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RESTORING THE FAMILY TO CIVIL SOCIETY: LESSONS FROM EGYPT

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Notions of civil society that focus on voluntary associations, interest groups, and a communicative public realm lead to rather bleak prognoses of political autonomy and democratization in the Middle East and in Egypt, which serves as the empirical backdrop for this inquiry.¹ Analysts and activists point to the inability of citizens to choose their leaders, to make government accountable, to articulate and debate ideas in the public sphere, and to associate freely with one another, protected by civil rights. While these accounts are not wrong about endemic authoritarian, entrenched military-security states, and monarchical and exclusionary rule in the region, their narrow understandings of civil society neither do justice to the thriving oppositional trends and submerged counterpublics in the region nor do they capture the primary contours of still-contested struggles for power, rule, and authority.² Here, I will argue that recent innovation in the conceptualization of the civil society, which recognizes the family and informal networks as part of civil society, prodded by feminist and Gramscian perspectives, offers a more inclusive and accurate understanding of political life in Egypt.

Why make an argument about including the family and informal networks in civil society and in the analysis of politics in Egypt? Simply, it is because ethnographic fieldwork reveals the importance of the family and networks in Cairo as they organize and distribute scarce resources, facilitate coordinated actions, and promote public discourse. Adopting a tone of revelatory discovery seems bizarre, since the extent of familial, kin-based solidarity and authority is so obvious to all who have even a

passing familiarity with Egyptian society (even if some might argue that kin solidarity is not as strong as it used to be). My research in Cairo in the mid-1980s and 1990s on the politics of lower-income *sha'bi* communities, or what I have called elsewhere the popular sector, emphasizes the ways in which families are intimately and extensively involved in almost all realms of social, political, moral, and economic life, such as educating children, childrearing, securing employment, negotiating the bureaucracy and the political elite, establishing and maintaining businesses, saving money, promoting morality and status, distributing resources and information, securing credit, organizing migration, policing sexuality, etc. (see Singerman 1995).

The discrepancy between theoretical definitions of civil society and the workings of civil society in Egypt, as I shall argue in this paper, lies at the doorstep of political science and Western political theory, whose definitional categories, overlaid with vestiges of modernization theory and Orientalism, fail to capture and recognize institutions outside the formal realm of political life, such as political parties, legislatures, bureaucracies, law, associations, syndicates, or the military. Thus, informal networks and the family are generally absent from recent debates on civil society, laws of association, poverty, women's rights, economic reform, human rights, enduring authoritarianism, military states, crony capitalism, clientelism, and succession crises. The paradox of this great distance between the family as an analytic category and "political" analysis has a historical and intellectual pedigree that can be explored only tangentially here, but this article will try to make an empirical as well as a theoretical case for reconciliation. After a discussion of theoretical debates on civil society and networks, I will turn to a more empirical investigation of the strength of the family, its legitimating discourse, which I have called the "familial ethos," and informality in both its political and economic dimensions (informal activities are those that are unlicensed, unregulated, and unenumerated by the state). By recognizing the strength of these political institutions, the conclusion can explore the ways in which people and other institutional actors have mobilized and utilized them to engage in collective political life in Egypt.

Notions of civil society that exclude the family have not only distorted the analytic utility of the term, but the character and meaning of political struggles in this region where family means so much. But first,

one caveat: arguing that the family and informal networks are part of civil society does not imply a normative commitment to monarchical forms of kin rule, clan politics, patriarchy, or patrimonialism or an endorsement of the norms and values that the familial ethos promotes—rather, it only implies a recognition of the modalities of power that structure society and the polity. As the feminist movement has demonstrated, understanding and exposing power asymmetries and the way they have been maintained for so long is the first step toward changing them.

RECOGNIZING THE POLITICAL: FAMILY, NETWORKS, AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Recent feminist and postmodern scholarship argues persuasively to include the family within civil society and to acknowledge its political character. On the one hand, feminists criticize the liberal order as patriarchal and politicize the family, women, and domestic life, arguing for their relevance in the public realm. Their theoretical “rehabilitation” of the family recognizes it as a site of power where power is contested, ideals are shaped, and identity is formed. On the other hand, postmodern theorists demonstrate the ways in which power has been naturalized within the family and the domestic realm so that the subordinate role, unpaid labor, and dependent status of women became associated with conscious and unconscious characteristics of the good wife or mother.

There are many reasons why the family has been excluded from pre-dominant understandings of civil society in Western political discourse, and they can be basically understood from two perspectives—liberal and Marxist. At the expense of gross simplification, in the historical tradition of liberal thought, the family is part of the private sphere, the domain of women, children, and the household, where power apparently does not operate and thus relations appear natural. Moreover, as part of the private realm, the family is seen as a domain free from state intervention. Okin contests this position by arguing that the “liberal idea of the non-intervention of the state into the domestic realm, rather than maintaining neutrality, in fact reinforces existing inequalities within that realm” (Okin 1991; see also Brown 1992, 1995). A recent generation of scholars and activists has demonstrated that the “writ of the state” does not run out at the gate to the family home, since personal and family

life is politically regulated by the state (Pateman 1983:297; MacKinnon 1983) and naturalized by dominant ideological constructions (see also Joseph 1993).

It is important to realize that in liberal theory, *public* has had a variety of meanings. It may mean only the state, or the state and the political sphere, or the state, the political and the economic spheres.... And, regardless of how the public was defined, it *never* included women and the domestic or family sphere. Constant through all descriptions of this modern differentiation, from Locke to Habermas, is the notion that women's lives in the family are not marked by the newly emerging priorities of rational, self-conscious individualism, but exemplify, instead, a natural (and subordinate) particularity.... Viewing the changes from this historical perspective, it appears that the public developed not merely in ways that happened to exclude women and family, but that the emergent nature of modern constructions of the public, citizenship, and individuality *depended upon* such exclusion (Bounds 1991:113).

The feminist critique of a naturalized understanding of the family recognized the inequalities and the relationships of power that ordered the domestic realm while pointing out in the historical record how they were treated as though they did not really exist. As Seyla Benhabib has argued, "All struggles against oppression in the modern world begin by redefining what had previously been considered private, non-public, and non-political issues as matters of public concern, as issues of justice, as sites of power" (1992:84). Activists transformed what were considered private matters of the good life (affection, childrearing, the division of labor) "into public issues of justice, by thematizing the asymmetrical power relations on which the sexual division of labor between genders has rested" (Benhabib 1992:92). Other political movements (the peace movement, environmental, and new ethnic-identity movements) have used a similar logic to politicize issues, gain sympathizers, and reshape politics (Benhabib 1992:84).

While early deTocquevillian and Scottish enlightenment notions of civil society had concentrated on finding one's voice, civility, and rights in associational life, Marxists subordinated civil society to the realm of economic and class relations. Within neo-Marxist discourse, the most decisive departure of Gramsci from both Hegel and Marx was the loca-

tion of the family and political culture on the level of civil society (Cohen and Arato 1992:143). For Gramsci, "civil society...comprises families and all private institutions whether religious, cultural, or economic, but also political parties, labor unions, and all forms of organization and resistance of the exploited classes. It is in civil society that the struggle to overcome bourgeois domination must be carried out, through the development of a counter-hegemony of the exploited and dominated classes" (Farsoun and Fort 1992:8).

Writing about Italian society, Gramsci understood that family and the church were institutions of power deeply rooted in everyday life, which weakened the ability of liberalism to achieve hegemony, or rule by consent, and certainly stood in the way of Communists coming to power. For Gramsci the answer was a new culture, available in Marxist theory, which had to be built into practice through various cultural forms, counter institutions, organizations, and associations, on the terrain of civil society (Cohen and Arato 1992:640).

Writing in the Marxist tradition, Gramsci wrestled with the relationship between the economy and the rest of social life. The strict economism of much Marxism held that the economy was the structure and that the state and other social institutions were super structural. For example, in capitalist systems civil society constituted the ideological-cultural relations of bourgeois rule; it had no independent status. Gramsci was innovative in his ability to remain Marxist while going beyond the conceptual apparatus of structure and superstructure. For Gramsci, civil society was not merely a function of economic conditions but had a form and dynamic of its own. Churches, the family, unions, civic associations, and the like could operate outside the imperatives of economic structures and generate alternative ways to organize everyday life. These could be, and often were, captured by a given class that was able to make its interests universal (hegemony), but the possibility existed for them to remain uncaptured. Gramsci disentangles civil society from the economy, then, by establishing an independent but related ontological status for the former in relation to the latter.³

People organize themselves within civil society to advance a particular way of seeing or acting in the world. This strategic dimension can be associated with Gramsci's understanding that the institutions and organizations of civil society are open to be captured by various

political actors. The strategic dimension involves a type of sociocultural politics whereby individuals and groups fashion a common purpose and direct their efforts toward nonstate institutions and organizations with the intention of bending them or reconstituting them to advance given interests. Groups arising within civil society attempt to politicize their counterparts through a nonviolent Gramscian "war of position."

At a less deliberate level, civil society acts as a form of governance by shaping the institutional or so-called epistemic matrix of society. As Foucault and others have noted, societies enact a general politics or regime of truth (1977:130-1). This includes ways of understanding and practices that are so well entrenched through the habits, customs, and ceremonies of all actors that there is a suppositional quality to them. As Foucault puts it, "[I]n any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterize and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse" (1977:93). The multiplicity of human activities in civil society partially generates such a discourse. To be sure, such activities intersect with and are informed by the state and economic enterprises. Nonetheless, they themselves play a role in consolidating and advancing certain understandings and practices that permeate and organize everyday life.

WHITHER THE FAMILY IN MIDDLE EASTERN CIVIL SOCIETY?

It is within the Gramscian view of civil society, affirmed by Foucaultian understandings of nonstate power, that it is possible to understand how the family, networks, and alternative normative visions remain an integral, if controversial, part of Egyptian civil society. The codes of conduct, norms, and values that arise or are articulated within civil society, which will be elaborated upon below, provide many of the rules that shape widespread behavior and expectations. In Foucaultian terms, they constitute the discourse of collective life. Cultural and social networks, anchored in the institution of the family and legitimated by a normative order, organize power at the domestic level into certain configurations, enhancing the autonomy and plurality of civil society (Cohen and Arato 1992:345-6).

This brief summary of Western political discourse on civil society affirms the place of the family and networks in civil society and the normative positions that underlie such a position. Yet there is a rupture between innovative theory and empirical research when the focus turns toward the Middle East. Instead, family, tribe, and informal networks are dismissed as prepolitical forms (Zubaida 1998), vestiges of traditional societies or primordial attachments that will wither away with modernity or socialism, fetters on productive society, the root cause of authoritarian, patriarchal political cultures, the foundational base of clientelism (Roni-ger 1994), particularly within authoritarian regimes or the institutional setting for survival or coping strategies that merely reinforce hierarchy and domination (Bayat 1998, 1997).⁴ This genre of scholarship largely privileges formal, legal organizations or visible, oppositional movements, leaving informal associations almost entirely out of the picture.⁵ As Norton suggests, "civil society [is] a *mélange* of associations, clubs, guilds, syndicates, federations, parties, and groups [that] come together to provide a buffer between state and citizen" (Norton 1995:7). It is the *mélange* of associations, clubs, guilds, syndicates, federations, parties, and groups that have received the scrutiny of analysts of civil society in the Middle East, while few have investigated other types of institutions or strategies that constitute a "buffer" between state and society, such as the family and informal mechanisms (for examples of the latter approach, see Grey 1998; Akman 1998; White 2002; Carapico 1998; Wiktorowicz 2001; Joseph 1993).⁶ Yet buffers do not only take on a formal associational cast.

Halim Barakat suggests the "family is the center of social organization and constitutes the dominant social institution through which persons and groups inherit their religious, class, and cultural affiliations. It also provides security and support in times of individual and societal stress... [and is] the basic unit of production and economic activity" (Barakat 1993:98). What I find so odd about both debates and research on civil society is the way in which family and networks are still ignored or laden with all manner of pejorative condemnation in Egypt and elsewhere in the region. Yet the family is such a powerful social, political, economic, and cultural institution in this part of the world. If anywhere, one would expect that the extremely resilient institution of the family in the Middle East would persuade scholars of its political dimension. One cannot but note that kinship is still the primary foundation of

political rule in Morocco, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the Emirates, Oman, Somalia, etc., and familial politics play a predominant role even within many secular or nationalist regimes such as Egypt, Yemen, Iraq, Iran, Sudan, Syria, Libya, etc. (see Anderson 1991; Herb 1999; Khoury and Kostiner 1990; Carapico 1998). Clearly, politics at the elite level is infused with kin relations, as the rise of Gamal Mubarak in Egypt and Bashar Al-Asad in Syria demonstrate. Why is it, then, that most scholars consistently fail to see the political significance of the family and deny its place within civil society?

Paradoxically, despite a theoretical inability to recognize the family and informal networks as political institutions, a wide range of ideologically diverse opposition movements to colonialism, to imperialism, and more recently, to globalization, American hegemony, Westernization, and American military occupation in the Middle East has placed the family at the center of their oppositional strategies. As Paidar argues in reference to Iran, "[t]he family and women have become the subject of a power struggle in the battle between the Western intervening powers and indigenous resisting forces. In this setting, women have become the bastions of Muslim identity and preservers of cultural authenticity" (1995:23). Nationalist, modernist, and secular regimes and their supporters in the Middle East have sought to transform the institution of the family and gender relations to "develop" their societies, creating the modern new man and woman in the process (see Hatem 1986, 1988). Partha Chatterjee reminds us of the violence and resources in some of these capitalist and modernist initiatives to erase "tradition."

[T]here is the suppression in modern European social theory of an independent narrative of community—the concepts of the individual and the nation-state both become embedded in a new grand narrative—that of capital. And this seeks to repress the narrative of community and produce in the course of its journey both the normalized individual and the modern regimes of disciplinary power. For capital, the destruction of community is paramount (1990:128).

Despite these strategies that were transcribed on the family by many competing and divergent interests, a surprising range of secular voluntary associations, political parties, politicians, interest groups, and state-sponsored associations—typically considered the basis of civil society—still

maintain a fundamental political blind spot by denying the family as a site of power and a space in which politics occur.

THE FAMILY, CIVIL SOCIETY, AND THE ISLAMIST MOVEMENT

In contrast, the Islamist movement (like the Christian right in the United States) has claimed the “family” as its territory and engaged in a Gramscian “war of position” (and a violent frontal attack) in defense of their understanding of the family. They have used familial and informal networks, among other strategies, to build their movement, to mobilize women and men, and to gain financial support. They have politicized (or repoliticized) a wide range of everyday practices and behaviors that encourage their constituents to make political statements, resist the dominant order (at least symbolically) as they dress in a particular manner, educate their children, work or decide not to work, or attend a particular mosque. Issues of everyday life are contested, and these conflicts between a secularist or Islamist vision of the “good life” are “not simply about ‘religion’ or ‘politics,’ but are cultural battles over the very definition of these terms” (Wuthnow 1991:16). Islamists have promoted an oppositional discourse in a less-censored and expanding public sphere that seeks to promote and protect the family, “complementary” gender relations, motherhood, and an Islamic “way of life” as they rail against supposedly corrupt moral influences from abroad, a growing domestic materialist culture, a repressive government, and a legal order that too closely mimics Western legal traditions (see Moussalli 1995; Kandiyoti 1991; and Al-Azmeh 1994).

A politicized Islamic discourse pervades all factions of Egyptian politics today, even as the regime often tries to outdo the Islamist movement by co-opting its symbols and sentiments in a rush to prove its moral and religious credentials (see Abdalla 1993; Langohr 2001). Macroeconomic and social changes during the past decade in Egypt have shaken the foundations of the household, its norms, and its gendered division of labor, and radical Islamist activists have used the increasing economic, social, and moral predicaments of lower-income communities as fodder for their opposition to the Mubarak regime and its allies in the West and the Middle East. Culture, values, norms, religion, and the

structure of the family remain at the center of their counterhegemonic movements. It is in this sense, within this particular historical and economic context, that the family is part of civil society and that civil society remains an important political arena. As Kumar suggests:

[C]ivil society is the sphere of culture in the broadest sense. It is concerned with the manners and mores of society, with the way people live. It is where values and meanings are established, where they are debated, contested and changed. It is the necessary complement to the rule of a class through its ownership of the means of production and its capture of the apparatus of the state. By the same token it is the space that has to be colonized—the famous “war of position”—by any new class seeking to usurp the old (1993:382).

Strategically, the Islamist movement has profited from a more nuanced understanding of deeply-seated modalities of power and the organizational opportunities that family and dense networks provide as they act as the defenders of public virtue and family values while using networks to build their national and transnational movements (see Hamdi 1995). They also have been active and successful in gaining power through formal voluntary associations and corporatist state-sponsored professional syndicates and unions (Al-Sayyid 1993; Wickham 2002). Ceding “the family” to Islamists only reinforces their ability to shape the terms of struggle and frame a range of issues to their advantage.

In order to understand the continued exclusion of the family and networks in the conceptualization of civil society in the Middle East and in Egyptian activists' mobilizational strategies, I find the work of Abdel-Salem Maghraoui very instructive. Maghraoui argues that Egyptian liberal reformers in the 1920s and 1930s envisioned a political community defined in exclusion of the Arab-Islamic characteristics of the people who were supposed to be part of that community (forthcoming 2006). In other words, the construction of the individual Egyptian as a modern citizen implied the compromise of indigenous values and moral priorities (Maghraoui 1991:ix). “The Egyptian liberal's social construction of their own people suggests that the image of the collective good they elaborated for their nation could take shape only by excluding or subordinating the basic traits [and identity] of the individual native” (1991:220). Thus, indigenous tastes, traditions, social institutions, solidarities, cultural

practices, dress, etc., were denigrated and became “projects” to transform. “The behavior of the masses, in the public spaces especially, was frantically perceived as a danger to be controlled if the nascent modern Egyptian nation were to materialize” (1991:170).⁷ If the devaluation of indigenous identity was explained as necessary for nation building, political independence from the colonial power, and modernity by early Egyptian liberals, it is not hard to imagine how everyday practices, traditions, and solidarities have become so politicized if not fodder for oppositional discourses and resistance.

A modernist paradigm demanding a particular construction of the individual—denying the morality, identity, and structure of the family—still reigns to some degree today in Egypt among intellectuals, political elites, and activists alike, articulated and promoted daily in the media, oppositional discourse, and in state ideology. As Ilya Harik notes,

[i]n most Arab countries, traditional solidarities constitute the most common social bonds, whether tribal, ethnic, communal, religious, or kinship-based. Yet Arab intellectuals—the biggest promoters of civil society—generally *loathe* [emphasis added] traditional loyalties and attitudes, and offer a vision with no place for associations based on primordial ties. To these intellectuals, only modern associations with voluntary memberships are acceptable.

Yet, civil society, let us recall, is supposed to act as an intermediary between the individual and national leaders, and in doing so is also supposed to serve as a check on the power that those leaders can wield. Should Arab intellectuals succeed in marginalizing traditional associations, they would harm the cause of democratic transformation by knocking out precisely those groups that are best able to mediate between citizens and their government, and that have the ability to restrain the latter’s power (1994:17).

While generalizing about “Arab intellectuals” and their antipathy toward traditional loyalties and attitudes is problematic, in part because this perspective reinforces the language and dominance of modernization theory, Harik’s analysis partially serves to explain why voluntary associations, NGOs, and parties have not been more successful in invigorating civil society (without denying, of course, the constant repressive measures that the state has directed toward associational life).

In a similar way, Carapico recognizes the ambivalence of intellectuals (and activists, I would add) toward "traditional" social forces.

Cairo's Western-educated intellectuals translate civil society as *al-mujtama' al-madani*, eschewing the alternative *al-mujtama' al-ahli*. *Madani*, meaning civic, civilian, and urban, becomes the antonym of *ahli*, which can also mean civic but further suggests local, private, community, parochial, and primordial. This rendering consciously accommodates cultural-essentialist assumptions about the incapacity of local, indigenous, or religious traditions to enter the civic arena. Social and religious conservatives tend to prefer the translation of *al-mujtama' al-ahli*, defined as the modern sector where a moral economy guarantees social, economic, and political security. But for secular intellectuals what is *ahli* cannot also be *madani* or constitute a component of *al-mujtama' al-madani* (1998:6-7)

Saad Eddin Ibrahim's study of organizations covered by Law 32 of 1964 (which regulates associational life in great deal, enervating civil society in the process) argues that most civil society institutions do not have significant grassroots participation; many serve as social bases for politicians and elites, and others are state created (see also CHRLA 1998). Many private voluntary organizations, he suggests, find "themselves in a vicious circle. The autocracy of the leadership has led to wide-spread apathy among the citizens, which in turn is feeding and justifying the elitist attitude of leaders" (1996:35). Law 32, he argues, "has in effect rendered Egypt's non-governmental organizations as mere extensions of the governmental bureaucracy, but without pay" (1996:21). In the early 1990s, a study found only about forty percent of Egypt's NGOs to be "active and effective" (Ibn Khaldun Center 1993). Yet he demonstrates that Egyptian men and women create informal associations outside the regulatory and supervisory apparatus of the state. In fact, this dimension of civil society is quite vibrant according to a study that estimated that there are *seven* [emphasis added] informal associations for each formal one" (1996:9, 36).

The costs born by the Egyptian state's extensive regulation of associational life is mitigated by the consent of the governed. It is always easier for governments to rule through consent rather than coercion for obvious reasons, and the Egyptian state uses both strategies. It promotes legitimating ideologies that reconcile contradictions, minimize divisions,

and build loyalty and support for the nation. In short, a particular normative order is constructed and reinforced through whatever means may be available: education, the media, religion, participation in the armed forces, etc. Yet, counterpublics also thrive in Egypt.

THE FAMILIAL ETHOS: A COUNTERPUBLIC

An important, widely agreed upon aspect of civil society includes forms of public communication that make free, open, and tolerant discourse possible (Cohen and Arato 1992:ix). According to Habermas, the idea of a public sphere is that of a body of "private persons" assembled to discuss matters of "public concern" or "common interest." These publics aimed to mediate between society and the state [as absolutism came under attack] by holding the state accountable to society via publicity (Fraser 1992:112; see also Calhoun 1992). In Egypt, there is an extremely vibrant alternative counterpublic (others use the term subaltern counterpublic) that I have labeled the "familial ethos," which promotes the "medium of talk," constituting a "theater for debating and deliberating" (Fraser 1992:110). Like marginalized, excluded communities elsewhere, "its practices and ethos are markers of 'distinction' in Bourdieu's sense, supporting alternative norms of speech, of participation, of contestation" (Ely 1992:114).⁸ While the state promotes its own discourse, trying (and not necessarily succeeding) in creating a manageable and docile subject, families and communities attempt to create a climate or environment promoting solidarity, order, and reciprocity. Furthermore, the paternalistic, elitist, classist, sexist, and (in places) racist attitudes of some associational leaders often discourage the participation of women and men from subordinate groups in society, and in Egypt it is generally the upper, middle, and state-based classes that dominate formal associations. As Fatton argues in his discussion of civil society in Africa, "by generally reflecting the lopsided balance of class, ethnic, and sexual powers, the [formal] organizations of civil society tend inevitably to privilege the privileged and marginalize the marginalized" (1995 as quoted in Hirschmann 1998:236; see also Bayart 1986).

The argument here is that the familial ethos goes beyond a "cultural" construct. It is produced within a specific structural and political environment where the legitimacy and authority of the state is

ambivalent and where the freedom to associate is heavily prescribed by legal and illegal means. Anne Norton reminds us that “nothing is outside culture” and that, following Wittgenstein, “meaning...is made in practice” (2004:5). The familial ethos, fashioned by the *sha‘b*, supports channels of arbitration, conflict resolution, economic assistance, and cooperation in the community, and it is made and remade daily. Many of the values and mores it seeks to ensure involve the continued reproduction of the family, which holds such an important place in Egyptian society.

There is a constant debate about morality and propriety, particularly concerning the sexual and moral behavior of women, which orders everyday life and about which people engage in debate and contestation. Discrepancies between theory and practice are common, reflecting typical contradictions and ambiguities in daily life and in the polity. In a similar sense, forces that were responsible for uniting families under certain circumstances divided families in others, and shame, violence, and money are often used as enforcement mechanisms of the familial ethos. Although people may insist publicly that a specific type of behavior is expected from a man or woman at a given point in his or her life, the community actually tolerates a broader spectrum of behavior and action. Yet, transgressing the familial ethos comes with costs, as individuals may not be able to find a spouse, a job, or an apartment or successfully negotiate the bureaucracy because their network of kin, neighbors, or friends does not consider them honorable, mature, or dependable and excludes them from networks.

Competition and conflict often surround the renegotiation of power and position, and fights frequently occur in public, occasionally in the form of theatrical performances to injure, shore up, or improve one's public reputation. A woman will choose the roof of her building to complain about her husband, screaming if he has beaten her. A man will pick a quiet time of the evening to shout from the street to a colleague in his apartment, chastising him for not repaying a loan, communicating to the entire community that the man is dishonorable, which means no one will lend him money again. The ideal of obedient women and children who sit passively as their reputations or resources in the family are threatened is not supported by fieldwork where women, men, and children creatively and vociferously protect their interests—even if they often do

not win their battles. Women will normally demand that their families and respected elders in the community support them in disagreements with their husbands, since it is the collective goal of the family to keep marriages intact and protect the integrity and reputation of the family; after all, it is the family that has typically arranged the marriage, and it is the family that will suffer the economic consequences of divorce, as they will be called upon to support the daughter and her children. Incredible resources from these communities are directed toward reproducing the family or marriage, and one's reputation and networks are critical in not only finding a potential mate but also for securing an apartment, household furnishings, jewelry, appliances, and celebrations that are standard for Egyptian marriages.⁹

People's values, their opinions, anxieties, economic goals, and interests are not expressed solely within the walls of their homes. Repeated by the thousands, these decisions resonate upward throughout the community, the economy, and the nation as a whole and shape an alternative normative order: a counterpublic to other normative discourses within Egypt. Interests that are important to maintaining the family are pursued within the larger community. Issues such as Personal Status Laws, which regulate marriage, inheritance, divorce, and child custody, the social and economic structure of the household, proper sexual relations between men and women, crime, domestic violence, the standard of living, employment opportunities or the lack thereof, childrearing practices, changes in civil codes to reflect more Islamic legal norms, the importance of motherhood, religious education, working women, and the modesty of women fill the airwaves, television, pages of government, opposition, Islamic newspapers and magazines, and official government reports and studies by domestic and international organizations. A consensus about the relationship between private, public, and governmental spheres has not been established in Egypt, and basic questions about representation, the source of governmental authority (God, the President, Parliament, an independent judiciary, the military, or Constitutional rule) and individual and collective rights remain. Certainly, different interests in society have greater resources at their disposal to promote their viewpoints—including the state, its large government bureaucracy, and the media—but as communities maintain and protect their vision of a good society, they debate and negotiate over the future direction of the country.

I do not mean to essentialize the familial ethos as a static, monolithic set of preferences for all people under all circumstances. Rather, it represents an ideal around which local and national disputes are contested and contextualized. Men and women are, as Wolin would say, "laying down basic and general principles, which, when legitimated, become the presuppositions of practices, the ethos of practitioners" (1981:402-3). When the sha'b promote the familial ethos, they are engaging in theoretical founding and demonstrating the superiority, legitimacy, and merit of their set of constitutive principles.

NORMS, LAW, AND AN ISLAMIST ENCOUNTER

Another way of understanding the familial ethos in Egypt and its relationship to civil society is to consider the notion of legal pluralism, or "a situation in which two or more legal systems coexist in the same social field," where a legal system is defined as the system of courts and judges supported by the state *as well as non-legal forms of normative ordering* (emphasis added) (Merry 1988:870; see also Santos 1985). Problematizing Egyptian law by acknowledging the familial ethos and suggesting there are plural notions of ordering and ways of determining truth and justice, which can exist in dialectical interaction, challenges simple notions of the Egyptian state's legitimacy, capabilities, and authority.

A glaring example of legal pluralism in Egypt that the state saw as a direct challenge to their authority and sovereignty was the attempt by the Islamic Group and other Islamic activists in the Imbaba (a very densely populated, largely informal housing area in the greater metropolitan region of Cairo, located just across the Nile in Giza province) during the early 1990s to spread not only their religious message and political positions, but enforce particular norms, rules, and codes of behavior on residents of Imbaba neighborhood, even if they did not support them (see Haenni 2005). Islamists had been engaged in conflict resolution in these neighborhoods for years, organizing and strengthening their movement. They also had been promoting their religious vision of propriety, morality, and justice through various educational, religious, and provisionary activities. At the same time, they used coercion against members of the community who refused to obey their edicts, as video shops were burned, Christian merchants were forced to pay protection money (legitimated

according to Islamic law as the *juz'iyya* or a tax that Christians and Jews pay in lieu of military service), unveiled women were harassed and attacked, and "immoral" marriage celebrations where dancing and alcohol consumption took place were broken up (Omar 1992; Hafez 1992). This normative order and the growth and increasing brazenness of this movement led to the "siege" of Imbaba in December 1992 as the government used 12,000 to 16,000 troops drawn from various security branches to "pacify" the area (Denis 1994; Singerman 1998; Salem 1992).

The familial ethos, however, does not by definition or necessarily pose a challenge to the state, since its tenets may or may not reinforce programmatic initiatives of the state. Certainly, at times the state itself embraces the familial ethos by appropriating the notion of "honor" and tradition to promote nationalism and Egyptian identity. Like any discourse, the familial ethos operates within a complex and shifting environment but, most simply, it is important to recognize this normative order and the institutions and mechanisms the *sha'bi* use to sustain and promote it.

INFORMAL NETWORKS

In the politics of everyday life among Egypt's popular sector, women and men are deeply involved in forging collective institutions that serve common public and private needs. Through the vehicle of informal political institutions, women and men both create public space and invade what is conventionally identified as the public arena as they connect individuals and communities to state bureaucracies, public institutions, and formal political institutions. They organize informal networks that weave in and out of the bureaucracy, the offices of politicians, religious institutions, private charitable and voluntary associations, workplaces, households, markets, schools, health clinics, the extended family, and the neighborhood in order to fulfill individual and collective needs. Informal activities, whether economic or political, are those that escape licensing, regulation, and even enumeration by the state and thus have an illegal or quasi-legal status.¹⁰ By nature of their informality, they lie outside the direct supervision and regulation of the laws regulating formal associations in Egypt.¹¹ Yet, at the same time, they are not immune to the state, since it may use bulldozers to destroy "illegal" informal housing settlements or

arrest, imprison, and torture members of informal organizations.

These networks are pervasive, flexible, and efficient. The range of classes, occupations, age cohorts, and kin groups represented in specific networks is wide, since incorporating people with different characteristics, high and low status, and a variety of resources and contacts into the network increases their effectiveness. Informal networks, though directed toward instrumental purposes such as obtaining food, employment, or saving money, can also be directed toward furthering communal "public" interests such as order and propriety. They fill a political need in the community by representing and furthering the interests of the *sha'b*, who have little direct influence over the formal political system after decades of exclusionary rule. Kin-based networks, a central feature of these networks more generally, are not anachronistic remnants from an era when dynastic rule was the predominant system of government; rather, they are a continuing positive resource that binds individuals and protects them from external interference or unanticipated political and economic change (see Joseph 1983). Informal networks connect kin to people they do not know, to members of "out-groups" as well as the "in-group," and social and political inequalities can be maintained through informal networks. Networks become stronger as they become denser as more and different types of occupational groups, resources, people, and information are incorporated within the network. In this sense, they embody social capital or "features of social organization...that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions" (Putnam 1993:167). In fact, Egyptian society is awash in social capital. Yet any narrative that celebrates "social capital" in Egypt is problematic if it minimizes the state's role in constricting and limiting formal, legal politics to certain realms. In Egypt, while it may be tempting to explain the prevalence and importance of informal networks, norms, and trust as a cultural issue, it is clearly a consequence of a historical legacy of intentional political exclusion by the state, which benefits some of its citizens and harms others. It is not history that "smoothes some paths and closes off others" (an argument of path dependence) or "the ancient culture of mistrust" (a political culture argument) but the state and its attendant policies of political exclusion that encourage the formation and maintenance of social capital (Putnam 1993:180, 146). Again, while Egypt remains an authoritarian political system with a façade of democratiza-

tion, it is the structural context of formal, legal politics that can explain, in part, the considerable individual and collective efforts that women and men invest to create informal political institutions centered in the family and informal networks to achieve their goals and objectives.

CONCLUSION: INFORMAL NETWORKS, MORES, AND CIVIL SOCIETY

The creation of a public sphere comes about through the creation of a wider sphere of social networks. A private matter is one where another person's actions don't matter. The public is a generalized self in the form of the other. Its existence presupposes shared moral standards and a sense of moral community (Barrington Moore, Jr. 1984:27 as quoted in Chmielewski 1991:271).

The familial ethos, a moral code and sense of propriety, is spread and maintained through an invisible organizational grid of informal networks in Egypt. In this manner, a wider public sphere is created. As was mentioned earlier, this public sphere provides a domain of autonomy, or in Norton's words, a "buffer" between citizens and the state (1995:7). It may provide a refuge from arbitrary power, though individuals may also suffer from the modalities of power within this sphere.¹²

These networks form what Havel has called a parallel *polis*, or informal, nonbureaucratic, dynamic, and open communities, which in Czechoslovakia exposed the weakness of the state and upset the power structure. He asked, in musing about the future of his country, is the parallel polis "not a kind of rudimentary prefiguration, a symbolic model of those more meaningful 'post-democratic' political structures that might become the foundation of a better society?" (1985:95).

Another observer of civil society notes that civil society serves to accommodate "differences of interest and sensibilities. It ties disconnected people together within communities of mutual responsibility, which are expressed in mutual connections of trust, consideration and embarrassment" (Bryant 1995:147). Informal networks, bound by the familial ethos, are built on trust, solidarity, and mutual exchange and cooperation (see Putnam 1993; Coleman 1988; Foley and Edwards 1996; and Warr 1998 for a discussion of social capital and its relationship to civic engage-

ment). Thus, in the Egyptian context and elsewhere, it is through informal networks in civil society that civility is produced and reproduced.

What makes the horizontal interactions associated with a limited government and a market economy "civil," according to the liberal account, is that the intrasocietal norms or codes of conduct that arise assume a cordial character. This notion stems from the Scottish Enlightenment idea that manners, education, and the experience of so-called "civilization" encourage people to treat each other with a certain degree of decency and tolerance. It recognizes that people have certain sensibilities and that these can be harnessed both for the good of society and preserved for individual enrichment through widespread mutual respect. While originally depicting the gentility of the *literati*, civility has become associated potentially with all types of sustained social interaction—economic, social, and cultural (Bryant 1995). When people associate with each other in a sustained manner, it is as if they are cultivating manners, undergoing a type of education, and exposing themselves to elements of civilization. As such, they develop an implicit sense of social trust and mutual regard that binds them into a type of "society" (Perez-Diaz 1995:82). Civility is the interiority of this society. It is the collective mind set that can emerge when people are free to associate for common purposes.

From a more contemporary perspective, particularly in debates about democratization and civil society, "civility implies tolerance, the willingness of individuals to accept disparate political views and social attitudes; to accept the profoundly important idea that there is no right answer" (Norton 1995:11). While Norton argues that civility is a missing quality in large parts of the Middle East, I would argue that informal networks promote civility, supported by norms of trust, mutual exchange, and reciprocity (Norton 1995:12). Civility in political society and the state is glaringly deficient in many Middle Eastern nations, but within civil society, civility survives and, at times, this moral order may serve as an implicit or explicit critique of the regime, particularly if new political opportunities arise (see Tarrow 1994).

In Egypt, a range of institutions and associations are deeply engaged in battles for hegemony. While the Egyptian state may be dominant, it is not at all hegemonic. Violent opposition from Islamists, international and domestic economic pressures stemming from globalization and

structural adjustment and the occupation of Iraq, an increasingly organized opposition movement, and cultural and moral critiques present challenges to the state and its legitimacy. Yet because the state and civil society are mutually constitutive of each other, though they may be analytically distinct, we cannot expect a strong civil society from a troubled state. Civil society cannot “go it alone,” and no state can survive for long if wholly alienated from civil society (Walzer 1991:301). Langohr has suggested a similar point in her bleak prognosis of democratization, when she argues there has been too much civil society in Egypt but not enough politics. Political parties remain weak and fail to mobilize broad swaths of society. The single-issue focus of civil society organizations, their lack of internal democracy, links to foreign funding, and nonrepresentative nature impede their growth and render them ineffectual (see Langohr 2005).

In order to understand the changing modalities of power in Egypt and throughout the Middle East, we must at least broaden our conceptualization of civil society to incorporate the family, informal networks, and counterpublics. In Iraq, religious, regional, and kin-based tribal groups have risen quickly and provocatively to fill the vacuum left by the demise of the Ba’thist state and its military forces. Foreign and domestic fighters continue to resist US occupation forces provocatively and violently with great cost to the civilian population and Iraqi and US troops. How were these forces organized so well that they can continue to launch attacks and win many supporters at the same time? We have been told by many scholars and activists that Saddam Hussein’s Ba’thist state obliterated nonparty solidarities, but that seems not to have been the case. While we see modest inroads of parliamentary elections, the energy of Lebanon’s Cedar Revolution in 2005, or the very recent presidential elections in Egypt, where Hosni Mubarak finally allowed competitors to enter the election (but did not allow the organizational, media, legal, or financial resources for them to succeed), we still see the resilient power of familial institutions and networks throughout the region.

The complex web of associability sits at the heart of the still-strong Islamic movement and is fundamental to understanding them. Networks are not only the most viable means of building movements of any political stripe within the current political environment, but they also are key transmission belts of collective identity, drawing the ideas, sensibilities, and reflexivity of people together while crisscrossing social, economic,

and political hierarchies. Finally, this analysis is not meant to celebrate this phenomenon but to understand it analytically and to explore its meaning.

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NOTES

1. See the overview of analyses on civil society in Schwedler 1995 and individual country assessments in Norton 1995, 1996.

2. Contemporary debates on civil society echo a historical narrative that used the "lack" of civil society in the Middle East to justify imperialism, colonialism, socialism, and capitalism. It was the supposed social absence in Islamic society of independent cities, an autonomous bourgeois class, rational bureaucracy, legal reliability, personal property, and that cluster of rights embodying bourgeois culture that created the conditions for Oriental Despotism in which the individual was permanently exposed to the arbitrary rule of the despot (see Turner 1978, 1984; Springborg 1992; Singerman 1997; Hourani 1970; Mardin 1995; and Lapidus 1967, 1970). The ways in which imperial and colonial institutions distorted or destroyed indigenous social and political structures and institutions received less attention in accounts of Oriental Despotism and Islamic society in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries, thus allowing colonial and imperial elites to argue that indigenous forces weren't really "ready" for self-rule.

3. I am indebted to Paul Wapner for his insights and scholarship on civil society; see Wapner 1995, 1996, 2000.

4. For illuminating treatments of the place of tribes in civil society, see Gray 1998 and Carapico 1998.

5. Although Jillian Schwedler notes that the modern liberal view of civil society includes the family and refers to Cohen and Arato's definition in *Toward Civil Society in the Middle East? A Primer* (1995), few of the scholars who wrote for the Civil Society Project operationalize this conceptualization. Exceptions include Brand (1995) and Hick and al-Najjar (1995), although they both examine the family primarily as an elite institution.

6. Norton's analysis reveals a familiar tension in research on the family and civil society. On the one hand, the family is appreciated as a possible base for political action, but on the other hand, the use of the language of modernization theory to characterize the family, clan, and sect as "socially divisive" encourages scholars either to exclude these institutions from civil society or portray them as a dangerous, problematic part of civil society (1995:6).

7. Maghraoui argues that this basic denial of indigenous identity and traits was maintained by both liberal Egyptian elites before the Free Officers Revolution in 1952 and the new cadres of the Nasser regime after they came to power as they argued for scientific socialism, development, and a modernist project (1991; see also Ghannam 2002 for an explanation of how President Sadat's vision of modernity legitimated his land grab of a valuable strip along the Nile in Bulaq in order to build luxury hotels and government buildings, necessitating the removal of the area's residents to distant public sector housing in the late 1970s.)

8. As Ely argues, the public sphere was always constituted by conflict and comprised of counter publics. Among the many historical and contemporary examples of subaltern counterpublics are Cornel West's discussion of segregated African American communities, particularly the supporting role of women and family in those communities (1993:15; 1993a:195).

9. A recent study based on national data found that marriage costs were a formidable challenge to Egyptian families, averaging LE 20,194 (US \$5,957 in the mid-1990s). Total marriage costs were *four and a half times* higher than GNP per capita. The average cost of marriage nationally was *eleven times* annual household expenditure per capita, and the average cost of marriage for rural households living under the poverty line was *fifteen times* annual household expenditure per capita (Singerman and Ibrahim 2001).

10. The word "informal" is borrowed from conceptions of the informal economy. This term came into vogue in the 1970s to describe and analyze activities that were not enumerated, regulated, licensed, or recognized by the state (Hart 1973; Rakowski 1994; for definitional debates on informality in Egypt see Singerman 1995; Kharoufi 1991; Rizk 1991; Sabel 1996; Abdel-Fadil 1980; de Soto 1989; Rakowski 1994; and Assaad, Razzaz and Zhou 1997). Others have argued that the informal economy is not only a "specific form of relations of production," but may refer to the status of labor, the conditions of work, and the form of management of some firms (Castells and Portes 1989:12-3). While the very notion of informality is contested and debated for a variety of reasons, I use this term to recognize that there are a range of political activities that are unenumerated, unregulated, unlicensed and unrecognized by the state. While some scholars may deny that these activities are in fact political (Bayat 1997:5-7, 1998; Zubaida 1998), the behavior of the state, its elite, and its various bureaucratic agencies suggest otherwise, as they often seek to limit and constrain many of these activities or at least regulate, supervise, or co-opt them (see further discussion below).

11. Although it is beyond the bounds of this paper, there is a symbiotic relationship between informal networks and informal economic activities. In other words, in my fieldwork in central Cairo in the mid-1980s, approximately sixty-two

percent of its economically active population was engaged in informal sector activities in at least one of their primary, secondary, or tertiary economic activities (see Singerman 1995:173-204). A third of the community relied upon informal employment in their primary means of earning a livelihood, and almost ninety percent of all secondary sources of income were informal. Furthermore, the family itself served an important economic role in sha'bi communities, as forty-eight percent of all informal sources of income were derived from family enterprises as a primary economic activity and nineteen percent as a secondary economic activity. (The economic logic of family enterprises is not based purely on market principles, but on motives to strengthen and enrich the family as well as individuals within it. They also provide a more socially acceptable option for employment for women, who, without an uncle or brother in their place of work, might be forbidden to hold a job.) These data are supported by other studies from the same period suggesting that the informal sector accounted for forty-three percent of all private non-agricultural employment in 1986 in Egypt (Handoussa 1991:17). The size of the informal economy has not abated, and Vignal and Denis found that the informal sector houses, at present, more than half of Cairo's residents, has satisfied eighty percent of the housing needs for the last twenty years, and still accounts for forty percent of the nonagricultural jobs (forthcoming 2006; see also Denis and Séjourné 2002).

12. For example, patriarchal models infuse family structures, although ideal notions of patriarchy are countered not only by the participation of women in informal networks and negotiation within the household but larger demographic trends suggesting that age and gender hierarchies are decreasing with the advent of increased female education, female participation in the labor force, and a generally more educated and skilled youthful population (see Fargues 1994:157; Inhorn 1996; and Rassam 1983:122-38).

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