

THE NETWORK STATE: TRIANGULAR RELATIONS IN MIDDLE EASTERN POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

This paper offers a network approach to the comparative study of Middle Eastern political relations. In contrast to the dominant *categorical perspective*, we propose a *network approach* as an analytical strategy which focusing on social ties and political interactions. Using the network perspective, researchers can analyze more effectively the multiple configurations by which the politics of the Middle East is embedded in social, structural and religious connections. The metaphor of social embeddedness then serves as a heuristic device, which facilitates a novel and more comprehensive conception of Middle Eastern political vertical and horizontal relations, at the dynamic crossroad between externally imposed states, community networks, and religious and secular pan-movements.

INTRODUCTION

FROM CATEGORICAL TO NETWORK APPROACH

The politics of the Middle East has produced one of the longest, most intensive, and bitter conflicts in the twentieth century. As a result, it has become an important area of regional studies. Yet the professional discourse among students of the Middle East shares a common methodological bias: we label this common propensity as ‘*the categorical approach*,’ presupposing binary epistemology in a hierarchical political order.

The *categorical approach* has utilized binary classifications marking real or imaginary social attributes, rather than relational patterns. These classifications are “confusing and redundant conceptual scaffolding that has been erected around the investigation of Middle East politics [and that] has obscured rather than enhanced our understanding [of the Middle East]” (Bill, 1996: 502).¹ Recently, there has been growing discomfort with its epistemic assumptions, mainly due to its binary demarcation and essentialist depiction of tradition (or modernity) as a homogeneous, static, and unitary entity. Yet despite the need to use an alternative analytical framework which can successfully deal with dynamic and flexible Middle Eastern processes emphasizing interactive relations, these critiques did not offer any well-organized conceptual alternative (Banuazizi, 1987: 297–298).

We argue therefore that the study of Middle Eastern politics requires an explicit construction of a more systematic and holistic analytical perspective. In contrast to the dominant *categorical perspective*, we propose a *network approach* as an analytical strategy which focusing on social ties and political interactions. The proposed theory’s particular advantage is its special suitability for analyzing complex strategic interactions between internally heterogeneous entities, structurally strained social systems, and changing identities. Using this network perspective, researchers can analyze more effectively the multiple configurations by which the politics of the Middle East is embedded in social, structural and religious connections.

INFLUENCES AND EPISTEMIC ASSUMPTIONS

Our alternative conception of political life in the Middle East has some ramification for studies beyond this region, and it synthesizes key ideas from many seemingly contradictory

sociological sources. First and foremost, it is derived from a network theory of political relations (Knoke, 1990), and is inspired by metaphors of social embeddedness mainly used by the New Economic Sociology (Polanyi, 1967; Granovetter, 1982). Though our approach agrees with the field theory of Bourdieu (1990a, 1990b) regarding the constituting power of cultural capital as a social resource, we are also inspired by the sociological version of Rational Action Theory (Abell, 1991; Coleman and Fararo, 1992) concerning notions of calculability of purposive action and relational management within a given field. Yet we do not share with Rational Action Theory their methodological individualism. Rather, we use structural accounts of action, emphasizing the primacy of constrained and opportunity structure over individual choice (Burt, 1992a, 1992b; Talmud and Mesch, 1997). Our theory corresponds to the New Institutionalism's key epistemic assumptions regarding the "sticky" nature of social relations and the importance of history and cultural repertoires in enacting role relations (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; 1990). We are also influenced by to the new synthesis between networks and narrative. In particular, we share with the latter the assumption considering the complex affinity between structure, institutional logic and accounts (Emirbayer and Misch, 1998; DiMaggio and Mullen, 2000; Misch and Pattison, 2000), and regarding the flexible nature of preferences and identity formation (White, 1992; 2000; Emirbayer, 1997; Bearman and Stovel. 2000; Mohr, 2000).

In this essay then we attempt to problematize the methodological assumptions governing the political categorical discourse by converting them into some verifiable hypotheses. Using these propositions, then, we introduce a triangular framework, based on a network approach, for the comparative study of Middle Eastern societies and politics. The metaphor of social embeddedness then serves as a heuristic device, which facilitates a novel and more comprehensive conception of Middle Eastern political vertical and horizontal relations, at the dynamic crossroad between externally imposed states, community networks, and religious and secular pan-movements.

THE CATEGORICAL PERSPECTIVE AND THE MIDDLE EAST STUDIES

The categorical approach constantly uses "unnuanced sets of contrasting markers deter awareness of the constant interpretation of social and political net-works" (Eickelman and Piscatori, 1996: x). Scholars holding a categorical perspective typically depict social and political reality as classified within two mutually exclusive, diametrically opposed categories, characterized by "either / or" relations. Moreover, categorical classifications have served as an explicit heuristic device (or implicit analytical assumption) of many studies of contemporary Middle Eastern politics.² Furthermore, according to this approach state formation is an evolutionary process, the state is external to society and political process involves a zero-sum game. Moreover, the categorical perspective depicts social identities, boundaries and actor's choices as fixed, stable and consistent. Prevalent also is the assumption that power structure is hierarchical, pre-given, and enacted according to formal and unambiguous rules (see Table 1).³

The categorical perspective is a product of the Western categorical epistemology and its Western philosophical dichotomies. This imagery typically assumes mutual exclusiveness, implying a clear boundary demarcation between categories. Moreover, the categorical perspectives' ontological assumptions stem from a Western mode of conflict resolution, which sharply deviates from socially-embedded conflict mediation devices developed by Middle-Eastern communities (Abu-Nimer, 1996; Ginat, 1998). The categorical approach underscores, then, inherent dissimilarities between actors. By that, it highlights the contrasting elements of the polity.

The categorical approach had gained a significant impact on Middle East studies due to several conditions. First, it is the geopolitical circumstance: employing contrasting dichotomies was considered particularly suitable for this region, where many violent disputes—and especially the Israeli-Arab conflict—have taken place. Consequently, even periods of relative imperturbability were interpreted as a dormant conflict, endemic dynamic of an unavoidable slide toward a violent clash between the parties. Hence, the next round of warfare seemed always inevitable.

Second, these categorical divisions were facilitated by a "textual" (or documentary) scheme, using texts as indices rather than deeds for politics. This intellectual emphasis on discourse has led to the study of textual documents such as: formal declarations, speeches,

constitutions, items of art, scientific publication books, leaflets, etc. Its emphasis on faith, religious doctrines, and the spiritual dimension of identity formation underscores ideological intensity, rather than “non-discursive practice.” Surely, there is a direct association between ideological intensity and the solidity boundaries.

This consistent bias, we argue, is also magnified by the lack of an institutional separation between state and religion in this region, as well as the existence of “grand visions,” comprising cultural political imperatives (Pan-Arabism, Nasserism, Pan-Islamism, Ba’athism) (Eickelman and Piscatori, 1990; 1996).⁴

Third, the categorical approach employs an essentialist assumption regarding states and societies, which was facilitated by the emphasis on conflict, both at the inter-states and the intra-state levels (tribes, ethnic groups and communities with strong particularistic solidarities and solid loyalties).

Moreover, under this definition of reality there is a strong emphasis on a continuous conflict between parties, having clear boundaries and well-defined goals. Politics, thus, is interpreted as a dominant instrument for manipulation, rather than an agent of communicative action, equipped to bridge over gaps, regulating and maintaining conflicts and contrasts to the degree that they are tolerable, without really “resolving” them in a unequivocal fashion (Eickelman and Piscatori, 1996).

IMPLICATIONS OF THE CATEGORICAL APPROACH

The categorical approach, with its emphasis on conflict and its essentialist bias, focused its studies primarily on the political behavior and tactics of elites and leadership, rather than analyzing long-term social processes of the population.

Moreover, because of its insistence on the epistemic assumption of clearly demarcated boundaries, the categorical approach has been consistently preoccupied with issues of collective identity that are “incoherently and statically primordial.” Consequently, the categorical approach is enmeshed by problems of political participation and regime legitimacy, deemed to result from the inevitable clashes between binary opposites (see Foucault, 1979: 170). In the categorical conceptual framework, then, transformation and change were often perceived in radical and revolutionary terms, and as stemming from the state’s weakness, rather than as an endemic sequence, resulting from ongoing behavior of the social and political processes

The categorical outlook assumes that social behavior result from individual possession of common attributes, rather than from its embeddedness in structured social relations.⁵ This stress on categories rather than on social structure leads holders of the categorical approach to the assumption that each actor has a primordial and fixed identity, attributed to distinct boundaries and rigid choices. The emergence of an actor, according to this view, means the relapse or declining power of other actors in the system.

Binary worldview, geopolitical circumstances, textual analysis and essentialism fueled the categorical approach. This has induced a depiction of boundaries and preferences as fixed, stable, and dichotomous. The categorical approach has led then to the creation of images such as: “there is a chronic identity crisis,” “Pan-Arabism will influx the region,” “weak states, strong societies,” “Pan-Islamism will crack down the regime,” and “a lack of legitimation and participation are the fundamental weakness of these regimes.”

GROWING DISSATISFACTION WITH CATEGORICAL CLASSIFICATION AND WITH HIERARCHICAL DEPICTION OF POLITICS

The categorical perception has received growing criticism particularly from sociologists and political theorists. Still, this increasingly critical legacy has left us with no explicit alternative methodological formulation (Mitchell, 1991: 90; Sandel, 1996: 74). Anderson, (1991) pointed out

unitary and homogenous character “national community” is also reified and misleading. As an abstract collective identity, it promotes transcendent reality which is relatively “independent from those persons or groups who perceive and participate in it” (Eickelman and Piscatori, 1990: 17; Layne, 1994: 7–9).

More particularly, there has been a rising dissatisfaction with the categorical representation of State *vis-a-vis* Society. Weberian and Neo-Marxian analyst have depicted the State as a hierarchical, relatively powerful, order which is externally commanding ethnically homogeneous, uniform, and geographically distinct population (Mishal and Morag, 2000). In such an imaginary hierarchical society, most political activity is deemed vertical in the sense that information flows and social actions are channeled “top down”, from the State to society. Scholars have criticized the assumption that the state is either an outcome of social process or is external to it. Ben-Dor, for example, uses Nettle’s variable-oriented definition of “stateness,” showing that the very concept and operation of the state in the Middle East is embedded in the ideological shell and religious language of the society (Ben-Dor, 1983). Likewise, Roger Owen claims that many authoritarian regimes use societal mechanisms and institutions “outside the state,” such as village councils and trade unions, to manage the ways in which interests are articulated (Owen, 1992: pp. 38–39). The state, furthermore, is not a singular coherent entity. Moreover, the state incorporates a “whole range of often contradictory aims and conflicting interests which intersect with those of the wider society in such a way as to blur boundaries and to call into question the whole notion of one distinct entity acting upon another” (Owen, 1992: 51).

Likewise, Joel Migdal expresses the logical conclusion that “we must move away from a perspective that simply puts state against society (1987: 396).

Moreover, even categorical distinctions such as the divide between rural and urban do not seem to fit the empirical reality. (Munson, 1988: 100–101). Munson correctly argues that while fundamentalist Muslims reject *social* modernization as a form of secularization, they do not repudiate *economic and technological* modernization (Munson, 1988: 108–109). Hence, the simplistic denotation of “back-ward Islamism” versus “modernist secularism” is neither illuminating nor informative, and serve to blind us to the concrete details of complex reality, where new ideologies and old cultural values are intertwined and blurred (Ayubi, 1990; 1991; Eickelman and Piscatori, 1996: 18–21).⁶

This categorical discourse has led, moreover, to the selection of units of analysis that seems to fit the binary image. Following this logic, the Middle East was portrayed as a “mosaic made up of distinct peoples (each represented by single, clearly demarcated boundaries) .. these discrete, static, clearly bounded groups keep their unique identities and cultures while contributing to a larger structure. There is no room for overlap, for gradation, for change” (Layne, 1994: 4). Typically, structural functionalists have used this categorical metaphor to depict the cases they studied in terms of the social equilibrium within a “timeless Middle East” (Layne, 1994: 4–6). Interestingly, even the alternative view of social order provides a categorical world-view as indicated by Bhabha’s (1994) attack on Said’s binary depiction of Orientalism (1978). Similarly, Ulrich Beck (1994) criticizes binary and hierarchically ordered politics as stemming from early modern experience of the West. “An examination of Muslim politics indicates that this “top-down” view is distorting,” add Eickelman and Piscatori (1996: 18). Instead, Beck points out that in “reflexive modernity,” politics is epitomized by informal institutions, multiplicity of participants, positions, and politics “from below” as well as informal “sub-politics” (Beck, 1994; c.f. Henry, 1981; Spingborg, 1982; Hopkins, 1991; Tibi, 1991; Singerman, 1993).

ATTEMPTS TO MOVE AWAY FROM BINARY DISTINCTIONS

In the literature concerning the Middle East, there has been a continuous effort, though rarely explicit, to break the binary categorical divisions into a more complex depiction of social reality. Mishal, for example, developed the concept of “floating identity,” showing how Palestinians in the 1950s and the 1960s constructed a relatively flexible identity. Their floating identity comprised different phases and a multiplicity of diverse components: Palestinian, Jordanian, Pan-Arabic and Islamic, as well as various combinations of those components. (Mishal, 1978: 90–91). Similarly, Kimmerling and Migdal demonstrate the plasticity of the Palestinian

identity over time, and the various structural and external effects on its formation (Kimmerling and Migdal, 1999). Likewise, Layne asserts that in Jordan, the two collective identities of “true Bedouins” and “true Jordanians” are intricately related. “The relationship between the two might be called ‘dialogic’ ... [where] ‘dialogism refers to the constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others. Which will affect the other, how it will do so and in what degree is what actually settled at the moment of utterance’” (Bakhtin, 1981 in Layne, 1994: 9).

Along the same line, Bassam Tibi illustrates that in the case of the Middle East, sub-societal segmentation leads to the formation of criss-crossing lines of solidarity. According to Tibi, “Middle Eastern societies are still characterized by the persistence of tribal, ethnic, and sectarian sources of identity and loyalty” (1990: 147). Consistent with general sociological logic of conflicting loyalties (c. f. Flap, 1997), Tibi demonstrates—particularly using the Syrian case—how different primordial and constructed loyalties (‘Assabya) simultaneously coexist with one another; loyalty to the tribe, the nation-state, the ethnic group, the religious sect. In contrast to European nationalism (Bauman, 1991; Bhabha, 1994) the Arab nation-state did not deny *in practice* the existence of local communities (Tibi, 1990: 147).⁷ On the contrary, the regime uses patron-client relations as a political device, thus intensifying these local loyalties (Anderson, 1987; Tibi, 1990: 148; Eiskelman and Pisactori, 1996). While using the concept of “nominal nation-states” with reference to such “externally-opposed nation-states,” Tibi admits that the regime sustains political stability while organizing along these lines. Michael Barnett adds that “at independence, the Arab states lacked both external and internal authority because of the colonial legacy in general and pan-Arabism in particular and were dependent on Arab identity to legitimate policies and actions” (Barnett, 1995: 496). The political identity of the nation-state and the social identity of pre-existing sub-societal groups were embedded in one another. More specifically, deliberate political and cultural strategies were developed to incorporate the “territorial cleavage” or local community as a vehicle for the more abstract notion of “Arab nationalism” (Baram, 1990: 426–427; Barnett, 1995). Moreover, “both sovereignty and pan-Arabism permit a range of behaviors that often overlap” (1995: 505). The state, thus, is under severe pressure from conflicting sources: Tibi and Barnett emphasize that political leaders are persistently engaged in (a) manipulating local and floating identities by constructing an integral political identity, (b) confronting supra-national integration via local identities, and (c) using pan-Arabism to counteract sub-societal loyalties.

Mishal, Barnett, Layne, Kimmerling, Migdal and Tibi show that the boundaries between political identities are permeable, contestable, and negotiable. They mark a growing tendency in recent scholarly literature, which attempts to break the linearity of political process and relations. A key notion implied in this literature is that the politics of identity do not necessarily lead to the political practice of radicalism. In this relatively new literature, political conflict does not “resolve” but rather, redefines. States, local communities, tribes, and ideological movements learn to coexist with one another, while redefining their operational goals and codes. Nevertheless, the manners in which social relations and linkages generate the choices of accommodation by various political actors are hardly specified in this literature. To various degrees, it seems that all of these scholars assume that social actors belong to opposing groups which are integrated around a common set of core values. Still, people internalize and conform to these core norms using them as a standard obligatory conduct. Situated in various structural linkages, then, people create and manipulate their own identity (Burt, 1992a; 1992b; Knoke, 1990: 20–22; White, 1992).

THE NETWORK PERSPECTIVE: FEATURES AND POSTULATES

a. Politics as Embedded Relations

In contrast to the categorical perspective, our approach relies on the network theory of politics, which is based on three leading assumptions. First, Networked states are heterogeneous,

fragmented polities (Beck, 1994). The various social subgroups or communities undergo different socialization experiences with different patterns of social myths and communication thus inspiring their members to view the state and each other in different ways. Because members are also loosely connected to other groups, their conduct is co-determined by multiple ties. Second, political behavior is *not* based on individual or group attributes but rather on structural relations between positions in ways that cross social boundaries (Knoke, 1990; Burt, 1992). Third, politics occurs within an inter-organizational context of blurred boundaries (Bauman, 1991; Latour, 1993). The network perspective recognizes— following the classic inspiration provided by sociologist Georg Simmel (1955)—that an individual can belong to multiple groups and organizations, and those multiple connections need to be examined in the political process. Additionally, the network approach views the state as a player, embedded in networks of communications, power, dependencies and customs derived from historical institutional arrangements. Hence, the network theory of politics can be described as a structural theory of embeddedness.⁸ Following Simmel (1922), Ronald Brieger identified an important duality in the nature of social structure: just as a person links two groups (by being a member of both of them), groups can link a person (Brieger, 1974). Brieger shows that by comparing linkages between persons to linkages between groups, we can comprehend social cleavages, integration and change in more structural and dynamic ways (Brieger, 1974; Wellman, 1988: 17–18). Correspondingly, Laumann and Knoke (1988) showed that the resolution of policy issues in the areas of energy and health is a direct function of relational patterns between many players. They illustrated that the linkage between members of “political networks” is critical in shaping policy options (Laumann and Knoke, 1988). This is a dynamic process, as Hecló reports that members of issue networks constantly changed, as actors moved in and out of the debate (Hecló, 1974).

b. Core Postulates

The network theory of politics posits the following premises:

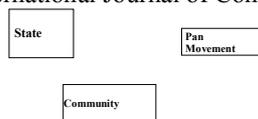
- a) **Network structure:** Political systems should not be seen as hierarchically ordered but, rather, as composed of social networks. These networks are comprised of inter-dependent (yet not necessarily equal) actors who have dissimilar, often even contradictory players. Moreover, linkages between political actors are often multidimensional. This structure fosters then the existence of **dynamic and negotiated political order**.
- b) **Preferences:** Each player attempts to maximize his or her control over events by setting constraints upon other players. Because relations are frequently multidimensional, involving multi-faceted bargaining, actors may rationally use an advantage in one dimension to obtain leverage in another societal dimension. Consequently, the “weak” side is not always as weak as he or she appears to be. These multi-dimensional bargaining construct a “pressures system” (to use Schattschnieder's terminology), resulting in a temporary, always-negotiated order (Berger and Luckmann, 1968).
- c) **Power:** Political power is a function of location within a network (Burt, 1982; Knoke, 1990). Centrality, relational asymmetry, cohesion, and direct and indirect alternatives of exchange and brokerage capabilities are the conditions under which certain players benefit from exchange at the expense of others. The struggle is not only on material interest but also on “people’s imagination” (Eickelman and Piscatori, 1996: 17). Because options are not categorically divided, there is a space for many contrasting options, where opportunities and constraints are mixed in a single social space (Bourdieu, 1990a, 1990b; Beck, 1994; Bhabha, 1994).
- d) **Dynamic cleavages:** As a result, social cleavages may not be eternal. While the categorical perspective uses an essentialist reading of cleavages (stemming from group’s attributes or fixed interests), the network approach employs a dynamic, configurational and kaleidoscopic image of political cleavages. Moreover, to the extent that social cleavage involves conflicting loyalties between memberships, especially in a case of “crosscutting social circles,” restraining effect emerges (Flap,

1997). In partially overlapping systems, the cost of violent conflict may exceed the perceived benefit from attempting to the status quo, especially where a third party has a stake in **both** sides of the strife, and the probability of brokerage is high (Flap, 1997). Yet, a third party may also benefit, especially in a deeply divided society, from tension between two antagonistic sides (Burt, 1982; 1983; 1992a; 1992b, Smootha, 1992), as long as collective goods are not destroyed by this conflict (Flap, 1997).

- e) **Identity:** As identities are nested in social boundaries, network structure may have influence not only real events, but also the cognition and preferences of the actors involve (Burt, 1982; 1992a; Bauman, 1991; Soysal, 1994; Flap, 1997, Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998; Herb and Kaplan, 1998). “Politics includes also public negotiation over rules and discourse that morally bind the community together” (Eickelman and Pisactori, 1996: 7). Inter dependent actors having multidimensional relations among them may effect social networks on three main issues: identity, preferences, and communication. With regard to the issue of identity, the social construction of identity evolves as a result of social, cultural, and political influences. These cross influences are not always consistent with one another, and they could appear to be contradictory. Yet, in practice, groups learn to cope with inconsistencies between fractions of their embedded identities. It has been also shown that the criss-cross network structure inhibits conflict (Flap, 1988; 1997).
- f) **Short term modification in preferences and interest result in long term change in identity** — Since social networks, especially community and patronage ties, are a vehicle for political mobilization through social interaction, actors’ preferences may be changed with their mobility within social networks. Their interests are not preconceived, consistent and homogeneous, but rather heterogeneous, strenuous, and could, in principle, either compete or overlap with one another. Furthermore, preferences change over time, as social actors learn from and are influenced by one another. Partially overlapping interests and ties are instrumental in reaching mediation and political accords between different societal segments.
- g) **Communication:** in the network perspective, the social embeddedness of political actors generates a blurred communication, which is also embedded in multiple audiences and symbols (Wellman, 1988; Knoke, 1990; Scott, 1991; White, 1992). This stands in sharp contrast to the logic behind the categorical approach implicit in most bargaining models, where political communication is linear, dichotomous, and hierarchical.

Table 1:
A Comparison Between Categorical and Network Perspectives

Dimension	Categorical	Network
Political structure is	Hierarchical	Vertical and Horizontal
The state is an outcome of	Political modernization	External Imposition
Nature of conflict	Discrete event, creates interruption of steady-state, involves dyadic relations	Imminent event, ambivalent, involves at least triadic relations
Nature of identities	Solid, unchanged	Multiple roles, intertwined, embedded in different spheres, interconnected
Attributes of boundaries	Stable and fixed	Blurred and dynamic

**Figure 1. The Triad of Politics**

(table continues)

Table 1 (continued)

Power structure	Monocentric	Polycentric
Nature of interests	Homogeneous, pre-conceived	Heterogeneous, post-factum
Values are perceived as:	Rational versus “primitive”	Pragmatic and identity-related
Preferences	Stable and consistent preferences	Partially overlapping, competing and conflicting
Nature of decision-making	Unitary decision-makers, singular issue-space	Heterogeneous decision-makers across multi-dimensional social space
Rules of the game	Clear and formal procedures	Negotiated according to unofficial rules of the game, and across informal ties
Systemic processes	Zero-sum game between parties (e.g. state versus society)	Neither rejection nor acceptance of the other party
Stability is reached via	Equilibrium point between overt, fixed interests	Network connectivity, linkages, social embeddedness and syncreticism
Political consequences	Static reality	Permanent fluidity
Change is viewed as	Radical	Endemic

THE POLITY WITHIN A TRIANGULAR REALITY: STATE, COMMUNITY, PAN-MOVEMENT

Societies are composed of complex relations. It is useful to describe the political structure of Middle Eastern countries as a triangle. The three poles of the triad enact, reproduce, and modify the relationship structure. More specifically, we argue that Middle Eastern political systems are formed as social networks, which comprised three key inter-related spheres of players: (1) *state* (2) *community*, and (3) *pan-movement*.

a. The State in a Relation

All Arab states operate to a large extent on the foundation of interlocking triangular relationships between state authority, supra-state (pan-Arab or pan-Muslim) movements, and ethnic or clan communal affiliations. In most cases, one element clearly dominates at the expense of the others, but all are present to some degree.⁹

We argue that the triangular character of Arab politics explains important variations of political cultures across the Arab states. Informal ties between segmented groups—ethnic, cliques or factions—remain important recourse to political and social action in Arab societies. Social relations, accordingly, are continuously changing with groups alternately fusing and splitting (Bill and Springborg, 1990: 87–99; Mishal and Morag, 2000).

It was the seminal work of Georg Simmel that provided a formal insight into the structural process in which a *triad* form of a system dramatically modifies the power distribution and interdependencies between social actors. Recent developments in network models of social structure has formally shown in remarkably different contexts, that an actor's dependency on others is a function of the degree to which his role partners are connected (Burt, 1992a; 1992b). In other words, an actor's autonomy is greater to the extent that other parties in the environment are disconnected. Collusion, tacit agreement and cooperation between actors minimizes an actor's degree of freedom (Burt, 1992a, 1992b; Markoswky et al.; Simmel, 1922; 1988; Talmud, 1992; 1994; Talmud and Mesch, 1997). Community and political conflicts in the Middle-East are mediated by networks of relations with third factions that, at the same time, buffer and link parties (Abu Nimer, 1996; Ginat, 1998).

The categorical outlook views the Middle Eastern type of state as a “natural” outcome of political development, which operates through formal rationality. By contrast, the network approach views the state as an external imposition on social networks, which constitutes the Middle Eastern communities (Tibi, 1991). Moreover, the state attempts at controlling cultural institutions, dominant narrative and not merely a material interest (Eickelan and Piscatori, 1996: 8). Yet in its operation, the state has to recognize tribes, ethnic groups, community relations, and ideological pan-movements. For that reasons, its success is highly dependent on its accommodation to these pre-existing and emerging ties.¹⁰ State action, then, is historically situated and socially embedded (Mitchell, 1990). Customarily, in a *network state* the information flow and societal links are horizontal in addition to vertical. Each player, therefore, is able to expand its informal, but effective, ties to other states or societal segments within those states independently of the control of state (Mishal and Morag, 2000). The regime's survival depends, accordingly, on its capacity to manage demands of various population segments, co-opting others, while using a variety of symbolic manipulation to enhance its legitimacy (Sivan, 1985; 1988: chapter 4).

Still, the state is the only centralized organization in Middle Eastern society. Its sovereignty is defined by nation-state claim for legitimacy, rather than community-based argument, whereas most Middle Eastern communities are fragmented according to tribal, sectarian and ethnic ties (Tibi, 1991).¹¹ This seemingly contradictory pressure creates a tension between what Michael Mann has coined “the despotic power of the state” and its “infrastructural power” (Mann, 1986) on the one hand, and the “particularistic commitment” of citizens and groups to tribe, ethnic, and religious sects. The intersection between tribes, rulership, and ethnic relations puts each player in multiple positions, and sometimes with potentially strenuous roles. In pre-revolutionary Libya, for example, the state had dual attachment: an administrative apparatus existed together with a tribal system, and the monarchy never resolved the contradiction between the two (Anderson, 1990).

Arab states demonstrate a continuum “from states which utilizes political patronage as an adjunct to meritocratic public administration, to those which are little more than family businesses” (Anderson, 1987: 8). As state economic penetration grew, more and more people were

seeking to cultivate their ties with the state. This created the rise of a “state-generated” entrepreneurial class, increasing the share of the private sector in the economy (Anderson, 1987; Ayubi, 1990). Economic structure and political legitimacy are partially linked. Anderson maintains that as the state's economic intervention increased, “state patriotism grew correspondingly, when, Sadat’s Egypt-first policy replaced Nasir’s pan-Arabism in the 1970s” (1987: 13). Yet, “that state patriotism has not completely eclipsed alternative identities reflects both the heterogeneity of the societies encompassed by the state and, perhaps, even more important, the fact that in state-directed social transformation the state itself is implicated by the damage such a transformation inevitably entails for old classes, norms, and networks” (Anderson, 1987: 13).

The basic challenge of those states was to mitigate the newly formed middle class’s growing political demands for democratization, while maintaining political stability. Yet, the state is crucially dependent on community support, because the economic intervention capacity of most Arab State, as well as their legal underpinning and theological grounds are relatively precarious (Ben Dor, 1983; Ayubi, 1991).

b. Community as a Web of Nested Identities

Turning to community players, the term “*community*” here refers to the social organization of practical everyday life. It includes networks of economic organization, circuits of praxis, and the networks of production, exchange, allocation, residential arrangements, and kinship systems. This dimension also denotes social divisions between particularistic groups across residential, ethnic, and religious lines. Usually, it expresses an interest narrower than the state’s territorial boundary. Still, power structure within the community is often constructed through state institutions, and maneuvered by state agents as well as by powerful community interest (Mitchell, 1991).

Community’s relationship’s structure, then, modifies the constraints and opportunities that each player possesses, specifies the feasible set of actions that each players retains, and defines the ways in which they can mutually determine the fate of one another. Trade, production, and consumption are organized in networks of exchange. Marriage, social bonds and community relations are also organized in an ongoing web of relational patterns according to ethnic, neighborhood, class, and occupational lines (Scott, 1990; Singerman, 1995).

There is a symbiotic inter-dependence between state and community in everyday life, especially in the provision of goods (Owen, 1992). The Arab State is typically concerned with trade regulation, especially in imported goods. The state taxes “luxurious” goods, while subsidizing primary goods. The “community” thus is highly dependent upon the state’s action. The state, in turn, is dependent on the community for both surveillance and economic ventures. The state also needs key segments of the community as a source of political backing, and as political leverage in opposing to pan-movements. In a comparative study of Egypt, Iran and Lebanon, it was found out that the regime’s stability is conditioned by the existence of urban informal community networks (Denoeux, 1993).

The Network State then is composed by interlocking, seemingly inconsistent, mechanisms of control. The State can possess powerful coercive machinery, but it still must attempt to base its legitimacy through an over-arching state or supra-state ideology (like Ba’athism) as well as informal arrangements between the various communities. These devices seem to be tenuous in principle, yet they can be effective in practice. For example, in the 1990s, in apparently contradictory move to the ruling Ba’ath ideology, Saddam Hussein entitled various Iraqi tribes’ leaders with more legal authority, also furnishing them with material and symbolic resources. Moreover, being the head of the secular Ba’ath party did not prevent Hussein from embracing Islamic symbolism in the Gulf war of 1990–91 (Eickelman and Piscatori, 1996: 13).

c. Pan-Movement as a Shell for “Imagined Community”

The term *pan-movement*, as we use it here, refers to the organized ideological and political aspirations of members of an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1991). A *pan-movement* manifests a mission or a calling, which is to rectify and to transform political arrangement in the name of an “irrefutable” transcendent reality. A *pan-movement* is the collective action of

proponents of sectarian religious “unity of all believer,” or supporters of ethnic, supra-state nationalism. Typically, a *pan-movement* re-interprets primordial past and shared symbols in a way that re-unites members into a symbolic and passionate universe of “spiritual community.” Usually, a *pan-movement’s* aspirations go beyond the territorial boundaries demarcated by the international system of the “nation-states.” This discrepancy is often expressed in a “*grand plan*” vision of an all-inclusive expansion of the political boundaries.

A *pan-movement* is successful to the extent that the social actor’s political strategies are prescribed by its ideologies. **A typical *pan-movement* claims for a symbolic representational monopoly over the “correct” interpretation of past collective experience.** It attempts to re-canonize—typically by using textual tradition — “shared collective understanding,” classification systems, religious imperatives, and cognitive scripts of the “people of the holy book.” As in the Middle East, politics very often involve the mobilization or the re-invention of strong “primordial” sentiments and attachments, a *pan-movement* is successful to the degree to which even in the matter of political strategy, its ideological networks effect political action. It attempts to mold the “cognitive maps,” classification systems, and the way social identities and their preferences are formed and maintained. As norms and myths are always ambiguous, the interpretative process takes place in ongoing community interactions (Mann, 1986: chapter 1; Knoke, 1990: 19–22). Thus, it is not merely the state which sets boundaries in a “top-down” process. Rather, “boundaries can also be set by religious authorities, Islam protest movements, and kin groups, along others” (Eickelman and Piscatori, 1996: 18). Frequently *pan movements* ideological scripts, classification systems, political myths and rituals through a process of social diffusion, influence, imitation, and social learning (Knoke, 1990). This process generates ideological networks, through which meanings, norms, and ritualized practices are disseminated (Erickson, 1981). Yet it is important to note that pan-movement’s conduct is not carried out in a vacuum. Its doctrine’s change is a complex process, embedded in political arrangements (Eickelman and Piscatori, 1996: 17). The formation of a *pan-movement*, its recruiting patterns, and its political strategies are a product of both the state’s policy consequences and community structure. Some secular pan-movements, like the FLN in Algiers and the Syrian Ba’ath, are merely mobilization agents of the ruling group (Anderson, 1987), while others, such as the Syrian wing of the Muslim Brethren, intend to change the existing order according to a totalized vision of the future. These antagonistic political pan-movements are born out of the limited ability of the state in the Middle East to win loyalty from those whose direct ties to the state apparatus “made such attachment profitable” (Anderson, 1987: 13).

The social construction of a pan-movement involves creative processes such as an “*invention of tradition*” (Hobsbawm, 1984), or the process of “*selective tradition*” (Williams, 1971: 96), in which segments of the idealized past are selected and re-interpreted, and organized in a way that provides a coherent historiography and a meta-narrative into which to read the future (Anderson, 1991; Ayubi, 1991). In many cases, a *pan-movement* emerges forcefully precisely after a state’s attempt to break with the past, as in some cases of Islamism (Keddie, 1981).

Using a normative perspective, Olivier Roy demonstrates how various Islamic political movements are capable of adjusting their strategies to environmental pressures and constraints (Roy, 1994). Roy delineates the basic dilemmas of Islamic activists. On the one hand, a *revolutionary* path entailing the total Islamization of society “top down.” On the other hand, a *reformist, neo-fundamentalist* path, mainly focusing on the construction of Islamic social space, while postponing the subjugation of the state to an indeterminate future. As a result, Arab regimes and reformist Islamic movements are capable of developing a *modus vivendi*. Roy exposes four resulting political reorientation strategies chosen by Islamic groups: (a) destruction and violent confrontation with the existing regime, as in the case of Syria or Algiers; (b) parliamentary opposition, as in the case of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood; (c) legal collaboration, as Jamaat-i-Islami of Pakistan; and (d) indifference (Roy, 1994: pp. 24–25).

This *modus vivendi* is possible because “Islam is many things.” And because “even those in power who wish to rail against Muslim fundamentalists ... they too mix religion and politics” (Ajami, 1987: 186). A pan-Islamic movement is dangerous to a regime not because of its capacity to overturn the state, but because of its potential to destabilize the political system (Ajami, 1987: 120; 1992). The existence of organizational options and a normative contest with other pan-movements may also modify a pan-movement's political strategy. Two contrasting examples: the emergence of Pan-Nasserism reduces the Muslim Brethren's political appeal (Ayubi, 1982), while stiff competition between rival Algerian Islamic *pan-movements* escalates extreme demands for cultural and political change. Recent studies of political Islamic movements have shown that Islamism has many diverse development, goals and strategies. Moreover, their infrastructure is not a secluded sector, but is embedded in community economic ties (Roy, 1994; Beinun and Stork, 1997; Esposito, 1997).

To sum, the appearance and the development of the *pan-movement* is shaped and influenced by the state and community networks (Roy, 1994). Dominant groups often use grand visions of the past in combination with their own political agenda in order to gain legitimacy. Arab states persistently attempt at controlling the religious discourse via a combination of co-optation, rule enforcement, control over religious schools and publications, as well as partial, external and cosmetic symbolic changes according to the Shari'ah.¹² Yet *pan movement* has usually a more totalist vision of politics, thus challenging the ruling regime. In the long run, however, the interaction between *pan movement*, the state, and the community sets up the strategic moves of all parties.

6. Political Conflict in A Triangular Form

Contrary to the picture portrayed by the categorical approach, the network perspective assumes that political contest among multiple positions, and challenge to the dominant ideological claim are prevalent, and they are part of everyday public life. Since Middle Eastern political systems are composed of co-dependant state, community, and pan-movement, the system is enacted via strategic interactions. Political relations are manipulated and calculated, but interactions have history and unexpected consequences as well. The categorical perspective of conflict views conflict as a discrete event between clearly demarcated, diametrically opposed groups, having clear goals. The network perspective of conflict, delineates that there is a continuous (often simultaneous and dialectical) relation between conflict and cooperation, of rivalry and collaboration, of antagonism and limited partnership.

A dominant party is successful to the extent to which it is able to implement either of two strategies: (1) the other strategy is to make a society accepting a binary image of fixed identities, including a meta-narrative of super-identity, hierarchically ordered, where there is mutual exclusiveness between components and rejecting all out the opponent identity. Usually this strategy is futile for all parties, as the Algerian case indicates. (2) The second, mostly chosen, strategy is either (a) co-opting and cooperating with nested identities, which are embedded in “local” practices. Consequently, “syncretic” identities and political practices are emerged; or (b) ambivalent of treatment of “neither accepting nor rejecting” the opponent. As a result, a dynamic, often changing, “Kaleidoscopic” political arena emerges (c.f. Anderson, 1990; Tibi, 1990; Eickelman and Piscatori, 1990; 1996).

The inherent duality of most prevailing social conflicts is possible precisely because most conflicts are mainly enacted between triads. Triangular relations are unique *system of co-determination*. While dyadic conflicts of all-out confrontation often result in violent attempts for mutual destruction, in triadic or network conflicts which tend to be situated within certain (socially learned) boundaries, the parties are more concerned with *relative* rather than *absolute* gains. They are more ambivalent and flexible, and consequently de-facto compromise and equilibrium are more reachable. Because multiple and complex identities are inter-linked, and the parties' preferences are cross-cutting, there is a room for bargaining (Simmel, 1955; Coser, 1967; Hopmann, 1996).

This *modus operandi* of Middle Eastern politics has macro and micro implications. At the macro level, the interaction between state organization, community structure, and pan-movements shapes the nature of the political system. Moreover, inter-organizational tacit agreements preserve

historical patterns that have been worked out by the actors. Hence, the political action of any actor is normatively embedded in cultural scripts and repertoire. For example, to the extent to which a social conflict enables positioning within more than two totally confronting, mutually exclusive identities, then the “constructive ambivalence” of the conflict and the network constraints restraining the capacity of each actor (Simmel, 1955; Coser, 1967; March and Olson, 1976; March, 1978).

At the micro level, institutional arrangements and inter-organizational networks pattern the fate of the actor, while the aggregate outcome of actors' purposive action re-shapes the system (Giddens, 1984; Klijn, 1996). On the one hand, each actor—be it the state, “community,” or a “pan-movement”—is embedded in a network of exchange and interdependence that predetermines constraints and opportunities within which social rivalry occurs. Political conflict, on the other hand, modifies the configuration of the network and the resulting negotiated order. Actor's preferences and goals may change when uncertainty regarding (unintended) consequences of strategic interactions is involved (March and Olson, 1976; March, 1978; Klijn, 1996). Repeated “strategic games” initiate and reproduce taken-for-granted rules or institutionalized interaction patterns. These patterns are recognized as rules by most of the actors in the political networks. These social rules are implicit, and shared understanding of these recurrent interaction patterns as “rules” implies that actors are integral part of collective community, organized according to cultural scripts (Giddens, 1984). Ambitious players may challenge these rules, obviously, and these challenges mainly involve trials and errors (Giddens, 1984; Klijn, 1996).

Ordinarily, political systems contain tensions and contradictions. This makes the steering mechanism of the state involves bargaining in networks (Dunsire, 1996). Fluidity, flexibility societal segmentation and inter-penetration between institutional spheres are a common phenomenon (Druckman and Mitchel, 1995; Hopman, 1995; Dunsire, 1996). Moreover, even in the eyes of Middle Eastern political participants, boundaries (between state and society, or even among states) are fuzzy and permeable. In the light of this, boundaries which demarcate divisions between “civil society” and the “state” are often meaningless, troublesome, or analytically futile. Although we attribute an inherent dynamics to political systems, institutional arrangements and practical strategies usually make it more stable. Yet stability is often an outcome of a successful “enforcement coalition,” composed of core players with co-opted segments, such as the Alawite ruling group of Syria (Collins, 1988: 435–441), or the Jordanian elite following the Arab Israeli War of 1948 (Mishal, 1978: chapters 2–3).

In such reality, then, political outcomes are not linear and predictable but, rather, are negotiated by multiple actors and often result in unexpected consequences. Hence, political stability is a product of many micro-events in a multiplicity of political groups, agents, and organizations. The “rules of the games” are negotiated in various social arenas, which are composed of community networks, inter-organizational linkages, and formal and informal political institutional arrangements. Network connectivity, therefore, is a tool of reaching *modus vivendi* which do not necessarily involve the “averaging” aggregation of preferences.

Typically, no single player (be it a state, a pan-movement, or a community) can successfully dominate the entire political system. The “infrastructural power of the State” (Mann, 1984) is limited in most Middle Eastern countries, and its dominance over a territory has to be legitimized by shrewdly manipulating religious and nationalistic symbols, some of which are also shared by the pan-movements.

In spite of its *prima facie* dogmatic aspect, a pan-movement has an organizational base: it is organized in networks of writers, universities and students, proponents, free professionals, charity associations, fund raisers, and underground circles. Consequently, a mature pan-movement has a vested interest in the existence of its organizational base, while, at the same time, it needs to examine and challenge the limits of state capacity to repress the movement's action. The Muslim *Jamaa 'at* in Egypt (Ayubi, 1982; 1991), or the Palestinian *Hamas* in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, have a strong interest in preserving their control over trade unions, workers' associations,

schools, higher education institutions, and in maintaining their politically vital charitable medical associations (Mishal and Sela, 1997; 1999). At least for the time being, pan-movements may prefer to stick to the *modus vivendi* rather than adopting an all-out confrontation with the state.

This *modus operandi* often creates *parallel systems*. Although political groups, such as Islamic pan-movements, may publicly challenge the state for a sole legitimacy the regimes continue their attempts to impose state legitimacy. Each side might gain from the fragile status-quo, by neither fully accepting the demand of the other party, nor completely rejecting them.¹³ Middle Eastern state stability is conditioned upon its ability to bridge, participate, and manipulate both community and pan-movement. State hegemony is ensued to the degree that the state (or its leaders) co-opts prominent elements of the community or pan-movement (or of both parties), depending on social and historical context.

7. An Illustration of Network Approach

The heuristic merits of the network perspective over the categorical, unnuanced one are especially manifest when we consider complex cases of conflict, cooperation, and internal heterogeneity. It is impossible to grasp the political scene in Lebanon since the 1970s according to the categorical perspective, as there is no solid and steady boundary differentiating between two mutually exclusive, constantly opposing or clashing groups. On the contrary, fragile coalitions, mostly non-ideological in nature, are constantly formed and dissolved (Bill and Leiden, 1979: 87–91). The patronage networks are organized within informal “confessional groups,” where their leaders (*zu'ama*) use public and private resources to intensify their system boundaries and their constituencies' loyalty (Bill and Leiden, 1979: 88; Richards and Waterbury, 1990: 333–334), where “defeat is never total, victory never complete, tension never ending, and all gains and losses are merely marginal and temporary as winners fall out and losers regroup” (Geertz, 1971: 251; cited in Diskin and Mishal, 1984: 44). Similarly, one cannot comprehend Jordan after 1948, and especially following the establishment of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1964, according to categorical lines. According to the categorical perspective, Jordan and the PLO should have been locked in a head-on collision, because each side had a totally opposing definition for the political future of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Yet, the network perspective allows us to understand how, despite the tensions and the uneasy equilibrium of the state-of-affairs, Jordan and the PLO have maintained strenuous coexistence in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Both strategic considerations and day-to-day reality force the Hashemite Kingdom and the PLO to keep open mutual political ties and communication channels. Jordan furnished material resources, while the PLO understood that breaking the ties with Jordan would cost it popular support, and hence *de-facto* accepted the special political position of Jordan in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip territories. On the other hand, Jordan recognized its limited ability in neutralizing the PLO as the main political contender in the West Bank, and sought to maintain its influence via other political and economic means (Mishal and Aharoni, 1994: 1–25).

Similarly, the *Hamas* movement represents an alternative discourse to the dominant Palestinian national one represented by the PLO, as their Islamic Charter effectively proclaimed the PLO's Charter null and void. Yet *Hamas* movement had to adopt Palestinian national identity as a necessary step in developing a political alternative to the PLO. *Hamas*, accordingly, faced a dilemma: it needed to maintain a universal Islamic vision, while advancing particular Palestinian interests (Mishal and Sela, 1997: 14–16; 1999). Thus *Hamas* forged a strategy of “controlled violence” against Israel together with dialogue and coexistence with the Palestinian National Authority. Even after the Palestinian National Authority's crackdown on *Hamas*' military apparatus, following the February-March 1997 suicide attacks—under strict pressure from of Israel, *Hamas* held to its policy of not confronting with the PLO (Mishal and Sela, 1997: 25; 1999). Both *Hamas* and the PLO's sense of relative political weakness (their own as well as the other's) made it imperative that the two organizations embarked on the road to dialogue and ensured modes of coexistence. *Hamas* is conscious of the PLO's historical role and popularity, while the PLO is aware of *Hamas*' growing prestige. By interpreting any political agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as merely a pause on the historical road of *Jihad* (holy war), *Hamas* is able to achieve political flexibility without losing its ideological credibility. Having adopted a phased strategy, *Hamas* could acknowledge the reality of the Oslo Agreement without

recognizing Israel; can accept limited Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip without renouncing its ultimate ends; can choose to restrain violence, without giving up the “armed struggle”; and can differentiate between the “political” and “military” wings of the movement. (Mishal and Sela, 1997: 38–39; Mishal and Sela, 1999).

The relational aspects of the triad of *state*, *pan-movement*, and *community* are also evident in the inter-Arab system as well. After 1967, the Arab region became an arena of mediators (Ajami, 1992). This had mixed results: there was greater political disintegration at the regional level, and a higher level of social and cultural interaction. Consequently, to survive and prosper, any Arab state has to take into account not only the political and economic interconnections between itself and its neighboring countries, but also the ideological and symbolic dimensions of these ties. A mixed and contradictory policy is often the result. The countervailing pressures on Saudi Arabia, for instance, have resulted in that country’s ambivalent foreign policy. Though the Saudis had high expectations from the Camp David talks, the Kingdom expressed embarrassed ambiguity toward the signing of Camp David Accord on September 17, 1978 (Salame, 1988: 325). Consequently, the Saudis were to face Israel’s threats, pressures from America, and Sadat’s criticism. The Saudi elite also felt much more vulnerable to internal disturbances and to Soviet expansion, and to joint pressure by Syria and Iraq to take a “firmer stand against Cairo” (Salame, 1988: 327). Although the Saudis were originally in favor of the talks, they needed to retain the mainstream Arab consensus against the treaty, in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution, and given internal strifes within the royal family (Salame, 1988).

Recently, Syria and Saudi Arabia cooperated to expose the Iranian-backed, Saudi Islamist Shiite underground group. The Saudi elite, rather than embark on a head-on collision course with Iran, preferred to cooperate with Syria in this matter, so sending a signal to the new Iranian president, Muhammad Khatami, that the two countries can coexist. Additionally, Syria, in attempting to mediate between Iran and Saudi Arabia, hoping to disintegrate the pro-American coalition, which includes Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Morocco, and Kuwait (Friedman, 1997). Given this regional arena of political, symbolic, and economic triangular ties, network models of coalition and ambivalence are more appropriate than a categorical perspective in the analysis of the actual reality in the Middle East (see also Diskin and Mishal, 1984).

CONCLUSIONS

Going beyond the categorical approach, the network perspective based on a triangular conceptualization is a “structural theory and an adequate theory of action” (Tibi, 1988: 1). Our perspective is especially useful for the political study of horizontally fragmented polity. Moreover, our approach is consistent with network models of social structure (Burt, 1992a; Granovetter, 1985; Wellman, 1988; Wellman and Berkovitz, 1988; White, 1992) and is akin to the new institutionalism in sociology and political science (c.f. DiMaggio and Powell, 1990; Hall, 1994). Furthermore, there is a clear analytical merit inherent in this configurational perspective, which is able to explain political complexity and interchangeable dynamics of non-hierarchical orders by depicting the relational pattern of any political system in its entirety.

The Arab Middle East provides us with examples of less hierarchical, *etatist*-national states and more of network, community-fragmented polities, where significant portion of information flows are horizontal, state legal history is minimal, and tacit agreements are the rule.

If this is the case, then relational patterns between the triangle between the key players—state, community, and pan-movement—shape of the political character. For example, there are countries that are more hierarchically ordered, being dominated by a strong state-based system, like Egypt or Israel. Other countries can be identified as a strong pan-movement system, like Syria and Iraq. By contrast, Lebanon is a community-based fragmented structure. Further on, coalitions and co-existence between community-system dominated by family and ethnic ties compose the polities of Jordan, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia. There are also some countries, epitomized by

direct confrontations, (observable in Algiers, for example) between a despotic state and a militant pan-movement, where a splintered, weak community is caught in between.

In a similar fashion, coalitions and conflicts between *state / community / pan-movement* set the preferences and influence the conduct of a given political system. Many configurations are possible, but the network perspective provided here is both sensitive to the Middle East and is analysis efficacious for comparative study. It can indicate how ties and relations influence decisions and behavior through a continuous process of negotiation and adjustment within the *state / community / pan-movement* triangle. The conceptualization we offer carries an additional property—the metaphor we use is a multi-dimensional one. We can comprehend several dimensions using one single metaphor, as a “crude cut.” This provides an important parsimonious gain.

The network approach helps to focus attention away from categorical divisions and formal dimensions, like strategies of control and command, toward critically relevant issues like interrelationships, dynamic negotiation, and the formation of trust and tenuous “competitive cooperation” between political rivals (Mishal and Morag, 2000).

The comparative advantage of this perspective precisely stems from its epistemic standpoint. It looks beyond the political common sense issues of stability, legitimacy, control and hierarchy, which occupied (though not solely) many students of states and societies in the Middle East. Rather, the network perspective turns these issues “on their head.” It also asks how a state, pan-movement or community can produce conditions to encourage and create a political reality which is based on perceptions of bounded instability, negotiated coexistence, blurred boundaries and conflicting, competing and overlapping preferences instead of secure and prolonged stability, fixed boundaries, and consistent preferences.¹⁴

Furthermore, a network approach differs from the categorical perspective by analysis of relationships among social actors in terms of competitive and conflictual horizontal and vertical relations (Scott, 1985; Knoke, 1990; Wasserman and Faust, 1995; Wellman, 1988). By contrast, the categorical approach tends to ignore the potential influence of formal and informal ties among actors, ties that cut across social categories and group boundaries, and the patterns and forms of social relations that affect actors’ identities, attitudes, and behavior.

Finally, the network approach provides an apt metaphor for the world order today. Our world is characterized more by instability than stability, by flows rather than stocks, by ambiguous and shifting boundaries rather than distinct and static boundaries, by multiple identities and fluid loyalties rather than single identities and fixed affiliations. Most of old models of social process, presupposed hierarchically ordered society, essentially based on linear metaphors and categorical classification, scarcely represent or capture these uncertainties and complexities. By contrast, network models of social structure provide a novel way to comprehend the social embeddedness of the political conduct.

DIRECTION FOR FUTURE STUDIES

A basic shortcoming of this network approach is its fuzziness. Because our alternative conception of political life synthesizes key ideas from many seemingly contradictory sociological sources, it cries out for the construction of more parsimonious models, derived from a network theory of social interaction. In particular, the precise nature and various dimensions of social embeddedness should be analytically decomposed and clarified in light of other works, especially in economic sociology and in studies of social movements and identities (Uzzi, 1996; 1997; 1999; Gulati and Garguilo, 1999; Talmud, 1999; Ansell, 2000).¹⁵ Furthermore, a more refined depiction of social embeddedness should be able to produce a more precise calculation of agency within a given structure. This has many important implications for the development of more sophisticated and dynamic models within diverse theoretical legacies such as: the sociological version of rational choice, structural sociology, and for the new integration of structural analysis with narrative accounts.

NOTES

1. The *category approach* was primarily induced and effected by early modernization theory which dominated the field until the 1960s (e.g. Huntington, 1987: 7). The categorical perspective was also salient in the “political development and political participation” studies of the 1970s and 1980s, that were, in turn, superseded by the “state and society” perspective of the 1980s.
2. Characteristically, the categorical classification of the Middle Eastern societies utilizes dichotomies such as “state” versus “society”; religiosity versus secularism; urban versus rural; “centre” in contrast with “periphery,” “elites” as opposed to “the masses”; Muslim majority (Suni or Shiite) versus (Christian) minority; traditional versus modern; regime versus population; rational versus affectionate; conservatism (or reaction) versus revolution; tribalism (or community) versus statehood; radical Islam as opposed to the secular State, and so forth.
3. To a large extent, modernization theory has epitomized the methodological underpinnings of the categorical approach. (See Geertz, 1968; Mottahadeh, 1985; Banuazizi, 1987; Huntington, 1987; Bill and Leiden, 1979, 9–15; Bill and Springborg, 1990; Eichelman and Piscatori, 1996, 22–28).
4. This point will be elaborated below.
5. On the global and multi-faced embeddedness of identities see Appadurai (1990), Soysal (1994).
6. Describing the religious history of Indonesia and Morocco, Clifford Geertz stipulates even under condition of acute social change, people do not necessarily become “secular” in the sense that they “progressively” turn into “religiousless-mind.” On the contrary, Geertz claims, they turn from “religious” to be “religious-mindedness”; from being a captive of religious conviction, to holding a religious belief in one way or another (1968: 61).
7. This is in contrast to the European experience described in Tilly (1975).
8. The metaphor of embeddedness employs a structural image of state politics and social relations. In this image, it is neither the individual, nor the group, but the configuration of linkages between individuals and groups that determines the way behaviour, perception, and attitudes are molded. The term “embeddedness” was first coined by anthropologist and historian Karl Polanyi (1944), and recently elaborated by sociologist Mark Granovetter (1985), to connote how social relations and political arrangements construct and mediate economic exchange. In recent years, various schools, especially in economic and political sociology and in organization theory, have been ordinarily using this metaphor of embeddedness as a key concept for their new theme of multidimensional business relations and networks models of social structure.
9. In fact, even the most hierarchical Arab State, Egypt, entails influential elements of supra-state ideology as well as important communal fragmented loyalties.
10. Delineating state formation in the Middle East, Lisa Anderson goes beyond the categorical assumptions: ‘the influence of historical patterns of state formation on post-independence state-society relations is not simply a matter of the state's relative strength or weakness, however, but of the changing contours of these relations as they developed’ (Anderson, 1987: 7).
11. While according to the dominant Western main narrative, state sovereignty has been developed by a gradual process in which social forces integrated to complete the form of economic, social and political modernization (Krasner, 1984). By contrast, the development of the Middle Eastern state can be described as an artificial external imposition (e.g. Tibi, 1991).
12. Muslim law.

13. This is a consequence of the fact that the politics of 'neither rejection nor acceptance' is not a part of an ideological decree but rather a product of the political dictum of survival. Under certain conditions, this institutional arrangement may fall apart. The rich complexity of the social structure induces structural conditions for tolerance. Still, because this "forbearance" is possible due to external conditions, it is highly sensitive to exogenic change. Among the conditions under which parallel systems break down one may include: the regime is internationally or financially fragile; economic problems hamper the capacity of the regime to promote materially its key supporters (such as army officers); a dominant minority group loses its control over the system; the ruling group reduces its symbolic ambivalence, so that only one side of the ideological stream remains satisfied, while other groups remain discontent; the regime attempts to break with the traditional past, and rapidly imports a new value system, which it attempts to implant throughout society (Keddie, 1988); leadership of a deprived co-opted majority group no longer receives material and political benefits and consequently invests in changing the status quo; a growing urban, relatively well educated, new class emerges without developing institutional ties with the regime, while simultaneously losing its previous (mainly rural) contacts. This leads to a shift of social identity and the transformation of political expectations from the state to a more demanding utopia (Richards and Waterbury, 1990); where the economic infrastructure is rapidly and unevenly developed, so existing community and patronage networks dramatically transform and people change their core identities. At the same time, local cliques, commercial activities and relations of local patrons with state institutions rapidly change (Bodemann, 1988; Flap, 1988; 1990; 1997; Graziano, 1975; Richards and Waterbury, 1990).
14. It is important to recognize that a network perspective does not look separately at bureaucrats, the public, the state, the power brokers, the external environment, ethnic relations, cultural sediments, economic and religious resources, and so forth, because these factors seldom have stable boundaries, fixed preferences and permanent expectations.
15. One can analytically differentiate between at least two major aspects of social embeddedness of politics (Zukin and DiMaggio, 1990): (1) Structural embeddedness expresses the network of (direct and indirect) interdependence between players, and the extent to which the social connections benefit certain actors at the expense of others (Talmud, 1992; 1994; 1999; Talmud and Mesch, 1997). By contrast, (2) institutional or normative embeddedness indicates the normative and cognitive scripts and categorization scheme designed for political action, including mental processes, epistemic and ontological assumptions governing the "order of things," and ideological preferences regarding the desirable policy direction. Network analysts have long recognized this multiplicity as well. The literature discusses several dimensions of embeddedness: positional, relational (Gulati and Garguilo, 1999); structural, political, cognitive (c. f. Talmud, 1992; 1999); cultural, normative (Zukin and DiMaggio, 1990); temporal, territorial, and issue embeddedness (Ansell, 2000). Some of the authors agrees on terms but not on definitions and meanings.

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