Openness as Political Culture
The Arab Spring and the Jordanian Protest Movements

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Abstract
This study is an exploration of the origins of the Arab Spring in Jordan and across the region. Based on ethnographic fieldwork among the leadership of the Jordanian protest movements, it suggests a new way of understanding why these movements fell apart. A recurrent theme in accounts of the political movements that emerged in Jordan and the Arab world more generally in 2011 is that the unity that initially appeared on streets and squares never transformed into a viable coalition but instead dissolved. A common way to understand why the Arab Spring’s promise of a less authoritarian society was not fulfilled is to look at the center of a political system and explain why it did not become more democratic. These explanations depend on an alternative that we know only through our counterfactual imagination: a united opposition capable of bringing about a democratic system. Instead of imagining a united opposition and explaining why it was not realized, the thesis starts with the fact that the Jordanian opposition was deeply fragmented, but that there were attempts to counter this fragmentation by coordinating and specifying its demands. These attempts fell apart due to something more general than ideological, ethnic or religious divisions within the Jordanian opposition. They were based on a way of conducting politics that was uncommon among the leadership of the protest movements as well as among their opponents. These attempts were characterized by an emphasis on political ideas and programs rather than patronage and by an orientation toward political dialogue, which some Jordanians described in terms of “inštáz” (openness) and contrasted with a more polemical form of politics. This ethnographic study puts this more unusual form of politics into sharper relief and shows how it was rooted in political practices and values as well as comparable types of education and social life. This allows us to see how democratization is a movement that is not only political but also cultural, which takes shape in political activism, education and social life.

Keywords: activism, Arab Spring, democracy, Jordan, political culture.

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Notes on transliteration

I have used the transliteration system of the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, with the following modifications: For Arabic names of prominent figures, I follow accepted English spellings. For names of Jordanians, I use their preferred English spelling (for the sake of consistency, I always spell the tribe al-Tarawna as Tarawneh, the preferred English spelling of a public figure I write about). When I use Arabic words as analytical or descriptive terms (e.g., ḥaraka, munfatiḥ, siyāsī), I apply English rather than Arabic grammar; that is, I use Anglicized plurals and do not make adjectives feminine or plural. The tāʾ marbūṭa in ḥaraka is rendered a also in ḥālāfa constructions. All quotes that are from my interactions with Jordanians are my translations (from Arabic), except for those from educators at international schools and from the informants Hussein, Madian, Rami and Muhammed Hussainy, which were originally in English.
Introduction

When Jordanian demonstrators occupied a square in central Amman on March 24-25, 2011, many of them experienced a new sense of unity in Jordan’s normally divided opposition movement. “The sun rose over the square where we had slept, and it was like waking up to a new Jordan,” said a leftist who for the first time felt a connection with the followers of the Muslim Brotherhood. They would occupy the square until the regime accepted their demands; thence the call for parliamentary democracy.

This was the most ambitious demonstration in Jordan in 2011. Egypt’s president Mubarak had stepped down the previous month, and the inspiration from Egypt was evident in the choice of name and place: The demonstrators occupied a square which (like Tahrir Square) was surrounded by a roundabout, and the place was named after a former Egyptian president.1 Moreover, the occupation was organized by a newly created umbrella organization, Youth of March 24, closely resembling the name of one of the Egyptian groups organizing demonstrations against Mubarak.2 A fair number of the participants thought that the Arab mass demonstrations now had come to Jordan.

Although most participants shared the sense of a new national unity, a unity we have heard expressed in many testimonies among demonstrators during the Arab Spring’s first phase, there were divisions under the surface, and Youth of March 24 soon fragmented. Most participants and organizers I interviewed stated entirely different reasons why the demonstration was held. Some said that they would not remain at the square until the regime accepted their demand for parliamentary democracy, but for a maximum of two to three days. Others said that the demonstration did not call for parliamentary democracy. Some of the most prominent political activists in Jordan returned home as soon as they saw the demonstration or after participating for a few hours. After the riot police had disbanded the demonstration, one of the largest participating groups released a statement accusing the Muslim Brotherhood of having hijacked it. The person who wrote this statement did so in the stillness of hindsight; on the spot he had been anything but accusatory. He had been one of the last participants remaining, even standing up to the police to defend the square.

1 Gamel Abdul Nasser Square. It is one of the roundabout’s two names.
2 The umbrella organization’s full name was March 24 Youth Movement (cf. the Egyptian “April 6 Youth Movement”). I use its shortened name, which most organizers used.
Before Youth of March 24 occupied the square in central Amman, a handful of its organizers pointed out that the demonstration was doomed to fragment and to fail in forcing the regime to accept their demands, because its leadership had never had any meetings where they clearly formulated their demands, or vented disagreements. They had only discussed where they should have the demonstration and how they would handle the logistics. When people came to the roundabout, they were united in abstract demands such as "social justice" and "no to corruption," but they attached very different meanings to these demands.

During 2011, these organizers tried to set up meetings and conferences in which Jordan’s protest groups could develop specific oppositional demands. For example, after the demonstration on March 24, they set up meetings to coordinate Youth of March 24’s goals and demonstration strategy. The organization collapsed after the outbreak of violence in Syria during the summer of 2011. Subsequently, the meetings degenerated into polemical discussions in which one side supported the Syrian regime and the other the opposition. The handful of organizers who had been most instrumental in developing specific political demands tried to steer the discussions to issues such as how to reform the electoral law, but they soon found their attempts futile, and stopped attending the meetings.

A group with similar concerns existed within the leadership of a protest movement that emerged in 2011 in Hayy al-Tafaila, a quarter in Amman. Hayy al-Tafaila’s inhabitants are members of some of the tribes that dominate Jordan’s state apparatus. The emergence of this protest movement was of great concern to the regime as the use of coercion risked alienating its own power base. During its first stage, a group of journalists, lawyers and other civilian and highly educated professionals controlled the movement’s leadership. They called for a return to the electoral law of 1992, which they thought would lead to a more powerful parliament, and demanded that the security service not interfere in the electoral process. This group of civilian leaders, however, lost the leadership to retired military officers who introduced a more authoritarian political culture. Their demands became more radical and less specific. The association’s new leadership sought confrontation with the regime, but they did not specify how they wanted it to change, and they refused any form of discussion with the regime. The group of civilian professionals, who initially had de facto control, thought that the protest movement’s lack of a demand-forming process coupled with its confrontational tactic vis-à-vis the regime would lead to fruitless confrontation rather than political transformation. They came to shift their understanding of the conditions of a more democratic society, from a focus on a power struggle against the regime, to a more “open-minded” (munfatiḥ) way of conducting politics.
The Arab Spring and the form of dissent

Youth of March 24 and the movement in Hayy al-Tafaila are examples of protest movements that emerged during the Arab Spring in Jordan, a monarchy with about 6.2 million citizens plus many more Syrian and Iraqi refugees. Although the country saw a great upsurge in demonstrations and the emergence of long-lasting protest movements in the wake of the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011, the demonstrations were never as massive as those in these two countries, and they demanded the reform of the regime, not its fall.

A recurrent theme in accounts of the political movements that emerged in the Arab world in 2011 is that the unity that initially appeared on streets and squares never transformed into a viable coalition but instead dissolved, as what began as relatively peaceful demonstrations ended in confrontations. In Egypt, many testimonies reveal the fragmentation and even violent polarization of the protest movements that first mobilized against Mubarak. In Libya and Yemen, the fall of authoritarian leaders was followed by a fragmentation of society and the state apparatus. The Syrian political opposition never managed to present a clear alternative to the Asad regime. The internal polarization of Youth of March 24 and the protest movement in Hayy al-Tafaila, as well as their clashes with the regime, are thus parts of a more general pattern.

Scholars, journalists, and political activists have tried to understand why the Arab Spring seldom led to the “freedom” and “dignity” that most demonstrators called for but rather to a fragmentation of society and state apparatus. Some answers emphasize the absence of a national identity and an ensuing political organizing on the basis of loyalty to village, region, tribe and religion, a Sunni-Shia (or Saudi-Iranian) cold war played out through proxies in coun-

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3 See, for example, Ahdad Soueif’s biographic account of the Egyptian uprising she participated in: “The shabab [youth] had all come together in Tahrir. Through the eighteen days, Liberals, Progressives, Salafis, Ikhwan, Leftists, Gama3at, and those with no affiliation, just the desire for a better, cleaner, happier life, had rebelled together, broken bread together, talked to each other, slept in the same place, defended the Midan [square], and finally died together—and they had discovered the vastness of the common ground they shared and the myriad meeting points between them and how much work they needed—and wanted—to do together. Many had begun to change, and to note and welcome the changes in themselves and others as they found this ground. But Mubarak fell, and we all went home and the old leaders all started pulling their shabab back into line. Some couldn’t go back and broke away—became, as it were, homeless in Tahrir. Some tried to form new groups, and some tried to form coalitions between groups, and some stood alone and spoke truth. Everyone was madly busy. No one had control of anything” (Soueif 2014: 71–72). For the case of Libya, see for example Pelham 2012, 2015. For a review of discussions about the inability to create a coalition among the Arab protest movements capable of causing institutional reforms, see Sa’adah (2015). See also the special issue of the British Journal of Middle East Studies (December 2011): “The Dynamics of Opposition Cooperation in the Arab World.” The title of Aron Lund’s work on the Syrian political opposition, written in 2012, was Divided They Stand.
tries such as Syria and Yemen, or an absence of civic traditions and associations independent of authoritarian regimes. One difficulty with this question, however, is that it is based on a comparison between what actually happened and an alternative that never was realized, whether this alternative is understood as an Arab version of the democratic uprisings in Central Europe in 1989 or—more vaguely—as the freer and less corrupt societies which many demonstrators and observers initially thought that the Arab Spring could lead to. For instance, if we ask, “why did the Syrian political opposition fragment?” or “why did Egypt’s democratic transition break down?” the questions are dependent on an alternative that we know only through our counterfactual imagination: a somewhat united opposition capable of bringing about a less authoritarian political system.

This thesis examines alternatives that are more concrete than these imagined ones. Instead of imagining a united opposition and explaining why it was not realized, the thesis starts with the fact that the Jordanian opposition was deeply fragmented, but that there were attempts to counter this fragmentation by coordinating it and specifying its demands. Although an imagined unity cannot be studied empirically, attempts to create one can.

When we examine such attempts, it becomes clear that they fell apart due to something more general than ideological, ethnic or religious divisions within the Jordanian opposition. They were based on a way of conducting politics that was uncommon among the leadership of the Jordanian protest movements as well as among their opponents. With this, I mean that the attempts were based not only on a political strategy but on more implicit practices and values—on a certain way of forming demands, communicating with other political groups and interacting with the regime’s representatives—which we in this thesis refer to as a political “form” or “ethos,” depending on whether we emphasize the practical or the ethical aspects of this way of conducting politics. They were especially characterized by a concern with political ideas and programs in contrast to patronage and by an orientation toward political dialogue which some Jordanians involved in these attempts described as “infitāḥ” (openness) and contrasted with a more polemical form of politics.

In other words, this thesis is a study of the attempts, challenges, and difficulties in coordinating the Jordanian protest movements. It studies these issues

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4 There is so much excellent literature on these topics that any list of references becomes arbitrary. See, for instance, the journalistic writings of Ghaith Abdul-Ahad (especially 2013), Reva Bhatta, “Enshani,” George Friedman, Joshua Landis, Aron Lund and Anthony Shadid. On Syria, see also Abboud 2016. For an account of the Shia revival and its effects on Middle Eastern geopolitics, see Nasr 2006. The classic account of the sectarian basis of the Syrian regime is Dam 1996. For an analysis of the social and ethnic roots of Egyptian, Syrian and Iraqi military revolutions in the 1950s and 1960s, see Batatu 1984.

5 These two characteristics found expression in a variety of activities, “in the style of what [people] do, say, and write as well as the substance” (Connolly 2008: 4; see also Weber 1992: 16-17).
through a focus on political activists who were involved in attempts to organize these movements and who, because of their failure, lost the framework in which they had understood democratic change—as a conflict between the people and an authoritarian regime. The methodological idea is that if we want to understand something that is not realized—in this case a less authoritarian form of politics—it can be more useful to look at marginal attempts to establish such a politics than to look at the center of a political system and explain—through counterfactual arguments—why it is not more democratic. The thesis does so by examining the more unusual form of politics mentioned above, and shows how it was rooted in political practices and values as well as types of education and social life referred to in terms of infīṭāḥ. This allows us to see how democratization is a movement that is not only political but also cultural, and to see how it takes shape in political activism, education and social life.

The idea that the protest movements of the Arab Spring are related to currents that are not strictly political, is of course far from unique. Scholars and journalists have referred to youth unemployment, the rise of information technology, and economic liberalization as broader socioeconomic causes for the Arab Spring (e.g., Ansani and Daniele 2012; Sika 2012). Nevertheless, although we know a lot about the causes of the dissent, we know much less about the broader currents that shape the form this dissent takes. This issue is not raised in analyses that understand the Arab Spring’s protest movements, or those of a single country, through a lowest common denominator (e.g., the rise of information technology, repressive security forces, a politics of resistance [Tripp 2013, 2014], “dismal economic conditions and living standards, abject poverty, . . . a widespread belief that chronic systemic corruption by autocratic rulers and their families and associates turned the state into a family-based uzba (fiefdom)” [Gerges 2014: 9]). If we pose questions such as “Why did the Jordanian protest movements emerge?” or “Why were they relatively small?” the answers will naturally smooth over differences among the demonstrators. Nevertheless, even if the Jordanian protest movements demanded an end to corruption due to similar causes (e.g., corruption following the liberalization of the economy), they often had completely different ideas concerning solutions to corruption, and when they organized politically in response to corruption, they did so in very different ways. These differences are what the thesis puts into sharper relief. It explores the form rather than the rise of dissent.

The argument that the way a political movement conducts its politics is highly significant has often been made in the context of democratic transitions. Timothy Garton Ash (2009) characterizes the Central European revolutions of 1989 through the symbol of a “Round table,” indicating the political significance of a non-coercive way of solving disputes, while Robert Hefner (2000) argues that Indonesia’s Islamic democracy movement was grounded in a “public culture of democratic civility.” In The Third Wave, Samuel Huntington writes that one common characteristic of the transitions to democracy between 1974 and 1990 was that they “were made by the methods of democracy;
there was no other way. They were made through negotiations, compromises, and agreements” (1991: 164). More generally, research on the foundations of democratic governance in the 1990s “took a sociological or anthropological turn” (Hefner 2000: 5), shifting the focus from formal institutions, constitutions and elections to (borrowing from the title of one of the best known works of this literature [Putnam 1993]) “the civic traditions that make democracy work.”

Scholars have referred to an inverse form of such civic traditions when explaining how political authoritarianism in the Arab world has survived the fall of specific authoritarian regimes. Nathan Brown (2013) and Hugh Roberts (2013) discuss the deeper reasons for the breakdown of Egypt’s transition toward democracy after the fall of Mubarak in terms of authoritarian practices and notions deeply woven into the country’s political institutions and ideological legacy. “In Cairo in the mid-2000s,” Roberts writes, “it was a matter for ironic comment that the leaders of the most prominent legal parties were all mini-Mubaraks, aging autocrats like the [president] himself.” Joshua Landis (2015) also alludes to a form of authoritarianism that defines not only the regime but also the political opposition when he points out that the “successful [Syrian] rebels replicate the authoritarian structures they complained of under Assad. The major difference is that rebels offer authoritarianism with a distinct Sunni-religious stamp, rather than a ‘secular’ or ‘godless’ Alawi stamp.” A classic attempt to explain the persistence of authoritarianism with a more general political form, rather than the power structure of the central authority, is Abdellah Hammoudi’s study (1997) of the cultural foundations of Moroccan authoritarianism, which identifies a paradigm of authority that informs political relations as well as gender relations and the relationship between a master of a Sufi brotherhood and his disciples.

This thesis shares these studies’ focus on a broader political culture rather than the power structure of the central authority. Yet in contrast to them, it analyzes this broader background by refining a theme that emerged among a group of political activists (those previously mentioned) during the Arab Spring. The political activists in question did not all know each other personally nor were they members of the same formal group, but they had all been engaged in politics before the Arab Spring and wanted gradual political reforms, not a revolution. Those I met lived in Amman and had a middle-class background. None were Islamist or nationalist, the two most common ideologies among Jordanian demonstrators. Some answered “social democrat” or “social liberal” when asked, but they were not unified by a common ideology. Nevertheless, they all thought that the aspirations of the Jordanian protest movements could only be fulfilled through collective action (e.g., negotiations with the regime, demand-formation) based on a discussion in which people listened to each other and to arguments to a higher degree than was the case within the Jordanian protest movements’ leadership. Seeing how difficult it was to establish such a discussion, these activists began reflecting on the long-
term conditions for democratization and came to emphasize the importance of “openness” (infitāḥ)—of a more dialogical way of acting—for political life.

With the appearance of openness as a political theme, it became possible to see a congruence between projects at squares, schools and cafes, which all are referred to in terms of infitāḥ. In parts of the Jordanian education sector, infitāḥ already referred to new forms of teaching practices introduced after Jordan’s political liberalization 1989–1992. Moreover, the word can also refer to places. Certain cafes, university campuses and streets can have infitāḥ. It is not a coincidence that the same word refers to places, forms of education and ways of acting politically. Several political activists think that political infitāḥ draws on other forms of infitāḥ, and from the life stories of these activists it is clear that their encounter with munfatiḥ (the adjectival form of infitāḥ) places and pedagogy have been important for how they act politically. Moreover, a café owner who tries to create an internet café characterized by ethnic diversity and a teacher who tries to introduce more reasoning and less authoritarian teaching practices in the classroom might have something in common with a political activist who tries to create a diverse political association or a non-authoritarian interaction pattern within a protest movement, even if the teacher and café owner are not part of a political movement. Instead of formulating the links between the form of dissent and broader currents by applying concepts originally defined in another political context to the Jordanian case—such as civil society or neoliberalism—the thesis explores such links by starting with this congruence between politics, education and social life which appeared during the brief period of political freedom which the Arab Spring led to in Jordan.

Rethinking the Arab Spring

The differences in forms of dissent—as well as the internal conflicts among the protest movements—which I have described so far are an anomaly for analyses that understand the Arab Spring in terms of a conflict between an authoritarian regime and an oppositional movement. These analyses often assume that a key step for changing authoritarian rule is the breaking of the “barrier of fear.” In line with this, Youth of March 24 and the protest move-

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6 For the case of Jordan, see Fida Adely’s (2012a) analysis of the country’s “new labour movement,” which ends, “These are old problems that have become more acute. What has changed is that Jordanians are no longer silent—and labor activists have been at the forefront of breaking the barrier of fear.” “The barrier of fear” is also the title of Thananis Cambanis’s first chapter in his acclaimed book on the Egyptian uprising, which is “a primal story of human beings shattering the chains that bind them, and striking against a power that oppresses them” (2016: 3). “Arab Revolutions: Breaking Fear” is the title of a special issue (2014) of the International Journal of Communication, which deals with media and the Arab uprisings. In much of the
ment in Hayy al-Tafaila should be understood as oppositional movements confronting the regime with demands for political reforms. This interpretation is not completely without basis. Riot police dissolved Youth of March 24, and the protest movement in Hayy al-Tafaila was the first group in the quarter’s history that demonstrated for democratic reforms. Nevertheless, even from the short description I have given so far, it should be clear that this interpretation is insufficient. When we see that attempts to establish discussions among the oppositional leadership to clarify their demands fell apart time after time, their initial unity and the idea that the participants had demands in common come into question.⁷ In subsequent chapters, I will argue that much of the scholarly work that relies primarily on concepts such as “power” and “resistance” when analyzing protest movements such as those in Jordan, have overestimated the unity of the demonstrations and the idea that these are demonstrations against authoritarian rule.⁸ These analyses seldom perceive the more exclusionary notions which several of these movements held (for example, that hundreds of thousands Jordanians of Palestinian origin should lose their Jordanian citizenship) or that many of them did not challenge—but wanted to expand—a political system based on patronage.

literature on how information technology affected the Arab Spring, the underlying assumption is—like in other works (e.g., Filiu 2015; Goldstone 2011)—that authoritarian rule is changed by a power struggle, and the question is what role information technology has in that power struggle; e.g., by mobilizing demonstrators or bringing international pressure to bear on autocratic regimes (for some examples, see Aday et al: 2012, 2013; Allam 2014; Alexander and Aouragh 2014; Tudoroiu 2014; Tufekci and Wilson 2012). The significance of the power struggle between regime and opposition is often maintained even when the opposition is divided. In the case of Jordan, consider Curtis Ryan’s argument that attempts to create coalitions against authoritarianism have failed because of the regime’s policies and “divide and rule strategy, splitting opposition forces along the lines of the many fissures in Jordanian society—between Palestinians and Jordanians, leftists and Islamists, and even within the Islamist movement itself—and thus rendering difficult, if not impossible, any effective opposition coordination” (2011: 369). For examples of a similar reasoning regarding the Arab Spring as a whole, see Anne Sa’adah’s (2015) review article. With this literature in mind, it is significant that the political organizers I focus on claimed that the belief that democratic reforms were brought about through a struggle between the regime and people was part of the problem if the aim was to bring about democratic reforms.

⁷ In other words, what it would mean to resist authoritarianism or the Jordanian regime is not as obvious, in this case at least, as what it means for the peasants James Scott studied to resist “those who seek to extract labor, food, taxes, rents, and interest from them” (1987: xvi).
⁸ See the references in footnote 6.
⁹ I am far from the first to make this argument. Writing about the Egyptian uprising in 2011, Kjetil Fosshagen notices that “a variety of social groups have entered into ad hoc coalitions with different or vague agendas of democracy and “freedom,”” and Amira Mittermaier (2014: 62) makes similar points about the vagueness of these groups’ demand for “social justice” (although she thinks that this vagueness was a political strength). Hugh Roberts (2013), writing about the ideological background of the young revolutionaries organizing the Egyptian uprising, suggests that they “were bound to lose the initiative the moment their single, purely negative demand [that Mubarak should step down] was conceded.”
It is also difficult to frame Jordan’s Arab Spring as a struggle between the opposition and the regime because of the particularities of the country’s political situation. The Jordanian opposition had no clear common enemy. The royal Hashemite family is not associated with corruption in the way Syria’s, Tunisia’s and Egypt’s ruling families were. This is related to the structure of the Hashemite regime. Although the regime has been based on a patronage system since its foundation, this system has never been as narrow as those of the Syrian, Libyan (under Muammar Qaddafi) and Iraqi (under Saddam Hussein) regimes, which emerged out of military coups and where the rulers were heavily dependent on the support of a small region, a religious minority and/or a small number of tribes, which they themselves originated from (see Batatu 1981, 1984: 9-12). Jordan’s most important political institutions are not—unlike Saudi Arabia’s—staffed with members of the royal family,\(^\text{10}\) and Jordanian Hashemites do not have the prominent place in the country’s business elite which Mubarak’s family members had in Egypt. Taken together, this means that many Jordanians associated the monarch with the struggle against corruption rather than with corruption.

Another reason why the Jordanian demonstrators’ demands for political reforms were not as radical as those of the Syrian demonstrators is that the demands to some degree—and often by intent—sounded like the king’s own official reform vision. Some of this official vision goes back to the previous king. After several decades of martial law, Jordan held elections in 1989, and the regime allowed political parties in 1992. Some analysts (e.g., Milton-Edwards and Hinchcliffe 2001: 58; Ryan 2002: 15) view King Hussein’s restoration of parliamentary life and political parties as a “defensive democratization,” a response to the protests in 1989. That year, Jordan had been unable to meet repayments on its foreign debts and sought emergency funding from the IMF, which demanded an austerity program that included price increases that came into effect in April the same year, sparking riots in southern Jordan.

In 1999, on his deathbed, King Hussein appointed his oldest son, Abdullah, as crown prince.\(^\text{11}\) The new monarch had a grand strategy that included democratization (the official vision has Jordan as a constitutional monarchy in the future), maintenance of the country’s alliance with the United States as well as its peace treaty with Israel, and liberalization of the economy.\(^\text{12}\) These objectives often clashed but most public protests, like the Friday demonstrations in Amman, explicitly supported the king, although they usually challenged the government and prime minister.

\(^\text{10}\) The military is the important exception. But the Jordanian royal family is much smaller than Saudi Arabia’s, i.e., its members are too few to control the military by occupying key positions.

\(^\text{11}\) A position Hussein’s brother had held until then.

\(^\text{12}\) For a brief treatment of this grand strategy, see George (2005: 83-92). For examples of what it means in practice, see the leaked cables from the American embassy in Amman.
Furthermore, the Jordanian regime responded relatively peacefully to the rise of dissent. In 2011, security forces never shot bullets at any demonstration, and almost all political activists I met said that they could say and do things they never would have dared to during the previous year.

Thus, although most Jordanian protest movements imagined themselves in terms of antagonism and opposition to the government, this conception was never as obvious as it was among the Syrian and Egyptian movements. Jordanian demonstrators never encountered anything close to the brutality of the Syrian regime, and they were never, like the Egyptian demonstrators, united against the head of the regime. In the absence of a common enemy, the demonstrators’ internal differences came to the fore much earlier than in Syria and Egypt.

This leads to another common way to analyze the Arab Spring’s protest movements, which focuses on conflicts stemming from a diversity of ethnic, tribal or religious identities, and which thereby is much more attentive to conflicts within these movements. This line of thinking has been more common in countries with great ethnic and religious diversity, such as Syria, in contrast to relatively ethnically homogenous countries such as Egypt, where the religious minority is not in power. Jordan has a majority Sunni population, with only very small Christian and Shia populations, and its non-Arab population is too small to be of the great political significance of, say, the Kurdish population in Iraq or Syria. Nevertheless, several observers have pointed out the divisions between “Palestinian-Jordanians” (Jordanian nationals with Palestinian origin) and “Transjordanians” (Jordanian nationals with East Bank origin) as a major reason why Jordan did not have Tunisia’s and Egypt’s huge demonstrations demanding radical political change and why it is difficult for the Jordanian opposition to unite behind an election law (e.g., Ryan 2011; Tobin 2012). The demonstration in Amman on March 24 partly dissolved be-

13 See the references in footnote 4.
14 Although Circassian, Chechen, Armenian and Christian minorities live in Jordan, it is the most ethnically and religiously homogenous country in the Levant, at least among its nationals (thus excluding the large population of Syrian and Iraqi refugees without Jordanian citizenship). This population, however, has arrived only recently in Jordan and so far has little political influence. A section of the General Intelligence Department has been established to combat the spread of Shiism, and prominent figures in Jordan’s national security establishment have been concerned with “political Shiism.” For example, it was the Jordanian monarch who popularized the term the “Shia crescent,” the notion of an emerging geopolitical alliance of Shiite forces in the Middle East, backed by a resurgent Iran and underpinned by the Shia revival in Iraq since the fall of Saddam Hussein. Nevertheless, the Jordanian Shiite population is very small, and a Sunni-Shia dynamic is, compared to Iraq, Syria and Bahrain, unimportant in domestic politics (even though a large population of Iraqi Shia have emigrated to Jordan since 2003).
15 This division stems from the Arab-Israeli wars, after which the Palestinians who fled to Jordan received Jordanian citizenship and did not become the stateless people they remained in most other countries in the Arab world. Today, Palestinian-Jordanians amount to more than 50
cause of the contentious demand for “a parliamentary system on a demographic basis,” which would give Palestinian-Jordanians much more political power than they currently have. Moreover, one of the most common ideologies among demonstrators of Jordan’s Arab Spring—what I call “Transjordanian nationalism”—was based on an identity that did not consider Palestinian-Jordanians as true Jordanian citizens. These nationalists claimed that “Jordanians” in recent history had begun losing what was due to them to “Palestinians” and that the Jordanian regime had let this happen.¹⁶

Nevertheless, some limitations of this line of thought should be evident from my initial description. If conflicts between opposition and regime or within the opposition are analyzed in terms of a conflict stemming from ethnic, tribal or religious identities, the counterfactual implication is that absence of conflict derives from a common identity. The protest group in Hayy al-Tafaila, however, was ethnically homogenous; its members came from the same area in Jordan (al-Tafila), and many were members of the same tribes. Moreover, these are some of the tribes that dominate Jordan’s state apparatus, where many of the protest movement’s members had worked before retirement. Still, the movement’s development was identical to that of many other protest movements during the Arab Spring: initial unity behind political demands, subsequent internal polarization, and radical but at the same time vague demands. In order to understand this development, we must consider the way of conducting politics that was predominant among the protest movement’s leadership—and the ethos that underlay it.

The public sphere and the roundabout

By studying the significance of how political activists deliberate, form demands, and relate to each other and to the regime, the thesis presents a reflection on collective action that does not focus on the difficulties of reconciling cooperation with the rational pursuit of self-interest—like the forms of political science that draw on game theory (e.g., Putnam 1993: 163-176; Ostrom 1990)—but rather on the difficulties of forming policies and settling disputes through the medium of talk.

Among contemporary philosophers, Jürgen Habermas has most famously developed the notion that the way people listen, argue and debate have great

¹⁶ Their demands usually included restrictions on the executive power and that “Palestinians” and the queen (who is of Palestinian origin) should have a more restricted role in the country’s political life.
consequences for collective life. His seminal work, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989), shows how a specific form of publicness emerged in Western Europe during the 18th century, originating in salons and coffee shops and through the circulation of journals and newspapers. Habermas describes the social origins, self-understanding, communicative ideal and historical development of this bourgeois public sphere, and its significance as a social condition for the development of democracy. Scholars have searched for publics in the Middle East with similar opinions and will-forming functions (e.g., Salvatore and Eickelman 2006; Shami 2009). Lisa Wedeen, for instance, goes as far as suggesting that the public sphere activities of Yemeni “qāṭ chews” are “analogous to Habermas’s seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European salons and coffeehouses in the sense that they work to produce important forms of political engagement and critical debate” (2007: 60).17

Like the bourgeois public sphere, the Arab roundabouts (of which the most famous had squares in the middle) evoke a relationship between collective action and speech, as “maidan” in Ukraine and the Greek word “agora” in English do, which refer “not just [to] a marketplace [or square] where people happen to meet, but a place where they deliberately meet, precisely in order to deliberate, to speak, and to create a political society” (Snyder 2014).

But instead of taking successful forms of deliberation as the starting point in examining the roundabout discussions, this thesis describes the difficulties of establishing discussions, both between and within protest groups, and between protest groups and the regime. An understanding of these difficulties will, I suggest, contribute to our understanding of the political fragmentation which the Arab Spring often led to. Political activists who tried but failed to bring about such discussions came, as a result, to shift their understanding of the conditions of a more democratic society, from a focus on a power struggle against the regime, to a focus on an “open-minded” (*munfatiḥ*) form of political engagement. Their primary political experience was thus not what, according to Mikael Karlström, “is most common to the various contexts in which the concept [civil society] emerged . . .”; that is, “a sense of an overempowered and excessively penetrative state” (1999: 104-105). What was common in the various contexts in which the concept *infitāḥ* emerged was rather a sense that there was an excessively polemical way of acting politically, among supporters of as well as opponents to the regime, which created “unnecessary” conflicts and made civic cooperation difficult.

This also means that *infitāḥ* emerged as a theme when faith in public discourse and the power of arguments was shattered. The loss of this faith was, in the political as well as educational contexts I write about, affiliated with an

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17 “Qat is a leafy stimulant drug that produces effects similar to caffeine. It is chewed in Yemen in the context of structured conversations occurring daily in public or semipublic places” (Wedeen 2007: 63).
emphasis on a less argumentative rhetoric and on discussions taking places in
“bubbles” protected from the outside, rather than in public.

In other words, the relation between discussion and democratic culture thus
implied differs from the notion of the liberal public sphere. According to what
Michael Warner calls, “the dominant ideology of the public sphere,” demo-
cratic culture is motored by a rational discourse manifested in a broad range
of contexts—from common conversation to parliamentary forensics—where
the rules are the same. “One proceeds by airing different views in the interest
of understanding, making assumptions explicit, and then reaching some deci-
sion” (2002: 143). It is a discourse structured by an idea of publicness and the
rational argument as the sole arbitrator.

On the other hand, intellectual traditions that claim that there is a higher
form of knowledge which is unavailable for most people—like the Islamic
tradition of the ulama or the ancient philosophical tradition—had much less
faith in public discourse and the power of persuasion by truthful arguments,
and have therefore emphasized the role of a more esoteric way of writing and
a less argumentative rhetoric. The best regime which Plato describes in The
Republic has as its foundation a “noble lie,”18 and many ulama accepted using
fabricated hadiths if they were rhetorically powerful. To dissuade people from
a sin like usury, for instance, “what could shame them into cringing reconsid-
eration more than the Prophet of God himself equating the least collection of
interest with mounting one’s own mother” (Brown 2014: 230), even if the
Prophet had never actually said this? “These Noble Lies,” Jonathan Brown
(ibid: 222) writes, “require more than just a particular conception of truth and
reality for justification. They are inseparable from a vision of society that as-
sumes the leadership of an elite possessed of superior wisdom and authority.”

The idea of the public sphere is based on more democratic notions. Never-
theless, if we treat these notions not as abstract ideas about how society should
be but as values that people have, we see that the above-mentioned themes in
pre-Enlightenment political philosophy (ancient as well as Arabic) can still
emerge from these democratic notions. If people are uninterested in, or even
detest, these democratic notions, democracy activists can hardly legitimize
their ideals by referring to the “will of the people.” Even if they do not go as
far as perceiving themselves as an elite possessed of superior wisdom and au-
thority, the coincidence between reasoning and political society—which the
notions of the agora and public sphere are based on—is not evident. It was
because of this discrepancy that an emphasis emerged among my informants
on a less argumentative rhetoric and on discussions taking place in “bubbles”
rather than in public.

18 Its citizens are to be convinced that their education and rearing happened underneath the
earth, which they “must plan for and defend, . . . if anyone attacks, and they must think of the
other citizens as brothers and born of the earth” (1894: 414e). The actual political society—
which always is artificial—is ascribed to nature through an act of deception.
This point should be distinguished from the often-made observation (e.g., Bourdieu 2000; Frazer 1992) that publics do not in fact conform to their own ideals of an inclusive and rational discussion. Several anthropologists who, like me, take an ethnographic starting point among people who consciously seek to create more open forms of political culture, have analyzed how political activists deal with modes of exclusion based on race and class (e.g., Graeber 2009; Juris et al. 2012; Maple 2015: 148-173). A reflexivity that makes us aware of these types of exclusions has little appeal, according to Pierre Bourdieu (1992: 72), because it discovers the importance of things that are generic, social conditions that are “shared, banal, commonplace.”

In contrast, the above-mentioned difficulties with ideals of “dialogue” or “being open to other perspectives” stem from the vulnerabilities of these ideals rather than the social conditions that structure what is thought and said. The thesis examines situations in which this vulnerability comes to the fore; situations in which dialogue turns out to be impotent or where it is existentially difficult to be open to another perspective; or when doing so threatens the ideals themselves. I put the rhetorical tricks, exclusions and repressions that emerge out of these situations into sharper relief and show how they are intimately connected with ideals of dialogue and openness, even if they might appear to be opposites of these ideals. Even though these situations are rare, I suggest that they throw light on more ordinary situations, precisely because they coincide with an increased self-reflexivity and a more searching form of reflection.

Studying infīṭāḥ

As mentioned, infīṭāḥ emerged as a theme in relation to difficulties in bringing about cooperation among political groups during Jordan’s Arab Spring. The notion that civic cooperation is a foundation for democratic governance has a long tradition in political research. In Democracy in America, for example, Alexis de Tocqueville (2000 [1840]) famously argued that effective and stable democratic institutions are dependent on habits and values developed by participation in civic associations. With the help of concepts such as “public sphere,” “social capital” (Putnam 1993), “civic culture” (Almond and Verba 1963) and “civil society” (e.g., Norton 1995-96), more contemporary scholars have argued that political life is grounded in everyday forms of communication and social life, and that democracy therefore has foundations that cannot be reduced to elections, constitutions or other formal institutions.

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19 “Psychoanalytic reflexivity is better tolerated and received because, if the mechanisms it makes us discover are universal, they are also tied to a unique history: the relation to the father is always a relation to a singular father in a singular history. . . . In the table of intellectual values, there is nothing worse than the common and average” (1992: 72).
Instead of beginning with such ideal types, this study refines an emic concept—*infitāḥ*—that emerges in Jordanian political and social life. In the reliance on a concept that emerges out of fieldwork rather than one developed ahistorically or within a European historical context, my way of theorizing is akin to the tradition of anthropology that used a theoretical vocabulary “full of peculiar-sounding terms like ‘joking partners’ or ‘relations of avoidance’ or outright borrowings from non-European languages: shamanism, mana, totem, and taboo” (Graeber 2007: 13-16, 45). Rather than using the fieldwork experience to criticize abstract and ahistorical usages of ideal types, for example to argue that a concept, such as civil society, “must be more firmly tethered to its sociological and cross-cultural moorings” (Hefner 1998: 7), I use it to formulate the study’s most important concept.

I do this for two reasons. First, *infitāḥ* refers to other practices than the concepts mentioned above refer to. The English word my often-young informants translate *infitāḥ* (or *munfatiḥ*, the adjective) with is “open-minded.” *Infitāḥ*, however, has a less mentalistic meaning than the translation suggests.

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20 Many concepts which now are called “ideal types” were formulated through a specific experience and by people participating in, rather than merely observing, political life. It is Kant, who in Habermas’s work presents the “fully developed” theory of the public sphere, of which he of course was a participant observer. “The recent revival of the concept of civil society in Europe,” John and Jean Comarroff wrote in 1999, “was propelled, in the first instance by anticommunist dissidents in the East, which lacked it but wanted it” (1999: vii). In countries such as Poland and Czechoslovakia, the distinction between the Party-state and a united (civil) society did not rely on technical terms. Solidarity members had in 1980 adopted a simple terminology “to describe the essential conflict in Poland since 1945: it was, they said, a struggle between ‘the society’ (*spoleczéntswo*) and ‘the power’ (*wladza*)” (Garton Ash 1985: 9). My analytical concern with a concept (*infitāḥ*) and political theme that are a concern also of people participating in political life is not a novel way to theorize. (For a discussion on the value that the study of politics begins in, and refines, the understanding and concepts we use as citizens, rather than in more technical scientific concepts, see Strauss 1968. See also the discussion on grasping the logic of activist practice in Juris 2007.)

21 In a manifesto for a renewal of anthropological theorization, Giovanni da Col and David Graeber make an argument for an anthropology that develops its concepts from the fieldwork experience and thereby return to an older form of theorization: “It is actually hard to think of any major European thinker of the first half of the twentieth century who didn’t feel the need to come to terms with anthropological concepts of one sort or another. Concepts lifted directly from ethnographic work—words like . . . potlatch, taboo—or those that had emerged from anthropological analysis—like magical thinking, divine kingship, kinship systems, the gift, sacrificial ideologies or cosmogenic myths—were heated topics of intellectual debate; concepts that everyone, philosophers included, had to take seriously. Nowadays the situation is reversed. Anthropologists take their concepts not from ethnography but largely from European philosophy.” (2011: x).

22 “*Infitāḥ*” (in the meaning “opening”) was also the name of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat’s program of economic liberalization, initiated in the early 1970s. It encouraged both foreign and domestic investment in the private sector and represented a marked departure from the state-centered framework of Gamel Abdel Nasser’s economic policies (Weinbaum 1985). The program was accompanied by a transformation of Egypt’s geopolitical alignment: in the 1970s the
As I have mentioned, it refers not only to a person taking in different thoughts and perspectives rather than having his or her mind closed but also to a space or sphere for doing so. A political system, an educational philosophy or an urban neighborhood can have infitāḥ, and the concept may refer to a certain kind of family relationship (in contrast to a more patriarchal family), where decisions are based on reasoning between family members. Thus, in contrast to “civil society,” infitāḥ does not refer to a network of voluntary associations that stand between the household and the state, but rather to practices across these spheres.

It is worth emphasizing the words “can” and “may” in the paragraph above. Infītāḥ is used in a range of different ways, and do not always refer to the same practices. For instance, some people use the word to refer to a Western lifestyle—including a way of moving, dressing and talking which in some sectors of the Jordanian economy functions as cultural capital—while others use it to refer to practices which they think are a precondition for a more pluralistic political life. Places associated with infitāḥ are in general located in the wealthier part of cities, which is one reason why some people view infitāḥ as a concept of freedom saturated with class biases.

Although I will pay some attention to the concept’s divergent meanings, I am not interested in the meaning of infitāḥ in a comprehensive sense, or for its own sake, but for what it can say about the foundations for political cooperation based on democratic means such as negotiations, agreements and compromises. Political activists talked about “a lack of infitāḥ” when they perceived a way of conducting politics—or an ethos—that made this kind of cooperation more difficult. Thus, they used the concept to reflect on the foundations for democratic cooperation, and this is also the theoretical question I am interested in. Infītāḥ is a means for studying it; it is not my object of study. The thesis is thus not, like Clifford Geertz’s (1973: 412-453) interpretation of the Balinese cock fight, oriented toward elucidating a distinct cultural phenomenon with a homogenous meaning. Specific uses of infitāḥ, and not necessarily the most common ones, interest me most.

Since I have a selective interest in infitāḥ, why do I not replace the emic concept with an ideal type? This objection is strengthened by the fact that the forms of infitāḥ the study focuses on have family resemblances with what political theorists (e.g., Almond and Verba 1963; Putnam 1993: 83-120) have described as a “civic culture” or “civic community.”

This leads to my second reason for using this emic concept. Early on in my fieldwork, I realized that infitāḥ was a crucial concept for my research, but several years later, I still have not been able to grasp exactly what “it” is. It is country signed a peace treaty with Israel, and the United States replaced the USSR as the dominant superpower. In Middle Eastern Studies, I have never seen the word infitāḥ used outside the context of economic liberalization. Among my informants, economic liberalization was associated with the word “liberal” (lībirālī) rather than infitāḥ.
an elusive concept also for my key informants. “You know what infitāḥ is, but it is difficult to explain” was a type of explanation I never received in relation to concepts such as dialogue, Western (gharbī) or liberal (lībirālī). This elusiveness leads to an inexhaustibility: in many different situations, I could ask myself and my informants “what is infitāḥ?” and be a bit surprised by the answer. In other words, infitāḥ was a philosophically and ethnographically stimulating concept because it recurrently put me in a state of uncertainty and questioning, and because it allowed me to find unexpected connections. In this sense, infitāḥ has been useful methodologically, as a way of thinking and of posing problems, in a way that the more precise and preconstructed concepts social scientists often rely on (e.g., social capital) could hardly do.23

This method is dependent on the ethnographic approach, with its tradition of teasing out the half-acknowledged logic and informal knowledge underlying a practice (see Razsa 2015: 210; cf. Graeber 2009: 287-358) instead of, like most work on political culture in political science, focusing on attitudes or values which might be gathered in questionnaires.24 This method allows for a gradual elucidation of “openness” embodied in a broad range of habits and sentiments, including certain forms of flirting at a public square, eye-contact in a political discussion and epistemology in school textbooks.25 It is at this concrete level that I study how the Jordanian protest movements were shaped by currents that are not strictly political.

23 Another way to put it is that infitāḥ is a useful concept only because it lacks the precision of an ideal type. See, by way of comparison, Jane Guyer’s comment on Marcel Mauss’s method, “This openness about ungraspable evocations and overlapping meanings in language is a strength, I believe, since it invites engagement with a text as well as instruction by it, even though it can make quite frustrating any philosophical yearning toward absolute precision” (2016: 15). In its reliance on an imprecise concept, my study is more akin to Marcel Mauss’s discussion of reciprocity than Marshall Sahlins’s (1972: 185-275) and to Max Weber’s discussion of the spirit of capitalism rather than his discussion of bureaucracy as an ideal type; cf. “If we try to determine the object, the analysis and historical explanation of which we are attempting, it cannot be in the form of a conceptual definition, but at least in the beginning only a provisional description of what is here meant by the spirit of capitalism” (1992: 14).

24 Political scientists who are interested in how culture shapes political life often understand culture as subjective values or worldviews (e.g., Almond and Verba 1963; Huntington 2000; Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Schwedler 2006: 118-120), sometimes objecting to the broader anthropological understanding of culture from the standpoint of a science that provides causal explanations; “if culture includes everything, it explains nothing” (Huntington 2000: xv). But the broader anthropological understanding of culture has always had a methodological aspect. By understanding culture in purely “subjective terms,” a scholar cannot address the human relationship, institutions and symbols through which values are expressed.

25 Cf. “Cultural acts, the construction, apprehension, and utilization of symbolic forms, are social events like any other; they are as public as marriage and as observable as agriculture” (Geertz 2000: 91).
Fieldwork

This study is based on fieldwork, between March 2011 and January 2012 and between May and July 2014, at Jordanian schools, among organizers of the protest movements of its Arab Spring, and at places associated with infitāḥ, such as the country’s first internet café. I began fieldwork with an interest in democracy and political culture through a focus on these three different sites.

I started the study of the education sector by interviewing school principals, academics and officials at the Ministry of Education and at other educational institutions in Jordan, and I came to focus on two issues that emerged from these interviews. First, the Ministry of Education had an official project aiming to spread what its officials referred to as “a democratic culture” and infitāḥ. I wanted to see how this project was carried out in practice, and I got a letter of approval from the ministry allowing me to do fieldwork at three schools, two in Amman and one in Zarqa. It was a middle-level official—a religiously dressed woman in her 40s—who recommended these schools, considered to be “good schools,” and they were probably more influenced by the trend I had set out to study than an average school.

Second, it was after interviewing a principal at an expensive private school, who distinguished his school’s educational culture from the rote learning and core ideas of the textbooks of the national education system, a system he himself had been educated by, that I decided to explore this criticism. What interested me was how radical this criticism was and that it was about fundamental educational ideas such as what knowledge is, what role the Qur’ān should have in the teaching of the humanities, and how examinations should be designed. This suggested that there were radically different visions about what Jordanian education should look like, and I wanted to explore this difference, which turned out to be significant also within power struggles about controlling teacher training and textbook production at the Ministry of Education.

I did fieldwork at the private school where this principal worked and at one of the public schools mentioned above during one semester, spending most of my time at the private school. I also attended classes and interviewed educators at two other public schools, a Muslim Brotherhood-run private school, one more private school, and a university, to gain a more comparative perspective than fieldwork at just one or two schools would offer. After understanding that there was a group of educators and politicians who, like the principal at the private school mentioned above, criticized the core ideas of the textbooks in use for not being “open-minded” (munfatiḥ), I read and discussed these textbooks with my former private tutor in Arabic (who belonged to that group), especially focusing on chapters they found problematic. I also did formal interviews with some leading actors in the education sector, such as two former Ministers of Education and a former Secretary General of the Muslim Brotherhood’s political party, and with—as mentioned—school principals.
and officials at the Ministry of Education and at other educational institutions in Jordan.

My access to these schools and interviews was facilitated by a Jordanian researcher and former employee at the Swedish embassy who agreed to work with me for this project. She helped to identify which people I should talk to and accompanied me to most formal interviews, during which she had a great ability to present my research project in a way that became well-received among people of the most various backgrounds and made them willing to help me.

My second field site was a special part of the city. After a stay in Amman in 2007, I was already familiar with a middle-class discourse about *infitāḥ* and its significance for politics, a discourse I had found no equivalent for when living in Damascus. This kind of *infitāḥ* referred to a new lifestyle that for example was characterized by individual freedom, involvement in a global consumption culture, and acceptance of girls and boys spending time together. I had previously studied Palestinian identity in Jordan and saw how this change of lifestyle weakened the idea of Palestine as a future home, at least among the young Palestinian-Jordanians most influenced by it. I now wanted to explore other political implications of this lifestyle change and decided to live with a person working at a place associated with *infitāḥ*—Jordan’s first internet café. Where I lived was also near a place with similar associations, Rainbow Street, which is full of restaurants, cafes and young flaneurs. I spent evenings hanging out with these young flaneurs, seeking to understand the street’s social life.

I began my study of the Jordanian protest movements, which took up most of my time, with the demonstration on March 24 and worked outwards, interviewing the people who had organized it. The demonstration was the most ambitious attempt in many decades to force the Jordanian regime into democratic reforms. Like for the anthropologists of the Manchester school, the atypicality of the event was my primary interest, but not because it expressed conflict and crisis or threw into relief social and political tensions at the heart of everyday life (see Kapferer 2015: 1-2), but because its collapse might reveal something about the resilience of authoritarianism. I thus began fieldwork in a very unusual event, not in search of its historical context nor any radical change (in fact I learned early on that it changed very little), but because I thought that this unusual attempt to initiate a democratic transition might reveal the more ordinary in a different light.26

The demonstration began a few days after I arrived in Jordan. I did not want to do anything politically sensitive during my first time in the country, so I followed the events through news reporting. The first people I encountered

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26 On the distinction between a focus on the context and background of a revolution and on a revolution itself, see Armbrust 2013: 842-843. For a discussion of events that involve radical change, see Robbins 2010.
who had participated in the events were a group of young men who were driving around the street close to where I lived, playing loud music and waving Jordanian flags, celebrating that they had dispelled the demonstration.

I initially understood the events through categories that came naturally to many people who watched them. Peaceful demonstrators demanded political reforms and people threw stones at them, and the police finally dispelled the demonstration with the help of water cannons and batons. When I interviewed the leaders of the demonstration, on the other hand, I soon encountered mutual distrust between the participating groups, especially between Islamists and secular groups, and between groups dominated by Palestinian-Jordanians and Transjordanians. Thus, those watching the demonstration would simply see a conflict between an authoritarian regime and an oppositional movement. On the other hand, interviews with the demonstration’s leaders reveal ideological and ethnic conflicts within the opposition itself.

My theoretical results stem from a change in my hermeneutic approach to this kind of demonstration: a shift from watching a dramatic event and interviewing its leaders to discuss with a more marginal group of leaders the demonstration’s organizational mistakes and how it should have been structured. Their alternative was not simply a condemnation based on a normative standard external to that of those organizing the demonstration. It was rather addressed to the protest movements’ leadership and based, to a large extent, on what these organizers wanted to achieve. For example, although all demonstrating groups wanted to avoid a clash with the regime on March 24-25, this marginal group pointed out, correctly I will show, that a clash was very likely, given how the leadership had structured their internal decision-making process and their back-channels with the regime. Most of my results arise from an engagement with a political thinking which, like this, is neither purely “descriptive” nor purely “normative.” In this example, it taught me something

27 There was no room for this kind of political thinking in the classical formulation of political anthropology, which distinguished itself from the normative elements of political philosophy. For example, in the introduction to African Political Systems (1940), Meyer Fortes and Edward Evans-Pritchard write that, “In stating our own views we have found it best to avoid reference to the writings of political philosophers, and in doing so we feel sure that we have the support of our contributors. We have not found that the theories of political philosophers have helped us to understand the societies we have studied and we consider them of little scientific value; for their conclusions are seldom formulated in terms of observed behaviour or capable of being tested by this criterion. Political philosophy has chiefly concerned itself with how men ought to live and what form of government they ought to have, rather than with what are their political habits and institutions.” Several contemporary ethnographers have, on the other hand, emphasized the value of a more politically and morally engaged form of political anthropology, for example as a precondition of access to political activists’ daily life (e.g., Razsa 2015) or as a way to improve our understanding of a community’s social life by participating in it more fully (e.g., Scheper-Hughes 1995: 411). Nancy Scheper-Hughes, for example, arguing for a more politically and morally committed anthropology, notices the following about her fieldwork experience in a Brazilian favela: “But the more my companheiras gently but firmly pulled me
about the demonstration’s violent dissolution that I could not have learnt by simply watching it or by speaking with more representative organizers.

The change in my understanding of Jordan’s Arab Spring was thus affiliated with a change in how I studied it. I had begun the study by interviewing leaders of Jordan’s protest movements and political parties, attending demonstrations and political meetings, and hanging out with some youth leftists in Amman and the organizers of a well-known protest movement in a town south of Amman (I went there on some weekends, sleeping over in the house of its leader). Although this experience was indispensable for becoming familiar with Jordan’s political landscape and the social origins of the protest movements, I did not learn much beyond what a knowledgeable observer already knows, and I gradually shifted my focus to the more marginal form of politics that I first encountered as a specific criticism against the planning and organization of the March 24 demonstration.

One informant was crucial in this shift. In the last five months of my fieldwork, I worked with a political activist involved in organizing Jordan’s political movements, a young man from an influential Transjordanian tribe. I first contacted him because he was writing a paper about Youth of March 24 for a politically-oriented NGO, and I became interested in working with him after listening to his analysis of the sit-in, which I found to be much sharper than anything else I had read or heard during my interviews. After a while, he agreed, after which we had interviews, hung out with activists, discussed politics and attended political meetings together. He became an important entry point to the marginal political activism I write about—both as an interpreter of it, and as someone who provided me with access to a network of political activists I would not have found out about on my own.

It was not until the very end of my fieldwork that I began realizing the key role of *infitāḥ* in this activism. I had pursued three rather separate studies—of the education sector, popular culture and political activism—and although I came to see connections between the popular culture and schools I was studying, I was not sure whether this had any clear relation to political activism. The breakthrough happened when I had identified the recurrence of a concept of *infitāḥ* among the educators and at the urban places I was studying, and asked my main political informant, “*Is infitāḥ important for politics?*” and got the answer, “It is the most important thing!” I initially had no idea what he (and other activists I later talked to, who expressed similar ideas) meant by this, but it was clear that it was not just an empty expression but referred to

away from the ‘private’ world of the wretched huts of the shantytown, where I felt most comfortable, and toward the ‘public’ world of the municipio of Bom Jesus da Mata, into the marketplace, the mayor's office and the judge's chambers, the police station and the public morgue, the mills and the rural union meetings, the more my understandings of the community were enriched and my theoretical horizons were expanded” (Ibid). Although some of these ideas apply also to my own fieldwork experience, I never felt as though I were a participant in my informants’ political projects in such a practical sense.
something more concrete, which I began exploring. Thus, except within the
study of popular culture, I did not set up to follow the metaphor (infitāḥ) (Mar-
cus 1995: 108-109) but rather began in different places and in all of them
found a similar theme. Only after discovering this coincidence did I begin to
explore the connections between these places more systematically.

I faced no great obstacles during my fieldwork among political activists.
Nevertheless, I had wanted to examine the role of Jordan’s largest political
party during the Arab Spring, which is closely connected the Muslim Broth-
erhood—mostly to gain a richer comparative perspective on the activism I was
focusing on. I interviewed some of its senior and youth leaders, several of
whom (especially the latter) attended events I was studying, but I never spent
time with its leaders or attended its internal meetings, mainly because of time
limits.28

I was initially worried about problems with the security services if I started
contacting political activists. Therefore, I did not contact these activists until
I had interviewed very senior officials at the Ministry of Education, hoping to
have established the fact that I was a researcher. Furthermore, after I began
working with a political activist from an influential Transjordanian tribe, offi-
cials at the intelligence services considered me his guest. They came to him—
not me—with questions about my activities in the country, and I was in prac-
tice protected by the symbolic capital of his tribe and family.

My background as a researcher from Sweden facilitated my access to Jor-
dan’s protest movements. The advantage can be illustrated by comparing the
legitimacy of democracy-funding—directed at Jordanian political parties and
movements—from different Western countries. A political activity funded by
a country like Sweden does not have the enormous legitimacy problem that
American, British, French and Danish funding has, which often makes their
democracy-promoting programs ineffective. The United States, for example,
has programs to expose young “promising” Jordanian political activists to the
workings of political parties in the United States. I have met several political
activists who aspire to see how a political party in a democracy works—to do
so in the United States, however, carries the risk of ruining their political rep-
utation (studies at an American university, on the other hand, is not a prob-
lem). Sweden’s legitimacy compared to that of the United States and countries
that have a colonial history in the region may not be that surprising, but small
European countries such as Sweden and the Netherlands had a higher degree

28 For a discussion of why the Muslim Brotherhood’s political party has become more “moder-
ate” (defined as a “movement from a relatively closed and rigid worldview to one more open
and tolerant of alternative perspectives”) since Jordan’s political liberalization, see Schwedler
2006.
of legitimacy among Jordan’s protest movements than a country like Germany, because greater powers are presumed to engage in policies driven by geopolitical interests.\footnote{The advantages of smaller European countries are also illustrated by the case of a Jordanian democracy activist I met who got admitted to a “political leadership” program in the United States. While there, he took every opportunity to meet senior American officials and politicians and posted photos of these meetings on his Facebook page. I first thought that this was a symptom of a search for recognition, but later learned that there was a political strategy behind it: “It is for the mukhābarāt (the intelligence services)” he told me. When they “see me in photos with these people (e.g., a former secretary of state),” he reasoned, they will not dare to “do something against me” (e.g., put him in prison, stop his political activities), because they will fear that he has very prominent political connections. This tactic backfired, however. After having established an NGO in Jordan and working with education programs for the country’s political parties for almost a year, he learned from a relative that a section within the mukhābarāt saw him as a problem and had been interfering with his work for a long time. They could not understand his intentions and was suspicious of his American support. He started to think that, despite Jordan’s alliance with the United States, an important part of the regime was suspicious of the country’s ambitious political intentions in the Middle East, and he had gotten associated with Americans that were too influential, creating the impression that he was involved in some kind of American strategy for the country. He sought to “purify” his association with the great power by finding work in a small European country, such as Norway or the Netherlands. Thus, not only in relation to the opposition but also to the mukhābarāt, there are advantages to be associated with countries that are perceived as being without great political ambitions in the region.}

Furthermore, the suspicion among the Jordanian opposition about the true agenda of foreign organizations which claim to be interested in democracy does not apply equally to researchers. This is illustrated by a conversation I had with my main informant, two days after a large conference for the Jordanian protest movements and political parties. I recalled a talk I had had with a Swedish embassy employee who attended the conference and remarked that he did not understand what was going on there.

\textbf{My informant} (Samir): Even if he wants to know nobody would tell him.
\textbf{Arvid:} Why?
\textbf{Samir:} He works at an embassy. People in the protest movements are suspicious of him.
\textbf{Arvid:} But everyone helps me a lot. And you explain a lot to me.
\textbf{Samir:} Because you do it for knowledge. You write your dissertation.

My access to political activists like this informant was also facilitated by the way I approached Jordan’s Arab Spring. He claimed that he preferred to work with me rather than the other researchers he met, because I, unlike them, “did not come with a specific idea to test.”

This more open approach is a common anthropological method and can be stated more generally. I arrived in Jordan in March 2011, thus beginning my fieldwork precisely when an unusual period began, full of attempts to organize protest movements and of opportunities for activists and observers to discover
and reflect on political forms that Jordanians, when they had freedom and enthusiasm, created at squares, streets and political meetings. Analyzing the Jordanian protest movements, I began with surprises generated during this period, rather than in a general analysis or history of the Jordanian regime or political opposition in which an event such as the March 24 sit-in only is a case in a broader argument. This is the case, for instance, in Marc Lynch’s *The Arab Uprising*, a book that “attempts to put all of these tumultuous events in perspective. It begins by returning to history, since we cannot understand the current uprising without looking at those that have come before” (2012: 27). The idea is that “what we have seen in the first year of the uprisings . . . are only the very earliest manifestations of a deeper transformation” (Ibid: 5).

It is of course difficult to say something intelligible about the Jordanian protest movements without knowing the country’s political history and larger structural trends, such as changes in the social contract between the Hashemite regime and the Transjordanian tribes and the liberalization of the Jordanian economy during the current king. Nevertheless, treating events only as manifestations of a larger process means there is little room to be surprised by a given event and ask questions that we could not pose was it not for that surprise (cf. Lindquist 2009: 6-8). An “openness to the unpredictable”—often listed as one of the general strengths of anthropological-style ethnography (e.g., Graeber 2007: 14-16; Strathern 2000: 287)—has thus been a crucial part of my method.

The informants in all my field sites had two general features in common. First, most were men. Almost no women were involved in the leadership of the Jordanian protest movements. When I visited the organizers of the protest movement in Dhiban (Chapter 2), their wives always remained in other rooms while I was there, so I had no opportunity to socialize with them. I spent time with some young female political activists in Amman and Salt, but none of them were involved at the higher level of decision-making, which this study focuses on.

I first became interested in “lifestyle-*infīṭāḥ*” when spending time with a middle-class female friend in 2007, whose brother had introduced me to her family. This gave us a license to meet often and on our own, which would otherwise have been difficult. During my fieldwork at a private school, most of my informants were women. Jordanian public high schools are sex segregated, and although I attended classes at both a girls’ and a boys’ school, the latter was much easier for me. I could come and go as I liked, and although my presence at the girls’ school provided the administration with great pride, it also burdened them (even though they never told me so), since someone from the administration always accompanied me to the classes I attended or to the groups of students I met.

The second common denominator pertaining to my informants was that I always found it most productive to work with people who were outsiders to, but at the same time interacted with, the phenomena that concerned me. For
example, when studying the Jordanian protest movements, I found it useful to work with political actors who did not identify with the two ideologies that were dominant among the demonstrators—Islamism and “Transjordanian nationalism”—but who still interacted with their adherents. When studying a street known for having infitāḥ, I found it useful to spend time with people who were raised at places with a social life different from that of the street I was interested in, but who had learned to dress, talk and behave in a way that made them “at home” on the street. Such outsiders had an awareness of what for most people were just the “seen but unnoticed” backgrounds of their everyday affairs. They were, I found, the best “ethnographers.”

Although I have, like most anthropologists, drawn on the reflections and empirically grounded understandings of my informants, I have especially been interested in what they struggled to understand or live with but never really could grasp; in other words, I was interested in their quest for knowledge rather than in what they knew.

This means that the definition of anthropology as “philosophy with people in it” has a methodological meaning in this work. When endorsing this definition of anthropology, Tim Ingold writes that although philosophers have speculated on the human predicament for centuries, “rarely if ever, however, do they enlist the help of ordinary people in their enterprise, or test their insights against the wisdom of common sense” (1992: 696), in the way fieldwork experience allows for. Whether this is a fair description of philosophy or not, what I think it misses is that philosophy starts in a form of doubt or uncertainty that is incompatible with the certainty of common sense (see Stenlund 2000: 195-202). Such a notion is expressed in Socrates’ statement that the quest for knowledge only can begin when we become aware of our ignorance—when we know that we do not know—and in “the idea about the contradiction, the crisis as the beginning of the thought movement in Hegel’s philosophy and the paradox in Kierkegaard’s philosophy” (Ibid: 200). The thesis proposes a “philosophy with people in it” that draws on our informants’ doubt and uncertainty rather than the wisdom of their common sense.

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30 I am here quoting Harold Garfinkel who, in his classic study of transvestites, argues that they “have as resources their remarkable awareness and (un)common sense knowledge of the organization and operation of social structures that were for those that are able to take their sexual status for granted routinized, ‘seen but unnoticed’ backgrounds of their everyday affairs” (1967: 118). This is one reason why scholars have taken transgenderism as a privileged vantage point for studying how sex and gender are enacted in everyday life (see Kulick 1998: 10). Paul Rabkinow (1977: 73-75) makes a similar argument about the self-reflexivity of informants who are marginal characters in their own social world.

31 My translation.
Chapter Outline

Chapter 1 deals with Jordan’s most ambitious demonstration in 2011, the sit-in at Interior Ministry Circle on March 24-25. It focuses on a group of political activists who tried but failed to bring about a discussion about demands within the sit-in’s leadership and a political activist and journalist who tried but failed to bring about discussions with people throwing stones at the sit-in. As a result of these failures, all these activists came to shift their understanding of the conditions of a more democratic society, from a focus on a power struggle against the regime, to an “open-minded” (munfatiḥ) form of political engagement. While most analyses of the sit-in understand its break-up—and the following fragmentation of Jordan’s political landscape—in terms of ethnic and ideological divisions or of a conflict between an authoritarian regime and an opposition with demands for political reforms, this chapter instead uses the form of political engagement mentioned above as a vantage point to show the significance of the way political groups conducted their politics—and the ethos that underlay it.

Chapter 2 is an ethnography of the protest movement in the small town of Dhiban, which many observers and political activists consider as the first of the new type of Transjordanian-dominated and politically ambitious protest movements that emerged in Jordan during the Arab Spring, which as a collective phenomenon were called “al-harakāt” (the movements). The chapter gives a historical background to the rise of al-harakāt and its demands by discussing the Palestinian-Transjordanian dynamic in Jordan and the economic liberalization carried out by the country’s current king. Although the chapter makes a common anthropological argument for the need to have historical and ethnographic context, in order to understand the demands of these new protest movements, it also uses political activism based on infitāḥ as an object of comparison, and thereby shows how the protest movement in Dhiban was animated by a specific form of politics, which determined what their unity and demands meant in practice, as well as the characteristics of their leader’s political visions.

Chapter 3 examines some of the most important events in the history of the Jordanian protest movements that emerged during the Arab Spring: The development of the protest movement in Hayy al-Tafaila, a conference for leaders of protest movements and political parties organized by a Jordanian NGO, the planning for a new demonstration at the Interior Ministry Circle on March 24, 2012, and an attempt by a wealthy Jordanian living abroad to sponsor a conference coordinating Jordan’s new protest movements. In all these cases, the chapter highlights political activists who, often independently from each other, attempted to establish a form of political dialogue that never took root within the leadership of the Jordanian protest movements. It describes this form of dialogue ethnographically and shows how it was not simply grounded in certain demands or a particular political strategy but in specific practices.
and values; for example, about how citizens ought to relate to each other and to the regime, and which some political activists referred to by the word “infitāḥ.” The chapter puts this political form into sharper relief and contrasts it with more common ways of conducting politics within the Jordanian protest movements. While Chapter 1 is a detailed discussion of such differences in relation to a single sit-in, this chapter is a more general discussion of such differences in relation to several attempts to organize politically.

Chapter 4 reveals a congruence between political and educational projects referred to in terms of infitāḥ. The chapter provides a detailed analysis of the educational activities of a political activist involved in the organizing of the Jordanian protest movements, drawing heavily on how this activist experienced the differences between the munfatiḥ form of education he was trying to set up and the education he was used to from his schooling and from the political party he once was a member of. The chapter shows how this munfatiḥ education is related to new forms of pedagogical practices that have spread in the Jordanian education sector after the country’s political liberalization in 1989-1992 (e.g., the use of student evaluations, a pedagogical focus on discussions rather than rote learning), but which are most prominent at some of Amman’s private schools, which distinguish their educational culture from that of the public system with the term infitāḥ, referring to pedagogical practices but also to the content of the teaching in the social and human sciences.

Chapter 5 deals with infitāḥ in the “lifestyle-sense” that the concept often is associated with in Jordan, and its ethnographic focus is on places associated with this kind of infitāḥ, such as university campuses and Jordan’s first internet café. The chapter explores how political activism relates to infitāḥ at these places, paying close attention to the masculinity ideals, consumption culture, and form of sociality that distinguish these places from other.

The Conclusion pursues a general discussion of the study’s methodological focus on relatively marginal phenomena and on doubt, and it also summarizes its main findings regarding how Jordan’s Arab Spring can be understood in terms of a broader political culture.
1. The Great Demonstration

On March 24, 2011, the newly created umbrella organization Youth of March 24 arranged a sit-in at the square in the middle of Interior (Ministry) Circle, a roundabout in central Amman. Both the Egyptian and Tunisian longtime presidents had stepped down during the previous two months at the height of the Arab Spring, and the demonstrators hoped that mass protests could bring about similar change in Jordan. Most participants of the sit-in I talked to remembered with nostalgia the optimistic mood on Friday morning, when the sit-in was on its second day and they, by having occupied a square in central Amman for an entire day, felt they had done something unprecedented in Jordan. Through its demands for constitutional reforms, the sit-in broke a barrier which changed the public debate in Jordan, and afterward it was the only demonstration in 2011 which political activists commemo rated with new demonstrations for several years.

But March 24 never became the start of mass protests in Jordan. In a rough estimate, 500 people participated in the sit-in on Thursday and less than 3,000 people on Friday.¹ On its second day, a large group of stone-throwers attacked the sit-in, and riot police eventually dissolved it. As I discussed in the introduction, in most countries the Arab Spring led to political fragmentation rather than the less repressive and corrupt society most demonstrators had called for. Although the sit-in initiated a period of relative political freedom in Jordan and pressured the regime to carry out political reforms, it fits this general pattern to the extent that it, as we shall see, led to a polarization of both Jordanian society and its political opposition.

Most scholarly accounts of Jordan’s Arab Spring paint a fragmented political landscape and some note that March 24 was the turning point, after which “the opposition was increasingly unable to work together” (Yaghi and Clark 2014: 259). Different explanations have been given for this fragmentation; most emphasize ideological divisions and Jordanian identity politics, especially divisions between Palestinian-Jordanians and Transjordanians (e.g., ibid; Ryan 2011). But when we look at attempts during the sit-in to set up discussions between political groups, in order to reach agreements on their

¹ Al Jazeera writes that 500 people participated on March 24 (“Protest Camp Set Up in Jordan Capital,” March 24, 2011). On their Facebook page, Youth of March 24 claimed that 5,000 people participated in the sit-in on March 25, but several participants I spoke to thought that this was an overestimation.
demands or to avoid clashes, it becomes clear that they fell apart due to something more general than ideological divisions or Jordan’s lack of a clear national identity. They were based on a way of conducting politics that was uncommon among the leadership of the Jordanian protest movements as well as among their most staunch opponents.

This is not just my own analysis. Several Jordanians, who during the Arab Spring were involved in attempts to set up discussions between political groups, made similar points. They learned that these attempts were based on a form of politics that was unusual and which some of them partly described with the word “infitāḥ.” While later chapters discuss this form in general and describe how it was rooted in types of education and social life, this chapter puts it into sharper relief in relation to a single event, the sit-in on March 24-25.

It does so by focusing on two cases. The chapter first describes the experiences of a political journalist who, after interacting with people throwing stones at its participants, came to realize that his own form of political activism was more unusual among Jordanians than he had thought. I describe the form of politics he had projected on the Jordanian citizenry—its notions of citizenship and dialogue as well as its types of exclusions. The chapter then turns to a group within Youth of March 24’s leadership who, in response to the many conflicts that soon emerged within the umbrella organization, came to realize that their political activism was based on a form of politics that was unusual compared to that of the sit-in’s leadership. Thus, instead of analyzing the sit-in in terms of a struggle between opposition and regime, the chapter focuses on a form of political activism that contrasted with that of regime supporters as well as opponents.

By showing how this form appeared during the sit-in, the chapter does not treat the event as a manifestation of a larger process or as a case in a general argument about Jordan’s political system, but instead starts in the event’s atypicality, or more precisely, in the possibilities it offered for political activists to be surprised by and reflect on the political forms that Jordanians created during this ambitious attempt to bring about a democratic transition. Before continuing with my argument, I will give the reader a sense of this atypicality, by comparing the sit-in with more common types of demonstrations in Amman during the Arab Spring, such as the weekly Friday demonstrations at Downtown.

Amman’s demonstrations during the Arab Spring

It is Friday, and the demonstration is set to begin when the noon prayer at the Husseini Mosque ends. The mosque is full, so attendants pray at the small square outside the entrance and at the road, which goes through Downtown (wasṭ al-balad). This is the oldest part of Amman; the area was settled when
the city was a tiny town of 6,000 inhabitants. Here, there are none of the shopping malls, international hotels or Starbucks of the wealthier part of the city; few well-off Jordanians come here. Nevertheless, it is a center of commerce. The streets are full of small shops, booths and street vendors, selling everything from bric-a-brac, cast-off T-shirts, CDs with copied films and music, and self-made perfume, poured into bottles and put into boxes branded “Hogo,” or other imitations of famous brands. On this day, almost all shops and booths in Downtown are closed. The demonstration is on the most appropriate weekday to avoid traffic jams when the protesters march along one of Downtown’s two main roads. Friday is a holiday in the Islamic calendar, and there is little traffic.

The prayer at the Husseini Mosque ends. As the men leave the mosque, a voice amplified by speakers shouts “khubz, ḥurriyya, ʿadāla ijtimāʿīyya” (bread, freedom, social justice). The crowd, except for some people who were there for the prayer only and now are zigzagging their way out of the gathering, repeats the slogan. The voice comes from speakers loaded on a pickup truck, which begins to drive slowly along the road. Three men stand on the cargo bed and take turns shouting in the microphone. People from the mosque soon gather behind the car for the one-hour Friday march.

Downtown hosted similar demonstrations to the one described above on most Fridays in 2011. Usually, between a few hundred and a few thousand participated, most of whom said they belonged to the opposition (muʿāraḍa). The demands usually included variants on the following themes: that the ones responsible for corruption should be put on trial, that the mukhābarāt (the intelligence services) should stop interfering in elections and political life, that prices on staple goods should not rise, and more abstract demands such as “bread, freedom, social justice” and “the people want the political system to change.” These abstract demands meant, as we shall see, very different things for different demonstrators, but the demonstrators were at least united in being upset about corruption and thinking that it had to be addressed by a change of the political system.

The recurring Friday demonstrations were part of a general trend of increased public protests in Amman and other Jordanian cities in the wake of the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt. On many weekdays in Amman, 20-70 people held a demonstration at some of the seven large roundabouts along the great Zarhan Street. The demonstrators restricted themselves to the middle of the circle and avoided cutting off the traffic. These smaller demonstrations had more diverse aims than the demonstrations in Downtown; for example, to free Salafi activists, to protest “unfair reporting” about the king by Agence
France Presse: and to increase the salaries of workers at a specific government-owned factory. These small demonstrations had little in common except the belief in public protests as a way to push forward their agenda.

The protesters in Downtown demanded ʾislāḥ al-niẓām (reform the regime) and never ʿsuqūṭ al-niẓām (fall of the regime, i.e., the fall of the monarchy). The mode of demonstrating manifested this moderation. I once discussed this with Tamer, a Syrian who had fled his country after the police confiscated his mobile phone and ID card when they caught him participating in a demonstration in Damascus. On the right side of his belly, he had a scar from a bullet wound, which he said he got when regime forces fired into the crowds during a demonstration in Darʿa. “Nothing will happen here,” he remarked, comparing this with his experiences in Syria. “Everything is ordered. They walk along the road. Stop at the square. Shout for half an hour. Then they go home. There is no confrontation.”

Nevertheless, the demonstrations crossed red lines, initially through chants that the regime should be reformed and about high-level corruption. Compared to most other Arab regimes, the Jordanian regime responded with moderation to protests during 2011. The initial demonstrations in Syria, which did not demand the fall of the regime, were met by bullets; the Jordanian police never stopped a Downtown demonstration, and they normally protected the demonstrators from groups hostile to them. Often, the police made up as many as one third the number of protesters. They walked with the demonstrators, most of them in lines in the front and back of the march.

The demonstrations’ crossing of red lines was part of a more general pattern. During 2011, some political activists began saying things they never would have dared before, such as criticism of the mukhābarāt and accusations about corruption among senior officials. “Before 2011, we would never have dared to speak about this!” a journalist told me when we sat on his balcony together with a friend of his and a friend of mine. His friend added that whenever he had talked about infīṭāḥ, rights, or corruption at home, his father (a general; his mother was a police officer) had shouted “get out!” Everything changed with the Arab Spring, they said. Now we can speak about corruption, the king, the mukhābarāt—about anything. Although most Jordanians were not as fearless, almost every political activist I met told me how red lines were redrawn in 2011. This was a freedom not only for “democracy activists.” “Before 2011, I would never have dared to upload this,” one of my Arabic teachers said while showing me his Facebook page. It had a picture with a text praising Abu Musab Zarqawi—the al-Qaida leader who planned the terrorist attacks on hotels in Amman, where one of the suicide bombers entered a Muslim wedding and killed 60 of the guests. These freedoms followed the mukhābarāt’s retreat from the lives of Jordanians, and the most visible part of that freedom

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2 On May 13, 2011, AFP reported that King Abdullah’s motorcade had been attacked by stone-throwers upon a visit to Tafila, as a protest against the king.
was a great increase in demonstrations and political discussions and the birth of a plenitude of protest movements.³

The sit-in at Interior (Ministry) Circle on March 24, 2011, was the first great exception to nonconfrontational protesting and modest demands. It began on Thursday around noon and participants announced that they would stay at the circle until the government met their demands. While a march within crush barriers in Downtown on a holiday disturbs the low traffic for some hours, the Interior Circle is a hub in Amman’s traffic, and if it is closed on any day except Friday, much of Amman’s traffic becomes paralyzed.

The tone of the sit-in was supportive of the monarch. Photos of the king were common. A large banner featuring the king hung from the bridge that passes over the circle, and the crowd chanted their support to King Abdullah. Nevertheless, a part of the sit-in wanted Jordan to become a constitutional monarchy where the parliament rather than the king appoints the government.⁴ In several public speeches, King Abdullah had stated that Jordan in the future should become a constitutional monarchy ruled by political parties, and the participants at the sit-in explicitly aligned themselves with this vision, saying that they demanded what the king already wanted. March 24, however, was the first time during the incumbent monarch’s regency that participants in a large demonstration raised demands regarding the king’s role in the country’s political system. Thus, both in its tactics and its demands, the sit-in was the most ambitious attempt in Jordan in 2011 to bring about regime change through street protests.

As I have mentioned, the sit-in was violently dissolved, and Jordanian society was polarized in its aftermath. I will focus on experiences of a political journalist which, I suggest, allows us to understand this violence and polarization as grounded in a specific form of politics, where a notion of compromise and dialogue with other political factions had a relatively small role. Before I make this argument, however, the reader needs to be familiar with the violence targeting the sit-in.

The sit-in’s breakup

During the first day of the sit-in, a small group of young men who opposed it had come to the roundabout. In contrast to those participating at the sit-in, these young men did not think that Jordan’s political system needed any change and used violent methods to push forward their agenda. They chanted

³ And a challenge to the regime’s spatial restrictions on public protests. For an analysis of the spatial dimensions of political protests in Jordan, see Schwedler 2012 and Schwedler and Fayyaz 2010.

⁴ Officially, the king appoints the prime minister who then appoints the government.
pro-monarchy slogans, slandered the sit-in, and occasionally threw stones towards its participants. A barrier of policemen prevented the groups from clashing with each other, and they had the situation under control.

The anti-sit-in group became larger and larger on Friday. The policemen kept the two groups from coming into direct contact, but the stone throwing toward the sit-in became more intense. “It was raining stones” was a phrase I often heard from people who had been there. They used tents, banners, and other equipment as shields from the stones. By Friday afternoon, the anti-sit-in crowd was becoming much larger than the sit-in. In recordings from this time, the sit-in group chants for the king and military to protect them. “Where is the darak?” they wrote on their Facebook page.

Darak roughly means “gendarmerie,” and is a Jordanian security force separated from the Public Security Directorate. It is a domestic paramilitary focusing on riot control, tactical missions, and the safeguarding of foreign diplomatic missions. The darak finally arrived at the circle, but to break up the sit-in rather than to protect it. They succeeded, and the participants fled the circle. Videos recorded by people at the circle show, and numerous written accounts tell, how policemen and young men from the anti-sit-in group hit people from the sit-in as they fled the circle.

Events at King Hussein Park, a large tract of land on the west outskirts of Amman, would greatly affect what happened at the Interior Circle on March 25. There, another gathering took place, whose official statement took a stance against “threats to the country’s security and stability,” which for example referred to the sit-in at Interior Circle taking place the same day. Like Youth of March 24, the leaders of the gathering aligned themselves with the king’s official vision of political reforms, but they rejected Youth of March 24’s method (their calling for a sit-in in central Amman) and their demands for rapid political change. Emad Shihab, the spokesperson of Homeland’s Call (Nada al Watan), the organization which arranged the gathering, commented in an interview: “To go out to the street to protest is not a goal, and we should not ride the wave that is going through the Arab world.” Homeland’s Call stated that it was against Jordan becoming a constitutional monarchy and against limitations on the king’s prerogative to appoint the prime minister. In an interview (Gavlack 2011), one of the group’s founders, Ismail al-Sheikh, said: “We think that the Jordanian people are not ready to elect the prime minister directly.” The gathering at Hussein Park had at least seven times more participants than the sit-in at the Interior Circle. (The Jordan News Agency reported that it had 25,000 participants. I am not familiar with any reliable estimations. Nevertheless, the testimonies I have heard from people who passed by Hussein Park make clear that the gathering was significantly larger than that at Interior Circle). It had been announced on radio, television and billboards. Free bus rides to the Hussein Park departed from towns outside Amman on Friday morning. The organizers of Homeland’s Call had never called for violence against any demonstrators in their public announcements, and they disassociated themselves with the violence targeting the sit-in at Interior Circle. Nevertheless, these were official statements which did not convey the thoughts of those who participated in the gathering. When it broke up on Friday evening (5 p.m.), many of them headed toward the Interior Circle. They knew there was a sit-in there and wanted to break it up.

Unlike the Jordanian police, the darak wear helmets and bulletproof vests. Helmets cover their faces, and no darak has a number by which he can be identified.

Youth of March 24’s Facebook page reported 6.29 p.m. that the sit-in had been dispelled.
An encounter I had a few days after March 25 illustrates the motives of a large part of the anti-sit in group. I met Bakri at a small square where he hangs out with his friends during Amman’s warmer months, and he suddenly exclaimed, “Palestinians are not good. We are all Jordanians.” The four young men in the street corner were all Transjordanians. “Ahmed is Palestinian,” I said. Ahmed was a social young man who introduced me to these four Transjordanians. “He is an exception,” Bakri answered. “Five percent of them are good.” All of them agreed. I asked about the demonstration on March 24-25. They were all staunchly against it. “Why should anyone demonstrate in favour of reforms when the king has already said that he wants to have reforms,” one of them said. They explained that it was only Palestinians [Palestinian-Jordanians] who demonstrated.

These Transjordanians implied that “Palestinians” [Palestinian-Jordanians] are not true Jordanians. After the two wars with Israel, in 1948 and 1967, many Palestinian refugees fled to Jordan. As most Palestinians in Jordan have Jordanian citizenship, they are not the stateless people that they have become in many of the other countries in the Arab world. The East Bank (present-day Jordan) and the West Bank were united in 1948 and was so until the war of 1967. After the war, King Hussein sought a settlement with Israel that would again incorporate the West Bank with the East Bank in a unified Arab state. One development was to make that impossible: the rise of the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people. The Jordanian regime long fought the birth of an independent Palestinian national movement and a political entity representing it, thinking that such an entity would mean instability in a country where more than half of the nationals were of Palestinian origin. The Jordanian regime lost that fight, and after the outbreak of the first Intifada in 1987, the king of Jordan gave up all claims to the West Bank. 1988—the year of the decision to disengage—was a watershed for the Palestinian issue in Jordan. Since then, the preferred international solution has been an independent Palestinian state consisting of the West Bank and Gaza. This means that there is no longer any national vision that imagines the banks to be unified, and the nationality of Palestinian-Jordanians have therefore become more complicated (see Abu-Odeh 1999). In 2010, around 1.9 million Palestinian refugees were registered with UNRWA8 in Jordan, and “the right to return” for Palestinian refugees is a formula adhered to by many Palestinian-Jordanians, a formula that makes their future nationality undetermined (see Farah 2003). The implications of a future Palestinian state entail some profound questions. What will happen to all people who are of Palestinian origin if Palestine is finally declared as a sovereign state? What will their role be in the Jordanian electoral system in the meantime? How will the question of citizenship be solved?

The anti-sit-in group consisted exclusively of Transjordanians. Most of them were convinced that the demonstrators at the circle were Palestinians.
(which was incorrect) who wanted to “destroy the country” and remove the
king from office.\(^9\) Only one of the four men I met at the small square had gone
to the circle. He had read on Facebook that “there was a demonstration and
that we were going to hit them.” He first threw stones at the sit-in. When the
darak broke it up, he ran into the crowd to hit the demonstrators.

A bubble in an abyss

Naseem Tarawneh—a political journalist from an influential Transjordanian
tribe—was one of those who was surprised by the hate and violence targeting
the sit-in, and he came to see it as grounded in not simply a regime strategy of
divide et impera but in a more general way of acting politically. This section
uses his experiences and reflections to put this more general way of acting into
sharper relief. The reflections are valuable, I suggest, because they start from
an ideological crisis, from doubt, which gives them a much more philosophi-
cal character than what he usually writes.

Naseem has no background in Jordan’s political movements or parties. His
interest in politics is instead expressed through his journalism, writings in his
prize-winning blog, and work in a politically-oriented NGO.\(^{10}\) He is one of the
founders of the independent media outlet 7iber, a website that features sections
on arts, culture, politics, as well as a “Have your say” section on topics such
as Jordan’s constitutional amendments and the Mubarak trials. He writes his
blog in English, a language he has mastered better than Arabic—in contrast to
all political activists I write about—partly due to an English-dominated edu-
cation, first at an international school in Amman, then at York University in
Canada.\(^{11}\) He never took part in the organizing of the sit-in, nor did he go there
to join the demonstrators. He came as a spectator, to see the event that already
was a topic in news reporting.

The emergence of openness as a theme

When Naseem arrived at the Interior Circle, he was surprised to find fairly
well-organized youths in their 20s. They seemed to have learned some lessons
from Tunisia and Egypt, he remarked, such as not to affiliate themselves with
political parties, and they recognized the need to act with restraint and respon-
sibility; “They had low-level organizers with bullhorns who would walk
around making sure their group kept to the sidewalk. . . . They had brooms

\(^9\) Yakhrab al-balad.

\(^{10}\) His blog has won the Brass crescent awards for best Mideast blog twice. The reads of his
blog posts typically range between 2,500 and 20,000. The blog post on the sit-in on March 24-
25 (Tarawneh 2011a) became his most read one; it had 31,000 reads and 185 comments one
year later. Every entry is counted as a read, though, even if it is from the same IP address.

\(^{11}\) I write about these international schools in Chapter 4.
and garbage bags, and people designated with the task of keeping the area clean.” He sympathized with their main slogan—“reform the regime”—which he thought was meant to pressure the regime to stop the interference of mukhābarāt in the lives of average Jordanians and to implement democratic reforms such as making the parliament stronger.

Naseem was watching the events at Interior Circle on Friday evening, and when the sit-in violently dissolved, he entered an ideological crisis. He lost faith in the prospect of democracy in Jordan and in “the people.” Why did he lose this faith? Not because the sit-in did not achieve its aims (cf. “I didn’t quite agree with their decision to have a sit-in”), but rather because when watching and talking with the anti-sit-in crowd he discovered, to a degree that shocked him, a lack of any idea of citizen rule and—more importantly—of openness.

A short interview with some young men of the anti-sit-in group, linked and commented on by Naseem, illustrates how his conception of citizenship differs from the political notions of these young men. The interviewer encounters a group of four men close to the Interior Circle on March 25. One of them has a Jordanian flag wrapped around him, another wears a Jordanian flag as a scarf. Two of them carry clubs.

**Interviewer:** Tell us, what happened?12

**Young man A:** We are with the country [watan] and with King Abdullah. . . .

**Interviewer:** What happened? Why did you come [to the circle]?

**Young man B:** My friend, in my name and in the name of my tribe, I send glorious congratulations to His Majesty. And we tell him, our souls are for you. And we will throw anyone who is against you out of the country.

**Interviewer:** Question: Our Majesty said he wants reforms, he said so.

**Young man A:** Correct.

**Young man B:** Reforms . . . He will decide what reforms. It is not for us, or the people, to decide about the reforms, it is he who decides. He is the ruler, he decides what he wants, and we are completely behind him.

**Interviewer:** But a question—His Majesty said that he wants to have reforms . . . true?

**Young man A:** True. [he nods]

**Interviewer:** And the group at the [Interior] circle also say that they want to have reforms.

**Young man B:** Who are they?

**Interviewer:** Who they are, you tell me?

**Young man B:** They are the Muslim Brotherhood.

**Interviewer:** No, not the Brotherhood. They are more.

**Young man B:** My friend, the Brotherhood, this group [at the circle], they do not decide, and we the people do not decide, it is the king who decides. He is the ruler of the kingdom, he decides. We are behind him completely.

**Young man A:** Long live His Majesty the great king.

**Young man C** (and 1-2 other young men not in view): Let him live! [C starts to wield his club in rhythm with the chanting]

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12 The dialogue is in Arabic, the translation is mine. http://www.aramram.com/episode/1031.
Young man A: Long live His Majesty the great king. [A also starts to wield his club in rhythm]

Young man C (and the other men not in view): Let him live!13

The interviewer uses the word “reforms” abstractly, without any indications of its substance. Thus, he can state that the king wants the same thing as the sit-in (“they both want reforms”).14 The respondents, however, do not accuse the sit-in of demanding bad reforms; they say nothing about the substance of the sit-in’s reforms at all. They rather accuse the sit-in of demanding their own reforms, instead of just supporting the reforms the king has called for. Only the king, never the people: there is no citizen. An argument that runs through Naseem’s blog posts is that problems regarding poverty, sanitation, health, unemployment, public services and so on need to be faced by citizens who meet, discuss, organize and make policy proposals that contribute to their solution, and 7iber aims to create such a forum, where citizens can discuss the country’s affairs, be it the constitution, elections or corruption.15

What most surprised him at Interior Circle, however, was a lack of openness, which was revealed in the crowd’s interaction with the sit-in and with himself. Unlike many participants at the sit-in, Naseem did not think that the stone-throwers were simply “manipulated” by power-holders wanting status quo—a thought that would let the dichotomy of government versus people remain intact. The stone-throwers were rather convinced that Youth of March 24 were disloyal Palestinians wanting to establish an Islamic government and kick out the king and that any reform that transferred power from the king to the people would lead to Jordan becoming a Palestinian homeland (“I saw this conviction in their eyes”).16 Some of them seemed to buy the conspiracy that Iran and Hezbollah were pulling the strings, shouting “Shia! Shia! Shia!” to the crowd at the circle. “Indeed, speaking to them often felt like being in Plato’s cave, and having the entire allegory play out right before your eyes.” The passage of the allegory he seems to have had in mind is this:

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13 This is the “salute to the king,” for example performed at schools’ morning assemblies (which, however, usually do not include the word “great”).

14 Nevertheless, for Jordanians like this interviewer, “reforms” has a more specific meaning, due to how the king uses the word in official discourse. It means, roughly, “modernization,” in the sense of creating more professionalized institutions, a more democratic political system, and so on.

15 For this conception of citizenship, see especially Naseem Tarawneh’s “The Jordanian Elections: the Search for Zion” (2010).

16 Many Transjordanians think that the Muslim Brotherhood is a Palestinian organization. I discuss this in Chapter 2.
And if there were a contest, and he had to compete in measuring the shadows with prisoners who had never moved out of the den, while his sight was still weak, and before his eyes had become steady... would he not be ridiculous?

Two of the many pictures from Facebook groups denouncing Youth of March 24. The shooter is king Abdullah, the Arabic text means, roughly, "screw Youth of March 24." "National unity is a red line" and "love it [Jordan] or leave it" are responses to Youth of March 24's criticism of the regime.

Men would say of him that up he went and down he came without his eyes; and that it was better not even to think of ascending, and if any one tried to loose another and lead him up to the light, let them only catch the offender, and they would put him to death. [1894: 517a]

Thus, what surprised him was not their ideas, but that they were aggressively uninterested in experiences or views that ran contrary to those ideas. The website Naseem has cofounded, 7iber, initiates discussions on all kinds of issues, but moderates the discussions if people accuse or attack rather than argue with another person. He found absolutely nothing of this ideal of calm discussion among the people opposing the sit-in and was shocked by how far they went. They disrupted the Friday prayer with patriotic songs from loudspeakers, chanted curses, constantly threw stones, and wanted to hurt the people at the circle. "There was no dialogue or compromise or trust," no way to convince them of anything else. He would never have learned this had he participated in the sit-in and therefore been unable to interact with them. He wrote that he never could have expected what he saw, despite having a job that, unlike a desk job, allows him to operate on the grassroots level. I heard similar
stories from demonstrators working at NGOs, saying that some people they had taught about human rights came and threw stones at them. It was as if they had mistaken their students’ listening to them as teachers for a much more general listening or openness. A single day taught them something that they had not learned during several years of work.

Naseem’s experiences reveal the shallowness of analyzing the Arab Spring, in Jordan at least, in terms of a power struggle between an authoritarian regime and an oppositional movement wanting democratic reforms, especially since he had himself understood Jordanian politics in such terms before the sit-in’s breakup.

I believed that the majority of Jordanians wanted reform and were merely silent. This is something I can no longer say today. I believed that we were “ready for democracy” and those who said we were not simply did not want to see it happen; because it was the people versus their government. This is something I can no longer believe today.

He expressed the same thoughts in his Twitter account the night after the demonstration. Stripped of the more analytic language of his blog post, the ideological crisis shines through even clearer. The for-and-against-democracy debate is enacted in a few tweets:

Naseem: We are seriously NOT ready for democracy. On a social level, we are absolutely NOT ready to accept each other. No way
Person A: Thats what they want you to believe...didnt the thugs attack the Egyptians in Tahrir?
Naseem: bro, these werent paid thugs. these were ordinary ppl. straight up. they ABSOLUTELY believe what they believe. same [as convinced] as #mar24
Naseem: ya samih. this wasnt 100 people. this was thousands who believe with all their heart that #Mar24 are there to overthrow king.
Naseem: @mab3oos no group was acting spontaneously. but i dont buy that strings were pulled. absolutely not. and THAT is the worse part. . . .
Person B: you are making a very fundamental U turn, was what happened there that bad today?
Naseem: yes, it destroyd perceptions in my book. Its a large constituency that doesnt want reform OR democracy & they have police support
Person B: do u mean most #Jo ppl dnt want reform?
Naseem: from what ive seen, “yes” is the only answer i have. i spoke to these ppl & they speak with conviction
Person C: its not like that, the majority stayed home today, the numbers of the two sides reflects that, the majority didn't take any side
Naseem: i disagree. this was a representative majority. families with kids getting into taxis & buses; this wasnt a fringe element. #JO
Person C: they want reform it's just they confuse it with over throwing the king, awareness is what needed now in order to move forward
Naseem: those that i spoke to repeatedly said clearly they want things to stay as they are. they just want “more govt jobs.”
Naseem discovered that he had projected his own political vision as well as his own way of acting politically onto the Jordanian citizenry. He would not have discovered this if the Arab Spring had not swept over Jordan, followed by the mukhābarāt’s retreat from political life, which allowed an event like that on March 25 to happen. Although the event was atypical, it brought his everyday way of acting politically into sharper relief and forced him to reflect on it. I have emphasized two themes that emerged in this reflection and which distinguish Naseem’s form of politics from that which he encountered among those throwing stones at the sit-in: a notion of citizen rule (or “public spiritedness”) and a certain way of listening, arguing and debating.

Exclusions

Although Naseem’s experiences during the great demonstration of Jordan’s Arab Spring puts a form of politics based on an ideal of inclusiveness and openness into sharper relief, his political thinking after the sit-in reveals some of the exclusions and repressions that this form of politics is based on. These appear in the new doctrine of civic activism he formulated after the sit-in’s break-up.

Naseem’s blog post ends in confusion. “I really just don’t know where we are anymore, or where we’re going.” How is it possible to reconcile his civic activism with the loss of hope in the demos (people)? What will his democratic ideology look like when the dichotomy of government versus people collapsed? I think the answer came two months later, in his blog post Surviving Jordan: Independent thoughts on Independence Day (2011b). The blog post tells the story of his activism. While he studied at a university in Canada, he chastised those who said they were not going to return to the Middle East. They were privileged in their opportunity to study abroad. It was selfish not to return.

And as time passed I discovered [that] the people [who live in West Amman, i.e., middle or upper class] who hadn’t left the country to study or work, existed in Jordan within a bubble—and so I chastised them. How can you live here and exist within the shelter of a bubble? It was a waste of a life. To surround yourself with family and friends and shun everything else is to exclude your role as a citizen. It was a neglect of duty.

But the imperative never to shield yourself from society turns out to be unsustainable. The blog post is an enumeration of dashed hopes. No one, he writes, neither the government nor people, is interested in what you can contribute to the country. Naseem sees the state discourse about democracy as window-dressing, and instead witnesses a government constantly playing the Palestinian card to divide the country. He has realized that there is an absence

17 Or in a “moral breakdown” (Zigon 2007).
among the populace of any positive notions of citizenship, which has become equal to a display of nationalism rather than civic virtue. In order to be an activist in Jordan, you have to shield yourself from all this, he concludes, you cannot let it affect you. The blog post has a cartoon from the caricaturist Emad Hajjaj. A banner with the text “the people want” rises from a boat. This is a phrase commonly used during Jordanian demonstrations to express demands; “the people want the regime to reform” was one of the slogans of the Youth of March 24. After what happened at the circle, this reference to the people turns out to be comical; there are only two people on the boat, and the ocean surrounding it is full of sharks. Naseem’s openness has reached its limit. 7iber, the small agora he has founded, no longer has a pretense for absolute inclusiveness. After March 25, he became aware that he had lived in a bubble. But it is as if he has realized that he can only live a political life within a bubble.

I’ve learned that if you want to keep your sanity while living in Jordan, existing within a personal bubble may be the best [way] to do it. . . . Above all, I’ve learned that if you want to do something for the country, contribute to it, you need to live in a bubble. Not a superficial I-don’t-care-about-anything-but-myself kind of bubble, . . . a “civic bubble” if you will.

During the violent breakup of Youth of March 24, Naseem felt, as mentioned, “like being in Plato’s cave.” While the notions of the liberal public sphere and the agora—as a place where people “deliberately meet, precisely in order to deliberate, to speak, and to create a political society” (Snyder 2014)—are underlined by a notion of a coincidence of reasoning and society, the allegory of the cave stems from an experience of tensions between philosophy and the city, from the belief that philosophy never will be completely accepted by any political society, most radically exemplified by the execution of Socrates. The idea of “civic bubbles” is an expression of this tension: the form of reasoning which ideally takes place at the agora or the public sphere can actually only take place in small groups protected from what is outside.

This point should be distinguished from the observation that liberal publics, despite the explicit ideal of openness and universality, are structured by unconscious mechanisms of exclusion (e.g., Bourdieu 2000, Warner 1992). Nancy Fraser, commenting on the rise of liberal public spheres in Western Europe, claims that “[a] discourse of publicity touting accessibility, rationality, and the suspension of status hierarchies is itself deployed as a strategy of distinction” (Fraser 1992: 115). Unlike these exclusions, the one endorsed in the doctrine of civic bubbles arises precisely when Naseem becomes more conscious of the exclusions 7iber always has been based on. Furthermore, while the scholars mentioned above understand mechanisms of exclusions as grounded in a strategy of distinction (e.g., ibid, Warner 2002: 51)—i.e., in a search for respect (see Bourdieu 2000)—Naseem’s texts after the sit-in reveal
another motive for closing one’s mind to arguments, worldviews and experiences of other people: a desire to protect a political way of life and the values it is based on. This becomes clear when we examine the problem the doctrine of civic bubbles is an answer to.

When experience shattered Naseem’s trust in the people, he was thrust into a situation that is reminiscent of Wittgenstein’s characterization of a genuine philosophical problem: “[It] has the form: I don’t know my way about” (1968: §123), an experience of confusion and loss of orientation. What is this problem about? It is best captured by some comments on the blog post. “I remember going through a dark night of the soul,” Samia Dodin writes in the comment section, “and grasping the reality you depict and deciding in a final way that I could not live in Jordan or Palestine. . . . I would have been utterly overwhelmed and my life [would have been] rendered meaningless.” The dark night falls over the soul due to the following situation: You want to do something for your country; in Naseem’s case, not to be a citizen is neglect of duty.

You also dislike the present regime. To put it simply, you love the country and dislike the regime, and without this distinction there is no activism. Neither the stone-throwers nor the people Naseem chastised sensed this distinction—the former’s patriotism made no distinction between regime and country, and the latter felt no patriotism for country or regime. They cannot be thrown into the problem that Naseem, and many other dissidents, have (see Garton Ash 1993). The events on March 25 and its aftermath showed Naseem that what he disliked was not restricted to “the government,” but is something much wider. The central question and doubt, never explicitly posed, is: What is it that I love? Can I still love it? Why should I do my duty as a citizen when no one wants me to be one? The stone-throwing, accusations of betrayal, and apathy all actualized this doubt, and he needed to shield himself from it somehow.

How can this problem be solved? One solution is to stop caring for the country, for something greater, and instead opt for isolation in the small bubbles Naseem chastised, or opt for withdrawal, the decision taken by Samia Dodin and available to Naseem due to his Canadian citizenship. Naseem’s solution was civic bubbles.

“The need to consciously consider or reason about what one must do,” Jarrett Zigon argues, “only arises in moments that shake one out of the everydayness of being moral” (2007: 133). For Naseem, March 25 was such a moment, and Zigon claims that the objective of the reasoning that arises in such moments is to abandon the state of confusion and get back to the unreflective.

18 “A7lam” writes “Naseem you have actually put into words exactly what has been on my mind the past few weeks. For the first time I have been considering finding a life in another country. I have never felt so heavy with negativity and even despair as I do now.”

19 For this distinction between country and regime, see Leo Strauss’s lectures (1960) on Aristotle’s Politics, https://leostrausscenter.uchicago.edu/courses.
mode of everyday life. It is burdensome to live in confusion. But this kind of explanation disregards the role of reverence in such reasoning, which is crucial in Naseem’s case. The idea of civic bubbles is not only about leaving a state of confusion but about protecting the public spiritedness which his political way of life is based on. The reasoning is an attempt to hold on to a value which has turned out to be vulnerable. This is also the reason for another closure, this one unconscious, which developed in his blog post on civic bubbles.

Repressions

How is the end of civic activism reconfigured through the notion of civic bubbles? On 1953, Hanna Arendt wrote that the goals envisioned by Communists (i.e., the classless society) and by ex-Communists (i.e., the world freed from Communism) departed from previous political philosophies in being ends with a tangible existence and a possibility of being realized within this world.\textsuperscript{20} Traditional concepts of the ends of politics were rather a measure. St. Augustine’s \textit{summum bonum} (the highest good), the commonweal, the happiness of the greater number, and the good life were all ends that transcended the tangible world of human actions and societies, and therefore could measure them and hence reveal their shortcomings (Arendt 2005: 395). Naseem’s understanding of democracy still shines through in his blog posts after March 25, but more as a measure which reveals shortcomings of Jordanian politics than as an end within reach in Jordan, in its transcendence analogous to the \textit{summum bonum}.

But the end of Naseem’s activism is never completely transformed from a realizable end to a measure. In the blog post’s last paragraph, hope, which has abandoned the \textit{demos}, settles in the bubbles. If they grow to include more and more people, change can happen. It is already happening. The dichotomy of people versus government is replaced by civic bubbles versus the outside.

These are reassuring words, appreciated by many of the readers. The paragraph containing these words ends the blog post and breaks with the more painful insights previously enumerated. In this last paragraph, Naseem speaks as an \textit{edifier} and \textit{comforter} (to his audience and probably also to himself), and this conceals the depth of the problem he is thrown into.\textsuperscript{21} It is as if he buries a nagging suspicion beneath an edifying doctrine; a repression that maybe is not strange. What is at stake is no longer his faith in the possibility of democracy, which the stones, curses and hate at Interior Circle destroyed, but Naseem’s own political activism, what he has lived for and the life choices he

\textsuperscript{20} Arendt makes a distinction between former Communists and ex-Communists, and claims that the latter has kept much of Communism’s philosophical heritage but replaced its end, “the classless society,” with another end, “the world freed from Communism.”

\textsuperscript{21} I am here inspired by a point Leo Strauss makes in his lectures (1960) on Aristotle’s Politics (https://leostrauscenter.uchicago.edu/courses): Sometimes, the edifying part of a work is the most visible part. This means that the more difficult questions are hidden.
has made. For someone as perceptive as Naseem, this problem is too genuine to be completely solved by something edifying, and to whatever extent the idea of civic bubbles weakens the experience of not knowing his way about, the problem resurfaces in several blog posts over the next year and a half, such as after the Jordanian parliament voted for a salary increase and a termination wage for its members: “My cynicism has quickly shifted to a more dangerous state—apathy” (2012).

An ideal of being open to other perspectives structures Naseem’s political activism, but when the ideal’s vulnerabilities come to the surface, so do exclusions and repressions protecting it. He has encountered perspectives he wants to protect his mind from rather than listen to. An ideal of openness also has existential walls.

The fragmentation of Youth of March 24

Naseem’s thinking, doctrines and repressions after the sit-in on March 25 were a response to his discovery of what he thought was an excessively polemical way of acting politically among people who opposed the sit-in. Within the leadership of Youth of March 24, however, there was a group of people whose form of political activism resembled that of Naseem and who, while sharing his “criticism” of those throwing stones at the sit-in, extended parts of this criticism to the leadership of Youth of March 24, which they were much more familiar with than Naseem ever became. While Naseem’s ideas were a response to the polarization of Jordanian society, theirs were a response to the polarization—or fragmentation—of the opposition.

Most people did not perceive this fragmentation. When people under the newly founded umbrella organization Youth of March 24 together occupied the square at the Interior Circle, many of them experienced a new feeling of unity in Jordan’s normally fragmentary opposition movement: “I was so proud that all different Jordanians gathered at the same place. This thing was something strange, usually we [the opposition] fight. The sun rose and I thought it was a new country,” a secular leftist recalled a few months later, when the opposition had begun to fight amongst themselves again and Youth of March 24 no longer held any meetings because of internal disagreements.

The sit-in was less united than what most observers and participants perceived, however. When I interviewed participants of the sit-in, I was struck by the contradictory answers about what the sit-in demanded and why it took place. I wanted to know why Youth of March 24 had decided to occupy the circle, and I reached out to some of the most important organizers—those I supposed would really know—but still got contradictory answers and the problem was not solved until I questioned a presupposition in my way of asking and their way of answering: that the demonstration had common demands.
Although demonstrators always have different ideas about why they demonstrate or what a demonstration will lead to, it is often meaningful to say that a demonstration has common demands, be it that Mubarak should step down, that the government should resign (the Jordanian demonstrations in January 2011), or that newly cut subsidies should be reintroduced (the Jordanian demonstrations in November 2012). If the demonstration is confrontational, it ends when its demands are fulfilled. The sit-in on March 24 though, did not have the common purpose that is presupposed in the question “what did the sit-in demand?” This explains the divergent descriptions of the sit-in’s purpose in news reporting. The sit-in demanded, according to various sources, constitutional monarchy and political reforms (Reuters), the ouster of the prime minister and wider public freedoms (The Associated Press, reproduced in Al Jazeera and Washington Post), and an end to corruption and autocracy and an increase in economic equality (New York Times). These articles all have a similar structure: they state the purpose of the sit-in, then cite some participants, which makes the purpose more concrete but at the same time more diversified: “I want the parliament dissolved and new elections. Now this is the only way forward,” “We need to be able to eat and live,” “That Prime Minister Bakhit resigns,” and “The protesters want a new election law reducing the number of votes in districts inhabited by tribesmen.” One task of journalism is to understand why a sit-in is held at a circle in central Amman. Contradictory answers appear as obstacles to that understanding. The divergent testimonies are framed as somehow united, most clearly in the New York Times article, which ends: “Three young women stood behind her. Asked whether they were with her, she stepped back, pointed to the hundreds of people all over the circle and said, ‘We are all together, all 2,000 of us.’” It is not only easier to be against something than to create an alternative; it is also easier to appear to have a common purpose than to actually have one.

Although few of the sit-in participants noticed the divergence in demands, many of its leaders—those planning the sit-in—did. Some of the most prominent political activists in Jordan returned home as soon as they saw the demonstration or after participating for a few hours. After the riot police had disbanded the demonstration, one of the largest participating groups released a statement accusing the Muslim Brotherhood of having hijacked it.

As I discussed in the introduction, the fragmentation of the political opposition is a recurrent theme in accounts of the Arab Spring, and the fragmentation of Youth of March 24 has a pattern that is similar to other oppositional groups: the main conflicts were between Islamists and non-Islamists and were related to power sharing between ethnic groups, in this case between Palestinian-Jordanians and Transjordanians.

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Nevertheless, in the case of Youth of March 24, several of these conflicts were based on misunderstandings rather than ideational differences. These misunderstandings were, the reader will see, rooted in the lack of a process through which the protest groups could specify which demands they would bring to the circle and—more fundamentally—in a conception of politics that did not emphasize the need for dialogue with other political factions and the specification of demands. In the last stage of my argument, I put this conception of politics into sharper relief by comparing it with a marginal form of politics within Youth of March 24’s leadership, which was based on what some of these marginal activists called infītāḥ—an ethos or form of politics similar to that which Naseem discovered that he had projected on the Jordanian citizenry. It is only at this last stage of the argument—when we discuss the significance of the way Youth of March 24 conducted its politics—that the congruence between this section and the previous will become clear.

The sit-in’s profound fragmentation

The reader needs to be familiar with the sit-in’s fragmentation before we can analyze it, and for this purpose I turn to the accounts of those who organized it, the leaders of Youth of March 24. This was an umbrella organization which planned the sit-in through meetings with 40-80 representatives of various political parties (e.g., the Communist Party, the Ba‘th Party, the Unity Party, the Islamic Action Front [the Muslim Brotherhood’s political party]) and ḥarakas (movements; unlike political parties, ḥarakas had a fluid number of participants rather than formal membership); among them the Teachers’ Union (which was not an institutionalized union), the Military Veterans, and the Constitution of 1952. Those who planned the sit-in had, unlike many of those who merely participated, previous experience of organizing demonstrations, and many of them had been active in a political party.

Several of those who had planned the sit-in were surprised when they saw its demands. Ali al-Habashne, a retired general and former head of an influential organization for military veterans, was in his car driving toward the Interior Circle to participate in the sit-in when a member of his organization called him. The member was at the circle, and said that “there are bad demands here.” “Something like ‘giving rights to Palestinians,’” al-Habashne recalls. Al-Habashne is a Transjordanian nationalist and wants Palestinian-Jordanians to have fewer political rights in Jordan. He turned to go back home, and so did the rest of the military veterans he knew. They would have been surprised had they arrived at the circle. Although some of them had participated in meetings leading up to the sit-in, they thought that it was a time-limited demonstration—not a sit-in—and that it demanded to make the corrupt accountable and

23 I have interviewed 15 people who participated in at least one—and often several—of the meetings planning the sit-in.

24 The number of participants at the meetings are estimates from the participants I interviewed.
to return the government assets whose sale had created fortunes for these “corrupt officials.” Like al-Habashne, these military veterans thought it was too early to have a parliamentary government in Jordan, and they had no idea that some people at the circle demanded this.

Habashne was not the only one of Youth of March 24’s leaders who found out what the sit-in demanded while he was on his way to the circle. Thursday morning, Rami was driving toward Interior Circle. He is in his early thirties, works as engineer at a large telecom company, and has been active in politics for at least 15 years—first in political parties, then in a haraka—and he was enthusiastic about the Arab Spring coming to Jordan. Driving toward the circle, he listened to the radio. A news reporter at the circle talked to Moadh Khawalde, who presented himself as the spokesperson of the sit-in. Khawalde read out the demands of Youth of March 24. They would stay at the circle until the regime accepted these demands. Rami was surprised. He had never heard about Khawalde before, nor did he recognize the demands. “I thought we were going there [Interior Circle] because of the seven nos and seven yeses.” These were the demands of his haraka, for example, no to corruption and autocracy, yes to free education and free health insurance. Like al-Habashne, he discovered that the sit-in had different demands from what it was supposed to have, but Rami and Ali al-Habashne had completely different ideas of “what it was supposed to have.”

The lack of clarity of the sit-in’s purpose was also reflected in Youth of March 24’s publishing—on its Facebook page—of two different lists of what the sit-in demanded. A few days before the sit-in, they announced its date and place and seven demands. The day before the sit-in, a new set of eight demands was published on the same page, presented as the aim of the sit-in. These were the two lists:

[the first]
1. A parliament that represents the people.
2. An elected national government.
3. True constitutional reforms.
4. That the corrupted be put on trial.
5. A reformation of the taxation system.
7. Realization of national unity.

[the second]
1. A parliament elected by the people.
2. Free and fair elections supervised by a special committee.
3. A real parliament within constitutional amendments that protect it from being dissolved [removal of the king’s prerogative to dissolve the parliament].
4. A government elected by and representative of the people.
5. The founding of a constitutional court to rule (“settle disputes”) on the constitutionality of laws.
6. Cancellation of the laws that restrict freedoms so that freedom prevails in our country.
7. Justice and equality through a judiciary independent of interference of the executive power.
8. The retrieval of assets and that the corrupted be put on trial.25

The lack of clarity of the sit-in’s purpose was reflected not only in the existence of two different sets of demands but also in the unawareness, among many of the sit-in’s organizers, that these sets of demands existed. The following example illustrates this: I showed these sets to Khaliq, a social democrat in his late 30s, who has been involved in politics since he was young and been standing on the van shouting in the microphone during some of the Friday demonstrations at Downtown. He participated in most meetings leading up to the sit-in, and had told me that the demands agreed upon were to make the corrupt accountable, to return privatized government assets, and to improve the sustenance for Jordanians. “Was there no agreement on this?” I asked as I handed over the lists of demands posted on the Facebook page and the poster. He looked at them. He had never seen them before. “What kinds of demands are these,” he said. “A parliament elected by the people. Who else would elect the parliament? An elected government. No country has an elected government.”

Not only the sit-in’s purpose but also its duration was unclear. Khaliq thought that they had agreed to stay two to three days. In contrast, according to al-Habashne, they would stay for a number of hours; while, according to Rami, until the regime accepted their demands.

Although the sit-in was very fragmented, its participants obviously had some notions in common, and before continuing with my argument, I want to give the reader a more rounded picture of the sit-in by classifying its demands according to the centrifugal or centripetal forces inherent in them.

“With spirit, with blood, we serve you Jordan!” and “With spirit, with blood, we serve you Father of Hussein! [King Abdullah]” were uncontentious chants meant to indicate loyalty to Jordan. “A civil state, not a security state!” (directed against the mukhābarāt’s interference in elections and political life) was probably the clearest demand shared by everyone at the circle. “The people want the regime to reform!” and chants against corruption and for social justice were centripetal demands, shared by almost everyone at the circle. These demands were not completely devoid of concrete meaning, as proved by the anti-sit-in group’s rejection of them. But a diverse range of very specific meanings were projected on them, and the unrecognized multivocality of these demands—their capacity to stand for many things—contributed to their centripetal force. How was this multivocality achieved?

Victor Turner argues that one way ritual symbols acquire multivocality is through a chain of associations or logical steps, where “the general direction

25 My translation.
is from the concrete to the increasingly abstract” (Turner 1970: 53-54).

The multivocality of the demands mentioned above was rather achieved by an absence of concreteness, a process similar to that when a psychoanalyst who wants to bring forth transference lets the patient lie in a sofa looking up at the ceiling rather than sit opposite the therapist (in the latter case, it is more difficult for the patient to project a certain person [e.g., his mother] on the therapist since he perceives that the therapist’s face is different from the person the psychoanalyst wants to bring forth). The undefined features of “the people want political reforms” are ceiling-like in their receptivity for projections of the most varied concrete demands and political visions. The projection of demonstrators’ own thoughts and political visions on these demands was eased by the erasure of specific ideological features that is prominent in demonstration tactics inspired by “velvet revolutions”: several speakers ensured that Youth of March 24 was an independent organization representing the people in its diversity, not based on a specific ideology, political party or ethnic group. During most of the sit-in, no one raised the flag of a political party or talked in its name. It was the “facelessness” or “universality” of the demands that made it possible to attach so many meanings to them.

“The people want a new constitution!” and “The people want a new parliament!” were vague enough to be shared by many—though not all—demonstrators at the circle. The demands to dissolve the mukhābarāt, to remove the chief of the mukhābarāt, that the prime minister resign, that the government be appointed by the parliament, that the king’s prerogative to dissolve the parliament be withdrawn, and to have an electoral system on a demographic basis were all very contentious. These concrete demands had nothing of social justice’s ceiling-like receptivity for projections, but rather made other organizers realize that what they had taken for granted as the sit-in’s demands actually were not shared by everyone; that is, it destroyed some of the projections that had maintained the demonstration’s unity. Generally speaking, the more concrete a demand shouted in the microphone was, the more centrifugal its effects.

26 He gives examples of such chains in his discussion of the “the milk tree,” a key symbol in the rituals of the Ndembu which is conspicuous for its white latex: the white latex, breast milk, “breast, mother-child relationship, matriliney, the Ndembu tribe or tribal custom of which matrilineity is the most representative principle. Another line runs [from the same beginning]: development of the breasts, womanhood, married womanhood, childbearing” (Turner 1970: 54).
27 On transference, see Lear (2005: 117-142) and McWilliams (2011: 151-358) (the sections on transference and countertransference).
28 For this feature of “velvet revolutions,” see Garton Ash 2009.
29 Dr. Omar, from the executive board of the Communist Party, claimed, when I interviewed him, that they brought their party’s flag. Some organizers, Ala for example, claimed that the Islamists brought green flags, but if this is true, it was a limited incident.
As I have mentioned, no journalistic account of the sit-in perceived these centrifugal forces but assumed, as I did when I began my interviews, that the sit-in had common demands and a common idea of how long they would stay. Many of Youth of March 24’s leaders, on the other hand, perceived that the demonstrators had radically different ideas about what the sit-in was about. Several of them thought that other political factions had broken an agreement about what they should demand.

One common way to analyze the fragmentation of the Arab Spring’s protest movements is, as mentioned, in terms of an absence of a national identity or of conflicts between Islamists and non-Islamists, and Youth of March 24 partly fits into this pattern. The greatest cause of internal conflicts was the announcement to the media by Khawalde—the spokesperson for the sit-in, who was affiliated with the Islamic Action Front (the Muslim Brotherhood’s political party)—that the sit-in demanded a parliamentary government on a demographic basis. The organizers had never agreed on this contentious demand, which also was written on some banners and on a leaflet which was handed to all who arrived at the circle early on Thursday. In Jordan’s contemporary electoral system, Transjordanian-populated areas outside the large cities are heavily overrepresented compared to urban areas whose population is dominated by Jordanians of Palestinian origin (and where the Islamic Action Front has their electoral strongholds). Many Transjordanian demonstrators left the Interior Circle because of that demand, and it was a main reason why outsiders thought that the sit-in consisted of only Palestinian-Jordanians. A few days after the sit-in, the leftist ḥaraka Jayin—an umbrella organization founded in 2011 by various leftists—made an announcement that they were leaving Youth of March 24 and that the organization had been hijacked by Islamists from the Islamic Action Front who had shown no respect for the views of the other participants at the sit-in. Thus, the most decisive conflicts that emerged within the sit-in’s leadership were between Islamist and non-Islamists (e.g., Transjordanian nationalists, Arab nationalists, and Communists) and were connected to different ideas about what rights Palestinian-Jordanians should have in the country’s political system.

Nevertheless, although these ideological and ethnic conflicts are very prominent within Jordan’s opposition, it is revealing that they, in the case of this sit-in, were partly grounded in misunderstandings. For example, when Ala Fazzah—one of Jayin’s most important leaders, a Transjordanian political journalist who in 2011 managed an online newspaper as an outlet for political dissidents—accused the Islamists of bringing demands not agreed upon, he mentioned (in an interview with me) especially two demands: an electoral system on a demographic basis and the dismantling of the mukhābarāt. Although the Islamists brought the first of these two demands, the leaders of the Islamists at the sit-in whom I have interviewed thought that other groups brought the “ridiculous demand” to dismantle the mukhābarāt. Although the demand created a conflict—or at least mistrust and irritation—between Islamists and
non-Islamists, it was not grounded in ideational differences between these
groups, but in misunderstandings whose origin I soon will explain.

This is far from the only example during the sit-in of a conflict between
different political groups based on a misunderstanding about who brought
which demands. Consider the following case. Khaliq, the political leader men-
tioned previously and who belonged to Jayin’s leadership, told me, as did Ala,
that the Islamists have more resources and are more organized than any other
opposition group, so they brought the huge Jordanian flag, the large tent, the
van and the speaker system, and on the huge flag, they had—without an agree-
ment with the other participating groups—replaced the often-used phrase
“God, homeland, king” with “God, homeland, people,” and that this “gave the
impression that we were close to demanding the fall of the regime.” But this
interpretation is refuted when we consider the ideas of Fawzi, a member of
Khaliq’s own ḥaraka, whom he meets at least once every week. Fawzi recalled
the great feeling of solidarity he felt at the Interior Circle, especially when
they saw the sun rising after having slept there for one day. The sit-in de-
manded that the citizens should rule, no one else, he told me. Therefore, they
had changed the slogan of the flag, replacing the word “king” with “people.”
What Khaliq thought was the work of the Islamists was partly the work of a
member of his own ḥaraka.

The prevalence of misunderstandings about who brought which demands
points toward a key reason for the sit-in’s fragmentation and internal conflicts:
the lack of a process through which the protest groups discussed and agreed
on which demands they would bring to the circle.

The sit-in’s demand-formation

The planning meetings for the sit-in rarely had any discussions specifying
what it should demand. The participating groups had never brought their de-
mands to one of Youth of March 24’s meetings in order to choose some that
they all could agree on and base the sit-in on; instead nothing was written on
a board, and the discussions generally revolved around where to have the sit-
in and how to handle the logistics. Therefore, the political organizers’ own
imaginations of what the sit-in demanded, always based on their own political
vision and desires, encountered little friction.31 For example, if an organizer
had a talk for one minute which included the idea that “we should have con-
stitutional reforms and a new government,” he might understand a silence
among the other people sitting in the circle of chairs as an agreement when in
actuality they did not understand his precise demands. Moreover, the organiz-
ers talked about the sit-in not only in the circle of chairs but also in smaller
groups, and people meeting in such smaller groups sometimes mistook the

31 An excellent illustration of this is that the authors of Youth of March 24’s Facebook-page, as
I have mentioned, suddenly presented a new set of demands, which most leaders knew nothing
about.
consensus of the group for the consensus of the sit-in as a whole. This meant that they came to the sit-in with an idea about which demands the organizers had agreed upon, and when they saw that people brought other demands to the circle, they thought that other political factions had betrayed them. The many conflicts and misunderstandings that the loose demand-formation gave rise to is illustrated by the fact that every organizer of Youth of March 24 that I interviewed said that the demand to dissolve the mukhābarāt was very stupid, but they all thought that another large faction supported it. Even if only one person brought this demand, it gave the impression that he represented a larger group of people. What appeared as ideological differences were actually misunderstandings rooted in the process of demand-formation. The loose demand-formation is also one key reason for the perception that the Islamists hijacked the sit-in. The Islamists arrived at the circle with their own demands, and their demands were the most visible ones, which gave many non-Islamist political leaders the impression that the Islamists had taken control over the sit-in, but any group would have “taken control” over the sit-in if they had the numbers, organizational skills, and resources the Islamists had. The sit-in did not speak with one voice; all groups worked on their own; it was a polyphony, and the most numerous, organized and resourceful chorus drowned out the others.

This interpretation can be contrasted with how Khaliq and Ala, who both participated in the sit-in as leaders of the ḥaraka Jayin, experienced the Islamists’ control of the sit-in. Both noted that many banners had demands that were not agreed upon, and that there was almost no control of what was said over the microphone. Both thought that while the sit-in had no single purpose, it was supposed to have one; the one agreed upon in the meetings before the sit-in, an agreement which the Islamists trampled over. Ala came to think that the Islamists manipulated the other demonstrators by bringing demands not agreed upon and by making the sit-in appear to be Islamist-controlled in order to be in a better negotiating position toward the regime. Whether this interpretation is valid or not, its insufficiency is obvious from the stories of Ala, Khaliq and Fawzi themselves. They state completely different purposes for the sit-in, and while Khaliq said that the slogan “God, homeland, people” was stupid and made by the Islamists without broader consent, Fawzi said that “we wrote it,” including the entire sit-in in the “we.” Khaliq, Ala and Fawzi all participated in planning meetings for the sit-in and they were from the same broad coalition; Fawzi and Khaliq met each other at least once a week; the divergence in the understanding of the sit-in’s purpose was even greater between people from different political groups. Nevertheless, they all thought that the sit-in was supposed to have a certain purpose, and the gap between this assumption and the polyphony at the circle created the sense that other political factions had betrayed them. Had the participating groups had a common decision-making process about which demands they would bring to the sit-in, this
sense of betrayal might have been avoided; or, at least, it would not have been inevitable.

Furthermore, Youth of March 24’s unclear purpose meant, in combination with its confrontational tactics, that it was very likely that it would clash with the regime, even though no participants wanted this to happen. No participant I talked with wanted the roads to close, and this aim was also stated on Youth of March 24’s Facebook page before the sit-in. Yet, the square at Interior Circle is small, and the roundabout is a central hub in Amman’s traffic. This meant that several thousand demonstrators coming to the circle—as many organizers hoped for—would cut off the traffic. Some organizers, for example the three I write about in the next section, did not want to have the sit-in at Interior Circle for this reason and instead proposed another place (Saha al-Nakhil). By starting a sit-in that closed the traffic in central Amman, Youth of March 24 initiated a confrontation with the regime. Their spokesperson declared that they would stay until the regime accepted their demands, but since it was very unclear what these demands were, for both the sit-in’s leadership and the regime, it was unclear what the regime could have done to meet these demands and thereby contribute to the peaceful solution which the sit-in’s participants wanted.

My point is thus that the conflicts within Youth of March 24, as well as its conflicts with the regime, were partly rooted in the absence of a process through which the leadership could clearly formulate their demands and vent disagreements. This was to a certain degree due to a lack of experience in organizing this kind of demonstration. “We learned [from the sit-in],” Ghaith, the leader of the youth section of the Islamic Action Front, told me, “that before going to demonstrations, we should make the slogans, understand them, and everyone should have the same message.”

But it was also due to a conception of politics that did not emphasize the need for compromises, dialogue with other political factions, and the specification of demands. When I asked Ghaith why they did not stop the demands that he called ridiculous (e.g., dismantle the mukhabarat), he answered that they could not stop them because “when we go for our demonstration, we know what to say, which slogans we have, but if you have others with you, you cannot control it.” This displays a certain unfamiliarity with a notion of working together with other political factions, an unfamiliarity which was most evident in Khawalde’s—the sit-in’s spokesperson who was affiliated with the Islamic Action Front—announcement to media that the sit-in demanded a parliamentary government on a demographic basis, a demand which is extremely controversial in Jordan, and was bound to create great anger.

32 Interior Circle was a bad choice strategically (if the aim was to keep the roads open), but a good choice symbolically—if the aim was to bring forth associations to the Egyptian uprising. The place is also called Gamel Abdel Nasser Square (i.e., it is named after a former Egyptian president), and the roundabout has—like Tahrir—a square in the middle of a roundabout.
among the other protest groups. And since the Islamic Action Front has more internal democracy than any other political party, several of their members were more used to political compromises and cooperation than leaders of Youth of March 24 who did not have that kind of democratic experience.

Forms of politics

The conception of politics that was predominant within Youth of March 24’s leadership is put into sharper relief by comparing it to that of a group of the leadership who thought that Youth of March 24 should have specified their demands before the sit-in and engaged in a form of dialogue with the regime. The three people I met who had these views had (like almost all the sit-in’s leaders) a middle-class background, and they had a conception of politics resembling that of Naseem, the political journalist, in their emphasis on the need of a more “open-minded” (munfatiḥ) form of communication, but unlike him, they emphasized this in relation to not only those opposing the sit-in but also those supporting it.

These activists understood the sit-in’s shortcomings in an unusual way. Most of Youth of March 24’s leaders had expected many more participants and thought that the sit-in’s relative failure was due to the regime’s policies to break it up, to other factions that brought demands not agreed upon, and/or to the time not being right for a great uprising. Most of them thought that the time eventually would be right. Political leaders such as Rami and Ala thought an uprising that removed the present “corrupt” regime would create a better and more democratic society. After the sit-in, they emphasized that such an uprising could not be planned, “we”—the leadership of the opposition movement—“cannot make it happen, but it will happen.” This meant that they believed in a democratic revolution unmediated by discussion; that is, a form of “general will” (Rousseau)—“democracy without public debate” (see Habermas 1989: 99).

The three people mentioned above instead believed that the common purpose lacking at Interior Circle could not be created through a spontaneous uprising but only through a process where the political groups met, discussed, and reached an agreement on demands. They thought that the other leaders did not see the necessity of such a process because they imagined themselves too much in terms of antagonism and opposition to the regime. This thought is best illustrated in this picture: a large round table with a blackboard behind it where it is written “Agenda: 1. The election law 2. A special committee supervising the elections.” Only two individuals sit in the chairs; however, others are rushing up, in small groups. The two individuals at the table try to make them sit down, but these people do not look toward the table or the blackboard; they see an injustice farther away, they are upset, and know it is there that the fight is going to take place. Each small group carries a banner with “the people want . . .” written on it, that they want to bring to the fight. But for the two
individuals at the table, “The people want . . .” is something that is made around that (round) table.

Thus, these three activists sought to create unity among the opposition—that is, to counter its fragmentation—through discussions, but discussions of a particular kind, which contrasts with more polemical discussions, as I am about to describe. After the sit-in, Youth of March 24 remained the most important forum for coordinating the protest movements, but with the outbreak of violence in Syria during the summer 2011, the meetings became dominated by polemical discussions about the Syrian situation. Most Islamists supported the Syrian uprising, while most leftists, Arab nationalists, and Transjordanian nationalists supported Bashar al-Asad and the Syrian regime, arguing along this line: “We are with the people, but what is happening in Syria is not like what happened in Egypt and Tunisia. There is a conspiracy against the regime that resists the occupation of Palestine” (i.e., the uprising is not only supported but also created by Israel, America and Europe). Kamal, one of the political organizers who attempted to create a process of demand-formation within Youth of March 24, acted as moderator during some discussions, but he felt that it “became impossible to have any good discussions” when the umbrella organization was “drawn into” the Syrian conflict, and he eventually stopped attending the meetings. During the March 24-25 sit-in, the discussions that took place were also just as likely to incite as to solve disputes. Ala, like many other participants, felt the strongest sense of solidarity when he first started chanting at the sit-in, when he woke up after the first night, and when the riot police hit them. People chanting at Jordanian demonstrations are normally facing in the same direction, and when the riot police hit him, he stood hand-in-hand in a line of people who faced one of the vans darak arrived in. Thus, they did not face each other, as you do when you sit around a table and speak to each other. Disunity increased when people had their faces turned neither toward the common enemy walking out of the vans nor the yawning and half-sleeping participants at the sit-in as they woke up on Friday morning, but when people faced each other during discussions about issues containing conflicts of interests.

The political activists I write about in this section had as an ideal a form of discussion that solved rather than incited disputes and which I will describe in more detail in Chapter 3. At this stage, however, I want to again point out that this form of politics was dependent on a what some of these activists described as infitāḥ, referring to a spirit of communication similar to that institutionalized in the web forum 7iber (cofounded by Naseem) in its emphasis on the reservation of judgement and belief in dialogue as a mode of political action. In Naseem’s case, this spirit of communication was put into sharper relief when he interacted with people opposing Youth of March 24 and realized that he had projected his own way of acting politically onto the Jordanian citizenry. In Kamal’s case, a similar spirit was put into sharper relief when he interacted with the leadership of Youth of March 24.
This spirit of communication determined not only these activists’ view on dialogue within the protest movements but also their view on dialogue with the regime. They thought that Youth of March 24 should have presented their demands to the regime and talked with its representatives when they were offered to do so. On March 25, one of them, Kamal, was close to the pickup truck with the speaker system when a man from the Interior Ministry building walked up there and said that the Interior Minister wished that a delegation from the sit-in would come to talk with him at the ministry’s building (next to the circle). Kamal thought they should negotiate with the regime, or at least talk with them, but he recalled how some people around the pickup truck—the demonstration’s informal leadership—started to shout that this man should go, thinking either that the regime controlled the stone-throwers or that they should stop them before any talk would take place.33

The sit-in on March 24-25 was the great demonstration of Jordan’s Arab Spring. It broke red lines regarding the possibility of talking about constitutional reforms and put a vague pressure on the regime to make political reforms. Many Jordanian protest groups gathered in Youth of March 24, but, as I have shown, the umbrella organization soon fragmented, reminiscent of the fate of many other protest movements during the Arab Spring. This fragmentation can partly be understood in terms of ideologically and historically rooted conflicts between the political groups participating in the sit-in and of conflicts related to the Palestinian-Transjordanian issue in Jordan. This chapter, however, has rather emphasized that what many activists perceived as ideological conflicts actually were misunderstandings, which were rooted in the form of political action underlying the sit-in. This form appears more clearly by contrasting it with a form of politics based on “infitāḥ,” a way of discussing and settling political disputes, which emerged as a theme in relation to (in the case of Naseem) the way people opposed the sit-in, as well as (in the case of Kamal) the way people supported it.

33 During Jordanian demonstrations in 2011, the people around the pickup truck always acted as the informal leadership.
2. The political movement in Dhiban and Jordan’s new protest movements (*al-ḥarakāt*)

For most observers and participants, Youth of March 24 appeared as an oppositional movement confronting the regime with demands for political reforms. The previous chapter instead emphasized the internal differences within this movement, both regarding political ideas (e.g., how the election system should be reformed) and ways of conducting politics. While the previous chapter discussed these differences by looking at the most well-known demonstration during Jordan’s Arab Spring, this chapter discusses them by looking at the most famous *ḥaraka* (movement) during Jordan’s Arab Spring: Haraka Dhiban.

Many political activists and observers (e.g., Amis 2016; Yaghi and Clark 2014; Yom 2014) agree that Jordan’s Arab Spring began in Dhiban, a small town 90 kilometers south of Amman. Demonsrations against Prime Minister Samir al-Rifai began there in January 2011, and a week later, demonstrations against the prime minister started in Amman and continued until his resignation.

The demonstrations in Dhiban were a prelude not only to a wave of demonstrations but also to the rise of a new type of protest movement in Jordan. Demonstrations that lead to the fall of a prime minister are not unique in the country’s history. The demonstrations usually end—without leaving any enduring structure of activism—when the king appoints a new prime minister. They are a protest, a reaction against something—usually price increases. Although the large gatherings in Dhiban ended when the government of al-Rifai resigned, the activists who arranged the demonstrations, brought the slogans, and talked to the media did not end their activism, but became one of the most well-organized groups of activists in *al-muhāfaẓāt* (literally, “the governates”), the provinces outside Jordan’s largest three cities and whose population is dominated by Transjordanians. They had a dissatisfaction—and a perception of the roots of their grievance—that the fall of a prime minister could not remove. The protests in Dhiban created a *ḥaraka*, and similar movements rose all over Jordan in 2011. This new phenomenon was called *al-ḥarakāt*

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1 One year after the beginning of the demonstrations that ousted the prime minister, the spokesperson for these demonstrations in Dhiban, Mohammed al-Sneid, was invited to speak at the Friday demonstration in Downtown, Amman, a recognition of Dhiban’s role as initiator of the wave of demonstrations which began the previous year.
(“the movements,” plural of ḥaraka) or al-ḥirāk (“the movement;” the word has the same root as ḥaraka), which people distinguished from the already established political opposition. Unlike political parties, ḥarakas had, as mentioned, a fluid number of participants rather than formal membership. Their leadership, however, was more constant (I use “al-ḥarakāt” when referring to this new noninstitutionalized opposition and “protest group” and “protest movement” as broader categories, which include demonstrators affiliated with a political party).

This chapter is about the form of politics through which al-ḥarakāt expressed dissent, and it discusses this through an ethnographic focus on the leadership of the ḥaraka in Dhiban. By doing so, the chapter provides the context for the focus of this dissertation, that is, a form of politics based on what some activists called infitāḥ and which had a close affinity with attempts to coordinate the Jordanian protest movements through discussions. This form of politics is seen more clearly when contrasted with what it was not. In this chapter, I describe “what it was not,” that is, the form of political activism that was more common among al-ḥarakāt. The full significance of this chapter’s descriptions of Haraka Dhiban’s political activism will only become clear when they are used as objects of comparison in the following chapter, but I want to offer a short prelude: In contrast to the political activism I study more thoroughly in Chapter 3, most political activism in Dhiban was based on an acceptance of a political and economic system based on patronage, a desire to heavily restrict the political rights of Palestinian-Jordanians, and—what we provisionally may call—a “confrontational” form of politics. To reach a deeper understanding of these issues, this chapter discusses the patronage system that has been the basis of the Hashemite regime, the economic liberalization carried out by the current king, and the Palestinian-Transjordanian dynamic in the country.

Several accounts (e.g., Adely 2012a; Amis 2016; Yom 2014) that deal with the politics of Haraka Dhiban or its leaders do not discuss the strongly regional, patronage-based and Transjordanian nationalist element of their demands but instead emphasize their national, liberal and inclusive content, an interpretation that gives the Jordanian protest movements a unity and purpose they never had. Differences in the form of dissent are also smoothed over in analyses that understand the Arab Spring’s protest movements, or those of a single country, through the lens of a lowest common denominator, for instance, as a response to youth unemployment, economic inequalities, or widespread corruption. Although most protest movements cared about these problems, they often had completely different ideas concerning their causes and solutions, and when they organized politically in response to them, they did so in very different ways. It is the particularities of al-ḥarakāt’s response to these problems—the form of its dissent—that is the focus of this chapter. First, however, I will briefly introduce the ḥaraka in Dhiban and its leader.
Haraka Dhiban and its leader

Mohammed al-Sneid lived in the village Mlih, a 45-minute bus ride from the closest city, Madaba. Arid land surrounded Mohammed’s house, and next to it was a small shack for hens and rabbits. Beside it, a few goats were crowded in a small pen. A huge water barrel, used for irrigation, stood at a small tomato patch. Fodder for the animals, wrapped in plastic, lay in front of the house. Both the water and the fodder had subsidized prices. The house was located between the more built-up area of Mlih, with the relatively new school close by, and an emptier landscape dominated by land that required irrigation to thrive. The land was hilly, and farther away were mountains on which nothing could be cultivated. Wheat was the most common crop. At a distance, its pale yellow fields melted into the paler dry earth around it. The landscape had green dots, mostly olive trees, and a tube often ran between their roots and a water barrel much larger than the one standing beside Mohammed’s tomato patch. Jordan has one of the gravest water shortages of all the world’s countries, and the land stretching out from Mohammed’s house was short on water.\footnote{Jordan is placed tenth in Verisk Maplecroft’s world ranking of countries with shortages in water supply. Water Stress Index 2011, http://maplecroft.com/about/news/water_stress_index.html.}

Mohammed worked at a farm that raised goats and produced dairy products and which was owned by the Ministry of Agriculture. He was one of Jordan’s most well-known labor activists and had been the spokesman for workers in Dhiban, Madaba and Amman. He said that he became interested in \textit{sīyāsa} (politics) in 2007; before that he was only involved in \textit{ijtimāʿī} (social) issues. \textit{Sīyāsa} usually refers to issues such as constitutional reforms, political parties, the Parliament, and the Senate. Issues relating to subsidies, minimum wages, labor rights, social services and poverty are not \textit{sīyāsī} but \textit{ijtimāʿī}. To demonstrate for a change of the electoral or political party law is to make a \textit{sīyāsī} demand, to demonstrate against rising prices or for free education is to make \textit{ijtimāʿī} demands. Mohammed often emphasized to me that he entered politics because of poverty. Unlike activists referring to the Iraq War or the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as the issues that politicized them, Mohammed cared mostly about domestic \textit{ijtimāʿī} issues. He referred to himself both as a leftist and nationalist (\textit{waṭanī}), identifying with the Transjordanian nationalism that together with Islamism (especially that of the Muslim Brotherhood) was the most widespread ideology among demonstrators during Jordan’s Arab Spring.

live in Dhiban, and the Transjordanian population is generally more integrated in their tribes than those living in Amman. Like the rest of southern Jordan, Dhiban has a weak private sector. Due to water shortages, there are limited opportunities for agriculture. Most employment opportunities are in the public sector: the state bureaucracies, military, police, and the security and intelligence services. There is one garment factory in Mlih, built by funds from the Ministry of Labor and the Royal Court, and its products are exported on a free trade agreement with the United States. Mohammed had never worked at the factory, but he once organized the workers for a strike demanding increased salaries that closed the factory for thirteen days.

The first demonstration in Dhiban took place on January 7, 2011. Mohammed and his friend Ismail recalled how it began. Ismail had a house at the outskirts of Dhiban, where he lived with his wife and three children. He had a university degree in shariʿa and worked at the Ministry of Water. In the beginning of January, Mohammed asked Ismail for the five Jordanian dinars that Ismail had borrowed from him earlier. He could not repay the sum and was not even able to afford gas for the heater during this cold month. They blamed the government for price increases following the lifting of subsidies and decided to call for a demonstration. Of the 30 people they talked with, seven came to a meeting the next day. This was the seed of Haraka Dhiban. They agreed to demonstrate the following day, to demand the fall of the government and the prosecution of corrupted people. They spread this idea to other inhabitants of the municipality, and when the Friday prayer finished at the mosque in central Dhiban, these seven people began chanting outside it. The crowd leaving the mosque turned into a protest march. This was the first demonstration in Jordan that demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Samir al-Rifai and his government, and demonstrations continued until King Abdullah appointed a new prime minister a month later.4

4 The demonstrators in Dhiban were all men. The inhabitants of Dhiban that I met practiced strict gender segregation. Mohammed lived with his family in a house with three rooms. He socialized with guests in a living room with an entrance separated from the rest of the house. Whenever I asked to go to the bathroom, Mohammed first entered the other living room that must be passed to reach the bathroom, where his family and four children usually stay. His wife went into the bedroom and stayed there until I had returned to the guest room. Gender segregation is not practiced at leftist meetings and activities in Amman which the activists from Dhiban attend. Girls and women integrate with men and do not stand in a secluded area during demonstrations as they do during gatherings of the Islamic Action Front (in Dhiban, women did not participate in the demonstrations at all). Moreover, the few female activists who participate in the leftist meetings usually dress in a way that would be unthinkable in Dhiban. In one of the meetings in Amman that I attended with Mohammed and his cousin, two participants were women, and one was dressed in a knee-long skirt and blouse. The norms that apply to women in Dhiban do not apply in Amman because, according to Mohammed and his cousin, gender norms in Dhiban are based on traditions and customs, not religion (ʿādāt wa taqālīd, laysa al-ḍīn). “Amman,” Mohammed says, “is a different society.” According to this view, despite a convergence of some practices, dress code and gender segregation are not the pious virtues that
The social question

As in many other Jordanian protest groups, the demonstrators in Dhiban responded to poverty and unemployment, but they did so in a specific way. This section elucidates some patterns in this specific response. The demonstrators in Dhiban imagined that the solutions to their economic problems consisted of increased subsidies (and ensuing price decreases), government investment in the region, and more patronage to the region and its tribes. Most of these solutions were regional rather than national and they did not seek to change Jordan’s existing patronage system.

The demand for the fall of the government, which originated in Dhiban in January 2011, was based on the perception that it was responsible for price increases. Since 1989, the lifting of subsidies has been the great cause of large-scale demonstrations and riots in Jordan. Many of the most senior officials in the Jordanian government are convinced that the era of subsidies needs to be replaced by productive investments and targeted support for the poorer sections of society. Especially after 2003, fuel subsidies have been one the largest expenditures in Jordan’s government budget (see Atamanov et al. 2015). The significant aid Jordan has received from Saudi Arabia ($300 million in cash in 2006 only) has been, at least before the Arab Spring, conditioned on a Jordanian commitment to end its fuel subsidies. The G8 countries had also conditioned debt relief on an improvement of Jordan’s fiscal position. Unluckily for Jordan, the attempts to remove the subsidies have coincided with very high oil prices, which have caused high budget deficits (12% of GDP in 2005) and inflation through much of the 2000s. These price increases have been very unpopular among Jordanians, and since the government has been the main defender of fiscal discipline, its legitimacy has suffered.

As long as the opposition to price increases was the primary demand, the demonstrators in Dhiban were part of a nationwide opposition. But when the government which, in the words of Mohammed, “had raised the prices many times for Islamists. The difference between these two types of moralities are expressed in the fact that there are two different words that can comment upon a transgression of norms: ʿayb (“shame,” used to describe culturally unacceptable behavior) and ḥarām (forbidden according to Islam).

5 Cf. “Economic class-conflict in nineteenth-century England found its characteristic expression in the matter of wages; in eighteenth-century England the working people were most quickly inflamed to action by rising prices” (Thompson 1971: 79).

6 For example, the lifting of fuel subsidies in 1989 led to rioting in Ma’an, a southern town with a large transportation sector, and the lifting of wheat subsidies in 1996 (which led to a doubling of the bread price) led to riots and attacks on government buildings in Karak.

7 Many members of parliament, especially those from poorer areas, are pressured by their constituents to vote against price increases, and the largest political party, the Islamic Action Front, always opposes price rises and blames the fiscal situation on government corruption and inefficiency. For price subsidies and Jordan’s fiscal picture in 2005-2007, see Embassy Amman 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2006a, 2007 (cables from the United States’ embassy in Amman).
times” resigned, there was no longer any concrete *ijtimāʿī* demand that united the demonstrators in Dhiban with demonstrators from other municipalities. There were still demonstrations in Dhiban, and the organizers of these demonstrations sometimes went to Amman to participate in demonstrations calling for bread and social justice—one of those times being March 24—but the remaining *ijtimāʿī* demands of Haraka Dhiban were local rather than national. The demand for social justice could therefore not create anything but a very fragile unity with protest groups outside Dhiban.

The tendency to understand social justice in local terms—and in terms of a lack of patronage given to the region—was evident in the answers the inhabitants of Dhiban gave when I asked why *al-ḥarakāt* began in their municipality. Everyone I asked gave similar answers: It is impossible to buy your own house and marry. There are no companies here. The government should open a factory to bring jobs to Dhiban. There is no university, army base or military hospital in Madaba, so those who study, work in the army or become sick need to travel for several hours and spend a large part of the family income on transportation. Moreover, although many from Bani Hamida (originally a confederacy of semi-nomadic tribes, which most inhabitants of Dhiban belong to) work in the public sector, they have no high positions. “There is no president of the royal court or minister,” Mohammed said when we one day sat outside the coffeehouse in Mlih with four other people. After the protests during 2011, a Bani Hamida was appointed chief of the police, but he was not from Dhiban, and he had no relation to its inhabitants. “Why does not a Hamida from Dhiban become the prime minister, or a general secretary [at a ministry], or minister [of the cabinet]?” Mohammed asked, and the young man whom we sat next to agreed angrily. I asked how that would help Dhiban, and Mohammed said that if a minister employs 100 people, he takes five of them from his own region.

I describe these demands not to answer why there was dissent in Dhiban—other places without a strong *ḥaraka* shared its socioeconomic conditions—but to present the ideas through which the dissent was expressed. The demonstrators in Dhiban were, like many other demonstrators of the Arab Spring, concerned with youth unemployment, “dismal economic conditions and living standards, abject poverty” (Gerges 2014: 9), but this common denominator conceals crucial differences. Even if the rise of dissent is caused by poverty, demonstrators might imagine the solutions to poverty in radically different ways. The demonstrations in Dhiban had mostly *ijtimāʿī* demands *limited to the region*. These additions reveal much about the demonstrators’ purposes even if they reveal little about their causes—and without paying attention to

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8 Children of retired military employees, of which there are many in Mlih, get treatment for free or for a heavily reduced price at military hospitals. Moreover, there is one university in Madaba, but it is private and too expensive for most families from Dhiban.
these kinds of additions, it is impossible to understand in what sense demonstrators calling for bread and social justice are united and what these slogans actually mean. The demonstrators in Dhiban had a common understanding of the call for bread and social justice, and the demonstrations therefore had shared and clear demands of how to solve their “dismal economic conditions”: by opening a university in the municipality, for example. When Haraka Dhiban called for social justice during the sit-in at Interior Ministry Circle, the other demonstrators obviously did not share this regional solution.

More precisely, the solution to the social question was, for the demonstrators in Dhiban, always about more government support to their municipality, often in the form of patronage. This is indicated by the fact that all three pictures on the walls in Mohammed’s living room are of Saddam Hussein. Hussein’s popularity still rests deep over Dhiban. In Karak, the Ba’th Party still organizes the celebration of the dead president’s birthday every year. Mohammed participated in a similar occasion in 2011, hosted in Madaba. I asked him why he likes Saddam Hussein, and he said that he offered university education for Jordanians [Transjordanians] in Baghdad for free and that he provided Jordan with subsidized oil. “It was bad that he was against democracy, but he was good toward the sons of the tribes.” The photos on the wall crystallize which kind of leftist Mohammed adheres to: the ijtimāʿī question is ultimately solved by the state bringing more subsidies, government jobs, public services and investments to the region—as it did when the factory was built in Mlih and as the Iraqi state did (through its oil revenues) during Saddam Hussein’s rule. No new political or legal institutions are required to solve these demands, and the large demonstrations in Dhiban demanded no such institutions. They rather imagined the solution along the lines of the traditional patronage system: pushing the government to open a university in the small town or having a cabinet minister from Dhiban who will employ people from his own region.

Apart from this, the call for bread and social justice among the demonstrators in Dhiban was “open”: it had no specific meaning regarding foreign policy, democratic reforms or the relationship between Islam and politics, which is why, within Dhiban, it could unite adherents of ideologies with radically different positions on these issues. Mohammed supported this call when he had been a member of the Ba’th Party as well as when he considered himself a nationalist. In 2014, Ismail supported Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria, called himself jihadist (jihādī), and argued that Jordan should Islamize its economy. If we consider just these two initiators of the demonstrators in Dhiban, it is clear that the call for bread and social justice could unite adherents to ideologies as different as radical Arab nationalism, Transjordanian nationalism and radical Islamism.

The unity which a call for bread and social justice could create outside of Dhiban was much more fragile. ‘Authoritarian regimes,” Lisa Anderson writes, borrowing from John Adams, “are governments of men and not of laws.’ . . . There were common elements in the Arab uprisings—not least
desire for a government of laws and not of men” (2014: 50, 52). This description is true for organizations such as the Constitution of 1952, and if it was true also for Haraka Dhiban, these harakas would have been united by a similar idea—that the realization of social justice is about implementing the rule of law. As we have seen, however, this was not how Haraka Dhiban imagined the solution to the social question. If by authoritarianism we refer to, like Anderson, a political system based on clientelism rather than the rule of law, the demonstrators in Dhiban did not challenge authoritarianism but worked within it.9

The national question

The demonstrations in Dhiban were thus to a large extent non-ideological movements that did not seek to change a national political structure but rather to bring ijtimāʿi benefits to a small region. This kind of politics—based on patron-client relations rather than common causes—has defined the Arab Spring also in other countries; it has for example been one reason for the great number of battalions in the Syrian uprising and their difficulty in unifying (cf. Abdul-Ahad 2013). Nevertheless, several members of the ḥaraka—and especially its leadership—had siyāsī demands. They wanted a change of the political system: more democracy and less corruption.

I now want to show that in order to understand these demands we have to see that they were, to a large extent, filtered through, first, the sentiment that “we, the true Jordanians” [Transjordanians] are losing the country to “Palestinians” [Palestinian-Jordanians] and, second, a confrontational political ethos that was antithetical to comprehensive agreements or demand-formation as a mode of conducting politics. This section deals with the first of these points, thus providing a traditional analysis of the Arab Spring’s fragmentation that emphasizes the significance of subnational identities. It does so by first contextualizing the Transjordanian nationalist (waṭanī) opposition that emerged during Jordan’s Arab Spring, with which several leaders of Haraka Dhiban

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9 Anderson’s text illustrates the difference between an analysis of a demonstration’s causes and aims. For another example, consider the issue of corruption. Few observers deny that discontent with corruption was one of the causes of the eruption of protests during the Arab Spring. Nevertheless, although demonstrators in Dhiban wanted corruption to end, they meant—implicitly and in contrast to many other protest groups—Palestinian-Jordanian corruption. Few social scientists would understand corruption as restricted to an ethnic group but would more likely emphasize that it is due to a country’s political structure. The risk is to commit a “scholastic fallacy” (cf. Bourdieu 1977: 2): to project an analysis of the causes of corruption on chants for an end to corruption. If the causal analysis contains a lowest common denominator, then a commonality—which arises from the way the observer understands corruption—will be projected on the aims of the demonstrators.
(but a minority of those who merely participated in demonstrations) consciously identified themselves.

The rise of a Transjordanian opposition

Several observers have noted that the Jordanian protest movements that emerged in 2011 have been strong in the provinces outside the large cities (al-muḥāfaẓāt), among Transjordanian tribesmen, the traditional backbone of the Jordanian regime (e.g., Ryan 2011; Tell 2015; Yom and al-Khatib 2012). Almost every Palestinian-Jordanian that I met who took part in the organization of a demonstration in 2011 had already been involved in political activities when the Arab Spring began, and unlike the participants in ḥarakas in places like Dhiban, Palestinian-Jordanian demonstrators were seldom from the poorer strata of society and often connected to the old opposition parties.

Because of the strong Transjordanian presence in the military, security and intelligence forces, the support of Transjordanians, and especially of the tribes that were nomadic when the Emirate of Transjordan was founded in the 1920s, has been crucial for the resilience of the Hashemite regime. According to the historian Yoav Alon, this loyalty can be traced to the slow integration—rather than violent subjugation—of the tribes into the emerging Jordanian state that developed on the East Bank under British rule after the first World War. Tribesmen got a greater stake in the existence of the state and the regime in Jordan than in most other Middle Eastern countries, where the common result of state-formation was “the coercive subjugation of the tribes accompanied by their marginalisation in society” (Alon 2009: 1-2). Jordanian tribesmen were employed in the emerging state institutions (especially the army), and in contrast to Iraq, Syria, and Egypt, Jordanian officers have never carried out a successful coup. Jordan is the only Levantine state where the ruling elite has been intact through the transition to independence (Tal 2002: 126). The Hashemite regime has relied on its East Bank power base when challenged by Nasserists, Başīthists, Arab Nationalists and National Socialists seeking to overthrow it in the 1950s and 1960s, and by Palestinian feḍayeen (commandos) seeking to replace it during the period of 1968-1971. Transjordanians have always held the most senior posts in the defense establishment (Susser 1994: 5).

Given that the Transjordanian tribes and the military historically have been two crucial pillars of the Hashemite regime, it is noticeable that a Transjordanian political opposition emerged during Jordan’s Arab Spring, who referred to themselves as “nationalists” (waṭaniyyīn) and claimed that they shared the ideology of “the military veterans” (mutaqā‘īdīn al-jaysh). Islamism and “the nationalism of the military veterans” were the two dominant ideologies among demonstrators during Jordan’s Arab Spring. The Islamic Action Front was incomparably Jordan’s strongest political party in 2011, and they brought at least two thirds of the participants to the weekly Friday demonstrations in Downtown, Amman. Although the party has many Transjordanian members
and a Transjordanian-dominated senior leadership, its electoral strongholds have historically been in areas where Palestinian-Jordanians make up the majority of the population, such as Zarqa and Amman (Bondokji 2015: 9), Jordan’s two largest cities. The nationalists, however, were stronger in areas demographically dominated by Transjordanians, had stronger support in the army and security services (proved by the prominent role retired military men had in al-ḥarakāt) and consisted exclusively of tribesmen. Unlike Islamists and the members of the other opposition parties, nationalists were firmly rooted in Jordan’s most powerful institutions.

The decline of the patronage system.

These nationalists’ roots in the Transjordanian tribes and the state apparatus influenced their demands. Their demand for an end to corruption, for example, must be understood against the backdrop of Jordan’s tribal-based patronage system. This system has for the most part been about government jobs in exchange for political loyalty, and it has always been a crucial part of the social contract between the Hashemite regime and the Transjordanian tribes. The emerging Transjordanian opposition views the economic liberalization carried out under the rule of the current monarch, which threatens the state-led economy the patronage system has been built on, as a break of this contract. Unlike Jordan’s communists and social democrats, they criticize these economic policies not primarily with leftist arguments. The essential concern is rather that economic liberalization implies a shift of economic power from the Transjordanian dominated public sector to the Palestinian-Jordanian dominated private sector.10

When a Transjordanian haraka like the one in Dhiban talked about corruption, most of its members implicitly referred to corruption connected to the dismantling of this patronage system. Many Palestinian-Jordanian political activists (who make up the majority of the members in some leftist political parties and the Islamic Action Front), on the other hand, view this patronage system itself as a key source of corruption and nepotism.

The patronage system emerged during the formation of the Jordanian state. Regular contact with the tribes has been a mainstay of Hashemite rule, beginning with King Abdullah I, Jordan’s first regent, who had close personal relations with leading shaykhs. Abdullah offered gifts and honorary titles to important tribal leaders, reduced tax burdens of certain strong tribes, and judged in tribal disputes (Alon 2009: 37-60). The Hashemites bestowed the tribes with tens of thousands of jobs in the emerging state. The Jordanian Armed Forces had an especially important role in the regime’s alliance with the tribes: its officer corps provided careers for many leading Transjordanian families,

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10 For a general description of how the Transjordanian tribes have responded to King Abdullah’s economic reforms, see Embassy Amman 2006b.
and its infantry-heavy army was not only a fighting force but also a job program for tribesmen, and so were many of Jordan’s state-owned enterprises. Almost all leaders of Haraka Dhiban worked at state-owned enterprises that were a legacy of Jordan’s earlier statist economy, and they felt they were entitled to better-paid jobs at these enterprises than what they had. Jordan has no oil reserves, so its patronage system has, unlike that of the Gulf countries, always depended on foreign assistance, which it primarily has received from the British Empire, Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, the United States, and Gulf countries (especially Saudi Arabia) (see for example Ryan 2002: 50-51).

Even after many Palestinians received Jordanian citizenship, this patronage has gone mainly to Transjordanians, especially since Jordan’s “civil war” that followed the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. After the loss of the West Bank and the destruction of the Jordanian army, fedayeen established themselves in Jordan and built up a state-within-the-state, including military forces. Several of these groups sought to overthrow the Hashemite regime, and tensions escalated until the Jordanian army defeated the Palestinian fedayeen in 1970-1971 and forced them (including Yasser Arafat’s Fateh) to leave Jordan. Many of Jordan’s military veterans, so prominent in al-ḥarakāt, remembered when the Palestinian guerrillas tried to destroy “their” state. After the showdown in September 1970, the government embarked on a purge of the public sector and security services of the fedayeen’s supporters, and this later became a process of de-Palestinizing the state. Although Transjordanian tribes always dominated the security and intelligence forces and the army units most crucial for internal security, both Palestinian-Jordanians and Transjordanians occupied key posts in the administration until 1971; now, in contrast, Transjordanians hold almost all middle-management positions in the state, and except for the health and education sector, few Palestinian-Jordanians work in the public sector. Transjordanians also dominate Jordan’s most central political institutions: in the lower house of Parliament elected in 2003, for example, seventeen out of 110 members of parliament were of Palestinian origin, and in the upper house of Parliament (appointed by the king) the same year, seven of the 55 members were Palestinian-Jordanians. Samir al-Rifai’s 29-member cabinet that resigned in 2011 had seven Palestinian-Jordanians, a percentage of Palestinian-Jordanians quite representative for the cabinets of the first decade of 2000.12

Palestinian-Jordanians, on the other hand, dominate the country’s private sector. They arrived at the East Bank mostly in three waves—following the

11 The goal of overthrowing the Hashemite regime contradicted Fateh’s core ideology, with its stress on non-intervention in the internal affairs of Arab states. This part of Fateh’s ideology, however, “was not shared by many of the other Palestinian guerrilla groups gaining influence in the late 60s nor by all its members, especially not its many new recruits who had not been schooled in the organization’s ideology” (Cobban 1984: 48-49).
12 Or eight, depending how Nasser Judeh is counted. For al-Rifai’s cabinet, see Embassy Amman 2009a. Bakhit’s cabinet in 2005 consisted of 18 Transjordanians and 6 Palestinian-Jordanians.
Arab-Israeli wars in 1948 and 1967 and following the Gulf states’ expulsion of Palestinians after the first Gulf war. Palestine was historically more urbanized than the East Bank, so the arriving Palestinians had relatively high levels of education and business experience, and they mainly settled in Jordan’s largest three cities. Many Palestinian-Jordanians now feel that it was they who “built the country,” with their capital and more educated labor force.

The regime’s program of economic liberalization was initially a response to a severe financial crisis in 1989 (see Ryan 2002). Nevertheless, Jordan’s economy largely stagnated in the 1990s, with high unemployment and declining living standards. When King Abdullah II succeeded his father in 1999, he inherited this economy, with the per capita GDP falling since the mid-1980s, and with a total public debt to GDP ratio at 111 percent. The stagnation of the government sector meant growing unemployment in places like Dhiban, where government jobs were not as available for the youth bulge as they had been for their fathers.

King Abdullah had a vision for transforming Jordan from a state-led to a more dynamic private sector-led economy, and he was committed to economic liberalization to a higher degree than his father. Five years after he ascended the throne, Jordan had joined the World Trade Organization, signed a Free Trade Agreement and a Bilateral Investment Treaty with the United States and an Association Agreement with the European Union, and set up a regional trade association with Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt. The government swiftly carried out a broad range of economic reforms, opening the country to foreign trade and investment and privatizing many of the state enterprises.

These economic reforms have primarily been carried out by western-educated technocrats of the king’s generation and with a background in the private sector. The most famous (and infamous) of them is the Palestinian-Jordanian Bassam Awadallah, one of the king’s closest advisers, who has been Minister of Planning and Finance Minister in Jordan. He had to leave the cabinet in 2005, at the urging of a bloc of Transjordanians in parliament, and he was very unpopular among the protest movements that emerged in 2011.

Since the economic reforms initiated by the king were implemented, Jordan enjoyed an economic growth of 5-7 percent per annum, an increasing per capita income, and a falling public debt until the rise of oil prices (and the concurrent rise of government subsidies) in the middle of the first decade of 2000 (see Embassy Amman 2005b). Nevertheless, al-ḥarakāt (as well as a large

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13 The Jordanian case is part of larger trend. “The herald of the end of state-led development in the Middle East,” Joel Beinin (1999) writes, “... was Egypt’s open door (infīṭah) economic policy announced in Anwar al-Sadat’s April 1974 ‘October Working Paper.’”

14 On this Transjordanian bloc, see Embassy Amman 2005c.
part of the Jordanian populace) have perceived the country’s economic boom largely through the large villas and expensive cars in West Amman. When the activists in Dhiban travel to Amman, they pass Dabouq or Abdoun, two of Amman’s wealthiest areas. There, they see the houses and private schools of the business class that is succeeding in Jordan’s more globalized economy. Much of this wealth is new wealth, and they get a sense that the country is moving in the wrong direction.

The Jordanian government is more sensitive to these concerns than most members of Haraka Dhiban thought. For example, the large-scale government investments in the southern province Ma’an, a university and an industrial park, are a job-generating scheme in this restive and Transjordanian-dominated part of Jordan (see Embassy Amman 2005d, 2005f). The garment factory in Dhiban follows the same government scheme: to invest in and support a private-sector development rather than a state enterprise. But in this new private sector, although all workers are Transjordanians from the area, the managerial class are of Palestinian origin “and much better paid,” as Mohammed pointed out to me after we had visited the factory.

Transjordanian resentment

As Mohammed’s comment indicates, the discontent in Dhiban was not only about the decline of the statist economy, but also about an awareness of increased wealth in the Palestinian-dominated private sector. In other words, the discontent was about a relative rather than absolute decline of fortunes, a sentiment that “Jordanians” [Transjordanians] are losing the country to “Palestinians” [Palestinian-Jordanians]. This is evident from the following example, from the first day I visited the leaders of Haraka Dhiban.

After we had tried to enter a famous church, which turned out to be closed, Mohammed and his cousin Qasim invited me to a restaurant. No menu was handed out; Mohammed talked to the waiter and ordered chicken, rice, yogurt, and some salads. The waiter put two big plastic bottles of water on the plastic table. They had been used many times before and had no labels. Qasim had a bachelor’s degree in law; he was a state employee and was active in Haraka Dhiban. When we finished the food, Mohammed and Qasim reflected on how easy life had become. They told me about a wedding they attended when they were young boys. Mohammed had grabbed the sheep head on the table and they both ran away with it. Hidden, they ate it up. That had been a feast. They laughed when they retold the story. They recalled eating mostly bread, olives, tea and tomatoes as children; meat once a month. “It was harsh before; we

15 That people are affected by not just their absolute but also relative living standard have been known by observers of political life at all times. The conflicts arising from such comparisons is one reason why the guardians, described in Plato’s Republic, are not allowed to handle and to touch gold and silver (416e-417a). For a modern treatment of the significance of relative status and income, see Wilkinson and Pickett 2009.
were often hungry. Now we eat at a restaurant.” Mohammed pointed toward
the many dishes we finished.

As the storytelling at the restaurant makes clear, Mohammed is aware of
the growth of his fortunes since his youth. Equally important, however, was
his sudden perception of a gulf separating Amman and Dhiban. Mohammed
recalled that he became aware of this gulf when he was working in Amman,
close to one of the “refugee camps.” There he saw “great public transporta-
tion,” clean wide streets, new cars, work opportunities and large buildings.
“Everything is present in Amman, hospitals, factories, universities, tourism,
and nothing in the rural areas (qura).” Mohammed recalled that he “realized
that Amman is rich and Dhiban poor” and that the wealth gap between them
was widening. Palestinian-Jordanians constitute a majority of Amman’s pop-
ulation, and when Mohammed said that Amman was rich and Dhiban poor, he
did not make a distinction between urban and rural—what he really meant, in
the words he himself used, is that Palestinians are rich and Jordanians poor.

In The War of the World, Niall Ferguson claims that economic volatility,
rather than economic decline alone, was one of the great causes of social ten-
sions and conflicts in twentieth century Europe. In a period of rapid economic
growth, some groups typically do better than others, which leads to grievances
(2007: lix-lxii). Every member of Haraka Dhiban whom I met, thought that
the weak economy and lack of opportunities in Dhiban was due to the coun-
try’s resources being taken by a Palestinian-Jordanian upper class in West
Amman, and this was why Mohammed, when he talked about corruption with
people in Dhiban, constantly used the phrase “the corrupted [Palestinian-Jor-
danians] in Amman.”

“No to corruption” is not necessarily a demand that stands for very different
issues. In some demonstrations during the Arab Spring, it had a very specific
meaning shared by many demonstrators; for example, the widely shared per-
ception of President Bashar al-Asad’s cousin Rami Makhlouf and the Mu-
barak family as symbols of corruption. Nevertheless, in the largest Jordanian
demonstrations, like those on March 24, the demand “no to corruption” had
conflicting meanings. For the demonstrators from Dhiban, it was filtered
through their discontents with the decline of the patronage system. Although
the state companies operate as private-sector firms, the chairs of the corporate
boards are appointees of the prime minister (Ryan 2002: 116). The appointees,
in their turn, can employ people on the basis of tribal origin. This is the basis
of the patronage system that Mohammed wants to keep and that many Pales-
tinian-Jordanian demonstrators want to replace with “meritocracy.”

The demand for the regime to reform (or for “political reforms”), chanted
at these demonstrations, also had conflicting meanings. Some observers un-
derstood this as a demand for political liberalization or democratic reforms

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16 They are still called refugee camps but have nowadays an infrastructure similar to many other
areas in Amman (see Farah 2003).
shared by most demonstrators (e.g., Amis 2016; Yom 2014), but it is important to look at the deeper motivations that underlay the demand. For Transjordanian nationalists such as al-Sneid, the demand for political reform was, to a large extent, a response to a fear that Jordan was becoming a homeland for Palestinians and that “Jordanians” [Transjordanians] were becoming marginalized in their own country. They thought that the regime let this happen, and therefore wanted to curb its power. It is correct that they wanted more power to the people, but only if we add that they understood “the people” as Transjordanian rather than Palestinian-Jordanian. As the next section shows, their fear of Palestinian dominance determined not only the meaning of their demand for political reforms but also their position on the Syrian conflict and dislike of the Muslim Brotherhood.

**The fear that Jordan will become a Palestinian homeland**

“We are like the red Indians in America.” Mohammed repeated the analogy several times as he explained to me that the “the sons of the tribes,” the Transjordanians, had lost their ancestral land (or at least fortunes) to the Palestinians. In the parliamentary democracy he wished for, no Palestinian-Jordanian would have a key ministerial position. He also wanted to lessen Palestinian-Jordanian influence in the parliament, and said that the demand for “a parliament on a demographic basis” at the sit-in on March 24 was part of a Muslim Brotherhood conspiracy. In contrast to Jordan’s contemporary electoral system, an electoral system on a demographic basis would, if we keep with Mohammed’s analogy, turn Transjordanians into “red Indians” not only economically but also politically.

The fear that Jordan was becoming dominated by Palestinians was a keystone in the political ideas of the Higher Committee for Military Veterans, an organization that in 2010 published a petition that was to heavily influence the protest movements that emerged the next year. Politically, Mohammed al-Sneid especially looked up to two individuals: the retired general Ali al-Habashne, a Transjordanian from a Karaki tribe and one of the authors of this petition, whom Mohammed in 2011 claimed to meet about every other week, and the political writer Nahed Hattar, a Christian Transjordanian from a Karaki tribe. Hattar was a former communist and editor of the Jordanian weekly paper *al-Mithaq*, which was the mouthpiece of an ideology that blends older Arab nationalist thought with a more recent form of Transjordanian nationalism, of which Hattar was the most well-known proponent (Abu-Odeh 1999: 246-248).18

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17 Both authors write that Jordan’s Arab Spring began in Dhiban; Haraka Dhiban is thus not at the periphery of their understanding of the Jordanian demonstrations that demanded political reforms.

18 Hattar was assassinated by a lone gunman in 2016. He was shot outside the court “where he was to stand trial on charges of contempt of religion.” Hattar had shared a caricature on social
Al-Habashne was one of the most well-known figures in the opposition movements during 2011. He lived in a large villa at the outskirts of Amman but frequently visited Karak for the weddings and funerals of his fellow tribesmen. In Chapter 1, I wrote that he was on his way to the Interior Ministry Circle on March 24 when a colleague from the committee called him and said that he saw signs reading “something like: ‘give the Palestinians their rights and citizenship.’” Unlike al-Sneid, al-Habashne never reached the circle, and he called other military veterans and told them to withdraw. Later in 2011, he sought to establish a political party, which the security forces stopped. If he had succeeded, he would have had a prominent place in that party. Given the hierarchical structure of the Jordanian political parties as well as his former high position in the army, his views on how the regime should be reformed were also more illuminating than the ideas of a more local organization like Haraka Dhiban, which was based on an ideology similar to his.

Al-Habashne was the former head of the Higher Committee for Military Veterans, which in early 2010 had 140,000 ex-army personnel and their families on its books. In May 2010, this committee issued a petition that criticized settlement of Palestinian refugees in Jordan and called for political reforms curbing corruption and giving more authorities to the government and parliament (i.e., fewer authorities to the royal court and the mukhābarāt). The committee consisted of 60 military veterans, who all had retired from high military positions, among them al-Habashne and Mohamed Jamal al-Majali (former Major General) (Fisk 2010; see also David 2010). It is very unusual that an organization representing tens of thousands of military veterans expresses controversial political views in Jordan, and they avoided publishing their more detailed accusations of corruption. Even so, they were prosecuted for publishing the petition.19

media, to—according to himself, when he later apologized—mock fundamentalist Sunni radicals and their vision of God and heaven (“Jordanian writer shot dead outside court before trial over cartoon,” Reuters, September 25, 2016).

19 The criticism in Dhiban of corruption among senior officials was to some extent based on trust in the publications and words of these officers, and the committee’s information about corruption was partly based on al-Habashne’s research for his dissertation, which he began writing after retirement. He initially wanted to study Jordan’s privatization of public companies since 2000. The university did not want him to write about the politically sensitive subject, so he instead wrote about corporate social responsibility. Nevertheless, the role as researcher gave him the opportunity to study some large privatizations: the cement and phosphate industries, water resources, the airport, and the banks of the Dead Sea and Aqaba. Interviews and anonymous questionnaires with the workers and—especially—the middle management in these former public sectors became the basis for his understanding of corruption in Jordan. After the mukhābarāt’s retreat from political life in early 2011, the charges against the three most prominent figures of the Military Veterans were dropped. In the freer political ambiance of the Arab Spring, the committee issued an economic document which in detail describes corruption during the privatizations of public companies, and most of the descriptions were based on al-Habashne’s inquiries.
The petition also warned about an Israeli strategy of making Jordan “the alternative [Palestinian] homeland” (al-waṭan al-badīl). When al-Sneid presented his politics to people in Dhiban, he focused on, ijtīmāʾi issues aside, that he was against the corrupted [“Palestinians”] in Amman and that he did not want Jordan to become the alternative homeland. He insisted that he instead supported late King Hussein’s decision in 1988 to disengage Jordan from Palestine. The issue of the alternative homeland reveals that although nationalists like al-Habashne and al-Sneid, just like the Muslim Brotherhood and the leftist political parties, wanted a stronger parliament, it was crucial for these nationalists that this stronger parliament was Transjordanian. This is one reason why it was so difficult for the Jordanian protest groups to unite on a precise demand for parliamentary reforms.

The notion of “the alternative homeland” comes from the Israeli political party Likud, and especially from Ariel Sharon, who during his tenure as Israeli Minister of Defense and in his authority over the occupied territories was the most outspoken proponent for the notion that Palestinians already had a country, on the other side of the Jordan river: “Jordan is Palestine.” According to Adam Garfinkle, the Likud policy “was to feed a graduated de facto annexation that had earlier grown not out of design but the habit of power,” and Sharon’s “ultimate motive was to depopulate them [the occupied territories] of Arabs” (1992: 101, quoted in Abu-Odeh 1999: 213). In addition to what that means for the Palestinians living in the West Bank, the Jordanian regime knew that such an Israeli policy would ultimately lead to a new wave of West Bank refugees entering Jordan, further straining the country’s weak resources and likely resulting in a destabilization of the Jordanian state due to a new demographic balance. The Jordanian leadership thought that the Likud notion “Jordan is Palestine” could be countered by an independent Palestinian state and a peace treaty between Jordan and Israel, and this aspect of Jordan’s peacemaking was reflected in the Jordanian Prime Minister’s remark after the signing of the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty: “We have now buried ‘the alternative homeland’” (Abu-Odeh 1999).

The question was never buried, however, because a Palestinian state never materialized, and its prospects have become increasingly dim because of the building of the separation barrier, increasing Jewish settlements on the West Bank, and the rise of Hamas. This means the rebirth of the Jordanian fear of a new mass migration, stressing the country’s resources and making real—demographically at least—the notion that “Jordan is Palestine.”

Most Transjordanians—and Jordanians in general—fear mass migrations from unstable neighboring countries, but for al-Habashne, Hattar (the late journalist Mohammed looked up to) and Mohammed, the alternative homeland was not only a future threat; they wanted to remove the citizenship that many Palestinian-Jordanians held. Al-Habashne claimed that 700,000 Palestinian-Jordanians had illegal citizenship that was assigned after Jordan’s disengagement from the West Bank in 1988, including many Palestinians who
left Kuwait after the Gulf war. They also designated some families as “foreign” and as Palestinian-Jordanian that normally were not considered so, such as the al-Rifai family which former prime minister Samir al-Rifai belonged to (the family moved to Jordan around the time of the state’s establishment in the 1920s and has since provided Jordan with three prime ministers), and thought that most corruption in Jordan originated from Palestinian-Jordanians (or “Palestinians,” as they called them). Although these nationalists stated that they wanted a separation of powers—putting the government under increasing parliamentary supervision and ensuring the independence of the courts—to counter corruption, they did not want the parliament to form the government. In addition to the instability this would lead to (when the different tribes do not accept a prime minister from another tribe), “the Palestinians are too organized,” al-Habashne explained to me. “They would support one candidate; Jordanians [would support] four to five [different candidates].”

The fear that Jordanians will lose their homeland to Palestinians shaped al-Habashne’s view on not only “political reforms” but also foreign policy. The key to understanding his view on foreign policy is this: when he saw a map of the Middle East, he really saw a demographic chart of Jordan. So al-Sneid’s and al-Habashne’s participation in a demonstration in support of the Syrian regime during 2011 and al-Habashne’s and Hatter’s support visit to Bashar al-Assad’s regime in 2012 had nothing to do with Syrian domestic politics. “It is a bad regime, bad that they kill people. But we should prioritize Jordan’s higher national interests,” al-Habashne told me. “There are 600,000 Palestinians in Syria. Where will they go if the regime falls? Not to Lebanon or Iraq. To Jordan.” There will be pressure from the United Nations to give them legal status, then Jordan’s demographics radically change. 20

Although the Muslim Brotherhood and Transjordanian nationalists like al-Habashne and al-Sneid all criticized the Israel-Jordan Treaty of Peace and supported Palestinians’ “right to return,” they did so on different grounds. The Muslim Brotherhood rejected the existence of Israel, and they were convinced that Jordan got no benefits from the treaty. However much al-Habashne and al-Sneid talked about the Palestinians’ right to return, what they really wanted was for fewer Palestinians to stay in Jordan and receive political rights and citizenship.

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20 Senior Jordanian officials shared this fear. In May 2017, 659,246 Syrian refugees were registered in Jordan (data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=107); a relative small amount of these were Palestinians since Jordanian “authorities began denying entry to Palestinians living in Syria beginning in April 2012 and officially declared a non-admittance policy in January 2013. . . . The head of Jordan’s Royal Hashemite Court told Human Rights Watch in May 2013 that the influx of Palestinians would alter Jordan’s demographic balance and potentially lead to instability” (Human Rights Watch 2014: 1).
Thus, when al-Sneid criticized the regime, he did not only think in terms of the marginalization of his municipality; but also in terms of the marginalization of Transjordanians, a step which not all demonstrators in Dhiban took. He had an ideology, that of the military veterans, and because he had an ideology, the *ijtimāʿ* question had *siyāsī* solutions: to restrict the power of the political class that acts, he thinks, against the interests of Transjordanians. His long-term goal was, as al-Habashne’s, to form a political party that could accomplish this.

Mohammed also thought that the Muslim Brotherhood acts against the interests of Transjordanians. He occasionally referred to the Muslim Brothers as “friends of America,” an accusation that people in *al-ḥarakāt* often directed against their political enemies. He claimed that after the large demonstrations began in Dhiban, Zaki Bani Irsheid, a senior Muslim Brotherhood official, visited his house in Dhiban and offered him a place in the party’s Labor Committee. The Muslim Brotherhood, with its political wing the Islamic Action Front, is one of the few Jordanian organizations outside the state apparatus that can offer a Jordanian activist a livelihood through politics. Mohammed declined the offer. He told me that he did not like Islamists. “Your religion is not important.” When I once asked Mohammed if he thought they wanted a religious state similar to Saudi Arabia, he disagreed.

Mohammed: No, the Saudis are better [not as radical]. They [The Muslim Brotherhood] are like al-Qaida.

Arvid: (at the same time) Like the Taliban?

Mohammed: Yes, like the Taliban.

On another occasion, he said that they are “half-way to al-Qaida.” Despite Mohammed’s designation of the Muslim Brothers as similar to al-Qaida or the Taliban, his opposition to them was, like the Military Veterans’, based more on the Palestinian issue than on any notion of secularism: it was based on the Muslim Brotherhood’s strong connection to Hamas, their visible presence in the Palestinian refugee camps, their engagement in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict “without regard for Jordan’s national interests,” and their pan-Islamism—at the expense of Jordanian nationals. “They do not care if Egyptians or Palestinians come here,” al-Habashne remarked. “Jordan is for all Arabs.”

To sum up, Haraka Dhiban’s positions (or at least those of its leader) on the electoral system, the members of the citizenry, the Israeli-Jordanian Treaty

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21 Linda Layne (1994: 71) has described a government policy to “unify and integrate individual tribal identities into one broad tribal identity, i.e., to promote a general Bedouinism rather than encouraging each tribe to maintain and develop its own tribal identity,” and this broader tribal identity is reflected in Mohammed’s equivalence of Jordanians with “the sons of the tribes” (*ibn al-ʿashāʾir*) and in the fact that the two individuals he looks up to in political matters are from another city and other tribes, something unimaginable before some integration of individual tribal identities.
of Peace and the Syrian uprising were all filtered through the sentiment that Transjordanians were losing the country to Palestinian-Jordanians. Demands such as “reform the political system,” chanted by the largest Jordanian demonstrations—and one of Youth of March 24’s key demands—had not only different but also contradictory meanings. These divisions have historical roots in Jordan’s early state formation, in its more recent shift from a state-driven patronage system to a market-driven economy, and in the evolution of its national identity, which at least since the first Arab-Israeli war has been closely connected to the Palestinian issue.

Forms of politics

The fragmentation of the political opposition along ethnic or religious lines is a recurrent theme in accounts of the Arab Spring, and to the extent that we understand the exclusivist ideology of the military veterans as an effect of a lack of an inclusive Jordanian national identity, the Jordanian opposition fits this larger pattern. As I have shown in the previous section, demands about “democracy,” “corruption” and “the right of Palestinians to return” appear as—to some extent at least—“liberal” or “altruistic” expressions of an actual desire to restrict the rights of what Transjordanian nationalists perceived as a foreign ethnic group.

Nevertheless, in the previous chapter, I argued that, during the sit-in on March 24, the conflicts that appeared to be between political groups with different views on the Palestinian issue were actually often rooted in the form of political action predominant among these groups. Haraka Dhiban had a relatively polemical way of relating to not only Palestinian-Jordanians but also the Muslim Brotherhood and the Jordanian regime. As will become clearer in later chapters, this polemical form of politics is rooted in a broader political culture that cannot be reduced to ethnic divisions or the secular-Islamist divide.

This section investigates this confrontational form of politics and the type of unity it could create. While the last section dealt with ideological differences between the Jordanian protest groups, this one deals with a confrontational ethos transcending many of these differences. I identified the marginal form of politics that I wrote about in relation to the sit-in on March 24 in terms of a less polemical ethos, which some political activists described as “infitāḥ,” and which during the Arab Spring appeared in contrast to an ethos that this section will describe in more detail.

Unity based on confrontation.

Mohammed occasionally went to political meetings in Amman together with a couple of activists from Dhiban. Such meetings were the main way
Mohammed coordinated with other protest groups in 2011, and the following is an analysis of the unity achieved at one of these meetings.

One day in October 2011, Mohammed, a couple of the leaders of Haraka Dhiban, and I drove to a leftist “cultural club” in Webde, an old area of Amman that houses many cultural and political centers.22 When we arrived, the meeting had already started. Around 30 people sat in a circle of chairs. There was no moderator and no one held any formal position of authority. When we entered, two participants were presenting a new haraka they had formed, and they were talking about its goals. The informal character of the meeting was reminiscent of the fluidity of the harakas and the shifting affiliations of their members.23 No one would have taken much notice if we had not been there. One participant proposed that they should have a demonstration in Amman with only ijtimāʿī demands, arguing that “the street” was not interested in siyāsī issues at the moment. Some others agreed, and they decided the place and date for the demonstration. The demands were discussed only for a few minutes; no one took any notes or wrote anything on a board: a firm decision on which demands they would bring was never made. This was the same process for forming demands that Youth of March 24 had.

Mohammed smiled when we walked down the stairs which led out of the building. “I am satisfied,” he said, referring to the agreement to hold a demonstration. Some of the harakas Mohammed had reached an agreement with had an ideology very different from his own, the Jordanian National Initiative (almubādara al-wataniyya al-urduniyya) being one of them. Mohammed introduced me to George, one of its cofounders, a retired Christian Palestinian-Jordanian geophysicist in his 60s. During his university studies in Germany in the 1970s, he encountered Marxist theory, which still formed the backbone of his political understanding. He viewed Jordan’s dependency on the world center (mainly the Western world and Turkey) as the fundamental cause of its financial problems and poverty, and thought that Islamism was a superstructure of customs and traditions caused by an undeveloped economic base. The leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood were not primarily Islamists but compradors, businessmen who supported capitalism and therefore also Jordan’s inferiority, based as it was on the country’s dependence on America and Turkey. The problem with Jordan’s political parties had been that they consisted of intellectuals and not workers, he claimed. The workers make the revolution, not intellectuals.

22 The owner of the club told me that since political associations need a license and are subjected to interference from the security services, it is easier to register them as philosophical or cultural clubs.

23 The same is true for demonstrations. At the two demonstrations organized by Mohammed that I see in Madaba, around 70 people attend. The demonstrations held in Dhiban in early 2011 were much larger, but the haraka in Dhiban is as informal as the meeting at the cultural club in Amman.
This theoretical interest in the working class was not matched by a practical interest. George never discussed practical problems of real workers, how to change existing labor laws or how to organize the working class. The main activity of the Jordanian National Initiative was to “spread consciousness” through seminars. Some of the remarks David Graeber makes about what he calls “sectarian Marxist groups” apply to this haraka. They conceived of themselves as an intellectual project and emerged out of a certain definition of reality; their emphasis, therefore, was on “spreading consciousness,” not on practical activities (2009: 322-323). Nevertheless, the group also participated in demonstrations, for example the sit-in on March 24, and people from the group had taken part in the meetings planning the sit-in.

How could Mohammed reach an agreement, not only in this meeting but also on March 24, on what to demand with a group that had an ideology so strikingly different from his own? Although Haraka Dhiban and a Palestinian-Jordanian dominated haraka like the Jordanian National Initiative or the Islamists at March 24 all chanted about social justice, an end to corruption, and “the reform of the regime,” they did not, as mentioned, have the same issues in mind. Some of their notions were in conflict; for example, most Palestinian-Jordanian activists disliked Transjordanian privileges such as the university quotas and other parts of the patronage system.

I do not imply that large demonstrations united in abstract goals always are ineffective in pressuring the regime or that the protest groups demonstrating on March 24 had completely different goals. My point is that since the demand-formation process was very loose, the groups were united in demands that required only a few minutes’ discussion and did not require any trade-offs, such as “the prices should not rise,” “the people want the regime to reform,” and in calls for improved living standards, cheaper education or against corruption. Many activists participating in demonstrations (like the leaders of Haraka Dhiban), however, thought that they were initiators of a mass movement that would transform the Jordanian political system. This unity was a chimera, which became evident whenever the more practical issues that are crucial for such an institutional transformation were at stake; for example, about exactly how to reform the election law or constitution.

Nevertheless, the leaders in Dhiban were convinced that something was bad with the Jordanian government, namely corruption and the prioritization of the wealthy in Amman, and that this could be changed if only the will existed. The solution is, as in the dependency theory George advocates, a simple negative act, a simplicity which was reflected in the language almost all leaders of al-ḥarakāt used, especially in one of the most well used phrases: “We are against the government (ḍudd al-ḥukūma).” And when the solution is to simply remove this bad influence, why would it be important to develop demands or have a clear sense of an alternative political society?
Forms of political activism

This belief in removing something bad at the top of the regime was affiliated with a “confrontational” form of political action, political activities conducted in a spirit of a polemics directed against the regime. When I went with Mohammed around Dhiban, and we met people he had not seen before, he soon began trying to convince them that they were marginalized and that the government neglected the area. He had great faith in what could be accomplished by forcing the government into concessions through demonstrations or strikes, and his account of how he became politicized, which I retell below, is identical with his discovery of this method.

In a valley outside Amman lies an old stone house that is in ruins. Mohammed grew up there, and his father had a small farm beside the house. A stream runs through the valley, but it is now barely visible. When Mohammed was a boy, water was plentiful. He swam in the water, and once, before he knew how to swim, he almost drowned. Then the water disappeared. It was diverted to Amman, he claimed. Several years later, the government was to remove the subsidies on fodder, making it much more expensive. Some tribe members, many of them living in Dhiban, blocked the road to the airport with their sheep. As a result, subsidies were only partially removed. “From that I learned how to act,” he told me. When the water disappeared, he did not know that those affected could force the government into concessions. “We did not think like that then. If we did, we would have responded differently.”

In early 2011, several observers were struck by a “sudden transition from apparent apathy to extreme activism” (Issam Fares Institute 2011: 17) in the Arab world, and the story above illustrates this transition in Mohammed’s life. Nevertheless, political activism can take many forms, and the story also illustrates the peculiar character of his new activism and how it differed from the form of politics I specified in the previous chapter. In that chapter, I showed how there existed a group within Youth of March 24 who—like all the umbrella organization’s members—wanted to reform the political system and combat corruption, but thought that this should be done through negotiations and agreements, both within the umbrella organization and vis-á-vis the regime. Although Mohammed obviously also reached agreements with people, his key modus operandi—which he discovered when some tribe members blocked a road—was to protest against the government’s policies and force it into concessions; that is, to struggle against an enemy.24 A political activist

24 I do not want to convey the idea that the leaders of Haraka Dhiban never discussed issues creatively. Like other strong harakas in Jordan, they focused on organizational issues. For example, during one meeting with six of the haraka’s most active members, they discussed the following issues: One proposal was that everyone in the haraka should pay 2 JOD a month. The treasury would be used for common expenses, especially to buy materials for the banners used at the demonstrations. An accountant needed to be assigned to handle the funds. They agreed to form a council of nine people responsible for political strategy and issues that required immediate decisions. One person should be responsible for coordinating with the harakas in
whose modus operandi is civic cooperation and political dialogue (like Naseem, the political journalist from the previous chapter)—and who judges other forms of activism from this standpoint—will find this reliance on pressuring the government and struggling against an enemy deficient. “Many demands of ḥarakas in al-muḥāfaẓāt were unrealistic,” one of these activists told me. “A ḥaraka with many unrealistic demands [e.g., a university and military hospital in a small municipality] can never prioritize. It can put pressure on the state, but it always becomes up to the state to make all decisions, because, as long as resources are limited, decisions require prioritization.” This type of criticism was based on their personal experience that it was difficult for these ḥarakas to work together with other political factions. Consider, for example, Mohammad’s claim that the Islamists from the Muslim Brotherhood broke the agreement that he and other leftists had made with them before the sit-in on March 24. “We had agreed on demanding fair elections, an end to corruption, and a progressive tax system,” he told me. The Islamists, however, brought other demands to the circle. Worst of all, they demanded an electoral system on a demographic basis. “It is a racist slogan,” he said. The last remark conveys the “ethnic divisions” of the Jordanian opposition, but the idea that the Islamists had betrayed an agreement conveys, as I argued in the last chapter, an inexperience in working together and reaching agreements with other political factions. This was not just “inexperience,” however, but was also rooted in a form of politics—described in this section—that was not oriented toward developing demands and reaching agreements that required trade-offs.

other parts of Jordan, and another for all media contact. Some members of the ḥaraka had a sense of the importance of “public opinion” and wanted a person with such a sense to be in charge of media contacts. The meeting attendees also agreed that the chants always should always be decided upon before the demonstration, and that all participants should be aware of them. One person would be responsible for writing them down, and only he would speak in the megaphone. This agreement was a response to some problems which these activists had encountered. Qasim recalled an incident during the anti-corruption demonstration the previous week. When they reached the square in Madaba, one of the participants began to shout, “Son of Hussein [King Abdullah] we want to have reforms!” He sounded very angry when he shouted, and he shouted very loudly. Qasim grimaced when he told the story, as if he was disgusted with how the man behaved, and he estimated that the angry shouting directed against the king scared away two-thirds of the 70 people who attended the demonstration. All the problems that were raised for discussion during the meeting point to a more general theme: the stronger ḥarakas in Jordan—whose leaders usually had a sense for organizing—realized that a strengthening of their ḥaraka required functional differentiation, “discipline,” the gathering of funds, and the installment of an “executive office” to handle the many decisions that needed to be taken on short notice. These are some of the needs that Weber (1978: 956-1005) means impels bureaucratization, and Mohammed, Qasim and the others at the meeting thought that the solution to the problems listed above and to their difficulty in facing the mukhābarāt (its “propaganda campaigns” and ability to “buy” key members of the ḥarakas) was to organize Haraka Dhiban more like a political party. Jordan’s Arab Spring may well be most significant, in a long-term perspective, as the germ of a Transjordanian nationalist political party.
The difference in modus operandi between Mohammed’s and Naseem’s forms of politics is reflected in their political hope. Hope appears most clearly when there are no longer any attainable objectives, when there is an evident limit to what you can do. It appears when we face difficulties, when what we deeply wish for cannot be realized here and now but only—possibly—in the future. Mohammed was in such a situation in 2014, when there was no longer any *ḥarakak* in Dhiban and he had been fired after arranging a demonstration. Mohammed told me about Ramzi, another influential person during the protests in Dhiban in 2011. “He was poor back then. He had a small house and an outhouse. Not even a toilet. Now he has a car, two apartments in Madaba.” The *mukhābarāt* offered him a nice job in return for him withdrawing from the protests. Like many prominent figures in *al-ḥarakāt*, Mohammed got such offers, and he turned those down. “I have chosen a difficult road,” he said. But he had higher principles. He saw himself as the poor but uncorrupted, brave man who confronted injustices and the regime. “One day,” he said, “the people will rise.” This was his hope.

After March 25, 2011, Naseem, the political blogger, also started to hope, not for a spontaneous uprising, but for ever growing civic bubbles. They would just grow, they would never bump into anything; in this imagination, there would be no confrontation and hence no need for courage. Mohammed, on the other hand, did not hope for a slow cultural change but for a great uprising, where the Jordanian people finally confronted the regime. The struggle between people and regime was, unlike in Naseem’s hope, at the center. And since a struggle was at the center, courage was a more important political virtue in Mohammed’s imagination than in Naseem’s. The difference between their political activism was evident even when they did not act but just sat and hoped.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on the ideas and political forms through which *al-ḥarakāt* expressed dissent. It has highlighted Haraka Dhiban’s patronage politics, the sense that their position is declining vis-à-vis Palestinian-Jordanians, and their “polemical” politics. These ideas and forms characterized not only Haraka Dhiban but all *ḥarakas* in *al-muhāfaẓāt* that I am aware of.

These ideas and forms affected the possible types of political cooperation. Of these ideas and forms, the scholarly literature on Jordan’s Arab Spring has dealt mostly with the Palestinian-Transjordanian issue, arguing that it was di-

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25 Cf. “You can do all you can to realize your hopes, but ultimately they depend on the fates—on someone else. I desire her. I hope she will desire me. I do what I can to bring about her desire, but finally there is a limit to what I can do. I can only hope” (Crapanzano 2003: 6).
visive and therefore made it difficult to bring about a broad political coalition.26 This argument is part of a larger tendency to understand the political fragmentation that the Arab Spring often led to in terms of a lack of national identity and subsequent conflicts between regional and ethnic groups. Nevertheless, although the demonstrations in Dhiban were oriented toward regional rather than national solutions to their problems, this orientation was not just due to the strength of subnational identities; it was an outcome of a politics based on patronage—rather than common ideas and causes—which in Jordan usually leads to a politics based on regional and ethnic lines. The demonstrators wanted a cabinet minister from Dhiban because, as Mohammed said, if a minister employed 100 people, he took five of them from his own region.

Transjordanian nationalists’ idea that hundreds of thousands of Palestinian-Jordanians should lose their citizenship—and their strong sentiment against Palestinian-Jordanian influence in general—obviously created great conflicts among the Jordanian opposition. This idea should be understood against the backdrop of the emergence of an exclusivist Transjordanian national identity, especially since the 1980s, but it was also grounded in a more general form of politics. In the case of Haraka Dhiban, Palestinian-Jordanians, the government and the Muslim Brotherhood were all political adversaries, and Jordanian society would be better without them. Political action is here about confronting or removing the privileges of adversaries rather than a civic cooperation that tries to find solutions to problems Jordanians have in common.

Thus, although divisions related to the Transjordanian-Palestinian issue were, as I have emphasized, of great political importance, the patronage politics and “polemical spirit” of many harakas also limited the possibilities of civic cooperation and broad coalitions based on anything but narrow issues such as opposition against price increases or a prime minister. That this was the case will become clearer in the next chapter, which focuses on attempts to create more advanced political cooperation and broader coalitions, and on the way of conducting politics that these attempts were based on.

26 See the references in Chapter 1.
3. Forms of collective action

This chapter investigates some important events during the organizing of the Jordanian protest movements in 2011-2012: A conference for leaders of al-ḥarakāt and the political parties organized by a Jordanian NGO, the planning for a new demonstration at the Interior Ministry Circle on March 24, 2012, an attempt by a wealthy Jordanian living abroad to sponsor a conference coordinating al-ḥarakāt, and the development of the ḥaraka in Hayy al-Tafaila, which I briefly described in the introduction. In all these cases, the chapter highlights political activists who, often independently from each other, attempted to establish forms of collective action that never took root within the leadership of the Jordanian protest movements. The chapter describes the practices and values this collective action was based on (cf. Graeber 2009: 287-358; Razsa 2015: 24) and contrasts it with forms of politics that were more common, such as that of Haraka Dhiban. While Chapter 1 was a detailed discussion of such differences in relation to a single sit-in, this chapter is thus a more general discussion of such differences in relation to several attempts to organize politically.

I emphasize these differences in the form of dissent to the extent that they affected the political opposition’s ability to solve disputes and form demands through democratic means such as negotiations, agreements and compromises. The difficulty in coordinating the political opposition has been one obstacle to bringing about a less authoritarian political system or, at least, to stopping political instability in several countries affected by the Arab Spring. The Syrian opposition’s disunity, Aron Lund pointed out in 2012, “is a major obstacle to any peaceful resolution of the conflict”: If the Asad regime would be toppled by armed struggle or a foreign intervention, only a unified and well-functioning opposition leadership could prevent Syria from descending into chaos (2012: 4). The significance of an opposition’s capability to cooperate extends far beyond the Arab Spring, however. In his analysis of the French Revolution, Alexis de Tocqueville (2011 [1856]) emphasizes the links between a society’s capability for political cooperation and the success of an oppositional movement wanting to establish freedom. “Successful self-government,” the political scientist Edward Banfield (1958: 7) writes in his classic

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1 Furthermore, Lund reasoned, if the regime would remain intact, or if an internal coup would dispose it, only such a leadership can negotiate a peaceful settlement with the rulers of the Syrian state (Lund 2012: 4-5).
study of how social values affected political life in a Southern Italian town, “depends, among other things, upon the possibility of concerting the behavior of large numbers of people in matters of public concern.”

Instead of imagining a united opposition and explaining, through counterfactual arguments, why it was not realized, the thesis starts with the fact that the Jordanian opposition was deeply fragmented and that there were attempts to counter this fragmentation by coordinating it and specifying its demands. This chapter examines such attempts and asks why they fell apart. It shows that they were grounded not primarily in a specific identity but in practices and values which most of the protest movements’ leadership did not share and which I specify with the help of Jordanian political organizers’ reflections on infitāḥ. My focus is on this relatively enduring “form” or “ethos,” even when I discuss the more time-bounded events and specific demands of the Jordanian protest movements. While later chapters describe how this form is rooted in types of education and social life, this puts it into sharper relief in relation to some central events during the history of the Jordanian protest movements.

The political organizers whose reflections I draw on had all been engaged in politics before the Arab Spring. They all wished that Jordan would have more democratic institutions in the future, but they wanted gradual reforms, not a revolution. None shared the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood or the Military Veterans. All of them had a middle-class background and had studied at university, and they consisted of both Transjordanians and Palestinian-Jordanians. Several had worked with an NGO for short projects, but this trend is overrepresented in my material, because of the difficulty to get access to information about the internal politics of a ḥaraka such as that in Hayy al-Ta'faila (see below). Their critique of the leadership of al-ḥarakāt was based on certain political ideas but also on alternative forms of collective action—ways of conducting demonstrations, forming demands, coordinating with other protest movements and interacting with the state apparatus. The attempts to organize these movements allowed political organizers to see and reflect on their own way of acting politically, which to some extent had been second nature. In this self-reflection, infitāḥ had a prominent place. In general, the political organizers I know of who emphasized the significance of coordinating the political opposition—and specifying its demands—also came to emphasize infitāḥ as one of its conditions. The concept thus points toward a broader political culture that appeared through a reflection on the difficulty in bringing about a more democratic society during Jordan’s Arab Spring.
Coordinating demands for political reforms

The two-day conference “Reformation of the structure of elections” was one of the most ambitious attempts to coordinate the Jordanian opposition during the Arab Spring. The conference was held in 2011 at a five-star hotel in central Amman, with around 60 participants representing fourteen prominent ḥarakas, four political parties, two trade unions, and five NGOs. These included some factions that I have written about previously: Haraka Hayy al-Tafaila, [Youth of] March 24, the Constitution of 1952 and the Higher National Committee for Military Veterans. Leading ḥarakas from Karak, Tafila, Mafraq and Ma’an—four of Jordan’s 12 governorates—also participated, and this was one of the rare times when ḥarakas from so many geographical areas met in order to discuss demands. The conference was organized by the Jordanian NGO Identity Center—primarily by people who identify with social democratic ideology and who have trust and contacts among the Jordanian opposition—and was funded by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Jordan, a German foundation associated with the Social Democratic Party. The conference was an attempt

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2 These numbers are a bit arbitrary since the trade unions were not formal trade unions and some members of a political party participated in the name of a ḥaraka. More ḥarakas were invited but answered that they did not want to come. The declining to come was a part of a larger pattern that I will describe later. The Islamic Action Front also declined to come. The organization seldom participated in meetings with al-ḥarakāt where the goal was to reach collective decisions. I do not know the exact reasons for this. Among my more well-informed informants, the two most common interpretations were that the Islamic Action Front’s leaders thought that the ḥarakas were too weak or that these leaders were inexperienced in having a more profound dialogue with other political factions.


4 Western-funded NGOs do not have the same problems with the mukhābarāt that the opposition political parties have. Like the mukhābarāt, many Jordanians associate these parties with opposition to the monarchy and therefore mistrust and fear of associating with them, which is one reason why politically-minded people working with NGOs are hesitant to start a political party. Furthermore, Western funding usually includes some political protection. The head of the Identity Center—Muhammed Hussainy—for instance, has good connections in the European embassies and international NGOs, which would probably intervene if he got into any severe problems with the mukhābarāt. He is a member of an influential Palestinian family but does not have the strong wāṣta in the Jordanian state (and tribes) that some young Transjordanians working with him have, which makes these Western connections even more valuable. These connections are insufficient, however, if a Jordanian NGO wants to do something politically sensitive, in which case, according to Hussainy, two things are crucial: “Knowledge of the law and good relationships. Nobody can enter the office; you can organize anything if you do it inside the office. If we want to organize something really sensitive, we do it with the partnership of a minister.” When the conclusions of the different workshops were presented in the hotel’s large conference room, headsets lay on the round tables where all visitors sat. Two interpreters sat in a booth in the back of the hall, and they took turns translating into English what the representatives presenting the conclusions of their respective workshop said. The handful of visitors who used the headsets were hearing the translation. The ones I met were employees at the Dutch, Swedish, and Spanish embassies. A Jordanian senator and an assistant
to coordinate the Jordanian protest movements through a form of discussion that was very unusual among these movements’ leadership. I will soon characterize this form of discussion, but first I will describe the aim of the conference in greater detail.

Reforms and the political agenda in Jordan

As I have mentioned, Jordanians active in the protest movements that emerged during the Arab Spring shared the sentiment that they lived in a corrupt political system which they wanted to change by *siyāsī* (political) reforms, that is, by a comprehensive change of the political system. Many protest movements spoke in the idiom of democracy and were discontent with the election law and electoral fraud. The conference addressed this shared but diffuse desire for *siyāsī* reforms and aimed to turn it into united and relatively concrete demands.

The conference dealt with four *siyāsī* topics: the election law for the parliamentary elections, an independent commission for supervision of elections, international monitoring of elections, and the governing of the municipalities. The topics—especially the election law—have been at the center of discussions about Jordan’s political reforms for many years, and they have been dealt with by various commissions appointed by King Abdullah.

The election law has always been the most difficult issue to reach consensus about. The most contentious issue is how many parliamentary seats should be elected from national lists—in contradistinction to seats that represent geographic constituencies. In elections for national lists, all of Jordan is one election district, which means that a Transjordanian vote is equal to a Palestinian-Jordanian vote, in contrast to Jordan’s contemporary system of electoral districting, where Transjordanian-populated areas outside the large cities are heavily over-represented. This is one reason why many Transjordanians oppose a national list system and many Palestinian-Jordanians (e.g., Hussainy 2014) support it.

Another contentious issue is how many votes each voter should cast. Most political analysts argue that Jordan’s system of a single non-transferable vote in small multi-seated districts makes it very difficult for political parties to succeed, and gives little incentive for the development of political programs. This means that several Jordanians who support political parties want to return
to the election law used in 1989 (where each voter cast three votes), believing that people will, as in that election, cast some of their extra votes on political parties instead of independent candidates.

The conference discussed international election monitoring and an independent commission for supervision of elections as possible remedies against electoral fraud. The establishment of the committee entails questions such as: Who would recruit its members? How long will their terms be? What should their minimum qualifications be regarding age and education? How can its autonomy be guaranteed?

In sum, the conference dealt with siyāsī problems (e.g., the election law, electoral fraud) that mostḥarakas and political parties thought were important. What made the conference unusual was not the idea that these were important issues, but the type of discourse it institutionalized to deal with them. Its purpose was to reach an agreement on and clarify demands. Its organizers attempted to initiate discussions where people did not just express their political opinions but solved problems (e.g., how to ensure the independence of a committee supervising elections) and internal differences. In other words, they attempted to create a unity based not only on issues which all parties already agreed on (e.g., stop price increases) but also on more contentious issues. The discussions were about national policies and took place at a national level, in contradistinction to the local focus of almost all Jordanian ḥarakas (e.g., that in Dhiban). Thus, these organizers attempted to establish a process of demand-formation within the leadership of the Jordanian protest movements, which, in its orientation toward the state and toward settling disputes, had similarities to the opinion and will-forming functions of the liberal public sphere, as analyzed by Jürgen Habermas (1989). This form of discussion meant that the participating political groups reached a much higher level of coordination during this conference than they normally did. They formed much more specific and united demands than they did during the meetings leading up to demonstrations such as the sit-in on March 24, and the conference’s demand-formation gave rise to far fewer misunderstandings than the sit-in’s. All this will become understandable by considering in greater detail the conference’s way of coordinating political groups through the medium of talk.

The characteristics of demand-formation

The conference’s goal of clarifying demands and solving problems determined its use of lectures. On the first day of the conference the director of the Iraqi election committee gave a lecture. A Jordanian and a Sudanese election observer each gave a lecture about election supervision, based on their work experience. The lectures were followed by discussions among the participants, who sat at three long tables set up in a square. The conference had lectures because its organizers believed that demands for political reforms, such as
Stopping the mukhābarāt’s interference in elections, needed to be specified to be effective. How can it be ensured that the mukhābarāt do not interfere in elections? By forming an institution supervising the elections. What can this look like? Let us listen to some experts.

Several of the participants were not used to this detailed way of discussing political issues. When I passed the hotel entrance after the first day of the conference had ended, I met Khaliq, one of the organizers of Youth of March 24, and asked him what he thought about the day. He was satisfied with the lectures, especially the one given by the Iraqi official, but was disappointed with some participants. “They do not listen to what people say, and they do not remain focused on the issue that is being discussed.” He mentioned some of the incidents he did not like. During the discussion after the lecture by the Iraqi official, the representative from the province Tafila stated, “The problem is the political system. There is no point in discussing the election committee before the political system is changed.” At another point in the discussion, the moderator asked the representative from Tafila what he meant by “constitutional monarchy,” after he had said that the solution was for Jordan to become a constitutional monarchy. He answered by repeating the statement:

“We want to have a constitutional monarchy.”
“Yes, but what do you mean by that?”
“We want to have a constitutional monarchy.”
“What do you mean by constitutional monarchy?”

The moderator received a similar answer, and the representative still felt that the election committee was not worth discussing. Khaliq referred to this “indifference” to thinking demands through and listening to the discussions as a lack of infitāḥ.

The combination that Khaliq complained about, of a self-assured knowledge of what the real problem is and an unwillingness to go into specifics about this “real problem,” is something I recognize from many of my interviews with leaders of ḥarakas, like the one with Haitham, leader of Tayyar al-Urduniyyin 36, a ḥaraka that participated in the sit-in on March 24 and at the “Reformation of the structure of elections” conference.6 I met Haitham for

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6 The name refers to the group’s ideological affinity with the Committee of 36, of which Tariq Tell (2015) writes: “A February 5, 2011, statement issued by some three dozen notables from prominent East Bank clans was more radical than the May 1 manifesto [that of al-Habashne and the military veterans]. It accused the queen and her family of financial improprieties, and warned once again of externally orchestrated campaigns aimed at naturalizing Palestinians and creating an alternative homeland for them in Jordan. It then gave notice that the compact between Jordanians and the Hashemite dynasty, once based on mutual partnership, was being violated. The Committee of 36 went on to criticize the regime’s neoliberal economic outlook, castigating the World Bank as the author of a program for Zionist-imperialist globalization and, in effect, linking Abdullah’s chosen economic reform model with Israel. The group’s statement concluded by affirming the need for liberty, equality, and democracy as the only way to deal with what it described as a revolutionary deluge that would reach Jordan sooner or later.”
one and a half hours at an empty cafeteria at the top floor in a shopping mall in central Amman (in 2014). He was in his mid-fifties, had lived in Germany for 34 years, and was a civil engineer. The political ideas of his haraka were very similar to those of the Military Veterans and Haraka Dhiban. When we talked about their demands, Haitham mentioned that it needed to be a constitutional monarchy and that the election law needed to change. I asked what they wanted to change in the election law. He said that the problem was that they were not one people, he first needed to know who was Jordanian and who was not, and he talked about this for several minutes. “Yes. But you said that you want to reform the election law, that it was one demand of your haraka. How do you want it to change?” I asked. He talked for several minutes, mostly about Israeli and American foreign policy, and he did not mention what the changes should be. He responded in a similar way to all my questions.

In the workshop I attended that was about an independent committee supervising the elections, however, the discussion always remained concrete and focused on the topic, and it never digressed into broad arguments about imperialism, foreign policy or political history. From what I heard from other participants, and judging from the final presentations, this was the case in at least three of the four workshops. Much of this was due to the “institutional structure” of the conference: To my knowledge, this was the only time so many harakas met and (a) split up in workshops, and where (b) the division of labor was based on the different types of proposals or demands the participants would discuss. In contrast, the meetings I attended with activists from Haraka Dhiban were usually about the place and date for a demonstration or about internal organizational questions—the fundamental question was not: “what do we want?” but “what should our strategy be when confronting the government?” or “how do we make this haraka stronger?”

Furthermore, the facilitators and moderators at the workshops and the general discussion after the lectures tried to steer the discussion away from vaguer statements toward more concrete issues, asking the participants to specify what they meant before anyone began arguing against them (e.g., “what do you mean by constitutional monarchy”). Furthermore, because the workshops had clear tasks (to decide on reform proposals that they would present at the end of the conference) there was little room for long digressions, and when they happened, the facilitators tried to steer the discussions away from them.

Moreover, the demand-formation at the conference was based on a political, in contradistinction to academic, form of discussion. I show this by describing the criticism by Samir, one of this conference’s organizers, of the inaugural conference in 2014 for the Reform Party, which resembled an academic conference. Samir is my main informant, a political activist present in many of the events described in this chapter. In 2011, he was 25 years old, was studying law, had been involved in al-ḥarakāt, and worked as a volunteer in a politically oriented NGO. He is from the Karaki tribe Tarawneh, one of
the most influential Jordanian tribes, and some of his relatives have high positions in the Jordanian regime.

On a summer day in 2014, the Reform Party (*ḥizb al-ʾIslāḥ*) had its inaugural meeting at the “Sports center.” Samir used *wāṣṭa* (connections) to get us there: another Tarawneh sat on the executive board. The meeting was in a large hall. Around two hundred chairs were lined up, but there were less than a hundred guests. Several cameramen and photographers attended. Some young women, who worked at a modelling agency that the Reform Party had hired for the occasion, walked around with microphones, handing them to people in the audience when it was time for comments and questions, and at the end of each panel they handed over glass sculptures with the Reform Party’s symbol to the lecturers. Except for Samir and I, these women were the only ones under 35 in the audience, and there were only a handful of people under 45. Several of the attendees were professors. The inauguration was filled with lectures, organized in different panels. Everyone who spoke had a Ph.D. None were members of the Reform Party. Except for the short introduction given by the general secretary, party members only ascended the stage when they handed over the glass sculptures to the lecturers. The event resembled an academic conference: it had panels with a broad unifying theme and a general discussion at the end of each panel, and most lectures were not oriented toward a practical problem.

Samir disliked the form of political discussion the meeting was based on. “I knew it was a failure from the moment I saw the brochure.” His thoughts were as follows: “If they have an inaugural meeting, it must be someone from the party speaking, talking about the aims of the party. Even if it had not been the inauguration conference, there must be some political aim with a conference like this. It is good to listen to experts when creating a party program, and to hear different perspectives, but the discussion had no focus. In the same panel, one person talked about unemployment and another about the situation of Sri Lankan housemaids. They should instead have started with a political problem, for example, ‘how can we solve the problem of unemployment in Jordan?’ and arranged a panel of experts talking about this single question from different angles, then have party members writing a political program based on that. As it was now, there was no direction toward a political program.”

I describe this criticism to elucidate the principles behind the “Reformation of the structure of elections” conference: Unlike the Reform Party’s inauguration conference, it had workshops, and its lectures were picked out regarding the topics that the workshops would discuss. To sum up, the conference’s lectures, workshops, invitations and topics were all chosen with the purpose of

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7 To have *wāṣṭa* is to have a connection (often a relative or acquaintance) inside an institution who can use his or her influence to help you to achieve various objectives.
translating the Jordanian protest movements’ vague discontent into more concrete demands that they all could agree upon. This resulted in demands that were more concrete and less multivocal than those of the sit-in on March 24, which I show by comparing their demands about reforming parliamentary elections and an independent commission supervising the elections.

**Demands about reforming parliamentary elections:**

Youth of March 24 (as I have shown previously, the sit-in had no written demands which everyone had agreed upon; I refer to the demands written on their Facebook page): “A parliament that represents the people” and “A parliament elected by the people.”

*The conference “Reformation of the structure of elections”:*

- The seats reserved for Bedouins are to be based on geography, not on tribal origin. [In the contemporary election law, some seats were reserved for specific Bedouin tribes]
- Anyone sentenced for a crime related to corruption cannot stand as candidate.
- Anyone wishing to stand as candidate is to be subject to financial disclosure.
- A clear message from the head of the Jordanian regime [the king] that the mukhābarāt must stop interfering in parliamentary elections.

[They did not unify behind one proposal on a new election law, but I summarize some of the main ideas:]

- (1) To return to the election law that was adopted in 1989 (80 seats in the House of Deputies, and each voter is to have three votes).
- (2) (Another proposal) To let each muḥāfaẓa (governorate) be one electoral district, instead of being divided into the current smaller electoral districts.
- To have a quota of 15 seats for women and Bedouins.
- To have an additional 37 seats, which are elected at the national level.8

[The second proposal means that more candidates are elected through larger electoral districts, which the ones promoting this proposal hope will lead to more national campaigning dealing with national instead of purely local issues (like bringing government investments and jobs to a specific town).]

**Demands about an independent commission supervising the elections:**

Youth of March 24: “Free and fair elections supervised by a special committee.”

*The conference “Reformation of the structure of elections”* (I exclude the more obvious points):

- Number of members: Nine, which will include a representation of women.
- Term of office: Six years.
- How the members are chosen: A committee from The House of Deputies [the Jordanian parliament has two houses; the House of Deputies is elected by the people and the Senate is appointed by the king] is to appoint the members of the Independent Commission by voting on the applicants, who must fulfil the following criteria:
  - Be a Jordanian national and not carry another nationality.
  - Be experienced and efficient.
  - Be at least 35 years old.
  - Have a bachelor’s degree or higher.
  - Be independent of political factions.

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8 I have simplified this proposal.
At least two members must be jurists.
• On its first meeting, the members elect a president and a vice-president, whose terms of office are two years; the officeholder can be re-elected only once.
• The members are to have the salary and rank of a cabinet minister.
• The members are to make an oath in front of His Majesty the King.
• The members cannot be appointed to a public office, except academic positions, within three years after finishing their work at the commission [to lower the risk that they will be bribed by a public office].

As I have mentioned, one way to approach the fragmentation of the Arab Spring’s protest movements is to ask why attempts to coordinate them fell apart. In the case of this conference, however, it is remarkable that the participants, consisting of Transjordanian nationalists as well as liberals and political parties dominated by Palestinian-Jordanians, reached a kind of agreement on the contentious election law. They reached a relatively detailed agreement because they participated in a discourse oriented toward solving problems and reaching explicit agreements.

But this type of discourse was based on an ethos that was very unusual among the Jordanian protest movements, and which I soon will describe in greater detail. Before doing so, however, I want to show how rare this type of discourse was.

The unwillingness to coordinate political groups

Two of the organizers complained to me that after the conference the protest groups had no interest in continuing with the discussions. They never attempted to resolve the final issues, consolidate the proposal about a new election law within al-ḥarakāt, or reach more concrete demands on the other issues. Some activists involved in al-ḥarakāt and some members of the opposition parties took part in more ambitious commissions appointed by the regime, but nevertheless, as a way to organize al-ḥarakāt, the conference “Reformation of the structure of elections” had no equivalent.

Often, the coordination stopped at a much earlier stage. Unlike the opposition parties, the ḥarakas seldom accepted invitations to conferences aiming to coordinate al-ḥarakāt or to discuss political issues. “The political parties usually come,” Samir, who used to invite representatives from the ḥarakas and political parties to such conferences, told me. “But ḥarakas seldom attend; it is very unusual (nādir)!"

The breakdown of an attempt to coordinate al-ḥarakāt that was much less ambitious than the conference described previously illustrates this unwillingness. In the spring of 2012, a wealthy Jordanian well versed in politics and living in the United States, whom I will call Maher, contacted Umm Saif, a woman who had not participated in a demonstration before March 24, 2011,

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9 My translation.
10 These conferences were often, but not always, funded by NGOs.
but who later became a quite well-known figure among demonstrators. Maher told Umm Saif that he wanted to support *al-ḥarakāt*, which by then had started to weaken. He would use his own money and wanted to have a discussion with some well-informed activists about what he should do. Umm Saif recommended that he talk to some activists she knew, and they presented their ideas to him individually. Afterwards, he met with three of these activists and said that they had presented what he thought were the three best ideas, and he wanted to discuss them. The three ideas were to make *al-ḥarakāt* into a political party (those activists who wanted to have an organization more in line with a political party lacked money to do so), to make an association that would work with and train *al-ḥarakāt* (e.g., in constitutional law, in the workings of parliamentary democracy) or to have a large conference where all leaders from *al-ḥarakāt*, from all over Jordan, would meet and discuss only how they should coordinate in the future; in other words, they would not discuss any political demands. Everyone settled for the last idea.

The reasoning was as following: It is too early to have a political party. *Al-ḥarakāt* is too unorganized for this to be possible, and most people in *al-ḥarakāt* do not like the idea of political parties. It is also difficult to make an association that would work with and train *al-ḥarakāt*. When a European NGO has a project, people often say that the funding is from abroad and that the organization has a hidden agenda. Furthermore, most leaders of *al-ḥarakāt* do not see any need to learn about “technical” subjects (e.g., the workings of parliamentary democracy). It is better to gather the leaders of *al-ḥarakāt* from north, center and south, and let them talk to and get to know each other. It is too early to discuss problems, demands or reforms. The only goal with the conference should be to find ways to coordinate *al-ḥarakāt*, primarily in the sense of building an infrastructure for the *ḥarakas* to talk with each other (e.g., a website).

But the *ḥarakas* did not accept this idea. One of the three activists mentioned above phoned leaders of *al-ḥarakāt* in central Jordan (e.g., Amman, Zarqa, Madaba) and presented the idea of having a conference. They all refused. Several said that Maher (whom none of them knew) surely got money from the *mukhābarāt* and that he had a hidden agenda. This kind of conspiracy theory and the sentiment that there was no need to coordinate with other political factions was much more common among *ḥarakas* than among political parties or *ḥarakas* formed by people who had been members of political parties. Moreover, *ḥarakas* differed in their willingness to talk with the regime and to coordinate with other protest groups. In contrast to Haraka Hayy al-Tafaila, Haraka Dhiban agreed to talk with representatives from the regime; Mohammed al-Sneid, the spokesperson of Haraka Dhiban, presented its demands to senior politicians and the *mukhābarāt* several times, and he participated at meetings and conferences with other political activists. Ali al-Habashne, a leader of the military veterans, negotiated with the regime, and the organization of military veterans he represented was, according to himself,
instrumental in the appointment of Marouf al-Bakht as prime minister in March 2011.

Nevertheless, when several Jordanian protest groups met, they rarely had any discussions about what the protest groups wanted and should demand. I have shown this to be the case for the sit-in on March 24, and this was also the case during the planning for the demonstration at Interior Ministry Circle on March 24, 2012, which commemorated the sit-in the previous year. This section describes the planning of the sit-in through the perspective of one of the organizers behind the “Reformation of the structure of elections” conference (Samir), as a final illustration of how uncommon an emphasis on demand-formation was among the leadership of the Jordanian protest groups.

The meeting took place in the office of a political party belonging to the opposition, and representatives from opposition parties and ḥarakas with various ideologies (e.g., nationalists, leftists, Islamists) participated. Most of them had been involved in organizing the sit-in the previous year—and they again called the coalition March 24. The meeting lasted two hours and was the only large meeting the organizers had before the demonstration. After small talk for about 15 minutes, the meeting began, and for more than one hour they discussed where to have the demonstration. Interior Ministry Circle, Saha al-Nakhil, and the Husseini Mosque at Downtown were the main alternatives, and most of those sitting around the large table preferred Interior Ministry Circle. Then, they discussed the organization of the demonstration for about five minutes: it was decided that no one could bring any flag except the Jordanian to the roundabout (neither the flags for the political parties nor the Palestinian flag), who would bring the pickup truck with speakers, and other logistical issues. When they had finished the discussion, there was some time remaining. Someone said that the young people should speak. They gave the floor to them, and they spoke in turns for half a minute or so.

Samir recalled that when it was his turn to speak he laughed and said, “I laugh because if I say what I think it will be a much longer discussion . . . I will not say what I want, but I ask you: when commemorating March 24, do you want to concentrate on the place or the demands? If you want to remember it as a place, Interior Ministry circle is best. If you want to remember the demands, you should do a long evaluation of the old demands, and unite behind four or five clear demands, and persuade people that they are reasonable.” He recalled that he saw that a few people agreed with him. Most did not recognize his points, and no one said anything for or against his ideas. The leader of the party which owned the office said some final words, and everyone went home. This was the only general meeting before the demonstration on March 24, 2012. As in the meetings leading up to the sit-in a year before, the discussions

11 The coalition dropped “Youth” from its name after the violent break-up of the sit-in a year earlier.
focused on the place of the demonstration, and they spent only a few minutes talking about the demands.

Thus, although the Jordanian political landscape is divided regarding the Palestinian-Transjordanian issue and has historically rooted conflicts between Islamists and leftists, when we consider actual attempts to coordinate the Jordanian opposition during the Arab Spring, it should be clear that these attempts fizzled out due to something beyond ethnic and ideological divisions. They were based on a political ethos which most of the protest movements’ leadership did not share, and which I now will discuss in greater detail.

The ethos of demand-formation

First, the organizers of these attempts to coordinate the Jordanian protest groups were concerned with political programs. Their sense was that the demands of the Jordanian protest movements were too vague, that even if these movements did not want to develop policy proposals as was done in the “Reformation of the structure of elections” conference, they should have discussed which problem they wanted the government to address. Was it that the mukhābarāt interfere in the elections? Was it that the parliament is too weak? Was it that the election system favors independent candidates instead of political parties? Was it the king’s prerogatives to dissolve the parliament? Haraka Hayy al-Tafaila, for example, protested the fact that some members of parliaments were involved in private business while they sat in parliament. “It did not have a clear solution to this problem,” one of these organizers told me, “which a new ḥaraka never has, but it had a clear formulation of a problem . . . To say that the people want political reforms is not a clear formulation of a problem. It can mean anything.”

This focus on political programs distinguished these organizers not only from the leadership of the Jordanian protest movements but also from most Jordanian political parties. Few of these parties were based on ideas and barely any had a political program, which I here illustrate by one example: The Jordanian National Union Party was in 2014 one of the few parties that had a member of parliament. Its leader was Captain Mohammad Khashman, Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer of Jordan’s first privately owned airline, Jordan Aviation Airline. When Samir once called the contact number the party had registered to the Ministry of Political Development, he laughed and handed me the phone. “You have to put this in your dissertation.” A recorded voice stated: “Ahlan wa sahlan l- (Welcome to) Jordan Aviation Airline. For tickets . . . press one. For tourism packages . . . press two.” The party’s political program was found on the party’s homepage. It was 1287 words long; the description (basically a C.V.) of Khashman on the same

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12 With the exception of the Islamic Action Front, almost all members of parliament get elected not through an ideology or political program but through kinship and tribal and ethnic affiliations.
Another illustration of the rarity of issue-oriented politics is that one of the few English terms Samir used when talking about politics was "policy paper," something he found no real equivalent for in Arabic ("there is awrāq siyāsiyya, but it is not clear what it means—it has a broader meaning").

Second, the organizers of the conference had a notion that it was important to develop demands through discussions and engage with other political factions through dialogue, an orientation some of them described as infitiāh. I have discussed what this meant in practice by describing the form of deliberation which the conference institutionalized. In previous chapters, I have contrasted this notion about demand-formation and dialogue with another—more polemical—view on politics that was predominant among the leaderships of Youth of March 24 and Haraka Dhiban. These two different notions were each affiliated with two different understandings of the protest movements’ failure to achieve their aspirations. The protest movements demanded that the election system and constitution should be reformed. The regime reformed them, but most activists were not content with the reforms, and went out demonstrating for “real reforms.” Most of the protest movements’ leadership thought the regime’s reforms were insufficient because the regime was not interested in reforms, but that street demonstrations could force it to reform. Activists like the organizers of the conference described in this section rather thought that the demands were so unspecified that the regime had to appoint their own commissions to make all the concrete decisions. The only alternative to this, these organizers thought, was if the opposition had developed more specific demands or clearer formulations of problems. They had relatively less faith in street demonstrations and relatively greater faith in more organized forms of politics.

From the latter organizers’ perspective, the protest movements imagined themselves too much in terms of antagonism and opposition to the government. The great majority of protesters involved in al-ḥarakāt said that they were against (ḍudd) the government and “in opposition” (anā muʿāraḍa) to it. When they demonstrated, they addressed the government, and many spoke angrily, made accusations, and demanded things from it. According to the organizers I write about in this section, this frightened many people and made them believe that al-ḥarakāt consisted of troublemakers that were against the country (ḍudd al-waṭan). “They should have addressed the people (sha‘b) rather than the government, and thought through how to speak to them,” said Samir, one of the conference organizers, and he illustrated this notion through the following story:

“Imagine that an ordinary Jordanian passes Interior Ministry circle and finds a gathering at the small square. Some participants wear white blouses where ‘organizers’ are written with blue letters. One of them asks you to read about why they protest, and he hands you a brochure which states that ‘we are from haraka x’ and ‘we organize a demonstration at Interior Ministry Circle
between 13.00 and 16.00 because we want y.’ The aim of the demonstration is written on the first page, on the next page other aims of the ḥaraka and maybe some solutions are written; it is a new ḥaraka so it does not yet have an elaborated political program. It is also written that the demonstration is non-violent, wishes that the road remains open, does not want to disturb passersby or the shops close to the square, and has permission from the government (if it has). The brochure also has the time and place for the next demonstration and the sentence, ‘If you have an idea or know about any research regarding this issue, please contact us at this number.’ Now, imagine that you pass Interior Ministry Circle and find a very different gathering at the small square. The place is full of people (and policemen), many of them scream, none hand out any brochures, and the square is full of banners with very different demands. A person speaks angrily into the microphone and says that they are the opposition and ‘demand this!’ from the government.” (This is how he perceived the sit-in on March 24 when he arrived at the circle.)

The story illustrates, correctly I think, that organizers who were focused on coordinating the protest movements were animated by a less polemical form of politics than that which was more common among al-ḥarakāt.

This emphasis on political programs and infitāḥ was also dependent on an ideological shift, which is brought out by a comparison with Jordan’s older oppositional political parties rather than with relatively non-ideological political parties and harakas. The largest Jordanian political parties that were forced to go underground during the 1950s were the Communist Party, the Ba’th Party, the Arab Nationalists (al-Qawmiyyun al-ʿArab), the Islamist party al-Tahrir, and the National Socialists. The fundamental ideational conflict between the royal court and opposition was not about democracy but about foreign policy: the Anglo-Jordanian military treaty, the Eisenhower Doctrine, rapprochement with the communist countries, and whether Jordan should exist as an independent political entity or seek unification with (or “subordination” to, as the critics called it) Egypt and Syria (see Shlaim 2008: 111-128; Mishal 1978: 59). The Arab Nationalists had close ties to the Egyptian and Syrian regimes, and were willing to smuggle arms into Jordan to overthrow the regime, and several political parties attempted to spread their ideas in the Jordanian officer corps. Political parties were allowed again in 1992.

13 Joseph Massad describes the great conflicts within the Jordanian army in the 1950s as a clash between two forms of nationalism: “Jordanian anticolonial nationalists saw themselves as part of a general Arab anticolonial nationalist movement and believed that Jordan could not survive outside of a future federation among Arab states. The palace espoused a different kind of Arab nationalism, one inspired by the anti-Turkish revolt during World War I, spearheaded by the Hashemites. Therefore, both parties spoke the language of Arab nationalism, although each accused the other of being an agent for foreign powers. For the anticolonial nationalists, palace men and their allies were collaborators with British and U.S. imperialism, whereas for the palace, the anticolonial nationalists were instruments of ‘Abd al-Nasir’s hegemonic plans and Soviet communism, which King Husayn had called a ‘new kind of imperialism’” (2001: 198).
when the conflicts between the Arab regimes were no longer as intensive, and Nasserism, Communism and Ba’thism had little ideological appeal. In other words, these parties were oriented toward transnational issues rather than domestic politics, had patrons that were in conflict with the Hashemite regime (e.g., Egypt, Soviet Union, Syria, Iraq), and emerged in a regional political climate of military coups and intense inter-Arab and Arab-Israeli struggles. The political activists mentioned in this chapter, as well as most leaders of al-ḥarakāt, criticized this “foreign focus” among the established opposition parties and claimed to focus more exclusively on Jordanian issues. This meant that these movements, in contrast to the old oppositional parties, accepted Jordan’s current borders and were not deeply engaged in and politicized by regional conflicts. The quest for Arab unity, for example, meant the dismantling of the Hashemite or other Arab regimes, which hardly could be done without

14 Shaul Mishal describes it as follows: “[In the 1950s] The impact of the Nasserist and Baathist version of pan-Arabism on political behavior in the West Bank [then a part of Jordan] was reflected in the emphasis of political parties on political problems of all-Arab significance rather than on local Jordanian problems. Furthermore, even Jordanian domestic problems were not judged solely in their Jordanian context but according to broader, usually pan-Arab criteria. . . . The Baathists and their representative in parliament, however, took no practical steps to implement this [economic] policy and indeed paid minimal attention to it. On the rare occasions when they were discussed, economic issues were generally used as a way of making broader arguments about economic dependence on foreign forces and the need to build an economy based on Arab finances” (Mishal 1978: 76, 82). Patrick Seale, writing primarily about the Syrian Ba’th Party, expresses the same point thus: “Critics object that the Ba’th never moved beyond inspirational rhetoric to produce detailed social and economic programs. But the party’s role was, nonetheless, immensely important in the immediate post-war generation. The major problems then facing the Arabs were how to free themselves from foreign influence and unwilling involvement in Great Power disputes” (1965: 157).

15 The foreign focus among the traditional oppositional political parties applies also, although to a less extent, to the Islamic Action Front. For example, of the 208 statements and declarations that the party published on its web page from 2005 to 2007, 58% dealt with foreign affairs (especially Iraqi, Syrian, Palestinian and Lebanese affairs, and Jordan’s normalization with Israel) (Abu Romman and Abu Hanieh 2013: 113-115). The Islamic Action Front’s electoral platform for the parliamentary elections in 2007 and the Muslim Brotherhood’s “Reform Vision” of 2005 held similar views on these foreign issues; the platform declares: “No entity whatsoever is entitled to waive any part of Palestine. . . . Our struggle with the occupier is a conflict of doctrine and civilization that cannot be terminated by a peace treaty. It is a conflict over existence rather than over borders. . . . All the agreements derogating the nation’s right to sovereignty are null and void, and do not obligate the nation to anything” (i.e., a rejection of the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty) (Ibid: 125). Moreover, the platform wants the “mobilizing [of] the nation with all its forces to resist this occupation [the American forces in Iraq] politically, culturally, and through jihad and to confront the American hegemony in most of Arab and Muslim countries!” (Ibid)

16 This is partly because al-ḥarakāt was dominated by Transjordanians. More radical ideologies, oriented toward foreign policy (such as Nasserism and Ba thism) have had more support among Palestinian-Jordanians (see Dawisha 2016; Mishal 1978).
military means. It is not surprising that the ideological trends that became dominant in the political climate of the 1950s and 1960s did not emphasize openness. In his seminal work on Arab nationalism, Adeed Dawisha puts it as follows:

By [the 1950s and 1960s], Arab cultural nationalism emerged triumphant over other competing ideologies and identities, capturing the hearts and minds of that quintessentially nationalist generation. . . The task ahead fraught with untold difficulties and obstacles: there were the foreign powers still in control of much Arab land; there was the Arabs’ own lethargy and lack of purpose; there were the political divisions, artificially created, so nationalists believed, but clearly gaining acceptance and legitimacy with the passage of time; and there were all those regional, sectarian and tribal identities, which to the nationalists were products of “false consciousness” encouraged and perpetuated by the colonialists and imperialists. This was to be a titanic struggle, and as the nationalists embarked upon it, they naturally had little patience for words such as liberty, freedom, and democracy. What need was there to listen to another point of view, to argue a contrary perspective? Would it not be a distraction, a diversion from the course of the struggle? [2016: 300-301]

An ideological vision in which political programs and infitāḥ have a prominent role was thus dependent on the idea that Jordan’s woes should be addressed by domestic siyāsī reforms and by discussions between different political factions rather than a revolutionary overthrow of the regime, a dismantling of “artificially created” borders between Arab states, or a victory over foreign powers or domestic “agents of imperialism.” The map of the Middle East did not have to be redrawn.

17 Fateh’s founders and organizers stressed this aspect of the call for “Arab unity,” which was one reason why they reversed the argument, “Arab unity is the road to the liberation of Palestine,” that dominated political discussions in the late 1950s and early 1960s and instead argued that Arab unity only could come after Palestinians had liberated Palestine. “When you talk about unity,” Khaled al-Hassan, one of Fateh’s founders reasoned, “then you have to work against the [Arab] regimes” (Cobban 1984: 24). See also Ian Lustick’s argument (1997) that no Middle Eastern great power emerged because the region’s equivalents of Muscovy, Piedmont, Prussia, Wessex and the Ile de France were deterred or prevented from engaging in state-building wars: “A third category error is made by those who ask whether the Arab and/or Islamic Middle East will ever be able to fulfill the dreams of union and great power status that fired the imaginations of Jamal e-din el-Afghani, Michel Aflaq, Gamal Abdel Nasser, or Saddam Husayn, without subversion, coercion, and war or the threat of war. These observers search for Middle Eastern leaders who can accomplish such spectacular political feats, ignoring the fact that such leaders never existed in Europe or the Americas and that no theory of political amalgamation exists that could justify such an expectation” (Ibid: 677).
Haraka Hayy al-Tafaila

This section focuses one of the most famous ḥarakas in Amman in 2011—Haraka Hayy al-Tafaila—and shows how two factions gradually emerged within the ḥaraka, with radically different views on dialogue and on how to form demands. The differences between these factions are akin to the difference in political ethos I have described previously in this chapter. One faction had greater faith in dialogue and gradual reforms than the other and described their approach with the word infitāḥ. While I previously have discussed differences in political ethos in relation to attempts to coordinate protest movements, this section instead depicts how these differences played out within a single protest movement.

The protest movement emerged from Hayy al-Tafaila—“the Tafaila quarter”—which is located in East Amman, on one of the mountains that surround the valley where Downtown lies. The roads leading up to the quarter are steep and narrow; when two cars meet, one of them needs to drive aside and wait for the other to pass by. Alleys and narrow stairs branch out from the roads. The Tafaila quarter is a result of the chain migrations that normally accompany rapid urbanization. As the name suggests, most of the quarter’s inhabitants come from the Transjordanian province Tafila, 120 km south of Amman. When a ḥaraka in 2011 emerged among tribesmen in this quarter, al-ḥarakāt immediately became a greater problem for the regime as the ḥaraka’s tribal base made it immune from accusations of being Islamist or Palestinian. Furthermore, Hayy al-Tafaila’s location (the quarter is relatively close to the royal castle and court) made the ḥaraka more threatening to the regime than ḥarakas in places such as Dhiban.

This section describes Haraka Hayy al-Tafaila through the perspective of Zaid and Latif, cousins who have university degrees and work in central Amman, and who both belong to the faction within the ḥaraka that emphasized the need of dialogue and infitāḥ. I met them in 2014, when the ḥaraka was dead.18

If I had attempted to talk with other former members of the ḥaraka, that would have put Zaid and Latif in a bad spot. One small road leads to their houses, and many young men were hanging around the street. This made it impossible to enter the neighborhood without being seen. As long as I only visited Zaid and Latif (whom Samir knew through a mutual friend and recommended me to meet) the people on the street would think that Zaid’s family had invited some faraway guest for dinner. But if more activists from the ḥaraka visited the house at the same time, or if I tried to reach out to other former members, people would notice, and they would be suspicious. Who is that Westerner who is talking to people in the ḥaraka? From the United States? Israel? Why do these activists talk with him? To avoid such a breeding ground

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18 Zaid did most of the talking, and I will mainly refer to him throughout the text.
for conspiracy theories, “it is better,” Zaid said on phone, “if you meet only members of my family.”

The ḥaraka’s foundation

Before describing the differences that eventually emerged within the ḥaraka, I want to describe its foundation. My aim here is to start at a moment when the ḥaraka seemed, to its founders, as an opposition movement confronting an authoritarian regime with demands for political reforms; that is, when it was understood in terms of resistance and power struggle. As mentioned previously, this has been a common way to understand the Arab Spring’s protest movements in general, at least during its first year. Instead of arguing against this understanding, I want to follow the thoughts of political activists who had this understanding, then show how it gradually gave way to a higher understanding (cf. Hegel’s concept of aufheben), which includes the significance of how a protest movement conducts its politics.

Before the ḥaraka was founded, Zaid and Latif had feelings that resonated among many other demonstrators during the Arab Spring: they were dissatisfied with corruption, the political system and how the mukhābarāt interfered in political life. They were also displeased by the notion that the inhabitants of Hayy al-Tafaila were all baṭṭaji (roughly: men who use violence to break up demonstrations that demand political reform), which was spreading after the sit-in on March 24, 2011, since residents of the quarter were found among the stone-throwers and not among the demonstrators. This was not the Hayy al-Tafaila that Zaid knew; “we have engineers, doctors, and journalists.” Many people in the quarter sympathized with demonstrators calling for political reforms and the end of corruption, and Zaid thought that the stone-throwers represented those who had succeeded in Jordan’s last election through vote rigging. He and some other people called for a meeting, where the 50 people who arrived discussed the image of Hayy al-Tafaila as baṭṭaji. During the next two weeks, several meetings took place at the quarter, where people voiced different views on the rise of protest movements in Jordan.

The great division during the meetings was between the around 70 people who wanted to have a ḥaraka and those who opposed it and feared that street demonstrations might end up in prison sentences, loss of jobs in the public sector, and violent clashes between the quarter’s inhabitants and security forces.

The people who founded the ḥaraka had various discontents. When they wrote the banners for their first demonstrations, they were, according to Zaid, “a bit too eager.” Different individuals exclaimed, “I want to write this!” “I want to write that!” about things that had happened and people they were 19 The mukhābarāt have often affected Jordanian elections. Two methods are to encourage someone to run for office in order to split the tribal support of a certain candidate, or to provide monetary inducements to a politician to sit out an election.
against. Zaid argued for restraint, which the members of the new ḥaraka accepted. Most banners ended up being about political and economic issues; for example, “politics and capital do not belong together!” (against the fact that several members of the Jordanian parliament at the same time were businessmen) and “the people want the regime to reform!” The members of the ḥaraka shared some general notions with other Jordanian demonstrators, and they began joining the Muslim Brotherhood for the Friday demonstrations at Downtown (Amman) and started to coordinate with the ḥarakas in Tafila (where they had relatives), even though this coordination did not go further than common dates and names for their demonstrations. These general notions included discontent with the country’s large-scale privatizations, price increases and corruption, and the thought that these problems could be solved only by a change of the political system and by restricting the mukhābarāt’s interference in political life.

During the first weeks after the ḥaraka’s founding, the people who later would make up Zaid’s faction channeled the discontent into what became the ḥaraka’s three key demands for this short period: That the economic situation be improved (against price increases and the large-scale privatizations), that the mukhābarāt stop interfering in political activities, and that the election law from 1989 be reinstated.20 Several people who opposed the founding of a ḥaraka thought, as I have mentioned, that it was like opening a Pandora’s box. Zaid remembers that many people were afraid during the second meeting that led to the founding of the ḥaraka, and few dared to speak about corruption or criticize the government. But Zaid did speak. He said that he did not want the regime to fall and that he was not against the king, but that he wanted neither price increases nor interference by the mukhābarāt in elections. Some at the meeting did not agree with his tone. “The country is good,” they said, “and we do not want any trouble.” When the meeting finished, one of Zaid’s uncles, who had attended, walked over to him, grabbed his arm, and said: “Do not destroy the neighborhood.” – “How can I destroy it?” – “You will destroy it.” – “We cannot live like this, like animals.” His uncle was afraid, and Zaid was also afraid when he began organizing the ḥaraka.21

20 The last demand was rare among ḥarakas not affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. The election law of 1989 gave each voter three votes, a system which supported more ideological (opposition) parties—mainly the Islamic Action Front—in contradistinction to independent candidates.

21 The mukhābarāt tried to stop the foundation of the ḥaraka through persuasion. The day after the meeting, one of their employees—a relative of Zaid—talked to him, saying that they did not want Hayy al-Tafaila to start demonstrating, since it could bring great instability to Jordan. The employee also talked with Zaid’s father, who afterwards told Zaid that he should not go out demonstrating, but he did not seem very convinced, and never said anything about it more than once. The episode is typical of how the mukhābarāt work. The residents of Hayy al-Tafaila are members of tribes that dominate the Jordanian state apparatus, so when dealing with them—in
The anxiety and fear regarding organized opposition was also evident during the ḥaraka’s first demonstration. They had decided to have their first demonstration outside the largest mosque at the narrow street that is the center of Hayy al-Tafaila. On a Friday in 2011, the 70 men strong ḥaraka (no women participated) left the mosque together after the prayers had finished and stopped at the street outside. The mood was tense. Men lined the street, and women and children looked out from windows. The mukhābarāt were of course there. This had never happened in the quarter before. Everybody saw that the 70 men strong ḥaraka held banners in their hands, but they had not raised them, and nobody saw what was written on them. Zaid had never participated in a demonstration before, and he felt it was a huge and irrevocable step to raise those banners. “We just stood there in silence for ten minutes.” Then, one of them started to shout, “the people want the regime to reform,” and they raised the banners. “It was as if the people watching us became relaxed,” said Zaid, because they discovered that the banners did not read that the people wanted the fall of the regime. Nevertheless, members of the ḥaraka felt that they had broken a barrier of fear. They had finally stood up against the regime.

Up to this point, Zaid’s and Latif’s account of the ḥaraka contains themes that are familiar from other accounts of the Arab Spring, especially during its initial stage (e.g., Cambanis 2016; Goldstone 2011; Ryan 2011; Tufekci and Wilson 2012): The members of the ḥaraka were politicized by corruption and a lack of freedom, and they saw themselves as part of an opposition that was challenging an authoritarian system that rules by installing fear. But Zaid and Latif gradually began to understand the prospects of a more democratic and less corrupt political system in Jordan in a different way. Like political activists I have written about previously, they discovered that there existed two radically different ways of conducting politics within the protest movements. Most of the ḥaraka’s leaders, Zaid and Latif came to think, had little faith in political dialogue and had a polemical way of relating to the regime and to members of the ḥaraka whom they disagreed with, an ethos which Zaid referred to when talking of a “lack of infitāḥ.”

Two forms of politics

After only a few weeks, it became clear that there existed two different views on what the ḥaraka should demand and how it should relate to the regime. As time went on, the difference between these two ways of conducting politics became more radical. Those who shared Zaid’s and Latif’s views consisted, to a higher degree than the ḥaraka at large, of civil professionals (e.g., lawyers, doctors, engineers, journalists). As was the case for most ḥarakas that emerged in Jordan in 2011, young people (shabāb; the concept includes contrast to Palestinian-Jordanians—the state in a sense deals with itself, and first opts for diplomatic channels. Who can do this better than a relative?
people in the 30s) were more eager to join or support Haraka Hayy al-Tafaila than older people, who more often were afraid of the possible consequences, both for them personally and for the quarter at large. Nevertheless, some older people joined the haraka. They were all retired from the military, police, or mukhābarāt (anyone still working in these institutions would never be allowed to participate in a haraka), and they all ended up in the faction that did not share Zaid’s and Latif’s views.

These two factions differed, first, on how radical the demands should be. In Zaid’s view, “Our problem was with people who wanted quick reforms.” These people had expected political change to happen fast, and when “nothing” happened after four or five demonstrations, “they wanted us to demand constitutional monarchy and the fall of the regime. [They thought it took too long but] I want it to take a long time!” The radicalization of demands began with the chant al-shaʻb yurīd s . . . s . . . ! (the people want s . . . s . . .). “S” could stand for either “the regime to fall” or “the regime to reform” (suqūṭ or iṣlāḥ). In other words, although the people chanting this did not explicitly call for the regime to fall, they gave the impression that they were close to doing so. Then, during one nightly demonstration in the street, someone shouted, “The people want the fall of the regime!” They stopped the demonstration and began asking who had shouted that. Everyone denied that they had shouted; it was dark and Zaid and Latif could not tell who it was. Soon after, a group in the haraka began having their own meetings and brought new slogans. They also started to insult the king, saying he was corrupt and a thief.

Zaid and some other activists opposed the radical demands because they believed that the Jordanian opposition was not united behind principles for a new constitution or reforms of the electoral system, and that there was even less such unity among the people at large. Therefore, they thought that the demand for “constitutional monarchy” was unclear, and that the demand for the fall of the regime would lead to great instability.

They also opposed such demands for the practical effects they had on their small haraka. First, they noticed that a large majority of Jordanians wanted the king to remain in power and were afraid that the fall of the regime would lead to instability and violence. The radical demands therefore deterred people from joining or supporting the haraka, making it much weaker. They also thought that these demands shifted the haraka’s attention from their substantive demands to a meaningless struggle with the mukhābarāt. Several people who chanted that the king was corrupt were put in jail, and the haraka’s next demonstration demanded that they be set free. A feedback loop emerged in

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22 Since most shabāb—in contradistinction to older people—are neither married nor have children or a house, the difference is between those who have little to lose and are far from reaching an acceptable standard of life and those who have much to lose and less to reach for.

23 In my experience, the more successful organizers of al-ḥarakāt reached this conclusion, whether they actually sympathized with these radical demands or not.
which demonstrators insulted the king, the insulters were put in jail, new
demonstrations demanded their release; then demonstrators insulted the king
again. According to Zaid, the haraka was caught in this loop; the demonstra-
tions no longer had any economic and political demands but were instead
about releasing people from prison. The mukhābarāt understood this logic and
played it. Zaid complained that many activists relished this fight and had noth-
ing against going to prison (for a few weeks or months); “they wanted to be
champions.”

This complaint is based on an understanding of the Jordanian protest move-
ments that is similar to that of political activists I have written about previ-
ously. Both the organizers of the “Refor mation of the structure of the elec-
tions” conference and the small group of people who criticized the lack of
dialogue within Youth of March 24 thought that most of the oppositional leader-
ship imagined themselves too much in terms of antagonism and opposition
to the government. In the case of Haraka Hayy al-Tafaila, Zaid’s faction had
a form of politics that was less polemical and less driven by anger than that of
the faction that came to dominate the haraka’s leadership, which, for example,
is illustrated by Zaid’s insistence—which was heeded only during the
haraka’s first demonstrations—that everyone should promise “to not insult
(or curse [sabb]) the king, Palestinians, or anyone.”

This difference between the factions was also reflected in their divergent
views on whether to engage in talks with the regime or not. Timothy Garton
Ash (1993, 2009) characterizes the revolutions in Eastern Europe in 1989 by
the symbol of a “Round table,” highlighting the role of negotiations in these
democratic transitions, which often gave rise to a sense that the previous re-
gimes’ misdeeds had not been properly accounted for. The dominant faction
within Haraka Hayy al-Tafaila, on the other hand, refused any talks with the
regime. Soon after the demonstrations began in Hayy al-Tafaila, the regime
sought to meet representatives from the haraka’s leadership for discussions.
First, the royal court contacted the haraka. Zaid wanted the leadership of Hayy
al-Tafaila to have a dialogue (ḥiwār) with the regime, saying that “we have
some demands, for a new election law for example, and we need to present
these to the regime.” A third of the leadership agreed with his idea while the
rest disagreed and said that to negotiate with the regime was to sell out the
haraka. Several people with high positions in the regime (e.g., the Interior
Minister, the Speaker of the Senate, a Jordanian ambassador, all of course
members of a tribe from Tafila) contacted the haraka, requesting to talk with
them. In each case, the haraka’s leadership discussed the offer, but a majority
was always against talking with anyone from the regime, except when the am-
bassador made his request.

24 This kind of revolution should therefore, he argues, be followed by a truth and reconciliation
process. For a more general discussion of how new democracies deal with the crimes of the
former regime, see Huntington (1991: 211-231).
The leadership accepted that Zaid would talk with the ambassador, whom he invited for mansaf (a traditional feast dish) at his house. His brother had prepared the food while Zaid was working. The ambassador was on a foreign mission and had come to Jordan for the occasion. He was staying at a hotel in Amman, and Zaid told him the address and at which time he was welcome. After Zaid had finished work and was driving toward the hotel to pick him up, he got a phone call from one of the leaders at the ḥaraka. He sounded sad and said that some people in the ḥaraka had called for a meeting the same day, while Zaid was working and therefore could not attend. This group did not want the ambassador to come and had called for a vote, which they won. Zaid was angry about this decision, especially since they already had agreed to talk with the ambassador and Zaid had personally invited him for dinner. Zaid called the ambassador to tell him that Zaid no longer could speak with him in the name of Haraka Hayy al-Tafaila. This was as close as the ḥaraka ever got to presenting their demands to the regime. There were never any negotiations that broke down; the leadership refused to have any talks with the regime in the first place.

When Zaid talked to me about the different views on dialogue within the ḥaraka, he talks about them as dependent not only on different political beliefs but also on habits and values. He thought that the military veterans—who had a great influence over the faction that came to dominate the ḥaraka—had a “frame of mind” (nafsiyya) that affected not only how they related to the regime’s representatives but also to fellow members of the ḥaraka. They were, according to him, “not munfatiḥ ["open-minded,” the adjective form of infitāḥ],” referring to the spirit of communication that so many other activists I have written about saw as an obstacle to creating a viable political opposition in Jordan. In Zaid’s views, the military veterans were skilled in organizational matters but had problems with having a discussion leading to a collective decision.25 It was difficult for them to listen to or accept another opinion or idea, whether it was from the younger people in the ḥaraka or from officials wanting to negotiate with them. They wanted to make the decision themselves and

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25 The low trust in collective decision-making which Zaid refers to might partly be due to a general feature of military authority. In an article on the planning of the American attack on Fallujah in 2004, Robert Kaplan (2004) writes about decision making in armies: “All the elements came together fast, owing to a factor largely missing from civilian life: the incontestability of command. Meetings quickly resulted in priorities that in turn quickly led to decisions. As soon as the ranking officer decided on something, the debate moved on to the next point. ‘Armies have always been viewed with suspicion in democratic societies because they are the least democratic of all social institutions,’ the military historian Byron Farwell writes. ‘They are, in fact, not democratic at all. Governments which have tried to . . . blur the distinction between officer and man have not been successful. Armies stand as disturbing reminders that democratic processes are not always the best, living and perpetual proof that, in at least this one area, the caste system works.’” If people raised in societies dominated by democratic institutions are suspicious of armies, the reverse is also true, at least among the military veterans as Zaid describes them.
had great difficulties accepting that a younger person might decide in matters regarding the ḥaraka. Moreover, according to Zaid, the faction that dominated the ḥaraka had a tendency to, when people disagreed on important issues, accuse the other side of working for the mukhābarāt or of being with (maʿ a) the king.

Haraka Hayy al-Tafaila dwindled in an environment where it had little popular support in the quarter and was weakened by its internal conflicts. As I have discussed previously, the internal fragmentation of the political opposition has been one reason why the Arab Spring often has led to political instability rather than the freer and less corrupt society most demonstrators called for. Haraka Hayy al-Tafaila’s development shows affinities to that of many other of these oppositional groups: initial unity behind political demands, subsequent internal fragmentation, and a difficulty to become part of a viable political coalition. One of the most common ways to understand this pattern is in terms of conflicts stemming from a diversity of ethnic, religious, regional or tribal identities. The ḥaraka in Hayy al-Tafaila, however, was ethnically and religiously homogenous, its members came from the same town (Eimeh, in the province Tafila), and many were members of the same tribes. The ḥaraka’s clashes with the regime, in contrast to the situation in Syria and Libya, for example, also cannot easily be understood in terms of ethnic, regional or tribal identity. The tribes from Tafila are some of the tribes that dominate Jordan’s state apparatus, where many of the ḥaraka’s members had worked before retirement. Rather, the ḥaraka’s development and conflicts were rooted in a polemical way of conducting politics.

A change of ethos

So far, I have considered differences in the form of political activism by contrasting different political groups or—in the case of Haraka Hayy al-Tafaila—different factions within one political group. In this section, I elucidate similar differences in the form of political activism by instead examining a change of a singular individual’s political ethos.

That person is Rami, one of al-ḥarakāt’s most famous leaders in 2011. He worked as an engineer at Ericsson, lived in an apartment in central Amman, and had been interested in politics since he was young, which he said was due to his father. The father was a Transjordanian army colonel from the Gharabie tribe, and a communist. Rami was earlier a member of the Communist Party but had become, he said, a “social liberal.” Both as a communist and as a social liberal, however, his political views grew through an attachment to ideas rather than to his tribe. During 2011, Rami was part of the loose group of activists that were the “leaders” of al-ḥarakāt: the group that set the demands and dates for the demonstrations and who themselves were part of a smaller
ḥaraka with its own demands. Rami’s political views had changed fundamentally between 2011 and 2014, especially regarding how radical the demands should be and the role of dialogue within oppositional politics; that is, the same issues that the two factions within Haraka Hayy al-Tafaila’s leadership differed on.

In 2011, Rami was eager and believed that revolutionary change was coming to the Arab world, including Jordan. He thought that the protest movements’ leadership had great organizational problems—that they spent too little time planning the demonstrations and convincing people to join—but he still saw the emerging demonstrations as a beginning of something great. This optimism stemmed from a belief in revolutionary change initiated by massive demonstrations demanding the fall of the regime. When Rami praised the ḥarakas in towns such as Karak and Dhiban—which “stood up and said no to everything”—or the people who in 2011 threw stones at the king’s motorized entourage in Tafila, it was as if he saw the first signs of a great earthquake that would shake Jordan’s political system apart, and from the ruins a better society would arise.

When I met Rami in 2014, he no longer believed in a messianic earthquake. He was critical of his previous views. “At that time, we had more hormones . . . working than our brain cells,” he said. After Egypt and Tunisia, “we thought that a few brave people in the streets could make a difference. No, they cannot.” They need to have more organization and, especially, a political alternative. In Egypt, the street protesters brought Mubarak down, but they did not bring a political alternative to the street. Without an alternative, Rami said, Egypt will become a military state again.

Rami’s ideological transformation is affiliated with a new understanding of knowledge, a new political epistemology. “I believed that I had the answers, now I believe that I am still in the process of finding the questions,” he told me. “Trying to find the questions” means to seek a positive alternative. This changes what political activism is. If you already have the answers, politics is about argumentation. It was because he was used to politics as argumentation that he, after I had interviewed him for half an hour in 2011, laughed and said, “I am not used to talking this much without anyone saying ‘no!’” He was not used to discussions, as those that took place at the conference I have described previously, oriented toward reaching concrete policy proposals and where the moderators asked the discussants to specify what they meant before anyone began arguing against them. In the discussions he was used to, he had mostly just expressed his views; rarely had he changed his opinion. He therefore had little experience in solving political problems and disagreements through speech, that is, the discussions where, except in trivial cases, maybe debates but never deliberations.

The belief in a messianic earthquake determined also which political activities Rami had esteemed. He had relatively little faith in attempts to form demands among the oppositional leadership but had much hope in signs of great
popular protests. When great demonstrations took place in Jordan in November 2012, he and his haraka went to streets in poorer areas in East Amman and began shouting for the downfall of the regime, trying to mobilize the people. The faith in a great uprising meant that he—like some other of al-harakāt’s leaders—by late 2011 had come to deemphasize the importance of siyāsa (politics), thinking that the opposition brought the wrong demands to the streets. “We talked about election laws and the constitution,” one of these leaders told me. “But people never cared about siyāsī issues. People cared about ijtimāʿī (social) issues: prices, health insurance, free education. That is what we should have brought to the street.” Only a great mass can make an earthquake happen, and the role of the organizers is not to direct it, but to awaken it. In 2014, when Rami no longer had faith in the earthquake he once was waiting for, he viewed this suspension of siyāsī work differently. It is as if he had realized that the leaders of al-harakāt had a notion that they were moving with the current; a belief that made them wait complacently for history to bring about a better society.26 With his emphasis, in 2014, that the demonstrations’ leaders should have brought a political alternative to the street, he replaces the historical process with the oppositional leadership as the author of a more democratic society.

I have presented Rami’s ideological transformation because the contours of his “confrontational” activism becomes clear in contrast to that which replaced it. His earlier ideas held that the problem was something bad at the top of the authoritarian regime. If this badness is destroyed, a better society will arise. The fundamental political issue is therefore a power struggle between the people and the authoritarian regime. The solution is a great mobilization of the people, a great uprising. The task of the political leader is therefore to agitate, to awaken. The highest political figure is the champion who confronts the regime. In contrast, if the activism begins with another principle; that is, building something new rather than removing something bad, the fundamental political issue is no longer a power struggle, and the task of the political leader is not agitation but formulation of a new alternative. Practices aimed at forming demands, such as those I have described earlier in this chapter, are no longer superfluous but essential. The highest political figure is the knowledgeable politician rather than the brave champion.

Conclusion

One way to improve our understanding of the fragmentation of the political movements that emerged during the Arab Spring is to examine why attempts to coordinate them fell apart. This is what this chapter has done in the Jord-

26 I here use a phrase from Benjamin 1969: thesis 11.
nian context. More generally, it has examined breakdowns of attempts to establish a form of discussion, both between and within protest groups, and between protest groups and the regime.

Much of the early scholarship on the Arab Spring did not address the complexities of coordinating protest groups and instead framed the uprisings as a power struggle between the regime and an opposition with demands for political liberalization. For example, in much of the literature dealing with the role of information technology in changing authoritarian rule in the Arab world, the underlying assumption was that such a rule is changed by a power struggle, and the question was which role information technology had for supporting “the opposition” or “the people” in that power struggle; for example, by mobilizing demonstrators, lowering the “barrier of fear,” awakening dissent, or bringing international pressure to bear on autocratic regimes (for some examples, see Aday et al: 2012, 2013; Allam 2014; Alexander and Aouragh 2014; Tudoroiu 2014; Tufekci and Wilson 2012).

Although these analyses usually include a summary of what the demonstrators demanded (e.g., political reforms, an end of corruption), few discuss the more concrete meanings underlying these demands. I have previously discussed how this means that several analyses of Jordan’s Arab Spring did not perceive the more exclusionary notions which several of the protest movements held nor that many of them wanted to expand a political system based on patronage. Considering the concrete meaning underlying a demand also reveals that this sometimes stood in opposition to the “explicit” meaning. When the leadership of established political parties such as the Islamic Action Front or the Ba’th Party called for constitutional monarchy or constitutional reforms, these demands had a meaning that was much clearer than when ḥaraka or a coalition of protest groups called for them. Although leaders of the ḥarakat in Tafila also said that they demanded constitutional monarchy, they could not, unlike these two political parties, specify what they meant by this. Furthermore, if we look at the demonstrable effects the invocations of this demand had rather than trying to interpret the “meaning” it referred to (cf. Austin 1962), we see that—during the “Reformation of the structure of elections” conference, for example—the invocation of constitutional monarchy interrupted discussion of issues which had to be settled for the demand to have a clear practical meaning. If we take this into consideration, we must say that the ḥaraka thought and said that it demanded constitutional monarchy but never really did so. This vagueness was not the outcome of a strategic choice to have a broad demand that many demonstrators could unite behind and which would put pressure on the regime; it is more apt to say that those who called for it thought that it had a much clearer meaning than it actually had. When we look at the concrete meaning underlying slogans for political reforms instead of the slogans themselves, the fragmentation of the Jordanian protest movements becomes clearer.
During 2011, these movements were nationally coordinated in a few ways: the Friday demonstrations had the same name in towns and cities all over Jordan. Occasionally, for example on March 24, 2011 and 2012, and on the Friday demonstrations in Amman, many protest groups demonstrated at the same place. However, the demonstrations were rarely mediated by a discussion about demands that lasted more than five minutes. The more ambitious attempts to coordinate the Jordanian protest movements, like those I have described in this chapter, fell apart.

Although the Jordanian political landscape is divided in regard to what political rights Palestinian-Jordanians should have and has historically rooted conflicts between Islamists and leftists, it should be clear from this chapter that these attempts fell apart due to something more general than ethnic or ideological conflicts. The attempts were based on habits and values which most of the protest movements’ leadership did not share, for example about how citizens ought to relate to each other and to the regime and about the role of dialogue with other political factions.

The literature on civil society and social capital is based on the notion that democratic governance is based on everyday forms of behavior and values beyond formal institutions, constitutions and elections, such as trust in one’s fellow citizens and a relatively inclusive political ethos. Such habits and values, it is argued, are fostered primarily through participation in a kind of voluntary association that stands between the household and the state; that is, civil society (see especially Putnam 1993; 2000). The impediments to this kind of association have, for example, been analysed in terms of kinship institutions and family structures that emphasize the individual’s moral obligations to the family and kindred at the expense of people outside that relatively small group of people (e.g., Banfield 1958; Campbell 1964) or an authoritarian government that destroys the soil for autonomous associations (e.g., Tocqueville 2011 [1856]).

Instead of just applying these understandings of the conditions for civic cooperation to the Jordanian case, I will make use of the fact that several political activists understood the difficulty to in cooperating in terms of a widespread unwillingness to engage in discussions and an excessively polemical way of acting politically, among supporters of as well as opponents to the regime, which they often described as “a lack of infitāḥ.” This is particularly revealing since infitāḥ can refer to not only political but also educational and social practices. A focus on these practices offers an understanding of politics different from that implied in the widespread discourse about civil society, and it is these practices the next chapters address.
4. **Infitāḥ** as a form of education

The previous chapter discussed a form of politics based on political programs and “infitāḥ.” In 2011, certain educators already used the concept *infitāḥ* when referring to forms of teaching practices introduced after Jordan’s political liberalization 1989-1992. Furthermore, among a small group of teachers, principals and senior officials, the concept figured in a criticism of features of the predominant educational culture, a criticism that mainly focused on the teaching and textbooks covering Arabic, English, religion and the human and social sciences. That the same word is used to refer to political activism and education reflects a deeper convergence. Several political activists think that political *infitāḥ* draws on other forms of *infitāḥ*, and from the life stories of these activists, it is clear that their encounter with *munaṭṭib* pedagogy has been important for how they act politically. This situation offers a concrete opportunity to study how the dissent which emerged during the Arab Spring was affected by educational practices.

The idea that political movements are affected by values and habits developed in schools is widely held. Scholars have, for example, pointed out that radical Arab nationalism—the great ideology of the 1950s and 1960s—as well as the Islamism of the Muslim Brotherhood had their strongest base among people educated in the modern education sector (e.g., Dawisha 2016: 125, 165; Devlin 1976: 9, 103; Khoury 1987; Mitchell 1969). In scholarship about Jordan, this argument is well-represented by Peter Gubser’s *Politics and Change in Al-Karak* (1973). Gubser shows how the increase of schools and communication (e.g., telegraphs, newspapers, roads) led to a wide range of social and political changes and gave rise to an educated middle class whose members often supported the ideology-based modern Arab political parties (in this case, the Ba’th Party and the Communist Party) and wished to overthrow or at least reform the patronage-based political system and the role of the tribes within it. Other scholars have described how educational institutions have contributed to sectarian and ethnic divisions. Amatzia Baram, for example, describes how the Iraqi Ba’th Party’s promotion of a secular national culture shifted, due to political reasons during the 1980s, to a policy of Islamization, which is one reason why Iraq, on the eve of the American invasion in 2003, was “a more religious and more sectarian society than had ever been the case since the 1950s” (2011: 25). Jordanian school textbooks still contain themes
which, according to Linda Layne, were “discernible in official nationalist rhetoric [in the late 1980s]: the role of Jordan’s leader in the Great Arab Revolt, the Hashemites’ genealogical links to the Prophet Muhammad and their traditional role as protectors of Islam’s holy places, and Jordan’s tribal character” (1989: 24). The notion that the country is tribal (and especially Bedouin) meant that several of my non-Bedouin Transjordanian informants viewed Bedouins as the “original” Jordanians, but the notion especially demarcates “Jordanians” from Palestine’s traditionally more settled and non-tribal population; that is, from Palestinian-Jordanians. Some analysts think this notion accentuates ethnic division and political fragmentation; Joseph Massad, for example, goes as far as arguing that “through inclusive policies . . . and an inclusive nationalist discourse, the Jordanian government and Jordanian nationalists might be able to unify the country under identities that are not mutually exclusive, thus adverting a second civil war” (2001: 275).

This chapter, however, focuses on how education affects political communication rather than national identity. This should be seen in the overall context of the thesis. As I have mentioned, many scholarly accounts of Jordan’s Arab Spring understand its fragmented political landscape in terms of ideological divisions and a complicated national identity. This study has instead focused on the significance of the way a political movement conducts its politics. More precisely, it has specified a form of politics that was associated with attempts to coordinate the Jordanian protest movements through discussions and which was based on an orientation toward political dialogue (or infitāḥ) and on political programs and ideas in contrast to patronage. This chapter examines links between this form of politics and teaching practices such as student evaluations, reasoning (as an alternative to rote learning), and the reservation of judgment.

The chapter first focuses on a single case to explore these links in contextual detail. I discuss the political teaching of Samir—the activist who was present at many of the events described in the previous chapter—especially by focusing on a course about democracy and political parties he gave in 2011; a first step in building a political association. The chapter provides a detailed analysis of the course, drawing heavily on this activist’s thoughts behind it, and on how he experienced the differences between its educational form and the form of education he was more used to from his schooling and from the political party he once was a member of. The nascent political association he was building was characterized by a notion of political programs, ideology and infitāḥ. The chapter contextualizes these notions and distinguishes them from Jordan’s more dominant political landscape.

The chapter then turns to a movement within the Jordanian education sector which Samir’s course was a part of. Educational practices such as student evaluations, discussions, and less authoritarian relations between teachers and students have been spreading in Jordanian schools and universities for over a decade. The chapter discusses this trend in general, but focuses especially on
some of Amman’s private schools, which distinguish their educational culture from that of the national education system with the term *infitāḥ*, referring to pedagogical practices but also to the content of the teaching in the social and human sciences. In the latter sense, *infitāḥ* is especially understood in contrast to what these educators think are moralistic ideas with Islamist motifs, which are influential in the textbooks in social and human sciences that are used in the national education system.

By discussing a congruence between activities at schools and among political movements, both of which are referred to in terms of *infitāḥ*, the chapter contributes to an understanding of democratic politics which differs from theoretical discussions starting from concepts such as civil society and public sphere. *Infitāḥ* refers to practices and sentiments that might be found in the voluntary associations of civil society but also in public schools and governmental bodies. The discourse the concept refers to is not necessarily structured by a notion of publicness or rational argument as the sole arbitrator. The concept of *infitāḥ* more often emerged as a political theme when faith in public discourse and the power of arguments was shattered.

**Teaching democracy**

The course on democracy and political parties—that I will use as a case study to discuss links between education and political activism—was taught by Samir in the autumn of 2011. The course was the first step in his plan to build a political association in Karak, a town with about 60,000 inhabitants, 140 km south of Amman. The thirty participants were young and mostly university students. One was an imam, and two had finished their PhDs at the university in Karak. Almost half were women. They were all frequent visitors at the club (*nādi*) where the course took place, which normally was a place for billiards, theater and other social activities. Samir offered the course after becoming increasingly disillusioned with *al-ḥarakāt*, and the political association he was building in Karak differed from the *ḥarakas* that had emerged in Jordan by being based on a notion of political programs, ideology and *infitāḥ*.

**Political programs and ideology**

In the previous chapter, I noted that organizers of attempts to coordinate the Jordanian protest groups were concerned with political programs. Their sense was that the Jordanian protest movements had demands that were too vague and placed too much faith in street protests instead of a process where political groups met, discussed and reached an agreement on common demands. This section further elucidates this notion of political programs and contrasts it with a politics based on patronage. It does so through an ethnographic focus on the political association Samir began building in Karak.
Samir had invited the course’s participants with the notion of political programs in mind. They were activists (nāshiṭīn) used to and interested in public work. Only a small number were political activists, more were social activists (nāshiṭīn ijtimāʿīyyīn), who worked voluntarily with making the city clean, with orphans, or with stopping violence in schools; others were interested in economic questions. This mixture was a conscious choice. Samir wanted people with different kinds of expertise so that in the future they would be able to divide themselves into committees according to their interests and expertise in order to handle different local issues (e.g., one group could work with educational issues). This division of labor is distinguishable from that of the strongest harakas in Jordan, which was based on a functional differentiation (e.g., the appointment of a cashier and a spokesperson) aiming to make the haraka stronger and not on different areas of expertise with the aim of formulating a political program.

Most of the people who participated in the course were unfamiliar with the notion that political parties had programs. Questions and comments constantly interrupted Samir’s talk, and one particularly illuminating dialogue took place. One of the participants, a female teacher, disagreed with Samir:

**Participant:** I do not care about politics at all.
**Samir:** So, what do you care about?
**Participant:** I am a teacher. I care about education.
**Samir:** Most parties have an educational program.

She became quiet. This was new information. He talked more about the different activities of a party. They did not only have political (siyāsī) programs, but also social (ijtimāʿī) and educational ones. The Islamic Action Front, for example, had been active in the engineer’s trade union, working for the workers’ rights and for salary increases. Most people in the audience thought that a political party had only siyāsī, not ijtimāʿī or economic (iqtiṣādī), concerns. In contradistinction to the insistence of some of al-ḥarakāt’s leaders, in late 2011, that political activists should talk about ijtimāʿī rather than siyāsī issues, Samir never replaced siyāsī with ijtimāʿī issues, but instead indicated that they were not worlds apart; in fact, they converged.

The audience’s unfamiliarity with the notion that political parties have programs was partly based on a realistic understanding of Jordan’s present political parties. Most of them have no ideology and barely any political program. Samir wanted to introduce the idea that a political party can be an organization through which people can work collectively with social and economic issues and that is based on an idea rather than patronage, a distinction I illustrate below.

The Baʿth Arab Progressive Party is one of the few Jordanian parties that is based on an idea. It is the Iraqi version of the Baʿth Party (there is also a Syrian); in their office, they have large pictures of Saddam Hussein and
Michel Aflaq. Mostafa Naser al-Rawashdeh is the only member from the party who in 2013 was elected to the House of Deputies (which has 120 deputies). He was elected through his tribe, not through the thoughts of his party; the latter “is very difficult,” he told me when I interviewed him. This means that Rawashdeh asked prominent figures of his tribe for the tribe’s support of his candidacy. If they accepted, they asked other prominent tribesmen to support the candidacy, and they in turn would tell their families to vote for him. When he had been elected to parliament, he was indebted to his tribe. They had supported him, and he needed to help them with ُwāṣṭa—government jobs to tribesmen, services to the community, and so on. He had a moral debt to repay, and if he did not, the tribe would never elect him again. Moreover, in order to get a good ُwāṣṭa, the member of parliament needed the support of a cabinet minister, and he got such support by voting as the minister wished him to. If Samir wanted to be elected through his tribe, he would ensure that the garment factory whose manager he worked with employed tribesmen of Tarawneh, and he would often travel to Karak and help people there for free as lawyer. He would also need to convince shaykhs and other people with influence in the tribe—high-ranked military officers for example—to support him and ask other people to vote for him. This patronage system has the same features as Peter Gubser’s description of the campaigning of Karaki candidates for the parliamentary election in 1968.

[The candidates] visited all the middle-level and many of the low-level leaders from whom they gathered support by various means. Promises to have schools built and roads improved and to secure positions in the army for their followers were the most common forms of patronage. . . . Direct cash payments for votes were also not uncommon. The candidates who enjoyed the best favour of the regime were in the best position to fulfil their pledges for government action and jobs and the lower-level leaders realized this. [Gubser 1973: 170-171]

The patronage system has several layers: middle-level leaders only have the loyalty of their followers because they can give them patronage. Therefore, they cannot support a candidate just because they believe in his ideas, but rather needs to ensure patronage that they can pass on. Aside from some members of the Islamic Action Front, Jordanian members of parliament who have political ideas are still elected through a patronage system and are thereby bound to it. Some Jordanians describe this as a tribal-based system, but a very similar system exists in Palestinian-Jordanian areas, where it often runs along communities based on the Palestinian village or city of origin rather than tribes (except among Palestinian-Jordanians who belong to tribes), and it also exists in the more diverse area in Western Amman where I lived, where some
wealthy candidates used to tour the poorer neighborhoods before the election day and hand over gifts such as large bags of sugar.¹

The patronage system’s logic is broken if voters support a candidate’s ideas rather than a candidate’s person. The difference is reflected in how Samir, Rawashdeh or an Islamist candidate can approach someone whose support he seeks: he can either ask “Do you support me?” or “Do you support my idea?” If he gets support through his first question, he has a debt that needs to be repaid, but if he gets support due to his idea, he is only accountable if his supporters see that he does not work to implement his idea or program. They cannot accuse him when they do not receive wāṣṭa because they voted for an idea they believed in (e.g., Social Democracy, Ba’thism, Islamism).

Samir and some other experienced young political activists that I met had been offered relatively well-paid jobs at new political parties, whose leaders thought that these activists could mobilize votes among youths. The activists knew, however, that in these parties they could never work with or argue about a political program because the parties were not based on the principle “we work together for these ideas” (e.g., social justice, democracy, combating unemployment) but on the principle “votes in exchange for patronage,” and these activists agreed with what Samir often told me: “If I start a political party, what is most important is that it is based on an idea (fikra).”²

The significance of organizations having common ideas has been pointed out in various contexts. David Graeber mentions that a consensus group, “whether a tiny affinity group or a vast network—is based on founding principles. These principles tend to refer to what the group does, or hopes to accomplish (its ‘purposes or reasons for being’) and how it organizes itself to go about doing it. In other words, the group itself is a project of action” (2009: 329).³ The political journalist Clare Malone, writing about the U.S. Republican Party, emphasizes the ethical aspects such principles have in the case of political parties: “Political parties strive to be something greater than the human beings they’re comprised of; they enshrine values and ideologies for the ages. The practical implications of this pursuit are often discussions of tax

¹ Therefore, one result of an election system on a more demographic basis would be to shift patronage from Transjordanians to Palestinian-Jordanians.
² Thus, like the different structures of domination Weber (1978: 952-954) called bureaucratic, patriarchal and charismatic, the political parties are based on different ultimate grounds of validity, or claims for obedience. The key distinctions are not Weber’s rational, personal and charismatic authority, however, but the difference between obedience to an idea (or cause) and to a person to whom you are indebted.
³ “In other consensus trainings,” Graeber continues, “experienced facilitators would emphasize to me that whenever there seems to be an intractable problem or difference of opinion, the best approach is always to remind members of the group of their reasons for being. No matter what kind of common project it may be, even if it’s five students living in a house together, always start by everyone agreeing on something they want to be able to accomplish together. Because when you all start arguing about the dishes, the best way to keep people from going for each other’s throats will always be to go back to that.”

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policy or judicial stances, but these debates are driven by what a certain group believes to be the best, most virtuous way to live life on earth.”4 When Samir or al-Rawashdeh asked people to support their ideas instead of them, they certainly asked for support on the basis of what people believed in rather than benefitted from in a narrow personal sense. A political party without a common cause (be it democracy, social justice, political Islam) was, both Samir and al-Rawashdeh certainly believed, doomed to become a mere machine for patronage.

The distinction between idea and patronage came through during the course itself. Samir intended to build the foundation of a political association, maybe a political party, but he came with little to offer (neither jobs nor money) except his ideas. The support he soon got from the participants (the course was very popular, and they soon wanted to found a political party) differs from the support he got from the inhabitants of a town in northern Jordan where a year later he was the face of a garment factory the World Bank financed. “They will always support me,” he told me. However useful that loyalty was, it was not on that kind of support he wanted to build the internal structure of a political association.

Infitāḥ

In Chapter 2, I argued that attempts to coordinate the Jordanian protest movements’ demands for political reforms were at odds with a form of politics based on patronage. This was also the view of many Jordanians with experience from political parties, and this criticism of politics based on patronage is far from novel. Philip Khoury writes that the dynamic element in Syria’s national independence movement by the 1930s “had become . . . the new modern educated classes,” a new generation “inspired by ideologically advanced political organizations, which a number of them had witnessed during their student days in Europe in the twenties and thirties,” who wanted to replace the maintenance of individual followings and the personal relations binding the movement together with subordination to party will, ideology and policy (1984: 532). According to Peter Gubser (1973: 132-134), the concept of a political party based on an ideology as an alternative to patronage was also a common notion among Karak’s educated classes in the 1960s.

The political organizers I have focused on in previous chapters were not only concerned with a politics based on ideas and programs instead of patronage, but also had a notion that it was important to develop demands through discussions and to engage with other political factions through dialogue, an orientation some of them described as “infitāḥ.” This notion also structured the political association built through Samir’s course in Karak. The association was thereby not only based on a common cause but also on a way of handling differences. This—what Samir referred to as infitāḥ—appeared not

4 “The End of a Republican Party” (FiveThirtyEight, July 18, 2016).
so much in the doctrine conveyed at the course as in the way it was transmitted: its educational form. This section studies this form in greater detail, showing how a form of politics based on what some activists called “infitāḥ” and which was associated with attempts to coordinate the Jordanian protest movements was linked to a certain form of education.

This form of education was characterized by the reservation of judgment. During the course, Samir never answered questions about his party affinities (because the Islamic Action Front figured in many of his examples, some of the participants believed he might be Islamist, but none seemed to be sure), and he seldom voiced criticism against the regime, political parties or al-ḥarakāt. He never used the phrase “I am opposed to the government” (anā muʿāraḍa), a phrase almost everyone in al-ḥarakāt frequently used. Nor did he present his own analysis of the problems with the political parties and al-ḥarakāt. After the course, when I commented that he avoided voicing value judgments about the regime, opposition or parties, he responded:

It is true. I do not say: “I am in this party,” or “I want this.” If I have an idea, and they have an idea, it is possible to discuss them; we might find out that one of us is right and that the other is wrong. But if they do not understand anything [about politics], and I present my ideas it becomes spoon-feeding (talqīm). Politics is not spoon-feeding. Politics is thinking (fikr). Learn how to think politically, then we discuss. You have to be ready.

Many analysts (e.g., Naguib 2006; United Nations Development Program 2003; World Bank 2008) have pointed out the congruence between the authoritarianism of Arab political institutions and an education system based on memorization of what the teachers and textbooks state and on a suppression of the students’ own doubts and questions, a teaching without any dialogue between students and teachers.

This type of authoritarian culture is not restricted to Arab regimes; rather, it is widespread among political parties opposing the regime. Hugh Roberts (2013) points out that not only the Egyptian regime, but also many of the prominent oppositional parties, have been ruled by aging autocrats. This applies also to Jordan, although to a lesser degree. Like several other political

5 “They included,” Roberts writes, “No’man Gomaa, in his early seventies by then, whose self-centred leadership of the New Wafd drove Ayman Nour (the future founder of el-Ghad) out of the party and who was finally ejected himself only after a gun battle at the party headquarters; Rifaa al-Said, the 73-year-old leader of Tagammu, who was notorious for ignoring his colleagues’ opinions; Dia al-Din Dawoud, the even older leader (at 79) of the Nasserist Party, whose autocratic manner drove his most talented young recruit, Hamdeen Sabahi, to leave and find a new party of his own, al-Karama (Dignity). But this is not just an Egyptian thing. The Kurdish Democratic Party in Iraq has been led by the Barzanis for generations, just as the Druze in Lebanon have been led by the Jumblatts. And what the Algerian press fondly refers to as the country’s oldest democratic party, the Socialist Forces Front, has been led since its foundation
activists, Samir claimed that the leaders of the leftist party he joined in his youth (the Communist Party) never accepted anyone voicing an opinion or argument challenging or questioning their own. The leader of a leftist political association, who later became Minister of Political Development, once referred to this authoritarian party culture when he chaired a meeting at a roundtable with eight young members of the association: “Everyone should talk and say if there is something they do not agree with; we do not do as before [when he was younger], it is not only I [the leader] who should talk and come up with proposals.”

The reformulation of the leader’s authority was, during Samir’s course, reflected in the use of evaluations (which the students filled in after the course), in the dialogue between the instructor and participants (Samir encouraged the participants to voice comments and ask questions) and in how the audience sat (the participants were told to put the chairs—which stood in a row—in a half-circle). As I will write about later in this chapter, these three pedagogical practices have been spreading in Jordanian schools at least since the country’s political liberalization in 1989-1992.

_Infitāḥ_ was thus defined against an authoritarian political culture rather than an authoritarian regime. Samir said that he could not give his democracy course in a place with little _infitāḥ_, referring not to staunch regime support in such a place but to a general unwillingness to engage with political opinions people were unfamiliar with, regardless of whether they were opposed or loyal to the regime. When he asked the young people attending the course to move the chairs into a half-circle, he thought that he was not only introducing a pedagogical technique but a more _munfatiḥ_ political culture, distinguishable from the authoritarianism of the political parties he had been a member of.

This way of engaging with other ideas was manifested also in the approach to political philosophy. Samir told me that he learned much from reading philosophers such as Marx, Hobbes and Machiavelli—taking something from Marx and something from Hobbes—but without accepting any of them as doctrinal truth. During the course he tried to reproduce his own experience, and in the reading packages he later handed out to the participants, there were texts about Michel Aflaq as well as Montesquieu.

This philosophical pluralism and the replacement of “spoon-feeding” with a more dialogical intellectual engagement are affiliated with the focus on political programs. Political activists who stressed the significance of political programs thought that the old political parties were stuck to a certain definition of reality that emerged from one body of truth (e.g., Marx, Aflaq or a holy book), had too much confidence that the solutions to political problems were found there, and therefore saw no need to develop a more concrete political program or a set of reform proposals. In contrast, a member of the political

in 1963 by Hocine Aït Ahmed, a president for life whose tenure (at fifty years) exceeds even Gaddafì’s.”
bureau of the Ba’th Party I interviewed saw the stability of the party’s political program as a strength, telling me with pride that it had not changed since the party was founded.

Nevertheless, most of al-ḥarakāt’s leaders were not schooled in the doctrines of a political party, and among their associations, the break-down of discussions were, as I have shown time and again in the previous chapters, affiliated with a confrontational ethos that lacked a theoretically developed justification. The reliance on confrontation was connected to a spirit of anger. Jonathan Haidt describes anger as an “underappreciated moral emotion,” whose moral element is evident in “cases of people indignantly standing up for what is right or angrily demanding justice for themselves and others,” an emotion which “generally involves a motivation to attack, humiliate, or otherwise get back at the person who is perceived as acting unfairly or immorally” (2003: 856). The affinity between anger and revolutionary ideas are evident in the history of the European social democracy, where the reformists’ victory over the revolutionaries meant that anxiety and discontent replaced wrath and moral indignation as dominant emotions in the movement’s ideas, rhetoric and symbolism (see Arvidsson 2016; Ljunggren 2015). Martha Nussbaum (2016) goes as far as claiming that the desire for payback inherent in anger makes it politically ineffective as a response to injustice and that this explains why the most successful revolutionary freedom movements of the twentieth century (Gandhi’s independence movement, the civil rights movement in the United States, and the freedom movement in South Africa) were conducted in a spirit of non-anger (which she distinguishes from non-violence).

Whether that is true or not, among the political activists I have discussed previously, infītāḥ appeared as a theme in response to a way of acting politically that was driven by anger. They thought that the protest movements should have worked to formulate an alternative instead of being driven by opposition to the regime and that there was a general unwillingness to engage with other political groups through dialogue. Is not the connection between such a criticism and a form of education that emphasizes habits of reading and discussion marked by the reservation of judgment obvious? Samir referred to philosophical pluralism and discussion rather than the spoon-feeding of doctrines, and to student evaluations as examples of infītāḥ, and he believed this to be a condition of the more dialogical way of acting politically which I have depicted in the earlier chapters.

A vulnerable openness

The congruence between democratic politics and education depicted so far has been about a way of listening, arguing and debating that permeates both these activities. The notion that the way people listen, argue and debate have great
consequences for political life is famously developed in the notion of the “lib­
eral public sphere” (see Habermas 1989), and scholars have pondered whether there are publics in the Middle East with similar democratic functions (e.g., Hirschkind 2001; Salvatore and Eickelman 2006; Shami 2009; Wedeen 2008). In the political contexts I have studied, infitāḥ arose as a theme when people lost faith in the power of persuasion by arguments and in public discourse. It was this lost faith that made Naseem, the political journalist (see Chapter 1), refer to Plato’s allegory of the cave, which in contrast to the notions of the public sphere and the agora is based on an experience of a tension between philosophy and political society. The form of reasoning which ideally takes place at the agora or in the public sphere can only, Naseem began to think after the violence targeting the sit-in on March 25, take place in small “civic bubbles” protected from what is outside. The following section returns to Samir’s course in Karak and shows how also it was structured by such a belief in “bubbles” concealed from public view—rather than a notion of “public­ness”—and by a rhetoric in which irony, flattery and creation of trust were central components in contrast to the ideal of rational argument as the sole arbitrator implied in the idea of the liberal public sphere.

Rhetoric

Aristotle astutely distinguished between persuasion based on trust and per­sua­sion based on arguments:

Of the modes of persuasion furnished by the spoken word there are three kinds. The first kind depends on the personal character of the speaker; the second on putting the audience into a certain frame of mind; the third on the proof, or apparent proof, provided by the words [logos] of the speech itself. Persuasion is achieved by the speaker’s personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible [trustworthy]. . . . Persuasion is effected through the speech itself when we have proved a truth or an apparent truth by means of the persuasive arguments suitable to the case in question. [1954: 1365a]

The scholarly literature on deliberation focuses on the third of these modes of persuasion: the use of arguments. The young political activists Samir trained in politics were also more interested in political ideas and arguments than in the art of establishing trust through speech. But Samir emphasized the importance of establishing trust. “They always want to learn about politics first,” he thought, “but you have to start with communication skills.” His activ­ism was oriented toward discussion as a means of settling disputes and forming demands. Nevertheless, when he tried to establish a political discus­sion with these deliberative qualities, he began by creating an infrastructure of communication through speech aiming to establish social contact and trust rather than with reasoning or frank discussion.6

6 Cf. Julia Elyachar’s notion “phatic labor” (2010).
This priority can be illustrated through Samir’s course. His vision was to eventually introduce ideas (afkār) about politics, those of Hobbes, Marx and Rousseau, for example, and have people discuss them. He also wanted them to eventually discuss how al-ḥarakāt could have been organized differently and how democracy could be realized in Jordan. Nevertheless, his first step was to neutralize the objections, skepticism and mistrust his audience had about democracy, political parties, and himself as the speaker. This was achieved by speech that provided trust rather than arguments.

This first step was evident in how Samir presented himself. He gave the course together with his friend Ayman, who talked about “communication skills and time management,” and according to Samir, Ayman failed to establish trust during the course, which is one reason why his lesson did not meet with approval from the participants. After a short introduction, Ayman introduced a prioritization game: There was a bus accident. You could rescue everyone on the bus except three. There was an imam, an Israeli soldier, a politician, a child, an American politician, and so on. After the participants all had declared whom they would choose, Ayman argued that it was wrong to reduce a person to these labels. The Israeli soldier turned out to be against the politics of his country, and he was about to defect from the army, and so forth. Many of the participants disliked the patronizing tone. There was half an hour discussion during which they argued with Ayman, with such comments as “You cannot say that it is wrong, we did not have more information to make the decision,” and “Even if they would be like that we would still have to choose someone.” Samir leaned toward me and whispered, “See how aggressive they are toward him. Because he said he is from Tafila.” Later, when the day was over, he elaborated on this: “That he is from Tafila was only a minor cause [of their opposition].” Nevertheless, “they were more open to what I said because of how I presented myself, as someone from one of the city’s tribes. Otherwise, they would not listen at all. Especially not to a sensitive issue like this [democracy and political parties].” This is why Samir opened his lecture with “I am Samir Tarawneh, from Karak.” The tribal name, Tarawneh, positioned him as belonging to one of the city’s most influential tribes. The Tarawneh tribe is now spread among many of Jordan’s cities, which is why he added “from Karak.” He planned to invoke a range of different identities by using different introduction phrases during his southern tour. In Ma'an, he would say: “My name is Samir Tarawneh; my grandfather was one of Ma’an’s shaykhs.” His grandfather was indeed a respected person in Ma'an. In Aqaba, he planned to present himself with: “My name is Samir Tarawneh; my mother is from Aqaba”; in Tafila, “My name is Samir Tarawneh; I am from southern Jordan.” When he gave courses in Irbid, a city without the tribal dominance of the south (i.e., it is demographically dominated by Palestinian-Jordanians),

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7 For a discussion about the role of “neutralization” in political campaigning, see Etzler 2013: 60, 291-292.
he started his lectures, “I studied in Irbid for 4 years. There is a Bedouin proverb, ‘one who lives with anyone for 40 days becomes like them.’ I have been living here for four years, so I am from Irbid.”

When he spoke in Karak, he spoke Karaki, not the dialect he speaks in Amman. His father is from Karak and his mother is from Ma‘an, and he has lived in Amman and studied in Irbid. These cities cover a wide range of Jordan, so he knew how to speak many Jordanian dialects, and he talked about democracy in the dialect the listeners recognized as their own. The tribal and family affiliations, the Karaki dialect, and the declared autonomy from the regime (“in Jordan there are freedoms,” he said in the beginning of his talk, “but the level of democracy is rubbish”) were all about one thing: creating trust, without which “they will not listen at all.”

Political parties also needed to be made trustworthy. One reason why the audience was suspicious of political parties was that they associated them with opposition to the Hashemite regime, an association which had historical roots. During the Cold War, the Arab world became divided between “revolutionary” republics and more conservative monarchies such as Jordan. From the 1950s onward, Jordan was a scene for this conflict; the Hashemite regime survived only because it warded off several coup attempts, and the Karaki tribes have been a pillar of the regime in times of threat. Most Jordanian political parties were affiliated with Nasser’s Egypt, the PLO, Syria or Iraq, regimes that sought to overthrow Jordan’s Hashemite regime (see Rogan 2009: 277-318). As a counterweight to this historical fact, Samir emphasized how the Muslim Brotherhood supported the monarchy during this period, and even backed it financially during the 1970s. Political parties were not necessarily against the king.

Moreover, the pro-democratic discourse of King Abdullah was useful. The king had said in interviews and speeches, some of them directed to the nation, that he wanted to see several strong political parties and that the end of political reform was a parliamentary government. Some political analysts and activists describe the official pro-democracy discourse as “window-dressing” directed at a Western audience, or propaganda targeting the domestic population (e.g., Hamid 2010; Haring 2017: 77). For Samir’s course in Karak to take place, however, this discourse was a precondition. On several occasions, he challenged the audience: “In 75 percent of his speeches the king says that he wants to have parties. The king says this himself. Is he wrong?” Scattered voices from the audience answered, “No.” On another occasion he asked, “Why do you not answer the king’s wishes?” The next time Samir went to Karak, he had prepared a compendium of articles about democracy and politics. The first page was titled: “What the king says about democracy and political parties.”

In Weapons of the Weak, James Scott criticizes theories of hegemony (and of “window-dressing”): “A hegemonic ideology must, by definition, represent
an idealization, which therefore inevitably creates the contradictions that permit it to be criticized in its own terms” (1985: 317; 335-340). The official Jordanian pro-democracy discourse, however, facilitates critique primarily by offering royal sanction, not symbolic tools. “If I present something controversial about democracy, I have to say that the king says so. They must feel that it is legal. I do not refer to the constitution, they do not care about that, but to what the king says.” Consider the counterintuitive argument for encouraging people to accept the idea of political parties. Be citizens. Why? Because the people are the real sovereign, that is, because we are citizens rather than subjects? No. Because the king says so. The argument for citizenship evokes the authority of the king, not the citizenry. But by importing what the king says, anyone who wants to argue against the need for political parties now must argue not only with Samir but with King Abdullah as well.\(^8\)

Democracy also needed to be made trustworthy. Samir aimed to transform it from something alien and imposed from outside, to something familiar and with roots in the audience’s own traditions. During the course, he emphasized that there has been a democratic tradition in Karak. The first national assembly met there, and there were strong political parties in Karak. Whenever he taught about democracy, in Karak or elsewhere, he made a metaphor out of something the audiences were all familiar with: *dabka*, the Levantine folk dance performed on joyous occasions. *Dabka* is a combination of a line and a circle dance, and in the version I have watched at Jordanian weddings, there have been 15-100 participants, standing shoulder to shoulder, forming a long and curved line. The first 4-5 dancers, and especially the first dancer, lead the dance. They decide if the dance should speed up or slow down and which moves should be made; the entire line watches the first dancers and dance like them. The positions in the line are not static; people move up the line, according to the principle that the best dancers should be in front, and the very best one should be the first in the line. A child, who only knows the basics of the dance, often dances at the end of the line.

The metaphor goes like this: in politics, in a political party, there need to be many members; otherwise it will fail, much like a *dabka* with only a handful of dancers. A political party (and a parliamentary democracy) is like a *dabka* also in other ways: a smaller group needs to lead it, but their position as leaders are not given; the most skilled one should have that position, and the activists can wait and watch what he does, and if he is not adept, he needs to move down the line. In democracy, the leading position is vacated in the same way as it is in *dabka*: without violence and after the participants have evaluated his performance. The emphasis on a democratic tradition in Karak

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\(^8\) Cf. “If I import Strathern my text becomes stronger, for whoever wants to argue against my playing around with the nature/culture divide now has to argue with her as well” (Mol 2002: 23).
and the illustration of democracy with *dabka*, rather than with European regimes, had the same function as his statement, “I am Samir Tarawneh, from Karak,” but what it made less alien and more trustworthy was democracy, and it said, “I am democracy, I have lived in Karak, and I am like *dabka*.”

To sum up, Samir did not begin the course by giving arguments, but by making the audience consider him, political parties and democracy trustworthy. The focus on persuasion via establishing trust distinguished his conception of politics from a notion of “modernity” based on—like the notion of “being modern” Keith David Watenpaugh writes about in his study of the middle class in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Aleppo—“either a passive or an active assent to the universal nature of modernity, a commitment to an assault on the forms of the past” (2006: 16). This type of commitment determined the Syrian Ba’th Party’s views on tribes, and in Jordan, a tribal ethos is sometimes upheld as a major obstacle to democratic reform which needs to yield to meritocracy, a national identity and the state’s monopoly of violence. But given that the people at the course at the cultural club preferred ideas coming from someone they could identify with and who did not speak to them with a patronizing tone, Samir’s attempt to promote democracy would be destroyed if it implied an incompatibility between democracy and tribes (or Islam). Democracy would present itself not as having lived in Karak, with the tribes, nor as a solution to the problems Karakis had, but as a stranger, disdaining what they were proud of. In contrast, then, Samir adopted the course to tribal sentiments. In the political party he planned to establish, he wanted to have not only a youth and women’s section but also a tribal section, with representatives of the country’s tribes. These ideas were grounded in a vision of a politics based on persuasion and consent rather than “assault on forms of the past.”

In other words, while Samir, like the modernizers mentioned above, thought that he had a vision of a better society, he also believed in a principle of legitimacy apart from the goodness of this vision: consent. Later in this chapter, I describe teaching practices, which have emerged since Jordan’s political liberalization, that are structured by an ideal of consent and persuasion. This ideal can be illustrated through the words of a high school teacher in religion which Fida Adely (2012b: 106-107) writes about: “I do not like to just reject a student’s idea. I don’t like to just disregard them. I like to approach them through discussion. I try and convince them.” What made this teacher unique as a religion teacher, Adely writes, “was not that she did not seek to be authoritative; rather, it was her pedagogical perspective, which viewed rational debate and discussion as the best means to ‘true’ religious knowledge.”

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9 See article 15 of the constitution of the Ba’th Party (adopted in 1947).
10 For an example of this type of analysis, see the Arab Human Development Report 2004 (United Nations Development Program 2005: 145-146).
Nevertheless, the “rational debate” which an ideal of persuasion and consent leads to—is—if the ideal is followed faithfully—permeated by a rhetoric of flattery. A person who holds this ideal and at the same time thinks that he or she has authoritative knowledge (whether political or religious) must not just voice what is true but what the community can accept. He or she needs to listen to the community and adapt him- or herself to it, but not necessarily because he or she think that their opinions are true, but because pretending to accept some of these opinions is the only way to be politically effective. Samir did not merely avoid offending his audience, however; he also tried to make them feel proud in a way they normally did not. During the course, he conveyed the message that “Jordan’s strongest political parties originated in Karak” and that “Islam is democratic.” He presented his ideas about democracy and political parties with a rhetoric that challenged his audience’s beliefs about these issues but supported their pride, the deepest core of their identity. The belief in dialogue and persuasion as modes of political action lead to a rhetoric based on flattery rather than an ideal of rational argument as the sole arbitrator.

Concealment

According to Leo Strauss, pre-Enlightenment philosophers used “central chapters or central items in lists to convey subtly their most important or most controversial thoughts, which they did not wish to present too openly” (Zuckert and Zuckert 2014: 227). They did so in order to avoid persecution but also because they did not share modern philosophers’ faith in popular education, or universal Enlightenment. “The center was appropriate because it is the least visible part of a discourse: readers usually attend most closely to the beginnings and endings” (Ibid). This way of writing was not animated by a faith in public discussion.

The type of discussion Samir organized in Karak was also based on a tactic of concealing controversial thoughts by hiding them in the center. The talk on democracy and political parties was in the middle of the course; surrounded by a talk on communication skills and a talk on time management. Samir wanted the first day of the course to begin with something that was declared in its title, but he did not want to lecture on democracy at the day’s end, afraid that people might go home before he began to talk. By putting the less appealing and controversial part of it in the middle, the audience could not leave without missing out on the part about time management, and as the central part it did not define the course in the way it would have done if it was at the beginning or the end.

Furthermore, the course’s title did not mention democracy or political parties. Samir gave the course together with Ayman’s course on time management and communication skills to be able to conceal the controversial issues 11 Cf. Plato’s discussion of rhetoric and flattery in *The Gorgias*. 
(democracy and political parties) he would talk about from the participants, mukhābarāt and political parties. “If I give a course about democracy, nobody will come. They will think that it does not concern them.” Communication skills and time management, however, might do well on the CV, and this is the only part of the course that was mentioned in its title.

The concealment was also part of a larger strategy of dealing with the mukhābarāt. If the mukhābarāt did not know what the course would be about, they could not act preventively but would have to deal with a fait accompli. The location of the course was also a part of this strategy. Although he wanted to give the course in several other towns, Karak is the home town of his tribe. “If I do it in Amman, I will not have the same protection if something happens.” He predicted the reaction in Karak if something would happen to him. “They would say ‘why did you take him when he came here, to our place?’”

Tribal protection against police and security services is widespread in Jordan, and the fear that people without that protection have is one reason why so few Palestinian-Jordanians were engaged in al-ḥarakāt or any other opposition movement. The family or relatives of an imprisoned protester might use wāṣṭa within the police or security services to have their family member released, or they might ask someone in the tribe (such as a tribal shaykh) with such wāṣṭa to help them. Another option is public resistance against state policies; for example, to block roads with burning tires and stones or to demonstrate for a release. Samir’s days at university were formative for his politics, and in the beginning the mukhābarāt always defeated him. When he ran as a candidate for the student council and wrote in his program that he would arrange seminars about politics if he was elected, the mukhābarāt interfered in the election in support of one of “their” candidates. He also started a club for political discussion during his time at university. After a month, the mukhābarāt arranged for the locale to be given to Islamists, who used it for reading groups about the Qur’ān. When I followed him to political meetings in 2011, he often concealed his thoughts and emotions behind a poker face or by avoiding discussions, thinking that someone might use what he disclosed to alienate other people from him or to control him. These thoughts were based on his own ability to start quarrels between people, by steering the discussion to issues where he knew they disagreed. He could control other people if he understood how they thought, so he supposed that people who understood him could also control him.

12 Samir’s planning bore fruit. When I met him four days later, he told me about a phone call he got earlier the same day. The man who called presented himself as being an officer from the mukhābarāt. “I heard that you were in Karak last week.” Samir said that they had a friendly talk. After a light conversation about the course, the officer said that he had a piece of advice for him. “Do not talk about. . . . You are teaching them about democracy and you should not interfere with your own political thoughts. It is just a scholarly advice.” Samir thanked him in reply, but when the officer was about to hang up, he asked: “Is there a problem?” The officer answered laughing. “No, you are a Tarawneh.”
The tactic of concealment was a response not only to the risk of persecution from the security services but also to a sense that political forms based on *infitāḥ* only could be created in a protected environment, in a “civic bubble,” to borrow the phrase of Naseem, the political journalist. Throughout 2011, Samir had become increasingly pessimistic about *al-ḥarakāt*, like several other activists I have written about previously. “I had expected that people would not know much about politics, but I thought there would be more acceptance. That people would listen to thoughts and learn.” The experience had taught him to work exclusively with people in their 20s. Like Zaid, he discovered that older activists were not interested in listening to the thoughts of a younger activist. Samir had selected the participants of the course carefully. He wanted people he knew “were smart” and that some of them were members of political parties with different ideologies (Ba‘thists, Arab nationalists, leftists, Islamists, Transjordanian nationalists) and who therefore thought that a political party was not necessarily bad. But he did not want them to be among those who sat in the party’s leading organs or to be otherwise heavily involved in the party and schooled in its ideology. The course’s title was chosen to also conceal the real content of the course from the political parties in Karak. If the person he wanted to come had seen that the course was about democracy and told that to a more influential party member, they would probably have told him not to go and instead sent someone else. “They would not send someone stupid, but someone schooled in the party, and the party’s version of democracy, . . . it will be a bit true but also a bit false, and it is difficult to teach someone who has fixed ideas.” Moreover, “Maybe he wants to make a show, showing that he knows a lot. I want someone who can accept a new thought.” The form of deliberation he began institutionalizing was not going to take place in public.

*Infitāḥ* in schools

So far in this chapter, I have described Samir’s attempt at a type of political organizing characterized by a relatively egalitarian paradigm of authority, the use of reservation of judgment, and discussion in place of doctrinal teaching. I have argued that these practices are closely related to the more dialogical way of acting politically that previous chapters described in relation to attempts to coordinate the Jordanian protest movements. I have also argued that these practices are not necessarily structured by a notion of publicness and argument-based rhetoric but might rather be shaped by a very low faith in public discussions and in the power of persuasion by arguments, as in the case discussed above. When I did my fieldwork, teaching based on these practices was spreading in the Jordanian education sector at large. The course in Karak was part of this larger movement, and it is this larger movement I focus on in this section.
Although this movement is not restricted to schools with international accreditations, I have found it convenient to have one of these schools at the center of my presentation. These schools are “extreme cases” which implement the “new” teaching with an unusual comprehensiveness, and their unique relationship with the national education system makes them a useful vantage point for studying the Jordanian education sector.

The origin of this relationship was in the 1980s, when private schools accredited by institutions such as the International Baccalaureate or North Central Association of Colleges and Schools were first allowed to give Jordanian students high school diplomas (I refer to these accredited private schools as international schools). The schools are still obliged to use the Ministry of Education’s curricula and textbooks on Arabic, Islamic studies, Geography, History, Civic Education, and General Culture; that is, in all human and social sciences. Nevertheless, since the schools have an international accreditation, they are independent from the Ministry of Education’s examinations; an independence which removes the most important incentive to comply to the official curricula. All schools must buy the textbooks, but there is little supervision to ensure that they are used. Teachers at some international schools I interviewed told me that they put forth the official textbooks only when they had a visitor from the Ministry of Education. Although most international schools use the textbooks more often than that, the national curricula never have a prominent place in their teaching (at least not in high school). Thus, although the teachers in these schools are not completely insulated from the national education system, the school’s institutional independence means that they can pursue educational projects that they never could have pursued had they worked at other schools. Their position is reminiscent of that of the marginal political activists I have studied previously: they are outsiders to what is more dominant but at the same time they interact with it, and they understand their outsider status, partly at least, in terms of infīṭāḥ.

My overall purpose in this section is to show how the political infīṭāḥ I have specified previously is affiliated with a form of education. In making this argument, I draw on these educators’ understandings of infīṭāḥ, but this is not a study of a concept. For some educators at international schools, infīṭāḥ is also about not wearing hijab or about having classes which are not segregated according to sex. Most political activists within the trend I have focused on did not refer to these types of ideas when discussing infīṭāḥ (every female participant at Samir’s course in Karak wore hijab). Moreover, I am discussing a similarity between political activism and teaching, not political activists and students at international schools. The students have, compared to the activists, a more well-off socioeconomic background, are seldom members of tribes, are culturally more oriented toward Europe and North America, and most of them are uninterested in politics. The section focuses on educational forms, not social groups. Before pursuing this discussion, however, I will introduce the school at the center of this section, which I call “School Z.”
School Z was an IB school located at the outskirts of a wealthy suburb of Amman. The school was surrounded by an arid landscape of hills and sparse oak and pine trees, with only a few other buildings in sight. On a typical morning, yellow school buses left children outside the guarded gate, the only entrance to the school yard, which was surrounded by a wall. The road outside the school gate was crowded, full of cars that dropped off children or drove into the garage where the staff parked their cars. One of the guards acted as a traffic police, directing the stream of cars. Beyond the gate was a field of concrete ground, equipped with football goals and basketball hoops. The six-floor school building rose above the field, and one of the first things you saw when entering was a large picture of King Abdullah. The building housed a cafeteria, a library, laboratories, offices, and classrooms for the 1,200 students, from kindergarten through high school. Around a fourth of the educators I met were foreigners, mostly from Eastern Europe and North America. Religious dress was uncommon both among teachers and students; only a few teachers wore hijab, and no personnel wore abaya.

The international schools I visited enjoyed protection from a family or person with great influence and connections at the highest levels of the Jordanian regime. Prince Hassan, then Jordan’s crown prince, was involved in the founding of Jordan’s first IB school, and he was also involved in the founding of other liberal educational institutions in Jordan, for example Aal al-Bayt University, which has been the only Jordanian university offering studies on Islamic sects such as Twelver Shia, Zaidiyyah and Ibadiyya, sects seldom included in an ecumenical dialogue in Jordan (Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh 2013: 71-73).

Around 10 percent of the Jordanian students in secondary education are enrolled at private schools, but only a minority of these schools have an international accreditation (World Bank 2009). Some of them were set up by a foreign mission and had existed long before they more recently introduced the international programs. In the late nineteenth century, the Ottoman state and Christian missionaries had already introduced the first schools with a modern education system in the area that is now Jordan (Rogan 1999: 22, 136-137, 154-157). In 2011, a disproportionately high number of Christians worked in the schools I visited, but the majority of teachers and especially students were Muslims.13

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13 In Jordan, unlike in Egypt for example, a student does not need to obtain a special permission from the Ministry of Education to study at an international school (for the Egyptian case, see Herrera 2003: 170). The Syrian education sector corresponding to Jordanian international schools were nationalized after the Six-Day War in 1967. That put an end to their education system, largely based on a Western model and often set up by a foreign mission, and it contributed to the near extinction of foreign-language fluency among a generation of Syrian schoolchildren (Landis 2007: 179-180).
The students have a privileged socioeconomic background and live relatively secluded from the poorer parts of Jordanian society. The great discount school personnel receive for their children, around 50 percent at School Z, mitigates the need of a wealthy background among the parents. Still, all students at School Z whose background I know of had at least one parent with a well-paid job in private business. The teachers at these schools are seldom as wealthy as their students’ parents, and I heard more leftist ideas among teachers than among students.

In public high schools, boys and girls go to separate classes with teachers of the same gender, and, most often, to separate schools. Most international schools do not practice this gender segregation: About a third of School Z’s students are girls, and no classes are gender segregated. Male and female students mix in the cafeteria and in the school yard, and they travel together on extracurricular activities such as excursions and trips abroad.

The school emphasizes “universal spirituality” rather than revealed religion. During a particularly illuminating incident during my fieldwork, the principal Noor entered the classroom when the ninth grade had a class in Islamic studies. She stood beside the door while the students finished their presentations about the meaning of jihad, the importance of praying at the right time, and the need to respect the parents. The teacher filled in what they had missed, and Noor interjected when he talked about the importance of praying at the right time. “Prayers are not only about Islam, they are the same in all the world’s religions: Christianity, Buddhism. Your teacher tells you about the prayers of our religion, because he is the teacher of Islam.” She also noted that it is not very important to pray on time. “During the Libyan uprising, Yousuf al-Qaradawi said that if you are busy demonstrating in the street, you do not need to pray on the spot. To protest is like praying.” She later told me that Islam, her religion, was but one of many ways to express a spirituality shared by many religions and that Leonardo da Vinci, Confucius, Prophet Muhammad, and Jesus were all spiritual models. What was most important and great in Islam, was something also found in other religions.

14 The annual tuition fees rise with the students’ age; in School Z, they were about 4800 JOD for ninth grade and 6700 JOD for twelfth grade (6720 and 9380 USD). The tuition fees for the final year of an international program vary between different schools, typically (in 2012) between 3500 and 11,700 JOD (4900 – 16,380 USD).

15 When Noor interviewed people applying to work as teachers, she searched for someone who was “open-minded enough to suit the school policy.” “We have a philosophy at the school,” she told me, “and it is very important for us to make that clear when we hire new religious teachers. We explain it to them, and they have to accept it.” The rules were as follows: “To not put any religion down for any reason, not just monotheistic religions, but Buddhism, Hinduism. Moreover, we encourage the teachers to speak more about ethics than specifics. They should not say things like ‘music is *ḥarām,*’ that it will make them [the students] go to hell. That is a line they cannot cross. If they do, I will know it immediately.” The focus on “ethics rather specifics” means that texts treating the resurrection day in the textbooks of the national education system were ignored. The textbook for fourth grade, for example, taught that when the
Rote learning

I now want to depict the connection between political infītāh and a teaching method that employs pedagogical ideals of discussion and reflection, in contrast to rote learning. School Z will be used as a vantage point to put this type of teaching—and its differences from the mainstream of Jordanian schooling—into sharper relief. The specifics of School Z’s teaching can first be illustrated through the following example of a typical lesson.

Mariam had written “Why do people revolt?” on the board. It was the first history lesson in tenth grade; the unit was about American history, and she taught it in English. It was September; the classroom was hot, and a single rotating fan was the only air condition. Twenty students sat behind benches formed into squares of four, turned towards each other. The arrangement was impractical in that students sitting on the wrong side of the square needed to turn around to face the board. Moreover, chairs turned toward each other rather than the teacher facilitated chatting among the students. Despite these shortcomings, it was school policy to have these squares. It was the embodiment of a pedagogy that focused on discussions among the students.

Mariam chose to have a unit about the American and French revolutions, because of the recent events in the Arab world. She began the lesson by asking “Why do people revolt?” The students, most of them obviously recalling the Egyptian uprising against Mubarak that took place half a year earlier, came up with different answers that Mariam wrote on the board: because people want freedom of thinking, because they want lower taxes, because they want religious freedom and equality. Mariam then told the students to write a paragraph in their notebooks on why people revolt. After a few minutes of writing, the students read aloud what they had written. Many just summarized the reasons written on the board.

At the end of class, Mariam told the students to write down three sentences of “reflection” on the lesson. “Reflect on the method of teaching and what you think can be done better.” When reflection time finished, Mariam asked a
group of boys, who had been chatting and had not been faced toward her during the lecturing, to read what they had written aloud.

“It was a boring lesson.”

“Do you have any ideas? You have not been active.”

They did not offer anything more. The other students were more positive, typically beginning their sentences with “I learned about . . .” or “The teacher helped us to understand . . .” When I later talked with Mariam about the students’ reactions, she was positive. “There is always someone who is not interested. If a majority says that it is boring, you know that you are doing something wrong. And you have to be open-minded (munfatiḥ); I have to listen to their opinions even if I do not agree.”

“Reflection” and “student participation” were catchwords at School Z. The students usually spent the last minutes of a class “reflecting” in their notebooks, and these reflections were important to the grading, even in subjects like music, visual arts and drama. This educational policy originated from the school management, and it was implemented through supervision and persistent teacher meetings. Some of the new teachers, especially in the arts, thought that this focus on “reflection” was exaggerated, but the line between these different views on reflection becomes thin when the pedagogy at School Z is compared to that of Jordan’s national education system. Much of the constant focus on reflection and student participation was a reaction against that system, especially its reliance on rote learning. (The notion that the country’s education system was too dependent on rote learning was common also among political activists who emphasized the importance of infitāḥ.)

The educators at the school expressed this criticism in relation to the final exams at the end of secondary school—the tawjīhi. In the national education system, the exams determined the students’ final grades, and many Jordanians appreciated them for their impartiality—an instance where people succeed by merit, not wāṣṭa. All high school students, regardless of the tracks they studied, took the subjects General Culture and Islamic Studies (unless they were Christians), both of which were completely based on memorization. Students who sought the high grades required to study medicine, law, or engineering at university were wise to memorize almost the entire textbooks of these subjects.

The following criticism of the role of rote learning in the tawjīhi—by Tariq, a private tutor in the Arabic language for foreigners and for children at an international school in Amman—is representative of the views of many of the political activists mentioned above as well as of educators working at international schools. Tariq had studied engineering at a Jordanian university and, before that, he had studied the natural science program at a public high school, because “there were no international schools in Karak [where he lived] then.” Because of its lack of human and social sciences, the natural science program required less memorization than other programs. Moreover, like all other Christians, he did not take Islamic Studies. Therefore, the only textbook he
had to memorize was the one in General Culture, which included sections on the Dead Sea scrolls, “Truth and Knowledge,” the history of the Hashemites, and “Citizenship and Islamic morality.” Tariq disliked the textbook, and he often became irritated at its arguments and ideas when we read it together. But he needed a high grade, and he succeeded in getting 99 out of 100 points.

The absence of a lucid message made the 266-page textbook difficult to memorize. Tariq exemplified this for me by reading from a page he randomly chose: “‘Every part of the human knows the truth that exists at the special world.’ I will immediately forget this because it makes no sense.” After school, he needed only one hour to finish two math lessons. The study of General Culture, however, required sterner discipline: “One of these pages required two hours, I am not joking. This book is 266 pages long; it took a whole lot of time. Seriously, can you imagine how many days I wasted on this!” He began studying General Culture in the beginning of the last year of high school and continued until he finished the tawjīhi, studying around 2.5 hours every weekday and reviewing the lessons during the weekends. “If I did not study it for one week, it would be, Oh my God, I forgot the previous lessons! I have to start all over again.” After a while, he could repeat the entire first chapter without seeing the book.

The General Culture textbook had the headings “Discussions,” “Questions,” and “Thinking.” All textbooks from the Ministry of Education had an accompanying book called the “Teacher’s Guide” (dalīl al-mu‘allim) with instructions to the teachers. These guides had the answers to the questions and exercises. Tariq and some of his classmates bought a Teacher’s Guide together. They copied it so that they all got one copy, then memorized the answers written in the guide. Tariq never cared about his teacher’s lectures on General Culture nor about his own objections against the arguments and “facts” presented in the textbook, all completely irrelevant for the grade: “I just wanted to have the exact answer.” When it was time for the exam, he had memorized the entire book.16

Since grades were dependent on a student’s ability to repeat exactly what was written in the textbooks, there was a private market that offered courses in the art of memorization. “Do you want to memorize this number, 75201374269517368 70962473187546823871, after merely seconds?” a newspaper advertisement asked. “Sign up for your course!” The ad was from a firm that offered a course in memorizing the high school textbooks in Math, Administration, Biology, General Culture, Geology, Information Systems, or Religion in five days. A line encouraged parents to let their children sign up for the course: “Do you want your son to be number one in class??”

No students at School Z took the *tawjīhi*; therefore, they did not obtain grades in the national education system. If they applied for a Jordanian university, they needed to convert their IB grades to grades in the national education system. The abolition of the *tawjīhi* was unavoidable; otherwise, the school would have a two-tier teaching system. The memorization of the Ministry of Education’s textbooks, which was necessary to succeed in the *tawjīhi*, was completely at odds with School Z’s educational philosophy. “It is not for humans,” said Firas, one of school’s two founders, when I asked why the school did not teach the *tawjīhi*. “It is based only on memorization.”

The respect for “reflection” and student participation and the dislike of rote learning structured the teaching at School Z in general. Although the school used the Ministry of Education’s textbooks for the social sciences in grades one to eight (they were obliged to use these books), it taught these subjects differently from the public schools. Adnan, a teacher in geography and history for sixth and seventh grade who had also taught at non-international schools, explained what he thought the difference to be: “In School Z the teacher is a guide (*murshid*) for the students.” Students made oral presentations, and wrote articles and reports more often than they took exams (compared to the national education system). Moreover, the textbook was not the primary source of information that it often was in public schools. Students at School Z used internet pages and other books as sources for their exercises, and they went on field trips—for example to the Roman ruins at Jerash when he taught a unit on the Roman Empire. The students spent less time listening to the teacher, doing exercises in the textbooks, or copying what the teacher and textbooks said.

I have used School Z as a vantage point to put a form of teaching based on practices such as discussions and reasoning in place of rote learning into sharper relief. Similar practices have been spreading in many Jordanian schools and universities for over a decade, and I now want to show, first, that this is connected to a reformulation of the teacher’s authority which has formal similarities with the reformulation of the political leader’s authority which I described earlier in this chapter (see the section “Teaching Democracy”), and, second, does not just grow out of “the civil society” but is rather driven by a state project. To make the first point, I turn to a public school where the spreading of these new educational practices—as well as a reaction against them—were noticeable during my fieldwork.

*Paradigms of authority*

Al-Hussein College (*Kulliyyat al-Hussein*) is a high school for boys in central Amman, and all its teachers are men. Four of its graduates have become prime ministers in Jordan, but al-Hussein College is no longer the elite school it once was. Nevertheless, in 2011, the average *tawjīhi* grade of its students was among the ten highest of all public schools in the country. It teaches the natural science program, the preferred choice among male students, and most
of its students wish to study engineering or medicine at university. The semes-
ter I did fieldwork there, the class size had just been reduced from around 50
to 25-35 students (the number varying between different classes), and thereby
it possibly became the public school in Amman with the smallest class size.

Ghaith was one of the teachers who disliked the new pedagogical reforms.
He had lived in Germany, where he worked as a boxer. He was square-should-
dered and robust, and taught Islamic studies. When Ghaith and I one day en-
tered the classroom, the approximately 25 pupils were already there. They sat
on small wooden chairs, with small tables attached to them, just big enough
for a textbook. The walls were bare except for one whiteboard. Everyone be-
came quiet when we entered. The first exercise was to memorize Qurʾanic
verses from the textbook. Ghaith told one pupil to recite, then told another one
to continue, and so on. One pupil recited in a clear beautiful voice. Ghaith
turned to me.

“What do you think?” he asked.

“It is very beautiful,” I replied.

“Yes, he is very good. He studies at the mosque.”

Later, another pupil mispronounced the words and recited without rhythm.
Ghaith stared at him. “Are you a Muslim!” I barely heard the “yes” from the
student. “Show me your ID!”

The other students laughed. “You are Muslim but do not know how to read the Qurʾan?” Ghaith then explained the verses,
following the explanation in the textbook. Several times during the class,
Ghaith barked at a pupil (e.g., “Why do you sit there!”; “Erase the black-
board!”; “Bring your stuff!”), and he shouted very loudly.

As in all other classes I visited at al-Hussein College, Ghaith’s students
never gave oral presentations about a subject they had chosen, wrote essays,
or discussed in groups. During most of the lessons, he lectured following the
textbook, or the students worked with the exercises in the textbooks. When he
asked the class a question, he always had a specific answer in mind, and I
never heard a student ask Ghaith to explain something which they did not un-
derstand from his lectures.

Ghaith sensed that his teaching style was not very popular among the stu-
dents, and he attributed this to a generational change. After one of his classes,
I talked with him and three other teachers in a small teacher’s staff room about
changes in teaching styles. They all agreed that it was better fifteen years ago.

“It was better before, more disciplined,” Ghaith said. “The teachers forced
the students to study. And they wanted someone who spurred them: ‘You have
to study!’ It was more like that before.”

“Now the students go to the police if the teachers are tough on them. He
has gone many times,” another teacher said while pointing at Ghaith.

“You have?” I turned to Ghaith.

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17 Religious affiliation (Christian or Muslim) is written on Jordanian identity cards.
“Yes, I went there many times. They are 100 percent with the students. Not with the teachers.” When I later asked Ghaith about this, he said: “It was better before. [Nowadays,] a small slap (**ḍarb basīṭ**) and they go to the police.”

Kareem, another teacher, stood beside the door (he had insisted that I should sit in his chair). He looked out at the corridor. “Where are you going!” He shouted very loudly. He ran out of the teacher’s staff room to reprimand a student leaving a class.

“Do the teachers in Sweden shout like that?” Ghaith asked me.

“No.” I was startled by the scream. I had rarely heard anyone shouting that loud before.

“You see the difference between the students? In Sweden, they understand from the gaze.” He pointed a finger at his eye. “Here you have to scream. The level of the students is not good.”

Mothanna, who had been teaching at al-Hussein College for only a few months, also disliked the changes in educational culture. Like all students and teachers, he liked that the school had order but also thought that it had disadvantages compared to the schools he had worked at previously. “Here, there is not the same respect for the teachers. The students can do whatever they want.” What he referred to was that students could go to the principal or the vice-principal and complain about a teacher. This had happened to Mothanna, the principal later told me when I sat in his large office with armchairs, a Jordanian flag, and large pictures of the king, crown prince and late king. Twenty-three of the 25 students in one of his classes had signed a note that they handed to the principal. They had three complaints: When they asked something during class, Mothanna said, “Shut up! Just copy what I write.” Moreover, he did not teach the textbook from the Ministry of Education but a booklet sold at a bookstore close by, and finally, he never talked with the students when they brought up these problems but instead told them to shut up. After the accusations, the principal talked with a sample of nine students from three other classes. Five of them agreed with the accusations. The principal told Mothanna about the complaints. He answered that the students were liars and that two of the classes were stupid.

Other teachers were sympathetic to the new pedagogy. Yahia, a math teacher, did not share Ghaith’s belief that teacher authority was based on slaps and shouting, a teaching style he and some other teachers called “traditionalist” (**taqlīdī**). “I am not like the other teachers here,” he told me. “I do not call the students ‘donkey,’ for example.” In the three classes that I attended, several students asked him to explain something they did not understand from his lecture, and Yahia never told them to shut up. Like Ghaith, he managed to retain order, but unlike Ghaith’s classes, his classes allowed for reasoning.

Educators such as Yahia understood the “new teaching style” in contradistinction to a certain paradigm of authority. This becomes clearer by considering the range of meanings the word **taqlīdī** had. The principal at al-Hussein
College called teachers who disliked the student council and the students’ opportunity to bring complaints taqlīdī, like Yahia did. Mutaṭawwir (developed) or “democracy” was the opposite of taqlīdī and was associated with practices that implied a certain acceptance that students might bring up problems, questions and arguments. The principal emphasized that the door to his office was open, so that students could enter, and he claimed that the school had also become more open to the ideas of parents. “Did you see? We have democracy here, write it down!” he told me and laughed in the middle of a meeting with parents, after he had answered some of their proposals. When talking about “democracy,” he also, like other principals I interviewed at public schools, stressed that the vice principal could sit in the chair behind his large desk if he was away from school. Taqlīdī referred to a more authoritarian educational culture, where authority was vested in a person rather than in a more formal position and where teachers tended to see students’ attempts to bring up problems and questions as a challenge to their authority.

In his analysis of the cultural foundations of Moroccan authoritarianism, Abdellah Hammoudi argues that political authoritarianism is based on a paradigm of authority which appears in various interpersonal relations. Hammoudi examines the relation of individuals to their chief—“whether it be a political chief, their fathers, the masters who introduce them to the arts and knowledge, or their superiors in a bureaucratic setting”—and argues that in all these cases, the subordinate position is characterized by an attitude of humble submission while the position of power implies an expectation of strict obedience which “takes precedence over any legal mediation” (1997: 3). His analysis of authoritarianism, unlike most such studies (e.g., Diamond 2010; Owen 2012), finds its basis in a form of authority that defines broader social power relations rather than in the power structure of the regime.

This distinction is valuable in the context of my overall argument. I have specified a range of political and educational practices and values that converge in being directed against a paradigm of authority rather than an authoritarian regime. For example, the faction of Haraka Hayy al-Tafaila that valued infitāḥ and dialogue thought that the military veterans who dominated their ḥaraka wanted to have all the leadership positions and make the important decisions themselves, and that they tended to handle important disagreements by accusing the other side of belonging to the enemy (e.g., that they worked for the mukhābarāt). These notions were very similar to a common criticism directed against the old political parties, which I referred to earlier, of their tendency to become small autocracies, where leaders expected to be listened to as—to draw loosely on a distinction made by Aristotle (1102b-1103a)—patriarchs rather than as mathematicians; that is, they expected to deliver a form of speech that could not be challenged by reference to a higher cause or standard. Similarly, what Firas, the principal of School Z, disliked about the national education system was not simply the rote learning but a general culture of submission; a dislike based on his own experiences, which had made
him flunk out of school after ninth grade. “I used to run away from school with a group of friends,” he told me, “because they hit us and shouted at us.”

More generally, all these teaching practices and ideas—putting chairs in circles, student evaluations, encouraging students to pose questions, and the respect for reasoning—converged, in the political as well as educational contexts I have focused on. They were understood in contrast to a form of authority that did not need to give reasons nor hold itself accountable to more abstract standards or principles, whether this form of authority was materialized in a political party, protest movement or classroom.

The expansion of educational infitāḥ

As I have mentioned, the educational practices that educators at al-Hussein College called mutaṭawwir (developed; the opposite of taqlīdī) and that other educators called infitāḥ were expanding within the Jordanian education sector when I did fieldwork in 2011. I now further describe this larger trend—noticeable at all three public schools and the private university where I did fieldwork—and the official goal of building a “knowledge society” that underpinned it.

One of these was a public girls’ school located in a middle-class neighborhood in Amman, where I did fieldwork for a couple of weeks. The English teacher, Elaf, was one of those who employed the new teaching style. During one class I attended, she showed a PowerPoint about global warming and talked rhythmically, and the girls occasionally filled in what she said or repeated a word or phrase. She asked the class what they thought the greatest environmental problem was. They would discuss this in groups. After the discussion, each group sent someone to present their opinions in front of the class. “I want to give the students the experience of standing in front of the class,” Elaf told me afterward. She learned this when she worked at a bank, but she did not apply the method when she started to work as teacher. The first time she stood in front of a class, “I was scared and was shouting a lot.” Now, she was not scared anymore. “I want the students to participate in discussions rather than only listen,” she said. “If I want them to discuss something sensitive [“like corruption,” she later added], I take the initiative by beginning with

18 When Firas flunked out of school, his father said that he was a lazy student and that he should start working in his shop, but one of his relatives suggested that the father give the “bad student” another chance by sending him to a boarding school in Bir Zeit, north of Ramallah. About four decades later, Firas remembered his time there with awe. The school turned him into an interested student. He told me, “The last day there, before I was going to Amman, I had finished my studies. I walked around the village. At that time, I said that ‘one day I will make a school which the students will love.’” He left Ramallah and soon began studying philosophy in Damascus. Firas viewed the differences between the national education system and School Z as analogous to the differences between the schools where he flunked and the school that made him a philosopher.
a personal story. Then they become more open to talk.” Later, she also commented that “10 years ago, students did not know their rights. Now they do, you cannot hit them.” At another lesson, some girls gave oral presentations. One of them held up a sheet of paper, a drawing of a volcano, and asked, “Who can discuss this picture? Who wants to read?” She had learned from Elaf’s ways.

School elections, oral presentations, classroom discussions and role playing were relatively new practices at the school, and not every teacher used them. “Maybe a student asks the teacher a question,” the principal told me, “and the teacher doesn’t know the answer. So what does she say to the student? She shouts ‘Quiet!’ But if there is a question that she doesn’t know the answer to, she should instead answer, ‘You do not know what ṣāwila [table] is in English? Look it up for homework.’” Students came to the principal and complained if a teacher shouted at them whenever they asked questions. “It is especially a problem with new teachers,” she explained, “We tell her [the new teacher] that if she does not know the lesson well, she has to study it at home [and not shout at the students when they ask questions].” The girls knew the differences in teaching methods. They had teachers teaching both the way Elaf had taught ten years earlier, and the way she did at the time of my fieldwork. After the class, when I talked with a group of girls about these differences, they told me they preferred Elaf’s ways. “She teaches us to be open-minded (munfatiḥ),” one of them said. “What is infīṭāḥ?” I asked. “To think freely, to say anything we want, be open to other religions, look at things from different perspectives, accept others,” she said. “Even if I disagree, I see her point of view,” another said.

My point with mentioning these value judgements is that more dialogical teaching practices have emerged in Jordanian schools and that students as well as teachers are aware of them. The pedagogical differences I have described is a theme in the works of two other anthropologists writing on education in Jordan, Daniele Cantini and Fida Adely. Cantini (2016: 51-58) describes striking differences in teaching methodologies between faculties at University of Jordan that require high grades (or payment) to enter and those that do not, where the former are based on oral presentations and discussions rather than only rote learning and on less authoritarian relations between the teachers and students.19 Adely did fieldwork at a Jordanian girls’ school, and singles out an appreciated teacher for her teaching method, which included small-group exercises, role playing, skits and reasoning (Adely 2012b: 89).

19 “A male professor in the Faculty of Education started shouting during one of his classes, a large audience mainly composed of female students, and most of whom were covered with hijab complemented by a black robe. His contention was that teaching them was simply useless, as the only good thing that they could achieve in their lives would be to go back to their villages, get married, have and nurture children. What struck me most was the total absence of reaction from the students. Similar behavior would not be tolerated in the better faculties” (Cantini 2016: 162).
When I asked Miss Suheil about Maysoon [whom the school had temporally expelled because she talked with other students about the ideas of the non-Sunnī religious group al-Habashiyya], she did not explicitly discuss the incident, saying: “I do not like to just reject a student’s idea. I don’t like to just disregard them. I like to approach them through discussion. I try and convince them.” Thus what made Miss Suheil unique as a religion teacher was not that she did not seek to be authoritative; rather, it was her pedagogical perspective, which viewed rational debate and discussion as the best means to “true” religious knowledge. [Ibid: 106-107]

This pedagogical perspective was also shared by Farouq, a lecturer in National Education (al-tarbiyya al-waṭaniyya) at Petra University, a private but not very expensive university, where I did a short period of fieldwork. Together with Arabic, English, and Military studies, National Education is obligatory for all university students in Jordan. The course deals with democracy, politics and citizenship. In the second class of the course, Farouq outlined the prospect of democracy in Jordan. “The goal is to transform Jordan from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy,” he said. “We are not there yet, we do not have a democratic state. It needs to be introduced incrementally. If democratization is implemented too fast, it will cause problems. Jordan will become like Syria and Iraq.” Farouq told me that he was inspired by the educational philosophy of student participation. Every student had to give an oral presentation on a subject they freely chose, and most of them were very nervous when they gave a presentation, which most of them never had done before. When Farouq introduced the course, he said that “it will be all about questions and discussions; it does not matter if we get off topic.” The class (which had 40 students) became dominated by discussions, especially with two students who were critical of Jordan’s political system. One was Hussein, who promoted a European-style parliamentary democracy, and the other was Rania, who promoted an Islamic state. For example, when Farouq outlined the prospects of democracy in Jordan, Rania objected, saying that an Islamic state is the best form of governance.

Farouq: There have been two Islamic states, Iran and Afghanistan. Which of them do you prefer? 
Rania: But I am talking about the true Islam, not what happened there. 
Farouq: It would only be a rule in the name of Islam. I agree that Islam is the most beautiful; I am Muslim, but not Islam as a system. I would not trust people to do it the right way. No people can do it. 
Rania: The Saudis do it in a good way. 
Farouq: No, there it is the people with power who decide. 

Farouq gave a political message in class. He did not render this message in a monologue. The students were allowed to disagree and raise objections, even though Farouq obviously had the last word.
Most of his students were not especially fond of these new pedagogical methods. In general, university students who have not been exposed to more participatory teaching practices during their earlier schooling prefer “traditional” practices, which they are more comfortable with.

The emergence of these participatory practices in the national education system is partly due to the official goal of building a “knowledge society.” The concept of “Arab knowledge societies” is most famously associated with a group of Arabic speaking activists, scholars and researchers involved in the United Nations Development Program’s annual project Arab Human Development Report, and the concept has informed educational reforms across the region (Mazawi 2010). The core idea, which most senior officials at the Ministry of Education could explain to me, is as follows: Jordan is not rich in natural resources; it has only its human capital. Skills like creativity, flexibility and critical thinking are therefore fundamental for Jordan’s prosperity, linked as they are to a workforce able to compete in a global economy by producing high-value-added, knowledge-intensive goods and services.

This entails introducing new pedagogical practices in Jordanian schools. In 2011, Erfke 2 (Second Education Reform for Knowledge Economy), where the Jordanian Ministry of Education and the World Bank were the key partners, was the largest reform project in the Jordanian education sector. Most indicators that Erfke 2 used to assess the education system were based on measurable criteria such as the average score in international assessments in mathematics and science, access to safe and adequate school facilities, online learning portals, classroom size, and the number of dropouts. It mainly focused on administrative and logistical issues: to lessen the number of students in each class, to improve the school buildings, and to decentralize the decision-making at the Ministry of Education. Nevertheless, it also identified rote learning as a basic problem with contemporary Jordanian education (and Middle Eastern education more generally) and proposed pedagogical methods where students would give oral presentations, have group work, or would be asked to think by themselves. A senior official at the Ministry of Education who had been involved in the implementation of these programs told me that it had mostly been a change in the curricula: “It is more difficult to affect what is happening in the classroom.” She had interviewed students at some schools whose teachers had participated in training programs, and they said that the teaching had not changed at all: “It was not as we expected.” Nevertheless, this official vision has affected classroom practices. Most educators I met at schools within the national education system, whose pedagogy resembled Elaf’s, had learned about it at a course given through the Ministry of Education. This more discussion-oriented culture did not just emerge from the kind of voluntary association Samir was building in Karak (“the civil society”) but was dependent on a state project.
Teaching reservation of judgment

So far, I have mainly focused on pedagogical methods and forms of authority within schools and on their links to political activism. Educators at School Z also talked about *infitāḥ* in relation to the content of teaching in the social and human sciences. In that context, *infitāḥ* referred to a teaching structured by source criticism, viewing political events and moral issues from multiple perspectives, and reservation of judgment. These practices were understood in contrast not to rote learning but rather to what these educators thought was a moralistic and polemical way of thinking that was widespread in the textbooks of the national education system, and which had Islamist motifs.

This section elucidates these practices at School Z and at a girls’ school with an IB accreditation and discusses the similarity between these practices and the political *infitāḥ* I have discussed previously. Although educators at international schools often brought up the concept of *infitāḥ* in contrast to an Islamist way of thinking, this was seldom the case among the political activists I have written about previously. The congruence between political activism and education which this section specifies is primarily at a more formal level. As a provisional explanation, the type of discussion political activists talking about *infitāḥ* wanted to create was—like the type of discussion the educators described in this section wanted to create—structured by ideals of viewing issues from multiple perspectives and of reservation of judgment. In both contexts, the discussions were understood in contrast to a more polemical way of thinking.

Mariam, the history teacher at School Z, knew that the school’s teaching in history was based on a way of thinking that would challenge her students.20 When the students in eleventh grade were to choose which subjects in the social or human sciences they would study, she advised those who came to her with questions to study a different subject than history.21 It was not enough to study hard to get a high grade. “I had to work hard in the beginning when I was about to teach history,” she told me. “It is difficult, because you have no clear answers. It is difficult for the students and for me too! It requires them to be very open-minded (*munfatiḥ*).”

When Mariam was teaching a unit on the Crusades, *infitāḥ* was about viewing events and wars from different actors’ perspectives. The students first watched a documentary about the First Crusade. Performers reenacted the

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20 Mariam is Christian; the other high school history teacher is Muslim.
21 IB schools can choose between two tracks in their historical studies for eleventh and twelfth grade: “The History of Medieval Europe and the Islamic World” or “Twentieth Century World History.” Within each track, the school has great freedom to choose what to teach. School Z taught the first track, which they called “Islamic History.” It included units on Prophet Muhammad’s life, the Age of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates, the Crusaders, and “Great battles.”
main events of the Crusades, and historians elucidated the different participants’ self-understanding of what they were doing. Mariam constantly paused the film and asked the students about the part they had just seen. She constantly returned to two questions: “How did Muslims view what was happening?” and “How did the Crusaders view the same events?” She said that, “According to the Christians’ point of view, the Muslims were infidels who had taken the Holy Land from the Christians. Why? Because they were living there before the Muslims came. And according to the Muslim point of view...” In her teaching, Mariam continuously brought forth different perspectives. The other perspective was not only Christian; at times it was Jewish or that of a non-Sunni Islamic sect. “It will be even more difficult for them the next semester,” she once told me. They would then study different Islamic sects and Ali. “Then they have to be really open-minded.”

As with the focus on “reflection” and student participation, this infitāḥ was a reaction against something else—another kind of historiography, which was prevalent in the textbooks used in the national education system; books which, as Mariam once told me, “are very different from ours.”

The historiography used in the national education system was more Manichean than that which Mariam taught. All textbooks used in Jordanian primary and secondary education were distributed by and written under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. The Jordanian textbooks in History, Islamic Studies, and General Culture all assumed that Islamic civilization was the most virtuous civilization there had ever been—and even more so during the era of Prophet Muhammad and the Rightly Guided Caliphs. Moreover, the textbooks tended to explain historical conflicts through “moral motivations”: whereas the Ummah was driven by just motives, the enemies of the Ummah—be it pagans, Jewish tribes in the time of Prophet Muhammad (see Anderson 2007), Mongols, crusaders, colonialism, or imperialism—were driven by vicious ones. These assumptions made the historiography in these textbooks very different from what Mariam taught; for example, in their depictions of the Islamic expansion and the Crusades.

In the textbooks, the Arab conquests after the death of the prophet were called “Islamic openings,” or were described with the verbal form of “opening”; for example, “the Muslims opened the besieged city after two months.” The Arabs opened Greater Syria, Iraq, Persia, North Africa, Minor Asia, Central Asia, and Andalusia. If they did not open, they “realized a victory” or emancipated the Arabic [sic] countries from Persian and Byzantine influence. When they succeeded in battle, they always “treated the people very well” or “set a model of how to live together.” This good behavior led to the spread of Islam. The people of the opened regions had their property and churches protected. They were allowed religious freedom as long as they paid jizya to the Muslims (Ministry of Education 2011a: 38-47, 77-90). In an inversion of the virtues of Islamic civilization, the Crusaders “invaded,” or “occupied” the Islamic world; “their greed led them” to occupy Egypt. The Muslims “took
back,” or “stood up against,” or “made a jihad against the Crusaders,” or took their responsibility to defend the Islamic lands. One effect of the wars of the Crusades was to halt the Islamic extension (al-madd) toward Europe and the Byzantine Empire, “because of the Muslims’ preoccupation with these wars” (Ministry of Education 2011b: 80-101). The authors of the textbooks cherished and justified the expansions of the Islamic states, and condemned their curtailments.

Although Mariam also confirmed that the spread of Islam was good, she did so only in passing. The aim of her teaching was rather to accustom the students to a less moralistic historiography, even in relation to the life of the Prophet. “Why did Prophet Mahammad send people to Abyssinia?” she asked the students in one class. “To open a trade route, or for military reasons, or in order to spread Islam?” They would write an essay on the topic, where they would lay out the Prophet’s reasons. Mariam emphasized the impartial nature of historical reasoning: “You cannot answer, ‘I think that because I am a Muslim.’” When the students would write an essay about the treatment of the Jews in the first Ummah she said, “But I repeat this, do not show that you are a Muslim in the answer. Show that you are a history student.”

The ideal of reservation of judgment that characterized the historiography of School Z structured most of its teaching. The most forceful illustration of the ideal is that some students played the Israeli delegation in the school’s model United Nations role play. The teachers normally avoided textbooks where Israel was marked on the map, or was called “a state,” to avoid getting into problems with the Ministry of Education (even though Jordan has a peace treaty with Israel), and the fact that the school had an exercise where they encouraged some students to argue from a position they (as well as the educators) hated clearly distinguished the school from much of the Jordanian education sector.

Several teachers at School Z had experienced that their teaching was at odds with that of the national education system. Mariam, for example, recalled when a supervisor from the Ministry of Education attended one of her lessons to see that the national curriculum was followed. The class was about Michelangelo, and Mariam wanted to show the students how artists during the Renaissance began to think outside the limitations of the church. “The students should learn to be open-minded to the worldview of such artists,” she told me. This included showing the students Michelangelo’s paintings despite their nudity and illustrations of God (which are forbidden in the Islamic tradition). Mariam recalled that the supervisor looked angrier and angrier during the lesson. When it finished, he approached her. “What are you teaching the students!” he shouted, “They will go to hell!” The school principal protected her from the accusatorial report that the supervisor wrote to the Ministry of Education. Another teacher told me that officials had torn off all pages about Anne Frank’s diary in a textbook the school used for English in seventh and eighth
grade (*Introduction to Literature*), after a parent had noticed the part and complained to the Ministry of Education. The teacher had told the officials that they intended to use the part as an example of Israeli propaganda (which hardly was the main intention), but “they were still not convinced.” One of the art teachers, who was teaching her first semester at School Z, learned about the school’s distinct form of education as she prepared for teaching a unit on cubism. “I learned about it [cubism] while I prepared for the course. I told you that I have not really studied art,” she said, referring to her three years of art studies at one of the largest Jordanian universities. In addition to having unqualified teachers, religious conservatism had impeded her studies. Some students complained to the dean if the lecturers showed non-Islamic religious art or a statue or picture portraying a naked person. During the course in human anatomy, they depicted models in baggy clothes. “We painted jars most of the time.” It was School Z’s teaching that touched on politics, sexuality or religion that was most likely to bring about tensions with the national education system.

I now want to further elucidate teaching structured by ideals of *infitāḥ* by turning to the English teaching at another international school. Layla was the head of the English department of a girls’ school with an international accreditation, and she conceived her teaching in terms of *infitāḥ*. “I come from a family too open-minded for this country,” she told me when I interviewed her for the first time. The school had become a second home for her, and my impression was that she was the most popular teacher of those whose classes I attended at international schools.

Although Layla’s teaching was structured by similar ideals as those of School Z, she dealt with issues that were closer to her students’ lives. When I first met her, she was teaching a unit about trafficking and the situation of maids in Jordan to some twelfth graders who took an optional English course, and who later gave a presentation based on this unit to their younger peers, during which these students talked and showed a video clip about the situation of maids in Middle East.22 Jordan has good legislation, compared with countries like Saudi Arabia, they concluded. Still, the situation was far from perfect. They provided statistics and examples from newspapers about abused maids to make their case. After the presentation, they introduced a discussion which lasted for half an hour. “How many of you have a maid at home?” Around three-fourths raised their hands. “How many know about her background? If she has children or is married?” A few students raised their hands. (Later.) “Who lets your maid eat at the same table as you? Why not?” During Layla’s course on media, the students read *1984*, studied clips from Syrian and Libyan national television as examples of state propaganda, and compared how CNN and Arabic Al Jazeera portray political incidents in Lebanon.

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22 Jordanian maids are mainly from Southeast Asia; the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Indonesia.
When I asked Layla how she could combine this pedagogy with the national textbooks in the human and social sciences, she answered stumblingly and smiled. It took me a while to realize that she was looking at my recorder, and when I turned it off, she told me that it was very difficult, and she portrayed the textbooks in a way I was familiar with: They were based too much on memorization and they were “not open-minded.” When supervisors from the Ministry of Education attended the classes, it was important to show that you used the textbooks, and during such visits she never talked about issues such as propaganda or the situation of maids.23 She seldom had problems with the ministry; the only incident she recalled was when the school got a warning for having the students read an excerpt from Anne Frank’s diary.

Layla’s teaching was, like School Z’s, characterized by attempts to bring about discussions. In some of her classes, she let the students prepare topics for a presentation with a class discussion afterwards, and some students chose sensitive topics, such as abortion. She encouraged her students to consider the issue from different perspectives.

Many girls will challenge you . . . because of their religious beliefs: “Abortion is ḥarām. End of story.” Great, it is ḥarām; put it on the side, that is religion. Now you argue with me [about] your opinion, why is it ḥarām? I will say, “What if the woman was raped?” . . . I try to let them look at it from another point of view. Just a try.

One section of General Culture—the only textbook in the human and social sciences that all students read the last year of high school—also encouraged the students to discuss abortion, and the difference between how the textbook and Layla pursued their respective discussions reveals the differences between these two educational projects. The chapter “Citizenship and Islamic Morals” states that there are three sources for moral knowledge: reason, experience, and religion. Under the heading “discussion,” the students are asked if abortion is moral or immoral. “Discuss the issue with your classmates and try to decide the source on which you base your judgment [if it is reason, experience, or religion].” This might seem to be a strange question. Abortion is forbidden in Jordan, and it is considered ḥarām; it would be impossible to say anything else in the classroom, so what is the point of the question? We find a clue in the follow-up questions: “Can we base the knowledge of good and evil solely on reason? Analyze your answer. Why are nursing homes for the elderly widespread in Europe and America, while they are few and not accepted in the Islamic societies?” The implicit idea is as follows: We know that abortion is wrong, but let us discuss it. We can find reasons for and against abortion, but no definite answer, which shows that reason cannot be the base for moral

23 Acting in front of a supervisor from the Ministry of Education is of course not restricted to international schools. Several of my informants remembered how the best pupils at their public school were put into the classroom during a visit from a supervisor.
knowledge. And we know that abortion is wrong, but how can we know that? If not because of reason, then it must be because of religion. We also see that there are reasonable arguments for nursing homes for the elderly, which is why they are widespread in countries which base their ethics on reason, not on the respect for parents, which is learned from Islam. Thus, religion is the greatest source of ethics. This kind of argument is a justification of—what their authors perceive as—the Muslim standpoint on revelation and ethics against a challenge from the Western world. Layla, on the other hand, did not want her teaching to provide arguments for one side in a struggle between the West and Islam but wanted to subject certain taken-for-granted issues and ideas to questions and objections.

The goal of defending an all-encompassing Islam against what the authors perceive as a challenge from the Western tradition also structured General Culture’s chapter on epistemology and science, “Truth and Knowledge.” This was one of the most disliked chapters among educators at international schools, and it is worth summarizing at some length because it illustrates that this Islamist goal is not just a sentiment but a thought-out educational idea. Like the concept of a “knowledge society,” this is not only a Jordanian but an international educational project, which usually is called the “Islamization of knowledge,” and which seeks to Islamize social and human sciences and thereby remove the “false Western” notions they contain.24

24 For example, in Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Work Plan (1989), one of the most famous books outlining the principles behind an Islamization of knowledge, the Palestinian-American philosopher Ismail Raji al-Faruqi argues against the bifurcating of the curriculum into two opposing components: one Islamic and one modern (i.e., shari’ah and law). A student of the modern sciences, he writes, will confront the ideas of these sciences without being able to counter them with an Islamic vision and epistemology. The result is that the student becomes a secularist, atheist or communist, or, at least, that his or her vision of Islam no longer becomes an all-encompassing one. Al-Faruqi’s reasoning is here close to that of modernization theory. Scholarship in the 1950s and 1960s assumed that the societies of the Middle East developed according to a historical logic called modernization, which entailed secularization (Voll 1993). An industrializing and urbanizing society undergoes a functional differentiation, where economy, politics and law become autonomous spheres, separated from religious institutions and norms. This differentiation is replicated in university departments. Religion becomes confined to the faculty of theology. In that restricted space, its importance is doomed to wither away. More precisely, to use Eric Hobsbawm’s analogy, irrespective of the number of people who call themselves religious, religion is not dominant but recessive in the industrialized world, (1996: 220). Al-Faruqi understands the logic of what he calls “deislamization” similarly: The education systems of the Muslim world have differentiated their curriculum into an Islamic and a modern one. The Islamic component of the curriculum remains unchanged and becomes out of touch with reality and modernity. The student of the modern curricula will encounter the secular foundations of these sciences. The students will be deislamized: although they remain Muslims, Islam will cease to be an all-encompassing vision (which is what he means by “secularization”). Islamic studies, separated from the other disciplines, become recessive—their graduates will not present any competition to those of secular institutions. It is the latter that rule in a modern age. Al-Faruqi’s implicit assumption is that the core of the secularization process is a very specific differentiation—that of the education sector—and he does
The chapter “Truth and Knowledge” lays forth the principle that all sciences should be built on an Islamic basis, and most pages provide quotes from the Qur’an to prove its points. The chapter argues that there are two types of knowledge. Spiritual knowledge is based on God and revelation. It comes directly from God; its source thus lies outside humans. The Torah, the New Testament, and the Qu’an (being the most perfected), were all examples of spiritual knowledge. This knowledge is higher than the other form of knowledge, that based on the human consciousness (al-nafs). Under the latter knowledge we find all secular knowledge, such as knowledge derived from studying the physical universe, history or societies.

Under the heading “Immanuel Kant and his denying of the heart and the spiritual knowledge,” the chapter defends spiritual knowledge from what its authors perceived as an attack on it from the secular philosophical tradition. In old times, the truth of spiritual knowledge was known over the entire world, even in the west, where Jesus was among those who had it. The first person who not only denied the truth of spiritual knowledge but also attempted to prove its nonexistence was Immanuel Kant, who argued that knowledge of the thing-in-itself is impossible, a logical contradiction, and that metaphysics based on this dogma is nothing but empty. Kant was right only if we consider knowledge based on human consciousness, because that knowledge cannot free itself from the individual perspective. The text asks us to imagine a chair as an example. We never know it completely, because we cannot see it from all angles at the same time, we do not know its history or all its qualities; for example, if it is going to fall apart when we sit down. “The chair is not known in itself but through the image of it in our consciousness which reaches us through the eyes, the memory, or imagination” (Ministry of Education 2010b: 20). The impossibility of knowing the thing-in-itself is not, however, as in Kant’s philosophy, a part of an epistemology on the limitations of reason and metaphysics. The impossibility of knowing the thing-in-itself applies only to “secular knowledge”; it never applies to spiritual knowledge, which is absolute. The source of spiritual truth is the direct relation to God, not thinking, not think that this differentiation is inevitable. It is the schemes of colonialists and local secularizers. It is “a rape of the Islamic soul” that is “taking place before our very eyes in the Muslim universities” (1989: 19). The solution is to present the Muslim students with textbooks and teaching based on a mastery of “Western science,” but whose problematic elements have been removed through an Islamization, adapting the science “as the world-view of Islam and its values dictate” (Ibid: 18). Al-Faruqi has, together with a handful other authors, dominated the discussions on Islamic sciences in Europe and North America (Stenberg 1996). He cofounded The International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), in which Ishaq Farhan, one of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood’s most prominent, leaders, in 2011 was a board member (guidestar.org/FinDocuments/2011/232/202/2011-232202414-08d51ea9-9.pdf). Farhan served as Minister of Education between 1970 and 1974, and later as president of University of Jordan (Jordan’s largest university) and Zarqa University (Harmsen 2008: 96), and he has written an article (Farhan 1989) in the American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences (published by IIIT) on the Islamization of the discipline he himself is professor of—education.
“Thinking can never change objects’ truth.” A Qur’anic verse is cited as evidence of the completeness of the spiritual knowledge emanating from the heart: “Almighty God says, ‘What the heart sees never lies.’” Kant’s mistake was that he supposed that no one could receive spiritual knowledge just because Kant did not have this experience himself nor did he know anyone who had it: “His excuse is like someone who has not gone to China, and does not know anyone who went there, and therefore says that China does not exist or that it is impossible that it exists!!” (Ibid: 30).

Modern sciences (including the social sciences and humanities), the chapter claims, never reach the level of the knowledge of faith and religion, the only certain knowledge. Strictly speaking, the modern empirical sciences cannot be considered knowledge at all. They are unreliable in their nature; they can be true or not, we do not fully know. This uncertainty is the basis of all modern sciences and technology. What is taught at universities is nothing else than points of view, theories, information.

Attacks on the ontological pretense of modern science are common in twentieth century philosophy, but what characterizes the argument in “Truth and Knowledge” is the idea that Islam is all-encompassing and should permeate all sciences. This leads to a certain historiography, which is repeated in the textbooks in history: the modern philosophical tradition was not a condition for modernity—the positive sides of modern technology (e.g., modern medicine) would still have happened, but without its negative consequences (e.g., pollution), had the sciences been based on Islamic principles. Therefore, the philosophical revolution beginning with René Descartes is superfluous: Jordanian textbooks attack thinkers such as Descartes, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Francis Bacon, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud while they nominally accept science.25 The problematic relation between the modern sciences and

25 It is easy to just see the explicit rejection of everything Western in these textbooks, and fail to see that they are based on an implicit recognition of Western status—and the sense of inferiority and care for Western recognition which this creates. This implicit recognition defines not only these textbooks but is a much more general phenomenon. Consider, for example, the section “The malaise of the Ummah,” which preludes and formulates the problem for al-Faruqi’s text on the Islamization of knowledge (see the previous footnote). It states that Muslims have been massacred and exploited, but it talks much more about the evaluation of Muslims in the non-Muslim world. More than half the description of the malaise is about this evaluation. “Muslims are vilified and denigrated in representations of them in all nations”; they enjoy the worst possible image in “today’s global mass media,” and in the “minds of people everywhere, the Muslim world is the ‘sick man’ of the world; and the whole world is led to think that, at the root of all these evils, stands the religion of Islam” (1989: 1). This is not only an Islamist sentiment. For an example from a famous non-Islamist thinker, consider Samir Kassir’s description of the Arab malaise: “But the Arab malaise is also inextricably bound up with the gaze of the Western Other—a gaze that prevents everything, even escape. Suspicious and condescending by turns, the Other’s gaze constantly confronts you with your apparently insurmountable condition. It ridicules your powerlessness, foredooms all your hopes, and stops you in your track times and again at the world’s border-crossings. . . . Still, you could conceivably overcome, or
the higher truths and ethics of Islam can be solved: the modern sciences can be Islamized and once again be reconciled with Islam. The chapter lists many subjects where the Muslim world reached scientific progress during the Middle Ages: medicine, optic, mathematics, astronomy, history, law. This progress led to the Renaissance in Europe. In the Muslim world, these sciences were pursued after Islamic principles and were therefore Islamic sciences. The empirical sciences were never studied in isolation from God and the angels. Man was always understood from his noble place as God’s creation and never as solely a biological event or statistics in an economic scheme. Islamic sciences were, and still are, not built on false grounds and they have never harmed humanity. They led to the modern Western sciences, even if they are built on completely different principles.

The goal of vindicating an all-encompassing Islam structures three of General Culture’s eight chapters; that is, a substantial part of the high school education in social and human sciences, and it is often carried out in the polemical manner described above. The absence of this goal is one of the clearest characteristics of the schools discussed in this section.

Although the political activists I have written about who valued infītāḥ thought that there was support for their type of activism in the Qur’ān, several of them reacted against the form of Islam presented in textbooks such as General Culture, complaining about their schooling that “too much was about Islam.”26 On the other hand, these activists were more rooted in Jordan’s Islamic culture (and other widespread social values, such as regarding honor) than the

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26 The Islamist educational project I have described in this section has a contentious role in Jordan’s education system. For example, in 2011, Minister of Education Ibrahim Badran and Senator Leila Sharaf were involved in an attempt to radically transform Jordanian elementary and secondary education. They both supported proposals, made by the Royal Advisory Committee for Education in 2008, to set up institutions responsible for the teacher training, development of the curricula, quality evaluation, and writing of the textbooks and the exams (including the important tawjīhi). These tasks would be divided between three new national centers independent vis-à-vis the Ministry of Education. The centers would thus overtake the Ministry of Education’s most important functions. The Ministry is too deeply influenced by Islamists, Badran and Sharaf meant, so it must be bypassed.
students and teachers at international schools. Similarly, Samir’s political course (discussed previously in this chapter) took place in an ambience very different from that of international schools, where the monarchy and revealed religion were taken-for-granted values, and people identified with their tribes. So again, what this section depicts is a congruence between a form of politics associated with attempts to coordinate the Jordanian protest movements and certain educational forms, not a congruence between political activists and international schools.

The few alumni of international schools who became political activists brought their experience of source criticism and reservation of judgment with them. Their activism was often about creating political discussions, education, or informed journalism. Although the overwhelming majority of political activists who talked about the need for *infitāḥ* during the Arab Spring were not alumni of international schools, there are formal similarities between the type of discussion these activists wanted to create in political meetings and the type of discussion the educators in this section wanted to create in classrooms. In both cases, the discussions were structured by ideals of viewing issues from several perspectives, reservation of judgment, and the rejection of an all-encompassing framework along the lines of “a theory of everything, which has an answer for everything”\(^\text{27}\)—like the epistemology found in the “Truth and Knowledge” chapter, where Islamization was presented as a solution to all problems arising from modernity. The demand-formation these activists engaged in was rather premised on the belief that political proposals had to be formed through a discussion that took practical considerations into account. This presupposed the dismantling of an all-encompassing framework based on one author (e.g., Marx or a prophet), that handed down formulaic answers to political problems. The withering away of the clear and simple answers had a similar effect in Mariam’s case. “I had to work much in the beginning when I was about to teach history. It is difficult, because you have no clear answers. It is difficult for the students and for me too!” Only when the “clear answers” are gone—or at least suspended—can a more open discussion begin, in politics as well as in historiography.

Furthermore, in both contexts, the discussions were understood in contrast to what these political activists and educators thought was a more black-and-white and polemical way of thinking. From the political activists’ perspective, the protest movements imagined themselves too much in terms of antagonism and opposition to the government—but also to other political factions they disagreed with—which made cooperation more difficult. The educators also reacted against what they thought was a too self-righteous understanding of

\(^{27}\) Timothy Snyder (2012) uses this phrase to describe common features of Marxism and Hayekian ideology; for example, that politics is a matter of one simple truth and that politicians who accept the theory can “predict the future, using their purported total knowledge to create and to justify suffering among those who do not hold power.”
conflicts. They spent more time explaining the motives of people on different sides of a conflict and less time saying that one side had bad motives. It is partly due to these similarities that the same concept—*infitāḥ*—was used in both contexts.

My point here is obviously not that the teaching described in this section was open to all kinds of perspectives nor that there was no discrepancy between the self-understanding of being open-minded and reality. To mention just the most obvious example, many of the students at School Z were very alienated from Jordanian mainstream culture and had great difficulties understanding it, partly owing to their school environment. My point is rather that ideals of viewing issues from multiple perspectives and of reservation of judgment had practical effects as ideals that structured the teaching. The significance of these ideals becomes clearer in contrast to the Islamist educational project that structure many of the Jordanian textbooks in the social and human sciences and whose primary aim is to prove the superiority and omniscience of a specific book.

**Vulnerability**

Early in this chapter, I described a political project understood in terms of *infitāḥ*—Samir’s course in Karak—that was based on a rhetoric aimed at establishing trust and on discussions taking place in “civic bubbles” concealed from public view, in contrast to the argument-based rhetoric and public discourse which the notion of the liberal public sphere refers to.

Several of the educators I have discussed also tried to conceal the discussions they encouraged in their classrooms, especially from supervisors from the Ministry of Education. Layla, the English teacher, had an even stronger sense that the discussions in her classroom had to take place in bubbles, especially when they were about sensitive issues such as politics and sexuality. It was difficult to find books for her IB English class that did not contain any sexual references. “Even if it is subtle, it is a bit of a problem, because they have to show the examiners that they have understood it.” When students asked her about the meaning of words like “female circumcision” or “sadistic,” she knew that “if they throw out a word like that at home, their parents think we discuss sex.” The best solution was “if we can have such an environment where what you do stays within the group, with no one going to the school [administration] or the parents.”

Layla was careful about the sensitivity of not only parents and the administration but also students. When Samir talked about sensitive issues like democracy, he began by establishing trust and credibility in himself and in democracy, not by giving arguments for democracy. As mentioned in the previous section, Layla also talked about sensitive issues, like abortion, but she used a rhetorical technique that Samir never used. She encouraged the students to
steer away from religion and think about it as an opinion. . . . Many girls will challenge you . . . because of their religious beliefs: “Abortion is harām. End of story.” Great, it is harām; put it on the side, that is religion. Now you argue with me [about] your opinion, why is it harām?

It is as if some discussions can take place only by lowering the stakes, by setting up a roleplay where we discuss opinions, not truth.

Layla’s and Samir’s use of concealment and rhetoric was grounded in their vulnerable positions. When Layla spoke about sensitive issues in the classroom, she did not have the institutional (and parental) backing which Mariam, the history teacher at School Z, had. The ideal environment, where “what you do stays within the group” was obviously not easy to create. If she failed, she would notice it immediately. When Samir talked to the youths in Karak, he had no institutional backing. In both cases, the risk had its advantages. When Ismail—an organizer of Youth of March 24 whom I have written about previously—spoke about human rights, he had institutional backing (a foreign-funded NGO giving diplomas) like Mariam had when she taught her students. This backing meant that the question, “How should I speak to them?” did not have the forceful immediacy it had for Layla and Samir, who immediately would notice if they had failed to handle this question properly. Because of their vulnerable situation, Layla and Samir read their students much better than Ismail read his. “Many of the people I trained [in human rights],” Ismail told me, “turned out to be completely against reforms. Some even threw stones at us [on March 25].” He had mistaken a listening without objections for agreement. His institutional backing guaranteed the listening; he did not have to acquire it through his speech, with risks if he failed. Layla and Samir acted in a more vulnerable environment, from where they had developed a tactic of concealment and a rhetoric.

This concealment and rhetoric were ultimately based on a recognition of human vulnerability. Humans cannot take in any thoughts and perspectives they do not agree with. They are not only autonomous—in control of what they take in—but also vulnerable, and what they take in can hurt them. This is the ultimate reason why Samir and Layla needed their concealment and rhetoric. If there would be, as philosophers of the Enlightenment looked forward to, “a time when, as the result of the progress of popular education, practically complete freedom of speech would be possible, or—to exaggerate for the purposes of clarification—to a time when no one would suffer any harm from hearing any truth” (Strauss 1988: 500), then there would be no vulnerabilities for this rhetoric and tactics to respond to. In other words, the most idealized versions of the agora and liberal public sphere can only exist if humans are not existentially vulnerable.
Conclusion

Scholars, journalists and political activists have tried to understand why the Arab Spring seldom led to the less authoritarian political society that most demonstrators called for but rather to a fragmentation of society and state apparatus. In this thesis, I have approached this question by looking at attempts to coordinate the Jordanian protest movements and asking why they fell apart. I have argued that these attempts were dependent on habits and values which most of the protest movements’ leadership did not share; for example, about the role of dialogue with other political factions. This chapter has showed how these habits and values had an affinity with educational practices referred to in terms of infitāḥ.

A more common way to understand the Arab Spring’s fragmentation and the resilience of authoritarianism is in terms of a lack of a unified national identity and subsequent conflicts between ethnic groups. In the context of education, the difference between a focus on national identity and on the educational practices studied in this chapter can be illustrated by looking at the daily morning assembly at Jordanian schools, called tābūr (lineup). It is ideally performed (according to the Ministry of Education) as it was on al-Hussein College, where the students every morning before the classes assembled in the school yard. They stood in lines and rows, with about one and a half meters between them. Two teachers walked around the yard, making sure the students stayed in place. On the stairs at the school entrance, above the students in the yard, stood the principal, two of his assistants, the physical education teacher, one Arabic teacher, and some students from the student council. Loudspeakers played the national anthem (“Hail to the King”). When it ended, a student from the student council shouted into the microphone, “Long live His Majesty the king!” (“ish jalālat al-malīk!”). “Let him live!” (“ish!”) the students shouted. It continued: “ish jalālat al-malīk! ʻīsh! ʻīsh jalālat al-malīk! ʻīsh! ʻīsh! ʻīsh! A teacher or student read a verse from the Qur’an over the microphone, then the physical education teacher led a brief physical exercise. He shouted “1!” into the microphone, and everyone on the yard put out their arms horizontally. “2!” They lifted their arms. “3!” They clapped their hands above the head. “1! 2! 3!” Several international schools did not perform the tābūr every day but two to three times a week. During the morning assemblies I visited at School Z, the students did not stand in orderly lines and rows but stood in groups, alone or anywhere they wanted to. Loudspeakers played the national anthem, but none shouted the “salute to the king,” read a verse from the Qur’an, or ordered the students to move their arms.

28 For an analysis of the tābūr in relation to the Jordanian regime’s national narrative and its efforts to be authoritative, see Adely 2012b: 67-70.
This latter ṭābūr illustrates the less Islamic and “patriotic” and more cosmopolitan identity School Z promotes, an identity which most political activists who emphasized the need for infitāḥ did not share. Nevertheless, in its lack of military discipline, the ṭābūr illustrates the paradigm of authority which prevails in School Z’s teaching in general, and which has a closer connection to political infitāḥ. The distinction between identity and paradigm of authority becomes clearer by looking at the ṭābūr at an Egyptian Islamist private school, described by Linda Herrera, which conveyed a different identity than the ṭābūr of Egypt’s national education system but kept its paradigm of authority, or what Herrera calls “a culture of submission.” The school’s management thought that the flag saluting and national anthem singing demanded by the Ministry of Education were akin to idol worshipping. But the ceremonies were not eliminated outright. The school’s management kept the form of the ceremonies, but infused them with Islamic content. For example, “during the singing of the anthem, teachers use conventional disciplining techniques, common in other schools in the area, to ensure students maintain straight lines, refrain from fiddling and talking with each other, and sing the required lyrics. Teachers circle the courtyard, sticks in hand, hitting or punching any student who was [sic] misbehaving . . . the school seems to inculcate a culture of submission common to general schools in similar social and class environments” (2006: 33-38). This chapter has studied how schools affect political activism by looking at the forms of authority and communicative practices they convey, rather than what identity they convey.

Another common way to understand the Arab Spring’s fragmentation is in term of a lack of civil society. In his book Syria (2016), Samer Abboud points out that although political discontent was widespread in Syria in the 2000s, there was “unlike in the postcolonial, pre-Baʿth period, . . . no parties or associations that could capture, mobilize and represent this dissent,” which increased the difficulties in coordinating the protest movements that emerged in 2011. The emerging opposition was shaped by the Baʿth regime’s historical suppression of civil society.

In previous chapters, I have focused on political organizers whose primary experience during the Arab Spring was not a sense of such an excessively penetrative state—common in contexts where the concept of civil society emerges—but rather a sense of an excessively polemical way of thinking that created unnecessary conflicts and made civic cooperation difficult. This polemical way of thinking went beyond ethnic divisions between Transjordani-ans and Palestinian-Jordanians, these organizers thought, and was manifested in a more general tendency to relate to other factions (and people within one’s own faction) in terms of the binary of “against” (dudd) and “with” (ma a). The educators I have focused on in this chapter conceived of their teaching in contrast to a more Manichean way of thinking, and several activists and educators described the contrast with the same word: infitāḥ. Infitāḥ was in both cases defined against a broader culture rather than an authoritarian regime.
This similarity points to a specific understanding of the political effects of educational practices such as rote learning, a relatively moralistic historiography or an all-encompassing ideological framework. These practices can be interpreted as regime propaganda, which paves the way for legitimacy by silencing contradictory ideas, or as practices that induce obedience and set guidelines for public speech and behavior even if people do not believe in their claims (see Wedeen 1999). Such interpretations approach these practices from the question of, “How do they help the regime to stay in power?” If we instead start the political analysis with the difficulty in forming demands and solving disputes through the medium of talk, we see that whether or not these educational practices lead to obedience (to the regime), they certainly do not lead to a familiarity with using dialogue in politics, neither among supporters nor opponents to the regime. John Borneman (2007: 87) makes—implicitly—a similar point when commenting on his experiences with a group of students from the university in Aleppo, Syria. “While talking, I become aware that with these students I slip into a Socratic mode, as I try to get them to engage with their own tradition and with me in a critical way. But they seem more accustomed to the professor-as-lecturer than the teacher, to someone just delivering a monologue they can either accept or reject.”

The idea that democratic governance and civic cooperation are based on everyday forms of behavior and values beyond elections, constitutions and parliaments, is the cornerstone of the literature on civil society and the public sphere. Instead of applying such ideal types in the Jordanian case, the study has refined a concept—infitāḥ—that appears in the country’s political and social life. This allows for a different understanding of how political life is grounded in more everyday values and practices. A key idea in the literature on civil society is that values that underpin democracy are fostered through participation in a type of voluntary association that stand between the household and the state. This type of voluntary association does not have the same importance in ideas about how infitāḥ shapes political life. The concept refers to practices and values found in political parties and protest groups as well as in schools and universities, and which partly are formed through a state project. This more democratic culture is defined by an ideal of consent and persuasion but not necessarily by an ideal of publicness or persuasion strictly by rational arguments. The discussions might as well be based on rhetorical tricks and take place in small bubbles, protected and concealed from what is outside.

29 My emphasis.
In this thesis, I have written about a form of politics based on infitāḥ, which was associated with attempts to coordinate the Jordanian opposition during the Arab Spring. In the previous chapter, I argued that this political form is affiliated with a certain type of education. This chapter examines how this political form is related to places where—in the words of my informants—“there is infitāḥ.” These places are in general located in the wealthier part of cities—and especially in Amman—and are characterized by an intensive social life and the presence of people from different social and ethnic backgrounds. They include both older cultural and political centers such as university campuses and Jabal Webde—one of Amman’s oldest neighborhoods—and cosmopolitan places that have spread in Amman more recently, such as internet cafes, shopping streets, and malls.

The chapter elucidates different forms of social life at these places, some clearly related to the form of politics I have described previously, and others not so clearly. Although the democratic implications of the new lifestyles at these types of places sometimes are exaggerated—like in the notion of a social media-savvy young Arab generation wanting democratic reforms—the more complex relation between these new lifestyles and political openness is obvious and is a theme in Jordanian political discourse. While some Jordanians associate places with infitāḥ—and the lifestyles that emerge there—with tolerance and a more democratic form of politics, others have notions such as “for most people, infitāḥ is just about alcohol, sex, consumption” and “the West Amman bubble” (where wealthy people live secluded from and unaware of the rest of society) that point toward the idea that the infitāḥ at these places seldom is more than a status symbol or an openness to influence from the world’s cultural and consumer centers. In line with this, infitāḥ is associated with places in West Amman, the wealthier part of the city, where most upper-income residential neighborhoods, bars, banks, and expensive hotels and restaurants are located. The distinction between East and West Amman is not only manifested in the urban fabric but also in the consciousness of the city’s residents. What is called West Amman is actually Northwestern Amman, but, as Omar Razzaz (1996: 501) writes, “It is not a coincidence that residents of Amman perceive of, and categorize, the city in terms of west and east and not, for example, in terms of north and south.” The association of infitāḥ with both
political pluralism and class biases is reminiscent of discussions surrounding concepts such as “the public sphere” and “civil society.”

The chapter describes places with *infitāḥ* from all these perspectives: their social diversity, the consumption culture that characterizes most of them, and a common way to associate the social life at these places with Westernization. It discusses similarities and differences between these aspects and the ways of conducting politics described in previous chapters.

It does so through informants who were familiar with them, yet outsiders. They had—like other informants who share this combination of familiarity and outsider status (see Garfinkel 1967; Kulick 1998: 10; Rabinow 1977: 73-75)—an awareness of what for most people were the seen but unnoticed backgrounds of their everyday affairs. The type of places this chapter studies is more commonly analyzed through concepts that are specified in a cross-cultural context, such as globalization, neoliberalism, and changing consumer attitudes (see Abaza 2006; Schwedler 2010), rather than through attempts to grasp their elusiveness, among people who know these places yet experience them through something like an anthropological distance.

Open and closed places

I have previously contrasted a politics based on consent and dialogue against a more polemical form of politics that was common among the Jordanian protest movements. This section describes how the relative inclusiveness of this politics based on consent and dialogue drew on the social forms at “places with *infitāḥ*.” It does so by focusing on a single case, the experience of Samir (the political activist whose teaching I discussed in the previous chapter) of coming to a place “with *infitāḥ*”—a university campus—after having grown up in a “closed” (*mughlaq*) military society. This experience was, according to him, what most of all had affected his way of acting politically. Although the politics of most of the Arab Spring’s actors were colored by the type of place they lived in, few shared his experience of growing up in what he later saw as a very closed (*mughlaq*) society and then spending most of his time at a place—the university campus—marked by great cultural diversity. This experience allows us to perceive differences between these places that do not appear in the experience of someone who has lived primarily in only one of them.

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1 The associations of *infitāḥ* with a “West Amman bubble” echo, at least on a superficial level, arguments that the elaboration of a distinct culture of civil society and the associated public sphere in Germany, France and England was tied to a process of bourgeois class formation; that its ethos and practices served as a strategy of distinction toward the aristocratic elites which the bourgeoisie sought to replace as well as the popular strata it aspired to rule over (see Eley 1992; Frazer 1992).

2 The meaning of *infitāḥ* is here very close to *ikhitāt* (mixture).
Samir grew up in an isolated villa neighborhood in Zarqa, Jordan’s industrial heartland and second largest city, which houses significant military facilities and has a Palestinian-Jordanian majority. Only officers and their families lived in his neighborhood, however, and none of them were Palestinian-Jordanian. The neighborhood was surrounded by a wall which had only one gate, and it was always guarded.

His family seldom had to pass that gate. Inside the wall, there was a supermarket, a vegetable stall, a barber, a football field, a mosque and schools. In the garden, they had olives, pomegranates, grapes and chickens. Every day a soldier cleaned the villa and tended the garden. The army distributed water, and if they had to leave the area, they could go in a special green taxi. “Imagine how closed (mughlaq) a society it was,” Samir said as we walked in the neighborhood, whose buildings by then had been razed. “You did not need anything from the outside.”

The neighborhood’s isolation was partly due to a feeling of vulnerability. Samir’s family had, like other families living there, a bomb shelter in the basement, and his parents always made sure that there was enough food and water there, fearing a new civil war. His mother had lived not far from this neighborhood in 1970, when she was a young girl, and her father was an officer in the army. One day the fedayeen (Palestinian commandos) shot a rocket into the house. Since that day, she had a problem with her heart and took medication daily.

The neighborhood’s schools were directed by the army, not the Ministry of Education, and they were permeated by a military culture. Military schools have the same curricula as public schools, but—if they are not located in a sparsely populated area—only children of military personnel study there. Samir’s class had 20 pupils, much less than a typical class in a public school. According to Samuel Huntington (1968: 198-207), professionalized officer corps have during the twentieth century often played a highly modernizing role in weakly institutionalized societies, and if “modern” here refers to the impersonal values of the Weberian bureaucracy, this role had its mark on the military school Samir went to. It was very difficult to lessen a punishment through ṣāṭe; if a pupil was absent it was noticed immediately, and any late arrivals were followed up. Moreover, the school had a staunchly pro-Hashemite political culture. It was strictly forbidden for a teacher to display any pro-Islamist or pro-leftist views in class. All the teachers wore military uniforms. They often talked about the king, and his photo was everywhere. Pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism were always subordinated or understood through the Hashemite kings (initiators of the Great Arab Revolt, descendants of the Prophet). When Samir’s family moved, the children continued at military schools. Every day a green bus picked them up and drove them to school, and when the last
lesson had finished, it drove them to their house again. “No way that you need anything civil if you are in the military.”

The isolation of this military neighborhood is part of a more general urban pattern. A few hundred meters from its gate lies a Palestinian “refugee camp,” which is also surrounded by a wall. Although the quarter is called a refugee camp and UNRWA runs its schools, its infrastructure is similar to that of most other areas in Zarqa, and its inhabitants have Jordanian citizenship. Once during my fieldwork, Samir was not allowed to enter the camp, an incident which, like the bomb shelter of the house he grew up in, illustrates an isolation grounded in a feeling of vulnerability and distrust.

Samir had asked a friend, who was raised in the camp and whose family still lived there, if we could come and visit his family and if he could show us the camp. He replied that we were welcome but that he just needed to speak to some people first. Later, he called and was angry and ashamed. He had gone to some of the camp’s leaders (from Hamas and Fatah; i.e., from Palestinian political factions) and said that he wanted to bring two guests, one Transjordanian from the tribe Tarawneh and one Swedish. They did not grant full freedom to visit. It would of course be fine for us to go straight to his family’s house and eat there, but we could not walk around the camp and speak to people. Maybe they did not want a foreigner that might be a spy in the camp, but it was probably Samir that was the problem, because he was from a Transjordanian tribe. Some might have thought that he was from the mukhābarāt or that he might see something written about Palestine that he should not see. Samir’s friend was angry—he had told them that it was a friend of his, someone he trusted, but they still did not accept the visit.3

The walls around the military neighborhood and the Palestinian camp which lay opposite it were erected at a time when the state had not monopolized violence to the extent it now has. Other Jordanian towns were also segregated in different communities, especially before the Hashemite state came with its monopoly of violence. Peter Gubser writes the following about Karak:

Before the establishment of a central government and thereafter of internal order [in the 1920s], there were three distinct living areas. The suq [market] divided the Eastern Alliance from the Western Alliance [two large tribal coalitions] and the Christians lived in the north-eastern section. In normal times and especially in periods of tension, no one from the Eastern section ventured into the Western and vice versa. However, because the Christians were part of the Western Alliance, there was free intercourse between their respective sections at most times. The minor alliances and individual tribes also tended to live in

3 When we talked with him, he cursed the camp’s leadership and said, “Come anyway.” If something would happen, he would take the fight, and his tribe would stand behind him. Samir declined. He later told me that he did not want to enter without protection (himāya). If someone wanted to make trouble, they could target him, for example, by saying that he was looking at a girl and thereafter start a fight. Or none would speak to us. It was unclear what might happen, but he did not want to enter if the protection was not guaranteed.
their own subsections of their alliance areas. In contrast, the suq was considered to be neutral territory where no violence should occur. [Gubser 1973: 57-58]

Zarqa has also been divided. When you enter the city on the road from Amman, you see an area on the left side—Wadi al-Hajar—where members of al-Sab’awia (a Palestinian tribe with several sub-sections) live. Jabal Tariq is on the right side; it has two parts, one newly built and mixed (mukhtalat) area, and another area where people who are working in or are retired from the army live (i.e., Transjordanians from various tribes). Farther away is an area called “the neighborhood of the officers” (ḥayy al-ḍubāṭ). It is now mixed but most of the population is Palestinian-Jordanian. The area still has its “officers club,” where army officers meet and which they use for weddings and other events. Behind it are two neighboring areas separated by a street, one inhabited by Palestinian-Jordanians from the tribe al-Dawayma, the other by Transjordanians from Khalayla (a sub-section of Bani Hasan). Like Karak, Zarqa was a more divided city when it had fewer police and less rule of law. Except for the suq, the mixed areas are in general newer areas where the state has monopolized violence to a higher degree than in the refugee camp and the other ethnically homogenous areas.

“Ethnic quarters,” T.H. Greenshields wrote in 1980, “have long been recognized as characteristic features of Middle Eastern cities” (1980: 120). The term “ethnic” here includes groups with an identity based on a specific tribe or village of origin. Scholars such as Peter Gubser (1973) and Philip Khoury (1984) connected the erosion of cohesive residential quarters in Karak and Damascus to the corrosion of traditional ties to quarter, family and confessional group and the rise of new loyalties, to the city, political parties and nation. Gubser (1973: 131) pointed out that Karakis from the educated middle classes spend their life “in the town, where they live next to members of other tribes, work with men of all segments of the society, and buy daily in the suq

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4 Compare Philip Khoury’s description of the Syrian cities during the French mandate: “Artisans remained loosely organized in corporations (asnaf), each craft grouped together, often on a single street or alley. The religious minorities, Christians and Jews, were also clustered in their own quarters with their own places of worship. ‘Except for a very small number of educated [and wealthy] people, they [quarter residents] were pretty much absorbed in the narrowness of their life, and seldom if ever thought of the community at large or of its interests. . .’ In some senses, the most acute cleavages were those between the independent quarters, which were separated from one another by walls with gates locked tight at dusk by watchmen. This physical separation had come about for many reasons, but was above all ‘an expression of the innate impulse for protection through unity.’ Quarters retained their distinctiveness in the early twentieth century. But their cohesiveness had begun to be eroded as a consequence of structural changes in the Middle East since the early nineteenth century—changes in administration and law; in commerce, industry and agriculture; in the movement of goods, peoples and ideas; and, most notably, in the Ottoman state's relations with Europe” (1989: 285). For a general introduction to the formation and development of ethnic clusters in Middle Eastern cities, see Greenshields 1980.
from a merchant of non-Karakī origins. Consequently, the nature of their lives calls for association with individuals not of their traditional social groups [based on village, family, tribe].” In other words, Khoury and Gubser traced the erosion of “ethnic quarters” to the forces of modernization, such as an increase of roads, telegraphs, schools and newspapers, changes in industry and administration. In contrast, modern phenomena had very much to do with the maintenance of the segregation and distinct cultures of the officer neighborhood and the refugee camp: the creation of a Jordanian officer corps and its “coup-proofing” through a pro-Hashemite educational culture, the Palestinian exodus following the Arab-Israeli wars, and the Jordanian civil war in 1970-71, where organizations based on radical Marxist-Leninist ideology—i.e., a very modern form of politics—played a great role.

An open space

The difference between a closed (mughlaq) and open place appears most clearly phenomenologically, by starting with Samir’s and his friends’ own experiences of the differences. When Samir started to study at a university in Irbid, Jordan’s third largest city, he was shocked. Before he began spending time at the campus, he barely knew anything about the many groups living in Jordan. “I knew a little about Palestinians and Chechens, but very little.” He did not know that Circassians lived in Jordan nor that there was something called Sunni and Shia, and he had seldom met people whose parents did not work in the military. Several of his former classmates could not cope with the culture at university, and they dropped out and changed to studies preparing them for work in the military or police. Many of them went to the university in Karak, whose culture they could cope with. It had a military and a civil branch and quotas for provinces and tribes. When applying for the university, a member of the tribe Sarayra, regardless where he is now living, competes within the Karaki quota, because Sarayra is a Karaki tribe.

In other words, it was difficult to become used to not only people’s different thoughts at a place with infītāḥ, but also to cultural differences that sprang from differences in political power, historical memory and social structure, as those ingrained in the weddings of Samir’s Transjordanian friend Mazhar and Palestinian-Jordanian friend Hasan. At Mazhar’s wedding (he was from the

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5 When applying for the university, a member of the tribe Sarayra, regardless where he is now living, competes within the Karaki quota, because Sarayra is a Karaki tribe.

tribe Bani Hasan, lived in Zarqa, and came from a family with high positions in the state apparatus) the celebration took place on a plain with large tents and chairs lined in long rows. Ropes with lamps hanging from them came together in a construction at the center of the celebration, a small tower with mini string lights, the Jordanian flag, and large pictures of King Abdullah and the late King Hussein. About 500 men and boys walked or sat in the lighted area, and some of them danced dabka. The songs were about the military (how strong it was, that it defended the country), the king, the tribes, and about the guests being welcome. This was one day in a three-day celebration, and the hosts would later serve mansaf, which is lamb cooked in fermented dried yogurt and served with rice, Jordan’s national dish. At least five people had guns which they fired in the air—it is forbidden, but the Transjordanian weddings I visited did not comply with the prohibition. At Hasan’s wedding (in Amman, he was from a middle-class family), about 90 men and boys attended, some of them danced dabka, no pictures of the king were visible, and no songs were about the military, the king or the tribes; mansaf was not served, and no one shot in the air with a gun. The young people who had lived in Samir’s neighborhood were not only used to the thoughts and opinions of military officers, but the Transjordanian relationship to the army and the monarchy was ingrained in something as tangible as the songs they listened to at weddings.

The form of consent and dialogue Samir’s politics was based on was, according to himself, based on his experience at university of the diversity of Jordanian culture. As I have argued previously, many protest groups had a form of politics based on confrontation, on a desire to defeat the regime and oppositional groups they did not agree with. Samir also engaged in such a confrontational politics during his first time as the leader of a coalition of southern tribes at university. When a conflict arose between someone from his group and someone else, he first tried to solve it with the help of his own coalition. It always ended in collision or in the surrender of one of the groups.

“I failed a lot. I thought that there had to be another way. I discovered that dialogue (ḥiwār) was that other way.” Before proceeding with my argument, I want to illustrate this new way through the following example:

A student from the tribal coalition he headed had been saying that a girl from another tribe was promiscuous. One of the girl’s relatives beat him at campus. It might have ended there and remained a personal conflict. But the student who was beaten went to his tribal coalition, drawing them into the conflict. The student who had hit him also went to his tribal coalition, made up of the students from a northern city, to get protection. It risked becoming a very large conflict, with many people fighting and ending up being expelled from the university. As the leader of his tribal coalition, Samir was responsible for keeping this from happening. Nevertheless, he could not openly seek to negotiate with the leader of the northern coalition, because he would appear weak in front of his own coalition and lose his influence over them. Instead, he tried to use back channels through the other student factions. For that, he
needed someone from a tribe outside that northern city, who had lived there, and therefore had good contacts with the students from the city. He knew such a man and asked him to go to the place where the coalition of the northern city had gathered to hear how the discussion went and then establish contact with the leader of the coalition. Then, Samir phoned the leader of another tribal coalition—the largest at the university. This leader gathered his people and came to the place where Samir’s people were gathered. This large group would walk with Samir’s coalition to the place where the northern city’s coalition was gathered. There would be a negotiation, and the large group was there as a guarantee that no fight would start when the coalitions met. When the large group arrived at the place where Samir’s coalition was gathered, it seemed as though the northern coalition had sent them, and because of this Samir did not appear weak to the members of his coalition. They all walked to the northern coalition, and for them, it appeared that Samir had brought the large group to negotiate. Now the leaders could negotiate without anyone appearing weak. Among other things, it was decided that the student who offended the girl would apologize to her in public, and the escalating conflict ended. Without dialogue, the problem would have ended either in a violent collision or with the surrender and humiliation of one side. Samir applied this idea to al-harakāt: “Even if they [e.g., Youth of March 24 and Haraka Hayy al-Tafaila] did not want to talk directly with the regime, they should have used back channels.”

In Samir’s case, this form of political dialogue was based on a feeling that the counterparts and back channels were people he could understand, feel at home with and trust, a feeling he only had with a small part of Jordanian society before leaving the more narrow and homogenous cultural environment he grew up in. This homogeneity was not just Transjordanian but also military. Many people with Samir’s background were, for instance, deeply distrustful of political parties. Although he obviously had encountered dialogue as a way of solving disputes outside the university—in the case described above, he acted like a tribal shaykh—the diversity of the university gave this way an entirely new scope.

The character of this diversity can be clarified through a contrast. One of the most defining political experiences for Mohammed al-Sneid—the leader of Haraka Dhiban—was when he worked close to a Palestinian “refugee camp” in Amman and discovered that Palestinian-Jordanians had “unfair privileges.” Like Samir, his politics emerged out of an encounter with ethnic diversity, but in al-Sneid’s story, Palestinian-Jordanians appeared as a problem. In Samir’s story of his life at campus, Jordanians of different backgrounds appeared as friends, acquaintances and girls he fell in love with. This appearance was not only due to Samir’s personal character but also to the campus’s infitāḥ—the ethnic and social diversity as it was manifested in its social life.
Although for his entire childhood Samir had lived next to the person who invited us to the Palestinian refugee camp, it was at the university campus they became friends.

The significance of “places with infīṭāḥ” appears in the life stories also of other political activists who have been introduced in this thesis. The civil professionals who made up one faction within Haraka Hayy al-Tafaila studied or worked at places that generally were more diverse than the quarter where they lived and the units where the military veterans of the other faction had worked. Most of the quarter’s inhabitants come from a single town in the province Tafila (Eimeh). “Nearly a hundred years after the first Tafaila residents arrived, community leaders and local historians estimate that of the families belonging to Eimeh, six major tribes still make up well over three-fourth of the quarter’s population.” The political organizer Khaliq (see Chapter 3) had lived in Webde, one of Amman’s oldest neighborhoods, which has several restaurants, cafés, and cultural and political associations. It is a place associated with infīṭāḥ, which has “ikhtilāṭ” (diversity or mixture), as Ali mentioned when explaining why political ideas and ideologies were more important there than in the Palestinian-Jordanian neighborhood he currently lived in, where the residents were from Hebron and the villages surrounding it, the politics was based on patronage, and people voted either on someone from the same village or on someone who paid for their vote. “Christians, Armenians, different tribes, Palestinians. No one is a majority.”

When training young people in politics, Samir generalized from his experience of coming to a place that had infīṭāḥ. “They always want to learn about politics first, but you have to start with communication skills,” he said, refer-

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7 “Hai Al Tafaileh: In City’s Historic Heart, A Neighbourhood Feels Left Behind” (Jordan Times, December 22, 2014).
8 The political ethos of the neighborhood can be illustrated with the society (jamʿiyya) Ali was president of, which had a building that was used for social occasions. All members were from the same Palestinian village, which lies in present-day Israel. A plate with names of “martyrs” from the village dominated the entrance. It had more than one hundred names and the place and date for the martyrdoms. Some died in Palestine during the British mandate, one was a journalist (with Al Jazeera) in Iraq who died after the American invasion, some died in Syria, and the great majority died in Israel. One day, I visited the society during a memorial service. The deceased lived in Palestine, and two of the fifty attendants lived in Palestine. Every attendant was from the tribe Batran; half of the tribe lived in Israel, half in Jordan. Ali’s sister and brother still lived in the village in Israel. One person I spoke with told me about the village. He had not been there, but his family always talked about it, and he could describe its streets and houses. The society had only one photo depicting a Hashemite. It was of the king, and it sat on the locker in the office. The picture leaned against the wall and was barely visible. This carelessness would be unthinkable at all Transjordanian diwans I have visited. The society illustrates a political ethos marked by a Palestinian collective memory, a concern with the situation in Palestine in contrast to a more exclusive concern with domestic issues, and an identity where village of origin is of great importance.
ring to a way of establishing social contact and trust with Jordanians of different social and ethnic backgrounds. When teaching people who had lived in a neighborhood as "closed" as the one he grew up in, it was "too early" to introduce political discussions. "It is better to arrange a cultural event, like a film evening, so people from different places get to know each other." Political action based on finding solutions to problems Jordanians had in common rather than on confronting or removing the privileges of other Jordanian groups—or at least not wanting to cooperate with them—was, he thought, dependent on places where Jordanians of different backgrounds became friends and fell in love.

New places and lifestyles

The place in Jordan that is most clearly associated with infitāḥ is probably Books@cafe, the country’s first internet café. The association is grounded in its ethnic diversity, books, English-oriented cosmopolitanism, and gay clientele. Madian—one of its two owners, who is Palestinian-Jordanian, has lived in Kuwait City and San Francisco and is Jordan’s first publicly self-identified gay man—described the cultural change his internet café was a part of as follows:

I came in here, and it was like landing, gliding and isshh, hitting a wall. There was nothing to do, for a young gay man from San Francisco; where is the party? Where are the people? Where is the color? Where is anything? I kept looking for a few years, and then thought: Okay, I need a social life. If I do not know people in this country, I will make the people come to me. And I opened Books@cafe. I opened Books@cafe because one, I wanted a social life; two, I could not find the people I really wanted to talk to. I was not just looking for gay people; I just wanted open-minded people, munfatiḥīn [adjectival form of infitāḥ], but I did not use these words; it was just in the head, you know. You looked and you don’t know what you want but it is not there.

In 2011, 14 years later, this experience was no longer mute and “just in the head” but had a name—infītāḥ—and a physical form.9 During these 14 years, restaurants, cinemas, internet cafés, shopping streets and malls became more widespread in Amman. Like many older people, Yasir Sakr, a Jordanian professor of architecture, remembers living in Amman during the 1960s and 1970s, where nobody he knew was outside the neighborhood after 6 p.m. He knew most people in the neighborhood, and the streets and mosques were the public spaces where people spent their spare time. This pattern still applies to many neighborhoods in East Amman. “The basic layout and infrastructures of

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9 “It is only in some dark and half-conscious way that we know our thought before we come to express them,” Collingwood notes (1995: 200).
most parts of East Amman,” Jillian Schwedler (2010: 548) writes, “have remained unchanged for many of its residents, as have the daily patterns of movement across time and space. Parts of West Amman, by comparison, have become very different places—spatially, temporally, culturally, economically, and politically.”

Madian’s company epitomizes this greater urban change. When he arrived in Jordan in 1992, he and five friends bought a house that they turned into a restaurant. In 1997, he opened Books@cafe, one of the first Internet cafes in the Middle East. It grew into a bookshop with English titles. In 2011, it had around 40 staff members and a newly opened outlet in Amman.

This change in spatial environment of West Amman is connected to a change in values concerning individualism, nightlife and gender relations. Many youths call people consenting to such changes “open-minded” (mun-fatiḥ), a label that is not always used in a positive sense. Infitāḥ here refers to individual freedom and openness to different new behaviours (especially girls and boys spending time together). Some of my most wealthy young informants talked about infitāḥ in reference to their desire to be able to be drunk without hiding it or to take drugs. A much more common idea among youths was that they did not want their parents making their decisions and did not like that people around them were gossiping about them so much. Ayman, a lawyer who was raised in Hayy al-Tafaila but no longer lived there, referred to these differences in values when explaining why he had moved out of the quarter: “They do not think like me. There is no infitāḥ!” He recalled that whenever he came home later than ten o’clock, people started to talk. Moreover, “it was impossible to work with girls,” that is, at the cultural club where he spent time every day.

In contrast to the educational and political practices referred to in terms of infitāḥ that I have described previously, infitāḥ is in this context about openness to a new lifestyle. This point was expressed by people who felt skeptical about the cultural changes West Amman was going through, in statements such as, “It is not infitāḥ as a way of thinking. It is more about waste, spending money, sex, clothing, dating,” or in writings where Books@cafe was a metonym for political activism stuck in a West Amman bubble. 11 Nevertheless, it is evident that the educational and political practices I have written about previously have some kind of kinship with places such as Books@cafe. Najah,

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10 The globalization of West Amman has, like the increase of international schools, been accelerated by the arrival of Palestinians with money and cosmopolitan experiences who were expelled from the Gulf countries after the first Gulf war.

11 In a discussion at the political discussion forum 7iber about the failures of Youth of March 24, a participant stressed the need to “reach outside the confines of books@cafe.” This statement, incorrect as a description of the sociological basis of Youth of March 24, associates Books@cafe with people aware of the democratic lack in Jordan, but unable to spread this awareness to ordinary Jordanians, since they have different values and live a life secluded from Jordanian society.
the art teacher at School Z, worked there when she was younger, Samir occasion-
ally went there, and when the police once closed Books@cafe, Madian published a letter in Naseem’s 7iber. Furthermore, educators at the public 
schools mentioned in the previous chapter thought that changes in Jordanian 
educational culture were connected to a broader generational change—to stu-
dents “knowing their rights” and disapproving of a more authoritarian teach-
ing style. Similarly, some of my political informants thought that a more 
“open-minded” reasoning in politics was affiliated with an “open-minded” 
family structure where—in contrast to a more patriarchal family—decisions 
were based on reasoning between family members. Whether we accept these 
thoughts or not, they indicate that the political and educational changes dis-
cussed previously cannot be cleanly separated from lifestyle changes.

This section, then, studies the lifestyle-البحث described above and dis-
cusses its similarities and differences with the political البحث I have specified 
previously. I first turn to Rainbow Street, a place associated with البحث, 
which has many cafes, bars and restaurants, and a small square where people 
stand or sit on benches, talking or looking at the unknown people around them. 
I analyze the street through the experiences of a group of young men who 
every evening traveled between the street and the lower-middle income neigh-
borhoods they lived in, and therefore constantly perceived and reflected on the 
differences between these two kinds of places.

Diversity

Seteny Shami (2007: 211) has pointed out that Amman does not have the 
grand boulevards, public squares, or structures of the nineteenth-century mod-
ern city:

If modernity is marked by “free circulation of crowds and vehicles; impersonal 
and anonymous encounters of the pedestrian; unprogrammed public enjoyment 
and congregation in streets and squares; and the presence of people from dif-
ferent social backgrounds strolling and gazing at those passing by, looking at 
store windows, shopping, and sitting in cafes, joining political demonstrations 
or using spaces especially designed for the entertainment of the masses (prom-
enades, parks, stadiums, exhibitions),” then Amman has only a curtailed and 
partial modernity. Its quiet, empty streets and modest shopping and business 
centers do not display the required intensity of public life.

Rainbow Street has at least some of this intensity. Every evening during 
the summer of 2011, a group of young men occupied a few benches at the 
small square at Rainbow Street, accompanied by their guitars and melodies. 
One of them, Ahmed, once told his friends something surprising he picked up 
about life in Sweden from a talk with me: “They go to the malls to buy stuff! 
They just go there, buy things, then go home.” Another of them said, “It is 
forbidden to stay.” Ahmed replied, “No; there are no police, they just do it.” 
The strolling without an aim and the hanging around without waiting for
someone were these young men’s prime experiences of malls and of Rainbow Street.

These places have a form of diversity resembling that of the university campus I discussed in the previous section. The guitar-playing young men did not live in the wealthier areas of Amman, in West Amman, but in different manātiq sha‘biyya (popular neighborhoods), which are much more ethnically homogenous than Rainbow Street. Ahmed was from a Palestinian-Jordanian area, while the others were from Transjordanian areas. “Palestinians are bad,” they often told me. “Ahmed is an exception.” It was at Rainbow Street where they had become friends with this “exception.” The street was, like the university campus, a place where they made friends and acquaintances—and fell in love with girls—from different backgrounds than their own.

In a discussion of the spread of shopping malls in Cairo, Mona Abaza hesitantly refers to them—in contrast to a Marxist approach—as having a certain “democratizing effect,” since these air-conditioned and clean spaces are accessible to all classes, in the same sense as gardens or public spaces, which, however, “are scarce in Cairo” (2005: 293). “What remains [for the poor] really is the shopping centers, it is the only space that you do not pay money to enter.” 12 Although the small square and shopping street at Rainbow was one of the few more socially intensive and strolling-friendly areas within reach for the guitar players, it is, for the purposes of this thesis, the place’s “melting-pot sociality”—and the more pan-Jordanian form of politics it makes possible—that is its most significant effect.

A munfatiḥ habitus

The difference between a manṭiqa sha‘biyya (popular neighborhood) and a place with infitāḥ is about more than ethnic and social diversity. At Rainbow Street, the guitar players had, according to themselves, learned to be munfatiḥ, which means that they had learned to master a way of dressing, flirting, walking and singing that had economic as well as social advantages (cf. Bourdieu 1984; Salamander 2006). “To be munfatiḥ” is to have style and “good taste,” which is contrasted with pejorative and class-biased terms such as sha‘bī (popular) or locals. In this context, infitāḥ is about a way of making pejorative distinctions—which is connected to the rise of new lifestyles and consumer habits—rather than a form of “open-minded” communication.

For the guitar players, a place with infitāḥ was always understood in contrast to a manṭiqa sha‘biyya. I never heard manṭiqa sha‘biyya used to describe parts of cities I visited outside Amman, not even in large cities such as Irbid and Zarqa. A taxi driver I talked to in Zarqa explained why, as we were driving in the central part of town. “Everything is manṭiqa sha‘biyya!” he said and waved his hand at the streets and buildings surrounding us. What Amman

shares with Aqaba, the port city in the south, is places marked by tourism, capital, and English language, places with architecture and a social life that differ from a *mantiqa sha’biyya*. The term *mantiqa sha’biyya* does not distinguish anything until the city is bifurcated. The guitar players expressed this duality in the adjectives *gharbī* (western) and *sharqī* (eastern), opposites associated with other pairs of opposites: a global western world versus a traditional eastern world, and West Amman versus East Amman, a place with *infitāḥ* versus a *mantiqa sha’biyya*.

The guitar players had an acute sense of this distinction; they learned about it whenever they left their homes in East Amman to spend their evenings at Rainbow Street. I had told Ahmed that I studied the differences between East and West Amman, and he repeated the topic to people we met, then joked about the differences. In East Amman, “they think latte is an Italian football team. And espresso, they think it is a car model.” “In East Amman, if someone has an ear piercing, they think that he is gay. If someone drinks Nescafe, they think he is gay.” Khalid, another of the guitar players, had another story about “a friend, he is *sharqī* [an easterner]. He worked at the Chilihouse. When he had a burger, he put soap on it, ate it, and said: ‘Mayonnaise has a strange flavor but is delicious.’”

As jokes often do, these exaggerated a known distinction, in this case between a *sharqī*, or a *local*, and themselves, *moderns*. A *modern* is a cosmopolitan, familiar with global brands and restaurant chains, like those found at Rainbow. He is not rough like a *local* is: Ahmed asked me to look; he showed me how to tell a *sharqī* from a *modern*. “This is a *sharqī*.“ He raised his shoulders and started to walk. “*Al-salām ʿalaykum* (the peace be upon you, a common greeting in the Arab world),” he said in a voice from deep down his breast. “Like King Kong!” Then, as he changed his posture he said, “This is a modern.” His shoulders sank down; his body relaxed; his gaze was no longer as intense; it moved around, and did so lightly, as if it only was touching the objects it reached; the gaze of the flaneur. He strolled a few meters.

In Charles Baudelaire’s essay “The Painter of Modern Life” (1864), in which the word modernity first appeared, the word signals a perception of change and of something new coming from that change. A contrast between the past and something new, the modern, is experienced. Modernity, then, is about a way of experiencing time, and the modern is only perceived in that contrast between past and new. Since the guitar players often traveled back and forth between a *mantiqa sha’biyya* and an *open-minded* place, between home and Rainbow, they thought, felt and talked (with words like *moderns*, *infitāḥ*, *locals*, *mantiqa sha’biyya*, *gharbī*, *sharqī*) more about the contrast than those who lived their lives in one or the other. To somebody who had not
experienced the contrast, Ahmed’s jokes would not be funny. To laugh at locals, you needed to think of yourself as a bit of a modern.13

The principals at the international schools also had an eye for who was a local (or, in their words, “not open-minded”), which they used when they employed new teachers. They distinguished this while they were unaware of on what precise ground they distinguished it, except for obvious signs such as religious dress. In contrast, the guitar players, and Ahmed especially, could tell the precise details that their perception was based on. They could do so because they had to learned to dress, talk and behave like moderns; practices which had nothing of the self-evidence they have for someone raised into them. Ahmed studied at a high school and at a college in West Amman, and then worked there, but he studied in East Amman before high school, and he had always lived in East Amman.

A male sharqi puts his shirt inside his pants; his belt is visible. Compared to a modern, a sharqi’s pants sit looser and higher over the waist; because of the length of the pants and their widening bottom, they cover parts of his shoes. If he wears the black- or red-checkered head scarf (kaftiya), he puts it on his head, not over his shoulders. Their shirts and sweaters have no logos, texts or pictures. A sharqi might have many rings or else none, but not only one; the same is true for necklaces. Ahmed once pointed at Nabil to illustrate: “look, style, one bracelet.” If a sharqi fixes his hair, he uses hair gel, not hair wax like a modern. A sharqi’s hair is usually cut short, not longer than three centimeters. A modern uses English words and phrases: “Hi,” “Bye,” “How are you?”14 A modern’s Arabic is closer to Modern Standard Arabic, to the transnational “dialect” of television. A sharqi’s accent might disclose which province he comes from. He greets people with al-salam alaykum or marhaba, and he says it with a voice rougher than that of a modern.

13 Ahmed understood this clearer than his friends. That was why he canceled his stand-up performance at the cultural club that he, four of the guitar players, and I once went to. We arrived at a yard, with some small booths, like in a fair. Most of the visitors did not stroll along the booths but stood in front of a stage, looking at the guitar performances, the singing, or whatever went on. There seemed to be no program; when a performance finished, anyone could enter the stage. When a girl stopped singing, left the microphone, and went down the stage, the four guitar players, and some others too, began shouting “Ahmed! Ahmed!” He shook his head, saying “no, no.” There was no trace of a smile in his face, like it is when a refusal is not really a refusal, but a sign of humility. They continued to shout. He continued to refuse until he finally went up on the stage accompanied by an applause, said one joke, and went down again. When I later asked him why he did not want to go up, he said: “It was just kids there.” The audience had been either too old or too young—parents and their children, neither of them familiar with both sides of the contrast.

14 All guitar players could order from an English menu at any restaurant or café at Rainbow. They made the order in Arabic, except the name of what they are ordering, which they said in English. None of these young men were fluent enough to understand an American film without Arabic subtitles; Bakri could tell stories to me in English; the rest could not.
Since Rainbow Street was a public space, and since Rainbow bordered East and West Amman, these guitar players constantly met male *locals*, who, especially on Thursday evenings, walked from their homes to Rainbow Street. On one summer evening, I sat with Bakri when he irritably looked at a group of guys sitting on a bench playing flutes. The ones not playing stood in a loose half circle around the bench; they sang the Arabic song that the flutes played, and they loudly clapped their hands to the rhythm, moving their bodies to the rhythm as well. Despite sounds from people and cars, we clearly heard the voices and the clapping 20 meters away. “It is getting bad at Rainbow, everyone is local. Those are locals, the band are locals,” Bakri said. Bakri, Masoud, and Nabil sat quietly for half a minute. They were looking at the group. Bakri spoke again, without turning toward any one of us. “What is this! Locals! They do not know what a guitar is, they come, clap their hands, what is this!” He stood up and waved his arms as he spoke. Irritated comments like these were typical in encounters with a group of guys playing music or laughing aloud; a laughter which was louder and had a darker voice than Bakri’s or Ahmed’s. Upon one such encounter, Ahmed commented that, “A non-local is calm, is interested in the music, not in taking up space.” The *local* then, was never part of the guitar players’ audience; an audience consisting of those standing at the square or sitting at the benches, talking to each other quietly enough to not drown out the chords. Or, to put it more precisely, the *locals* Ahmed and Bakri despised most were those creating their own audience. The ways to attract an audience differed: the louder music and clapping inserted itself into Rainbow Street. The guitar playing invited you to be part of an audience; the music was not loud enough to be heard far away from the playing; they seldom sang, and if they sang, they sang in soft voices. You only heard the music if you stood or sat at the square or at the street nearby.

This *munfatih* way of dressing, walking and singing had advantages in parts of West Amman’s labor and marriage market. Four of the band members won a competition hosted by Arab Idol, and Ahmed hoped to earn money from the short comedy animations he put up on YouTube; many of the jokes were about the distinction between *moderns* and *locals*, or between young people familiar with the modern life and old people not familiar with it. Moreover, the girls Ahmed flirted with often took him to be wealthier than he was: “They are always surprised when they hear that I am from East Amman. I have style, the way I talk, and the way of thinking: I am going with girls. In East Amman, to talk with them is ʿayb (shameful).” Becoming “at home” at Rainbow Street was to be at home among girls wealthier than they were and at places where they could earn more money than their fathers did.15

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15 In East Amman, Ahmed’s “style” did not have these advantages. Although he never was worried about his reputation when he met girls at Rainbow Street, the neighborhood where he
Obviously, not everyone had learned to be “at home” at the street. When I once invited Mohammed al-Sneid and three other leftists from Dhiban to one of these Rainbow restaurants, they were at a loss about what to order. Mohammed looked through the English menu, of which he understood nothing. “Can we have the Arabic?” he asked the woman standing behind the desk with the coffee machines and the register. “There is none,” she answered. I started translating the menu, which was difficult since the risottos and pasta salads were meals unfamiliar to them. As soon as I mentioned “hamburger,” however, all four immediately said that they wanted it; the first meal they recognized. When we had eaten, Mohammed suggested that we had tea before leaving. I silently counted the cash in my wallet to see if it covered this expense, six times as much as Mohammed expected it to be. Tea at this place is not the cheap after-dinner tea at a restaurant at Downtown.

This restaurant was an unfamiliar space, the opposite of chez moi, for my friends, and not primarily because they could not read the menu. In dress and behavior, they did not fit. They wore loose clothes of dull colors; Tariq had dirty hands, and all, especially Foad, talked and laughed so loud that they could be heard at the tables at the other end of the small café. Although Rainbow Street’s square, cafes and restaurants are characterized by ethnic diversity and the presence of people from different social backgrounds, truly becoming part of this melting pot requires a habitus which just “feels natural” for many young West Ammanis but which people of less wealthy and more rural backgrounds have to learn.

The softness of infitāḥ

This habitus is characterized by a certain softness, or pacification. Some of my female Jordanian middle- and upper-class friends were afraid to take the long stairs from Rainbow Street down to Downtown, the nearest manṭiqa shaʻbiyya. Rania was uncomfortable because “everyone was staring at us” when we walked there together. Men who stood a few meters in front of her stared at her body, in a way that she found very intrusive. The second time I walked there with a girl, it was with a European who was wearing a yellow sweater which, although it reached her neck, betrayed a vague contour of her breast. The contour attracted stares for the entire walk, and when we entered the staircase to a small café, a man who came downstairs murmured “sharmūṭa” (whore). At Rainbow Street, neither Rania nor that the woman’s contour would have been noticed; there, they melted into the background. When the guitar players called Rainbow an open-minded place, they partly referred to that background, which they associated with a global culture. But what distinguishes Rainbow Street is also that its social pressure is subtler than lived was another matter. A prospective wife’s family would ask his neighbors about his reputation, to be ensured that he did not drink or see girls. “Nobody there knows about it!” he once told me, referring to his life at Rainbow Street.
that which the girls encountered in these two cases. Yazan, a young man from a lower-middle income neighborhood who worked as a seller at Downtown, expressed this difference when we were walking along Rainbow Street: “People here do not shout things, they are respectful. If someone does, they are not from here, but from outside.” The guitar players thought that this “respectfulness” bordered on unmanliness. “When you look at a girl who walks with a sharqi, he hits you,” Ahmed once told me when discussing the characteristics of people living in West Amman, “if it is a gharbi, [a person from West Amman] he looks away” [as if pretending that he did not see], that is, he has no sharaf (honour).

A figure who is defined by this tendency to look away is the fāfi. A “man without honour” (zalama bidūn sharaf) is still a man. A fāfi is not really a man. Maybe his father gives him lots of money, and he never earns anything himself, or he does not defend his friends but rather runs away if someone hits them. He might let his sister and his girlfriend do “whatever they want”: talk with guys, meet guys, and, in some conceptions, have sex with guys. You do not need to be afraid of a fāfi. You can stare right at the girl walking next to him. He will not do anything. Among my informants, nobody was seen as a fāfi more than Hussein, who was thin and soft and had a piercing in his lower lip and long hair which he sometime put up. Whenever he was outdoors with his European girlfriend, men shouted, whistled, and stared at her. This was grounded in Hussein’s unthreatening or unmanly appearance. In contrast, when his friend Rosol followed Hussein and his girlfriend to a crowded market in East Amman, which Hussein had been worried about going to, nobody looked at her or said anything. Like Hussein, Rosol had long hair and piercings, but he had a more threatening and stranger look: he had tattoos, a big beard, and was two meters tall and muscular. He radiated a capacity to hurt anyone looking at the girl walking next to him.

Although the guitar players sometimes told me how they would hit a man whom they saw with their female relatives, when they were disturbed by locals, they reacted with comments (“those are locals”) and irritated stares made from a safe distance. They never confronted their object of irritation but wished the police to do it for them. Occasionally, if people on the street started fights or threw insults, they contacted a man whom they knew, who worked for the Greater Amman municipality, and who told the police to come. Arguably, it is precisely because the state had monopolized violence at places like Rainbow that its “softer” or “more reserved” pattern of interaction could develop (cf. Elias 2000: 169).

The “soft interaction” of Rainbow Street’s social life is evident in a range of different activities, such as its music (as shown above) and patterns of flirting. Flirting successfully at Rainbow Street requires the dress, style, and speech of a modern. Ahmed always fixes his hair and shaves before going to Rainbow Street. To flirt, “You must wear nice things, you must have style,” he said. The flute band’s rough dancing and singing are analogous to the rough
appearance that must be avoided for flirting to be successful. Instead, a discreet appearance is critical. In his jeans pockets, Ahmed has pieces of paper, just large enough to have his mobile number written on them. He cannot give the number to a girl too early; she would not accept it. Communication, even if not verbal, first needs to be established. The first contact is eye-contact. His look should not be a gaze that forces the girl to look away. He has a soft unthreatening smile when he looks toward her; when his eyes meet her eyes, he looks away, and smiles as he does so. His eyes were seeking her eyes though, not her body. The smile, eye-contact, and shy looking away bring associations of love, not of threatening objectification. Moreover, because his look is not intrusive, the girl can seek his eyes without worrying that doing so will cause him to intrude, to walk to her and loudly ask for her number, for example. After having done this looking-and-looking-away for a while, he goes and talks to her and discreetly gives her the piece of paper with his number, or instead of walking up to her he signals that he is leaving the piece of paper for her to pick up. The outcome is uncertain: “Maybe, a darling (ḥabībī), maybe just friends, maybe just hey and that is it.”

Compare this with the harassments of Jasim, a friend of the guitar players. He sat at a corner at Rainbow Street, always with friends and never with a guitar. When women unaccompanied by men passed by, he stared at their body. “What an ass!” he said loudly enough for her to hear. “Give me your number!” No one ever did. Jasim ṭaharrash (harassed) them. When my friend Razan (from a middle-class family) told me that she felt ugly in Europe, because however well she dressed no man seemed to notice her when she walked along the streets, she missed non-intrusive and non-assaulting comments about her beauty (e.g., “You are pretty,” “You have nice eyes,” “Your hair is beautiful”), spoken in a softer voice than what Jasim used when he shouted at girls. Is it not significant that although all guitar players disliked the gathering at the Interior Ministry Circle on March 24 and supported those who dispelled it, it was only Jasim who went there and threw stones and hit people?

Ahmed was not really being shy when flirting; rather, his looking away showed the girl that he was not intrusive. Because he was respectful of her

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16 This soft flirting also characterized Books@cafe. Consider the following example, when I one day walked in the corridor from the toilet and a young man met me. After he asked me if I spoke Arabic, he said, “I want to ask you about a thing, can I have your number? If you do not want to, it is okay.” He took a small step backward; his shoulder moved upward; his palms turned toward me; the body language and his last sentence marked that his flirting did not want to be intrusive. This flirting differed from the five other—much more obtrusive—instances I experienced in Amman of men hitting on me, all deaf to denial of interests and accompanied by an objectifying gaze; instead of one step backwards, six steps up a stair to try to kiss me (one case), instead of palms, a penis turned toward me (two cases). Those men interpreted my shoulder-length hair, tight cloths, and soft body language (high elbows, hands touching the face, absent pensive gaze) as signs of a manyak or maināk, passive participles of the verb “fuck,” i.e., “one who gets fucked.”
gaze, there was little risk of him not respecting what she might say. Jasim had nothing of that respect that signaled openness to what the addressee might say. He never searched for eye contact; he never looked at the faces of the girls who passed by. His stones, comments and stares all hit the addressee without any cares about their response. He had no interest in what the girl wanted or thought about what he did, in the same sense that he had no interest in what the people he threw stones at thought. This absence of imaginative labor was a fertile environment for various theories about who his addressees were. The girls were whores and the demonstrators were all Palestinians wanting to destroy the country. His beliefs did not just exist in an ideational sphere but were connected to a concrete way of interacting with other people. The infitāḥ at Rainbow Street is partly about a dialogical interaction pattern which Jasim did not master.\textsuperscript{17}

\textit{Infitāḥ} and the West

As mentioned in the previous section, the spread of cinemas, shopping streets, malls, and gender-mixed cafés in West Amman is connected to a change of values concerning individualism, nightlife and gender relations. The word “\textit{infitāḥ}” is often used to refer to these new places and lifestyles, and I have discussed some points of contact between this “social \textit{infitāḥ}” and the political \textit{infitāḥ} discussed previously. I now want to emphasize a common difference between these two concepts. Among Jordanians, \textit{infitāḥ} sometimes functions within a framework that divides cultural forms into Western and Eastern domains, where the concept only refers to one of these domains; that is, \textit{infitāḥ} is basically synonymous with the concept “\textit{gharbī}” (Western). The political ethos I have discussed in relation to attempts to coordinate the Jordanian protest movements, in contrast, was not based on an equating of \textit{munfatiḥ} with \textit{gharbī}. As this section shows through examples that represent broader trends in Jordanian society, this difference in usage is based on a difference in moral values.

\textit{Infitāḥ} as a source of culture

The guitar players understood \textit{infitāḥ} as a new “freer” or “more Western” lifestyle, which they had ambivalent feelings about. This understanding was reflected in deeply internalized schemes of speech, perception and judging,

\textsuperscript{17} Understanding the “softness” at Rainbow Street through the contrast with \textit{taḥarrush} has great limitations, however. Walid, a friend of one of the guitar players, had a soft way of speaking and listening which was not \textit{munfatiḥ}. He did not come to Rainbow Street to seek contact with girls, and when he was present while Ahmed or Bakri explained to me what a \textit{sharqī} looked like, they laughed while they pointed at him—the paradigmatic example—with his loose jeans that covered his shoes.
which can be seen in their use of the words “munfatih” and “muhtarama” (respectable) and the two separate value systems they were connected to.

The girls at Rainbow Street “are not muhtarama,” Ahmed once said, repeating a thought I had heard him express many times. “They are speaking with one guy and another guy at the same time. The good girls refuse to give away their number. They refuse speech, sex.” The girls who gave him their number were for dating, flirting and sex, but never for marriage. This partly explains the lack of seriousness on his part, in these relations. “I have many girlfriends. Fourteen. Not as in Europe; you have only one, do you not?” Whatever the real number, it was large enough for Ahmed to have two mobile phones and four SIM cards. If he had only one SIM card, one of his girlfriends could find that the line was busy during the night, which would disclose that Ahmed was talking to another girl and that he was not—in contrast to what he said—in love with her. A muhtarama girl, on the other hand, never went to Rainbow Street; she walked from school straight to home. “The girls standing over there, talking with guys, they are free (ḥurr),” Nabil said, making a wry face when pronouncing free. The signs through which Ahmed determined if a girl was too free and not muhtarama, were an inversion of the signs through which Noor, the principal of School Z, determined if a teacher was munfatih enough to work at the school. One who is “not muhtarama” wears pants, or a dress, and has no hijab. Her dress is tighter than that of a muhtarama and it reveals more contours. Her gaze has the flaneur’s curiosity, while a muhtarama’s gaze is turned down, avoiding eye contact with strangers. She would never turn around to look at anyone who passed her.

Most of the guitar players, however, thought that these outer signs were unreliable. It was difficult to know if someone was muhtarama, or if she only pretended to be. “It is difficult to find a muhtarama girl; I would search for one year before marrying someone. There are only a few,” Bakri explained. Luckily, there were techniques to find out. Ramzi used such techniques to ensure that his fiancé Dima was muhtarama. He was a friend to the guitar players, but he no longer spent much time on Rainbow; he was to marry the next month. His mother saw the girl at Petra. She found her beautiful and asked for her number. Following the usual procedures, she called her parents and talked with their neighbors to ascertain that she was a bint muhtarama (respectable girl). They also met her. She stuck to the point when she answered a question; “the muhtarama girl speaks little,” Ramzi said. A girl who was not muhtarama would talk with any person. To test his fiancé, Ramzi gave her number to one of his friends. He let the friend write “I love you” in a SMS. If she answered, Ramzi would know. “This is my life, my relation forever, I have to be sure,” he told me. “I made a test for my wife, every day I made a test.” Whenever they met by themselves, he tried to hold her hand and to kiss her.

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18 Al-bint al-muhtarama qūl bi-l-kalām.
If she held his hand, or let herself be kissed, she was not muḥtarama. He let one of his friends call her. Ramzi recalled the conversation:

Dima: Hello.
Ramzi’s friend: Hello. Is this Dima?
Dima: Yes, I am Dima.
Ramzi’s friend: How are you?

Now, the muḥtarama hangs up. And Dima always did. Ramzi called her at night to check that her mobile was not busy; “Night is the time for love,” he explained. He was finally satisfied: “I cannot try any more. I tried every day and she said, ‘No,’ ‘No,’ ‘No.’ She is muḥtarama.”

Ahmed had ambivalent feelings for the distinct ethos he experienced at Rainbow Street. When I once met him walking close to Rainbow Square, he told me that he had stopped meeting the girl I saw him with last week, “because we met each other on the street, ḥarām (forbidden in Islam).” When I met him at another time, he told me he had stopped seeing all girls. He was tired of it. He had torn apart his SIM card and deleted all numbers. “Enough. There is no love. And it all takes much time, talk with one, then with another.” He was smiling when the next week he told me that he had met a “very beautiful girl.” Another example of Ahmed’s changing attitudes about Rainbow Street involves the very first time I met him. “Everything is good at Rainbow,” he said. After a few seconds, he added: “Except Books@cafe.” Many Jordanians had warned me about the restaurant (because of its gay clientele). When I ran into Ahmed another time at Rainbow Street, a different voice spoke through him, a voice animated with the joys of a restaurant visit with a girl. He brought out his wallet, smiled, and showed me the bill from Books@cafe.

Ahmed’s conflicting notions are not unique. In Palace Walk, Naguib Mahfouz describes a conflict in the fictional character Mr. Ahmed:

His life was composed of a diversity of mutually contradictory elements, wavering between piety and depravity. Contradictory though they were, they all met with his satisfaction, without needing to be propped up by any pillar of personal philosophy or hypocritical rationalization. [2001: 47]

Ahmed could not formulate a philosophy to reconcile this tension either; but a “polyglossia”—several coexisting but conflicting approaches to the world that are each reflected in a specific form of speech (see Bakhtin 1981; Hill 1995)—better describes this tension than the “wavering” Mahfouz employs. Ahmed used some English words when he talked about his nice evening at Books@cafe: dating, girlfriend, coffee. When he condemned Books@cafe, the girls he met, and his own flirting, there were some Arabic words that he never used an English equivalent for; for example, ʿayb and ḥarām. ʿAyb denotes that something is wrong because it goes against ʿādāt (traditions), ḥarām denotes that something is wrong because it is against Islam. The English was
necessary when Ahmed spoke about his “open-minded” experiences. But he needed the Arabic concepts to speak about moral truth. Ahmed was not oscillating; he was rather speaking in two different languages.

The polyglossia he confronted is like that confronted by the hypothetical peasant described by Mikhail Bakhtin in *The Dialogical Imagination* (1981). The peasant has the local Russian variety he speaks, the Old Church Slavonic he heard in his priest’s prayers, and the “paper language” he uses to dictate petitions to officialdom. “The ideological systems and approaches to the world that were indissolubly connected with these languages contradicted each other and could in no way live in peace and quiet with each other” (quoted in Hill 1995). The different languages can never be reconciled to one language; there is no resolution. What Ahmed could say in one language he could not say in the other. In Bakhtin’s analysis, consciousness must choose which of these languages it uses in a given situation, which is an ethical choice (cf. Robbins 2007; Keane 2010). But there was only one of Ahmed’s languages that spoke with the highest claims of moral truth. The erotic adventures at Rainbow, in open-minded space, could never become love. Ahmed’s modern life did not have the moral weight of traditions (ʿādāt), sharaf, and Islam. “This is ḥarām,” Ahmed told me when he put aside the guitar after he had played sitting on a bench at Rainbow Square. That moral fact did not cause him to stop playing; there was no resolution of the two voices, but one judged the other.

For the guitar players, it was positive to be labelled *modern* and, in most cases, *open-minded*. If asked what the most open-minded place in Amman was, Ahmed, Bakri, Nabil, or Jasim all answered something like: “Abdoun for sure!” because, “There are more bars, McDonalds, Starbucks.” In contrast to a *manṭiqa shaʿbiyya*, an open-minded space was defined by its absence of sex segregation and it being part of a global consumption culture; places such as Rainbow Street, Books@cafe, malls, cafes and restaurants, with their cappuccinos, mayonnaise, unmarried couples and English menus. An open-minded person, a *modern* person, was at home in these places, familiar with its menus and codes of behavior. Nevertheless, although you could not be “too modern” you could be “too open-minded.” This shift, wherein open-minded became a negative label, happened when it referred not to the mastering of modern consumption and flirting but to new “extreme” values, especially regarding women, manliness, religion and sexuality, such as clothes too low-necked or too tight on a female, girls who spoke with guys or had the curious look of the flaneur, a restaurant that accepted gays. The guitar players had divided the world into two domains: a modern global realm and a traditional realm which bore the essential marks of cultural identity. When you were not at home in the former, you were a *local*, when not at home in the latter, “too open-minded.” *Infitāḥ* was about an openness in relation to only one of these domains.
Infitāḥ as a beaming light

In the previous section, I have drawn a distinction between *infitāḥ* as a concept that functions within a framework that divides cultural forms into Western and Eastern domains—and in which it concurs with only one of these domains—and a concept that refers to practices across this division. This section further elucidates this distinction by discussing how it appears in the life of a single individual. The chapter has previously dealt with people (Samir and the guitar players at Rainbow) who moved between two culturally different forms of places, since differences between these places appear clearer in their experience than in the experience of someone who has lived primarily in only one of them. This section deals with a person who moved between two different understandings of *infitāḥ*, since the differences between these understandings appear clearer in his experience than in the experience of someone who has had only one of them.

The person in question is Hussein, a university student with an upper-middle class background, from the Karaki tribe Sarayra. When I first met him, he had recently returned to Jordan from a two-year stay in Sweden which he said made him *munfatiḥ*. The stay had led to an obliteration of his former ideology, convincing him that what he once was proud of—the tribes, the Jordanian monarchy, *sharaf* (honour), and religion—were not necessary pillars of a good society. Since the ideology had not only been his own, but what he had learned in school and from friends and relatives, he thought that his new convictions were also relevant for them. In other words, Hussein had a position of marginality and uncertainty similar to that of my other main informants: He had returned to Jordan, and there was something he needed to come to terms with; Hussein was at distance from his native society, not only due to experiencing another country, but also because he was no longer really at home in the political worldview he grew up in.

Over the course of a couple of years, Hussein found a way of talking about *sharaf* and religion that resembled the political dialogue described in previous chapters, in the sense that it dispelled rather than increased conflicts. The meaning of *infitāḥ* changed for him, from being identical to “Western” (*gharbī*) to not being so and instead referring to a form of communication. This was a change not merely of ideas but of political hope and schemes of speech. Hussein’s life is a useful vantage point for the issue that concerns us precisely because of this change, which allows us to perceive two different concepts of *infitāḥ* and the different values and schemes of speech they are connected to.

*Infitāḥ* in the sense of “Western” is close to a liberal concept of freedom which is not uncommon among an English-oriented, relatively wealthy and secular part of West Amman’s population, who feel alienated from Jordanian culture with its notions of *sharaf*, piety and gender relations. In some historical contexts, a concept of sexual freedom—which this *infitāḥ* partly is about—
can obviously become associated with political emancipation. 1974, the year the Spanish prime minister launched the *apertura* (opening) that “virtually eliminated what remained of general censorship in Spain, except with regard to direct criticism of Franco and the government, . . . became the year of the great *destape*—the “uncovering”—as the eruption of nudity in common publications far exceeded even the increase in political discussion” (Payne 1987: 595). “*Destape,*” Jorge Mari writes, “came to be perceived as a liberating impetus, a harbinger of democracy, and therefore as a facet of the political, social, and cultural reforms that characterized the early transitional period.”

The “culturally alienated” Jordanian population described here, however, are, when push comes to shove, supporters of status quo in political affairs. Political liberalization and *infitāḥ* are not—like *apertura* and *destape*—united in their opposition against the censorship of a religiously conservative authoritarian regime. Many of these people rather feel that a democracy will devour their freedoms and their *chez moi*, such as the bars and cafes at Rainbow Street. “If the people will decide they will forbid this [type of place],” one of these Jordanians answered his friend Khalida—after she had talked about need for political reforms—referring to the restaurant we were sitting at, which sold liquor and where men and women sat at the same tables, even though they were neither relatives nor married. Madian, the owner of Books@cafe, had fled from Jordan twice in fear of his life and thought that he would be an early target in a period of political instability or Islamist-dominated parliamentary government.

In Hussein’s case, on the other hand, *infitāḥ* figured in a revolutionary ideology. In contrast to the revolutionary ideas among *al-ḥarakāt* which I have discussed previously, his revolutionary ideology was not based on the notion that there was something bad at the top of the Jordanian regime, whose disappearance would lead to a better society; he rather recognized that a revolution probably would lead to social and political chaos. He embraced this idea of revolution and chaos, because the ideal of a utopian society with *infitāḥ* led him to a sense of futility, and thus he felt that radical change was necessary. This is illustrated by the following exchange Hussein and I had, after he had voiced an increasing sense of alienation from Jordanian society:

**Arvid:** Even if your visions are not fulfilled, they can still be an ideal for practice.

**Hussein:** But you cannot change anything here. I cannot make small changes. You try to change the system, but then you are back in the shithole. The whole system needs to change.

To try to change, then you are back in the shithole: this is the motif of the Greek myth of Sisyphus, whom the Gods condemned to forever rolling a rock

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to the top of a mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight. For eternity, Sisyphus’s whole being is exerted toward accomplishing nothing. “[The Gods] had thought with some reason,” Albert Camus (2012: 119) writes, “that there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labor. . . . If this myth is tragic, that is because its hero is conscious. Where would his torture be, indeed, if at every step the hope of succeeding upheld him?”

In Hussein’s case, his sense of futility and failure was grounded in an experience of a duality between the country where he grew up and the country “with infitāḥ” where all what he believed in was shattered. Direct experience of democratic countries had made a great stamp in the political consciousness of both Hussein and Naseem—the political blogger—and it had made them both prone to Sisyphus’ despair. The duality between “Jordan-as-it-is” and the democratic “Jordan-as-it-should-be” was a sediment of their experience of a democratic country; a sediment that created the existentially relevant distinction between the bottom and top of Sisyphus’s mountain, and the idea that all the labour to reach the top—Jordan-as-it-should-be—was futile.

The role of this sense of futility becomes clearer by looking at what led it to dissipate. In Hussein’s case, the dichotomy between what Jordan was and should be weakened because of exchanges with his brother, who became a political activist after he watched the sit-in on March 24, 2011, an activist advocating for the status quo. For the rest of the year, he went to demonstrations almost every week. After some months, he bought an expensive camera to film the demonstrations. He uploaded the films on his YouTube channel and discussed the events with the participants on Twitter and Facebook. “I monitor them [the demonstrators]. It is good that someone does. If they do anything wrong, I put it here,” he once told me and pointed toward his computer screen, which showed his YouTube channel. Although this monitoring did not convince Hussein that the status quo was best for Jordan, it convinced him that some activists’ struggle for what they called “democratic” changes were worse than the status quo. The sharp dichotomy of what Jordan was and should be became less distinct. Not because of a new realization that shining ideals could not be reached, but because one activist hitting another one spread light on a problem with the supposed solution. Then, hope and futility were no longer determined solely by the light beaming from the mountaintop above Sisyphus; the distinction between Jordan-as-it-is and the “country with infitāḥ” he saw abroad no longer had a monopoly on his political imagination.

Hussein’s ideal society was thus a democracy characterized by “infitāḥ,” but this democratic society was not going to be created through democratic means such as compromises, negotiations and agreements but through violent chaos. In contrast to the political infitāḥ described in previous chapters, infitāḥ here describes an ideal society, not a way to get there.

This understanding of infitāḥ can be contrasted with the more communicative meaning Hussein later gave the concept, after he had found out that he
could have a mutual conversation with most Jordanians even about issues such as honor and atheism. Hussein did not use religious phrases, and many people asked him about his faith. When he answered that he did not believe in Islam, people usually asked why, and he answered with something like: “If I believe in something, I have to believe in it wholeheartedly. I was born a Muslim, but I do not believe in it as much as I believe in music. I need to believe in my religion more than I believe in music. Maybe in the future I will be a dedicated Muslim, I would want that, but right now I have not found it.” He found out that Islamists were usually happy to have long conversations with him. “People often pretend to be more Islamic than they are when I am talking to them. They sense that I do not hide anything.” Before, when someone asked him about his faith, “I would have avoided the whole thing, ‘personal freedom, it is not your business’ (ḥurriyya shakhṣiyya, mā ilak dakhāl). When you say it like that, he looks at you in a certain way, and you feel that you are different. Now, we have different views, but a common ground.” Infitāḥ began denoting a type of conversation he never had before.

This type of conversation had very specific features. First, he began using “I” to start his statements, which turned the argument into his own thoughts. More precisely, his way of speaking changed exactly like his music. “Before, my way of playing was more technical: oh, I can do difficult stuff. After the break-up [with his girlfriend], I started to play as I felt; for example, music that described my own experiences with her, and I remembered these when I played. People started to relate more to the music. Before, when I played at campus [outdoors, during the breaks], my friends used to get bored, but after my breakup, new people used to sit down next to us to listen.” People related more to his thoughts when he presented why he doubted some of them and why he was convinced of some of them with the same type of sincerity as when he played music. He could hardly have spoken like this before, when he was intent on persuading people, on changing them. He stopped claiming that his arguments were valid for everyone and began talking about his own thoughts. He had also given up his political project. His “activism” was not about a form of collective action but about waiting for a messianic moment, and when he realized that no messiah was coming, he stopped waiting, and there was no longer any activism left. Little was at stake in his open-minded discussions: no school curricula or proposal for a new election law. Samir, who grew up in the officer neighborhood, avoided some discussions, because he wanted to learn more about how the people in front of him thought to know how to discuss things with them, or because he avoided a personal sphere where discussion only leads to conflict. Hussein also recognized that discussions with strangers easily end up in polemics, but he had responded to this issue differently. Not by avoiding some discussions, but by speech oriented toward inner validity.

Before his change, Hussein—like his friends—shared the guitar players’ linguistic bifurcation, using English phrases such as “girlfriend” and “I love
you” but unlike the guitar players, he only used English when he spoke about the highest values. “I never use the Arabic words [to talk about sex, girlfriends, and dating],” he said, “They sound strange. It sounds [morally] bad.” Iman and her boyfriend Anas—like many other people I met who spoke excellent English that they learned from an international school—turned from Arabic to English as soon as they began talking about love. After Hussein’s change, he no longer spoke in English with his Arab friends when they talked about sex, love and dating. The change of his conception of infitāḥ—after which one source of culture no longer had the ethical primacy it had before—was affiliated with a change in his way of speaking, after which he could use Arabic to talk about the highest values. Infītāḥ was still valued but it now referred to an openness that was not identical to what is gharbī (Western).

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at places and social forms associated with infitāḥ and examined their connections to the kind of politics I have specified previously. I have argued that these places are connected to a politics that is based on ideas rather than patronage and on civic cooperation rather than opposition to domestic enemies, which Jordanian society will be better without. This connection is, I have suggested, based on the diversity and “soft” pattern of interaction—or change of masculinity ideals—that characterize the social life of these places.

The connection between the trust people have in their fellow citizens and the experience of a certain type of place has been noticed in other contexts. David Halpern, in a discussion of social trust in European and North American countries, points out that “people that go to university end up trusting much more than those who do not, particularly when they go away residentially.” This cannot be explained by income alone, so “there is something about the experience of going off as a young person in an environment where you have lots of other young people from different backgrounds.”20 The social life of Rainbow Street is—like that of the university campuses where Samir and Hussein began feeling at home with Jordanians they previously had difficulty relating to—characterized not only by ethnic diversity but also by the presence of young people.

The diversity of these places can be described more precisely than with the “melting-pot sociality” I have referred to previously. At Rainbow Street and at university campuses, people talk less about issues connected to the specific historical memories of places like the military neighborhood Samir grew up in or the Palestinian refugee camp next to it. In Palestinian refugee camps, for example, young people connect to Palestine and the struggle against Israel

20 “Trust Me” (Freakonomics Radio, December 17, 2017).
through their parents’ storytelling and the experiences of relatives who still live there. Palestinian-Jordanians normally talk about Palestine within the family or with other Palestinian-Jordanians friends, not in situations where Jordanians of other backgrounds are present. To be at home on a diverse university campus or street is therefore to be at home at a place where you cannot talk about these issues. The life at these more diverse places thus involve a kind of “loss,” which is one reason why some people find them difficult to live in.

I have also argued that one way to understand the various meanings of infitāḥ is to examine what people look up to. Infitāḥ is, for most people, not a value-free term but is connected to what is low and high, and the concept is therefore an entry point to these evaluations. The values that animated places like Rainbow Street are, in comparison to those animating the attempts to coordinate the Jordanian protest movements that we have studied previously, marked by a stronger identification of infitāḥ with the West. To be at home at places associated with infitāḥ—to be munfatiḥ—means, at least at places such as shopping streets and malls (but to a lesser degree at university campuses), to master a certain way of dressing, flirting, and walking. In this context, the opposite of munfatiḥ is local, sharqī (Eastern) or shaʿbī (popular). Like Cairene terms such as baladī (popular) and bī’a (environment) (see Abaza 2005: 11-13), these are pejorative and class-biased terms used especially by more wealthy people to distinguish their “good taste” from the “vulgar taste” of inferior classes. As these terms indicate, this good taste is associated with the global or the Western (“baladī literally means ‘from the country’ or ‘local’ as opposed to foreign” [Ibid]). In this context, infitāḥ is more about the mastery of a global consumer culture than about a form of “open-minded” communication. The local is not someone who acts politically in a specific manner but someone who dresses in a certain way or eats soap and thinks that it is mayonnaise.

The chapter has analyzed places with infitāḥ not from the standpoint of transnational phenomena such as globalization and neoliberalism but from the standpoint of a certain form of politics that appeared during Jordan’s Arab Spring. The Conclusion returns to this political starting point and shows how the study has proceeded from it.
The peak of the Jordanian protest movements was in November 2012. One of my informants watched the prime minister announce the lifting of subsidies on fuel and gas products on a television screen at an inexpensive café in Amman. People walked out the door shouting, and as people took to the streets en masse, so began a spontaneous demonstration with no organization or leadership. Similar protests started all over Jordan, even in Aqaba and Salt, the prime minister’s hometown, where around 100 protesters pelted stones at policemen protecting his home. Protesters burned tires, smashed traffic lights and blocked roads in several cities. At some places, crowds shouted for the downfall of King Abdullah. It was as if the spontaneous uprising several of al-ḥarakāt’s leaders had waited for finally had begun.

Rami, who waited for an uprising after March 24 (see Chapter 3), took to the streets in poorer areas in East Amman together with other members of his haraka, trying to mobilize people there. They shouted for the downfall of the regime. When the protests began, Mohammed al-Sneid, the leader of Haraka Dhiban (see Chapter 2) was driving home from the university in Salt in his brother’s car. South of Amman, the highway was blocked by people from a small town beside the road. He got out of the car and talked to them, asking them to let him pass. He did not have any money nor enough fuel to turn back and drive to Dhiban later. “I am with you,” he said to them. “But they did not know who I was,” Mohammed told me, and they did not let him pass.

In November 2012, there were nationwide protests but no trace of any nationwide coordination. Although the protesters were united in one demand—opposition to price increases—the groups and individuals that took to the streets were, as Mohammed’s story indicates, much more isolated from each other than were those who participated in the sit-in on March 24. Had November 2012 become the uprising some political activists hoped it would become, they would soon have discovered that this leaderless “revolution” would have much more chaotic effects than they had expected.

The mass protests ebbed out within a week, and several of my informants meant that this was the end of their haraka. In 2013, there were no longer weekly Friday demonstrations at Downtown nor any haraka in Dhiban, and

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1 For the fiscal backdrop to the removal of subsidies, see www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pr/2012/pr1240.htm; www.stratfor.com/analysis/costs-jordans-energy-insecurity; www.reuters.com/article/2012/05/26/us-jordan-energy-prices-idUSBRE84P0J020120526.
the mukhābarāt was gradually returning to political life. The demonstrations in November 2012 thereby marked the end of the period of political enthusiasm and freedom that began with the sit-in on March 24, 2011.

From the representative to the marginal

One fruitful way to understand the shape of Jordan’s Arab Spring is to look at the formation of the country’s regime and national identity. After World War II, minorities took control of most Levant states. In the case of Syria, due to the French Mandate authorities’ over-recruitment of Alawis, this religious minority constituted “some 65 percent of all noncommissioned officers in the Syrian military” in the mid-1950s (Landis 2012). Despite the rhetoric of Arab nationalism, the Asads were “keenly aware that only the traditional loyalties of family, clan and sect could cement their rule. In essence, they upheld the notion that it takes a village to rule Syria, a formula that successfully brought an end to political instability” (Ibid). This was the most successful formula for succeeding in the military coups that also brought Arab strongmen such as Muammar Qaddafi and Saddam Hussein to power. Although the minoritarian character of these regimes made them more durable in the face of internal dissent than the Egyptian and Tunisian regimes (i.e., made the military less likely to defect), it also made their demise much more violent.

Although the Jordanian regime has always been dependent on the support of the Transjordanian tribes and the Transjordanian-dominated army, its pillars have never been as narrow as those of the regimes mentioned above. The peculiar nature of the Jordanian state formation—where the tribes were integrated into rather than subjugated to the modern state—created, according to Yoav Alon, “a broad base of support for the state [and the regime] in Jordanian society, something that was lacking in many Middle Eastern countries and other new states in the colonial world” (2009: 151). Furthermore, the Hashemites came to present-day Jordan from Hejaz; that is, they did not themselves belong to a Jordanian tribe or region, and no monarch has married into the Transjordanian tribes. This means that the Hashemite regime, in contrast to several presidencies that emerged out of military coups—e.g., that of Asad, Qaddafi and Hussein—has not been heavily dependent on the support of a small region, a religious minority or a small number of tribes, that the ruling family belonged to (see Batatu 1984: 9-12) but has instead been able to operate “as an honest broker among tribes and prominent families” (Alon 2009: 154). Jordan did not achieve its political stability through a formula equivalent to “It takes a village to rule Syria.” The Jordanian regime’s relatively broad pillars make it easier for it to carry out political and economic reforms (and anti-corruption measures) that do not destroy its own basis.

These aspects of Jordan’s state and regime formation deeply influenced the shape of its Arab Spring. There was no Jordanian uprising in 2011 because, I
have suggested, its ruling family was not associated with corruption or minority rule in the same way as those of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya or Syria. Some observers claim, rather, that the absence of a Jordanian uprising in 2011 was due to the country’s complicated national identity, a claim that overestimates the political unity required to unite against the head of state. As uprisings such as the Libyan, Egyptian, and Iranian (in 1979) show, demonstrators who do not share a political vision can still unite to oust a country’s ruler.

The history of Jordanian regime formation and national identity is also the crucial backdrop for the most significant development during Jordan’s Arab Spring, the rise of the military veterans (see Chapter 2). This new opposition emerged from two of the traditional pillars of the Jordanian regime (the army and the Transjordanian tribes), and responded to what many Transjordanians saw as a break of the social contract between the Hashemite rulers and the tribes that “made Jordan.” Since his accession, King Abdullah has had a clear agenda of “modernization,” which is based on the belief that Jordan’s patronage system—and the state-dominated economy it is connected to—is economically unsustainable in the long run. The economic reforms initiated by the king has created a growing economy but has also led to the problem that has followed economic liberalization in so many other countries in the Middle East: A growing gap between rich and poor and the rise of a new class of businessmen that is succeeding in a globalized economy, whose conspicuous lifestyle gives rise to strong feelings of injustice. Among many Transjordanians, these sentiments have an “ethnic flavor” since Palestinian-Jordanians dominate the private sector.

The dominant role of Transjordanians in the state apparatus and in Jordanian nationalism also explains the low number of Palestinian-Jordanians in al-ḥarakāt. It is riskier for Palestinian-Jordanians to deal with the mukhābarāt, and a political movement that is seen as “Palestinian” risks facing serious opposition from a large segment of Transjordanian society, as the violence that targeted Youth of March 24 makes clear. Furthermore, the regime’s recent economic reforms are perceived with greater alarm among people with stakes in the patronage system and state-driven economy that are being dismantled.

Thus, in order to understand the relatively low level of demonstrations in Jordan during the Arab Spring, the demographics of these demonstrations, and the demands of the new Transjordanian opposition, it is crucial to turn to the history of the country’s regime formation and national identity. If these are the questions that interest us, it is useful to look at the center of Jordan’s political system and at a representative political movement, such as that in Dhiban (see Chapter 2). Nevertheless, many of the best scholarly works that study Arab politics by looking at the center of a political system and at representative political movements raise questions about the lack of democracy (e.g., Alon 2009: 153-154; Hammoudi 1997; Rogan 2009: 496-497), which sometimes are better answered by looking at more marginal experiences, like those
this study has focused on. If we want to understand something that is not realized—in this case a more democratic form of politics—it can be more useful to look at unusual attempts to establish such a politics than to look at the center and explain—through counterfactual arguments—why it is not more democratic.

The same applies to the scholarship on the Arab Spring. This is often written against the backdrop of the discrepancy between the promise, the hope, the spring!—and the more dismal reality that followed. Studies that ask why the Syrian political opposition fragmented, or why Egypt’s democratic transition broke down, or why authoritarian patterns were reproduced within these political oppositions, are dependent on an alternative that we know mostly through our counterfactual imagination: a somewhat united opposition capable of, to some extent at least, fulfilling the promise of bringing about a less authoritarian political system. These studies explain, more or less convincingly, why this imagined alternative was never realized.

A problem with these imagined alternatives, however, is that they cannot be studied empirically. Instead of explaining why an imagined democratic alternative never was realized, this thesis has studied a more concrete alternative that never was realized—a “movement” within the Jordanian protest movements that was characterized by a mode of politics based on dialogue and agreements—and explored what we can learn from that experience.

The study has thereby begun in the sort of moment—a time when what later happened was only one of many alternatives—that counterfactual historiography attempts to recover and thereby bring about an understanding of the past that does not read it in the light of what eventually happened (see Ferguson 1997; Paulsen 2014). “It is exceptionally rare,” James Scott (1998: 390) writes, “to find any historical account that stresses the contingencies. The very exercise of producing an account of a past event virtually requires an often counterfactual neatness and coherence . . . . The events . . . will be reread in light of that ending, with an air of inevitability being given to an act that may have been highly contingent.” One historiographical response to this “air of inevitability” is to focus on a moment when history did not seem inevitable. Responding to the objection that the counterfactual approach depends on facts that never existed, Niall Ferguson (1997: 86) writes, “We should consider as plausible only those alternatives which we can show on the basis of contemporary evidence that contemporaries actually considered.” Although I do not think that the events I have described during Jordan’s Arab Spring were highly contingent, my approach is based on taking seriously an alternative that people did actually consider. This has allowed us to direct the investigation toward a concrete rather than imagined alternative to the Arab Spring’s actual course of events.

Alternatives that contemporaries actually considered are of little interest to studies that view the events during the Arab Spring as mere crests of foam that
the tides of history carry on their strong backs. “My background as a historian,” Jean-Pierre Filiu writes, “soon led me to believe that this [wave of popular protest] was only the beginning of a long-term process, itself rooted in the two-century long and complex period known as the Arab renaissance, or Nahda” (2015: ix). Although the Arab Spring obviously has historical roots, to subsume events under a larger process, to give them an “air of inevitability,” means that the question of the discrepancy between promise and reality is no longer open to the unusual experiences and surprises that the Arab Spring brought with it.

The suggestion that the Arab Spring should not just be subsumed under a preexisting understanding of politics but that it rather offers an opportunity to rethink this understanding is of course far from unique. The idea was, for example, beautifully expressed by the Egyptian political activist Mahmoud Salem in July 2011. After describing how the more democratic society he and others attempted to build at Tahrir Square turned “into a parallel miniature Egypt, with all of its problems,” so quickly that it took everyone by surprise, he concluded that:

If Tahrir is a microcosm of modern day Egypt with all of its issues, and it managed to get there in a week, then being there for the next few days is crucial to understand what might happen in the next few years and how to prevent it. The lessons that we will learn from being there now, about our problems and the proposed solutions to solve them, is invaluable for a nation that is seeking a new beginning like ours, not one that we created from scratch like Tahrir was. All of those people with readymade solutions should go and try them out there before proposing it nation-wide. . . . Basically if you are interested in figuring out what the problems facing our society are and the best way to solve them, Tahrir is where you should be heading to right now. . . . Let’s go, and try, and fail and learn with us there, because that’s better done in Tahrir than in Egypt.

According to this idea, the society that people were building at Tahrir Square was utterly unimportant in the long run even though it filled the minds of its contemporaries, just like the political events Fernand Braudel encouraged historians to distrust. “Resounding events are often only momentary outbursts,” Braudel wrote, “surface manifestations of [the deeper currents of history] and explicable only in terms of them” (1995: 21). The importance of an event lies not necessarily in its political effects, however, but in it being an exercise and an experiment. Surface manifestation or not, it might be the best vantage point from which to observe the deeper currents.

This thesis has approached Jordan’s Arab Spring as such an experiment. It has focused on this unusual period, full of attempts to organize protest movements and of opportunities for activists and observers to discover and reflect on political forms that Jordanians, when they had freedom and enthusiasm, created at squares, streets and political meetings. My analyses have begun in
surprises generated during this period—and a congruence that appeared be-
tween politics, education and social life referred to in terms of *infitāḥ*—rather
than in a general analysis or history of the Jordanian regime or political oppo-
sition in which an event such as the March 24 sit-in only is a case in a broader
argument.

It may be difficult to take these attempts seriously some years later, when
the Arab Spring hardly evokes feelings of enthusiasm. Judged from their po-
itical effects, they were a waste of time. This was certainly the belief of their
initiators when they had the wisdom of hindsight. But the more general value
of these attempts lies perhaps precisely in their failures. “Man’s real treasure,”
Jose Ortega Gasset writes, “is the treasure of his mistakes, piled up stone by
stone through thousands of years” (1941: 81). If failure and being wrong are
experiences that we should remember and learn from, can a failed democratic
transition teach us more about democracy than a successful one? Reinhart
Koselleck has characterized the historiography of victors as “short-termed, fo-
cused on a series of events that, thanks to one’s merits, have brought about
one’s victory.” The historiography of the defeated, on the other hand, is de-
fined by a more genuine experience of a problem.

Their defining experience is that everything turned out other than they hoped.
They labour under . . . a greater burden of proof for having to show why events
turned out as they did—and not as planned. Therefore, they begin to search for
middle- and long-term factors to account for and perhaps explain the accident
of the unexpected outcome. There is something to the hypothesis that being
forced to draw new and difficult lessons from history yields insights of longer
validity and thus greater explanatory power. History may in the short term be
made by the victors, but historical wisdom is in the long run enriched more by
the vanquished.” [Quoted in Schivelbusch 2003: 4]

There are few traces of failures and defeats either in the scholarship on
deliberative democracy or in the literature on the Arab world that is guided by
the commitment to democracy. Here, an ethnography of an unusual period—
when everything seemed possible, and people tried, failed and learned—offers
an experience that normally is hard to access.

The experience of defeat that Koselleck describes has more general fea-
tures: The feeling of not finding the way and of estrangement from something
you previously had accepted and lived in that characterizes so much philo-
sophical thinking. It is from such experiences of uncertainty and estrangement
that we have reflected on social life, education, political activism, and the
“open discussion.”

This estrangement means that what for other people is just the background
against which life plays out emerges and becomes an object of reflection. The
guitar players and Samir lived in places with *infitāḥ*, but always perceived
them from the distance provided by the very different type of place they had
grown up in. Educators such as Mariam and Layla perceived the education of
the schools they worked in through the distance provided by their own schooling, in a different education system; a system they still perceived through the textbooks they were obliged to use, and the supervisors who visited their schools. Political activists like Zaid, Samir and Naseem took part in events that also defined other Jordanians’ impression of the Arab Spring, but in addition they perceived a broader cultural background against which these events took place, a background that emerged because of the distance these activists experienced toward the more common way of acting politically.

These types of reflections have a more philosophical character when they are also a response to an estrangement from the beliefs in which you once lived, acted, and took decisions. When Hussein (see Chapter 5) lived in another country, his ideas about the good society—which had been so evident for him that he had not been aware that they were ideas—appeared for him, and lost their hold. When he returned to Jordan, he did so with an uncertainty of how he should live. Political activists who were struck by the political movements’ difficulty to cooperate lost the framework in which they had understood democratic change. In some cases, this was a loss also of the framework in which they had understood their own activism. The loss involved an uncertainty about what role discussion and deliberation could have in political life, an uncertainty due to an increased awareness of vulnerabilities, not just the one everyone was aware of—the risk of persecution from the security services—but also the vulnerabilities of one’s own political life and ideals, and of the deliberations themselves.

These reflections imply a specific type of break with common sense. “The construction of a scientific object,” Pierre Bourdieu (1992: 235) writes, “requires first and foremost a break with common sense, that is, with the representations shared by all, whether they be the mere commonplaces of ordinary existence or official representations.” The ideal is the “radical doubt” of the modern philosophers, of Descartes and Leibniz: “Do not admit of anything that is not truly obvious;” the preconstructed is everywhere, also in scholarly works (Ibid: 218-253). But the methodological doubt of Descartes and Leibniz, the volitional questioning, was grounded in another type of doubt, which they were seized by rather than generated: the belief in the medieval worldview and the Aristotelian-Scholastic way of thinking, which lost their evidence with the advent of the new science. And this form of doubt—which means that ideas and practices in which you have acted and lived now appear empty and without basis—is a much more general feature of philosophical thinking than the methodological doubt of Descartes and Bourdieu (see Stenlund 2000: 175-219). It is this type of doubt, which is about a disorientation rather than a scientific methodology, this study has worked from.
The Arab Spring and political culture

This thesis has argued that there existed radically different ways of conducting politics within the Jordanian political movements that emerged in 2011, and that these different political forms deeply affected their ability to solve disputes and form demands. This became clear in relation to the experience of defeat discussed above, that is, in relation to failed attempts to coordinate these movements and specify their demands. In other words, the significance of these political forms appeared at the level of the political movements’ leadership, not at the level of people who just participated in demonstrations. Chapter 1 analyzed how oppositional groups coordinated during their most ambitious attempt to initiate a democratic transition during the Arab Spring (the sit-in on March 24); Chapter 2 analyzed how the ḥaraka in Dhiban coordinated with other protest groups, and Chapter 3 analyzed several attempts to coordinate protest groups in 2011-2012. In all these cases, I have analyzed the form of politics that was dominant among the protest movements with the help of the anthropological distance provided by a more marginal way of conducting politics.

The complexities of coordinating protest groups are overlooked when the Arab Spring is understood as a power struggle between an authoritarian regime and an opposition with demands for political liberalization. In Chapter 1, I showed that to understand the contradictory answers of what the sit-in on March 24 demanded, we must question a presupposition that observers had in their way of asking for the sit-in’s purpose and that participants had in their way of answering these questions: that the demonstration had common demands. Since common demands did not rise spontaneously, they could only have been created through some form of coordination, which, however, had not taken place. In Chapter 3, I showed that although some protest groups demanded “constitutional monarchy” and “political reforms,” these demands were so vague (except when certain political parties demanded this) that it is impossible to describe what they meant beyond a general dissatisfaction with corruption, the political system and the mukhābarāt’s interference in political life. Demonstrations during Jordan’s Arab Spring were rarely mediated by a discussion about demands that lasted more than five minutes. The more ambitious attempts to coordinate protest movements, like those I have described in Chapter 1 and 3, fell apart. The idea that the Jordanian opposition, if it had been more successful in a power struggle against the regime, could have transformed the political system into a more democratic or less corrupt alternative, was a chimera.

This idea was, among the Jordanian political organizers I have described, connected to a very specific way of conducting politics, and in a specific set of sentiments and values. According to this line of thinking, the problem was something bad at the top of the authoritarian regime. If the badness was destroyed, a better society would arise; a position indicated by the phrase “I am
against the government.” Since the solution was to remove this bad influence, it was not very important to develop demands or have a clear sense of an alternative political society. The great political creativity of an organizer like Mohammed al-Sneid (Chapter 2) was oriented toward how to succeed in a power struggle against the regime. The courage to stand up against the regime and confront it was the highest political virtue. The herald of the better society was not a growing civic culture but a great uprising.

This understanding—according to which authoritarian rule is changed through a power struggle between the regime and “the people” or “the opposition,” in which the breaking of the “barrier of fear” is of great political significance, and in which courage is the great political virtue—defined much of the early literature on the Arab Spring (e.g., Goldstone 2011; Ryan 2011; Sa’adah 2015; Tripp 2014). As mentioned, it was the underlying understanding in much of the literature dealing with the role of information technology in changing authoritarian rule in the Arab world (e.g., Aday et al: 2012, 2013; Allam 2014; Alexander and Aouragh 2014; Tudoroiu 2014; Tufekci and Wilson 2012) as well as in scholarship that traces the resilience of authoritarianism to the power structure of the central authority (e.g., Filiu 2015). The political sentiment this literature is connected to can be illustrated through Thanassis Cambanis’s claim that the Egyptian uprising was “a primal story of human beings shattering the chains that bind them, and striking against a power that oppresses them” (2016: 3). To break chains, you need strength! To strike against the power that oppresses you, you need courage! These are scholarly analyses, but it is a political activist that takes the decisive leaps of thought. We do not want to force this activist into a “normative” corner; from there, he will only exert his influence in a more covert form. Our method is instead to bring this activist to Jordan’s “roundabouts and political meetings,” to let him—to speak in the words of Mahmoud Salem—“go, and try, and fail and learn with us there.” And what then happens with the research results?

Moreover, when looking at attempts to coordinate the Jordanian protest movements through the medium of talk, it becomes clear that they fell apart due to something more general than ethnic, ideological or regional divisions. The Jordanian opposition was indeed marked by historical conflicts between leftists and Islamists—from when Jordan was a “battlefield” between the secular opposition (e.g., Arab nationalists and leftists) and the Hashemite regime (which the Muslim Brotherhood then supported)—and between Transjordanian-dominated movements such as the military veterans and political parties dominated by Palestinian-Jordanians, like those that emerged from the armed resistance against Israel.

Nevertheless, some conflicts that come in the shape of ethnic and ideological divisions should not necessarily be understood in such terms. In Chapter 1, I argued that what for many leaders of the sit-in on March 24 appeared as conflicts between political groups with different views on the Palestinian issue were actually conflicts rooted in misunderstandings that were caused by the
way these groups formed their demands and reached agreements. In Chapter 2, I argued that although Haraka Dhiban’s politics was animated by the sentiment that “we, the true Jordanians, are losing the country to Palestinians,” its polemical way of relating to Palestinian-Jordanians was a reflection of not only the exclusion of Palestinian-Jordanians from Jordanian nationalism but also of a more general polemical form of politics. Palestinian-Jordanians, the government, and the Muslim Brotherhood were all political adversaries, and Jordanian society would be better without them. Political action was here about confronting or removing the privileges of adversaries rather than a civic cooperation that tried to find solutions to problems Jordanians had in common. In the case of Haraka Hayy al-Tafaila (Chapter 3), I argued that such a polemical form was evident not only in how the haraka’s leaders related to the regime and other political groups but also to members of their own political group.

This form of politics was widely shared among al-harakāt and contributed to the protest movement’s fragmentation in at least two ways. First, it led to a more polemical way of relating to other oppositional political groups and therefore increased the difficulty to reach agreements and specify demands through discussions. Second, it made demand formation and—for some but not all harakas—even the most elementary coordination superfluous since a better society could be created by simply confronting the regime.

The presence or absence of polemics in the ways political groups conducted their politics was connected to broader currents, which is indicated by the fact that infītāḥ—which was used to refer to a nonpolemical way of conducting politics—could also refer to education and places. Chapter 4 discussed the orientation toward dialogue and reservation of judgement as a general cultural form, manifested in education as well as in politics. The chapter distinguished education structured by such ideals from teaching based on rote learning and from social and human sciences structured by a more Manichean way of understanding historical conflicts and by the aim of vindicating an all-encompassing form of Islam. Chapter 5 described how the relative inclusiveness of a politics based on infītāḥ drew on social forms at “places with infītāḥ,” especially on the “soft” pattern of interaction and ethnic and social diversity that characterize their social life.

Political fragmentation that appears in the shape of ethnic, tribal or regional divisions can be understood in terms of political form or ethos also in another sense. When the authoritarian regimes in countries such as Yemen, Libya and Syria started to crumble or fell apart, the result was not democracy but a fragmentation of society into subnational groups. This development did not happen in countries with a stronger national identity, such as Egypt and Tunisia. Nevertheless, this type of fragmentation can also be understood in terms of political form rather than identity. As mentioned, several political regimes in the Middle East have been constructed according to the formula that Joshua Landis, in relation to Syria’s Ba’thist regime, referred to as “it takes a village
to rule Syria.” Even regimes with an explicit pan-Arab ideology have often been built on patronage relations that primarily worked along sectarian, kinship, regional and tribal lines. The same applies to the Jordanian parliament, to most of the country’s protest movements, and to most—though not all—of its political parties. As I discussed in Chapter 4, a Jordanian candidate for parliament can ask people to support either him or his ideas. In the former case, he will mostly get support from people from his tribe, kin, or village or city of origin. Thus, what appears as “ethnic divisions” is partly an effect of a form of politics based on patronage rather than common causes and ideas.

This is not a novel point. Observers have pointed out that the absence of political parties and a civil society in a country like Syria meant that few institutions and civic traditions could capture and represent the public dissent that emerged in 2011 (e.g., Abboud 2015). According to this idea, the more repressive a regime is, the more likely it is that its fall will lead to a fragmentation of society into smaller groups.

Instead of linking a politics based on ideas to civil society associations, however, this thesis has linked it to a reformulation of a paradigm of authority, where authority becomes vested in a higher cause or standard rather than in a person. Chapter 4 argued that a similar reformulation can be seen in relation to authority figures in political parties, protest movements and schools. The chapter argued that this reformulation is connected to teaching practices such as putting chairs in circles, student evaluations and encouraging students to pose questions during the lesson, and a shift from rote learning to reasoning more generally.

There is another difficulty with explaining the persistence of authoritarianism in terms of identity rather than a form of politics. “[Arab] nationalism,” Adeed Dawisha (2016: 297-298) writes, “operated throughout its glory days in a sea of authoritarianism, and this happened not because of some unfortunate circumstance. . . . ‘Arab nationalist thinkers . . . had looked at the crucial problem confronting them and their people as one of identity rather than as one of institutions. The question was, who is an Arab, not how can the Arabs build a common political life and effective institutions of government?’”

Hugh Roberts (2013) makes a similar point when claiming that to understand the persistence of authoritarianism in Egypt, we must take into account “the radical absence of republican political thought in the societies of the region.”

In Chapter 3, I similarly argued that an emphasis on political programs and infitāḥ was dependent on an ideological shift, away from “foreign issues”—

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2 The last part of the quote (where Dawisha in his turn quotes Stephen Humphreys) actually comes before the former, but the order still portrays his argument accurately.

3 “When Egyptian intellectuals complained of tawrith al-sulta (the Mubaraks’ apparent project of constituting themselves into a dynasty) it wasn’t obvious that they were defending any republican principle: they were, rather, reasserting the fact that since 1952 the state had not been a monarchy” (Roberts 2013).
e.g., the struggle against Israel and Arab unity—to the idea that Jordan’s woes should be addressed by democratic institutions, the rule of law and political parties based on political programs. It was dependent on an ideological focus on institutions and openness rather than identity.

Taken together, this offers a way to think about the Arab Spring’s fragmentation and the replication of the authoritarian structures within its opposition groups in terms of a broader political culture. This is not just my own analysis, but, as we have seen, several Jordanians who during the Arab Spring were involved in attempts to set up discussions between political groups made similar points. Democratization was, they thought, a change that was not only political, but also cultural.

Some readers might view such a change of political cultural as a Westernization. Jordanians with ideals such as political parties based on ideas and programs, constitutional democracy, and participatory pedagogy do indeed look at Western examples. More generally, Timothy Garton Ash has noticed (in 2009) that the largest cohort of successful velvet revolutions—the kind of peacefully negotiated regime changes that took place in countries like Poland and Czechoslovakia in 1989—“is in just one region of the world—post-communist Europe—and most have so far been within the cultural-historical West, if that is taken . . . to include Latin America and the world of Orthodox Christianity.” The country with the most successful Arab Spring (Tunisia) was, some authors have pointed out (e.g., Kaplan 2011), ruled by an “Arab Ataturk”—Habib Bourguiba—for its first three decades after independence and has due to its geographical location been more oriented toward Europe than most other Arab countries have been.

Writing about the emergence of an Indonesian Islamic democracy movement, Robert Hefner, on the other hand, emphasizes that its adoption of democratic ideals should not be understood as a “Westernization” but as a “more subtle interaction between the local and the (relatively) global” (2000: 8-9). In the Jordanian case, such a more complex cultural interaction can be illustrated with the country’s state and nation formation. As discussed previously, Jordan’s state-formation was characterized by an integration rather than subjugation of the Transjordanian tribes into the state that was formed during the British mandate. The political structure that emerged combined features of the traditional political system and Western-inspired aspects of government promoted by British officials. Also today, many members of parliament, cabinet ministers and high government officials reach their positions through the support of their tribe, and these positions are distributed according to a system of power sharing: “Tribal figures keep detailed mental lists of how many ministers, MPs, and military figures various tribes have produced,” and heads of government seek to ensure that the major tribes are represented in the cabinet, “at times regardless of qualifications” (see Embassy Amman 2009b). Jobs at some institutions are reserved for specific tribes; for example, although members of Tarawneh have high positions in the army, few have them in the Air
Force. Peter Gubser reported how the educated classes in Karak in the 1960s were frustrated with the presence of this traditional system, which they saw “as unjust and immoral; only the rule of modern law and a central government founded on the principles of social justice are acceptable to them. . . . They see the educated elite gaining complete political control in neighboring countries like Syria, Iraq, and Egypt, and, in turn, feel cheated that Jordan remains a kingdom with strong tribal influences” (1973: 133-143). It was the remains of the traditional political system, however—a result of the “integration” mentioned above—that created a political system that in the long run has been more stable and less corrupt than the “more modern” political systems that these educated men wished for.

Similarly, Jordanian nationalism has not been defined against tribal identities, but tribes have rather played a dominant role in it. This was not only an invented tradition, where tribal history was imagined according to a modern nationalistic logic, but the national community was, in its turn, imagined according to a logic that drew on sentiments and idioms that predate the colonial period (see Shryock 1997). The role of Transjordanian tribes in Jordanian nationalism means that Palestinian-Jordanians often are excluded from the imagined community, but it has also allowed for a relatively strong identification with the Jordanian state among Transjordanians, which is one reason for Jordan’s remarkable political stability (Alon 2009). The relative success of Jordanian state and nation formation was thus due to them not being just a top-down process or an “imitation” of European political structures but instead having a certain hybrid character.

Is this also the case for the formation of a democratic culture? It is at least difficult to imagine a successful Jordanian political party whose moral foundation is not based on Islam and which does not manage to adjust to Jordan’s tribe-based political system. A political form needs local roots to survive. “Westernization,” however, often refers to a specific attitude in which a cultural change is introduced. In Misquoting Muhammed, Jonathan Brown distinguishes between two different ways of arguing against the evident meaning of Qur’an verse 4:34—which seems to condone wife beating—exemplified by two different speakers at the Eid dinner of the Muslim Student Association at Georgetown University.

The professor and the shaykh were delivering the same message. Both rejected categorically the evident meaning of Qur’an verse 4:34, refusing to accept that Islam’s sacred scripture could condone domestic violence. But the approaches and appeals of the two speakers differed dramatically. The first speaker attacked tradition from outside it, appealing to the authority of ‘this day and age.’ The second mounted a defense of tradition from within, deriving authority by acting as an indigenous and trusted bearer of sacred knowledge. The first speaker, in effect, defied the text of the Qur’an, restricting it to its pre-modern origins by admitting its anachronism and breaking the yoke of tradition. The second
speaker claimed that there was no contradiction between the Qur’an and modern justice. There was no anachronism, just misunderstanding. [2014: 270]

When Bernard Lewis refers to Turkey’s experiment with political freedom as a “domestic Westernization” and Robert Hefner refers to Indonesia’s democracy movement as a subtler interaction between the local and the global, the difference has something to do with the different attitudes with which these political projects were carried out. Lewis’s understanding of the changes of Turkish society during Ataturk’s rule—which he understands as “Westernization”—is dictated by the fact that “among the Turks, the two terms most frequently used to denote their revolution are nationalism and Westernization—and the two are not, as in other parts of the world, in contradiction with another” (1968: 485). The Islamic democracy movement Hefner writes about, on the other hand, was driven by a sense that Islam, properly understood, supports a democratic culture and that such a culture does not require a comprehensive Westernization.

Similar differences in appeals are reflected in the projects discussed in this thesis. When the history teacher at School Z (see Chapter 4) told her students “do not show that you are a Muslim in the answer; show that you are a history student,” and when the English teacher at another international school told her students, in a discussion about abortion, “Great, it is ḥarām; put it on the side, that is religion; now you argue with me [about] your opinion, why is it ḥarām?” they both appealed to a form of reasoning that was independent of revealed religion. In the former case, the authority of what the students perceived to be their religious history was replaced by the authority of the historical sciences, while, in the latter case, religious authority was suspended rather than replaced. Other projects claimed to draw inspiration from cultural forms that many Jordanians identified and were familiar with. The attempt to create a democratic political party in Karak, for example (see Chapter 4), was presented as a return to institutions that had existed in the same place at an earlier time and as a form of politics with similarities to the early Muslim community. Describing all this as “Westernization” signals a tone deafness to the rhetorical and imaginative variety through which these kinds of projects were presented and understood, and without which they hardly could be successful.

Whatever the specific form the rhetoric and imagination took, the congruence between projects at squares, schools and cafes—which became possible to see with the emergence of infitāḥ as a theme at all these places—offers an alternative way to think about political opening. “Opening” as a political term is more commonly used in the sense of easing up repression, reducing censorship, and allowing civil society more freedom (cf. apertura). The glasnost (openness) referred to by Soviet reformers, for instance, was part of a set of major reforms that would restructure what the Soviet reformers understood as the Stalinist legacy—the vast state apparatus and the great bureaucratic control of society. These reforms included managerial decentralization of state-
run industrial and agricultural enterprises, privatization, and increased economic and political competition, the latter by introducing multi-candidate elections to the new parliament, at soviets and workplaces, and inside the Communist Party (Cohen 1989: 14-16). They were directed against a state that was seen as excessively penetrative in political as well as economic and cultural matters.4

In contrast, the infitāḥ studied in this thesis emerged as a theme during a brief political opening in Jordan that followed the toppling of the Tunisian and Egyptian presidents. The concept of infitāḥ was not a call for a political liberalization but arose as a response to problems that appeared during one. Such problems have become well known after the Arab Spring. The chaos and violence that attempts for regime change in the Middle East often have led to since the Iraqi war have given more credence to the Russian “authoritarian solution” for the Middle East, a solution that Joshua Landis (2015) describes as follows:

Russia looks at the Middle East and says: “We need a strong man; there needs to be stability or things will crumble.” Look at Russia at the time of Perestroyka, when insecurity reigned and the country was weak. I think, the President says: “We need somebody strong.” . . . Unfortunately, in Syria, the Assads have been intoning this slogan of “Amn wa istiqrar,” “security and stability” for 45 years. Clearly, many Syrians were fed up with it and hoped to break out of this Hobbesian choice. But the situation in Syria has gotten so bad over the last four and a half years that many Syrians are embracing dictatorship again. They want authority over chaos and stability over insecurity, even at the cost of living under dictatorship and giving up political freedoms. . . . Whether it’s Erdogan in Turkey, Saddam Hussein in Iraq, or the monarchy of Saudi Arabia, [Putin] believes that strong state authority is necessary.5

Although few serious thinkers still have faith in rapid regime change, this authoritarian response is hardly a long-term solution to political instability. Comparing countries such as Jordan, Egypt, Syria and Libya, we can almost conclude that the more authoritarian the political system is, the more chaotic and bloody is the “freedom” that eventually erupts. A few Jordanians understood their “munfatiḥ projects” through that longer time frame. Jordan’s political system would eventually be destabilized, they thought. “When this happens,” one of them reasoned, “a more democratic political culture must be in place. If not, the future may be violent.”

4 There are obviously also political actors and analysts (e.g., Naar 2010) who perceive the Arab world’s problems in terms of an oversized state that is too penetrative in economic issues (see also Malik and Awadallah 2013).

5 The last sentence is from Landis 2017.
References


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Sammanfattning på svenska

Denna studie är en undersökning av den arabiska vårens ursprung i Jordanien i synnerhet och i Mellanöstern mer allmänt. Baserat på etnografiskt fältarbete bland de jordanska proteströrelsernas ledarskap föreslår den ett nytt sätt att förstå varför dessa rörelser föll samman.

Ett återkommande mönster bland de politiska rörelser som uppstod i arabvärlden 2011 är att den enighet som ursprungligen uppvisades på gator och torg aldrig gav upphov till livskraftiga koalitioner utan med tiden löstes upp. Studien visar att försök att koordinera den jordanska oppositionen var baserade på en form av politik som var ovanlig såväl bland proteströrelsernas ledarskap som deras motståndare. Försöken präglades av en politik byggd på idéer och program snarare än klientelism, och på vad vissa jordanier beskrev som ”infitāḥ” (öppenhet) och kontrasterade mot en mer polemisk form av politik.
