 1970's highly dependent on economic transfers from oil producing countries, which it received as support for being the military front towards Israel, and from The Soviet Union. The transfers fluctuated with the oil prices and Cold War strategies and prevented economic stability. The influx of funds and poor financial politics also led to a high rate of inflation. These factors combined with high military spending and the 1967 war put Syria in a state of economic crisis in the 1970's (Zisser 2001:196ff). At the same time as mismanagement and corruption within the government grew, the living standard decreased among large segments of the population (Batatu 1982:19).

The political and military elites used their power to enrich themselves while the wealthy bourgeoisie sought opportunities to translate their wealth into political influence. This resulted in corruption for access to state contracts, commission on foreign trade deals, manipulation of state-market interchange, and political protection for exchange rate speculation. Raymond Hinnebusch argues that "[the] various alliances […] generated a new bourgeoisie-in-formation […] which may well deserve critics' appellation of parasitic as it largely milked the public sector in pursuit of partly non-productive activities" (Hinnebusch 2001:91).

The regime faced a serious crisis of legitimacy in the later 1970's, which increased frustration over the lack of access to channels to express dissatisfaction (Hinnebusch 2001:89ff).

3.1.5 The Muslim Brotherhood's Critique of the Ba'th Regime

The Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood was established in 1944 with the objective to act as a moderating force, negotiating the gap between the state and Islam. They participated actively in society and the political life until the Ba'th takeover.

The main points of the agenda of the Muslim Brotherhood and its response to the Ba'th regime was first of all the anti-statist view of the Souq. They were emphasising freedom of small business, opposing large national industries and demanding a downsize of the government bureaucracy. Further they demanded independency of the judiciary and a government subordinate to the law. An establishment of an Islamic state would contain these ingredients according to the Brotherhood as well as freedom of religion and expression, democracy and the establishment of Shura in the Parliament (Hinnebusch 2001:94-95). Except for the last point, it seems more like classical liberalism, but as Hanna Batatu warns, temptations to see these claims as empty and populist should be resisted, arguing most Syrians should have come to realise the high value of liberal freedoms due to the repression (Batatu 1999:260ff).

Sunni extremists considered Alawis as infidels and claimed the regime illegitimate on that basis as well. (Hinnebusch 2001:94-95).

3.2 Episode of contention

3.2.1 Phase 1. An Islamic Vanguard

In 1976 Syria intervened in the armed conflict in Lebanon that had erupted the same year. The intervention was seen as directed against Syria's "natural allies": the Palestinians and Sunni Muslims, and it invoked an enormous outcry within the domestic Sunni majority in Syria (Zisser 2001:196ff)[2].

Following the intervention, a series of assassinations of Ba'thist officials occurred. At the beginning it was unclear to the regime who was responsible for the attacks, but it soon became clear that they were the work of domestic Sunni extremists (van Dam 1997:72).

The campaign in Lebanon turned out to be much more costly than initially expected [3], and it fixed the regime's primary attention to regional affairs, rather than to domestic dissatisfaction (Zisser 2001:196ff).

A Sunni extremist group, "Battalions of Muhammad", operating on the fringe of the Muslim Brotherhood claimed responsibility for the attacks in a statement motivating the attacks as a defensive measure against "infidel repression" from an illegitimate regime that was mismanaging the country, and claimed violence as a last resort. Nikolaos Van Dam analyses the statement as an attempt to polarize the Syrian public along historical sectarian lines, and thereby broadening the support within the different Sunni communities (Van Dam 1997:97).

The Muslim Brotherhood's mainstream political activities focused on illegal publications and small strikes and demonstrations. The movement in practice split between supporters of the vanguard and the more cautious factions in Damascus and Aleppo (Batatu 1999:262).

Analysis

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[2] It has been suggested that this intervention was to stop Israeli influence over the Marionites and at the same time halt the Fatah movement which was at this time only one of many actors claiming to legitimately represent the Palestinian cause. King Hussein of Jordan aired similar claims, and so did Hafez al-Asad. As very often the case of regional politics in the Middle East, the logic of behaviour is difficult to detect at a first glance. Recommended reading for an explanation of the internal debate is Patrick Seale (1989).

[3] The campaign was not only costly but resulted in an extended Syrian presence in Lebanon. Not until 2005 did the Syrian army make its way across the border back to Syria, after Lebanese popular protest and international pressure after the killing of Lebanese PM Rafiq Hariri and accusations of Syrian involvement in the murder. The army was in such a bad condition that many of the tanks broke down on the road to the border, and to avoid ridicule from the international media, the march back had to be done during night time, and tanks were repaired along the way (Stenberg, Leif)

The Muslim Brotherhood attributed opportunities to the decertification of the regime to increase popular support for criticism of the regime. But it did not lead to a change in strategy at this point.

The statement by the "Battalions of Muhammad" presented both opportunities and threats as category formation crystallised opposition to the regime as Islamic, thereby offering further grounds for mobilisation of support from the Sunni community, but it also threatened the organisation as polarisation could portray moderates as weak and ineffective. The regime looked unable to effectively repress the extremists, and was perceived as weaker, but not more "reformable", than before.

The economic strains of the military campaign threatened the very survival of the regime since it was depending on the distribution of resources for support through patronage networks.

However, affecting the regime's interpretation of events and the attribution of threat and opportunity is the tradition of military coups and the constant risk of intra-elite coups. This means that the emerging threats were still viewed second to the internal as well as international risks.

3.2.2 Phase 2. New Leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood

A new generation took power of the Muslim Brotherhood in the mid 1970's. They replaced a weakened leadership that represented traditional moderation and that could not reconcile with the idea of violent contention; their strikes and demonstrations had been met with increasingly violent repression and they were weakened and to a large extent exiled. The new generation pushed towards responding to the repression and exclusion from institutional politics by force. Many of them had studied in Egypt and had been exposed to radical Islamist ideas of Sayyid Qutb[4]. They replaced the old informal structure of the organisation with offices, chain of command, fighting cells, representative bodies and disciplined cadres of activists. This complemented the traditional sites for mobilisation such as the mosques and the souq. They published a statement claiming that it was a Muslim responsibility to fight the "infidel oppressor regime" (Hinnebusch 2001:193).

The regime's public response was to portray the Muslim Brotherhood as traitors to the country and agents of Zionism. It also charged the organisation with more religious attacks claiming them to be "traitors of the Muslim" since the attacks damaged Syria as the only remaining champion of the Arab and Muslim cause against Israel (van Dam 1997:93).

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[4] Sayyid Qutb, 1906-1966 was a radical member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and is considered one of the original theorists of modern Islamism. He advocated a clean break with the secular order in contemporary Egypt. He considered violent methods necessary in order to bring about an Islamic state (Kepel 2000:23).

A compromise between regime hardliners and softliners, who wanted to diffuse the opposition and its support with political reforms and anti-corruption purges in the government, was reached on the strategy to handle the Islamists. Limited political liberalisation was initiated as well as attempts to counter corruption. The liberalisation was directed towards secular communist and old Nasserist parties in the ruling coalition dominated by the Ba'th, but the Islamists were in no sense included (van Dam 1997:89ff). Asad tried to leave a middle way open and separated between those who were "mislead and unaware of the dangers to its faith and its world" and those who "misleads and knows where it is heading". He also distinguished between the Muslim Brotherhood and the conservative Ulema, whom he acknowledged as a wide and important sector in the country (Batatu 1999:270).

Analysis

For the Muslim Brotherhood the exclusion from the political system increased relative the other secular parties. The repression became more focused on Islamists and category formation defined opposition as Islamists and increasingly Islamism as oppositional.

With the generational shift in leadership the movement underwent an identity shift. The moderate nature of the Muslim Brotherhood changed, and views of violent contention changed with social appropriation. The new leadership's reorganisation of the movement led to increased accumulation of resources. The support base widened and supporters turned activists due to indiscriminate repression of strikes and demonstrations.

3.2.3 Phase 3. The Muslim Brotherhood Joins the Violent Contention

In June 1979 a spectacular assault on the Artillery School in Aleppo killed 54 army cadets and wounded 32. The Muslim Brotherhood assumed responsibility and claimed that the targets were of Alawi origin; the regime refuted the religious character of the attack and claimed that the victims were of both Sunni and minority origin (van Dam 1997:93).

The 1979 successful Islamic revolution in Iran chocked the whole Muslim world. No contacts were established between Sunni Islamists in Syria and Iranian Shi'a mullahs, but it demonstrated that Islamic revolts were possible (Hinnebusch 1999:295).

A Muslim Brotherhood Joint Command was established in late 1970, and a several weeks long local uprising was met with violence by authorities in Aleppo (Batatu 1999:267-9).

The intensity of assassinations and attacks increased during 1979-1980, with more resources put behind them. The government's response became more violent towards all expressions of critique, and demonstrations were met with harder repression, often resulting in civilian casualties. From 1976 about 300 Ba'thists

had been killed in attacks. Against this toll, should be put around 2000 killed from the Muslim Brotherhood, its supporters, families and people publicly critical to the regime, and many more jailed and tortured (Seale 1989:325).

Radicalisation of the Muslim Brotherhood was significant. On trial for assassination charges a member stated:

"Assassination is the only language with which it is possible to communicate with the state" (van Dam 1997:104).

Analysis

The regime tried to frame the conflict as challenges to national unity and security, while the Muslim Brotherhood attempted to frame it as a religious struggle against an illegitimate regime and oppressive infidel minority.

The increase in polarisation resulted in an erosion of the middle ground available to moderates in both camps.

The increased repression was reactive and threatened carefully build up resources and created radicalisation. The violent and indiscriminate repression changed the calculations of contention of potential supporters and activists since the difference in repression following non violent contention compared to violent contention was decreasing.

The example of the Islamic revolution in Iran provided empirical credibility to an Islamic revolt.

3.2.4 Phase 4. Regime Increases Violent Repression

Marking the next phase was the Ba'th party's Seventh Regional Congress on the 23 December 1979- 6 January 1980, where the hardliner and younger brother of Hafez, Rif'at al-Asad, was given increased mandate in methods to fight the Brotherhood (Seale 1989:327).

A series of government search-and-destroy operations swept whole cities executing and imprisoning not only Muslim Brothers but also supporters and civilians.

To alter public perceptions about the regime as being sectarian, Asad changed the composition of the Ba'th Regional Command (the main decision making body of the party) to promote more Sunnis, and attempted deal more thoroughly with misconduct in the bureaucracy. But at the same time loyal Alawis in the government apparatus and the army were given more senior positions and smaller purges of the party were made to counter threats of internal coups (Batatu 1999:273).

The passing of law No. 49 in July 1980, made membership in the Muslim Brotherhood a crime punishable with death. The militants were given a fifty days to renounce their connection with the movement. According to official statistics no less than 1052 members used this opportunity. It is difficult to examine the

truth in this claim, and also how big part of the movements it constituted. For example in Aleppo the branch shifted from 800 members in 1975 to 5000-7000 members in 1978 (Batatu 1999:275).

Analysis

The regime's purges of the ranks countered threats of coup, but at the same time isolated it further, which decreased perceived access to the political space, alienating moderate elements of the opposition further.

As whole villages and cities were targets of violent and indiscriminate repression, it greatly increased mobilisation, if only for protection from the repression. A threat to mobilisation of contention was the possibility for activists to "opt out" of the struggle. It can be seen to have functioned as a stroke of selectivity in the mostly indiscriminate repression.

3.2.5 Phase 6. Urban Warfare

In March 1980 the Muslim Brotherhood succeeded to mobilise popular uprising in several northern cities.
    The government turned to more totalitarian practices mobilising and equipping large groups of party activists and sending them to street fights. The army was used against demonstrations and cities were targeted by artillery (van Dam 1997:105ff). 9 March 1980 helicopter borne troops were send against a town in the North, Jisr al-Shughur, where demonstrators had attacked barracks and Party offices. Two hundred activists were killed and scores of prisoners were hauled off to military tribunals (Seale 1989:327).
    In June the same year Asad survived on attempt to assassin him. Rif'at swore to avenge the attack, and send elite army units to the state prison Palmyra. They were ordered to execute all Muslim Brotherhood prisoners, which resulted in a massacre of 550 inmates (van Dam 1997:105).

Analysis

The relative cost of violent contention decreased with mobilisation of whole communities and cities.
    The Muslim Brotherhood and its resources grew and the strategy became even more radical due to harder repression attributed increasingly as a threat to not only individuals but to the organisation itself.
    The response by Rif'at to "avenge the attack" suggests tribal logics rather than a government response to a threat and signals an identity shift in the government.

3.2.6 Phase 7. The showdown at Hama

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The coalition "Islamic Front in Syria" was formed in 1981 and consisted of different Sunni opposition groups, dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood. (van Dam 1997:107).

In early 1982 in the northern city of Hama the Brotherhood fortified themselves and declared the city "liberated". The regime gathered its troops around Hama, and soldiers originating from the region or not convincingly loyal were expelled from the ranks. To counter the threat of the army dividing along sectarian lines, the discipline was hard.

A battle raged during February 1982. Mosques and markets were shelled and eventually levelled to the ground while the army units and Ba'th militia viciously fought the Brotherhood and its allies in house-to-house fighting. The civilian population suffered terribly and different numbers of casualties ranges from 5- 25 000, most of them civilians.

The regime managed to avoid that the army split along sectarian lines and the end result of the showdown at Hama was that the Muslim Brotherhood was eliminated, many were killed or captured and its leadership fled into exile. From then on it seized to be an organised force within Syria (van Dam 1997:111-117).

Syrian exile Obeida Nahas explained in an interview that the brutality of the events in Hama traumatised Syrians for decades (Nahas, Obeida).

Analysis

Forming the Islamic coalition reiterated the interpretation of the conflict's religious character by new category formation. Increasing polarisation to its extreme and along sectarian lines rather than political was the Muslim Brotherhood's strategy, as they hoped that the sectarianism would reach the army.

4 The Damascus Spring

4.1 Background

Even though the Syrian political system remained largely intact with the Ba'th party effectively in power during the twenty years following the Islamic Revolution to the year 2000, the context of the Damascus spring has a few distinct characteristics described below.

4.1.1 Stagnating Economy

During the 1990s a short period of increased economic growth due to limited economic reforms and new oil findings was followed by a decline. The low and sometimes negative economic growth was not enough to cope with the population growth of a steady 3% annually, and rising unemployment was a great problem (Perthes 2004:99).

4.1.2 De-politicisation

Lisa Wedeen claims that most characteristic process in Syrian society is the *de-politicisation* of the people, due to two factors: 1) Strong ideological mobilisation around national unity and the Ba'th party. 2) Citizens internalisation of the surveillance of the numerous and extremely powerful security apparatus that were perceived to be everywhere.

The result of this was widespread apathy and cynicism that discouraged political initiatives of any kind (Wedeen 1999:145-160).

4.1.3 Problem of Party

Jeremy Jones traces a scepticism to the concept of political parties to a perception that they pose a threat against the idea of unity and consensus, suggest sectarianism, and are mainly vehicles for personal or small elite power

aspirations. At the same time the lack of credible alternatives strengthened the regime (Jones 2007:88-103).

4.2 Episode of contention

4.2.1 Phase 1. Surge of Civil Society Activities

President Hafez al-Asad's health was rapidly declining in early 2000 and it was expected he would not have long to live. In May 2000 political activist Michael Kilo and fellow intellectuals laid the ground for an organisation named "Committees for the Revival of Civil Society", which had as a purpose to improve the political climate in Syria by creating discussions and debates concerning political freedoms lacking in the country (Lesch 2005:85, George 2003:30-47).

On the 10 June 2000 Hafez al-Asad died and hopes were high that his son Bashar would not only be elected president, but also with his presidency bring major political liberalisation.

Bashar al-Asad did assume the presidency but in a climate of continuing intra-regime struggle for power. In his inauguration speech he stated that it was out of the question to import and apply a Western model of democracy, but he also stressed the need of reforms and new approaches especially in the economic and technological sphere. He even declared that the bloated and corrupt bureaucracy had become an obstacle to future development (Lesch 2005:81-98).

Shortly after Bashar assumed office the first political prisoners were released from prisons.

Kilo initiated the first unprecedented political discussion groups in July 2000. Closely connected to Kilo and his group was businessman and independent parliamentarian Riad Sayf, also well known for his articulation of government critique. His strategy was more traditional in the sense of an overt political campaign, rather than the politico-cultural movement of Kilo (George 2003:31-39).

Riad Seif formed the forum "Friends of civil society in Syria", which mission statement declared that a balance between civil society and the state was necessary for future development and that crucial in reviving the civil society was freedom of opinion and of expression and respect for opposing views. Important elements to achieve this were to end the emergency law in effect since May 1963, and the establishment of an independent judiciary (Lesch 2005:86-89).

Two new human rights NGO's were also formed, the "Syrian Human Rights Association" and "Defence of Democratic Freedoms and Human Rights (ibid).

In 27 September 2000 a major landmark of the civil society movement was published, the "Statement of 99" which demanded civil and political rights and was signed by 99 intellectuals and human rights advocates. It contested the idea of the regime that economic or administrative reform would be possible without political reforms, but stayed balanced enough not to condemn the regime explicitly or to provoke government reaction. (George 2003:39).

The state controlled media didn't report about the forums nor the statement, but the television channel al-Jazeera did, reaching most people in the Arab world including most Syrians. This resulted in a rapid spread of the forums throughout the country.

In November some 600 political prisoners were released and a general amnesty to political prisoners was issued. It is not clear whether this was a response to the "statement of 99" or something planned earlier, as it was officially said to commemorate the 30th anniversary of Hafez al-Asad's coup, the "Corrective Movement" (ibid).

Analysis

The activists attributed opportunities for an increase in institutional access to Bashar's inauguration in early 2000. The calculation of the cost of contention changed towards a lower relative cost of contentious politics, thereby increasing the likelihood of mobilisation of contention.

The release of political prisoners were interpreted as a response to the "statement of 99" and an affirmation of new access to the political space which would have affected the movements towards moderation. The release was also seen as a sign of declining regime strength, which in turn increased the perceived empirical credibility of influencing or even overthrowing it.

Different ambitions among the activists, mainly between Kilo and Seif, did not result in differences in strategy as both focused on creating a civil society. The organisations were created with inclusive organisational structures, which promoted political moderation.

Bashar and his reformists didn't seem to view the surging civil society as a threat, since they released political prisoners that joined the discussion forums.

"The statement of 99" did not change the regime's silent acceptance of the activists. This should be view in light of the internal power struggle and the perception that threats to regime survival were almost always coming from within.

4.2.2 Phase 2. Crossing the Red Line

In December 2000 a new statement to be considered a sequel to the "Statement of 99" was issued. This time the signatories were a thousand making it the "Statement of 1000".

The opposition now had different views on strategy. Michael Kilo and his group is said to have wanted to gradually influence the regime to make reforms, careful not to push them to hard in order not to undermine reform friendly elements. Riad Seif, on the other hand, was more confrontational disbelieving the regime would ever be able to reform itself. (George 2003:42) Others expressed hesitation to the methods of both; Tayyeb Tizini left the movement and later stated in an interview that "[Kilo and Seif] wanted to storm the Bastille" (Wieland 2006:40).

The statement of 1000 was in contrast to the Statement of 99, a clear frontal assault on the regime's very fundamentals. It demanded democratic elections of government, end of power monopoly of the Ba'th Party among other things (George 2003:186).

In January 2001 another event suggested that the political climate was changing rapidly in Syria. The first private newspaper was allowed by the Ministry of Information (ibid)

The same month the opposition took another contentious step as the first political party was founded outside of the Progressive National Front, which was the coalition dominated by the Ba'th party in which the only allowed parties were included. The new party was called "Coalition for Democracy and Unity" and was formed by a former member of the Nasserist Party. Riad Seif announced on the 30 January his plans to form a political party of his own, the "Movement for Social Peace" (Lesch 2005:92).

Analysis

The actors attributed different opportunities to the situation. The regime's lack of response was seen by some as weakness or as a silent acceptance of contentious activities, which should then be intensified, while others warned that stepping up the contention would undermine the moderates of the regime in the power struggle presumably taking place. The lack of repression from the regime was seen as an opening of the political space and promoted moderate and inclusive methods of contention.

4.2.3 Phase 3. Institutional Repression

The second Palestinian intifada that started in September 2000 and the Israeli hardliner Ariel Sharon's landslide victory with his Likhud party in February 2001 gave the regime increased credibility in the rhetoric of national unity and security. One Syrian hardliner in the regime uttered:

"How could you expect that the president would allow himself to be pressured by a couple of intellectuals while Sharon was at the gates?" (Perthes 2004:106-108)

The regime now responded to the civil society activities and security service agents started to attend the forums and participants were registered and intimidated.

The 9 February Bashar gave an interview to the newspaper Al-Sharq al-Awsat, in which he condemned the civil society movement in harsh wording. This interview is considered to mark the turning point of the regime's earlier silent acceptance of the civil society. He stated among other things that the activists were a small number of intellectuals not representative for the Syrian population at large. He claimed that challengers to the regime were either foreign agents acting on behalf of an outside power, or else simple minded persons who acted unintentionally to threaten Syrian national unity (Lesch 2005:92)

In an interview with David Lesch after the Damascus Spring, Bashar stated that he promised too much in his inauguration, and claimed he had not only had the movement under control but in fact had created it himself in what proved to be a wrong step. He continued, "We take small steps, and if we do it wrong, we take another step. So in some things we go back – we did not take the right way" (Lesch 1997:90).

A new law was passed in February 2001 stipulating that any forums require formal permission from Ministry of Social Affairs. This led to the closure of virtually all forums within weeks. This effectively stopped most of the broader civil society activities in one move (ibid).

Analysis

The effect of the changing international climate was to strengthen the regime hardliners in the presumably ongoing intra-elite struggle and it moved Bashar closer to their more conservative program. It persuaded reformers to close ranks in the regime, and it offered "a way out" of the promised reforms. The regime in other words underwent an identity shift and shifted attention to the civil society activists in an object shift.

The combination of the more confrontational wording of the "Statement of 1000" and the forming of new political parties was interpreted by both the hardliners and the softliners as challenges to the regime's authority. These responses to the civil society activists by institutional means, a form of light and selective repression, in contrast to other means available, increased the costs of contentions and affected mobilisation negatively. Its relative softness did not, however, dissuade all activists.

4.2.4 Phase 4. Answers and Arrests

Even though the movement had lost most of its momentum when the forums had effectively been shut down, its key figures didn't stop opposing the regime. Riad

Seif and his group published a new statement called "Towards a National Contract in Syria" on the 14 April. The statement met the regime's arguments of the activists being unpatriotic claiming that democracy was essential for national unity and nationalist objectives. The Muslim Brotherhood's leadership, from its exile in London also released a statement supporting the pro-democracy forces in Syria. The statement expressed the movement's support to democratic principles as rule of law and political pluralism. Both statements met the regime head on claiming that *it* was unpatriotic, not the civil society activists (George 2003:54).

In the changing international context it was argued by the hardliners and increasingly the whole regime that it was not the time for democratic experiments. This was expressed in a more brute way by the Defence Minister Mustafa Tlass:

"We will not accept that anybody takes power from us, because it comes from the barrel of the gun, and we are its masters." (Perthes 2004:104). And vice President Abdel Halim Khaddam warned that the calls for change had gone too far and that the regime would not tolerate threats that could drive Syria into civil war (Landis & Pace 2006:48).

The earlier institutional repression was supplanted by harder repression. The first arrests took place 9 August, when al-Homsi a philosopher and activist was seized. During August and September all of the leading figures of the civil society movement were arrested, on 20 August Michael Kilo among others, and on 6 September Riad Seif. They were put on trial and convicted on charges of "spreading false information" or "undermining national unity".

In September a new decree (50/2001 September 2001) signalled harsher control of the newly allowed private newspapers. The decree allowed the regime to deny publishing licences on the basis of "Public interests". (Lesch 2005:92ff)

These measures effectively ended the surge of the civil society and the Damascus Spring movement.

Analysis

As the institutional measures to close down the forums were launched, the movement lost its sites of mobilisation, and continued contention would be more costly than before, since the regime now signalled that contentious politics would again not be silently accepted.

Even though the civil society movement had lost most of its momentum Riad Seif and others persisted with their transgressive politics. Hardened repression forced mobilisation structures to become more exclusive, due to the repression. These structures require more time and efforts to mobilise contention, and it therefore decreased. The new published statement suggests it also led to a certain radicalisation.

The arrests were pre-emptive repression in effectively stopping the movement before it developed organisational strength and accumulated resources. It was also selective deterring from further mobilisation. The movement had lost its momentum and its leading figures, but some effects on the political climate could be traced back to the Damascus Spring. Volker Perthes quotes one observer concluding that the "complex of fear" had been broken (Perthes 2004:103-106).

Since the challenges to the regime was more or less effectively dealt with through the institutional repression, the hardening of repression none the less, can be explained as a result of the increasing conservatism of the regime, either through increased power of the original hardliners or a change in the softliners attribution of threats and opportunities, or a combination of the both.

5 Conclusions

From the analysis of the two cases, a number of conclusions regarding the mechanisms at work can be drawn; these are explained below. Following are the differences between the two cases explained according to the difference in mechanisms and their interactions. Finally conclusions and reflections regarding the research model are presented towards the end of the chapter.

5.1 Case conclusions

5.1.1 The Islamic Rebellion

In the episode of contention a number of mechanisms interacted to create an ever-deeper polarisation between the two actors, which in the end led to what seemed an inevitable showdown. Of course the events in Hama 1982, were indeed not inevitable, but a result of on one hand internal changes that lead to new attributions of threats and opportunities, an increasingly hard, reactive and indiscriminate repression of the Muslim Brotherhood, and contentious politics triggered by a political system perceived to be exclusionary.

Important interactions between the polarisation, mobilisation within already existing structures and the nature of state repression are found. As the repression became harder it strengthened the results of its reactive and indiscriminate nature. The reactive nature created radicalisation as the Muslim Brotherhood rose to defend its already accumulated resources, and the indiscriminate nature increased mobilisation of contention as relative costs of contention decreased. This in turn interacted with the polarisation as it made the actors attribute further threats to the context and develop further radicalisation.

The struggle over framing the conflict consisted of interactions between polarisation, identity shifts, and external input such as increased "empirical credibility" of an Islamic revolution after the events in Iran 1979, or the hostile regional political climate in the region giving the regime's nationalism greater credence. When the contention was framed as religious, broader sites of contentious mobilisation were created, and the nationalism of the regime worked in the opposite way.

5.1.2 The Damascus Spring

The government met the contentious politics with silent acceptance at first. Perceived government weakness increased participation in the civil society activities and influenced their organisational structures to be inclusive. Interacting with a perceived positive change in access to the political system, the two mechanisms moderated the activists. When the government turned to repression, it was as a result of an identity shift and new attribution of threats. The repression was both pre-emptive and selective, effectively raising relative costs of contention and dissuading further contentious mobilisation.

The polarisation did not reach quite the levels of the Islamic rebellion, but in the last phase a certain polarisation can be traced to the struggle over framing. The regime framed the civil society activists as representing a small elite and damaging national unity, while they responded with attempts to frame the regime as anti-Syrian, and themselves as progressive nationalists. The polarisation erupted some of the middle ground for moderates in the both the regime and civil society, as reformers most likely gave in during the intra-regime power struggle, and moderates wanting to decrease the pressure on the regime left the contentious movement. External events such as the Palestinian intifada and election of Ariel Sharon in 2001 interacted with the above processes and strengthened the nationalist credence.

Interactions also took place between perceived increased access to the political space, increased mobilisation and relative moderation until institutional repression.

5.1.3 Case Differences Examined

The examination of the two cases in this study suggest some main differences in the processes that can help explain the different outcomes of the episodes of contentious politics:

1) The differences in government repression of the movements. The repression during what lead to the Islamic rebellion was reactive and indiscriminate, lowering the relative costs of contention, whereas the repression that ended the Damascus Spring was selective and pre-emptive raising the costs of contention and not allowing the movement to accumulate resources that in a later stage need to be defended.

2) The organisational structure. The leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood increasingly relied on an exclusive structure that required much of its members, which in interaction with the repression lead to radicalisation of the movement. During the Damascus Spring the forums were open and mobilised through inclusive structures. The sites available for mobilisation were also different, since the Muslim Brotherhood had a

well established network whereas the activists of the Damascus Spring did not.

3) Perceived access to the political system. The Muslim Brotherhood's access to the political system decreased from an already very low level, whereas the Damascus Spring movements perceived a political opening and that had a moderating function.

4) Polarisation. The first attacks against the government, performed by the Battalions of Muhammad, forced the Muslim Brotherhood to take sides in an increasingly polarised society. A similar polarisation never took place during the Damascus Spring.

5.1.4 To Link Agency Back to Structure

Finally, to epistemologically link agent back to structure, both episodes of contention should also be considered as "input" to the external environment. In the case of the Islamic rebellion and its violent ending, it traumatised Syrians for decades, and in the case of the Damascus Spring it broke the "complex of fear" that had been prevalent in the political climate.

5.2   Theoretical Conclusions

The four theoretical dimensions (*external environment, internal structure, mobilising structures, and frames*) have served as a framework, or a topoi, from which the analytical mechanisms have been drawn. The analysis seeks to explain the episodes through a focus on the interaction processes of actors attributing opportunities and threat to a context, and based on that attribution formulates a strategy.

The mechanisms move the analysis from abstraction to a more concrete level, forcing it to be specific in how to link parts of the process together. This put the analytical focus on interaction: between different actors, between actors and context, and between attribution of opportunities and threats and formulation of strategy.

The episodes of contention in the two cases, sharing much of same features in context, developed very differently and the analysis suggests that the explanation to these differences is found in the difference in processes of interacting mechanisms.

The theoretical primacy of processes suggests a middle ground and links together factors of agency and structure as demonstrated in the analysis. In order to achieve accuracy, mechanisms forming processes, have been used as analytical tools. To further develop this approach, more work needs to be done furthering specification and operationalisation of the mechanisms.

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