Challenging and Transforming Frames in Jordan: identity, inequality, and the Jordanian Al-Ḥirāk Al-Shabābī (Youth Movement)

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Abstract

The political and social significance of new transformational dynamics since the Arab uprisings of 2011 have been of central interest for academia and the degree of novelty in these dynamics has been widely assessed and debated. In Jordan, analytical frameworks based on traditional understandings of identity and identity politics have ignored a new and transforming dynamic of identity reconstruction mobilised by activists of the Jordanian Al-Ḥirāk Al-Shabābī (Youth Movement) and that will be relevant for the future development of political participation in the country. This paper argues that this movement has mobilised transformative frames that challenge and fundamentally transform the traditional discourse around identity politics by mobilising socio-economic grievances, as well as issues of class and inequality. This paper takes on a framing alignment process analysis, and therefore explores strategic framing processes as a conversation between the state and social movements. The analysis addresses first, the historical state-led process of identity politics and its effects on Jordan’s socio-economic and political reality. Based on extensive fieldwork periods of participant observation of the movement, the second part of the analysis turns the focus to the way in which activists of the movement have strategically mobilised frames that challenge the state-led discourse and intend to re-construct identity today.

Key words: identity, inequality, Jordan, youth, framing processes, collective action, social fragmentation
Introduction

The political and social significance of new transformational dynamics since the Arab uprisings of 2011 have been of central interest for academia and the degree of novelty in these dynamics has been widely assessed and debated. In Jordan, analytical frameworks based on traditional understandings of identity and identity politics have ignored a new and transforming dynamic of identity reconstruction mobilised by activists of the Jordanian Al-Ḥirāk Al-Shabābī (Youth Movement) and that will be relevant for the future development of political participation in the country. This paper argues that this movement has mobilised transformative frames that challenge and fundamentally transform the traditional discourse around identity politics by mobilising socio-economic grievances, as well as issues of class and inequality. This paper takes on a framing alignment process analysis, and therefore explores strategic framing processes as a conversation between the state and social movements. The analysis addresses first, the historical state-led process of identity politics and its effects on Jordan’s socio-economic and political reality. Based on extensive fieldwork periods of participant observation of the movement, the second part of the analysis turns the focus to the way in which activists of the movement have strategically mobilised frames that challenge the state-led discourse and intend to re-construct identity today.

PART I. Strategic Framing Processes in Social Movement Theory

In this first part of the paper, I aim to present the theoretical framework that I will be using to analyse the transforming frames in Jordan. More specifically, this first part presents the concept of framing processes used by Political Process theorists, and argues that it is a useful tool to analyse the case of the Jordanian Al-Ḥirāk Al-Shabābī (Youth Movement). In order to do so, I first define the
concept of framing processes within the theoretical framework of Political Process Theory (PPT) and its main assumptions, including how frames conceptually link to identity as one of the key aspects of my analysis. Finally, I will present framing processes as an active phenomenon determined by both social movement participants and the state.

I will now turn to presenting the concept of framing processes, which has been mobilized by Political Process theorists. Framing has been defined as ‘conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action’ (McAdam et al., 1996 p. 6). The model especially focuses on movements that have been “excluded from political power and legal rights” and that direct their demands to the state and to state policies (Gamson, 1975). It is important to refer to two different assumptions of PPT that are relevant for the conceptualization of framing processes. First, this framework perceives activists as rational actors in collective action, therefore framing processes in this sense are seen as ‘an active, processual phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction’ (Benford and Snow, 2000 p.614). Second, PPT recognises that ‘activists’ prospects for advancing particular claims, mobilizing supporters, and affecting influence are context-dependent” (Meyer, 2004 p. 126) and that “social movements cannot be isolated from contentious politics as a whole” (McAdam et al., 1997 p. 163).

In this model, framing processes are strategized by social movements in response to existing conceptualizations of politics and society in a given context. Strategizing these processes results in frame alignment processes which are ‘framing processes that are deliberative, utilitarian, and goal directed: frames are developed and deployed to achieve a specific purpose—to recruit new members, to mobilize adherents, to acquire resources, and so forth’ (Benford and Snow, 2000 p. 624). Moreover, as suggested by Tarrow, frame alignment processes are strategies put forward by social movements in first, an attempt to replace ‘a dominant belief system that legitimizes the status quo with an alternative mobilizing belief system that supports collective action for change,’ and second, ‘to gain support and mark themselves off from opponents’ (2011 p. 106). Finally, according to the framework, ‘identity constructions are an
inherent feature of the framing process’ (Benford and Snow, 2000 pp. 631-632) and play a key role in the process of framing by social movement participants.

Benford and Snow present four main frame alignment processes: bridging, amplification, extension, and transformation (Benford and Snow, 2000 pp. 624-625). For the purpose of this analysis, we focus on frame transformation, which is concerned with the SM strategy of ‘changing old understandings and meanings and/or generating new ones’. This theoretical tool will enable us to analyse the way in which the Jordanian Youth Movement is re-conceptualizing identity in Jordan and challenging traditional political identity discourses to offer an alternative belief system that could favour youth collective action and unity for change.

As well as social movement participants, the state plays a key role in framing processes according to PPT framework. Framing is not only carried out by social movement activists, but also by the state. This makes it a contested process during which movement leaders have to compete with authorities (Tarrow, 2011 p. 145) in strategizing frames that are resonant in society. PPT creates a link between framing processes and the role of the state through the assumption that regime counter-strategies involve ‘contingent identities, historically-constructed frames of shared understanding, and variable political opportunity structure’ (Tilly, 1998). The analysis of these counter-frames or state-directed frames of political and social understanding has to take into account ‘phenomena such as nationalism, revolution, ethnic conflict, and creation of transnational institutions’ (Tilly, 1998). Only by including the role of the state in forming and framing identity politics, will we be able, therefore, to provide a holistic approach to the study of framing processes in the Jordanian Youth Movement.

PART II. Contextualising Political Identity Frames in Jordan

In this second part of the paper, I now turn towards contextualising political identity frames in Jordan. The aim of this part is first to present the way political identity frames have been developed historically in what I argue is an intentional
state-led process. Then, this second part of the paper aims to examine the social effects of this state-led political identity framing process in Jordanian society today. In order to do so, I divide the analysis into the major events that have determined the process, which are the first waves of Palestinian refugees in the 1950s, the Black September conflict in 1970, and the beginning of the economic process of liberalisation in the 1990s. I will explore the way in which these events have brought about major shifts in the process of state-led framing identity politics in Jordan.

Political Identity in Traditional State-Led Frames

In Jordan, the multiplicity of identities deployed historically, reinforced through different episodes of conflict, has resulted in current social fragmentation along several lines: ethnical (Transjordanian/Palestinian-Jordanian), urban/rural, class, gender, or generations.

First, the component of historical identitarian division that has been central to exploring social fragmentation in Jordan has been the ethnical Transjordanian/Palestinian-Jordanian divide. To talk about ethnicity in Jordan means to refer back to the historical construction of ethnic divisions through an identity politics strategy put forward by the regime and through warfare and refugee construction in neighbouring countries. Transjordanian identity finds its roots in the 'ashira (large clan or tribe), which works as a base of affiliation and source of prestige and patronage. This community is constituted by tribes or clans that belong to the land that now forms the modern state of Jordan, making them what is popularly referred to as ‘urdunī-urdunī’ ('original' Jordanian). This origin has been a discursive legitimiser of their position as first-class citizens vis-à-vis the state. On the other hand, Palestinian-Jordanians, or Jordanians of Palestinian origin, base their communal identity on an ‘attachment to the village or town of origin, a sense of loss of homeland and of gross injustice at the hands of the international community, and the centrality of the notion of return’ (Brand, 1995 pp. 48-49).

The question of constructing the Jordanian national identity started being a concern for the Jordanian state in the 1950s, with the first waves of Palestinian refugees. During those years, the state’s official goal was to create a hybrid Jordanian identity for both communities, which included the following
elements: association with the Monarchy; commitment to, and expression of, Arabism; commitment to Palestine; and the unity of the two peoples (Brand, 1995 pp. 50-52). However, according to Brand, the bases of communal identity tension between Jordanians of Palestinian origin and Transjordanians are historical, and have since then resulted in ‘a crisis of identity’ (1995) or ‘a country that does not agree on what it means to be Jordanian’ (AI23-04.11.14). However, these two major communal identities are not as homogeneous as it might seem at a first glance, and historical identity politics has created further complexities within them.

The first relevant period to understand identity politics in Jordan is the 1950s, which can be characterised as a period when the tribal base of regime support was consolidated and the discourse of Transjordanian ethnical loyalty began. Political dissent, in the form of the Jordanian National Movement, was successfully destroyed in April 1957 by the state, that effectively mobilized its existing ‘support from key components of society’ such as the ‘king’s men’, Bedouin tribesmen in the Army, peasants, and merchants (Anderson, 2005).

The way in which the King used its support base to retain power when faced with major opposition on the street during the 1950s has been considered a moment in which hopes for real participatory politics ended in Jordan (Milton-Edwards and Hinchcliffe, 2009 p. 36). In Anderson’s words, the strategies put forward by the state that resulted in its survival and in the destruction of the JNM are an example of how a ‘colonialist-designed state can generate support and garner a degree of legitimacy from the population’ (2005 p. 191). This designed networked support base will be crucial in understanding identity politics exercised until today.

The second event that has contributed to strengthening the identity politics discourse in Jordan, and that has affected the social politization of both communities in different ways was the Black September war of 1970. After a decade of rising tensions between the fedayeen guerrillas, Fateh and the PFLP, and the Jordanian regime, during which Palestinian groups had gained confidence and had taken an active role in Jordanian domestic politics, there was a clash between these powers in September 1970. The Black September 1970 War in Jordan was the first apparent example of the conflicting interests between the Palestinian cause and the Arab states (Taylor, 1982, p. 77) and
‘the limitations of the Palestinian armed struggle did not become obvious’ until then and until the ‘guerrillas’ expulsion from the country in 1970-71’ (Sayigh, 1997 p. 25).

This conflict, together with state-led identity politics, determined the development of inter-communal identity-based tensions at different levels. First, in terms of discourse, it strengthened feelings of distrust from Transjordanians towards Palestinian-Jordanians. In Transjordanians’ estimations, the Palestinians were not just ungrateful for the refuge that Jordan had provided them, they were also traitors, real or potential’ (Brand, 1995 p. 53). A much broader sense of Transjordanianness and a strengthened discourse of “East Banker first” increased after the war (Brand, 1995 p. 56).

Second, it resulted in a sense of insecure citizenship status among the Jordanian-Palestinian community and in a diminished sense of citizenship (Antoun, 2000 p. 442). Political integration of refugees since 1948, ‘most of whom were granted citizenship after Jordan annexed the West Bank in 1950, was reversed after the 1970-1971 “Black September” civil war’ (2012 p. 1). The feeling of insecurity in terms of citizenship status was heightened in 1988 with King Hussein’s decision to end administrative ties with the West Bank, leading to ‘the overnight loss of citizenship for roughly 1.5 million’ Palestinian-Jordanians (2012 p. 12).

Finally, it resulted in a separation of both communities into the public and private sectors. The Transjordanian/Palestinian-Jordanian identity fault line roughly intersects with ‘a private-public sector divide’ with urban-rural implications (2012 p. 5). After the war, and with an increased discourse that portrayed Palestinian-Jordanians as ‘traitors’, this community’s engagement with the public sector and the security apparatus was reduced, leading them to invest in the private sector, localised in urban centres, mainly in the capital Amman. At the same time, loyal Transjordanians became main beneficiaries of the public sector, including economic subsidies, governmental jobs, and jobs in the army. Tribal rivalries among the Transjordanian communal identity have resulted from the system of subsidies put forward by the state, created tensions among economically disenfranchised tribal and rural areas.
Economically, the beginning of the liberalization process in the 90s benefitted Palestinian-Jordanians in the private sector, where they had managed to play ‘a leading role’ (2012 p. 2). Benefits of economic liberalization concentrated in urban areas, economically marginalising rural communities, Transjordanians ‘who traditionally benefited from ties to the state’ (2012 p. 2). This once again fuelled a ‘nationalist’ Transjordanian discourse that promoted them as loyalists in opposition to ‘greedy capitalists or treacherous Islamists, disloyal and unpatriotic’ Jordanian-Palestinians (2012 p. 2).

The intersection of communal identities with this economic and urban-rural divide, although a relevant analytical explanation to present these communities, is not as linear as it might seem at first. Urban economic development was unequal, and benefits concentrated in the capital Amman among other urban nuclei and not in the whole of Amman but in West Amman only. Palestinian-Jordanians therefore form today a significant part of the urban poor that are economically and socially marginalized. Moreover, not all members of the Transjordanian community have remained economically marginalized in rural areas. Rural-urban migrations by members and families of these communities have resulted in the presence of Transjordanians established in cities that are also part of the economic elite.

*The Social Effects of State-Led Identity Politics*

I will now turn to analyse the effects of the aforementioned state-led process of identity politics on the Jordanian society. The aim is to present the impact that this identity politics has had in society, particularly in terms of social fragmentation and political discourse, in order to set the basis to understand why I argue in the following section that the framing processes put forward by the Jordanian Youth Movement in terms of re-thinking ethnicity and mobilising class inequality can be considered a challenging and transformational development in the opposition political discourse in Jordan.

The first major effect of identity politics framed by the state in the aforementioned historical process is the issue of social fragmentation. This
point is key to understand collective action today in Jordan. In the words of Bernstein, ‘identity politics precludes the articulation of a universal vision for social change’ (Bernstein, 2005 p. 51). An example of how the Jordanian political system affects social fragmentation is found in the electoral law (Hussainy, 2014). According to Hussainy, the system ‘generates inequality in voting power among the various electoral districts’ (2014 p. 4). The electoral system results in a clear variation in representation of social groups in base of their ethnic identity:

‘The most blatant and politically charged form of electoral discrimination revolves around over-representation of predominantly East Bank, rural Jordanians and under-representation of predominantly Jordanian-Palestinian urban ones’ (2012 p. 6).

The system in itself is inevitably therefore creating an intersection between identity politics and social politization, or the way in which different areas and communities participate in politics. The social groups that are under-represented by the system, mainly ‘urban areas and refugee camps populated by Palestinian-Jordanians form a key Brotherhood support base’ (2012 p. 5). Moreover, the system, as it is designed, keeps feeding the identitarian fragmentation within society, and some consider that the unfair representation leads to ‘a fragmentation of society and endangers the social peace’ (Hussainy, 2014 p. 11).

Identity politics strengthened through the way in which the Jordanian politics are framed, as in the example of the aforementioned electoral law, critically affects political discourse in the sense that identity-based groups tend to demand group-based benefits. This is evident in the way in which traditional as well as the so-called ‘alternative’ opposition works today in Jordan. In the political context in Jordan, the multiple opposition groups can be analytically classified into official opposition and alternative opposition (Bustani, 2011a, Bustani, 2011b). First, official opposition groups in Jordan are those legalized opposition parties and professional associations which have ‘weak reformist goals that constitute a continuation of its failed course since martial law ended in Jordan in 1989’ (Bustani, 2011a). The official opposition in Jordan is formed
by: Islamists, including the Muslim Brotherhood and its political wing the Islamic Action Front (IAF); Nationalists, including the two Ba'thist parties, connected to the Iraqi and the Syrian factions; and the traditional Left, including the Jordanian Communist Party, the Popular Unity Part, or the People's Democratic Party. This official opposition has been consistently criticised since 1989 for their absorption into the regime structure and their inability to bring about substantive political and social change (Al01-31.07.13).

Second, the alternative opposition, as Hisham Bustani names it, present themselves as the option capable of filling the political void. Its main characteristics are: an “East Bank Jordanian” isolationist character; it bases itself on a post-colonial identity that does not enjoy internal consensus; it resonates with the political authority’s identity propaganda “Jordan First” and “We are all Jordan”, which are regime led campaigns to build a “Jordanian national identity”; and has close ties to the “old guard”, one of the two competing factions in the regime that has been marginalized since King Abdullah II’s ascent to the throne (Bustani, 2011a). These groups of the alternative opposition (except for the National Progressive Current, the National Committee of Military Veterans, and the Nationalists’ Progressive Current) have tried to organize and managed to form the Movement of the Jordanian People (Al-Hirak Al-Sha’b Al-Urduny) in September 2011, and all of them took part in the Jordanian Campaign for Change Jayeen. The alternative opposition is seen as ‘the regime’s answer to those groups who are frustrated with the classical parties who came out and wanted to have a voice during the late 2006, 2007, 2008, when this neo-liberal economics really kicked-in in Jordan and the social manifestations started to appear’ and ‘the social arm of the old guard in a way, the political social progressive arm’ (Al01-31.07.13).

This whole system results in what we can classify as the ‘winners’ or those who benefit, and ‘losers’ or those that are marginalised by the system. First, the winners of the traditional state-led identity politics framing include: social powers, economic elites, and political leaders; religious associations, tribal leaders, beneficiaries of private sector, regime, state institutions, including
members of political parties. Individuals that belong to all these organisations have varied identitarian backgrounds, and all benefit from the identity politics and social fragmentation that derives from it because the system grants them benefits that empower them. In words of a Jordanian blogger interviewed for this research:

‘there is this mutual subconscious maybe interest I would say, from the majority of both these parties, to maintain the status quo, because however bad it is, the political status quo, it remains kind of in the favour for everyone because it spells out one thing which is ‘stability’. And stability and security are the paramount, the ethos of this country, and it is engrained in Jordanians from when we go to school, when we grow up, it is a security-minded and stability-minded population’ (AI23-04.11.14).

The situation that results from the historically state-led identity politics and the liberalisation process in Jordan also has losers. Among them are the major economically marginalized social groups, which is particularly relevant in a society with huge economic disparities like Jordan. Among the major losers of this system are youth, the unemployed, or women, which are marginalized economically, politically, and socially.

PART III. The Jordanian Youth Movement: Mobilising Frames to Challenge Identity Politics and Mobilise Inequality

In this third and final part of the paper, I will now turn to analyse the way in which the Jordanian Youth Movement has mobilised frames that challenge the traditional state-led identity politics. I argue that participants in the Jordanian Youth Movement have mobilised transformative frames that challenge and fundamentally transform the traditional discourse around identity politics by mobilising socio-economic grievances, as well as issues of class and inequality.

In order to do so, I first present the movement as a new actor in Jordan, and its overall motivations to take action since 2011. Then, I present ethnic composition and class in the movement, as key demographic levels for this
analysis. Finally, I analyse the way in which movement participants have mobilised frames during the diagnostic, prognostic, and mobilisation phases.

**The JYM: Characteristics and Motivations**

The Jordanian *Al-Ḥirāk Ash-Shabābī* (Youth Movement), formally established in 2012, represents a new regional trend of youth-led, youth-organised, informal, uninstitutionalized, horizontal, network-like organization whose existence contributes to re-define what dissent looks like in the country today. Activities of activists who participate in the movement pre-dated the formal creation of the movement, and have been sustained since early 2011.

*Al-Ḥirāk Al-Shabābī Al-ʿUrdunī* is a movement inside a wider context of social movements, some that have existed since the 50s and others that have been created since 2008 in Jordan. Some of them have been sustained until today and others have merged into other movements or have dissolved. All of these movements form part of a greater effort, popularly known as *Al-Ḥirāk*, which works for political, economic, and social change in Jordan. *Al-Ḥirāk Al-Shabābī Al-ʿUrdunī* is the youth action that has appeared in this context of social movements.

The movement was created and is organised by young people that found it necessary to organise ‘a social, youth, political frame which talks about us’ (AI04-04.09.13), a frame that is necessarily ‘outside any traditional frame’ (AI06-05.09.13). Activists in the movement claim to speak on behalf of the youth which is not represented in official political participation platforms in the country such as the Parliament given the current electoral law which excludes those under 30 years of age from presenting themselves as candidates in elections. Furthermore, they claim to represent youth that have been socio-economically marginalised in the same way as other social clusters; therefore their representativeness is extended to other social clusters that suffer from similar socio-economic grievances. Youth in Jordan, as in the rest of the Arab region, is viewed by the state as the hope for the future given the high percentage of youth in the region’s societies today. However, at the same time they are stigmatised and feared as disruptive, parasitic forces (Khalaf and Saad Khalaf,
so they have tended to be marginalised from political, economic and social participation.

Since the beginning of its activities, this movement has sustained public demonstrations of their political, economic and social demands that have been mainly directed towards the Jordanian regime. Movement activists agree on identifying the main socio-economic and political grievances and aims, even if there is a variation in their preferred way of achieving these collective aims. For movement activists, socio-economic and political grievances are 'of equal importance' (AI02-24.08.13).

Social grievances that motivate activists of the movement to engage in collective action are related to social injustice, lack of opportunities, and lack of freedom. Activists assert that their motivation to act and get involved in this uprising in Jordan is mainly social, seeing that 'there is a clear social injustice' (AI02-24.08.13) in the country as a whole, which results in their shared feeling of hopelessness, where the majority of them face a life in which 'there is no opportunity to do anything' (AI20-29.09.14). This feeling of social injustice and
lack of opportunity is closely linked in their interviews to a shared feeling of having ‘to fight for any right that has been stolen’ (AI06-05.09.13). All the activists of the movement that have been interviewed or observed for this project express the feeling of having a duty to demand social justice that will result from political and economic change. The words of an activist clearly express this:

‘There is injustice, the freedoms have been stolen, the amount of corruption that you see and feel in the country. So it was my duty as a citizen to exercise my right to demand justice, freedom, political and economic reforms; these were the main reasons for me to join’ (AI06-05.09.13).

They identify this social situation of injustice ‘with the capitalist economy and it is related to the tyrannical authority in this country’ (AI02-24.08.13). Activists address the importance of the liberal autocratic model of the regime to be engaged in social mobilisation in this last period. The socio-economic problems identified are explained in relation to the country’s dependency, privatization, and its social effects, particularly in terms of inequality. In words of an activist of the movement interviewed for this project:

‘The economic problem is related to the economic system that the regime puts forward in the country. An economic system that is dependent on foreign aid and the privatization and selling of national companies. This caused the economic liberalization that impoverishes the Jordanian society. This has a reflection in social classes where the rich become richer and the poor become poorer’ (AI02-24.08.13).
In words of another activist of the movement:

‘Mainly it is the economic system, it is the privatization that we fight so much against, the capitalist economic system in Jordan, you know Jordan is not an independent country, it is a dependent country, so the loans of the country, the increasing prices all the time, everything going on the people basically’ (AI13-13.09.13).

Second, although ‘the economy is what has spread a lot of this’ (AI13-13.09.13), for it is what affects society and creates social grievances on a daily basis, people got interested in politics once they realised that the economic situation was linked to the political system. As explained by a Jordanian blogger and activist, ‘that connection, once it was made, it could not be separated’ (AI23-04.11.14). Political issues of concern for activists of the movement are
‘related to the formation of governments, decision-making process, the lack of freedom, in general’ (AI02-24.08.13), highlighting the authoritarian nature of the regime. As one activist explained during an interview carried out for this project, ‘the problem is with the regime’ (AI04-04.09.13), ‘we are not even able to have a parliamentary government, it is still appointed by His Majesty’ (AI12-13.09.13).

In line with the authoritarian nature of the regime, the movement has mobilised against the imprisonment of political opposition.

Photograph of a sign used by movement activists during their protest on the 5th October 2012 that reads: ‘The People are the source of authority’.
As well as agreeing on the main problems, activists unite around their main collective aims. In the words of activists of the movement, their aims include ‘social equality’ (AI04-04.09.13) and mobilising to change ‘the economical situation’ (AI13-13.09.13) and to build ‘a country that is free and has its own choice and fights for its decisions’ (AI06-05.09.13). Activists of the movement recurrently state their will, in the long term, ‘to uphold a civil power among civilians, in favour of the state of law, the civil state, [and] for social justice’ (AI04-04.09.13). Overall they claim to mobilise for ‘anyone who is oppressed right now’ (AI13-13.09.13), in order ‘to support the social powers in Jordan and working to find links between these groups, to achieve a real overarching change’ (AI04-04.09.13).

‘Changing the situation and seeing Jordan become a national state, in my definition of national state, that Jordan becomes dissembled from the West, related to the foreign aid from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. All the economic issues related to Israel, all of these issues make the country dependent on the imperialist power’ (AI02-24.08.13).

The main political characteristics of the movement are that it works uniquely at a national level, and that it breaks with other opposition actors in the sense that it remains organisationally and ideologically independent from them. The
movement focuses on important ‘local’ (AI04-04.09.13) and mainly ‘national issues’ (AI02-24.08.13), although interviewed activists of the movement acknowledge the important influence of regional and global issues at a national level, and explain that ‘you cannot separate them practically, this is so hard’ (AI02-24.08.13). In this way, they claim to have reintroduced the debate on national socio-economic and political issues in Jordan. As explained by activists of the movement during my interviews, political parties and institutionalised organisations in Jordan ‘are working for issues that are supra-national, above the nation’ (AI02-24.08.13) such as the Palestinian cause, the Iraqi occupation, the Islamist *Umma* ‘the situation in Jordan was, to a certain extent, overlooked’ (AI02-24.08.13). Because of the movement’s national focus, activists explain that they do not have organisational links with other youth movements in the region, and that the relationship with them is based on punctual expressions of solidarity and support. We do ‘not have any links at all with other movements outside Jordan. There are solidarity links with, for example, the Egyptian revolution, with the 6th April Youth Movement. Maybe one time the 6th April Youth Movement expressed solidarity with us’ (AI06-05.09.13).

As well as having a national focus, the Jordanian Youth Movement is politically characterised as being an alternative way to do politics in Jordan that breaks with traditional forms of political participation, ie, political parties. The movement is mobilised around a shared feeling among activists of being ‘fed up with classical parties, fed up with ideologies’ (AI01-31.07.13) which conform to the political context in the country. As expressed by all of my interviewees, their political participation through ‘social activism is a new way, separated from the parties way’ (AI12-13.09.13). This break with institutionalised politics is explained in terms of the stagnation of political parties and their inability to adapt to a changing socio-economic and political reality in the region and in Jordan. Activists consider that ‘some political parties are stuck in the 70s, and it is hard for them to move and to understand what is changing; to give the change to younger generations is hard’ (AI13-13.09.13). Others explain this break with traditional political actors and political parties as they are part of the structure, and part of the system that they intend to challenge and transform.
For movement activists, collective and direct action is the only type of political participation possible (AI12-13.09.13).

**Ethnic Composition and Class in the Jordanian Youth Movement**

I will now turn to present the Jordanian Youth Movement demographically in terms of ethnic composition and class, as these two levels are key for the analysis that I am putting forward in this paper. Ethnically, the movement includes citizens of Palestinian origin as well as Transjordanian citizens. To talk about ethnicity in Jordan means to refer back to the historical construction of ethnic divisions through an identity politics strategy put forward by the regime and through warfare and refugee construction in neighbouring countries (2012, Anderson, 2005, Brand, 1995, Taylor, 1982). Transjordanian identity finds its roots in the 'ashira (large clan or tribe), which works as a base of affiliation and source of prestige and patronage. This community is constituted by tribes or clans that belong to the land that now forms the modern state of Jordan, making them what is popularly referred to as ‘urdunī-urdunī’ ('Jordanian-Jordanian', meaning 'original' Jordanian). This origin has been a discursive legitimiser of their position as first-class citizens vis-à-vis the state. On the other hand, Palestinian-Jordanians, or Jordanians of Palestinian origin, base their communal identity on an ‘attachment to the village or town of origin, a sense of loss of homeland and of gross injustice at the hands of the international community, and the centrality of the notion of return’ (Brand, 1995 pp. 48-49).

Understanding this historical ethnic composition of society and the way in which the regime has tried to politically fragment ethnicities helps us to understand that the Jordanian Youth Movement contradicts this ethnic historical division by strategising frames in a way that challenges the state’s identity politics. The struggle of youth in Jordan is a struggle of Jordanians of Palestinian origin as well as Transjordanians. Palestinian-Jordanians have remained away from any type of political participation since the Black September civil war in the 70s. However the participation of young Palestinian-Jordanians in Al-Ḥirāk Al-Shabābī Al-ʿUrdunī points out to a shift in the political participation of this community, which makes us rethink its role in re-framing
national politics in Jordan. Moreover, Palestinian-Jordanian youth is mobilising together with youth of Transjordanian origin, community that has traditionally been considered a loyal base for the regime. This again forces us to consider the shifting political role of younger tribal generations in Jordan which, in words of a Jordanian Transjordanian blogger, are ‘a more pragmatic, decently-educated segment of youth that (in many cases) has formed a layer beneath the advertised surface (i.e. the “dinosaurs”)’ (Tarawneh, 2014). Contrasting with this predominant idea of the tribal communities in Jordan, activists of the movement that are ethnically Transjordanian, are ‘young, fresh graduates, unemployed, in Tafileh, in Ma’an, [who] regardless of their ideological ties, they are economically disenfranchised, economically alienated, they are not as adherent to tribal politics as their elders are’ (AI23-04.11.14).

This movement therefore challenges traditional frames of ethnic and religious understandings of social and political subjectivities in Jordan. Multiple identities have been deployed historically in the country, and reinforced through different episodes of conflict (2012). Traditional political opposition parties and movements, including their ‘child’ youth movements, are still working within these ethnic and religious frames (Jordanian-Jordanian, Palestinian-Jordanian, Islamist, tribal, etc), however the Jordanian Youth Movement is trying to challenge these traditional frames by mobilising a different discourse that favours ethnical, identitarian and religious unity instead of fragmentation. They do so by mobilising socio-economic grievances and issues of class division and inequality that affect the majority of Jordanian citizens, which have been socially, economically, and politically excluded. This process of exclusion has been particularly noticeable and accentuated since the beginning of the 2000s and the realignment of political loyalties with the beginning of an accelerated economic liberalisation in the country. This reflects on the way in which youth mobilises in a way that contradicts the ethnic Jordanian-Palestinian divide which they consider has been promoted by the regime in its historical strategy of identity politics (AI14-15.09.13).

Second, in terms of class, throughout the interviews and participant observation carried out to gather data on movement activists I have found class to be an important variable of self-identification. Activists in the youth movement
belong to a working class, mainly from disenfranchised urban areas but also from middle income urban neighbourhoods and marginalised rural localities. Young activists try to make a living by undertaking precarious jobs, frequently multiple jobs at a time (AI17-22.09.13), that generally do not allow them to become fully economically independent from their families. This applies to youth from poorer working classes as well as to youth of middle-income areas, although there is a notable difference related to the dependency their families have on them economically. Tobin has analysed the middle and working classes in Jordan, especially in Amman, and argued that the ‘heightened notion of middle-class status and “aspiring cosmopolitanism” provides a new significant form of social organisation in Amman’, reorienting the population ‘away from political reform’ and serving as ‘a means to reinforce the status-quo’ (2012 p. 96). In this situation, activists in the Jordanian Youth Movement, particularly those from middle-class, are confronting their families and environment, as well as risking their work places because ‘not everyone is so accepting, it depends on your surroundings, working in this country is pretty hard, you actually need to sacrifice’ (AI13-13.09.13).

In sum, the Al-Ḥirāk Al-Shabābī Al-ʿUrdunī is a movement that serves as an organisational umbrella that brings together young people with shared socio-economic and political grievances and aims. Moreover, as we have explored, the movement is demographically diverse in terms of ethnicity, with Palestinian-Jordanian and Transjordanian young activists participating together. Furthermore, demographic diversity is present in the movement in terms of religion –Muslims, Christians, and atheists–, and class.

Framing Processes in the Strategic Diagnostic, Prognostic, and Mobilisation of the Jordanian Al-Ḥirāk Al-Shabābī (Youth Movement)

I will now turn the focus to the way in which the movement has mobilised framing processes in the diagnostic, prognostic, and mobilisation moments of its development. In the Jordanian Al-Ḥirāk Al-Shabābī (Youth Movement) we will see that, although there is agreement among activists in the movement during the diagnostic framing phase, when the problem is identified and attributed to a
particular actor, disagreement between the radical and reformist camps occurs at the moment of prognostic framing, or finding a solution to the problem and articulating it jointly. With existing competition between activists in terms of articulating a solution to the problem, motivational framing, or the third step in framing processes, is further weakened.

In order to analyse these three distinct moments of framing processes in social movement strategy, PPT presents four frame alignment processes—strategic uses of framing process by social movements—that are relevant for my analysis. These frame alignment processes are frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension and frame transformation. I will now analyse what frame alignment processes have been put forward by activists of the Jordanian Youth Movement through specific examples of their discourses mobilised during the three key moments of framing processes in social movement strategy.

According to PPT, the diagnostic framing phase is where social movement activists identify the problem and attribute it to a particular actor. In the Jordanian Youth Movement, there is agreement between individual activists and constituencies of the movement on identifying the problems as social and economic, and on attributing them to the regime, which in turn makes the problem also political (AI23-04.11.14). There is agreement in the movement that social and economic problems are central for their action, and affect socio-economically marginalised groups that suffer from shared grievances. Two major framing processes have been articulated by social movement activists in this context.

First, activists of the Jordanian Al-Ḥirāk Al-Shabābī (Youth Movement) have put forward a ‘frame transformation’ whereby they intend to change old understandings and meaning of the way in which the Jordanian society is structured. Traditionally, social structure in Jordan is thought to be based on ethnic and identitarian fragmentation mainly between Transjordanian/Palestinian-Jordanian ethnicities as a result of historical identity politics. These ethnic and religious frames have been historically constructed and reinforced through state-led political processes such as the electoral system, characterised by a system of quotas, gerrymandering, and individuality,
which ‘generates inequality in voting power’ and contributes to fragmenting society (Hussainy, 2014).

Activists of the Jordanian Al-Ḥirāk Al-Shabābī (Youth Movement) are working together to transform these social understandings into other forms of social belonging that they consider to be more real, related to socio-economic grievances of the poor and working classes that are ethnically of both Transjordanian and Palestinian-Jordanian backgrounds. Activists of the Jordanian Al-Ḥirāk Al-Shabābī (Youth Movement) are seeking to recover ‘the debate on class, on national identity, on unity’ (AI04-04.09.13). Young activists explain that, with this strategy, they ‘are trying to go against traditions and culture of people that have grown up with it’ (AI20-29.09.14). This reflects the way in which youth mobilises in a way that contradicts the Jordanian-Palestinian divide which they consider has been promoted by the regime in its historical dividing strategy based on identity politics (AI14-15.09.13).

Putting forward this strategic framing in Jordan has been extremely difficult for the Jordanian Youth Movement because frames are devised not only by social movements, but also by their counterparts, therefore becoming a contested process during which movement leaders have to compete with authorities (Tarrow, 2011 p. 145) in developing frames that are resonant in
society. As we have seen, in Jordan the regime has historically put forward an identity politics that has resulted in contingent identities and constructed frames of understanding which, reinforced through different episodes of national and regional conflict, have deeply marked communities. Trying to transform this historically-constructed frame of ethnic fragmentation into a frame of class struggle has been a challenge for activists given the deeply rooted divisions between these two social groups in Jordanian society.

Second, the Jordanian Al-Hirāk Al-Shabābī (Youth Movement) has put forward a strategy of ‘frame bridging’ with different groups of workers. Activists of the movement identified socio-economic grievances faced by workers of different companies, particularly grievances related to the ever-expanding informal job sector or the deterioration of workers’ rights, to base this strategy. They have tried to direct their action towards workers that are facing a particular unfair situation in their work, but are not politically mobilised.

‘We work with workers of the electricity, workers of the Telecom that have actually left their work, workers who work on daily basis, the day-labourers, and agriculture with the government. We have worked with the ones that were with the water company and have left as well, workers of the potash company, the ones who were making demands and have actually left as well’ (AI13-13.09.13).
This strategy directed to different groups of workers ‘has to do much more with meeting these people, working with them, helping them, providing them with support and showing them that we are a clean part. I am there to support you’ (AI13-13.09.13). And this last point has been particularly difficult for movement activists given the movement’s political stance, which is radical at specific moments in time. Activists interviewed for this project explain that workers ‘do not want to work with any group that has anything to do with politics. What are you representing? Who is behind you? Who is supporting you? And things like that. Because of our country, it is very hard. And you can understand this in a way’ (AI13-13.09.13). Moreover, it has been difficult for activists of the movement to sustain their work with these workers in time ‘because some of them think if some of our demands are answered, I am satisfied now and I give up. It is really hard to get people to work on the long-term’ (AI13-13.09.13).

Prognostic framing for PPT is the second phase in frame articulation at which movement activists have to find a solution to the problem previously identified, and then articulate a solution collectively. In the Jordanian Youth Movement, the variety of ideologies and a weak organisational structure have created competition between constituencies and activists of the movement. This competition has affected their capacity to reach agreements. More precisely, it has resulted in the inability of the movement as a whole to agree on a coherent approach to addressing these grievances. This disagreement resulted in an internal differentiation between the radical and the reformist conceptualisations of change: while some constituencies of the movement favoured a solution that involved gradual changes in policies, other constituencies favoured a solution that would necessarily come through greater confrontation and the removal of the regime (AI10-10.09.13). The strength that each of these camps inside the movement acquire at a particular moment in time greatly depends on the national and regional context.

Finally, in terms of motivational framing, different constituencies of the movement strategically put forward nonviolent tactics to construct a rationale for engaging possible adherents in collective action. Activists of the Jordanian Al-
Ḩirāk Al-Shabābī (Youth Movement) have agreed on tactics of nonviolent direct action, and constituencies of the movement have engaged independently and jointly in different tactics including strikes, sit-ins, campaigns, boycotts, mass meetings, and demonstrations. In this way, ‘frame amplification’ is used to resonate with potential adherents in society by incorporating the existing cultural values (Benford and Snow, 2000 p. 624-625), in the Jordanian society’s ‘security-minded’ mindset that completely rejects the reproduction at a national level of any episode of instability or violence that is present in the region (AI06-05.09.13).

Moreover, movement activists put forward a strategy of ‘frame extension’ where their interests were extended in order to include issues and concerns of importance for society, which would potentially increase the probability of mobilising other social groups. Some examples of this strategy were the campaigns of ‘Samtak bi kalfak’ [your silence will cost you], which took place in February 2013 after the government announced that the prices of electricity would increase (AI20-29.09.14).

Signs used during the Samtak bi kalfak campaign. The sign on the left reads ‘No to rising prices’; the sign on the right reads ‘Your silence will cost you. Don’t help the corrupt and don’t pay the electricity bill’. Both signs were posted on the movement’s Facebook page on the 4th February 2013.
During these campaigns, the aim of activists of the Jordanian Youth Movement was to address potential adherents by addressing the rise of prices on everyday products, which would result in further economic stress for Jordanian society (AI20-29.09.14). They did so by going house by house to talk to people in different neighbourhoods, particularly in popular and working-class neighbourhoods, about the intention of the government of raising prices, and trying to convince them to join them on the street (AI20-29.09.14).

However, basing a movement’s action on these initiatives without having been able to previously articulate a joint solution in the prognostic framing phase, led activists to fall in the trap of ‘normalization of protest’ (Meyer and Tarrow, 1998 p. 4). Their weekly organised protests during 2011, 2012 and 2013 became a recurring feature of Jordanian politics at the time. Some activists interviewed for this project explain that the high frequency of direct action, together with the great variety of claims in each action, had negative consequences for the movement at two levels. First, it changed this direct action into a conventional political instrument in the eyes of society, making the movement ‘lose its power to inspire challengers and to impress antagonists and authorities’ (Meyer and Tarrow, 1998 p. 4). Second, it created disagreements among activists of the movement on whether to continue taking direct action without having articulated a joint solution for the problem, or moving away from the streets and focusing more on organising at a grassroots level. The result was that some individual activists of the movement decided to not participate in direct action, projecting

Activists of the movement carrying signs during the Samtak bi kalfak campaign. The sign to the left reads 'Expired options and possibilities', posted on the movement's Facebook page on the 4th February 2013. The sign on the right reads 'Your silence will cost you. No to the rise of electricity prices', posted on the movement's Facebook page on the 3rd March 2013.
an idea to the general public, the regime, and media, of a weakening movement.

Conclusion

Overall, in terms of limits to the movement’s strategic framing, the movement has not been able to effectively move away from the current political dynamics and strategies of other parties in Jordan and effectively present themselves as more of the alternative that they are in terms of ideology. In a similar way to other opposition groups, their overall discourse has been framed in discussing political steps with the state, and the main political practice of the movement is still fed mostly by the historical experience characterized by state centralization and directing demands towards the state at a political level, instead of working to achieve a greater popular representation, support, or mobilisation. In the words of a Jordanian researcher, ‘even the chants, even the programs, even the Friday protests, it is always talking to the state instead of building something popular’ (AI14-15.09.13).

Bibliography


When we talk about the “old guard” in Jordan we refer to the people who ruled, the ruling elite, during King Hussein’s reign, and lost their power when the new king and his new men came into power. Those people are very influential in the mukhabarat (security services) and in the Army, especially in the groups of old veterans and among in the retired veterans.
The main constituents of the alternative opposition are: Jordanian Social Left Movement, Jordanian National Initiative, National Progressive Current, National Committee of Military Veterans, Jordanian Writers Association, Nationalists’ Progressive Current, Philosophy Society, Socialist Thought Forum, Assembly of Circassian Youth, Association Against Zionism and Racism.

Among those created before 2011, the Islamist movement, the Salafi movement, the Teacher’s union, Naqabyoun min ajal al-islah (Syndicates’ Members for Reform), Al-hamleh al-watanieh min ajal al-khoboz w al-democratieh (The National Campaign for Bread and Democracy), Moqati’oun min ajal al-taghyeer (Boycotting for Change), Jayeen (Coming Forward). Since 2011, Mobadaret al-malakieh al-dostorieh (The Initiative for Constitutional Monarchy), 24th March Movement, Al-tajmou’ al-sha’bi li-l-islah (The Populat Gathering for Reform), Al-hirak al-sha’bi al-urduni (The Popular Jordanian Mobilization Movement), Harket abna’ al-a’shaer li-l-islah (The movement of the sons of tribes for Reform), le’telaf al-a’shaer al-urdonieh (The Coalition of the Jordanian Tribes), le’telaf al-taghyeer al-tolabi (The Students’ Change Coalition), al-lajna al-watanieh li-isqat majles al-nowab al-urdoni (the National Committee to overthrow the Jordanian House of Representatives), haye’t al-difa’ a’n moa’taqli al-tafieleh wa al-rabea’ (the Committee for Defending the Prisoners of Al-Tafieleh and the 4th Roundabout), and al-hirak al-shababi w al-sha’bi (the Youth and Popular Movement)