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Chair in Islam: Culture and Politics

Jordanian Winter: Why Jordan was not affected by the Arab Spring?

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Introduction

Arab leaders generally enjoy considerable political longevity, however, with the Arab Spring, many regimes in Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have fallen and the stability of the MENA region had been profoundly shaken.¹ A country in particular has seemed almost impermeable to the unrest that has hit the area, this state is the Kingdom of Jordan.

Since its independence in 1946, the Hashemite Kingdom has been considered many times on the brink of dissolution.² However, Jordan has showed an incredible capability to survive against the odds, and the Arab Spring made no exception. The country was in a very delicate position, there was a severe economic crisis, demonstrations in the main cities, war in the neighbouring countries, a massive refugees' inflow, and clashes between the government and the opposition. Notwithstanding the years of insecurity that followed the Arab Spring, the Jordanian regime managed not only to avoid a revolution, but to calm the population by undertaking purely cosmetic reforms, which produced no real change, and exploiting the cleavages that oppose the different sectors of society. Thus, despite the conflicts that surrounded the country, Jordan remained an oasis of peace in the midst of a Middle East prey of chaos. In the north, a civil war erupted in Syria, in the west, Iraq was plagued by violence and terrorist attacks, in the east, there were clashes between Hamas and Israel. Moreover, there was the rise of the Islamic State, a jihadist organisation which threatened all the states of the area. Jordan was faced by multiple security concerns which brought the authorities to reinforce the borders and put the military in a constant state of alert.

However, the Arab Spring started with peaceful and pro-democracy protests, where youth and activists asked for reforms and change to address the social injustices that characterised the regimes of the area. Some authoritarian leaders were removed, others were able to cling to their positions, even tightening their grip on power. Thus, the Arab Spring represented a period of profound changes for the Middle East. Concerning Jordan, demonstrations for reforms are not a new phenomenon, and the same can be said of economic hardships, since the country has always been characterised by a weak economic system.³ Moreover, the Kingdom is used to exercise a cautious foreign policy in order not to alienate any of its more powerful, but also more volatile, neighbours. Yet, the Arab Spring has represented a difficult challenge even for Jordan.

The aim of this work is to shed a light into the effects of the Arab Spring in Jordan, in particular to explain for what reasons the country has not been affected by this phenomenon as its neighbours.

1 Sadiki L., 2015, *Routledge Handbook of the Arab Spring: Rethinking Democratisation*, New York, Routledge, p. 36.

2 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 1.

3 Comolet E., 2016, Jordan: The Geopolitical Service Provider, in *The Arab Spring Five Years Later: Case Studies*, Brookings Institution Press, available at www.jstor.org, p. 207-208.

Furthermore, this thesis aims at trying to understand not only how the Hashemite Kingdom was able to survive, but in particular if the line the regime is following is sustainable in the long-term. To reach this purpose, this thesis is going to examine the kingdom political and economic structures, with a focus on the institution of the monarchy. Moreover, this work will consider the internal pressures and the external factors that have affected the country's policies during the Arab Spring. Thus, this paper will be focused in particular on the period following the 2011 Arab uprisings, with some digressions in Jordanian history when required to provide more accurate explanations. It can be argued that understanding the impact of the Arab Spring on the Hashemite Kingdom is an essential element to gain an insight into the challenges that the country is facing in the modern era.

This thesis will focus on the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and it is intended to provide an in-depth analysis of the country's situation and to suggest the reasons behind its resilience and its capability to survive the Arab Spring without undergoing regime change. This work will examine Jordan under four main themes. After this brief introduction, the second chapter will treat the state-building process, with an historical background starting with the Ottoman domination, to the Arab Revolt led by Sheikh Hussein in 1916, and the creation of the country by the British in 1922. This would be followed by an excursus over the formation of Israel in 1948, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the assassination of King Abdullah I in 1951. Then, the chapter will consider the development of the state under King Hussein and his strategies face to the Gulf crisis in 1990-91, and it will examine the current monarch rule, King Abdullah II, to conclude with his policies to address the Arab Spring mass protests. The third chapter will concern the fault line that characterises Jordanian society, and sees East Bankers opposed to Jordanians of Palestinian descent.⁴ The impact of identity issues in the political arena will also be examined, with special attention to their influence during the Arab Spring. The chapter will end with an assessment of the March 24 Movement, one of the most promising organisations born during the demonstrations, that was crushed by state repression. The following chapter will provide an analysis of the Syrian civil war and its consequences on the regional equilibrium. It will discuss the consequent refugee emergency, and the way Jordan has tried to cope with it. It will also consider the rise of the Islamic State and the threat it represented for the stability of neighbouring states. The fifth chapter will provide a theoretical framework to explain the concept of Arab Spring, the causes at its origin, and the different reaction of Arab monarchies and republics. An overview of the roots of this phenomenon will take into account the middle class' role, the discontent of poorer areas, and the corruption that plagues these regimes. Later on, a part of the chapter will refer to the so-called 'monarchical democratisation', and its implications for Jordan. This will be followed by an assessment of April 1989 unrest and its long-term consequences for the Hashemite Kingdom. Then the Arab Spring street protests will

4 Plascov A., 1981, *The Palestinian Refugees in Jordan 1948-1957*, London, Frank Cass Publishers, p.32.

be treated more in detail, including the role played by traditional political parties, and the strategies employed by the monarchy to keep the opposition at bay. The chapter will conclude with a brief account of the 2016 demonstration in the country, to show that even if the palace managed to maintain its grip to power, this does not mean that the population's grievances have been silenced. The thesis will end with an assessment of how Jordan is faring and where King Abdullah II is heading it.

Chapter I

The Foundation of the Jordanian State

1.1 From the Ottoman Period to the foundation of Transjordan

Jordan region was annexed by the Ottoman Empire in 1517, after it defeated the Mamluks who ruled over the area. The Ottomans administered the region through governors who controlled the various provinces, however, the East Bank, considered a marginal area, was only loosely controlled. During the late Ottoman period, there were frequent Bedouin revolts against Istanbul, as the locals resented the Tanzimat, the reform process started by the Empire in order to reform the state and reassert its control over the territory.⁵ Indeed, at the end of the nineteenth century, there was the emergence of various political movements, for instance liberals, socialists, religious formations, Pan-Arab ones. Among them, two in particular were destined to shape regional politics: Arab nationalism and Zionism.⁶

The Nahda or Arab revival began initially in Egypt as a cultural movement, trying to identify the roots of Arabhood by praising the study of Arab traditions, history and language to restore the Arab identity.⁷ This brought the growth of a nationalist opposition who aimed at freeing the Arab nation from the Ottoman non-Arab authority. Meanwhile, in Europe, a similar phenomenon was taking place in the Jewish communities all over the continent, calling for the return of the Jews to their homeland. In 1897, the Zionist Organization was founded, with the aim of making Palestine the home of Jews. To reach this purpose, they favoured the immigration of Jews to the area, as a result by 1914, Jews represented the 12% of the inhabitants.⁸

In the meantime, the Young Turks, a group of nationalist officers were trying to reform the inefficient Ottoman system. They promoted a more centralised rule and a process of Turkification. The latter contributed to the growing Arab discontent. Furthermore, the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula were afraid to lose their autonomy due to stronger government control. As a consequence, Sharif Hussein, the Amir of

5 Anderson B. S., 2005, *Nationalist Voices in Jordan. The Street and the State*, Austin, University of Texas Press, pp. 34-35.

6 Hurt E., 2018, *Arab Nationalism and Zionism*, New York, Cavendish Square Publishing, pp. 5-6

7 Kassab E. S., 2010, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective*, available at www.jstor.org, pp. 1-2.

8 Milton-Edwards B. & Hinchcliffe P., 2009, *Jordan. A Hashemite Legacy*, New York, Routledge, p. 15.

Mecca was able to reassemble the desert tribes and the nationalists. He was the custodian of the Holy cities of Mecca and Medina, and the head of the Hashemite branch of the Quraysh tribe, thus he claimed descent from the Prophet. His ambition was to create an autonomous emirate in the Hijaz, free from Ottoman control.

At the beginning of the I World War, Istanbul sided with the Central Empires, thus to weaken their war effort, the United Kingdom co-opted Hussein, showing that London had more to offer than the Ottomans. To reach this scope, there was an exchange of letters between Hussein and the British High Commissioner for Egypt, Sir Henry McMahon, aimed at establishing the different spheres of territorial influence.⁹ The terms were vague, and the disagreements were left to settle after the end of the conflict. Hussein was satisfied by British support and he exploited it to launch the Arab Revolt in 1916. However, there was already a secret pact existing between the French and the British, who concluded the Sykes-Picot agreement establishing the post war asset for the Middle East. The two great powers made plans for the creation of an Arab state in the Arabian Peninsula, while dividing the rest of the Ottoman territories in the Fertile Crescent among themselves. The Tsarist Empire was also part of the pact before the outbreak of the Bolshevik Revolution. Another important document to determine the future of the region was the Balfour Declaration of 1917. It was a letter written by the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Arthur Balfour to Lord Rothschild, a leader of the British Jewish community. The letter stated “His Majesty's Government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people as long as it does not prejudice the rights of existing non-Jewish communities”¹⁰. In the eyes of the Zionists, this declaration represented British commitment to support the Jews in establishing a future state in Palestine. For the Arabs, this was a betrayal of the promises made to Sharif Hussein. These conflicting interests would have made the British Mandate in Palestine complicated to administer since the beginning.

However, in November 1917, the Bolshevik government made public the contents of the Sykes-Picot agreement. Britain was thus forced to reassure its Arab allies that it would have honoured its commitments. Indeed, the revolt, armed and financed by London, was proceeding well. As London had hoped, the Arab army was able to divert part of the Ottoman forces from the allies main offensive in Palestine. This contributed to the sign of the armistice of the 31st October, which ended the conflict in the Near East.

Following these events, what is present-day Jordan, was included in the British sphere of influence. Meanwhile, Feisal, one of Sharif Hussein's sons, had established an autonomous government in Damascus, supported by British officers. In July 1919 the Syrian General Congress met in Damascus, asking for the Allies to recognize an independent Syria (comprising Palestine), with Feisal as ruler. The Congress also proclaimed Abdullah, the other son of Hussein, King of Iraq. However, Paris felt that an independent Feisal

9 Karsh E., 2003, *Rethinking the Middle East*, London, Frank Cass Publishers, p 55.

10 Milton-Edwards B. & Hinchcliffe P., 2009, *Jordan. A Hashemite Legacy*, New York, Routledge, pp. 16-17.

could be hard to control, thus the French persuaded London to respect the Sykes-Picot agreement, which placed Syria in the French sphere of influence.¹¹

As a consequence, at the Paris Peace Conference, the mandate system was approved, and at the San Remo conference in 1920 the British and the French divided the Middle East between them. They decided that the United Kingdom was to get the control of Palestine, and Iraq, while Syria and Lebanon were going to France. Thus, Britain withdrew its support for Feisal, and French troops forced the Hashemite monarch to leave Syria. In exchange, he was given the Kingdom of Iraq by the British. This arrangement left Abdullah without a seat, also because he was defeated in Hijaz at Turaba by the Bin Saud's warriors, and this marked the end of the Hashemite dream of establishing an Arabian empire. Abdullah's new objective became organising the resistance against the French presence in Syria.¹²

To pursue his purpose, Abdullah arrived in southern Jordan with some tribal followers. It represented a possible problem for the British who were establishing a rudimentary administration in the Transjordan region. Abdullah moved to Amman, declaring to the British that he came to bring order to the area. As London was not willing to use coercion to expel him, chose to exploit his presence. In 1921 at the Cairo Conference, it was decided to confirm Feisal position as King of Iraq, and make Abdullah head of an Arab government in Transjordan for an initial period of six months. Abdullah accepted the proposal, also because he was promised that if he was able to defuse the anti-French feeling among its people, the French would have considered to put him as Amir of Damascus. Thus, in 1923 the United Kingdom recognised Abdullah as Amir of the Emirate of Transjordan, which was declared an independent state with British tutelage.¹³

As the other countries created in the area in the aftermath of the Great War, the borders of Transjordan were arbitrary. The new entity had a population of 300.000, which in 1922 was composed of 54% sedentary people, while the rest were nomads, although the distinction was not clear, because some tribes were semi-nomadic. Overall the population was rather homogeneous, with Arabs representing the 94%, with important minorities as Circassians. Moreover, the 10% of Transjordanians were Christians.¹⁴ Society was based on tribal affiliation, thus the Hashemites had to establish a new national identity from the scratch.

In the exercise of authority, Abdullah was assisted by British officials, who held many of the key positions in the bureaucratic apparatus, while the finances of the new state were guaranteed by a British subsidy. In exchange for its support, London, through the High Commissioner for Palestine, was able to exercise considerable leverage in the management of Jordan. To contribute to the stabilisation of the state, London allowed the formation of a limited military force of 1,300 men, that in 1923 became the Arab

11 Karsh E., 2003, *Rethinking the Middle East*, London, Frank Cass Publishers, p. 58.

12 Milton-Edwards B. & Hinchcliffe P., 2009, *Jordan. A Hashemite Legacy*, New York, Routledge, p. 19.

13 Alon Y., 2007, *The Making of Jordan. Tribes, Colonialism and the Modern State*, London, I.B. Tauris & Co, pp. 39-42.

14 Milton-Edwards B. & Hinchcliffe P., 2009, *Jordan. A Hashemite Legacy*, New York, Routledge, p. 20.

Legion.¹⁵ Formally, Abdullah was the Commander-in-Chief, however the real control was exercised by British officers. The most famous of them was General John Glubb, who became Commander of the Arab Legion in 1939. Moreover, when necessary, the United Kingdom deployed the Royal Air Force (RAF), in particular to repel Saudi attacks, but also to put down local uprisings.

The relation between Britain and Transjordan was regulated by two main agreements, one recognising Transjordan as a national state which London was preparing for independence, the other was the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty of 1928, which established that London controlled state finances, the military, foreign politics and communications. This document also provided the Transjordan Organic Law, which in 1952 became the basis for the Constitution.¹⁶ The Organic Law specified that British role was limited to advice concerning matters included in the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty, and it contained provisions for the creation of an independent judiciary, a legislative council, and an executive.

An important step in the development of the new state was land reform, as it allowed to establish landownership, and distribute to the people large parts of the land normally common property of the tribes. This process created a class of landowners interested in the preservation of the new country, a loyal elite to support the Hashemite monarchy. Another fundamental step was the expansion of the Jordanian army. A central figure to this achievement was the previously mentioned General John Glubb, who arrived in the country in 1930 to command the Desert Patrol, a unit equipped with modern weapons created to better impose Jordanian control in the desert.¹⁷ Glubb successfully achieved this objective, putting an end to cross-border tribal raidings. The Desert Patrol was later incorporated in the Arab Legion. During the years, the Legion manpower was increased, in particular to face the Arab rebellion in Palestine from 1936 to 1939, and to give its contribution to the British war effort in the II World War. Glubb was central in guaranteeing the recruitment for this force, Jordan military was from the start mainly based on the Bedouin tribes from the desert. This gave the Legion, and to its successor, the national army, the mainly tribal background that still characterises it.

1.2 The Palestinian issue and the assassination of King Abdullah I

Abdullah never abandoned his ambition to obtain the control of Syria. Furthermore, in the 1930s he tried to expand his area of influence by getting involved in Palestine, where the British appeared less and less able to handle the tensions between Palestinians and Jews. The former opposed the ever-increasing Jewish immigration from Europe to flee the Nazis. Nonetheless, they did not look upon Abdullah as a possible leader, because he was an outsider. When in 1936 the Arab Revolt broke out in Palestine, Abdullah

15 Anderson B. S., 2005, *Nationalist Voices in Jordan. The Street and the State*, Austin, University of Texas Press, p. 43.

16 Anderson B. S., 2005, *Nationalist Voices in Jordan. The Street and the State*, Austin, University of Texas Press, pp. 48-49.

17 Jevon G., 2017, *Glubb Pasha and the Arab Legion*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 8.

tried to mediate between the opposing factions. However, his prestige among Palestinians received an important blow when emerged that he supported the British plan for the partition of the region.¹⁸ The Amir was favourable to this proposition because London proposed to create a new Arab state constituted by Transjordan and the Arab areas of Palestine. The beginning of the II World War in 1939, paralysed the action of Palestinians, while Abdullah support for British war effort brought him advantages in the form of decreased British control.

During the war, Transjordan allied with the United Kingdom, and the Arab Legion took part in the fighting against the Rashid Ali's pro-Nazi regime in Baghdad, and the Vichy forces in Syria. The Legion arrived to comprise 7,400 soldiers, and its higher positions were mainly staffed by British officers. The Amir maintained an Anglophile policy during the conflict, but at the same time, he still nurtured the ambition to create a Greater Syria under his control, composed of Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Transjordan. Furthermore, he intended to add Iraq through a federal arrangement. However, there was no strong political support for him neither in Syria nor in Palestine.

In 1945 there was the foundation of the League of Arab States, originally composed by Transjordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Syria, Egypt, Iraq, and Lebanon. The isolation of Transjordan in the organization appeared evident from the start.¹⁹ For instance, post-Vichy Syria obtained the protection of Cairo against Abdullah ambitions. Saudi Arabia also sided with Egypt against its traditional Hashemites enemies. This situation put an end to the Amir's dream to establish Greater Syria, thus he focused on obtaining full independence for Transjordan. Consequently, in 1946 Great Britain and Amman signed a treaty of “perpetual peace and friendship”, and Abdullah was crowned King of Transjordan. However, the country was still military and financially dependent on London, which continued to provide subsidies and kept its military presence in the area.

At the same time in Palestine, the United Kingdom limitations on Jewish migration provoked the discontent of Zionists, and acts of violence between Arabs and Jews, and against the mandate authorities increased. The British were left exhausted by the war, thus they handed over the issue to the United Nations. The UN Special Committee on Palestine was established, and it elaborated a partition plan creating an Arab and a Jewish state, while granting a special international status to Jerusalem. However, the plan was opposed by the Arab states and by Palestinians. On the contrary, Abdullah supported it, hoping to expand its domains.

In 1948, Britain left Palestine, soon after hostilities broke out between the Jews and the Arabs, with the former being able to gain the control of vast areas, and undertaking ethnic cleansing in the territories under their grasp. This brought about the exodus of many Palestinians afraid for their lives. In reply to the difficult situation of Palestinians, the armies of Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Transjordan's Arab Legion entered Palestine.

18 Milton-Edwards B. & Hinchcliffe P., 2009, *Jordan. A Hashemite Legacy*, New York, Routledge, p. 25.

19 Milton-Edwards B. & Hinchcliffe P., 2009, *Jordan. A Hashemite Legacy*, New York, Routledge, p. 27.

However, the badly trained and unequipped Arab armies were beaten by the Jewish forces, except for the Arab Legion, who was able to occupy the Old City of Jerusalem, Hebron, and the majority of Samaria. At the same time, the Egyptians occupied the Gaza strip. Armistices were signed which recognised implicitly the status quo, allowing Abdullah to satisfy his expansionist ambitions, and to present himself as the only true defender of the Palestinian people.²⁰

Abdullah moved to consolidate his acquisitions in Palestine, however the Arab League opposed any partition of Palestine, making his task rather difficult. Nonetheless, Abdullah proclaimed himself King of Palestine, and he annexed the territory in 1950, while the country's name was changed in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. West Bank annexation improved the Kingdom economy since the new territories were more developed compared to the East Bank, but at the same time, Amman was faced with the problem of absorbing over half a million refugees. Moreover, as a result of his political choices, King Abdullah had numerous enemies, this led to his assassination in 1951 by a gunman while he was visiting the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. Although the real cause of this act remains unclear, the reason was probably Abdullah's agreements with the Israelis to the detriment of Palestinians.²¹

1.3 King Hussein's accession to power

The disappearance of Abdullah brought about important implications for the Kingdom. The short reign of his successor, King Talal, caused a crisis of confidence concerning the Hashemites' legitimacy and capacity to rule. The only noteworthy achievement under King Talal was the 1952's Constitution. The new document contained much of the provisions of the old Organic Law of 1928, while giving a more prominent role to Islam, identified as the religion of the state. In particular, the judicial system was divided into Shari'a courts and civil ones. At the same time, the Kingdom was given a parliamentary system and a hereditary monarch. A bicameral parliament was established, with an elected chamber of deputies, and an upper chamber whose members were appointed by the King, the approval of both chambers being necessary to pass legislation.²²

After King Talal demise due to health problems, his son Hussein ascended to the throne in 1953. The new ruler was only 18 years old, and he was faced by multiple challenges, he had to prove he was a capable leader, while guiding his kingdom through the implementation of the new constitution, the rising of Arab nationalism, and the constraints imposed by the Cold War. In particular, the most difficult opponent for the new King were the left parties. Indeed, the opposition saw Abdullah's death as an opportunity to reassert its

20 Afif el-Hasan H., *Is the Two State Solution Already Dead? A Political and Military History of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict*, 2010, New York, Algora Publishing, p. 145.

21 Nuwar M. A., 2002, *The Jordanian-Israeli War, 1948-1951: A History of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan*, Michigan, Ithaca Press, p. 106.

22 Massad J., 2001, *Colonial Effects. The Making of National Identity in Jordan*, New York, Columbia Press University, p. 41.

position and impose its program on the new inexperienced ruler. The opposition also gathered the Palestinians who had arrived in the country after the 1948-49 conflict. For them, the disappearance of Abdullah represented the opportunity to achieve independent statehood. They considered that the new monarch's authority was threatened by the challenges represented by Jordanian left parties, and the rising Arab nationalism, who had its champion in the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser. As a consequence, the country was affected by numerous protests and political demonstrations, there were even rumours of a revolution.²³

To appease the situation, the King made some concessions, for instance in 1956 Hussein ordered General Glubb, the British Commander of the Jordanian army, to leave the country with all the other British officers. However, the opposition only grew more vocal in its call to undermine the Hashemite rule. Moreover, following the adoption of the Eisenhower doctrine by the US, the King position appeared even more precarious, as he faced an attempted coup, and the new elections saw the triumph of the left, leading to the formation of a left-wing government led by Sulaiman Nablusi. King Hussein response was a turning point for the country, because starting with 1957 to face the opposition the monarch sacrificed democracy for stability.²⁴ There was a crackdown on the country's political life, political formations were disbanded, elections suspended and the government was obliged to resign. Furthermore, the King expelled from the army the elements involved in the attempted coup, many important political figures were jailed, while the press freedom was strongly limited. At the same time, the King asserted his authority over domestic and foreign policy, while the legislature was emptied of real power. The real centre of power became the Royal Court or Diwan, which included members of the Hashemite family, tribal chiefs and notables. As Jordan was a country with a small population, and a national identity built on tribal relations, the King was able to use the Diwan to maintain the contact with the majority of the population.

However, as Hussein was able to reinforce its position, the effective influence of the Royal Court in his policy choices declined steadily, and in the 1990s its members were reduced to the role of mere bystanders in the policy-making process.²⁵ The other institutions on which the power of the ruler was increasingly based were the armed forces, and the secret service or Mukhabarat. The 1952 Constitution stated that the King was the Supreme Commander of the Hashemite Arab Army, giving only to him the faculty to wage war. When the British forces left Jordan in 1958, King Hussein reinforced his authority over the army, and promoted the myth of the Jordanian Arab Legion, which he saw as one of the pillars of the country. This rhetoric aimed also at contributing to the legitimacy of the Hashemites as ruling family. Nonetheless, the real source of King Hussein's legitimacy was his survival notwithstanding the large number of hard challenges he had to

23 Anderson B. S., 2005, *Nationalist Voices in Jordan. The Street and the State*, Austin, University of Texas Press, pp. 150-151.

24 *Ibid.*, pp. 184-186

25 Milton-Edwards B. & Hinchcliffe P., 2009, *Jordan. A Hashemite Legacy*, New York, Routledge, p. 36.

fend off.

Hussein was able to secure his position, nevertheless, Arab radicalism was on the rise in the region, with Jordan being no exception. As a result, Hussein was under increasing pressures from Nasser to take on Israel. Furthermore, the important Palestinian presence inside the Kingdom made it hard for the monarch to resist this pressure. As a consequence, in 1967 he sided with Egypt and Syria in the Six-Day War against the Israelis. The conflict proved tremendous for Jordan, Israel conquered the West Bank and East Jerusalem, while thousands of refugees arrived in the kingdom. The defeat also represented a blow to King Hussein's and Arab prestige.²⁶

Ousted from its bases in the West Bank, the Palestinian resistance sought to create a new network in Jordan. Thus, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and its fighters transferred to Jordan. From their new bases, the fedayeen continued to launch attacks on Israel. Meanwhile, the coexistence between the Jordanian authorities and the PLO became more and more difficult, as the number of Palestinian fighters continued to grow. In particular, the Battle of Karameh in 1968 represented an important event. In this occasion, Tel Aviv decided to strike the PLO directly in Jordanian territory. The Jordanian army and the Palestinian fighters joined forces to repel the aggression, and when an Israeli convoy arrived in the Jordanian town of Karameh, they suffered heavy casualties and were obliged to withdraw. It was an important symbolic victory for the PLO, and Palestinians fighters were depicted as heroes in the Arab world.²⁷ This contributed to boost the confidence of the fedayeen, who moved freely throughout Jordan keeping their arms on display. This attitude, and the threat represented by the growing PLO influence in the country, made King Hussein and the Jordanian army increasingly concerned about the situation.

Finally the tensions between King Hussein and the fedayeen movement lead to a civil war, where the future of the kingdom was at stake. The term Black September refers to the events that saw the Jordanian army fighting against the PLO and subsequently expelling the Palestinians leadership from the country. In 1970 the destiny of Jordan appeared uncertain as the country was trying to cope with the presence of a large population of Palestinian refugees, that had also a component which was armed and capable of establishing a state in the state. Palestinians were prepared to challenge the Hashemite state, and King Hussein was also concerned by the Israeli strategy to reply to Palestinian raids by retaliating against the Jordanian population. Tel Aviv policy aimed at forcing Hussein to assert a stronger control over fedayeen's activities.²⁸

Concerning Palestinians, they blamed the King and the Jordanian army for the loss of their homeland in 1967, furthermore, many Palestinians supported the overthrow of the Arab regimes in the area (the

26 Hay J., 2013, Perspectives on Modern World History. The Arab-Israeli Six-Day War, United States of America, Greenhaven Press, pp. 48-50.

27 Becker J., 2014, The PLO. The Rise and the Fall of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, New York, St. Martin's Press, pp. 77-80.

28 *Ibid.*

Hashemites were no exception) as a first step to recover their land.²⁹ This brought Jordanian officers to repeatedly ask the monarch to allow them to use force to handle the fedayeen issue. It was evident that legislative measures were not effective, not even the imposition of the martial law in 1967 had been able to repress the Palestinians' activities. The King grew more and more uneasy seeing the increasing number of PLO training camps and recruits. At the same time, the fedayeen movement was also providing education and welfare for the refugees, marginalising Jordanian authorities.

The turning point was represented by 1970 when, after the Hussein and Nasser's acceptance of the Rogers plan to solve the Israeli-Palestinian issue, the most radical fringes of the Palestinian movement, and in particular the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and its leader George Habash called for the rebellion against the Hashemites. There was also the hijacking of three air planes by the PFLP, two were redirected to a field in northern Jordan controlled by the fedayeen. The third one was directed to Cairo and blown up after the disembark of passengers. The Jordanian army proved incapable to intervene and appeared vulnerable. Indeed, the hijackings were designated by the PFLP to provoke a confrontation with the Jordanian authorities.³⁰ As a result, on the 16th September 1970, King Hussein gave to the army the order to attack the fedayeen and eliminate them. The Palestinian fighters under the leadership of Arafat lost against the better equipped and more numerous Jordanian army. The Jordanians were also able to repel a Syrian invading force who crossed the border to help the Palestinians. The fights severely weakened the PLO, and the King took advantage of the surge of patriotic support from the Transjordanians to curtail the guerrilla and oblige the Palestinian leadership to leave Jordan in 1971. King Hussein had secured his position, however an important Palestinian minority remained in the country, and while officially East Bankers and Palestinians were seen as parts of the same nation, the legacy of civil war brought hostility and discrimination towards the latter.³¹

1.4 Economic hardships and the Gulf War, 1990-91

The early 1980s were characterised by a security crackdown, however despite the authoritarian turn, a new opposition movement emerged. Students organizations, professional associations and the Muslim Brotherhood were particularly active. During the same period the frictions between Palestinians and East Jordanians gradually eased, because of intermarriage and the increasing role of the former in the private sector. Moreover, in the late 1980s, following Jordan high population growth rate, Palestinians came to

29 Milton-Edwards B. & Hinchcliffe P., 2009, *Jordan. A Hashemite Legacy*, New York, Routledge, p. 41.

30 Becker J., 2014, *The PLO. The Rise and the Fall of the Palestinian Liberation Organization*, New York, St. Martin's Press, p. 92.

31 Milton-Edwards B. & Hinchcliffe P., 2009, *Jordan. A Hashemite Legacy*, New York, Routledge, p. 44.

represent over 50% of the country's inhabitants.³²

In 1987 the Palestinian Intifada and the reaffirmation of the Palestine Liberation Organization as the only representative of Palestinians, put an end on Amman claims concerning the West Bank and East Jerusalem. As a result, in 1988 King Hussein declared he abandoned the ambition to recover the West Bank. In reality he had no other viable choice. Moreover, this decision allowed the monarch to suspend Jordanian administrative and financial obligations to the West Bank. Nonetheless, the Hashemites retained the custodianship over the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. The King moves were viewed positively by East Bankers, because Hussein showed its intention to focus all his energies on the consolidation of Jordan, leaving aside the Palestinian cause. Indeed, the country needed urgent economic reforms, as in 1980s it was hit by a major economic crisis, with rising inflation rates, a heavy foreign indebtedness and growing unemployment figures. Moreover, the situation was worsened by the pervasive corruption among Jordanian elites and the consequent discontent of the population. To restore the country's economic stability, Jordan was forced to resort to an IMF structural adjustment program. IMF aid came in exchange of Amman commitment to remove a large number of subsidies concerning a wide variety of basic goods.³³

The crisis and the measures adopted to face it, caused a strong decline in the standards of living of Jordanians. This led to widespread protests especially in the south of the country, where the demonstrators asked to put an end to government corruption, to enact extensive political reforms, a more representative electoral law, democratisation and the withdrawal of austerity measures. The fact that the protests came from traditional East Bankers loyalists' strongholds represented a worrying element for the King, as it showed the conviction of many Transjordanians that they risked to become an impoverished minority in their country. Indeed, as the Palestinian community became larger, Transjordanians demanded guarantees for their future. The King responded by starting a liberalisation process and new free elections. To meet Transjordanians requests, the electoral law was amended in a way that made rural constituencies more important than urban ones (where the Palestinians were concentrated). The gerrymandering of electoral districts allowed East Bankers to maintain the majority in Parliament, thus preserving their traditional privileged position.

Meanwhile, regional turmoil had an important spillover effect in Jordan. In particular, the Gulf crisis which followed the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq in 1990 had a significant impact on the country. The kingdom found itself in a difficult position as the sanctions imposed against Baghdad had also implications for the Hashemite Kingdom.³⁴ Jordan position in the international arena was complicated as the country refused to take part in the Desert Storm coalition, because the majority of the Jordanian population was supportive of

32 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

33 Milton-Edwards B. & Hinchcliffe P., 2009, *Jordan. A Hashemite Legacy*, New York, Routledge, p. 48.

34 Nevo J. & Pappé I., 2013, *Jordan in the Middle East 1948-1988. The Making of a Pivotal State*, New York, Routledge, p. 55.

the Iraqis who were faced by a disproportionate force. King Hussein condemned Iraq's invasion of the neighbouring Kuwait, however Jordanians were concerned by Western intervention as they saw it as an intromission in Arab politics.³⁵ The monarch had no choice, because the population exploited the liberalisation process to push the regime to oppose Desert Storm, and if Hussein had not followed his people's will, this could have resulted in demonstrations throughout Jordan.

Indeed, the opposition, in particular the Islamic movement, saw the Gulf crisis as an opportunity to consolidate its stance. Also, Saddam Hussein had said that his attack against Kuwait was a first step towards assaulting Israel, and incited Jordanian Islamists to spread the same message. To maintain the streets calm, King Hussein decided to leave the Islamists room for manoeuvre, at least in the short term, also increasing their share of ministers in the cabinet as a way to meet their requests. This decision allowed him to gain the support of the Parliament, where there was the formation of a heterogeneous coalition to back the King's action.

Jordan attitude face to the crisis caused the isolation of the country in the international arena, while the Gulf states sanctioned Amman for its behaviour. In addition, over 300,000 Palestinian workers were expelled from the Gulf countries as supposed Iraq's collaborators.³⁶ This represented for Jordan the loss of workers' remittances, which was a hard blow for the Kingdom's economy. However, the King was able to take advantage of the crisis and reached an unprecedented level of internal support.

In the meantime, King Hussein continued to pursue a policy of liberalisation in the political arena. In order to explain the evolution of Jordanian political system it is necessary to examine this process of political openness launched by the monarch after decades of authoritarian rule and crackdown of constitutional liberties. The 1989 protests did not pose a serious threat to the regime, so why the monarch decided to meet the population requests for political change? The explanation lies in the reasons behind the social stratus of the protesters. It was the most loyal subjects to the King who rioted this time, a demonstration of a dangerous crisis of confidence in the capacity of the Hashemites to deliver good standards of living. Moreover, the monarch decision to concede more political liberalisation was due also to the pressure of Western donors and international agencies, who asked Amman to start repaying its debts and to reform the economy in exchange for loans and assistance. In addition the Jordanian elite saw democratisation as just another way to guarantee the survival of the regime, "prolonging their own rule, achieving international legitimacy and minimising domestic opposition."³⁷ Thus, it was a paradox, the King appeared to promote democratisation, while in reality he had no real intention to do so. For the abovementioned reasons it is possible to speak of a "façade democracy", where democratic procedures were just covering the real power

35 Schwartz R. A., 2008, *Encyclopedia of the Persian Gulf War*, London, McFarland & Company Publishers, p.184.

36 Turner M. & Shweiki O., 2014, *Decolonizing Palestinian Political Economy: De-development and Beyond*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, p. 20.

37 Milton-Edwards B. & Hinchcliffe P., 2009, *Jordan. A Hashemite Legacy*, New York, Routledge, p. 51.

structure who remained firmly in the hands of the traditional oligarchies, and the opposition was made ineffective by the security apparatus surveillance. Only one actor in the political arena had the capacity to challenge the regime, the Islamist movement. Yet, the Muslim Brotherhood did not enter in direct confrontation with the King, and acted mostly as a loyal opposition.

King Hussein was aware of the calls from the population for a more democratic system, thus he announced that free elections would have been held in 1989. As a result the citizens believed that a new seasons of reforms and democratisation was opening for Jordan. Indeed, the economic crisis had partially undermined Hussein coercive power, while IMF assistance was linked to liberalisation. 1989 elections were the freest that ever took place in the country, although political formations were still banned, and the press was subjected to censorship. Nevertheless, Jordanians took the opportunity provided by the new atmosphere of liberalisation, and voter turnout was over 70%. The elections for the House of Representatives saw the success of the Muslim Brotherhood who secured 34 of the 80 seats, while the rest was divided among the left, tribal leaders and notables.³⁸ However, the Senate and the cabinet continued to be chosen by the King, who also had the power to dissolve the Parliament at his discretion.

In 1991 the National Charter was reviewed to include provisions to better guarantee individual freedoms and equality. In the same year, the King allowed again the formation of political parties. It is necessary to point out that the Hashemite Kingdom is not a repressive police state as its neighbours Iraq and Syria.³⁹ Nonetheless, freedom is limited, and it is risky to protest against government policies. An indication of this situation is the way the regime dealt with the rising Islamic opposition in the 1990s. Indeed, the Royal Court underlined and exaggerated the threat posed by the Islamists, reinforcing its message with press campaigns, detentions and show-trials.

In the following years, general elections were held regularly, however the prospects of the democratisation process appeared far less good since the palace was not delivering on the promised reforms. The population also feared a return to authoritarianism. It has been argued that this feeling of mistrust in the monarch real intentions has been reinforced by King Hussein pursuit of the peace with Israel at the expenses of liberalisation. Indeed, to achieve this outcome, the monarch chose accommodating governments, closed opposition papers, put pressure on the Parliament to endorse its decisions, and manipulated the elections to assure a Chamber favourable to its peace process' vision.⁴⁰ The ruler showed little tolerance for criticism to his contacts with Tel-Aviv. As a result the Parliament was marginalised and the people lost faith in the capacity of the political system to represent them. In the early 1990s, the Kingdom was considered an example of democratisation in the Middle East. Nonetheless, the democratisation process never attained its

38 Atzori D., 2015, *Islamism and Globalisation in Jordan: The Muslim Brotherhood quest for hegemony*, London, Routledge, p. 101.

39 Pipes D. & Garfinkle A., 1991, *Friendly Tyrants: An American Dilemma*, London, Foreign Policy Research Institute, p. 455.

40 Milton-Edwards B. & Hinchcliffe P., 2009, *Jordan. A Hashemite Legacy*, New York, Routledge, p. 55.

objective, also because the regime had never really had the intention to transform Jordan into a democracy.⁴¹ The monarchy maintained a paper democracy in order to meet citizens' demands for more participation, and at the same time satisfying the conditions imposed by international donors for the delivery of aid. In particular, notwithstanding the stop in the democratisation process, the United States continued to provide financial assistance to Jordan as they esteemed Amman was a key player in the Arab-Israeli peace process.

1.5 Abdullah II

The death of King Hussein generated real nationwide grief, and the transition to his successor Abdullah II was without problems. This shows the level of legitimacy attained by the Hashemites as rulers of Jordan. The new monarch was educated in Britain, where he also received military training. He entered the Jordanian army where he became the commander of the Special Forces. His Arabic was weak compared to his English. His accession to the throne generated great expectations, because he was perceived as a young and dynamic leader, who would have accelerated the process of liberalisation, tackled corruption, and solved the economic issues affecting the country.⁴²

The first years of the new King's rule were marked by his attempt to get rid of the most conservative advisers he had inherited from his father, to replace them with a younger, well-educated and more liberal elite composed of technocrats. Abdullah acted in this way because he aimed at modernising Jordanian economy. The monarch was able to marginalise part of the old conservative officials, for instance the head of the Mukhabarat, General Samih al-Batekhi, who was removed from his position because he was against reforms and had too much power.

The current monarch has the support of the youth, who is enthusiast for his policies pursuing economic improvement and social cohesion as Jordan first. Nonetheless, Abdullah is confronted by some criticism for alleged violations of individual freedoms, human rights, and manipulation of the electoral process. On the other side, there is also a widespread perception that tight security measures are necessary in a region where stability is volatile. It is also worth it to underline an increasing disillusionment with the political system, seen as unable to represent the population. Concerning the older generations, they argue that the King is still inexperienced compared to his father, that he has not been able to maintain Jordan position in the international arena, while penalizing the East Bankers to the advantage of the Palestinians.

At the political level, the main opposition force is represented by the Muslim Brothers, who gather in

41 Diamond L., 2008, *The Spirit of Democracy: The struggle to build free societies throughout the world*, New York, Holt Paperbacks, p. 271.

42 Robins P., 2004, *A History of Jordan*, Cambridge, Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, pp. 210-211.

the Islamic Action Front. They criticize the King mainly because of his pro-Western policies, and his relation with Washington, which they esteem is too close. In addition, they have the perception that every reform of the electoral laws is aimed at weakening their strength in the Parliament. Regarding this last point, they are supported by the evidence, because gerrymandering in the country is widely used. For instance, with the current electoral rules, the conservative rural areas are able to send to the House of representatives many more parliamentarians compared to the more densely populated and more liberal cities. Indeed, in urban areas, each MP represents around 95,000 voters, while in the pro-regime countryside, each legislator represents on average 2,000 people.⁴³

However, as during King Hussein's rule, the real centre of power is not the Parliament, but the Royal Court.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, under the current King, the members of the Court are often just mere courtiers, and they have no independent power base, thus they can be dismissed any time if necessary. The current Royal Court is composed of young, well-educated professionals and constitutes a sort of unit charged to elaborate policies. They actually have more influence in the policy choices than the Prime Minister and his cabinet, as a consequence their role is source of controversy. Another controversial figure is the King's wife, Queen Rania, she is of Palestinian origin and the opposition accuses her of nepotism and of being too present in the Western tabloid newspapers. Nonetheless, it can be argued that the Queen is deeply involved in social reforms and she contributes to the King effort to improve the sort of the poor in the country.

Until now, the King has been able to face significant difficulties, economic crisis, the hardships of poverty, the tensions of a divided society, the occupation of Iraq with the consequent refugee issue, popular opposition to his close ties with the US and Israel, terrorist attacks and Islamic radicalism. Notwithstanding the monarch success in facing these problems, King Abdullah still has to concretely implement a more meaningful domestic reform.

To speed up the process of reform, in 2002, the King launched "Jordan First", a campaign intended to stabilise the domestic arena, stimulate economic growth, reduce poverty, unemployment, and guarantee national security.⁴⁵ This was the first of various marketing strategies employed by the palace and aimed at liberalising the economic and political arena. However, to achieve all these goals, internal peace was the first element needed. As a consequence, to achieve peace, the monarch elaborated a strategy that was based on the promotion of the East Bankers as the roots of Jordanian identity in contrast with the Palestinian component of the population. Moreover, it was also necessary to keep the Islamists under control and possibly to co-opt them, as the region was in turmoil due to the attacks of 9/11. Jordan First was articulated as a nationwide public relations campaign in newspapers, and media, making reference to the patriotism of

43 Milton-Edwards B. & Hinchcliffe P., 2009, *Jordan. A Hashemite Legacy*, New York, Routledge, p. 62.

44 Milton-Edwards B. & Hinchcliffe P., 2009, *Jordan. A Hashemite Legacy*, New York, Routledge, p. 62.

45 Ryan C. R., 2004, *Jordan First: Jordan's inter-Arab relations and foreign policy under King Abdullah II*, available at www.jstore.org, accessed on 20 September 2019, pp. 55-56.

the people. The campaign received widespread popular support, while other criticised it because slogans were not enough to address the economic downturn the country was facing and to justify the regime's oppressive attitude towards dissenting voices.

The King also elaborated the National Agenda, a set of policies conceived to tackle the country's issues. The main measures concerned social improvements, liberalisation in the economic field, and a new start for the democratisation process. However, ironically, the new course has been implemented with increasing authoritarian methods as the popular discontent grew due to Amman support for US interventions in the Middle East. In particular, concerning the occupation of Iraq, the people accused the regime of allowing the Americans to use Jordanian territory as a rear base for their operations and to interrogate suspected terrorists, accusations always denied by Jordanian authorities. To avoid popular resistance, the King made increasing use of the security apparatus, also restricting basic freedoms. To make the situation worse, on the 9th November 2005, al-Qaeda attacked a hotel in the capital causing 63 deaths, this further contributed to an increase in the security measures.⁴⁶

Notwithstanding all the public declarations he made, the King has little concrete results to show concerning his reform effort, which has mainly remained on paper, sacrificed to the altar of national security.⁴⁷ However, to achieve the abovementioned security, and prevent terrorist attacks, the regime should focus on long-term reforms, and on the promotion of a more tolerant version of Islam, instead of on empty slogans which have only a short-lived impact.

Chapter II

The Lack of Homogeneity in Jordanian Society

In Jordan identity politics are rather important, in particular if we consider that the private sector is mainly handled by Palestinians, while the state apparatus is largely dominated by East Bankers, as stated by Kadhim Abbas in his "Governance in the Middle East and North Africa". Furthermore, the King policy of economic liberalisation in the last decade, has favoured the private sector to the detriment of the state institutions. As a result, the pro-regime communities which were traditionally employed in the latter, felt increasingly abandoned by the palace.⁴⁸

When the Arab Spring started in 2011, in Jordan there was the emergence of the Hirak movement, mainly composed by the youth coming from the East Bank communities. The main concern of the

46 Milton-Edwards B. & Hinchcliffe P., 2009, *Jordan. A Hashemite Legacy*, New York, Routledge, p. 67.

47 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, pp. 202-203.

48 Kadhim A., 2013, *Governance in the Middle East and North Africa*, London Routledge, p. 346.

demonstrators was the neoliberal course took by the Palace in its economic policy, the protesters affirmed that the new policies were destroying their social safety nets. Nonetheless, even among those hitting the streets, there was a re-emergence of identity issues. Indeed, clashes concerning national identity, citizenship and conflicting loyalties have characterized the country since its foundation.⁴⁹

It can be argued that Jordanian politics cannot be reduced to the traditional conflict between Transjordanians and Palestinians, however, this division is real and it is often exploited by the conservatives to put one faction against the other in order to prevent them to form a unified front to advocate for reform. Thus, the determination of the Jordanian identity remains open to questions, who are the Jordanians? Some reply with a broad and inclusive definition, including all the people who live in the country, while others support a more narrow vision, that considers “true” Jordanians only those who can trace their lineage back to the founding tribes, and are afraid that the Jordan they know is disappearing.⁵⁰

2.1 The Fault Line between Transjordanians and Palestinians

Jordanian borders were arbitrarily drawn by the British and the country's name was due to the presence of the Jordanian River. Decades later, the Jordanian River is the symbol of the ethnic divide which characterizes the Jordanian population: those who come from the West Bank of the river, the Palestinians, and those who trace their origins back to the East Bank, the Transjordanians. One of the issues is the claim that now the former made up over half of the inhabitants of the Kingdom. There is a lack of reliable statistics, as a result it is assumed that the Palestinians constitute either half of the population either the majority. However, this line between East Bankers and Palestinians is just one of the many identity levels in the country. Indeed, the country's population is largely Arab, but with important Chechen and Circassians minorities. Also, the most important religion is Sunni Islam, nonetheless there are relevant Christian and Druze communities. Furthermore, tribal affiliation continues to play a role in the kingdom politics. Besides, Tribal communities are affected by internal divides, for instance the intergenerational tensions between the youth and the eldest, with the former struggling to find their path outside the traditional tribal networks. Yet, being Transjordan does not automatically translate in tribal affiliation or Bedouin origin. The current East Banker and Palestinian identity were more clearly defined only in the twentieth century, moreover both communities are mainly Arab Sunni Muslims, with important Christian minorities. It can be said that the accent on separate identities prevents the formation of a more effective pro reform movement and favours the reactionary elements in the regime elite.⁵¹

49 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, pp. 90-91.

50 Jabiri A., 2016, *Gendered Politics and Law in Jordan*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 9-10.

51 Koprulu N., 2012, *Monarchical Pluralism or De-Democratisation: Actors and Choices in Jordan*, in *Insight Turkey*, vol. 14,

According to Mitchel Young, Jordanian identity is strongly linked with the formation of the Hashemite kingdom, and the loyalty towards the various tribes.⁵² The Kingdom of Jordan has the monarchy and the army as its founding pillars, thus the national identity is affected by the pact of the ruling family with the Jordanian tribes, who pledged loyalty to the state and formed the traditional base for the security apparatus. However, the issue of national identity has become more and more problematic as Jordan received successive waves of Palestinian refugees as a result of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Furthermore, in 1950 Jordanian authorities decided to grant the citizenship to the Palestinian refugees also. As a consequence, it can be argued that Jordan has emerged from a combination of British imperial interests, regional conflicts, migrations, and the policies of the Hashemite family.

The Jordanian elite is composed of both Palestinians and Transjordanians, these two communities are not isolated one from the other, there are mixed marriages, and many families have roots on both sides of the Jordan River. Besides, there are divisions inside the communities. For instance, some impoverished Palestinians still live in refugee camps in the outskirts of the main cities, while others have luxury villas in the wealthy areas.⁵³ The same is true for East Bankers, some live in impoverished neighbourhoods of the south, while others occupy the highest echelons of the ruling elite. Notwithstanding the different social strata and origins, for many Transjordanians tribal links are still important, and continue to play a role in the politics of the Kingdom through the support networks of the tribes.

From the foundation of the state, the armed forces, the security apparatus and the bureaucracy have been mainly recruited among East Jordanians. Moreover, many of them perceive they have the task to protect the country from outside threats but also of internal dangers. "The security sector in Jordan perceives itself as the stronghold of Jordanian nationalism in the face of a demographic or political Palestinian takeover of Jordan."⁵⁴ To address the demographic imbalance, the government also opted for the abandonment of the military conscription, deciding to keep a professional army of volunteers, which has mainly a Transjordanian background.

On the other hand, the private sector is predominantly handled by the Palestinians. However, it can be said that with the economic privatization encouraged by the current monarch, there is an increasing presence of East Bankers in the private business. Nonetheless, historically Jordanian society has been characterised by this ethnic division of professions. As a consequence, both sides have usually claimed their prominent part in the process of state-building. Both are right, at least partially, because the army and the civil service have seen a fundamental contribution of the Transjordanians, while the economy has benefited greatly from the

available at <http://www.jstore.org>, accessed 15 September 2019, p. 79.

52 Young M., Zuelow E. & Sturm A., 2007, *Nationalism in a Global Era: The persistence of nations*, London, Routledge, p. 207.

53 Ryan C. R., 2002, *Jordan in Transition: From Hussein to Abdullah*, London, Lynne Rienner Publishers, p. 127.

54 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 94.

input and know-how of Palestinians.

It can be argued that the exclusion of the Palestinians from the public sector, while depriving them of employment opportunities, has also taken away the benefits granted to state officials, for instance health insurances and the possibility to obtain more favourable prices for certain goods.⁵⁵ Consequently, this situation has nurtured the discontent of Palestinian-Jordanians towards what they perceive as privileges available only for East Bankers. At the same time, Transjordanians complain about the Palestinian-Jordanians domination of the private sector, since wages in the public administration cannot generally match the incomes of those employed in the private.⁵⁶ Thus, each group has the tendency to see the other as wealthier. There are those who would like to expel rich Palestinians to confiscate their properties, while many Palestinians believe they are not equally represented, therefore they ask to be included in the regime.

Regarding the monarchy stance when facing the split identity of the country, the regime has promoted the expression of a common Jordanian identity, but with the addition of royalist symbols in a way to favour the identification of Jordanian nationalism with the Hashemite family. Some authors, such as Edward Said have argued that the palace has generally attempted to suppress Palestinian identity.⁵⁷ On the contrary, the authorities have condemned the ultraconservative Jordanians who are often hostile to Palestinians. It is useful to remember that the Hashemites are not natives either. However, the monarchy has been able to transform this possible weakness in an asset, presenting itself as a unifying element, capable of bringing together in a nation the various components of Jordanian society, Transjordanians and Palestinians, urban elites and Bedouins, Christians and Muslims. As his predecessors, King Abdullah II often refers to the Kingdom as “one Jordanian family” and calls for national unity when the country is confronted by hard challenges.⁵⁸ Moreover, the ruler outlines the Islamic roots of the monarchy, as the Hashemites are direct descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. They also consider themselves the guardians of Jerusalem's holy places: the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque. Furthermore, Jordanian national identity is underpinned by the Hashemite leadership of the Great Arab Revolt against the Ottomans, seen as an event that restored the Arab Nation's pride.⁵⁹

Considering the internal dynamics of the Jordanian political system, the Hashemites have always adopted a policy of inclusion. In particular, when appointing the cabinet and the prime minister, Palestinians are never left on the margins, though the predominant position of East Bankers is carefully maintained. The composition of the cabinets reflects also the geographic differences and the various tribal affiliation. In a

55 Abu-Odeh A., 1999, *Jordanians, Palestinians, and the Hashemite Kingdom in the Middle East Peace Process*, New York, United States Institute of Peace, p. 198-199.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 197.

57 Braizat M., 1998, *The Jordanian Palestinian Relationship: The Bankruptcy of the Confederal Idea*, London, British Academic Press, p. 112.

58 Phillips C., 2013, *Everyday Arab Identity*, New York, Routledge, p. 68.

59 Layne L., 1994, *Home and Homeland: The Dialogics of Tribal and National Identities in Jordan*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, p. 27.

similar way the practice of gerrymandering electoral districts aims at producing pro regime assemblies where Transjordanians held the majority of seats in spite of the demographic strength of the Palestinian component of the population. This strategy founds the support of conservative Jordanians, who fear that Tel-Aviv might be tempted to solve the Palestinian issues at their expenses, by transforming Jordan into an alternative homeland for the Palestinians.⁶⁰

It can be argued that the monarchy presents itself as the unifying element capable of linking Palestinian and East Bankers, however some critics state that the regime's cosmetic reforms are only aimed at buying time, while the Hashemites employ divide-and-rule strategies to keep the citizens under control, especially in difficult times. Notwithstanding these dissenting voices, it is often possible to see the emergence of ethnic identity politics in Jordan. This phenomenon traces its roots back to 1988, when King Hussein abandoned the claims over the West Bank, an event that really changed the dynamics of the Arab-Israeli confrontation. The king's decision also sparked the debate in Jordan about who could be considered Jordanian and who Palestinian, and if the two identities were separated or inextricably tied. Even now, these questions remain without a clear answer.

Moreover, the domestic political arena in Jordan has been influenced by several other events. Among them, the failure of the Arab-Israeli peace process, and the consequent apprehension about the possibility of Israel trying to turn the Kingdom into a Palestinian state. The role of identity politics became important also after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the instability that followed, when there was a surge of Iraqi refugees in Jordan. The most conservative were already discontent because of the Palestinians, and they worried that Iraqis could become another permanent community of foreigners further eroding the position of East Bankers in the Kingdom.

Concerning identity politics, another element has to be taken into consideration, the capacity of electoral laws to encourage the citizens to refer to smaller units despite the campaigns advocating a stronger unity in the country. The Kingdom is also experience a phenomenon of gradual detribalization, for instance the new elite who rose to power with the accession to the throne of Abdullah II has almost no tribal connections, and they are often identified as “the digitals.”⁶¹ This new ruling class is responsible, together with the King, for the enforcement of privatization policies who generated important social and thus also political changes in Jordanian society. Following the dictates of privatization, the state sold many of its industries, as a consequence there was a steady decrease in the possibility to obtain a stable job within the government apparatus. Moreover, in a country where employment opportunities are already limited, the grudge of East Jordanians who migrated from the villages to the cities just mounted when faced with the

60 Kadhim A., 2013, *Governance in the Middle East and North Africa*, London, Routledge, p. 350.

61 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 101.

evident wealth of the Palestinians living in the cities.

Thus, now Transjordanians argue that they do not want to be marginalized in their own country, as the economy was already dominated by the Palestinians, but now even state employment does not appear as safe as it was in the past. Consequently, East Jordanians seek to avoid what they see as growing Palestinian inroads in the state. To quote a prominent East Banker figure: “In our community, we all do national service. We serve in the army, the police, the intelligence. We have always been willing to sacrifice our lives for the state and for the regime. And now? Are they fighting for us? The Palestinians are now getting peacefully what they tried to get in the civil war in 1970.”⁶² Some even go further by making a comparison with the destiny of the Sunnis in Iraq after the fall of Saddam, who found themselves marginalized despite being the dominant group in the country.

Notwithstanding these extreme views, not the whole Transjordanian community harbours conservative feelings. Indeed, in the protests of 2011 and 2012, East Bankers formed the bulk of the activists in the streets advocating a more representative democracy and reforms. This demonstrates that the majority of Palestinians and Transjordanians do not correspond to the polarized image evoked by their detractors. Jordanians, despite their different backgrounds tend to be generally tolerant and well-educated. However, it is true that ethnic rifts are still present in the Kingdom, and these divisions do not have to be underestimated as they can be exploited by the conservatives to prevent changes and to break up the protesters front.

2.2 The Influence of Identity Politics in the 2011-2012 Protests

Notwithstanding the divisions affecting Jordanian society, the majority of the protesters who took the streets in 2011 and 2012 were not animated by identity politics. The youth movements who demonstrated in Amman were rather diversified, and included Palestinians and East Jordanians, Circassians and Arabs, women and men. In other areas the composition of the demonstrators groups was very different by location. The majority of the protesters were of Transjordanian extraction, in particular in the southern cities as Kerak or Ma'an. While in the north, in towns where there is a large Palestinian presence as Zarqa or Irbid, the Palestinian often joined the East Jordanians in the manifestations.

To better understand the issue, it is worth it to compare the events of 2011-2012 to the protests of 1989. In 1989, the majority of citizens, independently from the social background, regarded the Prime Minister Zayd al-Rifa'i as the archetype of the regime insider, a Jordanian conservative, who opposed any change of the status quo, and was contrary to the empowerment of Palestinians.⁶³ In 1989, as the riots against the government austerity policies spread in the south of the country, the crowds demanded the

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁶³ Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 105.

resignation of the Rifa'i cabinet. Their requests were satisfied, the King dismissed the government and embarked on a liberalisation process.

In 2011, the protests started again in the southern cities, and the people in the streets demonstrated against another member of Rifa'i family, the Prime Minister, Samir Rifa'i, son of Zayd. However, he was perceived differently from his father, he was criticized as being the expression of the Palestinian neoliberal and technocratic business class. Seen the high level of unpopularity of the government, King Abdullah II decided to replace it with a cabinet composed mainly of East Jordanians with tribal background. However, there was no real difference in the policies implemented, the government reshuffle was aimed just at neutralizing the dissenting voices in the short time. Nonetheless, the monarch's choice to appoint an "East Banker" government shows how in Jordan sometimes identity politics can obscure the more useful debate about reforms.⁶⁴ Moreover, identity is not stable. Both Zayd and Samir Rifa'i see themselves as Jordanian nationalists, proud of the long years spent in the service of the state. However, in 1989 the protesters used the origins of the family from northern Jordan to accuse them of Syrian connections, while in 2011 some demonstrators criticised the Rifa'i because they have roots also west of the Jordan River, thus could be of partial Palestinian origin. This illustrates the tendency in the Jordanian political arena to manipulate the opponents ethnicity in order to undermine their legitimacy.

Indeed, some ultra-nationalist Transjordanians consider themselves as the only pure Jordanians, thus in a certain way more Jordanian than the others, they tend to see refugees, immigrants and others just as temporary guests of the Kingdom. Nonetheless, it is necessary to point out that tribal lineages are older than Jordan, thus the majority of the families can trace its roots across the borders of the country. The royal family itself, migrated from the Hijaz to Jordan, and only later was able to gain the crown of Jordan thanks to British approval. As a consequence, the regime has always outlined the fundamental role of the tribes in contributing to the state-building of Jordan, but at the same time the Hashemites have strongly opposed the exclusivist paradigm supported by Jordanian nationalism.

One of the reasons behind 2011 protests was the growing feeling of alienation perceived by some Jordanians, but who do they blame for this situation? Usually conservatives blame the Palestinians businessmen, who seem to be taking over the private sector but also the state apparatus. Others accuse the palace, believing that the Queen Rania (of Palestinian origin) is able to exercise significant influence on King Abdullah. Some tribal leaders arrived even to complain publicly about the activism of the Queen in Jordanian politics.⁶⁵ This sharp criticism contrasts with Queen Rania's high popularity abroad, where she is renowned for her presence on social media, and her engagement in support of children and in the fight

64 Khatib L. & Lust E., 2014, *Taking to the Streets. The Transformation of Arab Activism*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 236-237.

65 Brichs F. I., 2013, *Political Regimes in the Arab World. Society and the Exercise of Power*, New York, Routledge, p. 272.

against global poverty. Anyway, the Queen has also many supporters in the Kingdom, who dismiss the critics against her as mere sexism. In fact, for Jordanian conservatives it is easier to attack the Queen than to directly criticise the King himself, but the main complain of East Bankers remains the alleged Palestinian influence on the palace decisions. However, from the point of view of Palestinians this argument is inconsistent, and they argue that on the contrary when it comes to state policies and public employment they are penalised and under-represented.

2.3 The 24 March Shabab Movement and State Repression

The protests that emerged in Jordan during the Arab Spring were very diversified. Among the different groups, one of the most influential was the “24 March Shabab Movement”, organized mainly through social media platforms as its counterparts in Egypt and Tunisia.⁶⁶ This Movement was mainly animated by the youth who exploited the instant messages of Facebook and Twitter to organize an exercise of direct democracy and mobilize the protesters. On the 24th March 2011, the activists organized a sit-in at the Ministry of Interior, they were able to gather Jordanians of all extractions, classes, and religions. The demonstration was patriotic but advocated also more political liberalisation. The crowd exposed national flags, and chanted patriotic songs, while asking concrete reforms, but not calling for a regime change. The following day, groups of pro regime thugs, that the author Curtis Ryan defines with the term *baltajiyya* charged the protesters and scattered them, leaving many injured.⁶⁷

What was at the origin of these ruthless repression? According to many activists, these anti reform groups were mobilized from the rural tribal areas and brought to Amman to crush the protests. Notwithstanding the evident patriotic character of the demonstrations, the *baltajiyya* perceived the protesters as revolutionaries and ultimately as Palestinians. Thus, this represents another example of the relevance of identity politics in the Jordanian domestic arena. In this case, the fault line between Palestinians and Jordanians was conceived more in loyalty terms rather than ethnicity.⁶⁸

Despite the suppression of the manifestation, the March 24 Movement was able to realize, even if for a short time, the ideals and the slogans often used by the government, as “We Are All Jordan”, at least until the pro regime thugs dispersed the activists. Notwithstanding this defeat, the pro-democracy movement has not disappeared, on the contrary it has continued to expand, and will constitute the basis for the next manifestations.

Indeed, as it has emerged previously, the relation between Palestinians and Jordanians has an important

66 Ryan C. R., 2018, Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 110.

67 Ryan C. R., 2018, Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 110.

68 *Ibid.*, p. 111.

influence on the politics of the Kingdom, but it is not its only feature. The origins of Jordan can be traced both on the East and West Bank, and the country population is made up of Arabs, but also of Chechens and Circassians, of Muslims, but also of Christians and Druzes.

The Arab Spring coincided with an increase in political activism in the Hashemite Kingdom, from clashes between government and opposition to manifestations in the streets, and the emergence of activists network as the March 24 Movement. At the same time, the protests marked a rise in identity politics, with increasing tensions between East Bankers and Palestinians, but also frictions within the various Transjordanian tribes. Indeed, often the dividing lines who characterise the Kingdom's society are due to different tribal affiliations, conflicting ideologies, regions or religious faiths. Nonetheless, ethnic divisions remain the most effective tool exploited by conservatives when they aim at thwarting reform efforts. This divide-and-rule tactic has historically proved successful when it comes to weaken the coalitions advocating for new economic guiding lines or for more openness in the political arena.⁶⁹ In general, the most reactionary fringes of the ruling elite had always manipulated the issue of identity, for instance by defining the protesters as Palestinians, or accusing them of having ties with Islamists. In both cases, calumnies are employed in order to question the loyalty of the activists to the nation.

These dynamics show that when there is an attempt to constitute a national and transversal front in support of reforms, it is often met by the counterinsurgency tactics of the conservatives, who exploit the identity fissures that affect the country in order to dismantle any national protest movement. On the contrary, with the exclusion of the Islamists, the majority of the activists of the Arab Spring considered themselves as non-partisan, and they focused on asking liberalisation and concrete measures to tackle corruption at the governmental level. However, it can be argued that identity politics remains the most contentious issue in Jordanian politics. It is relevant in all kind of debates, from the laws addressing the handling of refugees flows to the electoral laws. The pro-democracy activists in the Kingdom are willing to cooperate with the monarchy, and do not call for regime change, but they want the King to side with them. To accomplish this, it is necessary that the elements in the elite who support the reform effort leave aside identity issues, to focus solely on new policies aiming at improving the economic and political conditions of Jordan.

⁶⁹ Koprulu N., 2012, Monarchical Pluralism or De-Democratisation: Actors and Choices in Jordan, in *Insight Turkey*, vol. 14, available at <http://www.jstore.org>, accessed 15 September 2019, p. 79.

Chapter III

The Syrian Conflict and Regional Instability

Jordan is particularly affected by external elements, in particular by the policies and the events in the neighbouring states. Indeed, during the Arab Uprisings, external factors played had even a stronger impact on the Kingdom internal politics. When the protests started in 2011, the focus was mainly on the issues that concerned the country, as calls for reform and democratisation. However, as the protests took a violent turn in the broader region, Jordanians started to worry increasingly for the risk of a spillover of the violences, especially the destabilisation brought by the Syrian civil war, with the consequent refugees' flow.

It can be argued that domestic policies in Jordan are never exclusively influenced by the internal political arena. The Kingdom is a small country, it has an ailing economy, and unstable neighbours. As a consequence, Jordan is exposed to external crisis and threats, consequently it is in a condition of chronic vulnerability.⁷⁰ Thus, it is not possible to address the Arab Spring in Jordan without taking into account the regional setting, including conflicts and refugee emergencies. Therefore, the story of the Hashemite Kingdom in the last decades is characterised by struggles over reforms, liberalisation, and the definition of national identity. Nonetheless, at the same time this story includes the external turmoil affecting the Middle East in general. In particular, the Syrian conflict had an important impact on Jordan, with the necessity to handle thousands of refugees and the security threat represented by the rise of ISIS and other jihadist movements.⁷¹ When the Arab Uprising started, the authorities in Amman assisted with concern at the developments in Egypt, where the protests caused the fall of President Husni Mubarak, an ally of the Jordanian regime. Moreover, the Muslim Brotherhood was able to exploit the power vacuum and imposed itself in the elections, forming an Islamist government. However, as the Syrian revolution turned into civil conflict, the effects on Jordan were even stronger. As the war affecting its northern neighbour became more and more violent, Amman reinforced the border, at the beginning the main threat was represented by the army of the President Bishar al-Asad, and by its chemical weapons. However, the nature of the conflict and the players involved were changing rapidly. Indeed, in 2013 the Hashemites were more worried about the

70 International Monetary Fund, 2013, Jordan: First Review Under the Stand-By-Arrangement, available at <https://www.imf.org>, accessed on 15 September 2019, p. 27.

71 International Monetary Fund, 2013, Jordan: First Review Under the Stand-By-Arrangement, available at <https://www.imf.org>, accessed on 15 September 2019, p. 27.

rising tide of Islamism across the region, from the growing terrorist threat represented by the Islamist movements to the destabilising effect of the new Islamist regimes in Egypt and Tunisia. Jordan had tense relations with these entities, and at the same time was worried about the country's Muslim Brotherhood. Nonetheless, during the Summer of 2013, the army overthrew the Islamists in Egypt and assumed the power, while the fights of the Syrian civil war touched the north of Jordan and Iraq was hit by insurgencies and terrorist attacks.

In 2014 the region saw the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, a jihadist movement which aimed at establishing an Islamic Caliphate. ISIS was able to conquer parts of Iraq and Syria, but it wanted to expand also in the neighbouring states, including Jordan.⁷² Thus, King Abdullah deployed the army on the border in order to prevent the infiltration of Jihadist fighters. During the same period, another jihadist organization, Jabhat al-Nusra declared the constitution of its own emirate, calling all the true Muslims to join them. These events had an impact on Jordan, as over two thousand Jordanians arrived in Syria to join the jihadists ranks. It can be said that 2014 was a turning point in regional politics, in particular for Jordan, where the need for reforms was casted aside in order to focus on the security issues. Furthermore, while ISIS was acquiring more and more territories, there were clashes between Israelis and Hamas in Gaza, with the former bombing the Strip in retaliation to Palestinian attacks, and causing many deaths among the civilians.

The Jordanian public was divided over the allegiances concerning the Syrian conflict, but the bombings over Gaza were a different issue, the Israelis attack represented a unifying element for the Jordanians as the population of the Kingdom unanimously condemned Tel-Aviv actions.⁷³ Both the regime and the various opposition forces strongly protested against an act that targeted all the inhabitants of Gaza indiscriminately. On the contrary, the Israeli defended their actions, by arguing that they were striking back against successive rocket attacks from the Strip. Jordanians replied to this argument by pointing out the inequality of the force employed and the sufferings of civilians.

In the Summer of 2014, ISIS defeated the Iraqi army and captured the city of Mosul, declaring the caliphate immediately after.⁷⁴ In Jordan, this event contributed even further to the mobilisation of the security apparatus, this time they were not facing Jordanian protesters in the streets, but a real threat to national security. The Jordanian security establishment was used to engage in counter-terrorism, and jihadists appeared as a serious opponent. At the same time, another challenge was represented by the continuous inflow of refugees in the Kingdom, which was a burden for Jordanian society but also for its already weak economy. In fact, the growing instability in the region, damaged the Jordanian economy because it had an

72 Yusufi A. B., 2016, *The Rise and Consolidation of Islamic State: External Intervention and Sectarian Conflict*, available at <https://www.jstore.org>, accessed on 23 September 2019, p. 91-92.

73 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 178.

74 Georges F. A., 2016, *ISIS: A History*, Oxford, Princeton University Press, available at <https://www.jstore.org>, accessed on 20 September 2019, p. 181.

impact on the trade routes of the area, which were closed or could be used only partially. For instance, in 2014 and 2015, the border between the Kingdom and Iraq was often closed due to security reasons, because ISIS had assumed the control of Iraq western provinces. The same happened in the northern border with Syria, where border posts were closed as Assad forces, the jihadists and the insurgents clashed in order to affirm their power in the area. As a consequence, Jordanian economy was strangled and the country faced considerable hardship.

3.1 The Syrian Conflict

The Arab Spring in Syria began with peaceful demonstrations in the streets, but the government reacted with repression, and the situation escalated quickly into civil war. King Abdullah proposed himself as a mediator to reach an agreement between the rebels and the regime, in order to convince Assad to step aside avoiding violence and allowing Syria to embark on a gradual transition. The Jordanian ruler warned against the risks of a civil war that could generate instability, unrest and a new wave of terrorism in the region.

It is interesting to point out that since independence, relations between Damascus and Amman had been generally hostile. During the reign of King Hussein, the Kingdom was engaged in a sort of “cold war” with Hafiz al-Assad regime, which ended with the disappearance of the two leaders.⁷⁵ King Abdullah II was successful in establishing more cordial relations with Bashar al-Assad, however the two countries did not form any alliance.

Moreover, even this period of rapprochement was characterised by continued infiltrations of Syrian agents in the Hashemite Kingdom, which resulted in clashes with Jordanian forces, although these episodes were never made public. Furthermore, the Kingdom's intelligence knew that the Jordanian Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, one of the leaders of al-Qaeda, had contacts with the Syrian security apparatus.⁷⁶

Thus, Jordanian officials were concerned about the developments of the Syrian civil war, as they knew the ruthlessness of Damascus, but also they wondered what could happen in the case of regime change. In particular, policy makers in Amman were worried about the emergence of a possible Sunni Islamist axis from Tunis to Cairo, now threatening to include also Syria. In addition, Islamists already held the power in Turkey, and they seemed to be on the rise in Libya. To make matters worse, Jordan had to take into account the influence that Teheran exerted on the fragile governments of both Iraq and Lebanon.

Furthermore, the emergence of Islamism in Syria represented an issue also because after the end of the war, the Jordanian Salafists who fought there would have returned to Jordan, bringing instability and

75 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 180.

76 Quivoij R., 2015, *The Islamic State*, Rajaratnam School of International Studies, available at <https://www.jstore.org>, p. 4.

increasing the risk of terrorist attacks in the country. According to journalist Tony Karon “security officials in Amman fear that the return home of this cohort of battle-hardened and radicalised Islamists will result in a recurrence of the domestic security nightmare faced by Arab regimes when volunteers who'd fought the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s returned home.”⁷⁷ Besides, if Syria was to fall in a prolonged state of war, the country could become a breeding ground for jihadists just at the border with the Hashemite Kingdom. Indeed, the Syrian conflict was also fought at border posts and there were violent clashes in the city of Dera'a right on Jordan's border.

To avoid the worst-case scenario, Amman had to engage in its usual foreign policy aiming at keeping an equal distance from every actor involved but also at strengthening its traditional alliances as that with the United States, and with the Gulf monarchies. Thus, Jordan did not assume a confrontational approach towards Damascus, and at the same time it tried not to go against the positions taken by Washington and Riyadh, in order not to strain the relations with these important partners. It is necessary to point out that the Kingdom of Jordan was the player who risked the most, as it shared a border with Syria, while the Western countries and the Gulf states did not, as a consequence if their course of action in Syria would prove disastrous, they would not have to bear the same consequences. Thus, Jordanian officials were careful to maintain a position that oscillated between positive engagement and neutrality, with proposals to mediate to bring the warring parties to the table to negotiate a solution and put an end to the war.

To reach these objectives, Amman maintained the diplomatic channels with Syria opened, even when defectors of the Syrian regime arrived in Jordan asking for refuge. However, according to Assad, all opponents are terrorists, thus the Syrian leader accused Jordanian authorities of harbouring dangerous terrorists. Moreover, some media reported that some of the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, in particular Qatar and Saudi Arabia, were buying arms to supply the rebels in Syria through Jordan and Turkey.⁷⁸ This news provoked the reaction of Damascus, and Assad declared that by meddling in the Syrian conflict, Amman risked to have internal backlashes. In reaction to this comment, the United States left in the Kingdom F-16 jets and Patriot Missile Defence batteries in order to reinforce the border with its turbulent neighbour. Washington also kept in Jordan several hundreds of soldiers, in theory for the maintenance of the equipment, but in practice as a clear signal to Damascus.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, many among the opposition but also pro regime elements protested against prolonged US presence on Jordanian territory, which they saw as unnecessary foreign interference in Jordanian politics. As a result, on various occasions, Jordanian officials had to deny that the Kingdom would have been used as a base to launch any Western offensive on Syria. For

77 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 181.

78 Foster J., 2018, *Oil and World Politics. The real story of today's conflict zones: Iraq, Afghanistan, Venezuela, Ukraine and more*, Toronto, James Lorimer & Company Publishers, pp. 64-65.

79 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 183.

Amman the risk of angering Assad was offset by the improvement in military capacity, while also showing to its enemies that Jordan had many allies on which it could rely.

The Syrian conflict remained Jordan main concern, and the Kingdom officials were focused in avoiding spillovers which could jeopardise the stability of the country. The proximity of the danger emerges considering the fact that when fights broke out in Dera'a, at the border with the Hashemite Kingdom, Syrian artillery hit also the Jordanian side of the border. However, Amman was caught in a security dilemma, because it had to increase its military presence in the northern regions without making the Syrian regime feel threatened. Also the Jordanian regime has to be careful not to hurt the sensibilities of domestic nationalists, who were concerned by the precarious demographic balance of the country, and were jealous guardians of the country's sovereignty. They were concerned over the presence of Palestinians and Iraqi refugees already in the country, and the arrival of the Syrian refugees did not contribute to improve the situation. According to the conservatives, their country was becoming less and less "Jordanian". Thus, even the deployment of foreign allies in order to better ensure the security of the country was a sensitive issue.⁸⁰ In particular, critics from the left and the pan-Arab nationalist formations accused the Palace of being too close to the policies pursued by the West and Israel in the area. As a consequence, Assad pressured Amman to do not interfere in Syrian affairs, while the Kingdom's Western allies asked Jordan to assume a more assertive role.

Moreover, it was not clear which was the enemy to fight, especially after the emergence of ISIS as a new actor. Following the alarming expansion of the Islamic State in 2014, Bashar al-Asad was able to present himself as the only viable alternative to the chaos of Jihadist terrorism and religious fanatics, notwithstanding the fact that the regime itself was the original cause of that instability. Amman gave its support to the coalition who was fighting against ISIS, and was careful to maintain its ties with the US, Saudi Arabia, and other important regional partners. However, Jordanian authorities could not avoid to worry about the security threats which would follow. For instance, when in 2013 Assad employed chemical weapons against the rebels, and the US threatened to intervene, Jordan was already preparing for war. Luckily, President Obama agreed on a negotiated solution which allowed to remove the chemical arsenal from Syria in order to avoid US retaliation. Anyway, from that moment, the conflict only grew in intensity, with the intervention of Russia to save the Assad regime, which was on the brink of defeat. Russian troops were decisive in fighting back the Free Syrian Army, who before their arrival was getting the upper hand in the war. In the meantime, the US military personnel based in Jordan continued to increase, as the Kingdom served as basis for the anti-ISIS coalition guided by Washington. This forced the regime to keep the precise terms of this military operations as vague as possible in order not to upset the public opinion. The coalition was also hostile towards Damascus, nonetheless, many important political figures in Jordan agreed, at least

80 Jamal A. A., 2012, *Of Empires and Citizens: Pro-American Democracy or No Democracy at All?*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, p. 105.

privately, that the best outcome for Amman was the eventual victory of Assad over ISIS and the Nusra Front. The Hashemite Kingdom was dependent on its allies to ensure its stability, however, it also risked to be pulled in opposite directions following the various and sometimes conflicting aims of its partners. On the field, Saudi Arabia and the US proved unable to act in an effective way in order to force Assad to resign.⁸¹ At least, Washington shared with Amman the conviction that the most dangerous and immediate threat was represented by the Islamic State. Concerning the Syrian dictator, Jordanian officials were more worried about its allies, Hezbollah and Iranian Quds forces, who were deployed near the border with the Kingdom in order to back Damascus troops against the insurgents. This foreign presence was a concern also for Riyadh, which considers Teheran its main rival in the region.

Saudis' position emerged clearly when the Arab League made plans to form a coalition against extremism, while Amman thought that the objective was facing the mounting jihadism and ISIS, Riyadh turned the coalition against Iran, the country they considered the primary cause of instability in the area.⁸² Moreover, as part of their confrontation with the Ayatollah regime, the Saudis got involved in a proxy conflict in Yemen, which rapidly became a war of attrition. Riyadh interventionism opened the debate in Jordan about the convenience of the alliance with the Saudis, Jordanian authorities were afraid of being forced by their partners to intervene on the ground in Syria. Many important figures in the Jordanian military wanted to avoid to be used as a pawn for Saudi hegemonic ambitions, the Kingdom was already bearing the burden of thousands of Syrian refugees, there was no need to further destabilize the country. Nonetheless, the alliance with Saudi Arabia, and in particular the massive Saudi aid inflows, remained strategic for Jordanian economy.

3.2 A New Wave of Refugees

Since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, and the growing instability in the region, Jordan has been hit by an unprecedented wave of refugees, combined with a decrease in foreign investments, and a drastic reduction of trade with Syria and Iraq. According to the United Nations Development Program, the country hosts 1.3 million Syrians, which are concentrated mainly in Jordan's northern regions. The massive influx of refugees has exacerbated the country's endemic problems, in particular a saturated job market, obsolete infrastructures, strained resources and social services.⁸³ These facts resulted in a slowdown of Jordanian economy with rising unemployment rates and decreasing wages. This situation has increased the locals

81 Perlov O., 2014, "If Assad Stays, ISIS Stays": the Coalition Airstrikes as Reflected in the Syrian Discourse on Social Media, Tel Aviv, Institute for National Security Studies, available at <https://www.jstore.org>.

82 Ellison D., 2016, FPI Bulletin: Saudi Arabia and the Syrian Civil War, Foreign Policy Initiative, available at <https://www.jstore.org>.

83 UNDP, 2018, Brussels II: For Jordan, a key chance to build support for refugees and resilience, available at <http://www.undp.org>, accessed on 18 September 2019.

discontent towards the government, unable to respond with appropriate policies to the needs of the population. To address these challenges the Kingdom relies heavily on foreign aid; indeed Jordan's stability is a key priority for its neighbouring countries, and also for Western States, as it allows to avoid new refugee movements towards other Middle Eastern or European countries.

The issue represented by the Syrian refugees flow was the most challenging consequence of the Syrian civil war for Jordan. It is necessary to point out that the Hashemite Kingdom was already battling a recession, coupled with a heavy debt. Thus, the massive inflow of Syrian put to the test the country's water resources, social services, infrastructures and stability. From 2011 to 2017 thousands of Syrians found refuge in Jordan to escape the horrors of the war.⁸⁴ This was just the last wave of refugees in a country that since its independence in 1946 had already hosted other populations, in particular Palestinians, and Iraqis. Moreover, some of Jordanians historical minorities as the Circassians and the Chechens, arrived in what was at the time the Ottoman Empire, in order to escape the repression of the Tzar.

Jordan is poor of resources, and over the years its prosperity has been granted by foreign aid, in addition the country's rentier economy is coupled with a high population growth. If we add to these elements the turmoil that is currently affecting the region, it is evident that the refugee influx is even more difficult to deal with. Nonetheless, as stated previously the Kingdom is accustomed at receiving waves of refugees, and to employ them as a tool to obtain more funding and support from external political players. For instance, in the past Amman has been able to exploit the Palestinians and Iraqi refugees as opportunities to increase its international support. However, the refugees represent a heavy burden for the Kingdom's economy, indeed Jordan hosts the world second ratio of refugees to population as it shelters 89 refugees per 1000 inhabitants.⁸⁵

The country is not part of any international convention concerning the status and treatment of refugees, this leaves Amman with greater room for manoeuvre in dealing with the present crisis. The government considers Syrian refugees as guests, and has implemented policies to avoid their permanent settlement in Jordan in order to encourage the return to their home country. Nevertheless, Jordan has generally respected the international standards on the treatment of refugees. For instance, the Kingdom grants to Syrian children the access to the public education system. Moreover, Jordan is obliged to comply with the principle of nonrefoulement which is part of international customary law. According to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees “No Contracting State shall expel or return a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened.”⁸⁶

84 Francis A., 2015, Jordan's Refugee Crisis, Washington, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, available at <https://carnegieendowment.org>, accessed on 16 August 2019.

85 UNHCR, 2018, Jordan Fact Sheet, available at <http://reporting.unhcr.org>, accessed on 15 September 2019.

86 Francis A., 2015, Jordan's Refugee Crisis, Washington, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, available at <https://carnegieendowment.org>, accessed on 16 August 2019.

Despite these commitments, Amman has begun to restrict refugees freedom of movement and access to services, in particular to healthcare. In fact, the refugees in the country found themselves in a condition of vulnerability as Jordan has started to repel at the borders an increasing number of Syrians, while limiting their protection inside the country. Indeed, what at the beginning appeared as an emergency, has henceforth assumed the connotations of a protracted crisis, and the generosity in host communities has given way to grievances and frustration. The mounting tensions have been generated by the growth of unemployment, water scarcity, marginalization of certain social sectors, and overloaded infrastructures and services. The population blames the refugees for these issues, as a consequences the government is less and less willing to improve the condition of the refugees or to welcome additional ones.

The dimensions of the Syrian exodus were so relevant the authorities were obliged to ask international support to prevent the breakdown of the national economy. In 2015 the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) declared that in Jordan there were 628,000 Syrian refugees who were registered for their aid program. Amman argued that the real number was much higher, and at least doubled the figure given by the UNHCR.⁸⁷ The date were not precise because the inflow was so massive that it was hard to count everyone, and there were also Syrians who left the country for other destinations. As a consequence generally Jordanian officials referred to the refugees as 1,4 million. This number was also instrumental to allow the Kingdom to gather more international support from donors as it showed it was bearing the burden of a massive inflow. Anyway, there was no need for them to exaggerate, as from 2011 onward there was a continuous increase in the number of people who crossed to Jordan, the majority of them being women and children. Jordan saw its population increase by 10%, and the Syrians who arrived were usually deprived of any livelihood. In 2003, in the case of Iraqis, the situation was sometimes different. When they fled the US troops, some of them were able to bring with them some assets and goods, thus enabling them to start some businesses in the country.

To face the emergency, Jordan asked the assistance of the UNHCR, and initially they established the Zaatari Camp to accommodate the first refugees. Zaatari was soon followed by Azraq, as the arrivals did not show any sign of slowing down. However, the great majority of refugees did not live in the camps, but was hosted in the communities and cities, especially in the northern part of the Kingdom, as Irbid, Mafraq and Amman.⁸⁸ When the first Syrians started to arrive in 2011, Jordanian showed the hospitality they were renowned for, and welcomed them, nonetheless as the situation worsened and the years went on, the locals became discontent and tired due to the burden the foreigners placed on their country.⁸⁹ Furthermore, before

87 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 189.

88 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 188.

89 Carrion D., 2015, *Syrian Refugees in Jordan: Confronting Diffucult Truths*, London, Chatam House, available at

the outbreak of the Arab uprisings, Jordan was already facing a severe economic crisis, which was worsened by the costs linked to the presence of the Syrian refugees. For instance, the cities near the Za'atari camp saw their population doubled in a year, this caused the overcrowding of schools and hospitals which were not conceived to handle such a number of people. Also the Syrians put under strain the infrastructures and the limited water supply of northern Jordan, contributing to the economic hardships of the area.⁹⁰ At the beginning, the Za'atari camp was established as a temporary solution, but as the conflict continued to ravage Syria, it rapidly became the second largest refugee camp worldwide.

International donors were object of criticism as they delivered only a minimum part of what they promised, however the efforts by the Jordanian authorities, the UNHCR, NGOs and volunteers were remarkable. Gradually Za'atari became a peculiar patchwork of tents and prefabricated houses, while the refugees tried to recreate a semblance of normal life. There were even some attempts to elaborate a precise urban planning by the UN officers and the Jordanian authorities. For example, Jordanian security forces decided to form a cordon outside the camp, and allowed the development of various economic activities inside, as salons, restaurants, little markets. Concerning the distribution, it was organized around centralised centres inside the camp in cooperation with the World Food Program. Moreover, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) was involved in the creation of schools inside Za'atari, even though many children did not attend as they preferred to work in order to earn some money. To fight this practice, aid workers realized children playgrounds, centres for activities, and also football fields. The aim was building a network to substitute the community the children lost by moving to Jordan. In particular, the role of the Asian Football Development Project (AFDP) was essential to encourage the boys and girls in the camp to play soccer. This initiative was led by Prince Ali bin Hussein, member of the Hashemite family, and at the time International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) vice president for Asia. These efforts would not impact on the Syrian conflict, however the organizers hoped to teach some values to the refugee children, without them becoming a lost generation.⁹¹

Jordanian officials and international organizations complained that donations and aid was never enough to met the demand, and remained at 20% of what was pledged by donors. In addition, as the crisis went on, the Kingdom faced a problem of considerable donors fatigue, which affected the extent of donations. Notwithstanding this phenomenon, Jordan was in need of sources of funding to support both refugees and host communities, especially since the latter often complained about feeling neglected by the state which had to redirect a lot of resources to help the Syrians. Indeed, the refugee inflow affected the

<https://chatamhouse.org>.

90 OHCHR, 2014, Jordan in Constant Water Crisis – UN expert urges long-term solution while tackling emergencies, available at <https://www.ohchr.org>.

91 Ryan C. R., 2018, Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 192.

everyday life of Jordanians in many sectors, from housing, to education and water supply. For instance, the authorities allowed Syrian children to attend local schools, however, the limited teachers personnel and the lack of enough space in the buildings brought about a reduction in the quality of the education provided.⁹² There was also a lack of school supplies and the classrooms were constantly overcrowded, this caused many Jordanians to resort to tutors to make up for the shortcomings of the public system. Furthermore, there was a rapid increase in costs of food and housing, and also Jordanians accused the refugees of stealing their jobs as they were willing to work for lower salaries. In particular in the north, where the majority of Syrians were housed, the locals complained about rising crime rates, drug consumption, and beggars. An official stated: “We want to be hospitable. We want to keep people safe, but we are overwhelmed.”⁹³ It is possible that the dramatic increase of the population brought about a deterioration in public safety, nonetheless, it can be argued that Jordanians tend to blame the refugees for all the various issues affecting the country, while the majority of these problems were already present before the Syrian civil war.

However, there was the emergence of some social phenomena previously unknown to both Syrians and Jordanians, especially child marriages and polygamy. Often, poor Syrian families allowed their daughters to marry older rich locals in exchange of money dowries. Sometimes, these individuals were already married, thus they brought another wife in the household.⁹⁴ This practice was strongly opposed by Jordanian authorities, NGOs, and UN agencies, nonetheless due to the extremely impoverished condition of the refugees, the number of child brides only increased.

Concerning economy, it is hard to measure the impact of refugees on the employment. According to the Kingdom's public opinion, Syrians had a negative effect on the economy because they accepted to be paid less than their Jordanian counterparts. The public narrative blames the refugees for Jordan's economic problems, but actually the country was already facing a period of economic downturn before the Syrian crisis. In addition, the refugees have contributed to the economic development of the Kingdom under many aspects, for example they have increased the internal market by bolstering the demand, their presence has granted Amman foreign support and aid, and created new employment opportunities. Notwithstanding these positive elements, the presence of Syrians has worsened the negative trends that characterized the country's economy. The extension of public services has depleted government finances, the growing consumers demand has brought to price hikes, and the competition for jobs has caused a lowering of the salaries, damaging in particular the most vulnerable sectors of the population. These issues have strengthened the perception that the gap between the elite and the poorest Jordanians is growing.

92 Francis A., 2015, *Jordan's Refugee Crisis*, Washington, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, available at <https://carnegieendowment.org>, accessed on 19 August 2019, p. 15.

93 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 194.

94 *Ibid.*

In Jordan, refugees need a work permit to access the job market, and the government has so far conceded only a very limited number of these documents. As a result, 10 % of Syrians have obtained these permits, while the majority of refugees has been obliged to find a job in the informal sector. The scarcity of work opportunities makes NGOs assistance a fundamental part of refugees' income, since 82 % of Syrian families in Jordan live below the subsistence level.⁹⁵ However, it can be argued that the origins of the current hardships are to be found in the 2008 financial crisis that destabilized the Kingdom economy, causing a drastic reduction in the capital flows, while the Arab uprisings further damaged the economy, affecting key Jordan trade partners as Syria. This resulted in a rise of Jordan debt to 95.9 percent of GDP.⁹⁶ The economic hardships occurred almost at the same time of the refugee influx, thus the Jordanian people esteemed the Syrians responsible, even if the main cause was the regional turmoil.

However, in the first years of the conflict, refugees could not work in Jordan, thus they found jobs in the informal economy. Generally, they were more likely to compete for the jobs with the foreign guest workers, instead that with Jordanians. It is also necessary to point out that jobs were created in the refugee camps, in particular with the UN and the various international organizations. Furthermore, Jordanian host communities were already faced with unemployment and impoverishment before the arrival of refugees. As a consequence of the growing resentment, Jordanians and Syrians were concerned about possible clashes and unrest. The majority of people only wanted the end of Syrian conflict, the re-establishment of security in the region, and the possibility for the Syrians to return to their home country. Nonetheless, there were signs of growing discontent, as the rising of hate speeches of some who blamed the refugees for Jordan's difficulties.

Another challenge the Kingdom had to face was water scarcity, which has always been a concern for Jordanian authorities, indeed the country is the third most arid globally.⁹⁷ The high population growth rate combined with the presence of refugees, the inefficient water distribution system and the lack of proper planning have transformed this situation in an emergency. This is evident from the declaration of Catarina de Albuquerque, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation: “Jordan is at a critical moment and is struggling with severe water shortage issues.”⁹⁸

Around 37 % of the country's water supply derives from surface water sources, thus to face their needs Jordanians have to exploit also underground aquifers that if excessively used risk to become polluted and unusable. In addition, misuse, infrastructure obsolescence, and illegal wells cause the loss of over 50 % of

95 Danish Refugee Council, 2017, Understanding Alternatives to Cash Assistance, available at <https://drc.ngo>, accessed on 15 September 2019, p. 4.

96 World Bank, 2019, Jordan Overview, available at <https://www.worldbank.org>, accessed on 16 December 2018.

97 OHCHR, 2014, Jordan in constant water crisis – UN expert urges long-term solution while tackling emergencies, available at <https://www.ohchr.org>, accessed on 18 December 2018.

98 OHCHR, 2014, Jordan in constant water crisis – UN expert urges long-term solution while tackling emergencies, available at <https://www.ohchr.org>, accessed on 18 December 2018.

the water extracted.⁹⁹ To make matters worse, even though Jordan has severe law provisions to fight unlicensed wells, the government is often not willing to apply them because the punishment of drilling activities would anger the tribes, which are the political base of the monarchy and control the majority of the illegal wells. In this context, the Kingdom population is projected to double in the next decade, with worrying consequences for the already meagre water sources. The scenario is even more alarming after the arrival of the Syrian refugees. In particular, the communities in the northern part of Jordan have endured the major consequences of water scarcity, as it is in these areas that the largest number of Syrians resides.

The poor management of water sources can lead to extreme consequences, as showed by the case of Syria, indeed in the years before the Arab uprisings the country has been repeatedly hit by droughts which have provoked population displacements and increasing discontent.¹⁰⁰ These droughts were due to unfavourable weather conditions, but also to the mismanagements of water infrastructures. The inability of Damascus authorities to address the issue brought a mass migration from the agricultural provinces in the north to the southern regions. This displacement put a strong pressure on the southern urban areas, and contributed to enlarge the gap between the poor and the elite, fuelling social tensions and protests.

The current water emergency in Jordan is similar to that of Syria before the outbreak of the 2011 protests, hence it must not be underestimated. The Jordanian management of water distribution is no more sustainable, the concentration of refugees in urban areas has worsened the situation, while the burgeoning water demand impacts in particular marginalized communities. Water shortages have already caused tensions especially in the northern governorates. For instance, in 2012 the reduction of water supplies generated an insurrection in Mafraq.¹⁰¹ In order to solve this issue, Jordanian authorities need to focus on investments on water infrastructures, while instructing the population in the use of better conservation practices, otherwise this problem risks to threaten the country stability.

The authorities had to adjust their policies as it was clear that what started as a temporary problem was becoming a prolonged crisis, and promised to last even longer. The economic performances were not improving, and this risked to fuel locals and refugees' protests against the government who many saw as unable to effectively manage the crisis. Indeed, the Syrian conflict showed no signs of ending, thus Jordan needed to shift from short term policies to a long-term approach. The prospect of Syrians staying in the country for years awake the concerns of the Jordanian nationalists who were afraid to lose the country as they knew it. As mentioned before, identity politics is generally a complicated issue in Jordan, and the

99 Francis A., 2015, *Jordan's Refugee Crisis*, Washington, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, p. 23.

100 Kelley C. P., 2015, *Climate Change in the Fertile Crescent and Implications of the Recent Syrian Drought*, in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, available at www.jstor.org, accessed on 10 August 2019, p. 1.

101 UNHCR, 2012, *Analysis of Host Community-Refugee Tensions in Mafraq*, available at <https://data2.unhcr.org>, accessed on 20 August 2019, p. 6.

arrival of another wave of refugees just made the topic more sensitive.¹⁰²

Since Jordan gained its independence from the United Kingdom in 1946, the legitimacy of the monarchy was closely linked to its ability to mediate among the different interests of the tribes, the Palestinians, the secularists, and the islamists. The influx of Syrian refugees risks to destroy this delicate equilibrium. In particular, the support of Bedouin tribes is an essential component of the Hashemites political base, the identity of the nation has been modelled around these tribes, while the Bedouins also play a fundamental role as they constitute the backbone of the country's security apparatus. However, in the past few years, the increasing influence of the Palestinian elite has obliged the government to reconsider its attitude towards them, while in the past they were excluded from political power, their growing importance has caused protests to acquire more representation.¹⁰³ This new stance of the monarchy has brought about grievances from the tribes, who are afraid to lose their privileges in favour of Palestinians. Moreover, during the last decade the urbanization process in Jordan has accelerated, and this contributed to the marginalization of East Bank regions, historic Bedouin strongholds, further contributing to their declining support for the King. Besides, the refugee crisis combined with economic hardships and the saturation of the job market has deepened the cleavages between the Kingdom's elites and the poor.

Nonetheless, the refugee crisis has presented the government a convenient scapegoat, as Amman can blame the Syrians for the country's difficulties, and this allows authorities to buy some time and silence reform demand from the population. Notwithstanding this, the Kingdom has to face the aforementioned issues, because as the refugee situation is starting to appear long to solve, the citizens have started to criticise the government for the shortcoming of the services, and the economic problems; and this comes in the moment when the country's resources are exploited to their limit.

The Kingdom has built its national identity on East Jordanians, nonetheless especially after the 1948 Arab – Israeli War and the consequent Palestinian exodus in the neighbouring countries, emerged the idea the Jordan risked to become the new homeland for Palestinians. This fear is still present among Jordanian elites, and has brought about stricter laws concerning nationality.¹⁰⁴ For instance, the husband and the children of a Jordanian woman do not have the right to obtain the citizenship. As a consequence, in the near future, when part of the Syrian refugees will settle in the Kingdom, they will increase the number of the 'second-class' Jordanians, a category that already includes Palestinians and Iraqis. This event will risk to alter the frail political equilibrium of the country, generating further problems for the monarchy and calling into question the current definition of Jordanian identity. As a consequence, any debate concerning the possibility

102 Ryan C., 2010, "We Are All Jordan"... But Who Is We?, Washington, Middle East Research and Information Project, available at <https://www.merip.org>.

103 Muasher M., Palestinian Nationalism. Regional Perspectives, available at <https://carnegieendowment.org>, accessed on 18 December 2018.

104 *Ibid.*

to grant some rights to the Syrians, as work permits, had to be addressed with caution by the authorities in order to avoid protests from the locals.

By 2015, the refugee crisis had assumed a global dimension, with Syrians searching refuge outside the Middle East, in particular in Europe. This caused the death toll of the Syrians on the roads and in the Mediterranean to rise dramatically, as often they risked dangerous journeys in order to reach safer places. To address this emergency, the European Union and Amman signed an agreement, the Jordan Compact, which aimed at encouraging refugees to remain in the Hashemite Kingdom instead of embarking on the journey to arrive in Europe.¹⁰⁵ The incentive for Jordan was the willingness of the EU to open its market to a selection of Jordanian products, in exchange local authorities would have allowed the Syrians to be employed in Special Economic Zones where the manufacturing of these goods was located. The parties reached a consensus in 2015 at the London international donor conference, and additional aid was also promised to Jordan. This showed that the international community strongly pressured Amman to convince Jordanian policy-makers to modify their way to cope with the refugees' presence. The pledge of an important increase in Western financial support convinced the Hashemite Kingdom to comply, and in 2016 the government enacted new rules in order to allow 200,000 Syrians to enter the workforce. More specifically, the refugees were allowed to work in sectors where Jordanians were not willing to operate, for instance, agriculture, manufacturing and construction. This policy aimed at employing the refugees in the formal economy to avoid them being obliged to resort to the informal one, and also to improve the performance of Jordanian economy with qualified and cheaper labourers. Thus, the main purpose was turn a liability into an asset.¹⁰⁶

As the Middle East continued to be ravaged by conflicts, the Kingdom of Jordan continued to present itself as an oasis of stability and peace. In addition, by encouraging the employment of Syrians, Jordan was able to convince more businessmen to invest in the country. Notwithstanding these achievements, the International Labour Organization suggested to Jordanian authorities to legalize the informal economy, in order to apply to it the same regulations which were respected for the formal sector. This aimed also at improving the working conditions and labour rights of the many Syrian who constituted the backbone of the informal activities. It can be argued that by changing its labour policy toward the refugees, Jordan was finally shifting from short-term solutions to a long-term and more sustainable approach to face the crisis. However, the admission, even if partial, of Syrians in the labour market was strongly resisted by nationalists, as they perceived it as another blow to Jordanian identity. Moreover, the concession of citizenship and political rights was not being considered, as these were even more sensitive issue than employment. Regarding Syrians, they were not asking political rights, but only to be able to satisfy their basic needs, as

105 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 197.

106 *Ibid.*

the access to the national healthcare system, the possibility to work and the right of an education for their children.

3.3 The Jihadist Threat

Even considering the overall instability which affected the region, the summer of 2014 presented an important number of challenges for the Kingdom of Jordan. The country was afflicted by endemic economic problems while in the Middle East, there were seemingly ever-ending conflicts and unrest. In particular, ISIS had been able to establish its so-called “Caliphate” in large areas of Syria and Iraq, thus affecting the neighbouring Jordan. The Islamic State represented a more severe threat compared to other jihadist organisations, because it aspired to statehood and to the constitution of a caliphate, and Jordan was inside the territory that ISIS claimed.¹⁰⁷ In addition, Amman had stipulated a peace treaty with Israel, and allowed Western troops to use the country as a base for their operations. Furthermore, the threat came also from inside the Kingdom, as Jordanian Salfis were receptive towards ISIS call to arms, and in some cities they staged manifestations and clashed with the police. According to the experts, around two thousand Jordanians went in Syria as volunteers to join the Islamic State or the al-Nusra Front.

The United States organised a coalition in order to fight back the Islamic State, and in September 2014 they started to launch air strikes against ISIS positions in Iraq and Syria. Jordan decided to enter the coalition with its Royal Jordanian Air Force, in spite of fears of retributions in the form of terrorist attacks. These concerns were due to the bombings carried out by al-Qaeda in Iraq on the 9th November 2005 in three hotels in Amman. The attack caused the death of sixty people and hundreds of injured.¹⁰⁸ The crisis showed Jordanians that jihadi terrorism was a concrete risk, and the lesson was not forgotten by the authorities. Meanwhile, the Obama Presidency followed a line which aimed at avoiding the disastrous effects brought about by the unilateralism that characterised foreign policy under George W. Bush. In 2014, President Obama decided to intervene, following the execution of American prisoners by ISIS. Nonetheless, the US leader considered the possible backlashes of another American-led coalition to intervene in Arab and Muslim areas, thus the military operations were conceived as multilateral and aimed at including Arab countries. Washington request to take part in the coalition was welcomed by Kuwait, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and the Kingdom of Jordan.¹⁰⁹ This allowed the United States to obtain the necessary legitimacy for the strikes, and also local support. Concerning the five Arab states who chose to enter the coalition, the threat represented by the Islamic State was more serious and direct, as the Caliphate was close

107 Quivoij R., 2015, *The Islamic State*, Rajaratnam School of International Studies, available at <https://www.jstore.org>, p. 23.

108 Kaye D. D., Wehrey F., Grant A. K. & Stahl D., 2008, *More Freedom, Less Terror?*, Santa Monica, Rand Corporation, pp. 65-67.

109 Saleh L., 2016, *US Hard Power in the Arab World*, New York, Routledge, p. 106.

to their borders, but it had also the potential to destabilise these regimes on the domestic front with its propaganda and actions. Nonetheless, these Arab countries did not embody the reformist and liberal values of the Arab Spring, on the contrary these were Sunni monarchies who wanted to fight back ISIS, but also to contain any possible internal voice of dissent. However, the Hashemite Kingdom was different from its regional counterparts, as, during the Arab Spring, Jordanian authorities had enacted some reforms. In addition, the country shares the longest border with Iraq and Syria, and it has a relevant jihadist Salafi presence, thus for the security of the Kingdom, it was vital to dismantle ISIS.

King Abdullah advocated for the necessity of joining the fight against the Islamists, as for the Kingdom, neutrality was not an option, according to him there was an ongoing civil war within Islam, which affected all the Muslim countries, a conflict that opposed moderates to extremists, a war against terrorism where no grey area existed, and Jordan had to pick a side.¹¹⁰ For these reasons, Jordan followed a double-track strategy, and while the air force was striking ISIS in the field, the security apparatus tackled every activity linked to the Islamic State inside the country. For instance, some imams were banned from Jordanian mosques after they preached in favour of supporting ISIS efforts in the region. At the same time, the regime was preparing a strategy to handle the come back of the volunteers who joined the jihaidists ranks, thus border security was increased and soldiers were ordered to open fire on any armed group who tried to cross to Jordan.

The tightening of the country's security had an impact on the political arena. To curb the Islamic threat, in 2014 the Parliament endorsed a law which gave the authorities the power to prosecute Jordanians suspected to support terrorist formations in any way, even through online commentaries. The law was highly controversial as pro-democracy activists argued that it concentrated even more the decision-making power in the hands of the King, further reducing public accountability.¹¹¹ Others went as far as to declare Jordan was not a constitutional monarchy anymore, but an autocracy. On the contrary, supporters of this amendment stated that it was part of the wider reform process the country was undergoing, and allowed Jordan to better face the threats to its security.

Similar measures were undertaken across the region, as Arab regimes tried to consolidate monarchical authority and to improve national security. As a consequence, the Arab Spring was turning into an Arab Winter, as reforms were set aside and security regimes were restored. However, it can be argued that in Jordan the Mukhabarat had never lost its role of actor behind the stage in national politics. It was considered by activists as the main obstacle to change in the Kingdom, nonetheless many accept the GID intrusiveness in the country's everyday life as it is the pillar of national security. Nonetheless, the opposition regards

110 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 201.

111 *Ibid.*, p. 202.

security as the main excuse exploited by the regime and by reactionary forces to postpone reforms or to justify the restriction of freedoms and basic rights.

However, in 2014 regional insecurity was not just an excuse, as war and violence ravaged Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen and Palestine. Consequently, after some pro-ISIS marches took place in Jordan, the authorities started to arrest all the citizens suspected of having declared their support for the Islamic State. At the same time, the intelligence monitored any jihadist activity inside the Kingdom, which included also online activism or participation in protests. Thus, the government counter-terrorism campaign aimed at securing the borders, fighting jihadist propaganda online and in the mosques, and repressing pro-Islamic State protests. For instance, preachers were given state guidelines for their sermons, based on which they should avoid to criticise the monarchy, Western partners or allied Arab states. Also, imams had to avoid sectarian sermons, and could not speak in favour of jihadism.

There was an episode in particular which granted the support of the nation to King Abdullah's effort to fight back ISIS. A Jordanian pilot, Muath al-Kassasbeh was captured by the Islamic State when its air plane went down in the proximity of Raqqa, at the time the capital of the "Caliphate". The authorities tried to negotiate its release, and the entire nation was following the news hoping for the pilot to come back. Instead, the jihadists released a video of Muath in a cage, surrounded by jihadists who executed him by setting him on fire.¹¹² Furthermore, the islamists released the video while King Abdullah was visiting the United States, in order to convey a symbolic message. In response to this act, the Jordanian ruler declared: "We are waging this war to protect our faith, our values and human principles and our war for their sake will be relentless and will hit them on their own ground."¹¹³ The King made clear as it had done before, that Jordan had no choice but to fight in this conflict. The majority of Jordanians agreed with him, however some considered that part of the blame for the pilot's death was on the international coalition, and on the Hashemite Kingdom itself for choosing to side with the US. Others questioned if Jordan was not indirectly helping the Assad regime by targeting its strongest enemy. Some raised the issue concerning the fact that they were striking a fellow Arab and Muslim country, while at the same time they were part of a Western imperialist coalition. These doubts were expressed quietly after the death of Muath, but as the time passed, the dissenting voices grew in number. The majority of Jordanians opposed both the Islamic State and Assad dictatorship, nonetheless they asked if this was really their war. Indeed, after the initial tough stances expressed by the Kingdom's officials, Jordan toned down its participation in the operations, also in an attempt to avoid other episodes as the one of the pilot. Notwithstanding this, the country remained the main base for the coalition air-strikes, with a

112 Steed B. L., 2019, *ISIS: The Essential Reference Guide*, Santa Barbara, ABC-CLIO Publishers, p. 267.

113 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 206.

growing presence of US military personnel.¹¹⁴ There were also British, German and French troops with a role mainly of training and support for the Jordanian army. Jordan connections with these dominant Western powers were at the same time grating the Kingdom security, but represented also a liability, given the unpopularity of the American interventions in the Middle East. In order to avoid public opinion protests, Jordanian authorities kept vague the details concerning foreign presence on their soil. International security connections were a small price to pay to protect the Kingdom from external and internal threats.

As in the neighbouring Syria the civil war continued, in Jordan the Salafi movement was on the rise, in particular in the poorest cities in the north as Irbid and Zarqa. And it was precisely in the former that in 2016 special forces intervened, and after hours of gun battle were able to dismantle a dormant ISIS cell who was plotting terrorist attacks across the country.¹¹⁵ This episode showed that the authorities fears were real, not only hypothetical. There were attacks in some parts of the country, especially on the border and in refugee camps. As a consequence, Jordanian authorities restricted the entrance of refugees, and sometimes even completely closed the border crossings in order to stem the arrivals. This caused many Syrians to remain blocked in the area between Syria and Jordan. The Islamic State targeted the camps in the no man's land, aiming at the Jordanian security forces who guarded them. These attacks contributed to reinforce the position of those officials in the Kingdom who wanted to stop the influx of refugees. Even if there were few incidents, they were nonetheless alarming, and they contrasted with the image of Jordan which was known abroad, an oasis of stability in a region prey of turmoil. In addition, terrorist attacks convinced even more the security apparatus and the authorities that counter-terrorism must remain their main focus, putting on the side the reform effort.

3.4 Security and Reforms

Jordan small size and the fact that its economy is dependent on foreign aid make the country more vulnerable to the effects of regional crisis. Before the Arab Spring, the Kingdom was already plagued by economic problems, which were worsened by the Syrian conflict coupled with refugees inflow. The burden faced by the countries which host the Syrians (Iraq, Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon) is overwhelming, and often the funds provided by international donors are not sufficient to cover the expenses for services and food.¹¹⁶ Concerning Jordan, the country was already struggling to find solutions to address the economic issues and to undertake political reforms. The Syrian civil war represented just another problem for

114 Boulby M. & Kenneth C., 2018, *Migration, Refugees, and Human Security in the Mediterranean and MENA*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, p. 168.

115 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 209.

116 Boulby M. & Kenneth C., 2018, *Migration, Refugees, and Human Security in the Mediterranean and MENA*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, p. 168.

Jordanian officials. In addition, the authorities stated that they were able to enact the necessary reforms notwithstanding the instability that characterised the region, although according to the opposition the policies promoted by the government were only cosmetic measures, devoided of real content.¹¹⁷ Many activists argue that, while the threat represented by jihadists was real, the security efforts were used as an excuse to derail the reform process, to restrict media freedom and the right to public assembly.

During the Arab Uprisings, the regime exploited foreign policy as a tool to grant its political survival and face this period of important challenges. In particular, state officials often had to lobby donors in order to obtain additional aid, which was vital for the ailing Jordanian economy, and to feed and lodge the refugees. This caused the Kingdom to double its efforts to maintain its traditional alliances with the aim of granting the security of Jordan both military and economically. Nonetheless, the close relation of Amman with its Western partners sparked criticism on the domestic arena, because many Jordanians consider the regime too subservient to Western interests. Many democracy activists feel that the Kingdom allies are one of the main obstacles to the reform process. The opposition argued that the regime implemented only façade reforms, in order to appease the European Union and the United States, while there was no real attempt to steer Jordan in the direction of real democratization.¹¹⁸ In addition, local partners as Saudi Arabia represent a reactionary force capable of influencing negatively the reform process in the Hashemite Kingdom. Indeed, the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council are not known for their high degree of liberalisation or the promotion of pluralism, and Egypt, another key ally, under the Presidency of el-Sissi has become an oppressive authoritarian regime.¹¹⁹ According to some, the reactionary influence of these countries has already made inroads in Jordan, in particular in the form of the growing domestic Islamists groups.

Furthermore, activists are worried that the severity of the external and internal jihaidists threats the Kingdom is facing, may drag down the already limited reform effort. Reformers feared that in the name of security, the authorities could crack down on basic rights and dissent. Democracy activists argue that in Jordan there is much fanfare about achieved goals on the reform path, but the country in reality has made no real progress. Indeed, as the Kingdom was confronted with the security dilemmas of the Arab Uprising, it was also witnessing a debate about the future of reforms. Notwithstanding the declarations and the propaganda of the regime, it is clear that the security apparatus still exerts a pervasive control on the country's public life. Thus, it seems that once more, security concerns have took the upper hand over reforms.

117 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 212.

118 Joffé G., 2013, *North Africa's Arab Spring*, London, Routledge, p. 9.

119 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

Chapter IV

Protests in Jordan

4.1 What is the Arab Spring

The Arab Spring started on the 17th of December in 2010 in Tunisia, when the street vendor Muhammed Bouazizi set fire to himself to protest for the harsh treatment he received from the police, which beaten him because he did not have the work permit. According to the historian Crane Brinton a revolution starts with a limited number of citizens that sense the moment of fragility of the authoritarian regime and decide to exploit it.¹²⁰ Thus, they organise street demonstrations that cause the demise of the old order. Furthermore, the author identifies the government mismanagement of the economy and the consequent financial crisis as one of the main causes for the formation of subversive movements. This analysis reflects closely what happened in the Middle East, and to a lesser extent in Jordan (because here there was no revolutionary change). Indeed, the Arab uprisings generally began with a symbolic event, the immolation of Bouazizi in Tunis, street demonstrations in Amman and Cairo, unrest in Deraa. All these protests erupted in countries dominated by authoritarian regimes weakened by endemic corruption and economic hardships. The demonstrators called for freedom, human rights, bread. Thus, they had both economic and political demands. Moreover, the engine of these movement were the youth who lost faith in the institutions, and the discontent spread from the cities to the other parts of the country.¹²¹

Violence is the central element of these revolutions, although again in the case of the Hashemite Kingdom there not such an event and the level of violence was considerably lower than in the neighbouring states. To cite Brinton, revolutions begin from below, when a small group aims at bringing down a government and tries to show to the rest of the population that it is possible. After, the real agents of change are the masses, for instance in the Arab countries the outcome of the uprisings depended on the people not on the elite, the generals or the religious authorities. As Mark Perry, the author of “A Fire in the Minds of Arabs: The Arab Spring in Revolutionary History”, states power comes from the mobs that take the streets.¹²²

The revolutions that erupted in the MENA region will change the history of these states and their effects will continue to be felt in the long term, even if in some of these countries seems that the conservative forces have already triumphed, as in Egypt with the general al-Sisi. In particular, it was the popular mobilisation in Egypt, Yemen, and Tunisia that delivered unprecedented result, being able to

120 Perry M., 2014, A Fire in the Minds of Arabs: The Arab Spring in Revolutionary History, in *Insight Turkey*, vol. 16, available at <http://www.jstore.org>, pp. 27-34.

121 Sadiki L., 2015, Routledge Handbook of the Arab Spring: Rethinking Democratisation, New York, Roudedge, p. 32.

122 Perry M., 2014, A Fire in the Minds of Arabs: The Arab Spring in Revolutionary History, in *Insight Turkey*, vol. 16, available at <http://www.jstore.org>, pp. 27-34.

produce institutional change and also a change in the leadership. In the cases of Syria and Bahrain, peaceful demonstrations were quickly repressed, in the latter case by the Saudi intervention, in the former by the security apparatus, whose violence caused the current civil war. Thus, in both countries, the leaders managed to remain in charge. As for Lybia, the autocrat was removed from power following an international military intervention to back the protesters.

The majority of the Arab Spring participants expected a democratic transformation. However, in some cases, their hopes were dashed, when the mass mobilisation failed to produce uprisings, as in Jordan, Morocco, and Algeria. While, as stated before, in Bahrain and Syria, the peaceful demonstrations were violently suppressed. In Egypt, the elections did not result in the expected outcome, when the Muslim Brotherhood triumphed and Mohamed Morsi obtained the presidency. Later on, as the new government tried to subvert the democratic nature of the institutions, the opposition forces turned to the army, which removed Morsi from power and imprisoned him, putting an end to the country short-lived democratic experiment.¹²³ In Yemen, amid the proxy-conflict between Riyadh and Teheran, the deposed autocrat continues to play a significant role in the political arena, while there has not been a real reshuffle of the ruling elite. After the fall of Qaddafi, the situation in Libya mirrored that of Iraq following the deposition of Saddam. Elections were held, but the government did not have real authority, and the power was in the hands of militias. Tunisia is the only case where the old authoritarian state has been replaced an embryo of democracy, in which the people can express their voices. Thus, considering all the countries affected by the Arab Spring, the final outcome in terms of effective democratisation has been rather modest.

When the Arab Uprising broke out in the Middle East in 2011 and 2012, many experts stated that Jordan would have been the next. The dictatorships in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia were overthrown by popular protests, while there were protests also in Bahrain, Yemen and Syria. In the midst of this upheavals, the Hashemite Kingdom remained an oasis of stability. Indeed, during the Arab Spring, from 2011 to 2013, the Jordanian opposition did not manifest for revolution or regime change, but limited to ask reforms. To better understand this dynamics and what was exactly the Arab Spring in the Hashemite Kingdom, it is necessary to analyse Jordanian history of protests, youth movements and activism. It can be argued that, although the country did not present the volatility of its neighbours, it was nonetheless hit by street protests demanding meaningful changes.

According to conservative Jordanian, the Arab Spring was a phenomenon the country had to avoid, because it meant instability and social unrest.¹²⁴ On the contrary, for more liberal activists, the Arab Spring stood for a pro-democracy movement which would have pushed the regime to liberalise the state and to

123 Trager E., *Arab Fall: How the Muslim Brotherhood Won and Lost Egypt in 891 Days*, Washington, Georgetown University Press, p. 227.

124 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 20.

embark on a true reform effort. Considering these polarised views, it seemed unlikely for Jordan to be hit by the Arab Spring. Concerning the Hashemites, they saw the Arab Spring as both a threat and an opportunity. The monarchy narrative sustained that Jordan was drawing its own version of this phenomenon, an alternative based on reform without chaos. Indeed, King Abdullah II declared that the Arab Spring would relaunch the reform process, and would have enabled Jordan to overcome the resistance of the domestic reactionary forces. He argued that the Kingdom was different from the other states in the area, as the regime was able to reform itself, thus could exploit the protests as an opportunity, not as source of instability.

Many Jordanians, especially among the royalists, supported the ruler's view, and the conservatives often organized counter demonstrations as a show of force against democracy activists. Nonetheless, many others are less optimistic, they felt disillusioned because in 2011 seemed that change was possible in Jordan, but after a brief period of timid reforms, the status quo had been restored in the country. Nonetheless, after the first demonstrations, the experts expected the Hashemite Kingdom to follow the path of Egypt and Tunisia. An analyst stated: "Jordan's young and well educated population seems ripe for the message of the Arab Spring. The country has serious economic troubles, endemic corruption, and a lack of political freedom. Thus it is not surprising that uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia quickly spread to Jordan."¹²⁵ Indeed, there were protests, but, contrary to previsions, they never turned into a revolution. As a consequence, during the Arab Spring, the experts were often forced to change their assessments on the country's future.

Paradoxically, the regime was able to profit of the continual unrest that was afflicting the Middle East, as many activists toned down their requests, in order to avoid the country to fall victim of the instability that had hit its neighbours. The regional violence had not eliminated the claims of Jordanian protesters, but it had temporarily silenced them, as both the authorities and the opposition were carefully monitoring the regional conflicts afraid of the potential spillover. In particular, Jordan resources were drained as it had to handle the important influx of refugees from Syria, notwithstanding the fact that the European Union, the US, and Saudi Arabia increased the aid in an attempt to stabilise Jordan.

From 2011 to 2017, the Kingdom was not quiet, there were protests in the streets, but they did not escalated in an uprising against the regime. Furthermore, notwithstanding the external pressures resulting from the regional instability, Amman had chose neither a democratic transition neither the imposition of authoritarianism, but rather a process between these extremes.

125 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 22.

4.2 Republics and Monarchies

When the Arab uprising broke out at the end of 2010, with mass movements asking for the end of authoritarianism and liberalisation across North Africa and the Middle East, it gave way among experts to a debate on the possibility that democratisation would be pursued in these areas. In particular, scholars and analysts wondered if the popular upheavals would have led to regime change or just to stronger authoritarianisms. Indeed, long-standing leaders as Mubarak in Cairo and Ben Ali in Tunis were removed, since the protesters lost faith in the legitimacy of their power.

It can be argued that a key factor to understand the different outcomes of the uprisings in the region is given by the various processes of state-building.¹²⁶ The more traditional regimes, for instance the monarchies in Jordan and Morocco, have showed more resilience compared to Arab republics, as Egypt or Tunisia.¹²⁷ Consequently, authoritarian regimes in the Middle East were generally able to survive the unrest. This outcome was favoured also by the promise of these leaders to enact concrete reforms to increase political representation and allow the people to take part in the decision-making. A degree of liberalisation had been realised even before the Arab Spring. For instance, in Egypt, the state allowed a limited return of multi party system for the 1976 elections. Especially after 1991, many Arab regimes made democratic openings, among them the Hashemite Kingdom, Algeria, and Tunisia.¹²⁸ In these countries, the legislation concerning political parties was improved, and parliament were convened. Furthermore, there were changes also in the Gulf, where in 1991 Oman elected a Shura Council, even if it was only an advisory body, and elections were held in 1992. In Morocco, in the 1970s the monarchy praised to undertake a liberalization effort and take into account opposition demands, King Hassan II decision followed an assassination attempt against him. However, these measures did not aim at a genuine political transformation, the objective was to present cosmetic reforms to the opposition in order to appease the population, and grant the permanence of the regimes. When the Arab Spring erupted in 2010-2011, with upheavals sweeping across Middle East, the protesters carried a feeling of optimism, there was faith in the possibility of real democratisation.

The repression of the demonstrations showed that some experts were too eager in predicting the end of authoritarianisms. Although the mass mobilisations have shaken the region, the regimes, especially the monarchies, proved resistant to change. Instead, the Arab republics witnessed a surge in activism and street protests, with the population demanding a real liberalisation. Indeed, these states had pursued democratisation on paper, while remaining autocracies in substance. This contradiction generated the

126 Koprulu N. & Abdulmajeed H., 2018, Are Monarchies Exceptional to the Arab Spring? The Resilience of Moroccan Monarchy Revisited, available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com>, pp. 1-2.

127 Bank A., Richter T., Sunik A., Durable Yet Different: Monarchies in the Arab Spring, available at <https://www.tandfonline.com>, accessed 5 September 2019, p. 163.

128 Koprulu N. & Abdulmajeed H., 2018, Are Monarchies Exceptional to the Arab Spring? The Resilience of Moroccan Monarchy Revisited, available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com>, p. 2.

discontent of the people, who were expecting concrete reforms from the regimes. On the contrary, kingdoms as Morocco or Jordan managed to survive the regional unrest, and even consolidated their popularity among the population.

This longevity has been assured not only by the careful policies of the monarchs, but mainly by the institutions that underpin the stability of these kingdoms. In addition, in Jordan, there were massive demonstrations in all the main cities, however it is necessary to point out that the demands of the protesters were moderate. This moderation was also the product of the regime's policy to coopt part of the opposition while taking measures to appease the masses. King Abdullah showed his willingness to pursue a gradual liberalisation coupled with monarchy-led reforms to amend the constitution.¹²⁹ Moreover, kingdoms are not dominated by a single political party as republics such as Syria or Egypt. These monarchies have a party system with a plurality of formations, even though generally weak and lacking widespread popularity in society. The IAF is clearly an exception, since it enjoys large affiliation.¹³⁰ This element also contributed to the moderation of the demonstrations, since the protests were led by cross-ideological coalitions constituted by various political parties, which had to respectively tone down their requests in order to articulate common demands. Another element that explains the resilience of monarchies is the use of repression. For example, the Middle East regimes often make indiscriminate use of repression, this is a different approach compared to Jordan, which privileges soft security. Notwithstanding the features previously mentioned, it is the attachment of the people to the King that enables us to understand the stability enjoined by monarchies. Besides, the figure of the ruler started to assume the characteristics it has now during the colonial domination and the period immediately post independence, which allowed the sovereigns to gain legitimacy in the eyes of people.¹³¹ For the population, the monarch embodies national sovereignty, differently from republics, where the leaders obtain their power through the electoral process. In addition, these monarchies are able to distance themselves from ruling parties or governments when the country is hit by economic hardships or political uncertainty.

Concerning Arab republics, as Tunisia, Libya, Syria, or Egypt, they are the result of revolutionary nationalist movements, which saw the leaders obtain the power and keep it indefinitely. As a consequence, after decades of repression and economic mismanagement, discontent reached a boiling point and the population staged mass upheavals, the Arab uprisings, calling for pluralism and democratisation. Instead, revolutionary movements in the Middle East monarchies such as Jordan, Qatar or Saudi Arabia, did

129 Koprulu N. & Abdulmajeed H., 2018, Are Monarchies Exceptional to the Arab Spring? The Resilience of Moroccan Monarchy Revisited, available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com>, p. 5.

130 Ryan C. R., 2018, Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 49.

131 Koprulu N. & Abdulmajeed H., 2018, Are Monarchies Exceptional to the Arab Spring? The Resilience of Moroccan Monarchy Revisited, available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com>, p. 7.

not succeed in producing any real change. How is it possible to explain this conundrum? Robert Snyder in his “The Arab Uprising and the Persistence of Monarchy” has tried to reply to this question. The author suggests that the cause of the fall of authoritarian republics lies in the same element which allowed their formation: revolutionary nationalism. When the leaders of these revolutions obtained the power, they became autocrats and adopted constitutional documents underpinned by nationalism, that neglected individual rights in favour of an ideal collectivity.¹³² Consequently, these dictators imposed state control over the press and the media, systematically repressed dissenting voices, and adopted a state-directed economic system. The foreign policy of these regimes was centred on the identification of an alleged external enemy of the nation, often Western countries. Furthermore, the judiciary was sidelined by parallel courts linked to the security apparatus, thus compromising the respect of the rule of law. It can be argued that these republics lack inclusiveness at the political level, with all the powers in the hands of the leader.

Faced with the appeal of nationalist ideologies, the monarchies took measures to avoid the spread of these ideals among their citizens. Thus, sovereign made a clear separation between the state apparatus and the nation. Moreover, they reached a major level of political inclusiveness, while also being more open to dialogue in the international arena. These elements, combined with the important oil production of many of these kingdoms, as Kuwait, United Arab Emirates or Saudi Arabia, allowed them to establish close ties with the West. However, this situation is threatened by economic shocks, and the rise of anti-state actors as the Islamic State, capable of altering the equilibrium of the region. Another factor that explains the stability of the Arab kingdoms is given by western interests, in particular regarding Washington. Indeed, western countries have established more easily partnerships with the monarchies as opposed to the more volatile autocracies. In addition, kingdom's state-building was pursued by alliances with the most powerful tribal leaders, and by co-opting the cities' elites, instead Arab republics condemned the previous elite as traitors and constituted a new ruling class made of the regime's party members. As a result, the monarchies are based on a network of social ties that has its center in the royal family, instead the centralised apparatus of these nationalist republics excludes a significant segment of the population from the state.

132 Koprulu N. & Abdulmajeed H., 2018, Are Monarchies Exceptional to the Arab Spring? The Resilience of Moroccan Monarchy Revisited, available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com>, pp. 7-8.

4.3 The Middle Class' Discontent, neglected areas, and regime's corruption

Some experts have underline the centrality of the middle class, which is a pillar of political stability and also the engine of economic growth. In addition, a wealthy middle class is the main drive of consumer goods demand, favouring the development of domestic industries. Concerning the MENA region, for instance in the cases of the Hashemite Kingdom and Egypt, the middle class has more than doubled its size during the last decade, passing from 11% of the population in 2000 to 22,4% in the former, and from 16% to 36% in the latter.¹³³ While in Tunisia it increased of over 60%. It can be argued that in the countries examined, the middle class expanded steadily. However, people were dissatisfied, a possible explanation for this can be given by the fact that in absolute terms, the number of individuals living below the middle class has increased, and they felt left out from the benefits deriving from the countries' economy. These people represented a group willing to descend in the streets to ask for an improvement in their standard of living.

Moreover, among the middle class, the category that felt more harshly this exclusion were the youth, which were registered also a high level of unemployment. In addition, those who are able to obtain a job, often end up with precarious and underpaid positions, which only adds to their discontent. Thus, people were frustrated since they were unable to land on a stable occupation, and consequently they could not afford to buy a house and raise a family became also more difficult. Two factors can help explain this situation. First, the lack of opportunities in the Arab countries labour market.¹³⁴ Indeed, generally the most educated young people used to easily obtain a job in the state bureaucracy. However, as governments had to perform budgetary cuts, they were also forced to limit hiring in the public sector. Thus, the demand for qualified workers decreased, and the private sector was not sufficiently developed to adsorb the surplus of job-seeking youth. Many young graduates found themselves unemployed for long periods while waiting for the public sector to recruit them. Second, the Arab education system has not been able to keep the pace with global labour market, that often requires different skills from those in possession of Arab young professionals. For instance, it can be said that an element of weakness of Arab countries curricula is their focus on pre learning, while neglecting competencies required by the enterprises as problem solving or the ability to work in a team.

As a consequence, the youth which does not find a secure position, is obliged to accept precarious jobs, most of the times with low wages, and often in the informal sector, with no social security.¹³⁵ It can be argued that the bureaucratic apparatus is still the main employer in many Arab states, however the private sector is still small compared to the number of people who enter the job market every year. This lack of well-

133 Ghanem H., 2016, Roots of the Arab Spring, in *The Arab Spring Five Years Later: Toward Greater Inclusiveness*, Washington, Brookings Institution Press, available at <http://www.jstor.org>, p 51.

134 Andersson T. & Djeflat A., 2013, *The Real Issues of the Middle East and the Arab Spring*, New York, Springer, pp. 48-49.

135 Ghanem H., 2016, Roots of the Arab Spring, in *The Arab Spring Five Years Later: Toward Greater Inclusiveness*, Washington, Brookings Institution Press, available at <http://www.jstor.org>, p 57.

paid employment opportunities has been one of the driving causes of youth discontent, which in turn has brought them to descend in the streets during the Arab upheavals. Young people found themselves excluded from the economic system of their countries, and blamed the regime for this situation.

The middle class and the youth were not the only sectors of society which were not satisfied with the way Arab states were managing the economy, there were regions, in particular the rural areas that felt abandoned by the government as they witnessed the development plans and the investments centred in the main cities, leaving almost nothing for the rest of the country. For instance, this explains why the first protests in Tunisia started in Sidi Bouzid, one of the poorest and most underdeveloped areas in the country. For instance, the countryside is mainly devoted to agriculture, and while the share of agricultural production in the GDP is low, the importance of this sector in terms of employment opportunities should not be underestimated. However, if this is true for the majority of Arab countries, Jordan represents an exception, in the Hashemite Kingdom, agriculture contributes only for 3% to the GDP, and it employs only 2% of the country's workforce. In addition, in Jordan 17% of the population lives in the countryside, differently from the other Arab states, where on average 40% of the inhabitants live outside the cities.¹³⁶ Nonetheless, across the Middle East rural areas are generally characterised by lower incomes and higher unemployment, which is the reason behind the migrations from the internal regions to the richer cities in search of better opportunities. However, since the private sector does not provide enough job positions, these youth ended up in informal economy or were forced to accept low-income jobs.

Hafez Ghanem provides an interesting insight by stating that the dramatic episode which ignited the Arab uprisings could also be analysed in the light of Tunisia social and economic issue. Indeed, maybe Bouazizi extreme act could have been avoided if he had a stable and well-paid job, and if the economic hardships had not forced him to find an activity in the informal sector, thus more vulnerable to the extortion of the police.¹³⁷ This shows the centrality of economic problems as one of the main roots of the Arab Spring. Consequently, if these countries will not be able to find viable solution to address the economic crisis and the absence of liberty in the political arena, the instability will remain a feature of the region.

As stated by Steven Cook, another element that contributed to the outburst of the Arab upheavals was the endemic corruption that plagued the states of the area, in particular in the high echelons of the political systems. Protesters asked for politicians to be held accountable for the mismanagement of public funds.¹³⁸ It can be argued that the spark that ignited the mass demonstrations started in Tunisia, with protests against the Ben Ali regime, one of the most corrupted of the area. The upheavals spread to Yemen, Egypt, Libya, and in

136 Ghanem H., 2016, *Roots of the Arab Spring*, in *The Arab Spring Five Years Later: Toward Greater Inclusiveness*, Washington, Brookings Institution Press, available at <http://www.jstor.org>, p. 70.

137 *Ibid.*, p. 75.

138 Cook A. S., 2012, *Corruption and the Arab Spring*, in *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, vol. 18, available at <http://www.jstore.org>, pp. 21-22.

particular Syria, where the civil war was a product of the clashes between the opposition and the state led by the Assad family, renowned for its nepotisms and corruption. In the case of Jordan, King Abdullah II declared he took into account the grievances of the activists, and was ready to take action in order to tackle the rampant corruption that characterised the state apparatus. However, notwithstanding the palace rhetoric, the measures against public administrations abuses ended up being superseded by the emergency actions necessary to face regional insecurity.

In the states that were touched by the Arab uprising, people had the feeling that only a small elite was enjoying the benefits of economic growth, while the majority of the population was left behind. In addition, studies have proved that corruption, together with inefficient regulations, can slow down economic development, having a negative impact on trade and investments.¹³⁹ Furthermore, the incidence of corruption is higher in the presence of weak institutions, which is the case of most countries in the MENA region, where sometimes bribery is the only viable way to have access to public services. For instance, when demonstrations started in Tahrir square in Cairo, most of the activists accused Hosni Mubarak of electoral fraud, by manipulating the polls and trying to transform Egypt into a hereditary regime for his son, and economic corruption, by exploiting his power to enrich himself and the restricted circle of people close to him. The population criticised the leader as they believed that in their country the boundaries between the economic and the political sphere were blurred. As a result, Mubarak and his associates were able to use their power to realise economic gains, for example through illegal land acquisitions and by obtaining free stocks.¹⁴⁰

In Syria, these practices were even more evident, as the Alewites are the privileged minority which de facto controls the state. Although they make up for a small portion of the population, they held the majority of the important positions in the government, in the bureaucracy and in the military.¹⁴¹ The Baath party, through which Assad rules the state, has a disproportionate Alewite membership, and it is the only political formation which bears real power in country. Moreover, the national assembly does nothing more than a mere rubber stamp of the dictator's decisions, while the courts are also controlled by the President. For these reasons, when protests broke out in 2011, the people took the streets to accuse the regime and the Alewite minority of widespread corruption. Another force that represent an obstacle to the elimination of corruption in the Arab countries is the military. In these states, the armed forces held a special status in the economy, while also representing a fundamental pillar for the power of the leaders, since they are the instrument employed to crush dissenting voices. For instance, in Egypt, after the Arab Spring, the Supreme Council of

139 Hany A., Elgohari H. & Ayat M., 2018, Corruption, political instability and growth: Evidence from the Arab Spring, available at <https://poseidon01.ssrn.com>, p. 5.

140 Peleg I. & Mendilow J., 2014, Corruption and the Arab Spring: Comparing the Pre-and Post-Spring Situation, Lanham, Lexington Books, p.103.

141 Diamond L. & Plattner M., 2014, Democratisation and Authoritarianism in the Arab World, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, p. 170.

the Armed Forces has exploited its leverage to oppose changes towards greater transparency in the state apparatus, as they feared losing their economic privileges.¹⁴² Also, the traditional Arab monarchies have generally opposed the Arab Spring demands for greater liberalisation and the implementation of measures to fight corruption. Especially Riad, that has even intervened military in Bahrain in order to avoid the demise of the local ruler. Besides, Saudi Arabia has provided assistance to the friendly monarchies of Jordan and Morocco.

It can be argued that the eradication of corruption in the Middle East is intimately related to the question of "good governance", and also to the establishment of a political regime capable of building institutions that are not corruptible. Good governance could be defined as "institutional performance, efficiency, and responsiveness to basic public services".¹⁴³ These elements are central in tackling the symptoms of corruption, however this is not sufficient, Arab countries need a genuine democratisation process, that generates a political system where the power of the leader is limited by a checks ad balances, and where there is an endeavour to fight the roots of corruption. Indeed, the democratic deficit of Arab states has favoured the spread of corruption, which is present without exceptions in these area. In these countries, the leaders systematically use public power for their interests, and this happens independently from the nature of these regimes.

For instance, corruption is endemic in Arab monarchies as Jordan, or Morocco, but the same can be said for republics as Tunisia or Syria. The problem behind these practices is the personalisation of power, where the country becomes the personal fiefdom of the leader. The organisation Transparency International (TI) provides data concerning corruption in the various countries. In 2012 TI published an assessment in which for example Syria was ranked 144th among 176 states, and Egypt occupied the 118th position. The situation appeared slightly better for Kingdoms as Jordan, which was 58th and Saudi Arabia that was 66th.¹⁴⁴ The overthrow of the old autocrats as Ben Ali or Qaddafi, has brought new hopes for the enforcement of serious measures to face corruption. However, years after the beginning of the Arab Spring, the results present a rather sober picture. Indeed, corruption is deeply entrenched in Middle Eastern institutions, thus not so easy to remove. Moreover, the leadership who now holds the reins of power, is often composed by the old elite, as in Jordan and Saudi Arabia, or by individual with no experience or no interest in altering the status quo, as the deposed Egyptian President Morsi in the former case, or the new one General al-Sissi in the latter.

142 Peleg I. & Mendilow J., 2014, *Corruption and the Arab Spring: Comparing the Pre-and Post-Spring Situation*, Lanham, Lexington Books, p.105.

143 Maghraoui A., 2012, *The Perverse Effect of Good Governance: Lessons From Morocco*, Middle East Policy Council, Durham, p. 63.

144 Peleg I. & Mendilow J., 2014, *Corruption and the Arab Spring: Comparing the Pre-and Post-Spring Situation*, Lanham, Lexington Books, p.108.

4.4 Monarchical Democratisation

Since the democratisation process started in the Hashemite Kingdom in 1989, Jordan is the ideal example to explain what a controlled liberalisation looks like. The demographic equilibrium, the ethnic rifts and the conflicting identities that characterise the country are some of the main reasons that have limited the scope of the regime democratisation.¹⁴⁵ In particular, since 1994 the growing resistance against the stipulation of the peace agreement with Tel Aviv forced King Hussein to adopt a sort of defensive liberalisation¹⁴⁶ to cope with the dissenting voices, and in order to guarantee the survival of the regime. Considering the Arab Spring and its effects in the Middle East, it emerges clearly that Jordan presents different characteristics compared to Egypt or Tunisia. The core of this dissimilarity lies in the fact that the demonstrators did not aim at toppling the monarchy, but rather they asked more economic reforms and political liberties.

It can be said that political liberalisation in the Kingdom has started in 1989, and it was strongly connected with the country's economic hardships. The regime policies to open the system aimed at keeping at bay the discontent of Transjordanians, who blamed the state for the economic crisis, while also co-opting the Palestinians to grant internal stability. As a part of this strategy, the palace approved the National Charter, that re-established political pluralism after thirty years of parties' ban. Thus, this regime-survival strategy allowed for the emergence of political parties and for opposition in the country.

In the new context, one of the tools that the monarchy could employ to manipulate the political arena was the amendment of the electoral rules. Since in 1989 Amman chose to renounce its claims on Palestine, the electoral districts were redesigned, and the regime made them in a way to give more representation to the regions predominantly inhabited by East Bankers to the detriment of the Jordanians of Palestinian origin. In the 1989 elections, the Islamist forces managed to obtain 36 seats out of 80, 26 of them for the Muslim Brothers.¹⁴⁷ The monarchy feared that after the 1993 electoral competition the Parliament would have been dominated by the Islamist formations and the Palestinians, thus it decided to change the electoral law. Before, a voter could express multiple preferences in a list, this system was substituted by the "one man – one vote".¹⁴⁸ This strategy took into account the importance of tribal affiliation in the Kingdom, as having the possibility to express only one preference, each voter opted for the candidate coming from his/her same tribe instead that for one linked to a political party.

The objective was to weaken ideological formations and to penalise the Muslim Brotherhood to avoid

145 Koprulu N., 2012, Monarchical Pluralism or De-Democratisation: Actors and Choices in Jordan, in *Insight Turkey*, vol. 14, available at <http://www.jstore.org>, pp. 71.

146 Koprulu N., 2012, Monarchical Pluralism or De-Democratisation: Actors and Choices in Jordan, in *Insight Turkey*, vol. 14, available at <http://www.jstore.org>, pp. 71.

147 *Ibid.*, p. 76.

148 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 116.

them interfering with the normalisation of relations between Jordan and Israel. Thus, the new law aimed at producing a national assembly dominated by loyalists and MPs coming from tribal areas. The new electoral formula gave the expected result, and independent tribal candidates secured 45 seats out of 80.¹⁴⁹ This episode shows how the monarchy had to balance the necessity to liberalise the system with its desire to reach a peace deal with Israel. Following this controversial result, the IAF decided to boycott the 1997 elections. Consequently, the new Parliament was mainly composed by tribal candidates and independents. The 2001 polls were postponed by the King Abdullah II, as in 2000 there was the outbreak of the Second Intifada.

The monarch tried also to improve the relations between Jordanians and Palestinian, by stressing the importance of the two-state solution to solve the Palestinian issue. King Abdullah aimed at reforming Jordanian identity, and achieving internal stability by disengaging national politics from Palestine.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, his objective was also the strengthening of a Jordanian identity mainly linked to the country, not to a superior Arab or Islamic community. This put him in discontinuity with the history of the Kingdom, when the Arab and Islamic elements were emphasised in order to keep together the East and the West Bank. Establishing a clear distinction between Palestinians and the newly conceived Jordanian identity would have allowed the regime to point out who were the pure and thus loyal Jordanians. A step in the direction of redefining this identity was the Jordan First campaign, which started in October 2002. This marketing strategy had the objective of consolidating national unity in East Bankers communities, and was based on these principles: “Deepen the sense of national identity among citizens... Jordan is for all Jordanians and we appreciate the role of the opposition when it is for the interest of Jordan and its political development.”¹⁵¹ The campaign encouraged also politicians and voters to focus on changes on the domestic arena rather than on external crisis as the US intervention in Iraq or the tensions between Israel and the Palestinians.

With Jordan First, King Abdullah II wanted to address the increasing opposition of Palestinian Jordanians, to contrast Islamist activism, while also containing supranational narratives as the Islamist and the Arabist discourses. To achieve these objectives, the regime reassured the citizens of Palestinians descent, stating that the aim of the campaign was also the integration in the political and economic system of Jordanians of all backgrounds. Furthermore, the palace focused on the West Bank refugees living in the Kingdom, asking them to chose if they wanted to become fully Jordanian or maintain their Palestinian nationality. To translate Jordan First into concrete actions, a National Committee was created. The Committee issued a National Agenda divided in three main areas: reform of the administration, new rules concerning the political system, and policies to fix the country's economic problems.¹⁵² Notwithstanding the

149 Koprulu N., 2012, Monarchical Pluralism or De-Democratisation: Actors and Choices in Jordan, in *Insight Turkey*, vol. 14, available at <http://www.jstore.org>, pp. 76.

150 Achilli L., 2015, *Palestinian Refugees and Identity: Nationalism, Politics and the Everyday*, New York, I.B. Tauris, p. 47.

151 Available at www.mfa.go.jo, accessed on 16th September 2019.

152 Koprulu N., 2012, Monarchical Pluralism or De-Democratisation: Actors and Choices in Jordan, in *Insight Turkey*, vol. 14,

monarch declarations, the real purpose of the Jordan First was to curtail internal dissent by shifting the domestic debate away from the Palestinian question. However, it is unlikely that the National Agenda will be able to have an impact on all levels of society. For this outcome to be realised, the population should trust the palace's initiative, and this is not the case.¹⁵³ Many citizens believed that Jordan First would have favoured only the elite and those who enjoyed close ties with the monarchy.

Concerning foreign policy, notwithstanding the efforts of the regime to divert their attention, Jordanians assisted at the al-Aqsa intifada with sympathy for the Palestinians, while condemning Tel Aviv's action. On the contrary, the state aimed at normalising the relations with Israel. This shows the distance between people's preferences and the palace policies. Thus, 2003 elections were held in a context of regional and international instability, because as the Palestinians were resisting the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, Washington decided to intervene in Iraq and Afghanistan. The electoral competition saw the participation of the IAF, that resulted the main opposition formation in the national assembly. In the occasion of 2003 elections, the seats were increased from 80 to 104, although this measure did not meet the demands of the opposition, which asked for a more balanced representation between the cities and the countryside.¹⁵⁴

Two years later, in 2005, the capital was hit by al-Qaeda terrorist attacks, three suicide bombers attacked three hotels in the centre of Amman, killing 67 people and leaving 150 injured. This event and the security concerns it triggered influenced the 2007 elections. Before the polls, the ruler declared he aimed at a strong Parliament, capable to exert its authority, but also inclusive of all political forces. However, the 2007 electoral competition was deemed as one of the most controversial in the Kingdom's history, as there were charges of frauds and corruption.¹⁵⁵ Moreover, the new electoral rules had favoured the pro regime loyalists who obtained the majority of the seats in the Lower Chamber, while the opposition, and in particular the Muslim Brotherhood were penalised. This result shows that after the 2005 episode, the regime's security concerns outweighed political liberalisation.

Since the Kingdom independence, the Muslim Brothers had been accepted as a loyal opposition. In particular, in the 1950s and 1960s the Brotherhood tacitly support the Hashemite monarchy against the threat represented by the left and the Pan-Arab nationalists.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, the Ikhwan did not oppose the regime choice to pursue the unification with the West Bank, and later on the palace even relied on the Brotherhood during the violences of the Black September. Due to its relation with the palace, the Muslim Brothers in

available at <http://www.jstore.org>, pp. 80.

153 Hammerstein R., 2011, *Deliberalisation in Jordan: The roles of the Islamists and the US-EU assistance in stalled democratisation*, Germany, Deutschen Bibliothek, pp. 60-61.

154 Koprulu N., 2012, *Monarchical Pluralism or De-Democratisation: Actors and Choices in Jordan*, in *Insight Turkey*, vol. 14, available at <http://www.jstore.org>, p. 82.

155 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 117.

156 Hammerstein R., 2011, *Deliberalisation in Jordan: The roles of the Islamists and the US-EU assistance in stalled democratisation*, Germany, Deutschen Bibliothek, p. 21.

Jordan present different characteristics compared to other regional branches of the movement. They are more reform oriented and moderate, not resorting to violence to express their positions.

For the 2010 elections, new rules were devised, they still included the one man-one vote system, while electoral districts were divided in sub districts. According to the monarchy, this measures aimed at contrasting tribalism. On the contrary, the sub districts brought candidates to rely extensively on their tribal connections, and campaigning with a smaller target of voters.¹⁵⁷ Consequently, the demographic composition of the new Parliament was not altered. The opposition called for the amendment of the one vote man – one vote, and for the redrawing of districts, but the regime did not even take into account their requests. Furthermore, the 2005 Amman bombings coupled with the victory of Hamas in the 2006 elections in Gaza, brought the monarchy to adopt a line that aimed at containing the Islamists influence in Jordan. Thus, the tightening of the security measures in the Kingdom, in particular against the Islamists, restricted the IAF space of manoeuvre to publicly criticise the regime. As a consequence, in the elections, the party was able to secure only 6 seats.

However, it can be argued that the Muslim Brotherhood represent the only political formation in the opposition that could be able to win the majority in the Parliament, this in case the regime does not interfere with the polls.¹⁵⁸ In addition, in the past the IAF has already employed the strategy of boycotting the elections in order to pressure the government to review the electoral rules. Considering these elements, the 2010 electoral competition constituted another example of the regime-survival approach often adopted by the monarchy. The resulting Lower Chamber was mainly composed of loyalists and pro regime members, while the IAF chose not to present its candidates. 50% of Jordanians casted their vote, but in Amman the turnout was only 34%.¹⁵⁹ Moreover, the population debated over the fairness of the elections.

While Jordanians were still reflecting over the electoral process and asking for political liberalisation, there was the outbreak of the Arab uprisings. The unrest was linked to bad economic performances but also to the declining legitimacy of the regimes of the area, perceived as not being able to guarantee anymore the population standards of living. The protests started in Tunisia, spreading to Jordan, Egypt, Bahrain, Libya, Algeria, Syria and Yemen. Among these countries, Amman soon adopted a pre-emptive approach in order to tone down the demonstrators demands and cope with the opposition. For example, King Abdullah rapidly dismissed the Rifa'i cabinet as the people in the streets were asking.¹⁶⁰ The protesters discontent shows that the elections held some months earlier had lost all credibility in their eyes. The monarch made public

157 Koprulu N., 2012, Monarchical Pluralism or De-Democratisation: Actors and Choices in Jordan, in *Insight Turkey*, vol. 14, available at <http://www.jstore.org>, p. 85.

158 Hammerstein R., 2011, Deliberalisation in Jordan: The roles of the Islamists and the US-EU assistance in stalled democratisation,, Germany, Deutschen Bibliothek, p. 22.

159 Koprulu N., 2012, Monarchical Pluralism or De-Democratisation: Actors and Choices in Jordan, in *Insight Turkey*, vol. 14, available at <http://www.jstore.org>, p. 87.

160 Ryan C. R., 2018, Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 25.

statements and implemented new initiatives in order to contrast the growing influence of the Muslim Brotherhood and to placate the unrest. For instance, in March 2011 he stated: “We are moving ahead with the reform endeavour to build upon achievements, bring about developments and realise Jordanians' aspirations for a better future.”¹⁶¹ King Abdullah expressed his support for the reform process, and declared that he was ready to establish a national dialogue with opposition forces to listen to their requests, at the same time, he manifested the firmness of the state in facing every threat to the unity of Jordan. It is indeed this balanced approach that has favoured the stability and longevity of the Hashemites, and that also allowed the regime to survive the Arab Spring. Thus, the Kingdom of Jordan is an example of how mass protests can be taken under control by opening to the opposition in order to debate about possible reforms, while clearly imposing a condition: the survival of the monarchy. This position was accepted by the IAF since the Kingdom independence, which leaders have reiterated that the Brotherhood does question the institution of the monarchy, but aims at establishing a dialogue with the ruler.¹⁶²

Analysing the Arab upheavals, the Hashemite Kingdom is a remarkable case for three reasons. To begin with, it is the only remaining monarchy in the Fertile Crescent. Indeed, Jordan occupies a central position in the area, not only for its geographical location, but in particular for its close ties with the Washington and the European Union, and its relation with Israel. Second, the Israeli -Palestinian issue is still not solved, and the Kingdom of Jordan has received an important influx of Palestinian refugees. This has increased the pivotal role of the country, as its has also granted the citizenship to Palestinians. Consequently, Tel Aviv and Western capitals have a stake in Jordan stability. Finally, the integration of the Muslim Brothers in the political arena has been an important element contributing to the regime’s longevity.

4.5 April 1989 Protests in Jordan

The Arab Spring of 2011-12 echoed the protests that erupted in Jordan in 1989. Nonetheless, it is necessary to point out that the demonstrations that erupted in the Kingdom in 1989 had different roots and revendications. The riots were caused by the austerity policies implemented by Jordanian authorities following an International Monetary Fund plan aimed at stabilising the economy. As in 2011, the protests started in the southern regions, and in both occasion the protesters also called for measures to fight government corruption and to promote democratisation. The Hashemites were concerned because the majority of activists had an East Jordanian background.¹⁶³ They argued that the economic liberalisation had

161 Koprulu N., 2012, Monarchical Pluralism or De-Democratisation: Actors and Choices in Jordan, in *Insight Turkey*, vol. 14, available at <http://www.jstore.org>, p. 88.

162 Hammerstein R., 2011, *Deliberalisation in Jordan: The roles of the Islamists and the US-EU assistance in stalled democratisation*, Germany, Deutschen Bibliothek, p. 22.

163 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 24.

favoured the private sector against the public, thus, from their point of view, benefiting Palestinians instead of Transpirations.

In order to appease the situation, in 1989 King Hussein dismissed the unpopular Prime Minister Zaid al-Rifa'i, and announced new measures to start a political and economical liberalisation.¹⁶⁴ In a similar way in 2011, King Abdullah II dismissed the government of Rifa'i's son, and promised to open the Kingdom a new season of reforms. Indeed, when Abdullah ascended to the throne in 1999, he pursued the liberalisation of economy started by his father Hussein. In particular, these neoliberal policies provided for a broad program of privatisations, investments, an increase in trade, the realisation of infrastructures, and the development of communications. However, this liberalisation process involved only the economy not the political field, thus it was centred on the promotion of free market, privatisations, and austerity measures. These policies and their social implications provoked the resistance of the population, especially because it seemed that the new course was coming at the detriment of the welfare state, hitting the poor the hardest.¹⁶⁵ In general, demonstrators in the Kingdom had asked more political liberalisation and an improvement of social safety nets and increase basic incomes. Protesters blamed the regime for the lack of progress in political reforms, and some among Jordanian officials retained that the conservative elite and the General Intelligence Directorate (GID) were responsible for blocking any change.¹⁶⁶ Whatever was the truth, in 2011 Jordanians took the streets, showing that their patience had come to an end and it was time for concrete measures.

The Arab Spring hit Jordan some weeks before Tunisia and Egypt. Indeed, in November and December 2010, the Hashemite Kingdom saw the first demonstrations, however the protests intensified in 2011. Nevertheless, Jordan never witnessed the mass gatherings that emerged in the region, and in the Kingdom protesters asked reforms rather than revolution. At the end of 2010, the Islamic Action Front, Jordan main Islamist formation boycotted the elections as a form of protest against the electoral law, that they deemed devised to decrease their power.¹⁶⁷ However, they were not calling for regime change, they limited their requests to a more fair electoral process. Instead, in Egypt the activists in Tahrir Square and their counterparts in Tunisia had more radical revendications, in particular they aimed at ousting their dictators.

Thus, the beginning of 2011 was marked in the Hashemite Kingdom by protests in the capital and in the main cities, while Jordanians were looking at the events in Egypt and Tunisia. Actually, the protests

164 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 25.

165 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 25.

166 Schwedler J., 2018, *Routines and Ruptures in Anti-Israeli Protests in Jordan*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, available at www.jstor.org, accessed on 10 September 2019, p. 77.

167 Koprulu N., 2012, *Monarchical Pluralism or De-Democratisation: Actors and Choices in Jordan*, in *Insight Turkey*, vol. 14, available at <http://www.jstore.org>, p. 86.

started in the East Bank, an area that generally constituted the main bedrock of support for the regime, the demonstrations were stronger in places as Ma'an and Kerak. Jordanians addressed their anger to the Prime Minister and his government which they perceived as corrupt and ineffective, thus the activists asked for the demission of the cabinet. Many retained that the King could exploit the discontent expressed by the people in order to get rid of the old conservative elite that dominated the state apparatus.¹⁶⁸ On the contrary, the more reactionary elements hoped that King Abdullah II would have blocked the reform effort and repressed the protesters.

However, it can be argued that the unrest was not the result of the unpopularity of the Prime Minister, but rather of the disruptive effects of the liberalisation policies on the social fabric. Indeed, Samir al-Rifa'i was seen as the embodiment of the elite of technocrats that enacted the privatisation program which weakened social safety nets in Jordan.¹⁶⁹ Others criticised the pervasive corruption that affected state owned enterprises and the bureaucracy in general. Moreover, it is necessary to point out that personal attacks against members of Hashemite family are punished as a crime in the Kingdom, thus that probably the reason why many protesters avoided direct criticism towards the King or the Queen, and chose instead to ask for the destitution of the government. The majority of protesters focused their claims on more reforms and political liberalisation, however others were not afraid of crossing the red line and arrived to use seditious slogans against the ruler.

Generally, the rallies attracted a limited number of protesters, the demonstrators marched on predictable routes and after some hours they dispersed, and followed this pattern for weeks. On the contrary, in other parts of the Arab world the activists staged massive demonstrations in the capital's main squares, and occupied them with tents for long periods. For instance, in Tahrir Square in Cairo, the youth intended to continue its mobilisation until they obtained the change they were aiming for. In Jordan the most interesting product of the Arab Spring enthusiasm was the March 24 movement. These activists established themselves in Gamal Abd al-Nasser Square, one of the central places of daily life in Amman. They chanted pro reform and patriotic slogans, while asking also for more democratisation. Today, among democracy advocates in the country, this is considered as the highest point of the Jordanian Arab Spring.¹⁷⁰ Finally the protesters were aggressed by pro regime thugs, who helped the police to disband the March 24 movement. For Jordanians who considered the Hashemite Kingdom as an exception in the area, this repression seemed more like the raids of the Egyptian secret police against the youth in Tahrir Square in 2011. Moreover, since it seemed that the thugs had been ordered to charge by the state, the repression demoralised Jordanian activists, as they

168 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 27.

169 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 27.

170 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

assumed that the regime had chose to support the conservative forces in the Kingdom instead of the reformers.

Nonetheless, this episode did not stop the demonstrations, which continued, but with a more limited participation of the liberal and secular elements. The majority of the protesters came now from tribal areas in the East Bank, and they were called the Hirak.¹⁷¹ There was also an important participation of activists linked to the Muslim Brotherhood. These two groups sometimes tried to reach a certain coordination in order to stage different protests in various areas of the country at the same time, but in other occasions they had conflicting revendications and were unable to act together. The Hirak in particular, often crossed the red lines imposed by the regime, for instance comparing King Abdullah and his ministers to “Ali Baba and the forty thieves.”¹⁷² Moreover, the activists employed the social media to openly criticise the regime, blamed for the corruption of institutions and the mismanagement of the economy. A limited number of protesters went even further and called for the abdication of the ruler, or directly criticise the royal family, in these cases, the people involved were promptly arrested by the security forces.¹⁷³

However, other crossed the red lines before the Hirak, for example even before the Arab Spring, the National Committee for Retired Servicemen had issued a manifesto in which they criticised them corruption in the state apparatus, the lack of democracy, and the risk that the regime careless policies would turn Jordan into an alternative homeland for the Palestinians.¹⁷⁴ The veterans crossed previous red lines calling for change and attacking the regime policies. These critics were inconceivable in the era of King Hussein. This was even more relevant as these challenges came from traditional loyalist strongholds. Indeed, the revendications of the retired military officers paved the way for other critics to the regime, in particular for the formation of the Hirak movement. It was relevant also because these officials had served the state all their life, they were affiliated to the most loyal and powerful tribes. As a consequence, military veterans and former security officials constitute one of the most important pressure groups in the Kingdom. They represent the various tribes and regions of the country and they have links in the influential defence establishment, a key pillar for the regime stability. These protests came from groups, as the Hirak and the veterans, composed mainly by East Bankers, who felt betrayed by the state to which before they had an unquestioned loyalty. These communities consider themselves as the builders of the Hashemite Kingdom, and their families had served the state for generations. This was part of a bargain in which the central authorities were expected in exchange to provide the services for Transjordanians and to include them in the

171 Culbertson S., 2016, *The Fires of Spring: A Post Arab Spring Journey Through the Turbulent New Middle East*, New York, St. Martin's Press, p. 166.

172 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 29.

173 Culbertson S., 2016, *The Fires of Spring: A Post Arab Spring Journey Through the Turbulent New Middle East*, New York, St. Martin's Press, p. 163.

174 Kamrava M., 2014, *Beyond the Arab Spring. The Evolving Ruling Bargain in the Middle East*, Oxford, Oxfors University Press, pp. 299- 300.

decision-making. There is also a more chauvinistic version of this narrative, in which the more reactionary East Jordanians see themselves as the only true inhabitants of the country, while Palestinians will always remain a foreign element.

However, the majority of the Hirak movement had not this right-wing rhetoric. It is necessary to point out that the Hirak was not a unified movement, but was composed of different groups which varied for number of participants, level of organisation, and revendications.¹⁷⁵ The difference was evident for instance with the Muslim Brotherhood, the main Jordanian opposition formation, when they decided to stage a protest, the participants could be even thousands, also as a way to confront their strength with that of the loyalist forces. Concerning the security apparatus, the main responsible to make sure the demonstrations do not escalate into unrest is the Public Security Directorate (PSD).¹⁷⁶ The PSD has mainly kept a soft approach towards the Arab Spring activism, in contrast with its counterparts in the neighbouring states which often employed violence to disperse protesters. However, there were exceptions to this soft security, in particular when activists surpassed the line demarcating what was acceptable, in that case the police even arrived to beat the protesters. Moreover, activists argued that often manifestations were disturbed by counter-revolutions of loyalists and pro regime thugs, who seemed to cooperate with the security forces in order to restrain the demonstrators.

Notwithstanding these issues, protesters have continued to ask more democracy and serious measures to tackle corruption. For instance, in October 2012, the Islamist movement was able to rally fifteen thousand people, an impressive turnout for Jordan.¹⁷⁷ The regime controlled media exploited the event to criticise the demonstration as a purely Islamist affair, also implying that it was perhaps Palestinian. Thus, this press releases worried the activists who were afraid to be perceived as disloyal and not supportive of the country's unity. Notwithstanding this, the Muslim Brotherhood was able to gather an impressive number of people in the streets of Amman, chanting and criticising the government for its weak, if not in-existent, reform effort. They declared they were ready to desert the 2013 elections and vowed to continue to protest until the government would have enacted concrete measures.

Probably the most challenging period for the palace was represented by November 2012 mass protests, when thousands of Jordanians took the streets following the government cut of fuel subsidies as asked by the IMF austerity program.¹⁷⁸ Since it was winter, price hikes had even a heavier effect on the population. Consequently, riots erupted in all the Kingdom's main cities, where dozens of people clashed with the security forces, set aflame tires and blocked roads. However, the protests were not only driven by economic

175 Culbertson S., 2016, *The Fires of Spring: A Post Arab Spring Journey Through the Turbulent New Middle East*, New York, St. Martin's Press, p. 166.

176 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 32.

177 *Ibid.*, p. 33.

178 *Ibid.*, p. 34

reasons, some Jordanians were also exhausted by the Kingdom political immobility, and the more radical blamed King Abdullah for the country chronic financial hardships. The most extreme groups were throwing stones and Molotov cocktails at the police, this brought some analysts to state that revolution was about to begin in Jordan too as it happened before in Syria, Tunisia and Egypt. Nonetheless, after various days of unrest, the protests decreased in intensity and they did not escalated into an uprising.

Anyway, it is important not to underestimate the discontent of Jordanians, in particular authorities should take into consideration the people's complaints about the economy mismanagement and the endemic corruption affecting state apparatus.¹⁷⁹ Corruption has often been the unifying element behind which the opposition was able to rally, criticising government officials, and more rarely even the monarch. Some make reference to identity issue and blame corruption on the Palestinian technocratic elite. Instead, others argued that the source of the problem was Jordanian old guard, the conservative East Bankers who controlled the bureaucracy and the security apparatus, who were not willing to lose their privileges. Thus, ordinary citizens were expressing their fatigue for the sacrifices they had to endure, while the elite was not showing any will to improve the situation.

For these reasons, the people's lack of faith in the system, will outlast the Arab Spring, as inequality and injustice continue to be part of Jordanians daily life.¹⁸⁰ The only solution to address this issue is for the government to embark in meaningful reforms, yet after the most violent outbursts of the Arab Spring, Jordanian state officials did not show any serious intention to change the institutions, and gradually the opposition too toned down its revendications. For instance the Islamic Movement declared that it supported reforms and a monarchy with a more constitutional character, but it did not want regime change as instead was asked by the more radical elements among the protesters.

Many pro-democracy groups backed off, yet the violence of the riots in 2012 showed that the status quo was no longer sustainable, and the authorities had to implement some real reforms if they wanted the Hashemite Kingdom to survive. Nonetheless, only short term measures were put in place, as the reshuffle of ministers and the governments' turnover as a way to divert the people's attention from the concrete issues.¹⁸¹ This approach cannot be sustainable in the long run.

179 Culbertson S., 2016, *The Fires of Spring: A Post Arab Spring Journey Through the Turbulent New Middle East*, New York, St. Martin's Press, p. 164.

180 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 36.

181 Koprulu N., 2012, *Monarchical Pluralism or De-Democratisation: Actors and Choices in Jordan*, in *Insight Turkey*, vol. 14, available at <http://www.jstore.org>, p. 90.

4.6 The Role of the Jordanian Monarchy and the Political Parties

In Jordan the Arab Spring brought about the formation of new forms of political opposition, but it also revitalised the mainstream political formations. Indeed, in the Kingdom the opposition has historically formed parties, as the Islamic movement or the leftists. A dividing line can be traced between opposition forces and activism in the country before and after the 1989.

In 1989, the main opposition parties were the Palestinian nationalists, the Pan-Arab formations, the left, and the Muslim Brotherhood. It can be said that Jordanian opposition was dominated by the nationalists and the leftists in the 1950s and 1960s, however with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, these parties declined in importance in favour of the Islamists.¹⁸² These groups are still present in the political arena, nonetheless their ranks have considerably shrink, and their action has become rather ineffective, while the most influential nowadays is the Islamic Action Front (IAF), emanation of the Muslim Brotherhood.¹⁸³ Moreover, the country has witnessed the steady rise of the Salafi movement, whose positions a more radical compared to the Muslim Brothers.

Since 1989, the opposition has staged numerous attempts to form a united front against the reactionary ruling elite, yet with little effective results. The regime has traditionally employed various means to keep the opposition forces at bay, as engaging the reformers with rounds of new but mainly cosmetic laws, and resorting to the divide and rule strategy to hampering the opposition efforts. Furthermore, the opposition has often been characterised by profound rifts that had made its actions ineffective.

Indeed, political formations in the Hashemite Kingdom are generally weak, and they became legal again only in 1991, after a thirty years ban. The parties did not enjoined a strong organisation even in 1950s, which usually are considered by Jordanians as an era of more vibrant political life. Since then, the major change has concerned the ideologies, during the first liberalisation period, the Islamists were not the dominant force, and they competed with the stronger Pan-Arab nationalists, the communists, and the Ba'ath party. On the contrary, after 1989, the Muslim Brotherhood has become the best organised force, while the left is reduced to be the shadow of what previously was. This shift in the balance of power in favour of the religious formations follows a similar trend common to all the countries of the area. Since the 1970s the Islamist movements have grown in numbers, and this has been coupled with the emergence of alliances with the secular left, a phenomenon that before seemed inconceivable. This is indeed the case of the Hashemite Kingdom, where the left has formed various coalitions with the Islamists, having the desire to oppose the regime's corruption and change the system as common element. Concerning the Muslim Brothers, in Jordan

182 Anderson B. S., 2005, *Nationalist Voices in Jordan. The Street and the State*, Austin, University of Texas Press, pp. 118-119.

183 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 44.

they are as old as the monarchy, and they have generally acted as a loyal opposition, never questioning the legitimacy of the Hashemites.¹⁸⁴ Unlike its counterpart in Palestine, Hamas, the Jordanian Brotherhood does not have a militant wing, instead through its political formation, the IAF it sustains pro-democracy positions and has a network of professional associations.

Given their pervasive presence in Jordanian society, in the 1989 elections the Islamists and the Muslims Brothers secured the majority in the Parliament obtaining thirty-four seats together with the thirteen of the left.¹⁸⁵ The regime reacted to this result by changing the electoral law, this strategy worked and in the 1991 elections, the opposition won only twenty-nine seats out of eighty.¹⁸⁶ Faced with the obstruction of the palace, the opposition decided not to take part in 1997 electoral confrontation, in a move that aimed at convincing the monarch to enact a more representative electoral law. As a consequence, in the 1997-2001 national assembly the MPs were mostly loyalists and conservative tribesmen. In 1999, King Abdullah II succeeded to King Hussein, and in 2003 new elections were held with new rules, for instance the number of parliamentarians was increased to 104, and the electoral districts were redrawn.¹⁸⁷ The opposition was able to gain some seats, but since the electoral districts were conceived to under-represent the opposition, the IAF had only seventeen MPs.

Despite the protests coming from the opposition, the regime did not modify its stance, in addition Amman observed with concern the growing presence of the Islamists across the Middle East, as in 2005 the capital was hit by al-Qaeda terrorist attacks, and in 2006 Hamas obtained an important success in Palestinian elections. Consequently, Jordanian officials aimed at preventing Islamist to gain a foothold in the country, and to achieve this objective they rigged the electoral process. Thus, in 2007 elections, the Islamists were able to secure only 6 seats, however this undermined the legitimacy of the Parliament as it was the result of rigged elections.¹⁸⁸ The monarchy realised the error and called for new ballots in 2010 with new rules, nonetheless, the main elements of the previous electoral law remained. This brought the Islamic opposition to boycott the polls. Moreover, the political formations which chose to take part in the electoral process, but were not pro-establishment, did not obtain any seat.

As previously stated, after 1989 the opposition parties were not able to obtain any significant presence in the Parliament, consequently their ability to influence policy-making was limited. In particular, the leftists have become weak, and unable to cope with the changes in the system. On the contrary, the Islamist movement is better organised and popular among the people, however it considers that the various electoral

184 Hammerstein R., 2011, *Deliberalisation in Jordan: The roles of the Islamists and the US-EU assistance in stalled democratisation*, Germany, Deutschen Bibliothek, p. 22.

185 Wiegand K., 2010, *Bombs and Ballots: Governance by Islamist Terrorist and Guerrilla Groups*, London, Routledge, p. 33.

186 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 48.

187 *Ibid.*

188 Wiegand K., 2010, *Bombs and Ballots: Governance by Islamist Terrorist and Guerrilla Groups*, London, Routledge, p. 33.

rules are precisely designed to curb its potential. For decades, the palace and the opposition had clashed on the content of the electoral laws, with the latter arguing that Jordanian parties are weak because there have been no continuity in electoral rules. Nonetheless, the various components of the opposition have not been able to constitute a transversal front capable to push for reforms.

It can be argued that cooperation between the left and the Islamists appears more feasible nowadays than in the past, however the analysts disagree over the effectiveness of these cross-ideological coalitions.¹⁸⁹ Indeed, in the Hashemite Kingdom, the various opposition formations share some demands, and this provides the base for a broader coalition asking for changes. For instance, they all criticise the normalisation of the relations with Tel Aviv and oppose the peace treaty that Jordan stipulated with Israel. In addition, they argued that the Prime Minister should be expressed by the national assembly, not chosen by the King, and then only formally approved by the Parliament. And more importantly, opposition parties have repeatedly asked for more fair and transparent electoral rules. Despite these claims against the regime, the opposition has rarely questioned the institution of the monarchy, and it has generally focused its action in asking more liberalisation.¹⁹⁰

It is easier for opposition parties to share the same line on foreign policy issues than on problems concerning the domestic arena. For example, the situation in Iraq and Palestine has often united the secular, the leftists, and even the loyalists. In 2003, when the Bush administration decided to unilaterally invade Iraq, in Jordan, the society and the politicians alike, regardless of their ideological beliefs, condemned US aggression.

However, these convergence on the foreign policy ceased with the outbreak of the Arab Spring. The opposition continued to condemn the peace with Israel and to criticise the partnership between Amman and Washington, but it was split over the Syrian conflict.¹⁹¹ The Muslims Brothers and the Islamists in general were against the authoritarian regime of Bashar al-Assad, while the leftists and the nationalists tended to express their support for Damascus secular regime as opposed to the jihadists and the Islamist insurgents. Besides these contrasting views on foreign policy, on the internal front opposition parties could be able to form a united movement capable of forcing the regime to embark on a concrete reform process? According to the Arab politics expert Ellen Lust, the opposition effectiveness depends on the strategy employed by the regime to face criticism. If the palace has excluded the opposition forces from the power, they are more likely to form a united front against the ruling elite, while if the monarchy decides to exploit the divide and rule tactic, the opposition will generally splinter in smaller groups, thus it will not represent a significant

189 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 50.

190 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 50.

191 Culbertson S., 2016, *The Fires of Spring: A Post Arab Spring Journey Through the Turbulent New Middle East*, New York, St. Martin's Press, p. 166.

threat for the regime.¹⁹²

For instance, before 1989, political formations were banned, however when in that year the country was hit by economic hardships, the Islamists and the secular left managed to constitute a coalition strong enough to force the regime to open the system. The result was the 1991 National Charter, which was a document containing a set of guidelines that allowed the opposition to operate in exchange for its commitment to be loyal to the Hashemites.¹⁹³ Notwithstanding this agreement, the regime changed the electoral rules before the 1993 electoral confrontation in order to weaken the opposition in the national assembly. Thus, the scarce presence of opposition MPs in the Parliament allowed the monarch to sign the peace treaty with Israel without any obstacle. This move however brought the IAF and the nationalist left to join forces to vehemently criticise the palace authoritarianism, moreover they established the Higher Committee for the Coordination of National Opposition Parties (HCCNOP), which opposed the agreement with the Jewish state, and called for greater democratisation.¹⁹⁴ The regime reacted by increasing with hostility silencing the opposition newspapers and repressing demonstrations.

In 1996 Jordan was hit by another severe economic crisis, and asked IMF a loan to survive its financial problems. However, the austerity program proposed by the IMF imposed cuts to the welfare, the lift of subsidies, and an increase in taxes. This caused the opposition to react and lobby the regime to force it to leave its neoliberal policies, because austerity measures and privatisation favoured only the wealthiest, while worsening the standards of living of the average citizens. Furthermore, the left and the Islamists asked for changes in electoral rules, demanding in particular a revision of the districts, in order to make them more representative of the real population. As the palace did not comply with these requests, the HCCNOP chosen to boycott the 1997 elections.

This coalition however was not always able to act as a united force. The IAF was the dominant formation in the HCCNOP, thus it had no difficulties in breaking ranks when it did not support some measures. For instance, the Islamists called for reforms, but when it came to laws concerning the condition of women, they often criticise any attempt to alter the status quo.¹⁹⁵ In these situations, they found themselves allied with the reactionary forces, while then leftists tended to side with the monarchy.

In 2010 opposition parties were joined by NGOs and pro-democracy activists in asking to the regime to reform electoral rules to implement a mixed system, where the voters could chose a candidate for their district, while also voting for a national party list. Notwithstanding this heterogeneous coalition demands for change, the new law had the same gerrymandered districts, and did not include any proportionality. This

192 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 52.

193 Milton-Edwards B. & Hinchcliffe P., 2009, *Jordan. A Hashemite Legacy*, New York, Routledge, p. 54

194 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 53.

195 *Ibid.*, p. 54.

outcome showed that even the formation of a united and organised front asking for different policies was not able of obtaining significant concessions from the monarchy. One of the causes of this ineffectiveness may lie in the fact that differently from the IAF, many political parties do not enjoy an elevated level of support in society. The majority of Jordanians regards the parties as obsolete and unable of producing any real result.¹⁹⁶ Others consider that the traditional opposition has too many links to the regime to really antagonise it. An alternative emerged with the Arab Spring which saw the formation of activists networks without any relation with political parties. Thus, as the Middle East was shaken by the Arab uprisings, in the Hashemite Kingdom both the traditional formations and the new forms of opposition descend into the streets calling for political and economic changes.

As noted before, the 2010 elections' result was not favourable to the opposition, however the regime obtained the Parliament it preferred, with a majority of MPs that were not members of political formations, had a tribal and generally Transjordanian background, and were staunch supporters of the monarchy.¹⁹⁷ The King appointed Samir Rifa'i as Prime Minister, but not long after his nomination, in Tunisia and Egypt the dictators were ousted by revolutions. Jordanians saw what was happening in these countries and decided to take the streets in the capital and in the main cities asking for more democratisation, while also chanting patriotic songs. The mass demonstrations had the same demands that opposition parties asked for decades, they called for a respect of the checks and balances in the system, in order to make the King accountable to the Parliament, while respecting the Constitution, and also reducing the power of the monarchy.

Indeed, Jordanians tended to look at the Parliament as a tribal assembly who generally sides with the palace.¹⁹⁸ Thus, the activists asked for new electoral rules, more press freedom, the end of corruption, but in particular they called for a change in the balance of power, to empower the national assembly and make it more representative of the people. It is necessary to underline that the majority of the protesters, regardless of their party affiliation, ideology or ethnicity agreed with this set of demands.¹⁹⁹ Among the protesters requests there was also the revision of electoral districts, which historically were designed to over-represented rural areas, where loyalist Transjordanians were the majority, while the cities received a more limited share of MPs, as they had an important Palestinian presence. As a consequence a redefinition of the districts would have important effects on the division of power, and is directly linked to identity issues. Some opposition groups fear the implications of this measures, and this disunity is often exploited by the reactionary elite which uses the spectre of Palestinians empowerment to the detriment of East bankers. In

196 Hammerstein R., 2011, *Deliberalisation in Jordan: The roles of the Islamists and the US-EU assistance in stalled democratisation*, Germany, Deutschen Bibliothek, p. 60.

197 Koprulu N., 2012, *Monarchical Pluralism or De-Democratisation: Actors and Choices in Jordan*, in *Insight Turkey*, vol. 14, available at <http://www.jstore.org>, p. 87.

198 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 58.

199 *Ibid.*

addition, in order to prevent the formation of a unified coalition of opposition forces, Conservatives also accuse pro-reform elements to represent a threat for the identity of the Kingdom, and call into question their patriotism.

It can be argued that in the Hashemite Kingdom, and in the Middle East in general, the protests against the systems were also refusal of neoliberal policies adopted by these regimes.²⁰⁰ People associated neoliberalism with measures that favoured only the wealthy while destroying the traditional social safety nets and reduced public employment possibilities. In the case of Jordan, these policies had important repercussions on the country's ethnic divisions as the private sector is mainly in the hands of Palestinians, while the state apparatus is dominated by East bankers. Thus, neoliberal programs are opposed not only by the left and the Muslim Brotherhood, but also by conservative East bankers which consider the monarchy guilty of selling national enterprises to obtain short term gains.²⁰¹ The demonstrations that erupted in the southern districts of the Kingdom (which later formed the HIRAK movement) following the beginning of the Arab Spring were mainly driven by economic issues. These southern activists blamed the regime for the pervasive corruption that plagued the state, while resenting the privatisation measures and the investment policies that were centred in Amman neglecting the rest of the country. Thus, the liberalisation of the economy has united various forces as the conservative East Jordanians found themselves to fight side by side with the Islamists and the left. There was also a reversal in the traditional alliances, as the East Banker nationalists criticised the regime's actions, while the Palestinians supported the neoliberal policies which favoured their business.

Aside from the specific demands of each different component of society, the Arab Spring protests made clear that there was widespread discontent in the Hashemite Kingdom, this showed the necessity to restore the welfare state and reform the institutions. The palace has long ago mastered strategies to divide the opposition, as the co-optation of some groups, while allowing a limited possibility of critic to others in order to let them vent their malcontent. However, these tactics were not effective in dissipate the demonstrations staged by the politicised youth that took the streets with the Arab Spring. These people had no links with the parliamentary opposition, nor did they support the regime. Furthermore, the monarchy position was made even more delicate as the youth made use of the social media to organise the protests, resulting more difficult to control.²⁰² There were demonstrations in almost every city in the Kingdom, and even the powerful Mukhabarat found hard to keep the masses at bay.

To conclude, Jordan historical opposition, as the left, the Pan-Arab nationalists and the Islamists, pre-dates the Arab uprising, however, at least in the case of secular parties, since a long time it has lost the battle

200 Knudsen A. & Ezbidid B., 2014, *Popular Protest in the New Middle East*, New York, I. B. Tauris, p. 14.

201 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 60.

202 Knudsen A. & Ezbidid B., 2014, *Popular Protest in the New Middle East*, New York, I. B. Tauris, p. 14.

for the people's hearts. Moreover, opposition formations have traditionally been unable to constitute a united and effective front for reforms.²⁰³ These parties saw in the Arab Spring and in its popular mobilisation the opportunity to obtain real change, however they were soon divided by the Syrian conflict and the line to follow concerning the Assad regime. Notwithstanding these divergences, the opposition took the streets to push the monarchy to enact reforms, and was able to force the palace to sack the cabinet lead by the conservative Samir Rifa'i. This success was due in particular to the mass protests organised by the youth movement, which the authorities were not able to coopt or convince by reshuffling governments or using the general hollow slogans for reform employed in previous occasions.

There were different opinions among regime officials concerning the best way to address the issues raised by the opposition, in particular about the various degrees of concessions to make. Some favoured minimal concessions in order to improve the authorities accountability, while others for example argued that the state did not have to introduce any change. Furthermore, there are also genuine reformers in the state apparatus, who looked at King Abdullah to grasp the opportunity to renew the country-s institutions. Indeed, when the demonstrations showed no sign to dissipate, the ruler with a rapid decision dismissed the conservative Rifa-I government, surprising most Jordanian officials.²⁰⁴

In the following period, the ruler sacked a succession of short-lived cabinets. Indeed, in Jordan it can be said that Prime Ministers are a sort of “shock-absorbers” employed by the King to temporarily calm the people.²⁰⁵ For example in 2011 and 2012, during the Arab Spring, Jordan saw five different Prime Ministers and governments. The Rifa'i cabinet was replaced by Ma'rouf al-Bakhit in February 2011, and this government lasted only until October of the same year.²⁰⁶ The activists took the streets to ask democratisation and anti corruption measures, instead the regime reply was the appointment of Bakhit, a conservative former general of East Jordanian origin. Furthermore, he was Prime Minister in 2007, and his government presided to one of the most rigged elections in Jordanian history. Bakhit represented the antithesis of the reformist the people were hoping for, nonetheless he was a reassuring figure for the most reactionary Transjordanians. Not surprisingly, unrest continued and King Abdullah had to dismiss also the Bakhit government.

As new Prime Minister, the ruler chose 'Awn al-Khasawneh, who previously held the office of judge in the International Court of Justice.²⁰⁷ Khasawneh was a strong advocate of reforms and supported a better

203 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 62.

204 Koprulu N., 2012, *Monarchical Pluralism or De-Democratisation: Actors and Choices in Jordan*, in *Insight Turkey*, vol. 14, available at <http://www.jstore.org>, p. 90.

205 Milton-Edwards B., 2016, *The Muslim Brotherhood. The Arab Spring and its Future Face*, New York, Routledge, p. 98.

206 Koprulu N., 2012, *Monarchical Pluralism or De-Democratisation: Actors and Choices in Jordan*, in *Insight Turkey*, vol. 14, available at <http://www.jstore.org>, p. 87.

207 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 38-39.

implementation of the rule of law in the Kingdom. In addition, one of his top priorities was the fight against corruption, which was the main request of protesters. The ruler gave Khasawneh the task of revising the electoral law and amending some articles of the Constitution. Furthermore, the new cabinet was charged to form a new independent electoral commission, which aimed at making the voting process more transparent. The premises were good, but Khasawneh acted as if the government was the main center of authority in the country, thus as in a proper constitutional monarchy. As a consequence, his strong pursuit of independence put him at odds with King, and in particular with the Mukhabarat. Indeed, the Prime Minister was willing to reform Jordan, but he expected to have a free hand in achieving this objective, without the continuous interference of the security apparatus. Khasawneh approach brought him to clash with the palace and the GID, which he accused of meddling with the country's governance. On the contrary, the monarch argued that the Prime Minister was incapable of complying with his promise to deliver real reforms. These differences caused Khasawneh to resign only six months after his appointment, thwarting the pro reform activists' hopes.

His place was taken by Fayeze Tarawneh, a conservative with a long political career.²⁰⁸ Tarawneh had already been appointed Prime Minister during another critical period, the accession of King Abdullah to the throne after the death of King Hussein in 1999. Tarawneh was a veteran member of the Kingdom's Senate, moreover he had important ministerial portfolios, and he ambassador of the Hashemite Kingdom to the United States. His appointment was perceived by the reformers as the proof the reactionary old guard still held firmly the reins of power. However, his mandate was brief as he was dismissed after five months without leaving any tangible effect on the Jordanian crisis. Tarawneh was replaced in October 2012 by Abdullah an-Nsour, another veteran politician, already member of Parliament, who had previously been part of numerous cabinets.²⁰⁹ Nonetheless, Nsour was different from his predecessor, as he was known for his criticism of the state corruption, while he also supported a certain degree of liberalisation. His designation produced cautious optimism among the reformers, since the new Prime Minister was neither a reactionary figure nor a liberal. Nsour was the fifth Prime Minister since the Arab Spring had begun, a clear sign of the instability that affected Jordan following the mass mobilization and protests. Nsour was able to stabilise the situation, making some concessions to the activists, and managing to remain in office for four years. His government marked the end for the Kingdom of the most turbulent period of the Arab Spring, as the protesters toned down their demands, concerned by the volatility of the neighbouring states. Yet, even after the situation in Jordan improved, the roots of population's discontent persisted, and after years of protests, the economy was in worse condition than before.

208 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 40.

209 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 40.

4.7 The 2016 Demonstrations

After the Arab Spring, Jordan's streets did not remain silent, in 2016 there was another wave of protests, even though it was not as massive as in 2011.²¹⁰ In 2016, the Gulf monarchies cut the aid to Amman since they felt the effect of decreasing oil prices on the global market, moreover in that year the Syrian refugees crisis peaked, and the Hashemite Kingdom debt almost attained the size of the country's GDP. There was an increase in the costs for electricity and fuel, however the spark that brought Jordanians back in the streets was the proposition for a new tax reform. Indeed, as witnessed in the previous decades, when the population feels that the regime is betraying the social pact, demonstrations erupt nationwide. The Kingdom was helped by Washington, which pledged \$6.375 billion in military equipment and fundings. Furthermore, Riyadh meet with Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates in order to renew the financial aid to Jordan. As in the past, the International Monetary Fund accepted a relax in austerity measures, and supported the country with additional grants.²¹¹ Given Jordan strategic importance, the country which have a stake in its survival will not let the Kingdom implode.

Furthermore, the palace has its own strategies to defuse internal tensions. The most frequent is the reshuffling of cabinets. Since it is the King who appoints Prime Ministers, they are generally dismissed whenever there is unrest in the country, thus they have the role of shock absorbers to appease the opposition.

Moreover, the monarch has cultivated a super partes position, above the clashes of the political arena, instead favouring a more direct relation with the people. That is precisely what happened in 2016, King Abdullah addressed the protesters, promising he was willing to review the austerity program. It can be argued that the country's chronic insolvency is mainly due to the royal family's refusal to cut the military spending and to reform the public administration. However, a similar decision would endanger the social bargain and would be extremely costly in terms of monarchy's legitimacy. Consequently, Jordanian rulers have always found other ways to calm down the people, as a liberalisation of the system, promised and partially implemented under King Hussein, and then re-proposed by his son, King Abdullah II.

Besides, differently from the neighbouring regimes, in Jordan the palace has generally preferred an approach of soft security, as a repression can trigger backlash.²¹² In the Hashemite Kingdom, popular mobilisation is self-limited, and 2016 made no exception. The country was truly on the brink of revolution only in two occasions, in 1957 when there was an attempted coup, and in 1970 when civil war erupted between the army and the Palestinians. In both times, the King was able to gain the upper hand in the confrontation. Excluding these events, demonstrators often avoid directly targeting the monarchy, criticising

210 Abuqudairi A., 2016, Jordan: We are tired of living like the dead, available at <https://www.aljazeera.com>, accessed on 7 September 2019.

211 Yom S., 2018, Jordan's Protests Are a Ritual, Not a Revolution, available at <https://foreignpolicy.com>, accessed on 20 September 2019.

212 Ryan C. R., 2018, Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State, New York, Columbia University Press, pp. 10-11.

instead the political parties of the government. The relative calmness of 2016 protests is surprising, especially considered that nowadays Jordanian economy is in a worse condition than Tunisian or Egyptian ones before the outbreak of the Arab uprisings. For instance, trade has been heavily damaged by the Syrian conflict and ensuing regional instability, and unemployment is at 19,2%.²¹³ Protests can be considered an integral part of the Kingdom political life, and they remain largely peaceful in particular for the restraint that governs the authorities' reactions. For this reason, in the last decade, only one death has been registered among the activists.²¹⁴ There is a tacit agreement, as long as the protesters refrain from targeting the monarchy or clashing with the security forces, the police will not use violence to disperse them. Moreover, the Syrian civil war, coupled with the rise of the Islamic State, has showed Jordanians the consequences of regional unrest. Thus, fears of the same horrors spilling over into the Hashemite Kingdom contribute to avoid any radicalisation of public demonstrations. As emerges from what stated before, the country has successfully avoided major unrest, however this does not suggest that Jordan is thriving. In other states, the cyclical emergence of protests, the endemic economic hardships, and the palace strategies to handle the situation, would not be perceived as normal, but in Jordan this phenomena has become part of the daily life. Nonetheless, this dynamics will continue as long as the security forces do not shoot on the people or the international donors keep financing the country's deficit.

It is interesting to note that in 2016 there was a 22% increase in workers' protests for instance, which resulted from low wages, the worsening of working conditions, and a reduction of society's safety nets. Labourers expressed their grievances concerning the socio-economic crisis affecting the Hashemite Kingdom. According to the Phoenix Centre for Economic and Informatics Studies, in 2016 there were over 288 protests, compared to the 236 of 2015.²¹⁵ The entity and the number of demonstrations was inferior to the ones that took place during the Arab Spring, nonetheless, the increase of the mobilisation shows the anxieties that affect Jordanian society. Labour protests are an indicator of the deteriorating conditions of the job market, and shows that the palace has not been able to enact effective measures to face the country's socio-economic crisis. Jordanian workers suffer for the lack of sufficient opportunities, gaps in the social protection system, and the absence of important trade unions due to state interference.²¹⁶

In 2016, the protesters demanded a repeal of tax hikes, but behind these claims there was also a call for more inclusiveness in the country's decision-making, since the people perceived that King Abdullah was not respecting the social contract. This social bargain requires the regime to provide free education, a

213 Jordanian Government: Department of Statistics, 2019, 19,2% Unemployment Rate during the second Quarter of 2019, available at <http://dosweb.dos.gov.jo>, accessed on 16 September 2019.

214 Yom S., 2018, Jordan's Protests Are a Ritual, Not a Revolution, available at <https://foreignpolicy.com>, accessed on 20 September 2019.

215 Namrouqa H., 2017, Labour protests rise by 22% in 2016 – report, available at <http://www.jordantimes.com>, accessed on 15 September 2019.

216 OECD, 2017, Towards a New Partnership with Citizens: Jordan's decentralisation reform, available at <https://www.oecd.org>, accessed on 20 September 2019, p. 35.

functioning welfare state, employment in the public administration, and subsidies for cheaper basic goods and fuel. In return, the people pledge their loyalty to the monarchy and relinquish their political rights. The contract is also granted by a pervasive security apparatus which monitors all the aspects of life in Jordan. This tacit pact between the ruler and the citizens is present also in the other Middle East countries. In these regimes, when the leaders promise reforms, they generally intend to introduce minor changes concerning the economy and the social arena. Instead, regarding political rights, the demands for reforms are often met by repression or by cosmetic measures.

The roots of the 2016 protests are similar to the ones which provoked the Arab uprisings in 2011, when the insurgents were able to bring down the autocrats in Libya, Yemen, Egypt and Tunisia. Moreover, in its report *Eruption of Popular Anger: The Economics of the Arab Spring and Its Aftermath*, the World Bank states that the demonstrations were caused by the deterioration of the middle class' standards of living, the widespread corruption, and the shortage of jobs.²¹⁷ The approval of the King among the middle class was eroding, this coupled with double-digit unemployment and the burden the Syrian refugees represented for the economy has led to the outbreak of protests. In addition, another element commonly resented by people in Jordan is the feeling that the corruption in the public sector prevents individuals without important connections from obtaining quality services and running their businesses. These elements explain the reasons behind the citizens complaints about the broken social bargain. The exclusion of a part of the population from the benefits granted by the system was the spark that ignited the call for political changes.

King Abdullah has recognised the need for reforms and has stated that there is a “need to deal with challenges in a novel manner, away from the traditional style”.²¹⁸ In order to achieve this objective, new policies should be implemented to dismantle vested interests and build more inclusive institutions, where the rule-of-law is not disregarded. A new governance model is necessary, capable of redistribute the gains from the economy to all the sectors of society, in a way to incentive cooperation between the people and the state. It is necessary to point out that international largesse will not always be present to allow the Kingdom to weather the storms. Indeed, the heart of the issue is that the country is almost bankrupt, thus the government will still be confronted with the problem of implementing austerity policies to achieve sound and sustainable public finances. For this reason, the regime should pursue a reform path that respects the social contract, while creating a more liberal society.

217 Dorsey M. J., 2018, *Protests in Jordan: Revisiting the Arab Spring*, available at <https://besacenter.org>, accessed on 19 September 2019.

218 *Ibid.*

Conclusion

The Arab Spring brought about the fall of regimes in Libya, Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen, a counter-revolution in Bahrain, and a brutal internal conflict in Syria. However, the Kingdom of Jordan was able to remain stable notwithstanding the turmoil that affected the region. Although, it can be argued that protesters took the street in Jordan too, but the demonstrations produced no real change. As this thesis has shown, the opposition in Jordan has various components, that share some common elements. All the protest movements asked for more liberalisation in the political field, the restoration of social safety nets eroded by privatisation, and serious measures to tackle corruption in the state apparatus.

Unlike the majority of the regimes in the area, the Jordanian monarchy was able to preserve its position during the Arab Spring. King Abdullah II has declared that the country has avoided the violence as it has employed soft security measures to counter the protests and it has embarked on a new season of reforms. The ruler argued that the Arab Spring has been an opportunity instead of a liability, as it has represented a sort of wake-up call to implement concrete reforms. According to the monarch, the country has showed its exceptionalism, and its readiness to welcome liberalisation and changes. On the contrary, opposition forces criticise the monarchy which continues to hold the real power, while a truly parliamentary form of government has not been implemented yet.

At the outbreak of the Arab Spring in 2011, the youth hoped that genuine reform was possible in the country, however, since then many are wondering if the status quo will ever change as all their efforts have produced no tangible result. The regime responds to its detractors arguing that it has reformed the state as much as the regional instability allowed it to do so. Nonetheless, activists are tired to hear the same excuses that have been used countless times during the Kingdom's history, indeed over the years the palace has often exploited security concerns in order to postpone or downgrade democratisation and liberalisation. Moreover, the fact that there was not a revolution in the country must not be mistaken for stability. The regime should understand that the lack of an open revolution does not translate in acceptance of the status quo. In the majority of the countries of the area, the factors that ignited the Arab Spring are still present, and no measures have been taken to address them. In particular, in the case of Jordan, the resilience of the monarchy is a key element, but the same can be said of activism which has not gone silent.

Indeed, new austerity measures would probably trigger another wave of demonstrations. However, since the security situation in the region is still volatile, and many Jordanians aim at preserving the country's peace avoiding the violence that affected the neighbouring states, it is also probable that the protests will not escalate beyond the economic or social issue that provoked them. During the Arab Spring, the Hashemite Kingdom managed to avoid the violence that hit other countries, and the regime continued to follow its policy of soft security, thus not recurring to repression if not strictly necessary. Nonetheless, the risk of an outburst of violence remains, as protesters often cross the line of what the palace considers acceptable. If the

police overreacts, the demonstrations in Jordan have the potential to turn into a social upheaval. However, many factors should be present in Jordan at the same time to generate massive unrest, for instance, economic crisis, coupled with austerity measures, a united opposition front, and a violent reaction of security forces that accidentally kills a protester from tribal and East Jordanian background. In this case, nationalist groups from the military veterans to the HIRAK would put aside their differences and constitute a united protest, which would be not easily dispersed by the regime. Nonetheless, the diverse components of Jordanian opposition would form a coalition for change only in case of an outrage capable of crossing identity issue and ideological lines, for example a severe case of corruption in the high echelons of the state apparatus.

Thus, the palace aims at avoiding this type of situations, and this objective is at the origin of the cyclical cosmetic reforms that open the political system in small doses, and engage many citizens in the process, contributing to reduce the possibility of demonstrations in the streets. Many opposition figures at some point chose to take part in the electoral competition even if they know it's rigged, in order to try to obtain reforms anyway. Consequently, the regime is able to coopt part of them, and to weaken the protest movements. Even before the Arab Spring, the palace has routinely engaged in limited reform rounds to maintain the support of the international donors and to keep reformers quiet, often employing slogans and marketing campaigns which overshadowed the real entity of reforms. Indeed, reformers often argue that there are constantly new policies, but the country is not actually moving forward. An activist stated that the palace's "words are with the reformers but its actions are for the status quo."²¹⁹ Aside these waves of apparent reforms, the state also employs the divide and rule tactic in order to make the opposition efforts ineffective. Coercion is also used, but not as extensively as in the other regime of the area. Furthermore, the regime relies on its regional and international allies to guarantee its security, as the stability of Jordan is of great importance, in particular for the United States, due to the strategic position of the country.

Moreover, the monarchy enjoys a high degree of domestic popularity, due to the prestige of the King, and its choices to maintain a hybrid regime and a liberalising autocracy. These factors have contribute to the survival of Jordan throughout the Arab Spring, however the people are becoming tired of reform promises which produce only reshuffling of the traditional Jordanian oligarchy. It can also be argued that regional instability has not favoured the cause of the pro-democracy activists. The chaos that followed the Arab Spring has been both an asset and a liability for Amman. The conflicts in Syria and Iraq, and the attacks of the Islamic State represented a threat for the Hashemite Kingdom, but they allowed the regime to call for national unity face the instability that affected the Middle East. At the same time the opposition toned down its demands fearing a possible spillover of the regional violence. In addition, the Kingdom had to bear the costs of lodging and nourishing thousands of Syrian refugees, but on the other hand, Jordan saw an increase

219 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 219.

in donors support from the European Union, the United States and the Gulf monarchies. Thus, Jordan had proved its ability to face the adversities, but at some point the issues will be too heavy for the country to deal with them, and change will be inevitable. Consequently, the best alternative for the regime is to enter into a dialogue with various opposition forces, in order to confront them on the concrete aspects of the reform process.

Despite the widespread criticism of the country's corruption and endemic economic crisis, the majority of Jordanians remains loyal to the monarchy, and in particular to the Hashemites. Even the opposition when it calls for change, refers to a more constitutional monarchy, but does not ask for a republic. Indeed, during the Arab Spring, some radical fringes of the protesters criticised King Abdullah and the Queen, nonetheless, they continued to support the regime as they consider it as a constituent part of the Jordanian state. For instance, the attacks of the retired military officers aimed at saving the monarchy and pointing at the King the right path to follow. These officials spent their lives serving the state, thus they considered that their loyalty to the king was beyond question, and they earned the right to judge the ruler's action.²²⁰

Although many Jordanians ask for more political liberalisation, their main concern remains the economy, with rising unemployment rates, and growing costs of living. The discontent has the potential to generate a revolution, however since the Kingdom's independence in 1946, the opinions of those who considered that the country was about to implode have always been proved wrong. Until now, Jordan has always proved its capability to survive internal and regional crisis, however the Hashemite Kingdom may have arrived to the point when just manoeuvre through the various hardships without real change is no longer enough. Jordan is a country poor in natural resources, plagued by chronic economic difficulties, a high unemployment and a massive level of indebtedness. Finally, economic issues may generate more instability than any other regional or internal threat. It can be argue that Jordan weak economy and its high dependence on foreign donors' aid, coupled with its social problems and the endemic regional tensions is not sustainable in the long term. Moreover, since the Hashemite Kingdom depends on other states for its survival, it is also often obliged to comply with requests of its benefactors, in particular Washington, the European Union, Riad, and the Gulf monarchies.

The ever-present regional insecurity and fiscal crisis, should convince King Abdullah II and Jordanian ruling elite that maybe the time has come to open the country, instead of tightening the control of the state on society. On the contrary, Amman tend to rely excessively on securization in order to grant the Kingdom survival, using the regional unrest as an excuse for its inability to engage in a concrete reform process. In the meantime, the recent refugee influx has only added more pressure to the state economy and social tissue which were already faltering. In order to avoid the same turmoil that affected its neighbours, Jordanian

220 Ryan C. R., 2018, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings. Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 221.

authorities should enact policies to grant more pluralism, liberties, and a more democratic political system free from the burden of corruption. The risks of this strategy are known to the regime, however there are even greater risks in choosing to maintain the status quo.

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Summary

This thesis will focus on the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and it is intended to provide an in-depth analysis of the country's situation and to suggest the reasons behind its capability to survive the Arab Spring without undergoing regime change.

Jordan region was conquered by the Ottoman Empire in 1517, however, since it was considered a marginal area, was only loosely controlled. During the late Ottoman period, with the Nahda or Arab revival that began in Egypt, there was a cultural movement, which aimed at restoring the Arab identity. This brought the growth of a nationalist opposition who aimed at freeing the Arab nation from the Ottoman non-Arab authority. In the meantime, the Young Turks, a group of nationalist officers were trying to reform the Ottoman system. The tribes of the Arabian Peninsula were afraid to lose their autonomy due to stronger government control, consequently Sharif Hussein, the Amir of Mecca was able to assemble the desert tribes and the nationalists with the objective of creating an autonomous emirate in the Hijaz, free from Ottoman control.

At the beginning of the I World War, Istanbul sided with the Central Empires. The United Kingdom, through the promise of territorial gains, co-opted Hussein, who in 1916 launched the Arab Revolt against the Ottomans. However, there was already a secret pact existing between the French and the British, the Sykes-Picot agreement, establishing the post war asset for the Middle East. Furthermore, in 1917 there was the Balfour Declaration, a letter written by the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Arthur Balfour, who promised British support to the Jews for the establishment in Palestine of a “national home”. For the Arabs, this was a betrayal of the promises made to Sharif Hussein.

Following these events, Jordan was included in the British sphere of influence. Meanwhile, Feisal, one of Sharif Hussein's sons, had established an autonomous government in Damascus, but his presence was contrary to French interests. In 1920 at the San Remo, the United Kingdom obtained the control of Palestine, and Iraq, while Syria and Lebanon were going to France. Thus, French troops forced Feisal to leave Syria. In

the meantime, Abdullah, the other son of Sharif Hussein was defeated by the Bin Saud's warriors, who forced him to leave Hijaz, thus he decided to organise the resistance against the French in Syria. To pursue his purpose, Abdullah arrived in Jordan with some tribal followers. The British chose to transform a liability into an asset and in 1923 recognised Abdullah as Amir of the Emirate of Transjordan, which was declared an independent state with British tutelage. Abdullah was assisted by British officials, who held the key positions in the bureaucratic apparatus, and in the army of the Emirate, the Arab Legion.

During the II World War, Transjordan allied with the United Kingdom, and after the conflict, in 1946 Abdullah was crowned King of Transjordan. In Palestine, the British were left exhausted by the war and unable to stop the clashes between Palestinians and Jews, thus they handed over the issue to the United Nations, which proposed a partition plan creating an Arab and a Jewish state. In 1948, Britain left Palestine, soon after hostilities broke out and the Jews were able to defeat the armies of Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Transjordan, which had intervened to help Palestinians. Nonetheless, the Arab Legion was able to occupy the Old City of Jerusalem, Hebron, and the majority of Samaria. In 1950, Abdullah annexed the territories, while the country's name was changed in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Amman was faced with the problem of absorbing over half a million Palestinian refugees. In 1951 the monarch was assassinated, probably for his agreements with the Israelis to the detriment of Palestinians.

The short reign of his successor, King Talal, caused a crisis of confidence concerning the Hashemites' capacity to rule, due the ruler's health problems. In 1953, his son Hussein took his place, however the monarch's authority was threatened by the challenges represented by Jordanian left parties, and the rising Arab nationalism, who had its champion in the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser. To face the opposition, King Hussein authorised a crackdown on the country's political life, the legislature was emptied of real power, while the real centres of power became the Royal Court, the armed forces, and the secret service or Mukhabarat.

As Arab nationalism was on the rise in the region, Hussein was under increasing pressures from Nasser to take on Israel. As a consequence, in 1967 he sided with Egypt and Syria in the Six-Day War against the Israelis, after the defeat the Kingdom lost the West Bank and East Jerusalem, while thousands of refugees arrived in the kingdom. Thus, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and its fighters transferred to Jordan, and started to launch attacks on Israel. The growing PLO influence in the country made King Hussein and the Jordanian army increasingly concerned about the situation. The turning point was represented by 1970, when the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine called for the rebellion against the Hashemites. As a result, King Hussein gave to the army the order to attack the fedayeen. The Palestinian fighters lost and were obliged to leave Jordan in 1971, however an important Palestinian minority remained.

In the 1980s the country was hit by a major economic crisis, and resorted to an IMF structural

adjustment program. The consequent austerity measures brought the population to descend in the streets, asking the end of corruption and reforms. There were also pressures of Western donors and international agencies, who asked Amman to start repaying its debts and to reform the economy. The King responded by starting a liberalisation process and new free elections. Meanwhile, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on 1990 provoked the Gulf crisis. The Hashemite Kingdom refused to take part in the Desert Storm coalition, perceived as a Western intromission in Arab politics. This caused the isolation of the Kingdom in the international arena, while the Gulf states sanctioned Amman for its behaviour. In the following years, King Hussein pursued the normalisation of the relations with Israel at the expenses of liberalisation, as he employed repression to silence dissenting voices.

In 1999 Abdullah II succeeded King Hussein. He aimed at modernising the economy and surrounded himself with a younger and more liberal elite. Nonetheless, Abdullah is criticised for alleged violations of individual freedoms, and manipulation of the electoral process. On the other side, there is also a widespread perception that tight security measures are necessary in a region where stability is volatile. Until now, the King has been able to face significant difficulties, economic crisis, the hardships of poverty, the tensions of a divided society, the occupation of Iraq in 2003 with the consequent refugee issue, and terrorist attacks. However, notwithstanding all the public declarations he made, the King has little concrete results to show concerning his reform effort, which has mainly remained on paper.

To understand the impact of the Arab Spring in Jordan, it is necessary to examine the Kingdom's institutions and the issue of identity politics. Jordanian borders were arbitrarily drawn by the British and the country's name was due to the presence of the Jordanian River. The river is still the symbol of the ethnic divide which characterizes the Jordanian population: those who come from the West Bank of the river, the Palestinians, and those who trace their origins back to the East Bank, the Transjordanians.

Furthermore, the Kingdom's pillars are the monarchy and the army, thus the national identity is based on the pact of the ruling family with the Jordanian tribes, who pledged loyalty to the state and formed the traditional base for the security apparatus. Moreover, while the state apparatus is largely dominated by East Bankers, the country's private sector is mainly handled by Palestinians. King Abdullah's policy of economic liberalisation has favoured the private sector to the detriment of the state institutions. As a result, the Transjordanian pro-regime communities which were traditionally employed in the state apparatus, felt increasingly abandoned by the palace. In addition, the issue of national identity has become more and more problematic as Jordan received successive waves of Palestinian refugees as a result of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The exclusion of the Palestinians from the public sector, while depriving them of employment opportunities, has also taken away the benefits granted to state officials. At the same time, Transjordanians complain about the Palestinian-Jordanians domination of the private sector.

The regime has addressed these problems promoting a common Jordanian identity, with the addition

of royalist symbols to favour the identification of Jordanian nationalism with the Hashemite family. It is useful to remember that the Hashemites are not natives either. However, the monarchy has been able to present itself as a unifying element, capable of bringing together the nation the various components, but careful to maintain the predominant position of East Bankers. For instance, the practice of gerrymandering electoral districts aims at producing pro regime assemblies where Transjordanians held the majority of seats in spite of the demographic strength of the Palestinians.

The emergence of identity politics in Jordan traces its roots back to 1988, when King Hussein abandoned the claims over the West Bank. The king's decision sparked the debate in Jordan about who could be considered Jordanian and who Palestinian, and if the two identities were separated or inextricably tied. Moreover, the failure of the Arab-Israeli peace process has generated East Bankers' apprehension about the possibility of Israel trying to turn the Kingdom into a Palestinian state. The role of identity politics became important also after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, when there was a surge of Iraqis refugees in Jordan. The most conservative worried that Iraqis could become another permanent community of foreigners further eroding the position of Transjordanians in the Kingdom. Moreover, as stated before, privatization policies have generated important social and political changes, as the state sold many of its industries, provoking a decrease in the possibility to obtain a job in the government apparatus. Thus, Transjordanians argue that they do not want to be marginalized in their own country, as the economy is already dominated by the Palestinians, but now even state employment does not appear as safe as it was in the past.

Notwithstanding the divisions affecting Jordanian society, the majority of the protesters who took the streets in 2011 and 2012 were not animated by identity politics. To better understand the issue, it is worth it to compare the events of 2011-2012 to the protests of 1989. In 1989, Prime Minister Zayd al-Rifa'i was seen as the archetype of the Jordanian conservative, who opposed any change of the status quo. As the riots against the austerity policies spread, the King dismissed the government and embarked on a liberalisation process. In 2011, the people demonstrated against the Prime Minister Samir Rifa'i, son of Zayd. He was criticized as being the expression of the Palestinian neoliberal and technocratic business class. These events show that identity is not stable, illustrating the tendency in the Jordanian political arena to manipulate the opponents ethnicity in order to undermine their legitimacy.

One of the reasons behind 2011 protests was the growing feeling of alienation perceived by some Jordanians. The conservatives blamed the Palestinians businessmen for taking over the private sector but also the state apparatus. However, according to Palestinians this argument is inconsistent, and they argue that on the contrary when it comes to state policies and public employment they are penalised and under-represented. Among the Jordanian protest groups during the Arab Spring, one of the most influential was the "24 March Shabab Movement", which on 24th March 2011 gathered thousands of Jordanians of all extractions in a patriotic demonstration, advocating for more political liberalisation. However, groups of pro

regime thugs charged the protesters, marking the end of the movement. These conservative forces perceived the protesters as revolutionaries and ultimately as Palestinians (even though this was not the case). This represents another example of the relevance of identity politics in Jordan, as in this case, the fault line between Palestinians and Jordanians was conceived more in loyalty terms rather than ethnicity. In general, the most reactionary fringes of the ruling elite had always manipulated the issue of identity, for instance by defining the protesters as Palestinians, or accusing them of having ties with Islamists to question their loyalty to the nation.

Another element which has an important impact on Jordan are the policies and the events in the neighbouring states. Indeed, during the Arab Uprisings, as the protests took a violent turn in the broader region, Jordanians started to worry increasingly for the risk of a spillover of the violences, especially the destabilisation brought by the Syrian civil war, with the consequent refugees' flow, and the security threat represented by the rise of jihadist movements.

To avoid the worst-case scenario, Jordan was careful to maintain a position that oscillated between positive engagement and neutrality towards the Syrian regime, with proposals to mediate between the warring parties to put an end to the conflict. Moreover, it was not clear which was the enemy to fight, especially since after expansion of the Islamic State in 2014, Bashar al-Asad was able to present himself as the only alternative to the chaos of Jihadist terrorism, notwithstanding the fact that the regime itself was the cause of that instability. Indeed, Amman joined the coalition who was fighting against ISIS, nonetheless, many important political figures in Jordan agreed, at least privately, that the best outcome for Amman was the eventual victory of Assad over ISIS.

Moreover, since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, Jordan has been hit by an unprecedented wave of refugees, combined with a decrease in foreign investments, and a drastic reduction of trade with Syria and Iraq. The massive influx of refugees has exacerbated the country's endemic problems, in particular a saturated job market, obsolete infrastructures, strained resources and social services. These facts resulted in a slowdown of Jordanian economy with rising unemployment rates and decreasing wages. To address these challenges the Kingdom relies heavily on foreign aid, as Jordan's stability is a key priority for its neighbouring countries, and for the West, since it allows to avoid new refugee movements towards other Middle Eastern or European countries.

Indeed, what at the beginning appeared as an emergency, has henceforth assumed the connotations of a protracted crisis, and the generosity in host communities has given way to grievances and frustration. The population also tends to blame the refugees for all the various issues affecting the country, while the majority of these problems were already present before the Syrian civil war, as the country was already facing a period of economic downturn. Moreover, the prospect of Syrians staying in the country awake the concerns of the Jordanian nationalists who were afraid that the presence of another wave of refugees would have

called into question Jordanian identity.

Notwithstanding the Syrian crisis, Jordanian authorities stated that they were able to enact the necessary reforms, although according to the opposition the policies promoted by the government were only cosmetic measures, devoided of real content. Many activists argue that, while the threat represented by jihadists was real, the security efforts were used as an excuse to derail the reform process. Indeed, during the Arab Uprisings, the regime exploited foreign policy as a tool to grant its political survival. In particular, state officials often had to lobby donors in order to obtain additional aid, which was vital for the ailing Jordanian economy. This caused the Kingdom to double its efforts to maintain its traditional alliances with the aim of granting the security of Jordan both military and economically. Nonetheless, the close relation of Amman with its Western partners sparked criticism on the domestic arena, because many Jordanians consider the regime too subservient to Western interests.

The Arab Spring started on the 17th of December in 2010 in Tunisia, when the street vendor Muhammed Bouazizi set fire to himself to protest for the harsh treatment he received from the police, which beat him because he did not have the work permit. Indeed, Arab uprisings generally began with a symbolic event, the immolation of Bouazizi in Tunis, street demonstrations in Amman and Cairo, unrest in Deraa. All these protests erupted in countries dominated by authoritarian regimes weakened by endemic corruption and economic hardships. The demonstrators called for freedom, human rights, bread. Moreover, the engine of these movement were the youth who lost faith in the institutions, and the discontent spread from the cities to the other parts of the country.

The majority of the Arab Spring participants expected a democratic transformation. However, in some cases, their hopes were dashed, when the mass mobilisation failed to produce uprisings, as in Jordan, Morocco, and Algeria. While in Bahrain and Syria, the peaceful demonstrations were violently suppressed. In Egypt, the elections saw the Muslim Brotherhood triumph and Mohamed Morsi obtained the presidency. Later on, as the new government tried to subvert the democratic nature of the institutions, the army removed Morsi from power, putting an end to the country short-lived democratic experiment. In Yemen, amid the proxy-conflict between Riad and Teheran, the deposed autocrat continues to play a significant role in the political arena. After the fall of Qaddafi, the situation in Libya mirrored that of Iraq following the deposition of Saddam. Elections were held, but the government did not have real authority, and the power was in the hands of militias. Tunisia is the only case where the old authoritarian state has been replaced by an embryo of democracy. Thus, considering all the countries affected by the Arab Spring, the final outcome in terms of effective democratisation has been rather modest.

When the Arab uprisings broke out in the Middle East in 2011 and 2012, many experts stated that Jordan would have been the next. From 2011 to 2017, the Kingdom was not quiet, there were protests in the streets, however they did not escalated in an upheaval against the regime. Concerning the Hashemites, they

saw the Arab Spring as both a threat and an opportunity, as King Abdullah II declared that it would relaunch the reform process. Many Jordanians, especially among the royalists, supported the ruler's view, but others were less optimistic, and felt disillusioned because after a brief period of timid reforms, the status quo had been restored in the country. Paradoxically, the regime was able to profit of the continual unrest that was afflicting the Middle East, as many activists toned down their requests to avoid the country falling victim of the instability that had hit its neighbours. Amman had chosen neither a democratic transition neither the imposition of authoritarianism, but rather a process between these extremes.

It can be argued that a key factor to understand the different outcomes of the uprisings in the region is given by the various processes of state-building. The more traditional regimes, for instance the monarchies in Jordan and Morocco, have showed more resilience compared to Arab republics, as Egypt or Tunisia. This longevity has been assured not only by the careful policies of the monarchs, but mainly by the institutions that underpin the stability of these kingdoms. In addition, in Jordan the demands of the protesters were moderate as a consequence of the regime's policy to coopt part of the opposition while taking measures to appease the masses. King Abdullah showed his willingness to pursue a gradual liberalisation coupled with monarchy-led reforms to amend the constitution.

Moreover, kingdoms are not dominated by a single political party as republics such as Syria or Egypt. These monarchies have a party system with a plurality of formations, even though generally weak and lacking widespread popularity in society. This element also contributed to the moderation of the demonstrations, since the protests were led by cross-ideological coalitions constituted by various political parties, which had to respectively tone down their requests in order to articulate common demands. In addition, Middle East regimes often make indiscriminate use of repression, on the contrary Jordan privileges soft security, employing violence only when strictly necessary. However, the main element that contributed to the stability of monarchies is the people's attachment to the King. Concerning Arab republics, as Tunisia, Libya, Syria, or Egypt, they are the result of revolutionary nationalist movements; these dictators imposed state control over the press and the media, systematically repressing dissenting voices. These republics lack inclusiveness at the political level, with all the powers in the hands of the leader. As a consequence, after decades of repression and economic mismanagement, discontent reached a boiling point and the population staged mass upheavals, calling for pluralism and democratisation.

Another factor that explains the stability of the Arab kingdoms is given by western interests in the stability of oil producing countries or strategic allies as Jordan. Furthermore, in the Hashemite Kingdom, the state-building was pursued by alliances with the most powerful tribal leaders, and by co-opting the cities' elites, instead Arab republics condemned the previous elite as traitors and constituted a new ruling class made of the regime's party members. As a result, the monarchies are based on a network of social ties that

has its center in the royal family, while the centralised apparatus of these nationalist republics excludes a significant segment of the population from the state.

In explaining the Arab uprisings, some experts have underlined the centrality of the middle class, which is a pillar of political stability and the engine of economic growth. In the Arab world the number of individuals feeling left out from the benefits of economy has increased, in particular among the youth, which registered also a high level of unemployment. This situation brought them to descend in the streets during the Arab upheavals. Moreover, demonstrations spread to the rural areas as they felt abandoned by the governments which invested only in the main cities. For instance, this explains why the first protests in Tunisia started in Sidi Bouzid, one of the poorest and most underdeveloped areas in the country. Another element that contributed to the outburst of protests was the endemic corruption that plagued the states of the area. Protesters asked for politicians to be held accountable for the mismanagement of public funds. However, years after the beginning of the Arab Spring, the results present a rather sober picture. The leadership who now holds the reins of power is often composed by the old elite, as in Jordan and Saudi Arabia, or by individuals with no experience or no interest in altering the status quo, as the deposed Egyptian President Morsi in the former case, or the new one General al-Sissi in the latter.

Regarding Jordan, a factor that explains the country's resilience is the democratisation process started in 1989 and the Kingdom is the ideal example to explain what a controlled liberalisation looks like. The demographic equilibrium, the ethnic rifts and the conflicting identities that characterise the country are some of the main reasons that have limited the scope of the regime democratisation. When the political liberalisation started in 1989, the regime aimed at keeping at bay the discontent of Transjordanians, who blamed the state for the economic crisis, while also co-opting the Palestinians to grant internal stability. Among the tools employed by the monarchy to manipulate the political arena there was the amendment of the electoral rules, in particular by redesigning electoral districts to give more representation to the regions predominantly inhabited by East Bankers to the detriment of the Jordanians of Palestinian origin. Moreover, King Abdullah aimed at the strengthening of a Jordanian identity by linking it to the country, not to a superior Arab or Islamic community. To achieve this outcome, in 2002 the ruler launched a series of marketing campaigns as Jordan First also to encourage the people to focus on changes on the domestic arena rather than on external crisis as the US intervention in Iraq or the tensions between Israel and the Palestinians. Besides, the regime reassured the citizens of Palestinians descent, stating that the aim of the campaign was also the integration in the political and economic system of Jordanians of all backgrounds.

The King policies did not succeed in meeting the people's demands. As a consequence, in 2011, the protesters called for measures to fight government corruption and to promote democratisation. Moreover, demonstrators blamed the regime for the lack of progress in political reforms. In order to appease the

situation, King Abdullah II dismissed the government of Prime Minister Samir Rifa'i, and promised to open the Kingdom to a new season of reforms.

The majority of the protesters came from tribal areas in the East Bank, and they were called the Hirak. There was also an important participation of activists linked to the Muslim Brotherhood. The pro-reform groups employed social media to openly criticise the regime corruption, the lack of democracy. The authorities maintained a soft security approach towards the activism, in contrast with neighbouring states which often employed violence to disperse protesters. However, there were exceptions to this soft security, in particular when activists surpassed the line demarcating what was acceptable, for instance directly criticising the King.

The most challenging period for the palace was represented by November 2012 mass protests, when thousands of Jordanians took the streets following the government's decision to cut fuel subsidies as asked by the IMF austerity program. Riots erupted in all the main cities, where people clashed with the security forces. However, the protests were not only driven by economic reasons, some Jordanians were also exhausted by the Kingdom political immobility. Nonetheless, after various days of unrest, the protests decreased in intensity and they did not escalate into an uprising. Witnessing regional unrest, many pro-democracy groups backed off, yet the violence of the riots in 2012 showed that the status quo was no longer sustainable, and the authorities had to implement some real reforms if they wanted the Hashemite Kingdom to survive. Nonetheless, only short term measures were put in place, as the reshuffle of ministers and the governments' turnover as a way to divert the people's attention from the concrete issues.

In Jordan, the Arab Spring brought about new forms of political opposition, as the Hirak, but it also revitalised the mainstream political formations. Indeed, in the Kingdom the opposition has historically formed parties, as the Islamic movement or the leftists. A dividing line can be traced between opposition forces in the country before and after the 1989. In the 1950s and 1960s, the opposition was dominated by the nationalists and the leftists; however, with the end of the Cold War, these parties declined in importance. These groups are still present in the political arena, nonetheless their ranks have considerably shrunk, and their action has become rather ineffective, while the most influential nowadays is the Islamic Action Front (IAF), emanation of the Muslim Brotherhood. In Jordan, the Muslim Brothers are as old as the monarchy, and they have generally acted as a loyal opposition, never questioning the legitimacy of the Hashemites.

Since 1989, the opposition has staged numerous attempts to form a united front against the reactionary ruling elite, yet with little effective results. The regime has traditionally employed various means to keep the opposition forces at bay, as engaging the reformers with rounds of new but mainly cosmetic laws, and resorting to the divide and rule strategy to hampering the opposition efforts. Indeed, the Islamist movement is well organised and popular among the people, however it considers that the various electoral rules are precisely designed to curb its potential. For this reason, for decades, the palace and the opposition had

clashed on the content of the electoral laws.

In 2010 opposition parties were joined by NGOs and pro-democracy activists in asking to the regime to reform electoral rules and for changes in the political system, however they were not able to obtain significant concessions from the monarchy. One of the causes of this ineffectiveness may lie in the fact that differently from the IAF, many political parties do not enjoy an elevated level of support in society. The majority of Jordanians regards the parties as obsolete and unable of producing any real result. Others consider that the traditional opposition has too many links to the regime to really antagonise it.

The Arab Spring protests made clear that there was widespread discontent in the Hashemite Kingdom, this showed the necessity to restore the welfare state and reform the institutions. Jordan opposition saw in the Arab Spring and in its popular mobilisation the opportunity to obtain real change, however they were soon divided by the Syrian conflict and the line to follow concerning the Assad regime. Moreover, the palace has long ago mastered strategies to divide the opposition, as the co-optation of some groups, while allowing a limited possibility of critic to others in order to let them vent their discontent.

There were different opinions among regime officials concerning the best way to address the issues raised by the opposition. Some favoured minimal concessions in order to improve the authorities' accountability, while others argued that the state did not have to introduce any change. Furthermore, there were also genuine reformers in the state apparatus, who looked at King Abdullah to grasp the opportunity to renew the country's institutions. Indeed, when the demonstrations showed no sign to dissipate, the ruler dismissed the conservative Rifa'i government, and then sacked a succession of short-lived cabinets. Only after the appointment of Abdullah an-Nsour in October 2012, the situation stabilised. The new Prime Minister was known for his criticism of the state corruption, while he also supported liberalisation. Nsour made some concessions to the activists, and managed to remain in office for four years. His government marked the end for the Kingdom of the most turbulent period of the Arab Spring, as the protesters toned down their demands.

After the Arab Spring, Jordan's streets did not remain silent, in 2016 there was another wave of protests, even though it was not as massive as in 2011. In 2016, the Gulf monarchies cut the aid to Amman since they felt the effect of decreasing oil prices on the global market, moreover in that year the Syrian refugees crisis peaked, and the Hashemite Kingdom debt almost attained the size of the country's GDP. Consequently, the proposition for a new tax reform brought Jordanians back in the streets. King Abdullah addressed the protesters, promising he was willing to review the austerity program. Also, in 2016 there was a 22% increase in workers protests, which resulted from low wages, the worsening of working conditions, and a reduction of society's safety nets. It is true that the protesters demanded a repeal of tax hikes, but behind these claims there was also a call for more inclusiveness in the country's decision-making. To face these issues, new policies should be implemented to build more inclusive institutions, and redistribute the gains

from the economy to all the sectors of society,

The Arab Spring brought about the fall of regimes in Libya, Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen, a counter-revolution in Bahrain, and a brutal internal conflict in Syria. However, the Kingdom of Jordan was able to remain stable notwithstanding the turmoil that affected the region. King Abdullah II has declared that the country has avoided the violence as it has employed soft security measures to counter the protests and it has embarked on a new season of reforms. On the contrary, opposition forces criticise the monarchy which continues to hold the real power, while a truly parliamentary form of government has not been implemented yet.

The palace has exploited security concerns in order to downgrade democratisation and liberalisation. Moreover, the regime has been able to coopt part of the opposition, and to weaken the protest movements. Even before the Arab Spring, the palace has routinely engaged in limited reform rounds to maintain the support of the international donors and to keep reformers quiet, often employing slogans and marketing campaigns which overshadowed the real entity of reforms. Furthermore, the monarchy has employed the divide and rule tactic in order to make the opposition efforts ineffective. Another element that explains Jordan resilience is the assistance of its regional and international allies, in particular the United States, for which the stability of the Kingdom is fundamental, given its strategic position. In addition, the monarchy enjoys a high degree of domestic popularity, due to the prestige of the King, and its choices to maintain a hybrid regime and a liberalising autocracy. Even the opposition when it calls for change, refers to a more constitutional monarchy, but does not ask for a republic.

Until now, Jordan has always proved its capability to survive internal and regional crisis, however the Hashemite Kingdom may have arrived to the point when just manoeuvre through the various hardships without real change is no longer enough. Indeed, economic issues may generate more instability than any other regional or internal threat. It can be argued that Jordan's weak economy and its high dependence on foreign donors' aid, coupled with its social problems and the endemic regional tensions is not sustainable in the long term. Jordanian authorities should enact policies to grant more pluralism, liberties, and a more democratic political system free from the burden of corruption. The risks of this strategy are known to the

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