The Narrative Network:

Analyzing Meta-narratives by Utilizing Network Narratives

A paper prepared for the 2016 WPSA Annual Meeting

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A preliminary draft, Please do not quote

Abstract

National meta-narratives are important indicators of a nation's identity. These are interpretive socio-cultural frameworks which embody the leading principles of a nation and guide it accordingly. Yet no methodology for empirically investigating meta-narratives is at hand. This study suggests such a method by integrating network and qualitative-narrative analyses in a two-step process: (a) finding the narrative themes that appear in founding political texts, constitutions, and identifying the most significant ones; (b) integrating the most significant narrative themes to reveal the meta-narrative of each state. To demonstrate this method's effectiveness in revealing meta-narratives, 13 constitutions' preambles of three Arab nations – Egypt, Iraq and Syria – were analyzed. Meta narratives are presented and discussed. Finally, directions for future research are suggested.

Introduction

In recent decades, scholars of various research interests, and particularly within the field of political science, have taken an intense interest in questions concerning national identity. Identity can be understood as an evolving collection of features and characteristics that are constructed by stories (Spektor-Mersel, 2012). Such understanding of identity emphasizes the importance of the concept of "narrative identity" (Singer, 2004; Somers, 1994).

Our focus in this study is on the national level. While national narratives have been studied by various scholars utilizing different methods and perspectives (e.g., Dixon, 2010; Fleisher-Feldman, 2001; Hammack & Pilecki, 2012; ; Sheafer, Shenhav & Goldstein, 2011; Shenhav & Oshri, 2013), to the best of our knowledge, there has been almost no attention to the broader perspective offered by the analysis of national meta-narratives. A meta-narrative serves as an interpretive socio-cultural framework that embodies the leading principles of the nation and guides it accordingly (Bamberg, 2004, 2005). It is therefore fair to assume that an understanding of national meta-narratives allows a broader perspective on the main characteristics and changes in national identities.

Despite the consensus regarding the significance of meta-narratives, a method for empirically identifying them is absent. A main reason for this gap lies in the abstract nature of national meta-narratives, which makes them difficult to comprehend (Auerbach, 2009). Our study seeks to fill this void by offering a systematic method to study national meta-narratives, based on a combination of interpretation and discourse network analysis. Our method allows a systematic observation of narrative themes and meta-narratives that characterize the national community. This systematic observation illustrates the way texts carry changes in national identities over time and allows a comparison of these changes. In this paper, we apply our methodology in order to explore national identities in three Arab countries. We analyzed the constitutions of Egypt, Iraq and Syria.

Theoretical Background

Narratives and National Narratives

Narratives are common forms of discourse in human communication. Although there are various ways to characterize a narrative, by most definitions it involves temporal relations between events, or, in other words, a succession of events (Rimmon-Kenan, 2002 [1983], see also Franzosi, 1998;

Franzosi, 2010; Shenhav, 2015; Toolan, 2001). These events, as put forward by Prince (1980: 50), can be "real or fictive" events in a time sequence. The concept of narrative also refers to the ways in which people tend to organize their experiences: through stories that construct and design their perception of reality (Bruner, 1991). People do this both as individuals and as collective units, such as nations (Patterson & Monroe, 1998). They do not narrate all the details of any circumstance and it is not an objective description of events (Bruner, 1986). Rather, it is a form of human communication which mediates people's memories, gives meaning to their life events, and helps interpret experiences and personal actions by giving them political and social meaning (Polkinghorne, 1988, 11; Czarniawska, 2004; Zilber 2009; Sheafer, Shenhav & Goldstein, 2011).

As for individuals, narratives serve a purpose within the collective, playing an important social role: the shared stories recognized by the community contribute to the creation of a sense of collectiveness (Riessman, 2008) and help shape common ideals and values (Patterson & Monroe, 1998). These shared stories relate to "the origins and development of a nation" by answering questions such as "who we are, where we come from, and how we fit together" (Ibid, p. 322). The stories derive from the community's collective memory, which are the representations of past events its members choose to adopt (Hammack & Pilecki, 2012). The community utilizes these representations in a variety of ways: as a basis and a justification for its existence, as a means to define its cohort's behavior in the present, and as a tool to overcome future challenges (White, 1981; Bar-Tal & Salomon, 2006). It is an instrument, used to reinforce a particular dimension of ideology and political positions in light of present and future conflicts (Zerubavel 1995; Bar Siman Tov, 2014).

Narrative Identity in the National Domain

Addressing narratives as a focus of identity analysis is not new in the study of discourse. Researchers have shown that through storytelling, narrative creators are able not only to represent social worlds, but are also able to establish themselves as members of a particular group (e.g. Polleta et al., 2011; Carr, 1986; De Fina, 2006; Bar Siman Tov, 2014). In fact, identity can be understood as an evolving collection of features and characteristics that are constructed by the narrative. This understanding of identity emphasizes the importance of the concept of "narrative identity" (e.g. Somers, 1994; Somers and Gibson 1994; McAdams, 2001; Ricoeur, 1991; Singer, 2004; Sheafer, Shenhav & Goldstein, 2011; Shenhav 2015). Narrative identity refers to stories

individuals and collectives construct in order to define themselves both internally and to others (McAdams et al., 2006). This perspective emphasizes the importance of stories individuals, groups or nations tell about themselves. The study of narratives addresses all these levels.

Analyzing narratives and their interrelations with identity is especially useful in revealing the speaker's concept of self, for it is the self that is located at the center of the narrative, whether as an active agent or as a passive experiencer. The narrator uses the past self to explain the present and the future. This applies both on the individual level as it is on the national level, when groups of people describe a common past suggesting why they have a shared identity that should be recognized as legitimate by others (Patterson & Monroe, 1998, p.316). The acceptance of national traditions and concepts as a form of national identity is not possible without narratives reflecting the history of the nation (Cinar, 2012). Hence, national identity can be interpreted as a narrative-based identity: it includes the reconstruction of events that take place on a time sequence and unfold the nation's story which concretely empowers national heroes and founding historical events, retold and reshaped by the circumstances of each generation (Shenhav et al., 2014; Sheafer, Shenhav & Goldstein, 2011). This national narrative, even though relatively flexible and changeable, promotes a feeling of belonging that binds together the individual and the group in light of a social reality (Auerbach, 2009, p. 298; see also Hammack & Pilecki, 2012; Carrithers, 1991).

Therefore, it is clear that national narratives are important tools for creating and maintaining national identities: Through national narratives, political agents and representatives of the state design concepts, categories, interpretations, and memory – which are all used as foundations for the construction of national identity (Korostelina, 2013; Bridger & Maines, 1998). These narratives provide political elites with a simple and transferable message through which they motivate people and justify various policies in the eyes of the public.

Meta-Narratives

The concept of meta-narrative is addressed in several disciplines, from children's literature (Stephens and McCallum, 2013) to research on race, ethnicity, and education (Zirkel et al, 2011) and governmental policies and minority rights (Cinar, 2012). This concept's importance is gaining recognition in the political science domain, yet there is still much to explore concerning the power

of narratives and meta-narratives and their ability to shape political perceptions, different types of national identities, and therefore, political behavior.

In order to address this issue, one must first define what is a meta-narrative. The concept of meta-narrative, was first introduced by Lyotard (1984 [1979]), and is sometimes referred to as master narrative or grand narrative. Some researchers define a meta-narrative as a story about other stories, a "larger than life" narrative, or as a narrative about other narratives, propelled by general principles (e.g., Andrews, 2007; van Eeten 2007, p. 256; Somers and Gibson 1994). Stephens and McCallum refer to meta-narratives as an inclusive culture schema, which instructs and explains knowledge and experience. By providing a structure for individual narratives and the criteria to evaluate these individual narratives, meta-narratives entail ideologies, which are designed to reinforce systems of values prevailing in society in order to organize knowledge and experience. The meta-narratives' role is to outline behaviors and reaffirm desired behaviors, cultural ideologies, systems and institutions (Stephens and McCallum, 2013).

As one can see, these definitions are not necessarily structured in accordance with the narration of a succession of events criterion or with other similar definitions of narratives (Shenhav, 2015). Subsequently, Bamberg argues that a meta-narrative serves as an interpretive socio-cultural framework that embodies the leading principles of the nation and guides it accordingly (2005). Thus, meta-narratives assist members of the community to understand the group's goals and desirable social conventions. Similarly, Auerbach defines it as an "all encompassing, interpretive frameworks which incorporate the basic symbols, values, beliefs, and behavioral codes of a collective and serve, therefore, as the symbolic representation of the national ethos" (2009, p. 297).

A common denominator of all these definitions is the understanding that "stories in the social domain reflect or evolve from leading principles, widespread ideologies, or socio-cultural perspectives", which themselves can be conceived as meta-narratives (Shenhav, 2015, 39). In a sense, these leading principles affect all specific narratives; while stories are driven by the specific nature of events and characters, narrators are themselves subjected to the influence of meta-narratives (Bamberg, 2004). It is therefore fair to assume that an understanding of national meta-narratives allows a broad perspective on the main characteristics and changes in national identities.

Despite the consensus regarding the significance of meta-narratives, to the best of our knowledge, a method for empirically identifying them is absent. A main reason for this gap lies in the abstract

nature of national meta-narratives, which makes them difficult to comprehend (Auerbach, 2009). Our study seeks to fill this void by offering a systematic method to study national meta-narratives, based on a combination of interpretation and discourse network analysis. In order to present this method we will address three case studies: Egypt, Syria and Iraq. We will use their founding texts, their constitutions, as the object of analysis.

Constitutions as a Reflection of National Identity in the Arab World

Constitutions and National Identity: Apart from its institutional role to set a stable political framework and to grant institutions their political power (Elster, 1988; Gavison, 2002; Elkins et al., 2009), a constitution serves as a unifying factor for the country's citizens. It establishes common ground rules, emphasizes collective values and principles and expresses the country's ambitions for the future (Aucoin, 2010; Henkin, 1994). In that respect the constitution is not merely a set of instructions and laws, but a detailed description of the practices that define the political identity and uniformity of the nation for whom it was written (Lerner, 2011). It is a formative document that at least in some of the cases also presents the national story of the nation and plays a key role in the ongoing construction of the national identity (Breslin, 2009). The part of the constitution that defines the collective identity and national solidarity in the most significant way is the preamble.

The preamble is the opening statement of a constitution. It is a common element, appearing in the majority of constitutions.[1] For a long time the preamble was falsely perceived as nothing more than a symbolic statement. Yet constitutions' preambles reflect and define the political and social norms, specify the nation's core principles and goals, clarify who the sovereign is, and unify the citizens in their support of the constitution (Webber, 1999; Winckel, 2001). Furthermore, the preamble has an essential role as a political source for the creation of a distinct national identity (Orgad, 2010). This is done by the presentation of the nation's national narrative, which is based on meaningful events in the history of the nation. The relatively free literary style of the preamble and the fact it expresses the most basic principles of the nation, makes it not only a natural platform for displaying the nation's national story and identity but also for expressing it's meta-narrative.

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[1] Elkins, Ginsburg & Melton reviewed 578 written constitutions (among 801 constitutions that were written between the years 1789 and 2006) and showed that 79% of them include preambles (Elkins et al., 2009).

Constitutions in Arab States: Many believe constitutions in Arab states are nothing more than instruments used to disguise a tyrant regime, yet the constitutions reflect to a great extent the political atmosphere in which they were written (Brown, 2002). Moreover, careful examination reveals they are rarely publicly broken (Breslin, 2009). History shows that when a constitution becomes uncomfortable, the regime will prefer to cancel it and create a new constitution, rather than ignore it (Brown, 2002). Therefore, Arab constitutions should be perceived as a valid representation of the way the political elites tell the story of the nation. Indeed, a change in the elite is usually followed not only by a new constitution but also by a new story, as manifested in the preamble.

The three case studies presented in this paper were chosen for the turmoil the writing of their last constitutions ignited, and in light of their common constitutional history. Egypt, Iraq and Syria share common characteristics that make them comparable: all were part of the Ottoman Empire and its dissolution gave rise to a local autonomy, but simultaneously promoted the establishment of an external powers rule. In all three, military coups that led to a change of governance had occurred, and all declared constitutions at similar times. The main religion is Islam in all three countries and all have expressed support in the concept of Pan-Arabism. The ties between these countries culminated when different union attempts were made in the 1950's and 1960's, which included announcements of common constitutions.[2] None of these unions' attempts have succeeded, but observing them in hindsight can give an insightful perspective of the relationships among these countries and of the effect each country's meta-narrative had on those relationships.

Data and Method

The suggested method is based on the assumption that meta-narratives constitutes narratives (Bamberg, 2004). Since exiting literature has already established approaches for locating main themes of narratives, our main challenge was to find a way to gauge meta-narratives out of these narratives themes. The proposed method is based on a combination of qualitative interpretation and discourse network analysis. It is a two steps process: (a) finding the narrative themes that

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[2] Between the years 1958-1961 a unity was declared among Egypt and Syria which included a joint constitution. Throughout the 1960's contacts were made concerning a union between Syria and Iraq. In 1963, a decision was made to establish a federal unity that shall include Egypt, Iraq and Syria and would even have a joint constitution (Shimony, 1977). Neither of these constitutions included a preamble.

appear in a national text and identifying the most significant and stable ones; (b) integrating these narrative themes to reveal the meta-narrative (see elaboration below).

Formalizing the Analysis: Narrative Themes, Super Themes, Meta-Narrative

In order to illustrate the suggested approach, all constitutions that were written by 2012 in Egypt, Syria and Iraq, were analyzed (a total number of 13 constitutions).[3] First, we identified the main narrative in the corpus. For this purpose, the texts were coded into key narrative themes. The themes were: anti democratic values and procedures; belonging to the Arab nation; contribution to humanity; democratic values and procedures; external powers; future vision; international community; leading the Arab world; nation's supremacy over other nations; security forces; national unity; our people; patriotism; peace; previous regime; religion and sacredness; revolution; rule of law; struggle; territory. The unit of analysis in this study was a sentence. Using a sentence as a focal point gave a higher-resolution picture of the constitutions' narrative themes, in comparison to a paragraph based analysis. This next sentence, taken from Iraq's 2005 constitution, shows the categorization of text employed in the research:

> … Upon our land the first law made by man was passed, and upon our soil, companion prophet and saints prayed.

This sentence contains references to the following themes: territory ("upon our land"; "upon our soil"); rule of law ("first law made by man was passed"); religion and sacredness ("companions of the Prophet and saints prayed"). Hence, more than one theme might appear within a sentence. In order to test the reliability of the coding and to control for possible biases that could affect the coder, two independent coders, both advanced students, were asked to attribute themes to 100 sentences. Two coding books were created, one in the original language, Arabic, and one in English.[4] Coding was found consistent, and an inter-coders Cohen's Kappa test showed strong reliability ranging from .82-1

Under the assumption that addressing a theme frequently indicates the authors' intent to highlight a certain one, themes that appeared frequently were analyzed as more important than themes that were rarely mentioned, and were addressed as *super themes*. The super themes are important since

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[3]All constitutions containing a preamble except two: Syria's constitution of 1969, which could not be traced in its original language and therefore was not included in this study, and Iraq's constitution of 1968, which was not obtained prior to the analysis and thus was not included.

[4] The Arabic coder was an Arabic native speaker.

they represent the core themes, the most stable and highlighted themes that characterize the meta-narrative.

The significance of a narrative theme is not only determined by repetition, but also by emphasis in specific parts of the text. Within the texts we analyzed in this project – preambles - there are four key structural paragraphs that are relevant: *Opening Paragraph*; *Concise Narrative Paragraph*; *Future Vision Paragraph*; *and Concluding Paragraph*;

A qualitative-narrative analysis, focused on understanding the importance of themes appearing within these four key paragraphs, revealed that the themes related to those sections of the text are usually the most frequent themes in the entire preamble. However, in some cases, themes that appeared in key paragraphs had few, if any, appearances in the rest of the text. Themes of the four key paragraphs were examined and defined as super themes with respect to their frequency and their significance in one or more of the four paragraphs. The four types of paragraphs that emerged from the texts are:

Opening Paragraph: This paragraph introduces the fundamental pillars of the national story. Examination of all preambles showed that themes which appear in this section are typically the most frequent themes in the whole preamble, usually appearing in most of its paragraphs.[5]

Concise Narrative Paragraph: A concise narrative is a concept used for a structural analysis of political narratives. Concise narratives appear in the segments of a political text that contain its entire chronological range. Those are parts of the text that present both the earliest and the latest periods mentioned by the speaker (Shenhav, 2005, 2015). Analyzing the concise narrative facilitates a structural and thematic understanding of how references to current politics are framed by historical perspectives in a way that creates ideological-political narratives. This reflects the ideological core perceptions the constitution stands on (Ibid). These perceptions affect and shape the national identity of the country, hence analysis of the concise narrative of any constitution sheds light on our understanding of the main narrative themes.

Future Vision Paragraph: Analysis of the *future vision* allows us an examination of the ideal situation the country (and therefore its people) desire. Future aspirations of the collective are a

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[5] In the few cases none of the themes listed in the opening paragraph were most frequent. Even in these cases themes were of high frequency in the text.

direct derivative of national identity. All constitutions except Iraq's 1925 constitution contain references to a *future vision*. Themes attributed to the *future vision* usually appear in the *opening paragraph*, and are commonly the most frequent ones in the text.[6] In some cases the *future vision* appears as part of the *concise narrative*.[7]

Concluding Paragraph: This paragraph is meant to highlight significant components of the national identity such as religious affiliation, membership in a supra-national community, commitment towards certain values, etc. For the most part these themes are woven throughout the text, but at times they do not appear prior to this section of the preamble. Using a theme for the first time in the *concluding paragraph* might be the nation's way of trying to integrate this theme into its national identity. Although its importance is relatively marginal (since it is not a common theme), this use of a theme can indicate that the nation will not waive this narrative theme but try to find its place in the national story. A theme may also appear for the first time in the text within the *concise narrative paragraph*. As with the *concluding paragraph*, this might be done to reflect the complexity the country is facing in relation to the integration of certain themes in the national identity. Themes appear in the *concise narrative paragraph*, despite not appearing elsewhere, in order to express an ideology, the main purpose of this paragraph. Placing a theme in this ideological oriented section can imply that the state wishes to maintain this idea but in a limited way.

To better understand the way the super themes were gauged, we used a network analysis program. Network analysis is a useful tool that allows the extraction of information from a broad corpus. The network itself is formed in accordance to the connection between key actors and theme narrative. By presenting information within a network, one can draw conclusions with respect to the relationship between different actors, even when they are not mentioned together within the same text. For this study we used a program called "Discourse Network Analyzer" (henceforth D.N.A.). This computer software allows empirical analysis of political discourse in a dynamic perspective, using numeric coding of texts. Coding in the D.N.A is based on noting whether the author of the text is presenting a specific narrative theme in a positive or a negative manner. If the claim made in the sentence supported a theme, it was coded as a positive statement; if it was made

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[6] The future vision and concise narrative usually appear within a whole paragraph but they may also appear as a sentence that is a part of paragraph.

[7] Other key paragraphs can appear together, it usually depends on the length of the preamble.

against a certain theme, it was coded as a negative statement.[8] Subsequently, the program created networks based on the appearance and co-appearance of different themes (e.g., "democratic values and procedures"). The structured networks were then visualized using UCINET software, enabling a panoramic view of the changes and processes of the constitutions and the narrative themes represented in them. This helps to identify the core characteristics that are placed at the base of the narratives.

As mentioned above, the second step includes interpretive analysis of the super themes. For this project, examining all the constitutions created by each state gives a wider perspective on the core values and social ingredients of the nation, which in turn helps uncover the elusive meta-narrative. The most frequent or emphasized *super themes* of a state's constitutions were grouped based on contextual relations. The combined super themes were defined as new themes, re-coded, and then analyzed and visualized using the computer software. This process of coding and recoding enables the trace of the meta-narrative, since it exposes the core elements, lying at the base of the texts. Through this procedure, new networks were created that revealed each nation's meta-narratives. Figure 1 shows the process of analysis.

Figure 1: A model for recognizing national meta-narratives in a two steps analysis
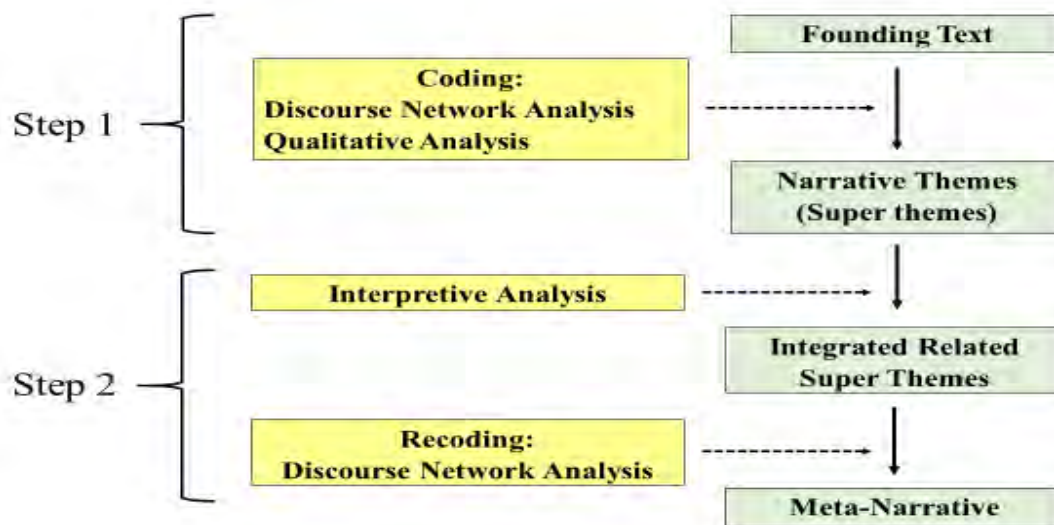
Note: The model is consisted of a two steps process: (a) finding the narrative themes that appear in a national text and identifying the most significant and stable ones; (b) integrating these central themes to reveal the meta-narrative.

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[8] Out of twenty themes, only 3 were always coded as negative: "anti democratic values and procedures"; "external powers"; "previous regime". There was one exception with the "anti democratic values and procedures" theme on Egypt's 1930 constitution where it was coded as positive. All other 17 themes were always coded as positive.

Demonstrating Meta-Narrative Analysis

The following is a demonstration of our method for analyzing meta-narratives. It shows the potential contribution of our method for conducting an overtime comparative analysis of formative documents (and other types of documents).

Egypt: Narrative Themes and Meta-narrative Analysis

Throughout its history, Egypt approved nine constitutions, seven of which containing a preamble.[9] Through the national story, depicted in those constitutions, Egypt's meta-narrative unfolds.

*Step 1: Extracting the Egyptian Super Narrative Theme*s

This step focuses on the theme level. Such analysis allows examination of specific narrative themes and exploration of their dynamics. Mapping texts through a network shows all the narrative themes that constitute Egyptian preambles. Figure 2 demonstrates that not all themes are equally important. The most prominent ones were frequent through all constitutions. These are "democratic values and procedures"; "our people" and "struggle". These themes are prominent due to the number of times they were mentioned in the text. It can also be seen that some themes are becoming more frequent as years go by, such as "religion and sacredness" and "national unity" and some, such as "rule of law", are becoming less frequent. As was mentioned earlier, identifying the super themes is not only done in light of their frequency but also according to their appearance in the four key paragraphs of the text. We analyzed the preambles in light of this combined methodological approach.

The Democratic Narrative Super Theme in the Egyptian Preambles

Throughout its constitutions, Egypt's national story is interwoven with references to democratic ideas and procedures. It is evident that by the 1970's the democratic super theme has been strengthening and becoming an inherent part of the Egyptian national story.[10] The importance of this notion is shown both by the frequent use of this super theme and by addressing it in the key paragraphs of the text. In the 1970's there was a shift in the attitude towards the democratic super theme, and the status of that theme slightly weakened. Although the super theme of "democratic

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[9] This count does not included common constitutions Egypt jointly singed with other Arab states in 1958 and in 1963.
[10] The only exception is the constitution of 1930. In this constitution, the democratic theme does receive representation, but not in any of the key paragraphs and in many respects this theme could be perceived as weakening.

values and procedures" still remains among the most prevalent theme in the constitution of 1971, there is no reference to it in the *opening*, *concluding*, or *concise narrative paragraphs*, as was in previous constitutions, but only within the *future vision paragraph.* In 2012, this super theme regained strength, becoming one of the most frequent themes in the text, but still receiving reference in only the one key paragraph of *future vision.*

Reading the texts shows that the democratic super theme is contradicted in some ways by the super theme of "religion and sacredness", as we will show next.

Figure 2: Step 1 – network analysis of all themes appearing in all Egyptian preambles

Note: This figure shows all narrative themes as were originally coded for all Egyptian constitutions. Diagrams were created by the UCINET software based on data coded through the Discourse Analyzer Network software.

Index For all D.N.A Figures:

1. Lines connect narrative themes (blue squares) and specific constitutions (red circles). The width of the line and size of the arrow, as defined by the software, indicate the frequency of the theme appearance in the connected constitution.

2. The lines connected to a theme indicate the constitutions that the theme appeared in.

3. Change in constitutions can be seen by observing both the number and width of the lines connecting themes and constitutions.

Diagrams were created by the UCINET software based on data coded through the Discourse Analyzer Network software.

The Religious Super Theme in the Egyptian Preambles

Until the 1970's, Egypt's preambles indicated a limited religious affiliation. In almost all constitutions, the theme "religion and sacredness" was addressed few times and only in one of the

key paragraphs. This indicates that this theme was evidently of some significance for the Egyptian identity, yet, for the most part references were brief and occasionally laconic. For example, in the constitution of 1964, the "religion and sacredness" theme is only referred to in the *concluding paragraph*, beginning with the words:

> … With the help of Allah, the articles of this constitution shall be the basis for a social and political regime in the United Arab Republic.

Other than that, there is no reference to religion throughout the text. In this respect, the 1970's brought a sign of change to the political discourse: for the first time, the status of religion was strengthening, and references to it were placed throughout the national story, as well as integrated in the key paragraphs. In the constitution of 2012, religion became the second most important narrative theme of the text.

In many aspects the strengthening of democratic discourse, alongside the deepening religious affiliation, creates a contradictory trend, mainly due to the strengthening Muslim religious law as part of the constitutional text. This is reflected, for example, in the constitution of 2012, which declares equality between men and women:

> "… Women are sisters of men and are their partners in all, related to the rights and duties and national responsibility".[11]

On the other hand, article 2 of the same constitution declares that "Principles of Islamic Sharia are the principal source of legislation", and in article 219 it declares that "The principles of Islamic Sharia include general evidence, foundational rules, rules of jurisprudence, and credible sources accepted in Sunni doctrines and by the larger community".

Relating to both the democratic and religious super themes in this intensity creates a tension within the constitutional texts. As mentioned, it appears that in both the constitution of 1971 and the constitution of 2012 the democratic super theme is slightly marginalized, and is not referred to in key paragraphs as in previous constitutions (*opening*, *concluding*, and *concise narrative paragraphs*). Instead, it is only included in the *future vision paragraph*. The religious super theme, on the other hand, is becoming more common in the text and appears more prominently in the key

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[11] While this reference does not relate to any event and therefore does not meet the definition of narrative, it is a part of the preamble text which contains references to various events in the national story, thus it is consistent with the definition of narrative.

paragraphs. In light of that, we can learn about Egypt's deliberation over the status of these two components of identity, and of the existing tension between them.

The Struggle Super Theme in the Egyptian Preambles

The perspective of struggle characterizes the constitutions of the Arab world in general and the constitutions of Egypt in particular. This super theme was adopted in the constitution of 1956 and has since appeared in all of Egypt's constitutions, to different degrees. The struggle is usually a particular one, i.e., refers to the dangers for the existence of the Egyptian state, but in a few cases, like in the constitution of 1956, it refers to the "common Arab struggle". The "struggle" super theme does not stand on its own, and there is a negative correlation between it and the "revolution" theme. As "struggle" is more frequently mentioned in the text, the number of references of "revolution" decreases and vice versa. The link between these two themes stems from the fact that they almost always appear in close proximity (within the same or subsequent paragraphs). For example, taken from the constitution of 1956:

> … We the Egyptian people, who took our fate in our hands, after the great victory, which was achieved in the revolution of July 23rd 1952, that occurred after a historical struggle.

Although the "struggle" super theme constitutes a significant component of the Egyptian national story, it seems that its importance in the text decreases in the constitution of 2012 (this can be seen by the relatively narrow line connecting the 2012 constitution and the "struggle" theme, and also by the relatively narrow line connecting the same constitution to the "revolution" theme in figure 2). A possible explanation is that during this time Egypt was facing an internal struggle. This super theme may be relatively modest in this constitution because there is no public consensus about it. One of the preamble's functions is to unite the public. When the struggle is internal, and the public perceptions of it are not homogeneous, it is likely that this super theme's expression in the text will be less significant.[12] On the thematic level, it seems that Egypt may not easily concede the struggle perspective, since it is reviewed as part of its national identity and thus integrated into the national story.

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[12] During the 1950's Egypt also faced an internal struggle against the monarchy, and yet it received great attention in the preamble. There might be two explanations for that: first, the monarchy was associated with an external enemy (the British Mandate). Second, four years had passed since this struggle occurred and until the constitution was drafted. Thus, enabling the unification of Egypt around the theme of a struggle

The Egyptian Motivation to Belong to a Supranational Community

The super themes are a step towards the meta-narrative level. Yet, they heavily rely on the interrelations between specific narrative themes. Although this is a pre-stage of the meta-narrative analysis, it can stand as a level of analysis by itself, providing interesting observations. For example, in light of the discussion held in the Arab world on the issue of Pan-Arabism ideology, one might expect the "belonging to the Arab nation" theme to appear in the context of any Arab constitution (Gershoni, 1997; Khalidi, 1991; Sasar, 2006). Egypt indeed adopts the idea of belonging to the inclusive community of the Arab nations, but assigns it less importance than might be expected. It seems that Egypt is trying to resolve the conflict between this super theme and the attempts to form and strengthen the particular-territorial national elements in its national identity.

Up until 1956, the Arab community was not mentioned in Egypt's constitutions, and hence it did not constitute a potential group to belong to in the eyes of the Egyptians. Since the 1950's, the theme of belonging to the Arab nation appears in all of Egypt's constitutions, and starting from the 1964 constitution, this theme is constantly mentioned in one of the key paragraphs (hence becoming a super theme), although its frequency in the text is significantly lower than other themes. Hence, it is of some importance for the Egyptian national identity. On the other hand, it is clear that Egypt has a limited commitment to this idea.

Accordingly, through its preambles, Egypt tries to resolve the tension arising between the "belonging to the Arab nation" element and other Egyptian particular-territorial themes. This is done in several ways: first, the super theme of "belonging to the Arab nation" is mentioned less than other themes in the text (no more than 2-3 times and usually within the same paragraph), and as the years pass by, it is gradually pushed towards the end of the text. Second, in certain cases this theme appears in only one specific paragraph, usually the *concise narrative paragraph* (as seen in the 1971 constitution), in contrast to other themes which Egypt is willing to commit to. Ultimately, it is evident that Egypt emphasizes other themes in the texts, which aim to balance the boundary-crossing Arab theme. A relevant example can be found in the "territory" theme. This theme appears in the national story for the first time in the 1971 constitution, a few years after the 1964 constitution, in which the commitment to the "belonging to the Arab nation" super theme reached its peak. Highlighting the territorial theme contradicts the idea of boundary-crossing Arab nationality.

The preamble embodies the tension between the particular-territorial and the Pan-Arab components of the Egyptian identity through an additional narrative theme, "national unity". The theme of national unity usually refers to the Egyptian unity, but in a few cases it actually refers to the unity of the Arab nation. For example, the constitution of 1964 refers to national unity in Egypt itself, but this theme can also be seen in the constitution of 1971 and the constitution of 2012 – both in the Egyptian context and the Arab national context.[13] While it evidently attributes more importance to the particular-territorial national element, Egypt tends to combine the super theme of "belonging to the Arab nation" in the key paragraphs of its founding document, and it is quite obvious that this super theme cannot simply be discarded.

The Changing Status of the Arab and the International Communities: Egypt's attitude towards the Arab and the international communities, as portrayed in its constitutions, is quite dynamic. It seems that there is a tension between the two super themes, "belonging to the Arab nation" and "belonging to the family of nations". The difficulty to keep both under the same constitution is evident. Nevertheless, it is clear that Egypt aspires to belong to a supranational community, either Arab or international.

As mentioned above, until the 1950's, the Arab community is not mentioned in the Egyptian constitutions. The super theme of "belonging to the family of nations" (represented by "international community"), however, appears already in the constitution of 1923:

> … Achieving this is for our desire and concern and it is our goal to promote the nation at the highest level among the nations of the world and according to our ancient historical superiority.

The emergence of the "belonging to the Arab nation" super theme in the 1956 constitution, being more frequent in the text, pushed the theme of "belonging to the family of nations" aside.[14] This trend continued in the constitution of 1964: the super theme of "belonging to the Arab nation" appeared at the highest intensity of all of Egypt's constitutions and "belonging to the family of

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[13] In the 1971 constitution, the "national unity" theme appears once in relation to Egypt and twice in relation to the Arab community. In the 2012 constitution, the "national unity" theme appears six times in relation to Egypt and twice in relation to the Arab community.

[14] In the constitution of 1923 reference to the international community appeared in all of the preamble's paragraphs. Although this is a relatively short preamble, consisted of only three paragraphs, this theme, unlike some of the other themes, appears in all paragraphs. In the constitution of 1956, however, the international community is mentioned only twice (in a preamble that is consisted of nine paragraphs) and not in any of the key paragraphs.

nations" was completely pushed out of the national story. The constitution of 1971 is accompanied with signs of change: the "international community" is becoming one of the most prominent themes in the constitution, while the status of the "belonging to the Arab nation" super theme is downgraded. The constitution of 2012 demonstrates another dramatic change in the political discourse: the weight of the theme of "belonging to the family of nations" considerably decreases, which results in only two repetitions of it, while "belonging to the Arab nation" maintains its status. In the view of the trend cited above, relating to the tension between the democratic and religious themes, some might argue that the estrangement of the "belonging to the family of nations" super theme is consistent with the rising status of the religious one. Throughout the Egyptian constitutions, the international community is largely identified with democratic ideas, while the Arab community is identified with religion and Islam. Hence, it is reasonable to argue that the rise in prestige of the religious super theme among the Egyptian people influenced the status of the "belonging to the family of nations" one.

Step 2: Extracting the Egyptian Meta-Narrative

In light of the analysis of the super themes and the examination of the changes they underwent throughout Egypt's constitutions, we can see the Egyptian meta-narrative. As mentioned earlier, the process of unveiling the meta-narrative is done in two steps: extracting the super themes from the preamble (according to their frequency or appearance in the key paragraphs), and creating groups of related super themes that form the meta-narrative.

Observing the Egyptian national story shows that Egypt addresses super themes related to the characters of its particular-territorial identity and is debating over the place these super themes should occupy in the Egyptian identity. These super themes are mainly democracy and religion. This is reflected both by highlighting these specific super themes and emphasizing related themes such as our people, territory and national unity. Earlier on this paper we addressed the existing tension between these two super themes. Thus, if we put the democratic and religious themes under one conceptual umbrella of competing internal identity elements, we will be able to see Egypt's dilemma about the integration of these two themes in its national identity.

Figure 3: *Step 2 - network of all Egyptian preambles after an integrative analysis of super themes*
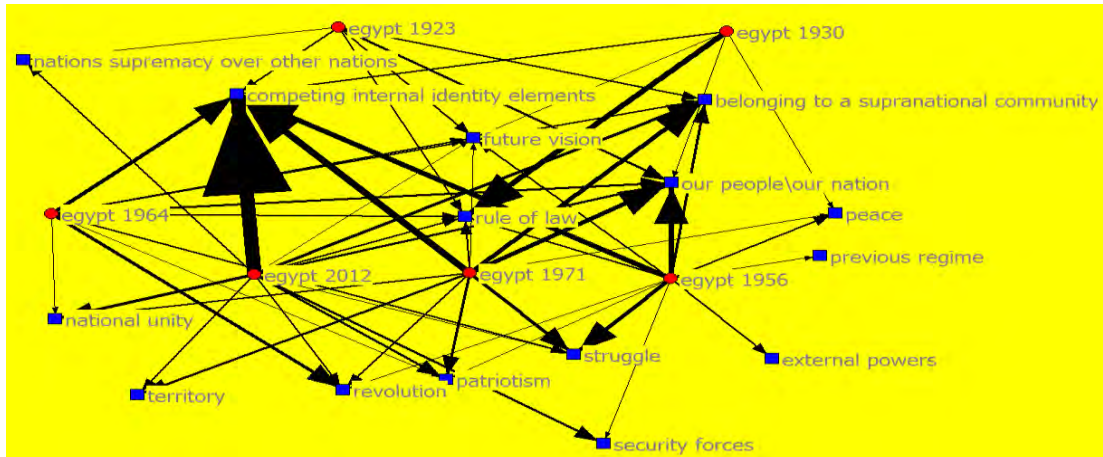
Note: This figure unites super-themes relating to supranational communities and competing internal elements, thus pointing to Egypt's meta-narrative. Diagrams were created by the UCINET software based on data coded through the Discourse Analyzer Network software.

Two other super themes deriving from the national story are "belonging to the Arab nation" and "belonging to the family of nations". It appears that from its inception, Egypt has debated the sources of its supranational identity, while struggling to decide which community to commit to and what status it will receive. Thus, uniting these two super themes under one theme of "belonging to a supranational community" is beneficial to the understanding of Egypt's meta-narrative.

It appears that Egypt's meta-narrative revolves around two main axes: conflicting and establishing the core elements of its particular-territorial national identity and position itself within a supranational community. In the case of Egypt, the meta-narrative is actually driven by internal tensions.

Iraq: Narrative Themes and Meta-Narrative Analysis

Throughout its history, Iraq approved seven constitutions, five of them containing a preamble.[15] As in Egypt, the preambles of Iraqi constitutions reflect the Iraqi national story. We analyzed these preambles, refined the super themes that characterize Iraqi constitutions and utter them in order to reveal Iraq's meta-narrative.

Step 1: Extracting Iraqi Super Narrative Themes

Mapping the texts through a network shows all narrative themes that constitute the Iraqi preamble. As shown in figure 4, not all themes are equally important. The most prominent themes are

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[15] This count does not include the common constitution Iraq jointly singed with other Arab states in 1963.

represented as the most frequent through all constitutions. These are "democratic values and procedures" and "rule of law". It can also be seen that some narrative themes gradually gain dominance, such as "religion and sacredness"; "national unity"; "our people" and "territory".

Figure 4: *Step 1 – network analysis of all themes appearing in all Iraqi preambles*
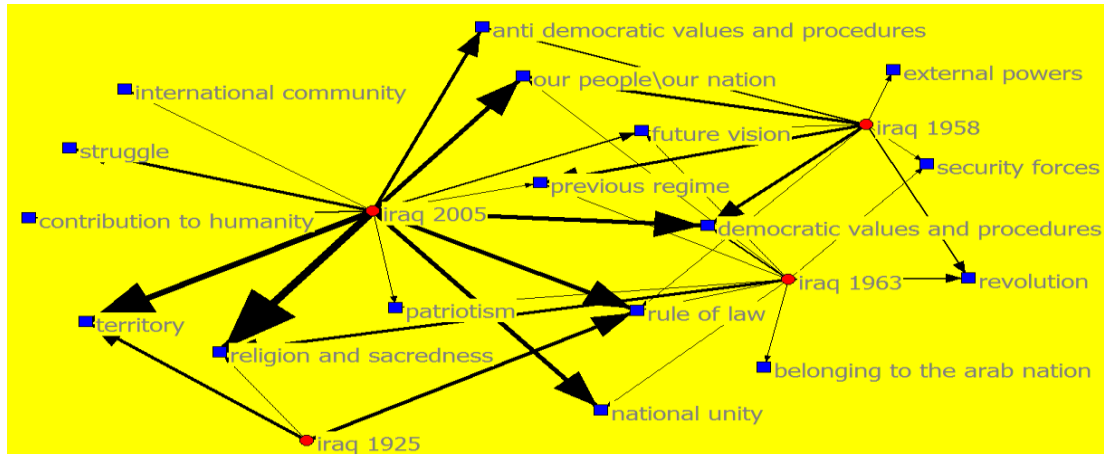
Note: This figure shows all narrative themes as were originally coded for all Iraqi constitutions. Diagrams were created by the UCINET software based on data coded through the Discourse Analyzer Network software.

The Democratic Super Theme in the Iraqi Preambles

As can be seen in the figure 4, the democratic super theme is one of the most prominent components in the Iraqi national story. While it is not the most frequent theme, it is common and consistently referred to in all constitutions since 1958. As in Egypt, it is difficult to perceive Iraq as a democracy, but democratization processes that apply to the political discourse can be observed within its constitutions. A clear sign for that is the increasing prevalence of "democratic values and procedures" super theme, as well as the increasing flow of entries negating "anti-democratic values and procedures", as can be seen in later constitutions. Another noteworthy indicator is the status of the people in the preamble: in the 1925 constitution, the people are not mentioned at all. In the constitution of 1958, the people are mentioned more often, but they appear in the text only third, after addressing the security forces and the leaders of the revolution. In the 1963 constitution, the people are not mentioned frequently, but they do gain primary importance and are referenced before any other actor and within key paragraphs. In the 2005 constitution, their status is reduced to second place only after God. Also, in this constitution, the "our people" theme becomes more frequent than ever, and is mentioned within key paragraphs. The people's rule is a basic principle

of democracy. Granting the people more space in the formative text could be related with the attempt to move toward the adoption of a democratic discourse. Recognizing the importance of the peoples' status in the national story is significant for the democratization processes, and therefore constitutes a measure for the state's strive for democracy.

The Religious Super Theme in the Iraqi Preambles

Historians maintain that until the 1970's, Islam was in retreat in all fronts: political, legal, state-educational, etc. Secular values largely characterized Arab countries, and disobedience to religious commandments was common and acceptable (Yapp, 1999). In the early 1970's a reversed trend emerged, when Islamic foundations increasingly entered the public discourse, and Islam was appearing more dominantly in Arab constitutions, state laws, educational systems, etc. In Iraq this trend preceded the rest of the Arab world: while in the 1958 constitution the religious theme was completely absent (quite unusual comparison to other Arab constitutions in the 1950's), the constitution of 1963 referred to the religious super theme several times, reaching a high point at this ending of the text:

> … We use the help of God and apply his verses (and consult with your people).[16]

This is a surprising reference since this constitution was written by the new rulers of Iraq, the secular Ba'ath party. This shows that the narrative themes that appear in the constitution are not detached from public preferences. Although the constitution was formulated by representatives who apparently did not have a religious affiliation, the narrative themes were constructed on values that the public is close to and can identify with. In the 2005 constitution, religion became the most significant super theme in the national story.

Self-Definition by Referring to the Enemy and the Super Theme of National Unity

In all its constitutions, with the exception of the one written in 1925, Iraq refers to a certain enemy. All preambles since 1958 indicate an internal enemy which resides inside the State. Although the preamble of 1958 also refers to an external enemy – the British control – addressing it is done through people and entities of the state that supported it:

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[16] "And consult with your people" is a verse taken from the Quran (3:159).

> … Since the previous regime was based on political corruption that characterized the people who stole power and ruled the country against the will and interests of the public, they established their rule in order to promote their own interests and to protect the interests and desires of the mandate.

Reference to the other, in this case to an enemy, is a common way of defining a national identity. However, the choice to refer to an internal enemy is not trivial. As discussed in the literature review, through the narrative presented in it, the preamble has the power to establish and invent a common identity, but also to serve as a disassembling power which polarizes the people and facilitates existing conflicts (Orgad, 2010). Thus, choosing to mark an internal enemy may assist in bringing the people together, but can also push them further apart.

This approach is interesting since another super theme which Iraq seeks to promote is the theme of "national unity". The reference to this idea first appears in the 1963 constitution, after Iraq had already experienced two military coups that led to the establishment of two new constitutions. In the constitution of 2005 the "national unity" super theme became much more prominent and it appears that the writers wished to emphasize it. Reference to a common enemy allows this emphasis. For example, in the same constitution, Saddam Hussein' government is marked as an enemy unifying all groups of people:

> … Remember the ethnic oppression carried out by the dictatorial government, and inspired by the Iraqi dead: the Shiites, Sunnis, Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen - of the entire people, and inspired by desecration of the holy cities and the popular uprisings of the southern region, and inspired by the mass graves in... and by the national massacre in… and remember the disasters of the Turkmen in… and the suffering of the residents of the western region, like the other Iraqi regions… we are working hand in hand in favor of the establishment of a new Iraqi state – with no more sectarianism, racism, discrimination and or rejection of the other.

This attempt to highlight national unity in Iraq may stem from the understanding of the events that led to the military coup, or from the Iraqi attempts to find a solution to one of the essential problems accompanying it since its inception till present days, the ethnic and religious conflicts (Ma'oz, 2002). In this respect, the national story seeks to construct a new reality.

The (Lack of) Iraqi Motivation to Belong to a Supranational Community

Belonging to the Arab Community Theme: Surprisingly, the only time where any affiliation to the greater Arab community is mentioned in the constitutions of Iraq, is in the constitution of 1963,

and it is a relatively general reference: "Act for educating the young generation, in the light of the spirit of the Arab values". The absence of a Pan-Arab theme in Iraq's constitutions is intriguing. The constitutions writing "wave" of the 1950's indicated the upcoming Pan-Arab component of national identity in the constitutions of Egypt and Syria, a component which is still absent from the constitution of Iraq today. This trend suggests that the theme of "belonging to the Arab nation" has never played a significant role in the Iraqi national story, despite the attempt to establish a federation that will have a common constitution between Egypt, Syria and Iraq during the 1960's (we will address this issue later in the text).[17]

Belonging to the Family of Nations Theme: Another theme which is not characteristic of the Iraqi constitutions is the narrative of belonging to the family of nations (represented by the "international community" theme). Reference to this theme first appears in the constitution of 2012:

> …Out of global support of our friends and those who love us, marched for the first time in our history toward the ballot boxes …

This reference is rather insignificant since it only appears once throughout the text and not in any of the key paragraphs, which makes it difficult to determine whether it represents a real change in the statues of the "belonging to the family of nations" theme.

These references (or lack of references) to the themes of "belonging to the Arab nation" and "belonging to the family of nations", indicate the particular-territorial emphasis of the Iraqi national identity. As opposed to Egypt (and, as we will later suggest, also as opposed to Syria), Iraq does not look outside the boundaries of the country, but rather seeks to concentrate its national story in experiences and events that had been part of Iraqi life and people within the state borders.

The Struggle Super Theme in the Iraqi Preambles

While discussing Egypt we highlighted the connection between the "revolution" and "struggle" super themes. The Iraqi constitutions of 1958 and 1963 refer to revolutions that took place in the country and led to the establishment of two new constitutions. These references were made within

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[17] Some may argue that because of American influence in the writing process of the 2005 constitution, no reference was made to the Arab community. But, constitution drafters cannot completely ignore prominent themes in the national identity. If this theme was important to the public, it would have been expressed in the constitution of 2005. Furthermore, this theme dose not receives attention in other constitutions. Hence, the 2005 constitution continues a trend already exists.

key paragraphs. The "struggle" theme is not referred to in any of these constitutions. However, the constitution of 2005 did not display the "revolution" theme, while the "struggle" theme was adopted into the national story and was mentioned within key paragraphs. Although this theme appears only in the constitution of 2005, and in light of the connection between the "struggle" and the "revolution" themes, the prism struggle is relevant to previous Iraqi constitutions and should be seen as a significant part of Iraq's national story.

Step 2: Extracting the Iraqi Meta-Narrative

Now that the super themes of the national story have been refined, we can try to understand Iraq's meta-narrative. It is evident that Iraq emphasizes almost exclusively super themes that are related to its particular-territorial national identity. Thus, if we take all super themes that symbolize particular-territorial identity (national unity; our people; territory) and put them under one definition (particular-territorial elements), we can see that this becomes Iraq's main concern. These super themes represent messages aimed at creating a sense of partnership and unity. That is what Iraq's meta-narrative revolves around: the search for a sense of partnership and unity, the attempt to create a common ground for all Iraqi citizens. It is obvious that the super themes of religion and democracy are prominent elements in the national story that can also be understood under this meta-narrative: these super themes are the basis on which Iraqi sense of unity should be built on.

Figure 5: *Step 2 - network of all Iraqi preambles after an integrative analysis of super themes*
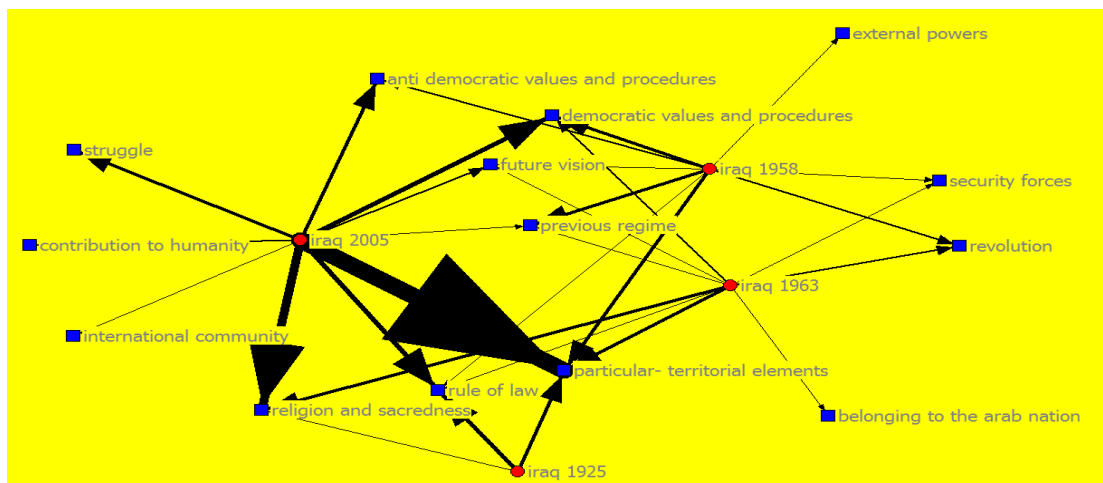
Note: This figure unites particular-territorial super-themes, thus pointing to Iraq's meta-narrative. Diagrams were created by the UCINET software based on data coded through the Discourse Analyzer Network software.

This may be trivial for some countries, but Iraq has experienced much turbulence, both internally and in terms of foreign relations: It was established by a foreign power (Britain) that determined its political boundaries without any consideration of its ethnic and religious structure, which created a problem Iraq is still facing today; It had experienced internal tensions which jeopardized its stability; Iraq had signed federal union agreements with other states, losing some of its sovereignty; and it had suffered from a tyrant rule which was overthrown by another foreign power (United States). In light of this chaotic history it is clear why Iraq would seek to find a way to emphasize a sense of unity and solidarity, and shape its meta-narrative around these values.

Syria: Narrative Themes and Meta-Narrative Analysis

Throughout its history as an independent country, Syria approved six constitutions, four of which containing a preamble.[18] As in Egypt and Iraq, the preambles of Syrian constitutions reflect the Syrian national meta-narrative.

Step 1: Extracting the Syrian Super Narrative Themes

Mapping the texts through a network shows all narrative themes that constitute the Syrian preamble. As shown in figure 6 not all themes are equally important. The most prominent one in all constitutions is "belonging to the Arab nation". It can also be seen that some themes are gradually strengthening, such as "struggle" and "national unity". Also, it is clear that some themes are weakening in later constitutions, like "religion and sacredness".

Figure 6: *Step 1 – network analysis of all themes appearing in all Syrian preambles*
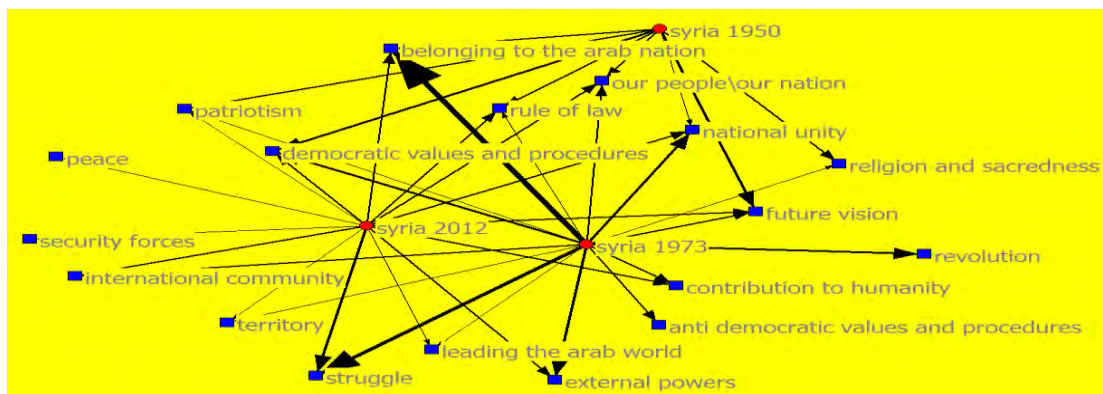
Note: This figure shows all narrative themes as were originally coded for all Syrian constitutions. Diagrams were created by the UCINET software based on data coded through the Discourse Analyzer Network software.

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[18] This count does not include the common constitutions Syria jointly singed with other Arab states in 1958 and 1963.

The Democratic Theme in the Syrian Preambles

As opposed to the constitutions of Egypt and Iraq, where a general tendency towards democratization can be indicated, Syria shows a reversed trend. In the constitution of 1950, the earliest one with a preamble, the democratic theme is the most prominent one ("democratic values and procedures"): it is the most frequent theme referred to in the text, and is dominant in the key paragraphs. For example, in the 1950 constitution, Syria declared that it is committed to:

> … Promoting strong fundamentals of justice to ensure every man his deserved rights without any fear, with the backing of the judiciary and establishing its independence, under the free democratic republican government.

In the constitution of 1973, the same theme is still important but is weakened. The "democratic values and procedures" theme is no longer the most frequent one in the text and not even one of the three most frequently referred. while it is integrated in some of the key paragraphs, it still seems that its status is deteriorating (for example, it is not mentioned in the *opening paragraph* and does not constitute a solution for the presented complexity the state is facing - as was in the constitution of 1950). It is additionally evident that its commitment to democratic values also decreases when considering some of the statements appearing in the constitution, as when men's liberty appears in the context of sacrificing themselves for their country:

> … Freedom is a sacred right and popular democracy, which guarantees the citizens the ability to exercise their freedom and presents them as respected men contributing to society, and as capable of defending their country, sacrificing themselves for their nation.

Binding the right to freedom with the idea of sacrifice for the country in this manner is more compatible to authoritarian regimes then to democratic ones. This trend of deterioration of the democratic theme continued in the constitution of 2012. This is manifested both in a significant decrease in the frequency of "democratic values and procedures" theme, and in its exclusion from all key paragraphs except the *concluding paragraph*.

The Religious Theme in the Syrian Preambles

Similarly to the democratic theme, that reached a pick in dominance in the constitution of 1950 and since has been on retreat, the religious theme has gradually lost its weight in the national story. In the 1950 constitution, religion was considered a significant component of the national story and references towards it were explicit ("With the help of Allah and free will of the people", "Since

the religion of the majority of the people is Islam, the state declares its commitment to the ideals of the Islam", etc.). In the constitution of 1973, the "religion and sacredness" theme became more implicit as the text referred to "sacred right", or "creating the sacred atmosphere in order to complete important achievements". In the constitution of 2012, the religious theme was completely absent from the preamble.

As mentioned earlier, historians mark a fundamental trend in the Arab world - strengthening of the religious dimension since the 1970's. This trend is obviously not relevant in the case of Syria's national story. The absence of this theme from the national story could affect Syria's relations with other countries of the Arab system, an issue which will be addressed later.

The Syrian Motivation to Belong to a Supranational Community

Belonging to the Arab Nation Super Theme: Syria is the country that demonstrates the highest commitment to the idea of an Arab community, often at the cost of conceding particular-territorial identity themes. As early as in the constitution of 1950, the lack of separation between Arab identity and territorial identity is obvious, as can be seen by the way "Our People" is introduced as the "Arab Syrian people". In the constitution of 1973, the first four paragraphs of the preamble are dedicated to the national story of the Arab community, whereas only the fifth paragraph presents a reference to the "Arab Syrian state".

Observing the theme of "national unity" can also indicate the importance of the "belonging to the Arab nation" super theme in the national story. In the constitution of 1950, the "national unity" theme refers to the territorial aspect, namely - Syrian unity. In the constitution of 1973, the same theme appears mostly in the context of unity of the Arab nation. The constitution of 2012 brings some change to this discourse. Although the super theme of "belonging to the Arab nation" wins a significant place in the text, it is smaller than that given in the constitution of 1973. The "national unity" theme in this constitution appears mainly in the context of the Syrian nation. However, Syria does not concede the Arab theme and even draws legitimacy from it. For example, while facing an erratic political reality, the Syrian writers of the 2012 constitution turn to the Arab community:

> …For building a strong state and strengthening the integration between the people and the **Syrian Arab Army**, the authority which ensures the country's sovereignty, security, and the unity of its

lands, which is the base for the popular struggle for the liberation of all occupied lands (emphasis added).

Referring to the Arab super theme in this context is not coincidental, as the Arab community serves as a source of legitimacy on days when military and government actions are not perceived as legitimate in the eyes of some of the population.[19]

This combination of the particular-territorial and Pan-Arab super themes, and the attempt to resolve the inherent tension that exists between them, teaches us a lot about the Syrian deliberation over its sources of identity. Despite the changes in its approach and commitment to the "belonging to the Arab nation" super theme, Syria does not concede the dream of Arab unity and sees itself as its leader:

> … Syria has a major role in the struggle being the beating heart of the Arab world, in staying at the forefront of the conflict with the Zionist enemy and in supporting the movements resisting the colonial control in the Arab world.

The appearance of this super theme in the 2012 constitution might be utilitarian: in such turbulent reality, the Arab community is a source for legitimacy, which could strengthen the Syrian rule.

Belonging to the Family of Nations Theme: Alongside its commitment to the Arab community, the Syrian national story expresses another super theme: "belonging to the family of nations" (represented by "international community"). Although the position of the international community is always lower than that of the Arab community, it is still significantly expressed in the texts. Syria adopted this theme in the constitution of 1973, expressing it through a number of key paragraphs. Interestingly, while the international community was mentioned in the text few times in comparison to the Arab community, its status increased in the 2012 constitution and became nearly equal to the status of the Arab community. The frequency of appearances in the text was similar and they were mentioned within the same key paragraphs. The explanation of a search for legitimacy might apply here as well: Syria is in a state of a civil war, and the government is looking for sources of support. In this sense, one can see the power of the national story in reflecting reality as well as constructing it.

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[19] Principally, in all Arab constitutions examined in this study, reference to security forces is only made in light of an internal crisis. This means that it is integrated into the national story only when inner-state conflict irrupts.

The Struggle Super Theme in the Syrian Preambles

The theme of "struggle" has not been visible in Syria from its inception; it is not referred to in the constitution of 1950. However, the 1973 constitution shows that "struggle" has been adopted by Syria, becoming a significant part of the national story. The enemies Syria struggles with have a place in the Syrian national story; Syria is fighting against the representatives of colonialism and the territorial division of the Arab states, while trying to fulfill the dream of Arab unity. While colonialism remains an enemy in the constitution of 2012, there is another added dimension – an internal enemy, which is not clearly identified. Lack of specific identification is not surprising here. The Syrian regime seeks to write a constitution that will unite all citizens, as oppose to perpetuating the national conflict. As one can learn from the Syrian case, problems that beset the country cannot simply be ignored in the constitution. Trying to unite its people and strengthen its rule, Syria seeks to give an expression to the existing diversity, by explaining the possibilities of coexistence and the realization of the historic role of Syria in the international arena:

> … The Syrian society has succeeded, through all its layers, components and popular and political organizations, to bring the achievements that have proved the depth of its cultural diversity, its willingness and ability to adapt to changes; all of this while creating the appropriate atmosphere for maintaining the human role of the Syrian society, as an active historical force in the human cultural march.

Step 2: Extracting the Syrian Meta-Narrative

At first sight, the most prominent super theme that emerges from the Syrian constitutions is the one of "belonging to the Arab nation". This super theme receives significant attention (though not uniform) throughout all of Syria's constitutions. Nevertheless, it is interesting to see that whereas Syria's national story emphasizes this super theme, its other prominent themes are different than the ones Iraq and Egypt choose to emphasize. Thus, whereas Iraq and Egypt give much room to the democratic and religious themes, Syria has pushed them aside as time went by. This raises questions about the nature of this sense of belonging and the common ground it is based on. In addition, it is notable that throughout the 1950's and 1960's, Syria has signed failed union agreements with Egypt and Iraq. Despite these failures, Syria continues to emphasize "belonging to the Arab nation" in its constitutions as a super theme. Alongside, it can be seen that Syria also

gives room in its national story to the "belonging to the family of nations" super theme. If we will put these two themes under one conceptual umbrella this picture immerges:

Figure 7: *Step 2 – network of all Syrian preambles after an integrative analysis of super themes*
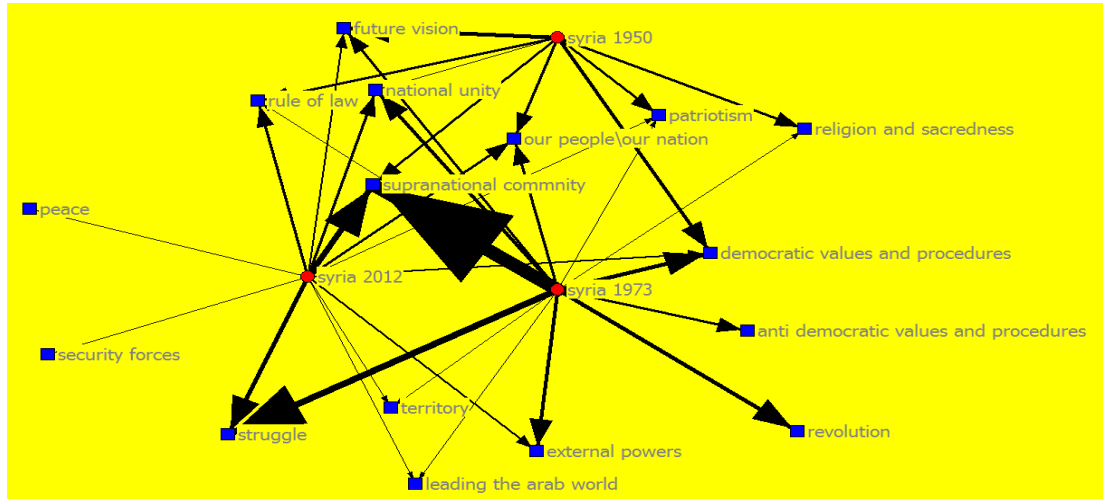
Note: This figure unites super themes relating supranational communities, thus pointing to Syria's meta-narrative. Diagrams were created by the UCINET software based on data coded through the Discourse Analyzer Network software.

Figure 7 reflects the Syrian search for a supra-national connection. Syrian constitutions show that the "belonging to the Arab nation" super theme took more room in the national story, but the international community also received significant references. This can reveal Syria's meta-narrative: a search for support and legitimacy from outside sources. This determination is also supported by the strong presence of the "struggle" super theme in the national story. Starting from the constitution of 1973, it is evident that the perspective of struggle becomes significant. This can be influenced by Syria's sense of insecurity or at least by its constant search for support and legitimacy.

A Meta-Narrative of the Arab world?

Thus far the meta-narratives of Egypt, Iraq and Syria have been presented, based on their founding political texts, the constitutions. In light of the different meta-narratives that were extracted, and since none of the common constitutions these three countries signed had a preamble, it is difficult to identify one meta-narrative that characterizes the inter-Arab system. However, it can be seen that the three countries share certain narrative themes, and that each country attributes different importance to those themes. Comparing the prevalence of narrative themes in texts published at

different times, in an inter-Arab perspective, can reveal processes of convergence and divergence within the inter-Arab system.

Figures 8 and 9 show the frequency of themes within constitutions written in the 1950's and 2000's, respectively. It can be seen that major changes had occurred in the dominance of several narrative themes within the constitutions, mainly the democratic and religious themes. Comparing the figures also demonstrates how certain themes, such as struggle and national unity, became more important for the three countries.

The Democratic Theme

The place the democratic theme takes in the constitutional texts changed over time in the three states examined. Although all three countries attributed similar importance to the democratic theme in the 1950's (as can be seen in figure 8), their attitudes towards it developed differently (as can be seen in figure 9). The general trend in Egypt and Iraq showed strengthening of the democratic theme, whereas in Syria it gradually weakened.

The Religious Theme

The religious theme provides additional evidence for the difference in the way Egypt, Iraq and Syria evolved in their attitudes towards certain narrative themes. While in Egypt and Iraq the religious theme gained dominance throughout the years (in Iraq this theme, which did not appear at all in the 1958 constitution, was the second most prevalent theme in the 2005 constitution), in Syria it was gradually marginalized to the point of not appearing at all in the 2012 constitution.

Figure 8: *Network of all Egypt's, Iraq's and Syria's preambles written in the 1950's*
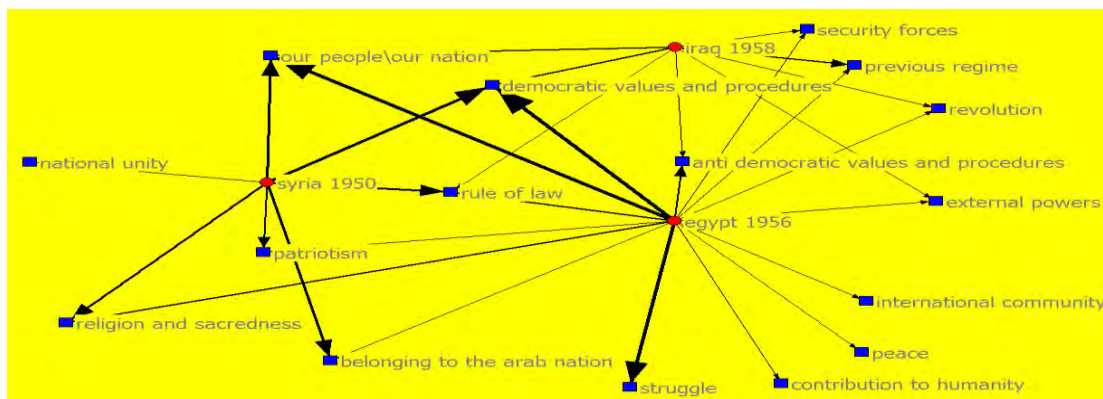
Note: This figure demonstrates all narrative themes that appeared in Egypt's, Iraq's and Syria's constitutions in the 1950's. Diagrams were created by the UCINET software based on data coded through the Discourse Analyzer Network software.

Figure 9: *Network of all Egypt's, Iraq's and Syria's preambles written in the 2000's*
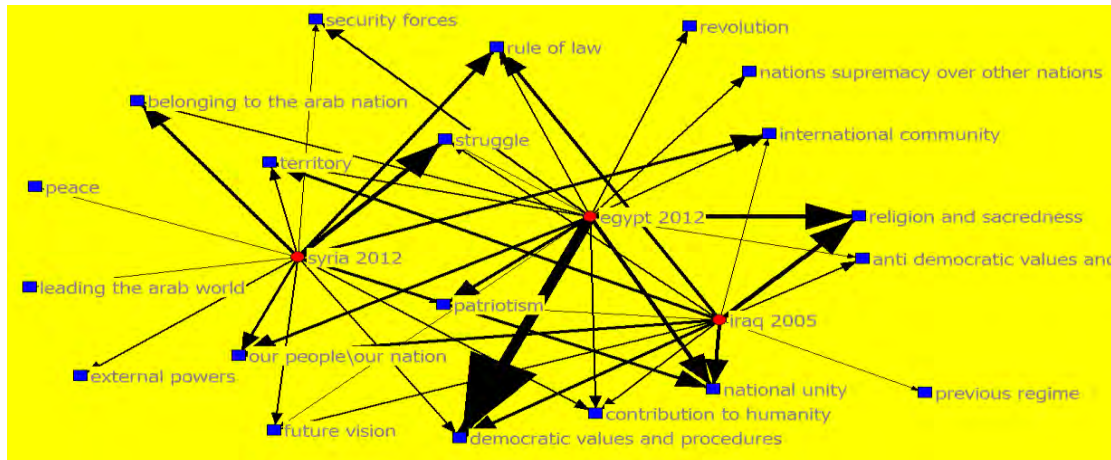
Note: This figure demonstrates all narrative themes that appeared in Egypt's, Iraq's and Syria's constitutions in the 2000's. Diagrams were created by the UCINET software based on data coded through the Discourse Analyzer Network software.

Nevertheless, democratic and religious themes might not be the most challenging obstacles inter-Arab cohesion is facing.

Belonging to the Arab nation Theme

The idea of looking at Arab states as part of one inter-Arab system is based on the notion that each country's identity has some aspiration to be a part of the Arab nation. Observing the theme of "belonging to the Arab nation", shows that it is not a common theme for all three countries. As can be seen by both figure 8 and figure 9, Iraq was neither interested in this theme in the 1950's, nor in the 2000's, while Egypt and Syria did show commitment to it, though in different intensities. We can recall the meta-narrative of each state in order to explain this: Iraq's meta-narrative revolves around the search for a sense of inner unity; Egypt is debating the sources of its supranational identity; and Syria searches for support and legitimacy from outside sources, including the Arab community. Obviously, it cannot be maintained that the idea of belonging to the Arab nation has completely disappeared, as Egypt and Syria did not give it up. These countries are seeking to cope with the existing tension between their particular-territorial national themes and the Arab theme, while determining the status of Arabism in their identity. However, it is clear that the ability to produce a common ground is not as obvious as it might have seemed before. One theme that demonstrates a different trend, of growing commonality between the three states, is the theme of struggle.

The Struggle Theme

While this is not a prominent theme for all three states, figure 8 and 9 show that the "struggle" theme is becoming more important in the eyes of Iraq and Syria. While in the 1950's only Egypt referred to this theme, in the 2000's constitutions, all three states referred to it in different intensities. Even though the struggle referred to in the national story is not identical in all states (in some cases it relates to the state's particular struggle, while in others it relates to the struggle of the Arab community), referring to an external enemy always reflected a common enemy. It is evident that this perspective is adopted to some extent by all three states, and still serves as means for them to conceive the world. Perhaps this perspective is the "glue" which maintains the Arab world together and keeps it in the current form. When a country is in a struggle state of mind, belonging to a wider community can provide some comfort and confidence.

The observation that the inter-Arab system should not be perceived as a monolithic block is hardly groundbreaking. Yet, mapping the narrative themes of Egypt, Iraq and Syria helps understanding the common denominator between these states as well as the points of difference.

Conclusions

The importance of narratives as a means for constructing and maintaining collectives has been established through extensive research (Shenhav, et al., 2013; Patterson & Monroe, 1998; Hajer, 1995; Auerbach, 2009). Despite the consensus regarding the significance of meta-narratives and of their basic definition as an interpretive socio-cultural framework that guide the nation (Bamberger, 2005), to the best of our knowledge, a method for empirical identification of meta-narratives is absent. Such a framework is required in light of the abstract nature of meta-narratives (Auerbach, 2009; Patterson & Monroe, 1998), which leaves much of room for the researcher's interpretations, and creates significant obstacles in reaching reliable results. Thus, designing a way to comprehend meta-narratives is a challenging task, one that this study aims to overcome. We propose a new approach to explore meta-narratives, jointly using network and qualitative–narrative analyses. Analysis was done in two steps: identifying the super narrative themes, and using these super themes as a basis for extracting the meta-narrative.

The super themes were located through the creation of networks which visualized their significance in the text. Visualizing the narratives in networks was useful, providing a large scale view of the data and clearly illustrating the connections between different themes. Super themes

were expressed not only by repetition, but also by emphasis in specific four key paragraphs of the preamble. Once identified, super themes were integrated into groups based on contextual relations, in order to reveal the meta-narrative of each state.

This methodology was implemented on the founding political texts of three Arab states: the constitutions of Egypt, Iraq and Syria. Arab states make an interesting case study in light of their turbulent political reality and their recent engagement with constitution writing. Analysis showed valuable findings regarding each country as well as the inter-Arab system. Whereas the three states share many themes, they do not necessarily perceive them in the same manner, and they did not constitute similar meta-narratives: Iraq's is searching for a sense of inner unity; Egypt is debating the sources of its supranational identity; and Syria searches for support and legitimacy from outside sources. Analyzing the meta-narratives of Egypt, Iraq and Syria, one could understand what otherwise might be overlooked: these are three countries with different collective aspirations, which share some commonalities but are not monolithic.

In light of the profound differences between the meta-narratives of each state, we did not find an inclusive meta-narrative for the entire Arab system. Yet, understanding the narrative themes of each country may shed light on deeper processes in the Arab world. Thus, analyzing the narratives themes in an Arab world perspective revealed several trends in attitudes towards central issues such as democracy, religion, struggle and the concept of belonging to the Arab world. The analysis presented in this study suggests that extraction of the narrative themes may offer a sharper prism which would allow a more accurate analysis of the changing connections within the Arab world, and the various inner-political blocks it is based on.

Though this study focuses on the constitutions' preambles of three Arab countries, we believe this two-step method for extracting meta-narratives - first by identifying the main narrative themes (super themes), and then by integrating them - could be applied on other political texts, whether it is constitutions or other founding texts such as anthems or speeches held by national representative figures. Future research may apply this method on a sample of non-governmental political organizations within a certain state. Doing so could yield meaningful insights regarding interactions and tensions between a state's national meta-narrative and the meta-narrative of organizations operating within it. Finally, looking at the entire global system through the meta-narrative perspective might sound ambitious, but can provide a new way to map similarities and

differences between countries. We may be surprised to discover proximity between countries we did not expect.

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