brother/sister relationships: connectivity, love, and power in the reproduction of patriarchy in Lebanon

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The Yusifs’ were a working-class family living in the urban neighborhood of Camp Trad, Borj Hammoud, a part of the Greater Beirut area of Lebanon. Abu Hanna, the Lebanese Maronite father, was a man who, even on the rare occasions when he was angry, spoke with the soft slow lull of someone who had just awoken from a deep sleep. Um Hanna, the mother and a Palestinian Catholic, graced an abundant figure and a shy yet welcoming smile. A caring family with five boys and two girls, the Yusifs were respected as peace-loving, honorable folks by their neighbors. I lived next door to the Yusifs from 1971 to 1973 and came to know them well over the course of a decade. When I first met them, I sensed a harmony. There never seemed to be a raised voice. I developed close relationships with all the members of the family, taking on the role of sister with the parents and aunt with the younger children.

I was particularly close to the oldest son, Hanna. With soft wavy brown hair and roguish brown eyes that seemed always poised to make an assertion, Hanna, at 19, was seen as a highly attractive marriage choice. Very conscious of his grooming and masculine self-presentation, he ritually combed his hair with a comb kept in his back pocket. His medium build and height seemed to expand as he walked with firm yet graceful movements that appeared thought-out. There were few college students in this street, and Hanna was already in the 11th grade in 1972. A politically active bridge-builder with friends across ethnic and religious groups, Hanna was viewed as peace-loving and conscientious.

I was shocked, therefore, one sunny afternoon to hear Hanna shouting at his sister Flaur and slapping her across her face. Flaur, at 12, was the oldest daughter and the third oldest child. She seemed to have an opinion on most things, was never shy to speak her mind, and welcomed guests with boisterous laughter and dancing light brown eyes that invited visitors to wonder what she was up to. With a lively sense of humor and good-natured mischief about her, neighbors thought of her as a live wire, despite the fact that she did not conform to Lebanese ideals of feminine beauty.

The Arab brother/sister relationship has been overlooked, romanticized, or seen as an extension of the patriarchal father/daughter relationship. The central role of the brother/sister relationship in the reproduction of Arab patriarchy, as a result, has been missed, misconstrued, or underestimated. This article argues that Arab brothers and sisters in Borj Hammoud, Lebanon, developed connective relationships based on love and nurturance, while paradoxically also based on power and violence. These dynamics were manifested psychodynamically, socially structurally, and culturally. Connectivity, love, and power underwrote the central role played by the brother/sister relationship in the reproduction of Arab patriarchy. [family culture, psychodynamics and social structure, gender, urban working class, Lebanon]

Hanna played father to Flaur, even though she helped care for the younger siblings who looked to her for mothering. Hanna repeatedly instructed Flaur to comb her hair, dress attractively, and carry herself with grace. In a local culture in which self-grooming occupied young women, Flaur seemed to pay no attention to her clothing, hair, body, or comportment. Her curls fluttered around her face, her clothes were often wrinkled and worn, and hugging her you could feel a few pre-adolescent rolls adorning her hips and waist. This irritated Hanna considerably. His ire at her peaked, though, whenever he caught her lingering on the street corner near their apartment building gossiping with other girls. He would forcefully escort her upstairs to their apartment, slap her, and demand that she behave with dignity. No doubt the charge in their relationship came in part because Flaur was entering puberty as Hanna was reaching manhood.

Perhaps because of my special relationship with the family, I was stunned at Hanna's behavior. Flaur sometimes ran crying into my apartment. A few times I heard Flaur screaming, and I ran across the hall. Um Hanna watched. No one, myself included, questioned my right to intervene. Hanna took it as his right and responsibility to mold and discipline his sister. Neither Um Hanna nor Flaur appeared to appeal to Abu Hanna about Hanna's behavior. Flaur's 17-year-old brother, Farid, might have protected her, but he deferred to Hanna. Family members, including Flaur, agreed that Hanna was acting within his brotherly role.

Hanna regarded me as an older sister, consulting me on personal, social, and political matters. I had accepted that role and so felt comfortable speaking to him about his behavior. When we talked, he said he knew what the world was like and she did not. It was his brotherly responsibility to train Flaur to be a lady. I suggested he might teach rather than beat her. He responded, with a smile in his eyes, that Flaur could not understand words and he did not hurt her. With authority, he added, he did it "minshanha, minshan mistakbilha" ("for her, for her future").

When I discussed Hanna's behavior with Um Hanna, she found the matter amusing. I was surprised. She claimed that Hanna was doing his brotherly duty. She continued that Hanna cared deeply about Flaur. Besides, she added, Flaur provoked Hanna and brought his violence upon herself. Maybe, she chuckled, Flaur even liked it.

Flaur, for her part, seemed not unmindful of her own power over Hanna. While she admired her brother, she teased him about his constant grooming or the romantic interests of neighborhood women in him. She was aware that her behavior would provoke Hanna. There was a willful element to her behavior that I thought was either an attempt to assert her own identity or to involve her brother intimately in her life.

On one occasion when Um Hanna, Flaur, and I were discussing Hanna's behavior, Um Hanna repeated, in Flaur's presence, that Flaur invited and enjoyed Hanna's aggression. With a mischievous smile in her eyes, Flaur laughed and agreed. She added, with bravado, "It doesn't even hurt when Hanna hits me." On another occasion, she indicated that she would like a husband like Hanna.

When I returned to Camp Trad in 1978 during the Civil War, I stayed for a couple of days with the Yusifs. Flaur was married and had a one-year-old baby. While taller, more voluptuous, and womanly, she still seemed a bit disheveled. Her husband was quiet, thin, and pale to the point of seeming unhealthy. Um Hanna asked me what I thought of Flaur's husband. I responded that I thought he was 'akil (well-mannered). Um Hanna continued that, prior to her marriage, Flaur had lost weight and had become quite pretty. In the pocket-size wedding picture she showed me, Flaur did look beautiful and like a perfect size eight. She had had a number of suitors, Um Hanna, went on, and could have gotten a better looking man. She asserted, "Win Hanna wa win ħada" ("Where is Hanna and where is this one")—implying that the best match for Flaur would have been someone like Hanna.
The relationship between Hanna and Flaur is a prime example of the connective love/power dynamic between brothers and sisters in these Arab families. That dynamic was critical to Hanna’s empowerment and masculinization and Flaur’s domestication and feminization. Hanna was teaching Flaur to accept male power in the name of love. His family supported his learning that loving his sister meant taking charge of her and that he could discipline her if his action was understood to be in her interest. Flaur was reinforced in learning that the love of a male could include that male’s violent control and that to receive this love involved submission to control. She was learning that her brother was a loving protector and controlling power in her life.

Hanna was additionally teaching Flaur how to present her feminine sexuality. She was learning to become a sexual person for her brother. Given Abu Hanna’s absence and the interest that Hanna took in her, her brother was the most involved male sexual figure during her puberty. By feminizing Flaur, Hanna was masculinizing himself. Hanna also was using his culturally acceptable control over his sister to challenge his father’s authority in the family. By taking charge of his sister, with blessings of his mother and siblings, he highlighted his father’s failures as head of the household. Hanna was learning to become a patriarch by becoming the man of the house in relation to his sister, mother, and younger siblings. Hanna and Flaur’s relationship socialized each into the links between gender, sexuality, love, and power. Their mutual dependency was underwritten by patriarchal connectivity inscribed as love. Their relationship reveals psychodynamic, social structural, and cultural processes through which the brother/sister relationship contributes to the reproduction of Arab patriarchy—a role that scholars of the Arab world have yet to unravel.

**brother/sister relationships: the Arab context**

While brother/sister relationships have received anthropological attention in the literature on a number of societies, relatively little of the work on Arab societies has considered the centrality of brother/sister relationships to the reproduction of family life and patriarchy. This lacuna comes in part from the relative lack of studies problematizing the internal dynamics of Arab family life. With the “Arab family” becoming increasingly the center of controversy in the literature and popular culture of the Middle East, new efforts have been made to more closely scrutinize familial issues on both Arab and national bases. Most of the research on family in the Arab world, stressing the cultural ideals of patriarchy, patrilineality, patrilocality, and patrilineal endogamy, has focused on relationships among males, however. Scholars have paid less attention to brother/sister or other key male/female relationships. Research on Lebanon also offers insights into family life but does not address the brother/sister relationship in detail.

The little work that does exist on brother/sister relationships in the Arab World tends to regard it as either romantic or patriarchal, focusing respectively on “love” or “power.” Scholars who focus on “love” aspects of the relationship are often attuned to psychodynamics but usually do not link them with social structural and cultural process. Scholars identifying the “power” aspects of the relationship tend to be interested not in brother/sister relationships per se but in family structure and culture. These scholars often neglect psychodynamics or inadequately connect them to social structural and cultural processes. Few studies effectively link psychodynamic, social structural, and cultural processes. Most, therefore, do not recognize the connectivity that charges the love/power dynamics underpinning the central role played by the brother/sister relationship in the reproduction of Arab patriarchy.

**the romantic view** In a functionalist vein, the romantic view represents the brother/sister relationship as a kind of safety valve—a relationship of love and mutuality in a presumed cold and authoritarian family system. The approach differentiates the brother/sister relationship from the father/daughter and other familial relationships as the only safe cross-gender relationship
in otherwise relatively gender-segregated societies. Given patrilineal endogamy and a family culture in which a woman continues to belong to her natal kin group and her male kin continue to be responsible for her throughout her life, the romantic view valorizes the link to a brother as the woman’s lifeline.

One of the best representatives of this romantic view of brother/sister relationships is folklorist Hassan El-Shamy. El-Shamy (1979) contends that the brother/sister relationship and its derivative, the ego/maternal uncle relationship, are characterized by a mutual loving not found in other family relationships. All other family relationships (parent/child, spouse/brother/brother, sister/sister, ego/paternal uncle, brother/sister’s husband, sister/brother’s wife), he claims, are organized around hostility. He asserts (1981:319) that there are incestuous tendencies underlying the Arab brother/sister relationship, which are unrecognized and untreated in the Arabic psychiatric literature. Basing his analysis on variations of a folktale found in most Arab countries (1979), analysis of selected Egyptian fiction (1976), and a review of some Arab psychiatric literature (1981), he posits a “Brother-Sister Syndrome.” This syndrome, is “responsible for the development of a distinctive culture and personality pattern characteristic of the Arab, which transcends religious, regional, and social class differences” and “plays a decisive role in the formation, development, and maintenance of family structure and all other related organizations” (El-Shamy 1979:1). El-Shamy, while recognizing significant psychodynamics of the brother/sister relationship, sees little of the hierarchy and so does not link the relationship to Arab patriarchy.

El-Shamy is not alone in casting the cross-sibling relationship in romantic terms, however. Hilma Granqvist, in her classic early studies of Palestinian peasants, contends that for the Palestinian fellahin (peasants) of the 1930s the love between sisters and brothers was “more beautiful than the love between wife and husband, because not founded on passion” (1935:II:254). Granqvist notes that when a woman married, her brother offered himself as her “camel” to carry her burdens (1935:II:252). The brother was more responsible for a woman than her husband. “The husband is only a garment which a woman puts on or throws off again, or she herself can be ‘thrown off’ by her husband, but the brother is the one, who is always there” (Granqvist 1935:II:253). If a married woman committed a shameful act, the father or brother, not the husband, was responsible (1935:II:253). The man’s responsibility for his sister had eternal consequences, according to one of Granqvist’s informants who asserted: “This is my sister. To-morrow in eternity [i.e., at the Judgment Day] she will make me responsible, but not my children and my wife” (1935:II:254). Although the power between brothers and sisters seems apparent here, Granqvist makes little of it, focusing on the implied love.

Michael Meeker (1976:388) offers an intriguing comparison of Turkish and Arab brother/sister and husband/wife relationships. He contends that among Arabs the disgrace of a woman must be responded to by “those who ‘love,’ ” while among the Turks it must be responded to by “those who ‘control.’ ” Given that among both the Arabs and the Turks, the brother/sister relationship is one of love and the husband/wife relationship is one of control, then among the Arabs the brother must respond to a sister’s disgrace, whereas among the Turks it is the husband. Meeker, however, does not discuss the connection between love and responsibility. The brother’s responsibility of response invests him in controlling the sister’s behavior so that he would not have to respond. Responsibility translates into power; love and power become intertwined.

The romantic view of the brother/sister relationship is at times reproduced by scholars in the important attempt to represent Arab persons by respecting their voices. In a portrayal of Egyptian feminist Huda Sha’rawi, Leila Ahmed comments that Sha’rawi’s love for her brother was the deepest and most intense of her life. Ahmed quotes Sha’rawi as asserting that when her brother died in her late 30s, “‘all my hopes died;’ and but for a sense of duty toward her children, ’I would not have survived him by an instant’ ” (Ahmed 1989:161). Offering significant insights
into her life, Ahmed views Sha’rawi’s relationship with her brother through Sha’rawi’s lens of love, even in transactions that also could be interpreted as displays of power. For example, after a period of estrangement, Sha’rawi separated from her husband. According to Sha’rawi’s report, her brother refused to proceed with his own marriage until she returned to her husband. Ahmed observes, “Not wanting to stand in the way of her brother’s happiness, she agreed to a reconciliation” (1989:172). One could read love/power dynamics here also—the brother using his happiness to control his sister.

the patriarchal view  Most of the literature on the honor/shame complex focuses on social structural and cultural rather than psychodynamic processes. The scholars interested in psychodynamic aspects of honor/shame rarely apply their analyses systematically to brother/sister relationships and tend to focus on non-Arab Mediterranean societies (Gilmore 1987). Scholars who recognize the hierarchy in the brother/sister relationship tend to be interested in the social structure and culture of the Arab family rather than in psychodynamics or the brother/sister relationship per se.

In this patriarchal view, the brother/sister relationship, as an extension of the father/daughter relationship, is an instrument of the honor/shame complex thought by many scholars to predominate in Mediterranean family culture. Women, through their modesty, are supposed to uphold family honor. Should they bring shame onto the family, their closest male patrilineal relatives must restore family honor by disciplining them or the other culprits involved. Usually the task belongs to fathers or brothers, but also might be undertaken by paternal uncles or male cousins.

Most scholars tend not to discriminate conditions under which one or another of the patrilineal males responds. We might wonder whether Arabs differentiate. For example, a Jordanian adage appears to gloss male patrilineal relatives: “‘Deficiency harks back to [patrilineal] origins’ but ‘the mare belongs to the rider [husband]’” (Antoun 1968:692). Yet assertions specifying responsibility can also be found. Alois Musil notes that for the Rwala Bedouins:

The person whom the married woman can most inconvenience is her own brother; hence the proverb: “the brother of a married woman is far removed from any good done by her, but very close to any evil she may be guilty of.” [Musil 1928:494]

In this view, the father and brother are also responsible for the protection and well-being of the daughter/sister. The father/brother are entrusted with control and protection of the daughter/sister throughout their lives. The brother, then, as a representative of the patrilineal line, exerts patriarchal authority to protect and control the sister in order to maintain family honor. Recognizing the power brothers exert over sisters, scholars adopting this view link the brother/sister relationship with the reproduction of patriarchy. But they tend not to differentiate it from a woman’s relationship with her father or her close patrilineal relatives, thereby missing the complexity of the love/power dynamics between brothers and sisters.

Privileging social structural and cultural processes and conflating brother/sister relationships with others patrilineally distorts the brother/sister relationship. We must unravel the historically and culturally specific dynamics and analyze the co-determinancy of psychodynamic, social structural, and cultural processes.

connectivity, love, and power in the reproduction of patriarchy in Lebanon: psychodynamic, social structural, and cultural processes

It would be an easy error to assume that if one privileges psychodynamic events in brother/sister relationships, their mutual love is foregrounded and that if one privileges social structural and cultural events, their disparate power is foregrounded. I argue that the patriarchal connectivity of brothers and sisters in love/nurturance and power/violence dynamics was
expressed psychodynamically, social structurally, and culturally. It was the interlinking of connectivity, love, and power, throughout, that gave the brother/sister relationship its centrality in the reproduction of Arab patriarchy.

Classical Middle Eastern patriarchy is probably best understood in terms of those pastoral societies in which kinship was coterminous with society and was the key force in organizing politics, economics, religion, and other social processes. The dominance of male elders over kin groups translated into dominance over society. The emergence of state structures transformed classical patriarchy, as state leaders competed with kinship leaders for control over individuals and groups—often by coopting kin structures, kin morality, and kin idioms into the state, leading to state patriarchal forms. In many contemporary Middle Eastern societies, kin groups continue to offer effective resistance to state control over their membership. Contemporary patriarchy in the Arab Middle East, therefore, takes many forms. Minimally, then, I will use patriarchy here to mean the dominance of males over females and elders over juniors (males and females) and the mobilization of kinship structures, morality, and idioms to institutionalize and legitimate these forms of power. By power, I mean the capacity to direct the behavior of others, even against their will.

Contemporary Arab patriarchy takes many forms leading to variability in brother/sister relationships based on state, class, religion, ethnic, rural/urban, and other differences. I have chosen, nevertheless, to refer to the phenomenon I am analyzing as “Arab” because of the national, ethnic, and religious heterogeneity of the population of Camp Trad (see below). In using the term “Arab” to refer to the patterns described here, I am signalling the recent origins of the residents of the neighborhood and their heterogeneity. Camp Trad was mostly working class and was, therefore, relatively homogeneous in class terms. As the material below indicates, however, I observed many of the same patterns in other social classes in Lebanon. The national, ethnic, and religious mixture of families, their relative recency in Lebanon and/or Camp Trad, and the observations of similar patterns in other social classes in Lebanon would suggest that the general patterns described were not unique to this urban situation. The meaning of any institution or social practice must be understood in its historically and culturally specific context, however. The implications of the patterns described here for brother/sister relationships in other Arab countries or classes would need to be tested empirically.

Psychodynamic processes: Connectivity and love in patriarchy in Lebanon

I use connectivity to mean psychodynamic processes by which one person comes to see himself/herself as part of another. Boundaries between persons are relatively fluid so that each needs the other to complete the sense of selfhood. One’s sense of self is intimately linked with the self of another such that the security, identity, integrity, dignity, and self-worth of one is tied to the actions of the other. Connective persons are not separate or autonomous. They are open to and require the involvement of others in shaping their emotions, desires, attitudes, and identities. Like Catherine Keller (1986:9, 114), I use connective, rather than connected, to indicate an activity or intention rather than a state of being.

The concept of connectivity is useful in characterizing the social production of relational selves with diffuse boundaries who require continuous interaction with significant others for a sense of completion. Defined as such, it is a nonculturally specific concept. I use connectivity to depart from Western-centric notions of relationality that are associated with judgments of dysfunctionality. The leading theorist of dysfunctional notions of relationality, Salvador Minuchin (1978), offered the concept of enmeshment to describe constructs of self that resonated with my observations in Camp Trad. His insights, though powerful, are limited by his Western-based assumptions that individuation, autonomy, and separateness are psychodynamically necessary for healthy maturation. This judgment emerges from evaluations of persons in Western, industrialized, market, and contract-based societies organized around the expec-
tation of mobile and autonomous selves. Minuchin’s family systems theory is also limited by its functionalism and his neglect of patriarchy (Luepnitz 1988:57).

Rather, I employ connectivity in the context of a culture in which the family was valued over and above the person or society and in which “individuation,” “autonomy,” “separateness,” and “boundedness” as understood in the American psychotherapeutic literature were less valued than bonding with and commitment to family. It is in the context of the primacy of the family over the person and society that the love/power dynamics of the brother/sister relationship made sense and contributed to the reproduction of Arab patriarchy. This is not to say, however, that there were no individuated, autonomous, separate, bounded selves in Camp Trad. Rather, I argue that such bounded selfhood was relatively unsupported, while connective selfhood was both supported and valorized.

In Camp Trad, brothers and sisters were expected to love one another. I use “love” here to mean deep “feelings” of caring. Current research has significantly contributed to culturally sensitizing emotion words (Abu-Lughod 1986; Lutz 1988; Rosaldo 1984). While I do not employ a literary usage of “love” as does Lila Abu-Lughod in her important work, I agree with her that emotion words can signal culturally significant values that “contribute to the representations of the self, representations that are tied to morality, which in turn is ultimately tied to politics in its broadest sense” (1986:34). Meanings of emotion words must be understood in the context of local cultures, the value systems they signal, and the culturally specific notions of selfhood that they represent.

Connective relationships could be loving or hostile. Connective relationships were considered loving when persons anticipated each other’s needs, attended to and acted in each other’s interests, and took on each other’s concerns, pains, and joys as theirs. In Camp Trad, love was understood as an enactment of connective relationships. Brothers and sisters were called upon to develop such loving relationships. Their senses of self, identity, and future called for their mutual involvement with each other. They saw themselves reflected in each other’s eyes and lives. A brother was responsible for his sister’s behavior. A sister was expected to embrace a brother’s wishes as her own. The boundaries between them were fluid. They were to read each other, anticipate needs, and fulfill expectations unasked. Figuring out what was his, what was hers, were not central preoccupations. They were to share, care, and commit to each other.

Connectivity was poignant among Camp Trad brothers and sisters because the expectation of love and nurturance was coupled with gendered dominance supported by familial structure and culture. Through the brother/sister relationship, men learned that loving women entailed controlling them and women learned that loving men entailed submitting to them. Sisters also had some power over brothers. Women had numerous avenues for involving their brothers in their lives. Because a woman’s behavior immediately reflected on her brothers’ honor, dignity, and sense of self, she could enhance or detract from her brothers’ status by her actions and potentially compel her brothers into action. Connectivity was a double-ended hook joining the lives of brothers and sisters.

As a result, the brother/sister relationship became a critical vehicle for the socialization of males and females into culturally appropriate gender roles, thus helping to reproduce patriarchy. That is, I am arguing that, in Camp Trad, contrary to much of Western psychodynamic theory, which places almost exclusive stress on the parent/child relationship for modeling of appropriate gender roles, sibling relationships were also significant vehicles of gender socialization. Cross siblings used their relationships to learn and practice socially acceptable notions of masculinity and femininity, dominance and submission, and commitment to patrilineal kinship structures, morality, and idioms—processes mediated through connectivity.

social structural processes: family, marriage, and inheritance A number of features of Arab family social structure contributed to the dependence of Camp Trad women on their
brothers. First, women were considered to belong to their natal families even after marriage. Their natal families were ultimately responsible for their behavior and well-being—and in the long course of lives, such responsibility fell most heavily on brothers.

Second, Muslim men could marry up to four wives, and divorce, although uncommon in practice, was primarily a male privilege. Legally Muslim men could divorce their wives easily and/or marry additional wives. Thus, a Muslim marriage left women structurally vulnerable. For the same reasons, reliance on a father could be problematic. Muslim fathers could become involved with the children of other wives and even abandon children by previous marriages. Full siblings, however, shared the same set of family ties. Because of the structural possibility of abandonment by the father, the brother/sister relationship also could be a locus of contestation between sons and fathers about control over the family. Brothers could use their rights over their sisters to challenge the authority of their fathers, thus preparing to become patriarchs in their own right.

Third, the cultural ideal of marriage between the children of brothers (FaBroSoDa marriage), according to most scholars, bolsters both patrilineality and patriarchy—that is, reinforces the natal kin ties of both men and women. For men, FaBroSoDa marriages meant that their sisters could marry the men they considered their closest allies after their own brothers and the ones most bound to protect their sisters. For sisters it meant that their brothers could marry the women closest to being their own sisters. And each could marry the person closest to the role of their cross-siblings. Endogamy also meant brothers and sisters could live near each other, facilitating the fulfillment of the cultural expectation that brothers remain responsible for sisters throughout their lives.

Regardless of whether siblings married relatives, there seemed to be an edge in their relationships with each other's spouses. Structural strains in marriages could develop from the continued claims of brothers and sisters on each other's love and loyalty. Men and women expected their spouses to live up to their idealized images of their cross-siblings and often negatively compared their spouses to these images. El-Shamy found that Arabic folktales depict the sister's relationship with the brother's wife as one of jealousy and hostility (1979:43), while the brother's relationship with the sister's husband is depicted as mainly neutral, though at times "potentially negative" (1979:59).

Siblings could offer protections to each other's children, even against parental authority. The brother as khal (maternal uncle) played an important structural role as nurturer of his sister's children. El Shamy (1979:79), quoting an Arab adage, "'al-khal walid' (i.e., the maternal uncle is a father [literally, 'birth-giver'],)" argues that the affection of the khal for his sister's children was an expression of brother/sister love. Similarly, the sister as 'amta (paternal aunt) was seen as nurturer. This role of the 'amta was reflected in the popular Lebanese saying: "al 'ammi bit 'imm matrah al um" ("the father's sister can take the place of the mother").

Structural tensions from competing obligations could constrain the brother/sister relationship. Aging parents expected to be cared for by sons, even though in reality many were cared for by daughters. Men's obligations to their families of procreation increased as their families matured. Thus, a man's duties to his sister were always competing with claims on him by his parents, wife, and children. As a result, brothers often could not fulfill their sisters' or the culture's expectations. Women were also structurally caught between competing loyalties. Husbands demanded loyalty from their wives. Children expected the undivided involvement of their mothers. Women often felt torn between families of origin and of procreation as they matured.

For sisters, another social structural source of limitations developed from the asymmetrical expectations engendered early on. Brothers were socialized to receive more than to give service to sisters. Throughout their growing years, sisters did for brothers much more than brothers did for sisters. As adults, brothers expected the same. Women at times felt frustrated by the asymmetry.
Tensions were also built into the structure of inheritance. Many women left their patrimony with their brothers as insurance against future need. This could lead to tensions with husbands who wanted to claim their wives’ inheritance. Additionally, a woman’s children, as they matured, might lay claims on their mother’s inheritance.

The issue addressed implicitly by these observations is the preservation of patriarchy in the context of a segmentary patrilineal system. In such systems, the boundary of the kin unit could change in keeping with what was contested. Depending upon where the line was drawn around the family at a particular time, preservation of patriarchy might require opposition to siblings’ spouses (in FaBroSo/Da marriages, the cousin) and at other times alliance. While these were Muslim patterns, the values surrounding them permeated Camp Trad culture across religious lines. In the Camp Trad cultural ideal, the structure of family, marriage, and inheritance reinforced sisters’ dependence on brothers and brothers’ responsibility for sisters despite these variable conditions.32

cultural processes: honor and shame For both brothers and sisters in Camp Trad, connective identities and mutual love were linked to family honor. The ideal of bother/sister relationships in Camp Trad was based on a cultural promise: A brother will protect his sister; a sister will uphold her family’s honor. Men saw themselves as their sisters’ protectors.33 Invested in their sisters’ behavior, their sense of their own dignity and honor was tied to their sisters’ comportment. They were permitted by their parents and the culture to see sisters as extensions of themselves and thus to be molded to fit their sense of self. This included the cultural sanction to discipline their sisters when their behavior was considered improper.

Sisters identified with their brothers as their security. A woman without a brother was seen as somewhat naked in the world. A brother’s achievements opened opportunities for their sisters, just as their failures closed doors. Sisters understood that to receive the protection and support of brothers, they had to address their brothers’ expectations.34 They were socialized to accept their brothers’ authority over their lives and to see it in their own interests to accept that authority. Even when they might have disagreed with their brothers, sisters acknowledged their brothers’ “rights” over them as a central vehicle for maintaining family honor.

Thus, connectivity was an underlying psychodynamic process supporting the enactment of the cultural practices entailed in maintaining family honor. It is, I argue, because their connectivity encouraged brothers and sisters to view love and power as parts of the same dynamic that their relationship was so critical an instrument of the reproduction of Arab patriarchy. It is also because love and power were experienced as part of the same dynamic that these patriarchal relations had such hold on the members of Arab families. That is, patriarchy seated in love may be much harder to unseat than patriarchy in which loving and nurturance are not so explicitly mandated and supported.35

My data is presented around three sets of processes. After describing the local community, I will first discuss psychodynamic processes in brother/sister relationships focusing on the love and power dimensions of connectivity. Second, I analyze social structural processes of family, marriage, and inheritance, drawing out the implications for cross-sibling mutual dependence and responsibility. Finally, I consider how cultural processes, working through notions of honor and shame, link brothers’ and sisters’ senses of self. The processes I discuss below did not characterize all brother/sister relationships at all times in Camp Trad. Yet, they constituted such a significant pattern of relationality in discourse and in practice that one could see, and I demonstrate, a fundamental intertwining of connectivity, love, and power in psychodynamic, and social structural, and cultural processes.
Borj Hammoud is an urban working-class municipality in the Greater Beirut area. In the early 1970s, almost all of the religious sects and ethnic groups of both Lebanon and the neighboring Arab countries were represented in Borj Hammoud. About 40 percent of the population were Lebanese Shi'a. Forty percent were Armenian Orthodox, Armenian Catholic, or Armenian Protestant. The remaining 20 percent were Maronite, Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Arab Protestant, Syrian Orthodox, Syrian Catholic, Sunni, Druze, or 'Alawite. The population included Lebanese, Syrians, Palestinians, Greeks, Jordanians, and Egyptians.

My fieldwork in the Camp Trad neighborhood of Borj Hammoud just prior to the outbreak of the civil war in 1975 captured a unique moment of modern Lebanese history. It was a period of change, escalating tensions, and potential (Barakat 1977; Salibi 1976). Camp Trad experienced an unprecedented high degree of heterogeneous relationships among peoples of different religious sects, ethnic groups, and nationalities. Its residents, primarily Arab, included members of all of the communities mentioned above. Many shared patterns of family life developed across religious, ethnic, and national lines (Joseph 1982, 1983).

Most of the families in Camp Trad were recent migrants to the area. A Lebanese Maronite agricultural area at the turn of the century, the neighborhood became gradually urbanized, particularly in the 1940s with the influx of Armenian refugees. Palestinians entered the area after the creation of Israel in 1948. Syrians and rural Lebanese began settling in the 1950s for economic opportunities or to escape political insecurities. In the early 1970s, few household heads had been born in Camp Trad or Borj Hammoud. Almost all the residents had come from rural backgrounds, where extended family ties remained vital. Some, like the Palestinians and Armenians, were cut off from their places of origin; while others, like the Lebanese, Syrians, Jordanians, and Egyptians, had access to natal family and village ties. A number of the residents had managed to reconstitute parts of their extended families within Camp Trad and Borj Hammoud. Sociologically, there were many household forms: nuclear families, joint, extended, duo-focal, single-parent, single individual. Yet, culturally, Arab family ideals of patrilineality, patriarchy, and patrilocality were relatively strong for most residents.

In the early 1970s, when I began fieldwork, Lebanon was in the midst of economic, political, and social crises. Banking, trade, and tourism were being undermined by the Arab-Israeli conflict fought on Lebanese soil. Inflation, unemployment and underemployment, and worker strikes fueled the sense of economic crisis. Rapid urbanization had left the infrastructure of Greater Beirut ill-equipped to respond to the mass demand for basic services. A “ring of poverty” circled Beirut.

The Lebanese state system was being challenged from within and without. Lebanon had become the primary site for attacks by Israel against the Palestinians and vice versa. Political minorities, such as the Shi'a, were organizing to demand equitable representation in government. Bribery and brokerage became necessary for most political transactions (Joseph 1990). Stalemated, the minimalist Lebanese state could not provide the services and protection citizens wanted (Barakat 1977; Haley and Snider 1979; Joseph 1978; Odeh 1985).

In this economic, political, and social pressure cooker, individuals were thrown onto their families for help finding jobs, financial assistance, political protection, and emotional support (Joseph 1982). Family had always been central to social, economic, and political life in Lebanon. Ruling elites recruited following and distributed services to their clientele on the basis of kinship (Khalaf 1968). Non-elite individuals relied on their families for brokerage and protection in a state that was perceived as untrustworthy and inefficient. While it was not new for individuals to rely on their families, such dependence was precarious, because the same pressures were limiting the avenues through which family members lived out their obligations. So, while individuals needed, turned to, and believed in their families as the repositories of their identities and securities, family members found it increasingly difficult to carry out familial obligations.
The conditions of the early 1970s in urban Lebanon, therefore, in many ways were undermining the foundations of patriarchy. It was a struggle for brothers and sisters to live out the roles and responsibilities for which they were socialized. Under these pressures, it is remarkable that brother/sister relationships remained powerful. It is only by linking psychodynamic, social structural, and cultural processes that we can understand the ongoing struggle to live out brother/sister relationships even under conditions undermining the family system which gave them meaning.

**Psychodynamics of connectivity**

**Connectivity as love** In Camp Trad, connectivity was taken to be an expression of love. Brothers and sisters were taught to bond with each other and see themselves mirrored in each other. Brothers saw their identities and sense of self wrapped up with their sisters' attributes and behavior. Sisters saw their dignity and security tied to their brothers' character and fortunes. Brothers and sisters were expected to love and look out for each other through adulthood. Parents and other relatives encouraged brothers and sisters to idealize and romanticize each other. They supported their using each other as standards for judging potential spouses. I had a sense that something precious was undermined by the marriage of either. Um Hanna's (above) concern that Flaur's husband was not as handsome as Flaur's brother was, in cultural terms, an acceptable criticism of Flaur's husband. Idealization of the brothers and sisters was expressed through sayings that children learned. "Al ikt hanūn?" ("The sister is sympathetic") was a frequently repeated saying in Camp Trad. Sisters referred to their brothers as "akh al hanūn," "al 'atār," "al 'azīz," "al habīb," and "al ghālī," ("the brother is sympathetic," "sensitive," "dear," "beloved," and "priceless"). The idealization of cross-siblings continued after marriage. Brothers and sisters named their children after each other at times. Nimr Zahr, a 73-year-old Lebanese Shi'i from Kfar Dunin in Southern Lebanon, had a sister who had died when she was about 20. Five years later, when he had his own first born child, a girl, he named her after the deceased sister. His second son was named after the wife's brother.

Sonia Fraij was a 35-year-old Lebanese Maronite married to 36-year-old Greek Orthodox bus driver's aide. Two of her brothers lived next door to her. She had named her oldest son after the younger of these two brothers and her youngest son after her youngest brother, who was living in Australia. A strong-willed and outspoken woman, she continually praised her brothers, described them lovingly, and compared them favorably to her husband. In interviews she subtly, in his presence, put her husband down in relation to her brothers. The older brother traveled frequently. The younger, John, a strikingly handsome 26-year-old, was a chronically unemployed construction worker. Sonia had a loving relationship with John. As his apartment was right across the hall from hers, he spent much of his leisure time with her in one of their apartments. John spoke in the most affectionate terms of Sonia, gazed on her lovingly, and seemed to hang on her words. The expressions of devotion were among the most pronounced in the neighborhood. They were together all the time. She both served him and took charge of his life in some ways: she cooked for him, washed his clothes, went shopping with him, received her house visitors with him, and at times took him with her when she paid some of her formal calls. In some ways, John acted as a husband in the absence of her husband, who worked long hours. Having a brother nearby whom she loved, served, and to some degree managed, and who also protected her, empowered her.

A number of neighborhood women seemed to compare their husbands to their brothers. Yasmin Unis, a 47-year-old Lebanese Shi'i, married for love, and yet said her brothers "bi nāwrū hiyyāti" ("light up my life"). Her sense of identity came from her natal family. She and her children referred to her brothers repeatedly when speaking of themselves. Her marriage was relatively stable, yet she spoke of her husband as maskīn ("poor, humble"), a mixed compliment and criticism.

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I found this idealization/romanticization of brother/sister relationships in other social classes in Lebanon, particularly the Beirut middle classes. Among the families I observed, married and unmarried brothers and sisters talked of each other affectionately. Middle-class brothers and sisters went together to parties, movies, theaters, and other social occasions. They danced together, escorted each other in cohort group events, traveled together, and often walked arm in arm in the streets. Brothers, by accompanying their sisters, might have been giving them access to activities they might not have had otherwise. In playing the dual role of sister's protector and partner, they contributed to the romanticization of the relationship.

Unmarried women often devoted themselves to their brothers and their brothers' children. Unmarried men often relied on their sisters to provide emotional support and household service. Unmarried adults usually lived with their natal families, so unmarried brothers and sisters often became each other's primary caretakers. In one case, a married Maronite woman with no children had raised her brother's two children while he was working in West Africa with his wife. The children called their aunt, "Mama" and her husband, "Baba" (father). While there is little research on sexuality in brother/sister relationships in Arab societies, my own fieldwork indicates that the brother/sister relationship was sexually charged. Boys and girls in Camp Trad practiced sexual presentation with each other in socially approved ways. They seemed to groom themselves as much, if not more, for each other as for other opposite-gender individuals. Brothers paid attention to and commented on sisters' clothing, hair styling, and makeup. Sisters sought their brothers' approval for their self-presentation, as well as offering their own evaluations of their brothers' presentation. Brothers defined their sexuality in part by asserting control over and lavishing attention on sisters. Sisters defined their sexuality in part by acceding to their brothers and/or by affording resistance.

Among a number of middle-class Beirut families, also, I noticed that brothers and sisters were very involved in each other's attire and comportment. Brothers in these families often participated in purchasing their sisters' wardrobes. Sisters, while not having similar control over the brothers, often, nevertheless, significantly influenced their style by their evaluations.

On festive occasions, when Camp Trad young people dressed up and could engage in sexual play-acting, brothers and sisters seemed to use each other particularly involved with each other. Few families had much in the way of fancy attire. Going to church on Sunday or the mosque on Fridays, visiting neighbors and family on Christian and Muslim holidays, and attending weddings and funerals were among the few occasions on which Camp Trad youth could parade themselves. On these occasions, brothers and sisters often escorted each other or went in the company of their families. On such occasions, they usually spent more time in the company of each other than with nonfamily individuals. Brothers and sisters, as well as the rest of the family, were on display to each other and seemed to take great interest in the opportunity for expression that such occasions provided.

I noticed in other parts of Beirut and surrounding suburbs that festive occasions were similarly occasions for constructing sexualities. Here too, brothers and sisters seemed to use each other for role playing. For example, in family gatherings, brothers and sisters danced with each other from a young age. On one occasion, I observed two preadolescent, middle-class siblings (children of a Syrian Christian mother and an Italian father) dancing together in their home in a suburb of Beirut during a festive gathering. The boy was advancing toward his younger sister. With roars of approval and great laughter the men and the women in the room (all Arab, except the father) shouted, "bi hājim, bi hājim" ("he attacks, he attacks"). The little boy, appearing somewhat confused, accelerated the behavior. The little girl, seemingly as confused, was ignored and continued dancing. Such occasions were prime times for learning culturally appropriate sexual behavior.

The romanticization/sexualization of the brother/sister relationship appeared to have had concrete expression at times. There was one half-sibling marriage reported by Camp Trad
informants. Sa'da Hamid was a 55-year-old Lebanese Shi'i from Bint Jbeil in Southern Lebanon. Both her parents had been married twice. She reported a marriage between her sister by her mother and her full brother—that is, the couple shared a mother, but had different fathers. In 1972, Sa'da's brother, 82, and his wife/half-sister, 78, were living in their village of birth.

In a more ambiguous case, Yasmin Unis, a Lebanese Shi'i reported a marriage between her step siblings who did not share a parent.

**connectivity as power**  Romanticization and sexualization differentiated the brother/sister relationship from other familial cross-gender relationships. The relationship was differentiated, also, in terms of its role in gender socialization. Training for relationships of power organized around gender, brothers and sisters were used in the family system and used each other to learn culturally appropriate hierarchal masculine and feminine roles and identities. Additionally, young males emerging into their manhood might compete with their fathers for control over the family, using relationships with their sisters as a base of power—at times with the cooperation of their sisters and mothers.

Brothers and sisters learned early on that love and power were parts of the same dynamic. Love meant acceptance of the power asymmetry and culturally approved assertions of the asymmetry were taken as expressions of love. Parents taught daughters that loving their brothers included serving them and taught brothers that loving their sisters included some control over them. Families may have preferred brothers to fathers as sisters' protectors because their secondary positions relative to fathers would burden them with less responsibility should violence occur. Little girls practiced modesty, seductiveness, and serving authoritative males with their brothers, thereby learning how to be feminine. Brothers practiced sexual assertion, receiving feminine nurturances, and protecting and taking charge of the life and sexuality of females. Although connective love/power dynamics were enacted in parent/child and other family relationships, the mutual gender socialization distinguished the brother/sister relationship.

Young men also distinguished themselves from their fathers in relation to sisters by being physically present in the house. Fathers were often absent, working long hours six days a week. Brothers usually did not work if they were still in school and spent much of their nonschool time at home. When they did work, they often spent more time at home or around the neighborhood than their fathers. Married brothers could play their cultural roles toward their sisters more effectively if they lived in proximity to their sisters. A remarkable number of Camp Trad adults indicated that they did have siblings in other parts of Borj Hammoud or neighboring districts. Those whose cross-siblings lived further away, still expressed similar attitudes toward their siblings.

For young males living with their families, adolescence was the period to shape their manhood. Taking charge of the lives of their sisters and, at times, those of their mothers and younger brothers, was an avenue of empowerment for some males. Mothers often deferred to their older sons' control over younger children. Some fathers deferred to their sons, while others resisted. The degree of power the brothers took, then, was affected by how much power the father asserted. The more controlling the fathers, the less power the brothers could assert. In the case of the Dawuds, a Palestinian Catholic family (discussed below), the eldest son exerted considerable authority, including defying his parents to help his sister marry the man she loved. In the case of the Rafik family, Abu Mufid, a Syrian Sunni, exerted patriarchal control to such a degree that the oldest son could assert little.

Differences in the brother's view and the sister's view of their relationship or in their reading their own and each other's needs could create spaces for resistance. Yet, when resistance occurred, the challenge most often was not to the basic premises (love/power) of the brother/sister relationship. Rather, it usually centered on whether the sibling was acting on those premises properly, or it was understood as miscommunication or was explained away as flukes of
character. Flaur’s persistence in her behavior, despite Hanna’s response, might be seen as resistance, except for the fact that she did not challenge his right to have authority over her or that he loved her and that she loved him. Instead, she and her family brushed it off as the consequence of her feistiness.

structure of family, marriage, and inheritance

family and marriage Some of my informants stated a preference for non-kin marriage. The cultural norm of marriage between relatives, however, was still valued as an ideal by most of my Muslim informants. While expressed as an ideal less frequently by Christians, endogamy was nevertheless practiced among them as well. Sa’da Hamid, the Lebanese Shi’i whose brother and half-sister had married (above), was herself married to her father’s brother’s son. Five of her seven married children were married to relatives, including two sons who had married two sisters. Two other sons had not married relatives, but their wives were related to each other. All but one of her children lived in Borj Hammoud and were very involved in each other’s lives. Four of Sa’ada’s siblings had married relatives and two of them (a brother and sister) lived in Camp Trad.

Brothers and sisters were involved also with each other’s children. The father’s brother (’am) was viewed as a formal authority often feared second only to the father, but the khal, (maternal uncle) was seen to be affectionate, loving, warm, and playful. He could become a substitute father in the absence of the father. The khal could also shelter the sister’s children from their father. In one incident, a young Camp Trad Maronite man had a heated dispute with his father after which the son took refuge in the home of his khal. The children of the khal, both sons and daughters, were also sources of emotional support and compassion—at times, in contrast to the children of the father’s siblings. In the cultural ideal, a similar relationship was expressed with the mother’s sister (khala) and her children. The sister, as the wamta (paternal aunt), was expected to be affectionate to her brother’s children. A common saying in Camp Trad depicted this relationship: “ya ‘amti ya iktbayyi hamm min ummi ‘aliyyi” (“my aunt, my father’s sister, worries for me more than my mother”). At the same time, as a member of the patriline, the wamta also occupied a position of authority vis-à-vis her brother’s children. Hanan, a Lebanese Shi’i, lived two stories below her brother’s daughter, Dalal. Visiting each other daily, more than they each visited anyone else, Hanan helped Dalal by watching the three children (the oldest of which was four), shopping for her, and cooking with her.

inheritance Inheritance and property issues impacted the brother/sister as well as the husband/brother-in-law relationship. Women often did not take their inheritances from their natal families. Leaving their inheritance with their brothers could offer them insurance should they need protection from their families of origin. A woman’s attitude toward inheritance could change as she and her family of procreation matured. She might want the inheritance to help support her children. As her sons grew older, she might rely more on them than on her brothers. Husbands and brothers could compete over a woman’s inheritance.

Najat, a 32-year-old Lebanese Sunni married to a 41-year-old Lebanese Sunni (son of a Tunisian Sunni) had three brothers between 26 and 36 years old. Najat’s siblings (married, divorced, and single) all lived with their mother in nearby Sin il Fil except for a married sister in Aley. Her father had died earlier in 1972, shortly before my interview. Najat claimed that she had refused to take any inheritance from her father’s property. She had left it with her brothers. As she said, “My brothers’ and mine are the same. It will always be there for me.”

family culture: honor and shame

Ideally, brothers continued to be responsible for their sisters’ behavior and welfare throughout their lives, even after marriage, although practices were often contradictory in the 1970s.
Should a woman commit a shameful act or be compromised in any way, her brothers shared responsibility with her father in disciplining or avenging her. The range and limits of brotherly responsibility for protecting and controlling adult sisters can be seen in the following example. The whole neighborhood street became involved in this dramatic enactment of the brothers’ roles as protectors of their sisters’ and families’ honor. The key actors included the Dawuds, a Palestinian Catholic family; Amira Antun, a recently widowed Lebanese Chaldean Catholic of Syrian origins; Amira’s son Edward and brother Francis; Abu Mufid, a Syrian Sunni discussed above; and Abu Mufid’s brother’s son, Adnan.

The Dawuds were a close family. The parents and sisters were bonded in devout admiration of their sons/brothers. They saw the sons/brothers, especially the oldest, Antoine, as heroes. The parents and sisters outdid each other in superlatives describing Antoine. They emphasized his strength and courage. Active in the Fateh wing of the Palestine Liberation Organization, Antoine was frequently armed, which no doubt added to the family’s sense of his fearsomeness.

Antoine had helped his sister Antoinette elope against their parent’s opposition. Antoine was 19 when Antoinette (18) decided she wanted to marry their mother’s father’s sister’s son. Their parents opposed the marriage because Fadi was poor. Antoine was interested in marrying Fadi’s sister. Overriding his parents, Antoine had helped his sister elope with the intention that Fadi would then assist in arranging his marriage to his sister. Later, Antoine decided that Fadi’s sister was too demanding and did not marry her. Antoinette’s marriage was still intact, however. Antoine and Antoinette had a close relationship, and she continued to think of him as her protector.

Antoine and his brothers appeared to derive pleasure and personal pride from the beauty and comportment of their sisters. The sisters also felt their security and dignity were linked to their brother’s involvement with them. The Dawud sisters boasted continually about their brothers. Twenty-one-year-old Therese often said that if she could only find a man like her brothers, she would marry instantly.

In spring of 1973, Adnan, a young Sunni, had eyes on an unidentified young woman living on the street. Neighbors thought it was Therese. In a manner considered inappropriate, Adnan drove repeatedly in front of her house. He sped his car screeching through the street. Given the narrow streets and the fact that small children usually played outside unsupervised, neighbors complained. Adding to this concern was the fact that while intermarriages did occur in the neighborhood, they were usually arranged in a more discrete manner. It was a breach of etiquette for courting to take place in this manner, particularly given the intersectarian character of the relationship. Therese’s brothers (Antoine 24, Jacque 19, and Michel 14) discussed the matter with several male friends living on the street, including Edward Antun (the 20-year-old son of Amira Antun), Rafik Abdullah (18-year-old son of a Maronite divorced woman from her Shi’i husband), and Hanna and Farid Yusif (Hanna’s 17-year-old brother). They decided to stop Adnan.

One afternoon late in March, Adnan sped through the street several times. Michel Dawud and Edward Antun were at home. At his next pass, they stopped his car and told him they did not want him to drive through the street because there were children playing. Adnan had a friend with him. He replied that he was free to come and go as he wished, and furthermore, that they were not to speak with him but could speak with his friend. The friend had a long knife and made “teasing” or “threatening” looks at the young men. Michel Dawud became irritated and hit Adnan’s friend in the face. Adnan sped away.

The commotion attracted the attention of a number of residents. Rafik Abdullah was home ill but came down to the street in his pajamas. Farid Yusif was coming down the stairs from his apartment and went to join his friends. Abu Antoine (Therese and Michel’s father) had overheard the conversation and had come to try to make peace. ‘Adil and Zaynab, close Shi’a friends of
Amira Antun (Edward’s mother), stepped out as well. Within a few minutes, over 50 people had gathered in the street, and many stood on their balconies or rooftops watching.

Adnan, in the meantime, had collected his friends and relatives from the predominately Shi’i neighborhood of Nab’a. They returned to the street in two cars. At an apparently prearranged whistle, the two cars drove through the narrow street at top speed aiming right at the crowd. Most of the people jumped out of the way, but Edward Antun was slightly injured. A car parked at the end of the street blocked Adnan’s escape. Neighbors began beating the cars and breaking the windows. Within a few minutes, though, the two cars sped away.

It was early evening by this time, and I heard the commotion at my end of the street. I had been helping Um Hanna who was ill. I went down the street to find members of practically every household talking excitedly. Um Antoine was arguing with Zaynab. Um Antoine shrieked, “This is the fault of the Muslims. The Muslims are coming to get us!” Zaynab, a Shi’i, shouted, “Don’t make this sectarian!” Hanna Yusif told me that his brother Farid had noticed that one of the two cars had been that of Mufid (the son of the Syrian Sunni, Abu Mufid) and that he thought he had seen Mufid with them, but he could not be sure.

Edward Antun was rushed to the hospital by ‘Adil, Zaynab’s husband and Amira Antun’s good friend. Amira became hysterical, tearing at her clothes and screaming uncontrollably. Amira was a 41-year-old mother of ten children ranging in age from 5 to 22. Her husband had died in 1971, just as I was beginning my fieldwork. She had six sons (her four oldest children were all male), including a married son, but she turned to her second oldest brother, Francis, as a father-substitute for her children. Francis, 34, married with no children, owned a pinball arcade two short blocks away from Amira’s apartment.

When Edward was injured, Amira’s neighbors gathered around her, particularly her good friends, Zaynab and ‘Adil. Amira had excellent friends in the neighborhood; however, the primacy of the brother was apparent. Francis was informed of the incident and came quickly. When he arrived on the street, the crowds parted to let him through. I vividly remember the hushed silence as he approached his sister and embraced her. There was a stirring sense among the neighbors that Amira was now in the care of the most honorable of protectors—her brother. The silence among the neighbors added to the drama and the authoritative voice with which he spoke. He turned to the people and demanded to know what had happened to his nephew. As her brother stood there next to her, there seemed to be a feeling that now justice would be done.

Abu Antoine sent for his son, Antoine. The tension noticeably increased as Antoine arrived almost immediately with a motorcade of armed Palestinian guerrillas dressed in civilian clothes. The neighbors now felt bold and invincible. The presence of Therese’s brother Antoine, backed by the Palestinian guerrillas, and Amira’s brother Francis, along with practically all the men of the neighborhood, enhanced the incredible sense of neighborhood solidarity.

The crowd gathered around to tell the story of the incident. Some of the young men of the neighborhood had run after the car. Later, a couple of the culprits were found in a shop near Francis’s pinball machine store. Francis was among the neighborhood men who found them. They beat the culprits and called the police. The families of the Shi’a young men were mistakenly told that one of their sons had been killed. Several cars from the Shi’i neighborhood of Nab’a, filled with men and guns, came immediately to Camp Trad. The Nab’a families arrived just as the police pulled in, so they drove away. The one person who was still in custody was taken to the police station. Within minutes, a phone call came from a za’im (political leader), and he was released.

Adnan’s paternal uncle (FaBro), Abu Mufid, deflated the conflict. He lived on the same street as the Dawuds and was highly respected. Abu Mufid told me that he thought his nephew was a bit wild, and he would rather not have gotten involved. He felt he had no choice but to...
intervene for the sake of neighborly good will and to protect his own name. Arranging a meeting between Adnan and the Dawuds and Antuns, Abu Mufid forced his nephew to apologize.

The incident provoked a neighborhood crisis. Across religious, ethnic, and national lines, neighborhood people supported the brothers’ actions. It was uniformly discussed in terms of the brothers protecting the honor of their sisters and families. Men and women seemed to agree that the incident was primarily about honor, not religion. Therese and her parents extravagantly praised Michel and Antoine, while Amira heaped praise on her son Edward and brother Francis. The men were described as abtal (“heroes”). The neighborhood men, in general, appeared to take great pride in their manly display of solidarity. And the women glowed in admiration of the men. In the immediate days after the incident, there was a noticeable swagger in the walk of the men directly involved. Displays of boasting by both men and women created a sense of possession—they owned this street. Brothers had protected their sisters and men had protected their women—the ultimate social boundary of the community. The community was reminded of the importance sisters had in their brothers’ lives. For all the participants, the incident reinforced the cultural belief that brothers were the foundation of sisters’ security. The culture had been supremely upheld in a most honorable manner.

Arab brothers and sisters: connectivity, love, and power in the reproduction of patriarchy

Granqvist (1935:11:252–256) reports a story about brother/sister relations cited among Palestinian fellahin. She indicates that fellahin women, given a choice as to whom they would prefer to free from military service (which was equated with death), would choose to free their brothers rather than their husbands or sons. The reasoning reported was: “A husband may [always] be had; a son can [also] be born; but a beloved brother, from where shall he come back [when he is once dead]?” (Granqvist 1935:11:253). This a story about brother/sister love for Granqvist (1935:11:254). But it is also about the centrality of the brother/sister relationship to the reproduction of patrilineality and patriarchy. Arab sisters, committed to preserving their patrilineages, invested in their brothers—for it was only through their brothers that they insured the continuity of their patriline and security.

In Camp Trad, the brother/sister relationship was central to the reproduction of patriarchy. It contributed to socializing young males and females into appropriate gender roles. Young females learned feminine roles by submitting to brothers. Young males learned to be patriarchs by practicing first on their sisters and younger brothers. Brothers could also use their relationships with their sisters to contest their fathers’ authority and attempt to build a sphere of influence from which they would mature as patriarchs.

The sister paid a price for the protection of the brother. She served the brother, to some degree shaped herself into his image, at times put her brother before her husband. Sisters had some power in this relationship because their conduct directly affected their brothers’ and families’ standing. The tensions around the issues of honor, protection, and control at times led to violence.

At the same time, the brother/sister relationship was one of love. Brothers and sisters reported deep caring and concern for each other. They were expected by others and expected themselves to protect and nurture each other for all their lives. Brother/sister love was romanticized. Their masculinity and femininity were defined and practiced in a connective relationship that was often sexually charged.

Complexity is missing in much of the literature. As my analysis suggests, the brother/sister relationship was a connective relationship built on the duality of love and power expressed psychodynamically, social structurally, and culturally. It was second only to the mother/son relation in evoking love, and yet it was premised on a power asymmetry—the subordination of the sister to the brother. The intense involvement of brothers and sisters in each other’s lives
invested each in their natal family and its reproduction. Life-long connectivity organized around love and power gave the brother/sister relationship a forceful role in the reproduction of Arab patriarchy. By the early 1970s, Camp Trad brothers and sisters were living with external stresses that made achievement of cultural prescriptions concerning their relationships more difficult. The instability of family life; the economic, political, and social uncertainty; and the limitations of the Lebanese state in providing services and protections thrust people onto their families for support at a time when it was increasingly difficult for family members to help each other. It is striking that, under these conditions, men and women, nevertheless, still made the effort to embrace their cross-siblings and the patriarchy and patrilineality their siblingship supported.

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1. Names of all Camp Trad residents have been changed.
2. Abu Hanna means “father of Hanna.” Adults with children were referred to by the name of their oldest male child. Thus, Hanna's mother was called “Um Hanna,” the “mother of Hanna.”
3. It was not uncommon among urban working classes in Lebanon for women to be overweight during and after their childbearing years.
4. Fieldwork was carried out from 1971–73 under an NIMH predoctoral research grant. Brieler follow-up research was undertaken in 1974, 1976, 1978, 1980, and 1993. Unless otherwise indicated, the argument in this article refers to the period just prior to the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war in 1975.
5. The dynamics of these families resonated with me. Having been born in a village not far from Camp Trad and raised as an Arab American, my relationships with these families and my analysis in this article have been shaped and informed partly by my own family experiences.
6. Corporal punishment for perceived misdeeds was not specifically a cross-sex pattern among Camp Trad families. It was considered socially acceptable for parents to discipline children and older siblings to discipline younger ones in this manner regardless of sex.
7. Civil war erupted in Lebanon in 1975, two years after I completed the initial fieldwork, and continues to this writing.
10. The debates that concern the FabroDaSo marriage have spanned several decades. Scholars have evoked functionalist, structuralist, ecological, political-economic, and psychodynamic theories. See Murphy and Kasdan 1959, Patai 1960, Ripinsky 1968, Barth 1954, Khuri 1970, and McCabe 1983.
11. The folktale has many renditions recorded in different Arab countries. Briefly, the main themes are as follows: A woman gave birth to a boy and girl. The mother died when the children were little, but before dying entrusted the care of the brother to the sister. The sister lovingly raised the brother and gave him all the inheritance when he reached manhood. He chose a wife with the guidance of the sister and they all lived together. The sister-in-law attempted to drive a wedge between the brother and sister. Finally, she induced the sister to eat a “pregnancy egg” to make her appear pregnant and told the brother to see what his sister has done. The brother, assuming the sister had had an illicit affair, took her to a deserted place, intending to kill her. Unable to kill her, he abandoned her there. The local people, upon hearing the sister’s story, built her a palace. One day the sister sneezed two pigeons out her nostrils. The pigeons flew to the brother’s house, proclaiming to the wife, who tried to shoo them away, that this was the home of their khal (mother’s brother). The brother, upon hearing the pigeons, followed them to the spot where he had left his sister. Arriving at the palace, he was greeted by his sister dressed as a man. He asked about the story of the pigeons and was told the whole story by the “man.” The brother asserted that no one would know that story except his sister and asked to be taken to her to ask her forgiveness. At this, the sister revealed herself, and she and the brother embraced and cried. The brother renounced his wife and lived with the sister, begetting boys and girls.
12. Some of the literature on the Arab world reports more ambivalence in brother/sister relationships. Davis and Davis (1989:81) found considerable variation among brother/sister relationships in the Moroccan town of Zawiya. Sisters were both affectionate toward their brothers as well as resentful of the control they
the practices associated with the brother/sister relationship. In general though, older brothers almost always dominated over sisters and mutual love between them was generally accepted and upheld among the members in the household or in the neighborhood, and previous marriages of either parent or concurrent marriages of the father. Such demographic variables impact the living out of cultural norms and condition power over sisters. While it is not in the scope of this article to account for all the variations in brother/sister relationships among their members in general.

It is important to note that despite the resultant variable practices, the cultural prescriptions of brothers' jural duties of the brother to the sister. Hatem (1987) seems to indicate more ambivalence in Egyptian families. See Paige (1984) for an application of the concept of enmeshment to Egyptian families.

The hierarchy in brother/sister relationships was also affected by family demographics such as the number of children in the family and currently in the household, residential proximity of adult siblings, gender and age orders, the presence or absence of one or both parents, the presence of extended family members in the household or in the neighborhood, and previous marriages of either parent or concurrent marriages of the father. Such demographic variables impact the living out of cultural norms and condition the practices associated with the brother/sister relationship. In general though, older brothers almost always had culturally sanctioned power over younger sisters (and brothers). Older sisters usually had control over younger brothers (and sisters) until the boys came into puberty, at which point brothers increasingly gained power over sisters. While it is not in the scope of this article to account for all the variations in brother/sister relationships, many of these dynamics appeared in Camp Trad Armenian families as well. Because of their special history in Lebanon, however, I will not discuss them, except when it seems particularly useful to do so.

22. Most of the dynamics I describe here were found in families across religious sects. Arab Christians and Muslims shared basic patrilineal and patriarchal values about family life. Christians did not articulate a cultural norm of patrilineal parallel cousin marriage. They, like Muslims, practiced close bilateral kin marriage, however. Christians and Muslims shared beliefs concerning the primacy of family loyalty, duty, and honor. They, alike, supported the creation of connective social personas. And they shared similar beliefs about brother/sister relationships. Many of these dynamics appeared in Camp Trad Armenian families as well. Because of their special history in Lebanon, however, I will not discuss them, except when it seems particularly useful to do so.

23. Andrea Rugh (1984:97) maintains that, in Egypt, sisters are socialized to love their brothers and to focus on the affective aspects of the relationship. Brothers, while affectionate to sisters, are taught to focus on the jural duties of the brother to the sister. Hatem (1987) seems to indicate more ambivalence in Egyptian families. See Paige (1984) for a feminist critical review of the honor/shame literature.

I use the concept more broadly to indicate a self that is relational, but whose experience and expressions vary with different political economies.

Catherine Keller opposes the concept of connective selfhood to separative selfhood (1986:9). For her the concept of connective selfhood is a liberatory concept indicating a self that is relational and autonomous. I use the concept more broadly to indicate a self that is relational, but whose experience and expressions vary with different political economies.

See Joseph (1993) for a further discussion of the notion of connectivity and its relationship to Arab patriarchy and the limitations of family systems theory. Few scholars of the Arab world have researched the process of connectivity. Many have discussed the immersion of the individual in the family, however (Barakat 1985; Rugh 1984; Sharabi 1988). Some authors have applied the related concept of enmeshment to Egyptian families. See Paige (1984) for an application of the concept of enmeshment to Egyptian families.

While it is not the subject of this article, I would argue these Arab families supported connective relationships among their members in general.

The brother said: “She has her father’s house. Nobody can tread on the hem of her garment [i.e., insult her]. May it be as thou wishest. Our beard is on thy sack. We are thy camels [i.e., we bear all they burdens and sorrows].” (“ilha & abha ma hada byidar yuhbut ‘a tarafha marhabbi’ ilhana ‘ala ‘alishie ‘ilha jnali”) (Granqvist 1935:11252).

5. “‘Nadi Saqtiq bukra bithabibi fi-il-dhre walkin uladi u marathi la)” (Granqvist 1935:11254).

6. Parallelis to this romantic view of brother/sister relationships have been reported for other cultures of the Mediterranean. Literature on the ancient Mediterranean, particularly ancient Egypt and Rome, seems to indicate that intimate relationships between brothers and sisters ranged from love, to incest, to marriage (Hopkins 1980; Middleton 1962; Patal 1960; Slotkin 1947). While fascinating, interpreting this literature in relation to the contemporary period would need to be done carefully to avoid assumptions of cultural continuities. Research on the contemporary Mediterranean also reveals some parallels. Lloyd and Margaret Fallers (1976:250–58) contend that the brother/sister relationship in Edremit, Turkey, has “an almost romantic quality” and is, for many brothers and sisters, the “most intense cross-sex relationship they will ever experience.” Ian Whitaker (1976:198) claims that among the Ghegs, shepherding Albanians, a woman’s dearest relation is with her brother.

19. Granqvist (1935:255) quotes El-Barghuthi’s study of judicial courts among Bedouins of Palestine in 1922 as reporting: “‘The good of a woman belongs to her husband and her evil to her family.’ ” Williams (1968:83) reports a similar attitude in the Lebanese Sunni village of Haouch el Harimi.


18. Perhaps no subject related to gender and family in the Mediterranean and the Middle East has received more anthropological attention than the relationship between honor and shame. Explanations have ranged from culture (Campbell 1964; Peristiany 1966; Pitt-Rivers 1977), to ecology and political economy (Schneider 1971; Schneider and Schneider 1976), to psychodynamics (Gilmore 1987). See Jowkar (1986) for a feminist critical review of the honor/shame literature.

21. The scholarly research I cite indicating similar patterns in other Arab countries needs to be contextualized historically, socially, and culturally. That requires a fuller treatment of the subject than I can undertake here.

See Joseph (1993) for a further discussion of the notion of connectivity and its relationship to Arab patriarchy and the limitations of family systems theory. Few scholars of the Arab world have researched the process of connectivity. Many have discussed the immersion of the individual in the family, however (Barakat 1985; Rugh 1984; Sharabi 1988). Some authors have applied the related concept of enmeshment to Egyptian families. See Paige (1984) for an application of the concept of enmeshment to Egyptian families.

26. While it is not the subject of this article, I would argue these Arab families supported connective relationships among their members in general.
27. El-Shamy (1979:79) argues that because of the possibility of polygyny, Arab children identified with their mothers more strongly than their fathers and with their mothers’ family more than their father’s.

28. Patai (1960) argues that this marriage rule preserves property in the patrilineal line. Murphy and Kasdan (1959) argue that parallel-cousin marriage allows for agnostic segmentation and structural opposition at the nuclear family level. Khuri (1970) argues that the rule mitigates the effect of marriage on patrilineality—that is, ensures that marriage will not undermine patrilineal solidarity. El-Shamy (1979:60) points out that despite the formal anticipation of political and marital alliance between patrilineal cousins, the relations between cousins and the siblings of their spouses in FaBro/So/Da marriages remains hostile as compared to the brother/sister relationship.

29. McCabe (1983:58) found in the Southern Lebanese village of Bayt al-‘asir unmarried, opposite-sex, first cousins displayed an intimacy very similar to that of cross-siblings. Her findings conflicted with those of Fuad Khuri’s (1970) for two suburbs of Beirut.

30. Donald Cole observes that the most affectionate relationship across generations among the Al Murrah Bedouin of Saudi Arabia are between young people and their mothers’ brothers and sisters. While he does not discuss the brother/sister relationship, per se, he notes that the coldness and indifference with which a man greets his wife after a period of absence sharply contrasts with the lavish warmth he offers to his mother, father’s and mother’s sisters, and his own sisters (1975:73–75).

31. This structural limitation reinforced a woman’s ultimate dependence on her own sons, if she had any. Structurally, in some ways, a woman was encouraged to look to her sons to fulfill what her father, brothers, and husbands did not. This partly explains the great intensity of the mother/son relationship, perhaps the only cross-sex family relationship that overshadowed the brother/sister in the cultural stress on love.

32. Granqvist (1935:II:255) reports cases of Palestinian fellahin women risking their relationship with their husbands rather than risking being cut off from their natal families. Altorki (1986:78) reports similar cases among contemporary elite Saudi women.

33. Granqvist (1935:II:254) reports that Palestinian village men in the 1930s felt more responsible for their sisters than their wives and children. I would not make a similar claim for the Camp Trad men. However, it was clear that they did feel a strong responsibility for their sisters.

34. Fuller (1966:52) observes that Sunni village women in Buarij realized that to gain the protection of fathers and brothers, they had to conduct themselves with propriety.

35. I am indebted to Judith Walkowitz for pointing out the need to emphasize this point.

36. There has been no formal census in Lebanon since 1932. These percentages were estimated from interviews with local officials and residents.

37. Many families had lived in Lebanon and or Camp Trad less than a year while few had lived there more than two generations.

38. Prothero and Diab (1974:71) report that the approximately 500 formally organized family associations in Lebanon outnumbered all other nongovernmental welfare agencies recorded in the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Social Affairs combined. See also Khalaf (1971).

39. Prothero’s (1961:94) study of rural and urban child rearing among Lebanese of different religious sects reveals that about half of the mothers reported that their children got along well with each other, while a fourth reported open hostility among siblings. Prothero does not specify gender in his report.

40. Fallers and Fallers (1976:258) similarly observe that marriage in Edremit, Turkey, breaks the highly charged brother/sister bond. The affection between brothers and sisters is so charged that the Fallers comment, “It is little wonder that marriage partners must be chosen by others and that they take so long ‘to get to know each other’” (1976:258).

41. This, like many of the patterns described here, was also characteristic of non-Arabs in the neighborhood. In one Armenian Catholic family, an unmarried, adult 35-year-old woman lived with her married 43-year-old brother and his family. She stayed at home, helping with their 78-year-old mother and his four children.

42. El-Shamy (1981:319) claims that there are incestuous tendencies underlying the Arab brother/sister relationship. I cannot confirm such a tendency from my research. The distinction between gender and sexuality and the cultural specificity of these constructs warrants mention. If sexuality signals notions of the erotic and gender signals notions of masculinity and femininity and both are culturally constructed, as I believe they are, then evaluations of what constitutes a sexually charged relationship would have to be culturally specific. I believe it is important to raise this issue.Treating the subject of incest in the detail that it requires, however, necessitates more research than is available and more space than I have here.

43. For analysis of brother/sister marriages in the ancient Middle East see Hopkins 1980, Middleton 1962, and Slotkin 1947.

44. An Armenian resident of this street also reported that her mother had been adopted and raised by her father’s family. She did not consider her parents to be “real” siblings, although she acknowledged that they had a special relationship.

45. I am indebted to Richard Antoun for this insight.

46. Gender socialization was affected by sibling birth order and changed through stages of the siblings’ lives. Older boys and girls often took care of younger siblings and became second parents. It was more common for girls to take on mothering roles than for boys to take on fathering roles. As boys came into puberty, however, they usually took power over sisters, regardless of age ranking, or experience of having been parented by sisters.
According to the story, Intaphrenes, one of six Persians who supported King Darius in an uprising against Magus, was disrespectful to Darius. Fearing a conspiracy, Darius had him and all his near relations arrested.

Intaphrenes' wife pleaded with the king to save her family. Eventually moved by the woman's pleas, King Darius offered her the choice of saving the life of only one member of her family. Her decision to save her brother surprised him, and he asked her for an explanation. She replied that she could find another husband and have another son, but she could never have another brother. Impressed with her reasoning, Darius gave her her brother and her eldest son.

Abu Lughod, Lila

Abou-Zeid, Ahmed


Abu Lughod, Lila


Gulick, John

Haley, P. Edward, and Lewis W. Snider, eds.

Hatem, Mervat

Herodotus

Hopkins, Keith

Joseph, Suad

Jowkar, Forouz

Keller, Catherine

Kelly, Raymond C.

Khalaf, Samir

Khuri, Fuad

Luepnitz, Deborah Anna

Lutz, Catherine A.

Mabuchi, Toichi

Malinowski, Bronislaw

Marshall, Mac, ed.

Marx, Emanuel

McCabe, Justine

Meeker, Michael E.

Middleton, Russell
Minuchin, Salvador, Bernice L. Rosman, and Lester Baker

Munson, Henry, Jr.

Murphy, Robert F., and Leonard Kasdan

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Rugh, Andrea B.

Salibi, Kamal

Sharabi, Hisham

Schneider, David M., and Kathleen Cough, eds.

Schneider, Jane

Schneider, Jane, and Peter Schneider

Slotkin, J. S.

Weiner, Annette B.

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