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State Building, Modernization and Political Islam. The Search for Political Community(s) in the Middle East.
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The experience of Middle Eastern societies with state and political community building implies a great deal of variation. Writing about this experience in one chapter is likely to suffer from a great deal of simplification. However, such a risk is acceptable since a certain degree of generalization is necessary to provide a perspective through which the variant experiences of Middle Eastern countries can be explained.

The title of this chapter suggests that the process of state building in the Middle East is influenced by, or that it is a function of, both modernization and political Islam. The relationship between these variables is rather indirect, however. Modernization is the deep-seated process which underlies all kinds of changes in the region. Political Islam, on the other hand, is an endeavor to redesign Middle Eastern states and societies in conformity with Islamic law, known as shariàa. Political Islam is dealt with here as only the tip of the iceberg of a much deeper problem – the identity crisis in the region. The dynamics of identity formation is the variable that underlies changes and developments regarding state and political community building, and for a political community, identity is the concept that provides for cohesion. When the identity of a society is questioned by its members, other means are likely to be needed to compensate for the questioned identity, means which might include different forms of violence. Cohesion imposed through the use of violent means, though, is not as efficient as

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cohesion based on identity. The instrument used to achieve that cohesion, violent or voluntary, directly influences the form(s) the political regime takes. And so, while the political regime's legitamacy is, among other things, a function of the state's, the state's legitamacy is partly a function of the degree of identity agreement among the different sections of society, especially between the ruled and the rulers.

The impact of the identity crisis in the Middle Eastern countries can be seen in the major political processes taking place in the region, among them state building and nation building. The variable that relates and underlies the two processes is the dynamic of identity formation and re-formation, which is to say how the identity crisis is formed and experienced in different degerees and forms. It is by refering to this variable that the political fragility and instability experienced by a large number of Middle Eastern countries can be explained.

NATION AND STATE BUILDING IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Only a few states in the world deserve to be called nation-states. However, the concept of the nation-state is an ideal type that is so prevailing and inspiring that most nations have sought, and some still seek, to reshape their polities according to the guiding principles it suggests. Historically, the ideal of the sovereign state preceded the formation of the nation-state. While the modern sovereign state was created and legitimized in the 17th century as a result of the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, the development of nations came later in the 18th, and especially in the 19th century, when nationalist movements swept across the continent. Only at that point was the notion of the nation-state developed.

The concept of the nation-state suggests the identification between a people and the governing body which rules them. The rise of democratic ideals have legitimized and provided the means for tolerating almost all kinds of rifts and friction within a polity except for that which deals with identity, because such a rift not only questions the legitimacy of the political regime but also the legitimacy of the state and the political community themselves. The lack of perceived common identity in a society weakens the bonds which keep the members of the society together. "A society's understanding of itself and its problems –its sense of identity and purpose– is the principal binding force that integrates the members of that society and enables them to act effectively in common to solve their domestic and foreign problems" (Black, 1966, p. 59). Therefore, the processes of identity formation and nation and state building are closely inter-linked.

Directly derived from the ideal of the nation-state, the 'right to self-determination' has been suggested to decide in situations where identification between the 'rulers' and

the 'ruled' is wanting. Over and again, the right to self-determination has emphasized the legitimacy and desirability that both ruled and rulers be of the same identity, seeing as that the presence of a common identity that relates one to the other is perceived as being the natural order of politics, and that deviations from such order is considered unfair and a threat to peace.

The right to self-determination has been exalted to the level of moral principle. Although applying such a political and moral principle has not been by any means an easy task, the difficulty has not arisen from questioning the principle itself, but rather from disputing whether a certain group constitutes a real nation. Disputing a certain group's identity is the main line of argumentation pursued during during conflicts that have arisen as a result of attempts to apply the principle of the right to self-determination, especially during the era of decolonization.

How this discussion can be linked to Middle Eastern polities and politics is a legitimate question at this point. The relevance of this discussion to Middle Eastern polities derives from two phenomena. First, Middle Eastern polities are riddled with different degrees and forms of conflicts between contending and, more or less, incompatible types of identities. Second, 'legitimacy' is a major concern always influencing Middle Eastern politics.

Four types of identities are to be mentioned in this regard. While the scope of some is much wider than that of the present nation-states, the scope of others is much narrower. The four types are as following:

a. Primordial identities: These include all kinds of identities usually called ethnic, i.e., tribal, racial, sectarian, and cultural, and which play essential political roles in the Gulf states, Libya, Lebanon, Iraq, Algeria, and the Sudan.

b. National identities: These include territorially based identities evolving around the state apparatus in which the sovereignty of the state is invested.

c. Regional identities: These include the self-proclaimed national identities that transcend the boundaries of the present states and claim being inclusive for the peoples of a number of states. Arab nationalism is the most famous of this type; another is the pan-Syrian nationalism whose proponents claim represents the peoples of Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine, and which for a short time included Cyprus in the definition of greater Syria. This type of identity can therefore be considered as supra-national.

d. Universal identities: These include identities which claim being inclusive for peoples regardless of their national, territorial or cultural affiliations. Pan-Islam is the most important identity of this type. Robinson (1979, p. 216) noticed that "there is hardly a Muslim state in the world which does not have a party whose professed aim is to impose its vision of the Islamic ideal on contemporary politics and society." Such a vision is adopted by fundamentalist movements all over the region, which claim that

Muslims of the Middle East, together with Muslims in other regions in the world, belong to the same identity, and that such a common identity justifies the endeavor of bringing all Muslims together in one single, united state.

The mere presence of the contending identities is not in itself the problem. Conflict between different identities is at the essence of the process of nation building; thus, according to Brass, nation formation "is the process by which elites and counter-elites within ethnic groups select aspects of the group's culture, attach new value and meaning to them, and use them as symbols to mobilize the group, to defend its interests, and to compete with other groups" (Brass, in Robinson, 1994, p. 217). The problem, rather, takes two other forms. The first is the prolonged contention among the different types of identities which hinders developing national consensus in the region's countries, and the second is the unhealthy coexistence which results among them so that no policy can be pursued to its logical ends.

This does not mean that the role and meaning of the primordial or religious identities is the same as it used to be centuries ago. Rather, as Owen argues "methods of political organization and styles of political rhetoric are largely defined by the context and that, from the colonial period on, this context was created by the territorial state" (Owen, 1992, p. 20). The territorial state became the arena within which the traditional entities and identities interacted, becoming also the reward and subject over which they struggled.

Establishing the Middle Eastern states had a great influence over the dialectics of identity formation in the Middle East. Gradually, increasing sections of the societies of the newly created states began identifying with these states, including those sections of the society linked closely to the apparatus of the new states. Even those who failed to identify with the new states were forced to think and to act the "state" way since it was only within the new states where life was conducted. The different political settings, legislations, social structures, etc.., forced the peoples of these states to "think" Syrian , Iraqi or Jordanian regardless of one's ideological inclinations, and thus the national identities of these states began developing.

The irony of this –the territorial state in the Middle East– is that while everybody needs it and fights for it and are not ready to give it up, at the same time, nobody is willing to recognize the territorial state as a legitimate entity, justifiable on both moral and ideological grounds. A factor which might explain this irony is the fact that since the territorial state was a project initiated by the European colonial powers, such a state was inherited, maintained and developed by the indigenous nationalist forces (Bromley, 1994). The failure of the radical Arab nationalists during the fifties and sixties to achieve Arab unity is a clear example of the durability of the territorial state even under the rule of radical Arab nationalists who sought to dissolve it into a much larger united Arab state. The contention among identities in the context provided by

the territorial state creates types of disguised identities where, for instance, tribal , sectarian or national interests are best served by being formulated in supra-national, or universal, rhetoric and terminology.

Little is written in the Arab world on the legitimacy of the territorial state. Much more is written on Arab nationalism, Islam, Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict. It is not plausible for an Arab writer to write about the national interest of this or that country because the concept of national interest is reserved to the imaginary interest of the Arab nation. The same is the case concerning the concept of national security, which is usually used to mean the imaginary Arab-national security.

The legitimacy of the territorial state in the Arab World is, to a great extent, measured by its commitment to serve interests, whether Arab or Islamic, that are larger in scope than those of its own. Thus, the Palestinian cause provided Arab states with a foci and arena to show off their commitment to the interest of the Arab-Muslim nation, and hence to enhance the legitimacy of the territorial state: what's more, the tremendous difficulties facing Arab unity provided the Palestinian cause a greater importance in this regard.

The analysis suggested in the previous paragraph is fairly accurate regarding states at the eastern end of the Mediterranean. However, Arab countries in North Africa (Libya aside) have different experiences in that a much higher sense of territory-based national identity is present and the legitimacy of territorial state is stronger (Hermassi, 1972). In almost all cases, however, conflicting identities and the oscillation among them is a phenomenon that can be seen throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

The relationships among these types of identities are not static by any means. Large segments of Middle Eastern societies keep oscillating among these different types of identities; and the problem with such oscillation stems from the impact it has on the legitimacy and political stability of, plus the foreign and regional policies of, Arab states.

In spite of the lengthy literature about the process of globalization and the evolving global village, and about how these developments challenge the state as we have known it until now, the nation-state is still the most important human invention in the realm of politics in the last four centuries. Though recent developments on the global level challenge the nation-state, making adaptation a must, they do not, by any means, threaten the presence and role of the nation-state. In other words, the forces of globalization are far from making the nation-state obsolete. And while a great deal of adjustment is needed on the part of the nation-state to adapt to the global changes, the specificity of the situation in the Middle East is compounded by the fact that Middle Eastern states have to carry out two tasks at the same time-adjusting to global challenges on one hand, and continuing the building of the nation-state on the other.

THE MODERNIZATION CONNECTION
AND POLITICAL ISLAM

The term modernization refers to the process in which the structures of the traditional societies are dismantled and replaced by new structures on economic, social, political, and cultural levels. Regardless of the numerous definitions of modernization, it is sufficient for the purpose of this paper to describe the major features of modernization. What should be clear at the outset is that these features are derived from the experience of the industrialized societies in Europe and North America. Historically speaking, scientific and technological progress played the major role in transforming the traditional structures of the European feudal societies into modern capitalist structures. As a result of this progress, new social classes were created and the relationships between individuals and groups were transformed, developing these latter atop utilitarian bases. Industrialization, urbanization, and education were the vehicles that carried these transformations forward. At the cultural level, these transformations went deep: reason replaced metaphysics as the way of thinking, and the individual was allowed a greater deal of freedom vis-à-vis repressive social and political institutions. The rapid progress in people's control over the environment and over their social lives made progress the ideology of modernity. At the political level, democracy was the modern form of political restructuring.

When applied to the study of non-European societies, the modernization school of analysis has been heavily criticized, even from some of the scholars who initially contributed to its development (Eisenstadt, 1970; Huntington, 1968; Binder, et. al., 1971). This, however, should not obscure the usefulness of the concept(s) developed by the modernization school. Nevertheless, the failure of the modernization school is due to its applying the European experience only as the heuristic means to explain developments in non-European societies: In other words, it is the uni-lineal and universalistic assumptions of the modernization school that are responsible for its shortcomings (Pool, 1994, p. 199). The European experience was dealt with as the model of development that should be followed by all nations regardless of their past histories. The Euro-centrism which characterized the proponents of the modernization school caused them to fail to notice the idiosyncrasies of human societies which defied simple models based on the experience of certain areas. Defeated was the concept of replicability of the Western European model and experience, not modernization as a universal process that manifests itself in different ways in different societies. In short, conceiving of modernization as an ideology and as a prophecy, not as an analytical tool, was the mistake made by proponents of the modernization school.

Though modernization as a process is still taking place and impacting on non-Western societies, the results of this process are different from those of the European nations. The modernization process in non-Western societies was not allowed to proceed

without constraints. Most important of these constraints was the influence exercised by the Western colonial powers to gear modernization to achieve their interests. Most of the non-Western societies began experiencing modernization under the heavy pressure of the modernized-colonial Europe. Modernization, in that sense, was more successful in dismantling the traditional structures than in setting up modern ones as replacements. Essentially, non-Western societies were not allowed the opportunities for full-fledged modernization while being exposed to the many displacements caused by the imposed modernization. As a result, such developments created a situation where the losers outnumbered the winners; and while the early stages of modernization did create great expectations, the results turned out to be more disappointing, enough so that a retreat, psychologically and culturally, came to dominate the scene.

The identity crisis in the Middle East is a new phenomenon which can be traced back to the early nineteenth century when the region had its first major encounter with modern Europe. The demarcation line for such an encounter is the French invasion of Egypt, 1798-1801. Exposing the traditional Egyptian society of the time to the technology, ideology, administrative and political institutions, and especially the military might of modern Europe unleashed tremendous changes in Egyptian society. Significant progress in the fields of industrialization, education, and urbanization took place in the aftermath of the withdrawal of the French army. A few decades later, the early signs and expressions of Egyptian nationalism, in the modern sense, began rapidly unfolding.

Similar processes have taken place in other Arab countries; however, the different circumstances, forms, and pace in which these processes happened have yielded different results. Regardless of the major differences between the different Arab societies, the driving force for all these developments was modernization. According to Emerson (1960, p. 93), the disintegration of the traditional communal institutions and the rise of new social forces are the most two significant elements which contributed to the rise of modern nationalism.

Interactions with modern Europe was an experience of both education and subjugation for the Arab peoples. European modernity was very much inspiring for the Middle Eastern peoples who set out to reorganize their societies according to the new principles derived from the European experience. Thus, the modern/European concepts of state and nationalism made their way to the Middle East. And while the breakup of the Ottoman empire did lead to the formation of the current Middle Eastern state, the boundaries of these states, especially in the eastern end of the Mediterranean were drawn to serve the interests of the colonial powers.

Modernization is also the driving force underpinning the oscillation of Middle Eastern peoples among the different types of identities. This is apparently the case with the primordial type of identity. Different levels of modernization in different societies have resulted in different degrees of disintegration of the communal institutions. But the impact of modernization on the identity crisis in the Middle East is more than just

the impact of the different levels of modernization. The successes and failures, the ups and downs of modernization, and the mobilization and displacement caused by the same are responsible for the nonlinear development of identity in the region.

The Palestinian cause also contributed to such a zigzag path developing. No matter which type of identity is prevalent in a certain time and country, the feelings of cultural affiliation and kinship among Arabs can not be denied. The severe situation the Palestinian people suffer and the over-all failure of the Arab states in handling the Arab-Israeli conflict have kept the attention of Arab masses focused on Palestine, rather than on their own countries and states. The Palestinian cause was, and still is, a vehicle which keeps fueling trans-national identities such as Arab nationalism and pan-Islam. For these reasons, the damage caused by the Arab-Israeli conflict is much greater for Arab states than mere numbers of casualties and military expenditures. The worst impact of the Arab-Israeli conflict can be seen in the distortion it has caused to Arab politics and polities, one of the major factors that has contributed to the failure of territorial states in the region to achieve legitimacy and sustainability.

The rise of political Islam since the 1970s is the last phase in the cycle of identity formation and reformation in the region. Islamic fundamentalism receives a great deal of support from large sections of Middle Eastern societies and it is far from being a marginalized movement. The available tentative and crude indicators show that fundamentalists comprise the most influential political grouping in the region other than the ruling elites. In Egypt, Islamists were the largest opposition block in the Egyptian parliament in the People's Assembly elected in 1987. Most fundamentalist candidates were not able to make it to the People's Assembly in the election years of 1990 and 1995 because of the pressure exercised by the government. In Jordan, Islamists were the largest single block in the Jordanian parliament elected in 1989; Islamists, however, failed to make a similar record in the following fair elections of 1994. In Tunisia, 13% of the votes went to the Islamic ticket in the elections of 1988, the last elections in which they were allowed to participate. The story of Algeria is too well-known to be retold. In the Sudan, the Islamist "National Islamic Front" came in third in the elections of 1986, only 10 seats behind the 'Itihadi', the traditional strong party of Sudan. In Yemen 'al Islh', the fundamentalist party of Yemen came in second in the two multi-party elections of 1992 and 1997.

What we are talking about, then, is anything but a marginal phenomenon. The mistake usually made in addressing such an issue is dealing with it as if it were just a security problem. The argument made in this paper is that the fundamentalist movement is a deeply-rooted phenomenon that needs to be understood through a more comprehensive approach. The view adopted here conceives of the rise of the Islamic movements as an integrated part of the Middle East endeavor in search of a political community –and that identity formation is at the core of that search.

The political and ideological failures of the Arab nationalist elites provided the conducive conditions for the reemergence of the ideology of pan-Islam as an alternative to the failing ideologies. The military defeat of 1967 was, at the same time, the lowest point of pan-Arabism and the departure point of pan-Islam. The 1967 defeat was more than a military defeat. It was, rather, a defeat for the modernizing ideology adopted by the Arab nationalist elite. The heavy territorial loss the Arab states suffered in the war and the feelings of national humiliation helped create a stark perception of threat in regards the national interest and dignity. Adding all of this to the normal dislocations created by modernization, deep feelings of frustration characterized the psychological mood of the Arab masses, and seeking refuge in religion was their response to the defeat and its consequences.

Along the continuum of tradition-modernity, religion, in general, is usually conceived of as being closer to the traditional pole of the continuum. However, current fundamentalist movements in the Middle East are far from being traditional in the stereotypical sense. The impact of modernization on fundamentalism can be seen in the characteristics of the followers of the fundamentalist movements. The typical follower of the new fundamentalist movements basically comes from the middle class, which is generally made up of graduates of modern secular education institutions. Such a trend might explain the well-known phenomenon of the fundamentalist take-over of the syndicates representing middle class professionals, e.g., physicians, lawyers, and engineers.

Is spite of the claim made by the Islamists concerning the common identity that binds all Muslims together, fundamentalist movements significantly vary due to the national conditions under which they conduct their struggle. The fundamentalist movement in Syria functions as a sectarian movement which represents the Sunni Muslim community (the largest religious group in Syria) in their endeavor to end the political dominance of the Alawite. The fundamentalist movement of Sudan is essentially a modernizing one that seeks to accelerate the process of modernization in a country long dominated by the traditional sectarian parties of El-Khatmia and El-Ansar. The fundamentalist movement in Egypt is political in that it seeks to empower the people, especially the Middle class, against a rigid regime that does not allow enough room for serious participation. In Tunisia, the fundamentalist movement is more keen on protecting and maintaining certain parts of authentic culture against a modernizing regime that seeks to impose secularism and westernization in a radical way. These variations exemplify both the different worlds of fundamentalism and the essential role of the territorial state, which, in turn, provides the context and the parameters within which these conflicts take place.

As long as scientific and technological progress is the basis of modernization, the process of modernization is unstoppable. The challenge which faces the Middle Eastern societies is how to develop the capacity to handle the continuous social and political changes accompanying modernization. This major challenge can be broken down into three parts: bringing peace and stability to regional politics, economic development, and democratization.

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