

Towards the rise of the unprotected? Neoliberalism, social policies, and socio-economic contention in contemporary Jordan

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Abstract

The Jordanian welfare and economic system underwent a drastic neo-liberal transition, sponsored by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and state policies that aimed at progressively dismantling the distributive welfare mechanisms as well as job provision at the basis of the hashemite authoritarian bargain. This paper provides a historical overview of the ways in which Jordan's neoliberal transition has pushed the country into a continuous state of socio-economic contention, characterized by workers' mobilizations and the periodical resurgence of anti-government mass protests, and hence an understanding of the current social contention in the country.

Keywords: Jordan, Neo-liberalism, socio-economic demands, labour movement, Mobilisations, Social Movements

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Introduction

In the past thirty years, the Jordanian welfare and economic system underwent a drastic neo-liberal transition. This process began in the early 1990s, in the wake of the economic and debt crisis that the country had experienced in 1989, prompting the late King Hussein to implement a fifteen-year program of structural adjustments. The program, sponsored by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) aimed at progressively dismantling the distributive mechanisms of welfare and job provision which, until then, had been providing the material bases of the Hashemite authoritarian pact. Starting in 1999, Jordan's neoliberal transition gathered further speed with the throning of King Abdallah II. Along with the progressive withdrawal of the state from the provision of secure jobs and services, King Abdallah II was also intent on privatizing state assets and de-regulating the financial sector and the customs policies which had been established by his father. Since the beginning of the 2010s, the socio-economic vulnerabilization of Jordanians has intensified. The severe backlashes of the global financial crisis of 2008-2009 and the post-2011 regional turmoil on the country's economy inaugurated a phase of protracted economic stagnation, and triggered the return of IMF-backed austerity. This has plunged the country into a state of socio-economic agitation, characterized by workers' mobilizations and the periodical resurgence of anti-government mass protests.

Against the re-emergence of labor protests, the bulk of scholarly attention has focused on the mobilization of workers in the public sector, and their prominent role in the making of the 2011 *Hirak* (Ababneh 2016; Lacouture 2022; Yom 2020; Fioroni 2017; Tell 2015). This emphasis has been placed as a result of the prominent position historically occupied by the public sector within the Hashemite authoritarian pact. In contrast, much less attention has been devoted to the mobilization of workers in the private sector and their structural triggers, despite the growing share of private sector workers in labor protests in recent years. Furthermore, until the mid-2010s, the majority of protest participants were either impoverished public sector employees or workers employed by the recently privatized state-owned companies, fighting to maintain their social benefits against austerity and outsourcing policies. In recent years, however, state-backed austerity policies have pushed another workers' category to the forefront of labor contention: unprotected workers groups. In light of the above, this paper aims at providing a historical overview of the ways in which Jordan's neoliberal transition and its modes of articulation have shaped socio-economic contention. In so doing, the paper provides an updated analysis of the general and particular stresses which are currently defining the fault-lines of social contention in Jordan.

1 - The making of Jordanian welfare state: Rent, incorporation, and the debt crisis of the late 1980s

The earliest social security schemes in Jordan were set up in the 1940s, with the introduction of the first mandatory retirement program for civil and military personnel (Alhawarin and Selwaness 2018, 5). This introduction was part of a larger process of consolidation of the Hashemite rule sponsored by the British mandate authorities, whereby Transjordanian bedouin tribes and *fellahin* (peasants) were integrated into the emerging colonial state apparatus through their enrolment in the Arab Legion (Tell 2013, 94-108). Their loyalty to the regime was further solidified by the concession of a number of additional benefits particularly targeting the military personnel. This made the military a particularly desirable job for tribe members, especially against the backdrop of the decline of camel trading and subsistence farming which occurred during the Mandate, and the lack of a modern manufacturing sector. The "military Keynesianism" instituted by the British authorities remained the blueprint of the welfare-based incorporation mechanisms^[1] adopted by the Hashemite monarchy in the wake of Jordan's independence. The expansion of the armed forces took place in parallel with an equally sustained enlargement of the civil public sector (Ibid. 119-24). Yet again, these policies benefited the Transjordanian tribes of the peripheral provinces the most, consecrating them as the social base of Hashemite power. This incorporation also paved the way for a sharp ethnicization of the labor market, with a public sector primarily governed by Transjordanians (or East-Bankers), and a private sector dominated by West-Bankers (or Palestinians). This process was further reinforced in the following decades, as the Nakba (1948), the Naksah (1967),^[2] and the consequent loss of the Hashemite control over the West Bank and Jerusalem, resulted in the expulsion of more Palestinians to Amman. Among the newly-arrived migrants were some of the more affluent strata of the Palestinian bourgeoisie, which contributed to the expansion of the service sector and the very capital city. The loss of the West Bank also deprived Jordan of half of its industrial capacity, one quarter of its arable land, as well as the touristic revenues associated with the pilgrimages in the Holy Land, all of which led to a 40% decrease of its GDP (Robins 2019, 131). This contributed to enhancing Jordan's external dependence for the

supply of basic goods, and increasing the weight of public sector-related expenses in the national economy. In addition, a powerful Amman-based mercantile elite emerged, benefiting from both the demographic and administrative expansion of the city, and their close ties with the Palace apparatus.

The Civil Retirement Law and the Military Retirement Law were established in 1959 amid these momentous social changes (Alhawarin and Selwaness 2018, 5), enhancing the social protection of both military and civil servants. The Hashemite welfare system expanded even further between the 1960s and 1970s, as the introduction of the Labor Code (1960) and the first organic national Social Security Law (1978) progressively provided the majority of formal wage earners with increasingly homogenized forms of social protection. Equally important, a sustained universal system of subsidies on basic commodities (bread, water, electricity, energy, to cite the most important) was set up in 1974. On the one hand, this equipped the state with a powerful instrument of price control. On the other hand, subsidies became a crucial tool to sustain the livelihood of informal workers and the lowest social strata. Finally, several professional associations were licensed and allowed to collect and manage the retirement indemnities of their associates.

The expansion of welfare in Jordan throughout the 1960s and 1970s answered to three different yet related political exigencies. The first one was to consolidate the Hashemite power base against the radicalization of Jordanian politics which, along with the rise of Nasserism, was increasingly subjected to the winds of Arab Nationalism blowing all over the region. The year 1957 registered the peak of Arab Nationalism in Jordan with the victory of a coalition of Arab Nationalists in the parliamentary elections. This was followed by an attempt at a military coup by young officers in Zarqa, at a time when it was becoming increasingly clear that the King was to endorse the Eisenhower Doctrine^[3] (Robins 2019, 99-106). This triggered a significant authoritarian shift in King Hussein who, after proclaiming martial law, disbanded and banned political parties, shut down publications, and repressed radical groups. The second political exigency was to provide the Transjordanian constituencies with economic corrective measures against the sharp inflation that the country began experiencing in the late 1960s. In 1974, protests among the military in Zarqa against price hikes sounded yet another alarm, alerting the palace about the necessity to introduce mechanisms of price control so as to keep its incorporation mechanisms functional. This played a pivotal role in the establishment of the Ministry of Supply that same year, charged to organize and manage a broad-based program of subsidies on basic goods (Ibid. 2019, 152-53). The third political exigency was to ensure social peace through the provision of material benefits to the West Bank constituencies. This was especially important in the wake of the worsening relations between the Hashemite monarchy and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) that followed to the Naksah (1967) and Black September (1971)^[4] (Odeh 1999, 190). In this context, welfare provision became the central component of the authoritarian upgrading^[5] (Heydemann 2007) of King Hussein's social contract, inaugurating a long autocratic phase that would come to an end in 1989.

It should be noted that despite Jordan's attempts to reach industrial and agricultural self-sufficiency, the expansion of the Jordanian state welfare and public apparatus were primarily enabled through the economic and military aid provided by the United States against the backdrop of the emerging Cold War order. In this context, Jordan became one of the major allied forces in the Levant to counter the spread of socialism and Arab Nationalism (Peters and Moore 2009, 268-73). US aid was also a key factor in carrying out major infrastructural projects, such as highways and the East Ghor Canal in the Jordan Valley, the latter of which provided water to 75,000 citizens (Peters and Moore 2009, 269).

Another prominent source of external rent came from the remittances of Jordanian residents, most of whom were of Palestinian origins employed in the Gulf (Iraq, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia among the most important). In fact, the growing demand for workforce triggered by the oil boom in the Gulf countries provided Jordan with an alternative market to absorb the chronic national labor surplus (Keely and Saket 1984). Furthermore, oil-extracting Arab countries – Iraq being on the top of the list – became the second main donors and investors in the Jordanian economy after the US, and among the main importers of Jordanian goods (Tourk 2001; Ryan 2000). By 1980, about one third of the Jordanian workforce was employed in the Gulf, and 40% of the Jordanian GDP came from remittances from oil-producing countries (Baylouny 2008, 285). This was instrumental in exacerbating the inflation, as much of this income was either reinvested in rentier outputs, such as real estate, or used to boost households' consumption expenditure. In the meantime, while the private sector struggled to provide employment opportunities for those who were entering the workforce, the number of public sector employees increased by 200% between 1970 and 1985, competing with the army as the main source of employment for Transjordanians (Robins 2019, 152).

The precarity of this rent-fed labor market and welfare structure came to the fore in the second half of the 1980s, as the decline of oil prices progressively plunged the country into a severe debt crisis. The peak was reached in 1988-1989, when an unprecedented currency devaluation ultimately led to the bankruptcy of the state. The economic crisis was further aggravated by two factors. The first one was the administrative disengagement of King Hussein from the West Bank (1988) which triggered the dismissal of more than 20,000 employees in the Hashemite administration (Robins 2019, 172-73). The second one was the fiscal policies adopted by the government in the 1980s. In an attempt to cope with the waning rent-related income, the government resorted to increasing debt rather than cutting on public expenditures (Robins 2019, 176-81). However, as the crisis deepened, revolts were bound to follow. The first disturbances took place in early April 1989 in Ma'an, and quickly spread out across the Transjordanian provinces. Prime Minister al-Rifa'i was the primary target and subject of the public rage that accompanied these protests, having been deemed responsible for the country's economic collapse.

The revolt was sparked by the lifting of subsidies on fuel and a number of non-essential goods, such as cigarettes and alcohol, which resulted in an immediate rise in consumer prices. The lifting of subsidies was part of a broader series of austerity measures bargained with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) within the framework of a fifteen-year Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) which included, among the most important initiatives, the freezing of salaries in the public sector, the privatization of several strategic public assets, and the liberalization of the financial sector (Ryan 1998)^[6]. The agreement was officially signed in July 1989, and was followed by another conditional agreement with the World Bank (WB) in the month of November. Meanwhile, and in an attempt to quell the popular uprising, the first free elections in thirty years of autocracy were organized. This was the first course of action in a new yet troubled phase, of the making of the Jordanian social contract: economic neo-liberalization in exchange for greater public liberties (Robinson 1998).

2 – Neo-liberalizing welfare: Jordan, the IMF, and the throning of King Abdallah II

Although the first SAP promoted by International Financial Institutions (IFIs) was endorsed by Jordan in 1989, its implementation only began from the mid-1990s onwards. Its execution was first delayed by the outbreak of the Second Gulf War (1990-1992) which, due to the geographical proximity and the tight economic relations between Jordan and Iraq, resulted in a refugee and economic crisis in the country (Jreisat and Freij 1991; van Hear 1995). Further delays occurred due to the opposition of the Jordanian ruling elite to the austerity measures imposed by the agreements, fearing the political implications that the latter could have on their power base (Harrigan, El-Said, and Wang 2006, 273-75).

As stressed by Colin Powers, among others, the fifteen-year SAP implemented in Jordan in the wake of the 1988-1989 crisis followed the general guidelines of the Washington Consensus. The program coupled a drastic reduction in public expenditures with the fostering of an economic environment that encourages private initiative as a means to reach economic stability and promote growth (Powers 2020, 172–77). The rationale was one of “downsizing and debureaucratizing,” founded on the progressive withdrawal of the state from welfare programs, the downsizing of the public sector, the privatization of state assets, and a general deregulation of customs and financial policies. Within this maneuver, the first welfare mechanism to be impacted was that of subsidies. Their dismantlement followed an incremental approach spanning throughout the whole decade, and was sealed in 1998 by the dismantlement of the Ministry of Supply (Daher 2016; Kawamura 2015). This system was replaced by a number of specialized, less costly cash-assistance programs in favor of vulnerable households (the so-called Targeted Safety Nets programs) which, in line with the IMF’s recommendations, became the new blueprint for the national social protection schemes. Their implementation was assigned to several national programs and institutions, including the Family Assistance Program, the National Aid Fund (NAF), and the Zakat Fund, whose scope of work expanded beginning in the year 2000 (Baylouny 2008, 298). Another similar process involved labor policies. Their driving engine shifted from state-led “Big D” development projects and public interventions, such as infrastructural projects, to private-led “small d” ones, such as microfinancing programs to promote self-entrepreneurship; and the institution of export-oriented Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and Qualified Industrial Zones (QIZs) (Daher 2016, 50-53).

It should be noted that, despite an outward display of diligence, the late King Hussein was much less compliant with the conditionalities imposed by the IMF and the WB than what was publicly suggested (Harrigan, El-Said, and Wang 2006). This lack of compliance was enabled by the Jordanian endorsement of the US-backed Israel-Palestinian peace process launched at the Madrid Conference in 1991 which, despite significant internal opposition, set the stage for the kingdom to earn some space of independent economic maneuvering (Greenwood 2003, 255). The King was more reluctant to address the full removal of subsidies, the introduction of sale taxes, and privatizations, whose implementation lagged behind the IFIs’ expected timeframe. This vigilance was grounded in the King’s concern about the impact that a complete dismantlement of traditional welfare mechanisms at the basis of the Hashemite authoritarian pact (e.g. subsidies, jobs redistribution in the public sector, etc.) could have on the long-term endurance of its power base. These reservations were further burdened by the economic hardships that the country continued to experience throughout the 1990s, despite the positive macroeconomic performance in debt reduction and inflation. In fact, despite the implementation of the strict austerity policies requested by the WB and the IMF following the 1988-1989 crisis, the Jordanian economy struggled to recover. Although the nominal growth of the GDP reached a yearly average of 8,6% after the end of the Gulf War (Harrigan, El-Said, and Wang 2006, 276), the majority of private

investments remained concentrated in rentier and non-productive activities, such as retail services and real estate, with a limited impact on the creation of new jobs. The same marginal impact on employment also concerned the creation of SEZs which, thanks to their *ad-hoc* regulatory framework, mostly attracted foreign, export-oriented manufacturing companies employing predominantly the cheaper south-Asian workforce (Powers 2020, 176; Labadi and Mercier 2021). Furthermore, the companies operating in the SEZs were exempted from labor laws and social insurance payments, and from any conditionality with regards to the hiring of local workforce. Finally, although the absolute average yearly inflation rate was significantly decreasing, this deceleration failed to compensate for the impact of the removal of subsidies on the citizens' purchasing power, which also suffered due to the steep increases in the costs of healthcare, energy, and education (Baylouny 2008, 295-97). The absolute value of the average wage dropped from 1.500 USD in the mid-1980s to 1000 USD in 2000 (Ibid.). Consequently, between 1990 and 1999, the national poverty rate went up from 10% to 30%, whereof a consistent portion was made of working poor (Ibid.). The latter, in turn, consisted for the most part of public employees, whose freezing of the salaries after the 1988-1989 crisis had a tremendous impact on citizens' purchasing power. This further exacerbated the impact of the austerity measures and the economic crisis on the poorer Transjordanian provinces, where the public sector employed over 90% of the adult population (Baylouny 2008, 285).

Against this backdrop, King Hussein sought to preserve as much as possible the authoritarian pact with its power base. He attempted to do so by combining political liberalization with a restructuring of the existing incorporation mechanisms that were redesigned according to the new social expenditure boundaries imposed by the SAPs (Greenwood 2003). The first initiative within this restructuring aimed to maintain minimal subsidies on food products in defiance of the tighter conditionalities imposed by the agreements with the IFIs. Food items covered by the subsidies included wheat, sugar, milk, and rice. Up until 1996, food coupons were created specifically for these items, along with a dedicated budget to control import prices (Kawamura 2015, 89-90). The second and most important initiative consisted of redefining the privileged access of Transjordanians to state welfare and employment through the military (Baylouny 2008). The operation was enabled yet again by US military aid to the Jordanian army which, after a temporary downsizing during the Gulf War, returned to its pre-war standards following the re-alignment of the Hashemite foreign policy to Washington's agenda (Sarhan 2019; Robins 2019, 199). This allowed King Hussein to reboost employment in the army as a compensatory incorporation tool for Transjordanians - especially vis-à-vis the freezing of recruitments of civil servants in other public sector segments - and to expand the social security and fringe benefits associated with military employment. In 1998, 20% of Transjordanians were employed in the army, and the military budget amounted to a quarter of the state budget. Furthermore, the sector was expanded and diversified into several sub-contracting and new enterprises specifically conceived to increase the economic capacities of the military apparatus (Baylouny 2008, 301-2).

Despite these numerous efforts to adapt to the IFIs and international donors' requests without hindering its power base, the King's new social contract failed to achieve the expected outcome. In August 1996, another wave of fierce anti-government riots exploded in the northern and southern provinces, calling into question economic austerity and the IMF's grip over the country's national economic policies. These riots were triggered by the lifting of most of the remaining subsidies on wheat, following a sharp rise in the global wheat prices, which forced the government to reduce the number of beneficiaries to meet the IMF's conditionalities (Andoni and Schwedler 1996; Ryan 1998, 57-60).

Although the protests did not directly challenge the monarchical authority, the King's response this time was that of the iron fist. This paved the way for an abrupt reversal of the process of political liberalization that began in the aftermath of the 1989 riots. The King's change in pace towards liberalization policies (both political and economic liberalization) also depended on the rising dissatisfaction among opposition groups for the peace treaty signed between Jordan and Israel in 1994, involving Transjordanian and West-Banker constituencies alike (Robins 2019, 203-6). The signing of the peace treaty also triggered the resurgence of ethno-nationalist rifts between the two constituencies. In particular, Transjordanians were increasingly concerned about the political consequences of a tighter integration of West-Banker elites in the ruling apparatus they once dominated. Their concern grew in the wake of the expansion of the West-Banker-dominated private sector and the return of wealthy Palestinian traders and professionals to Jordan after the Gulf War (Reiter 2004).

The authoritarian shift and the neoliberal turn pursued by the late King Hussein gathered speed after King Abdallah II's accession to the throne in early 1999.

Aged 37 at the time of his coronation, King Abdallah II kicked off his mandate raising high hopes for a genuine modernization and democratization of the country. This reformist impetus seemed to be confirmed by the programmatic priorities identified by the young king in his first Speech from the Throne, which stressed, among other things, the commitment to a fully-fledged democratic transition, the modernization of state bureaucracy, and the implementation of economic reforms (King Abdallah II 2009). This initial burst of hope was quickly dispelled when the King aligned himself to the de-liberalizing agenda pursued by his late father (Yom 2009). The official pretext for the legitimization of political de-liberalization was attributed to the al-Aqsa Intifada in 2001, and later to the geopolitical developments triggered by George W. Bush's "war on terror", which enabled Abdallah to dissolve the parliament, postpone the elections, and impose major restrictions on political, civil, and media freedoms under the pretext of state security. Meanwhile, late King Hussein's reluctance to implement the most politically sensitive economic measures required by IFIs was abandoned through the use of *ad hoc* temporary laws circumventing the parliamentary debate. By the end of 2000, the bulk of the remaining subsidies on food were lifted, and the first major round of privatizations was set up. Furthermore, the economic relations with the West were enhanced through several agreements and international treaties, as well as the establishment of partnerships between the state and international donors and NGOs, most notably USAID, with the purpose of outlining future development and social policies in the country. This phenomenon was furthered by the intersecting policy views of the IFIs' neoliberal agenda and the economic vision of King Abdallah II and his advisors. The latter were primarily made up of a younger generation of globalized, English-educated economists, who had replaced King Hussein's previous guard of Transjordanian tribal leaders at the core of economic decision-making. This paved the way for a new phase in Jordan's neoliberal transition, whereby neoliberal reforms would no longer be an exogenous superimposition by the IFIs, but rather an endogenous upgrading of the country's socio-economic structure and social contract, entrenched within global financial capital and institutions.

3 – Jordan First: Setting up the foundations of King Abdallah II's neoliberal upgrading of Jordan's authoritarian pact

The neoliberal, Western-aligned zeal with which Abdallah II inaugurated his kingdom earned him the international reputation of a promising, liberal-minded regional leader. The domestic response to his new political and economic course, however, was far from enthusiastic. New riots erupted yet again in Ma'an which, in late 2002, bore witness to the fierce and protracted armed clashes between the residents and the security forces (Schwedler 2002). The clashes broke out following months of mounting country-wide tensions that arose as a result of the progressive curbing of political freedoms which accompanied Abdallah's economic reforms. The state was quick to repress the numerous mobilizations staged by both organized (Islamist and leftist parties, professional associations, among the most important) and informal groups against Abdallah II's US-aligned foreign policy agenda, most notably in regards to Iraq and Palestine. These mobilizations also served as a platform for a broader critique of the regime's new political and economic course (Schwedler 2003). The contested authoritarian shift was strictly related to the neoliberal restructuring of the Jordanian economy and the social contract promoted by the King. As Barari notes, the strengthening of the strategic and military ties with the US and its regional allies – most notably the Gulf monarchies – became the prerequisite to guarantee the needed influx of aid and investments necessary to sustain the economic stability of the country (Ryan 2004).

The restructuring of the economy was first announced to the public in October 2002 through the launching of the "Jordan First" campaign. According to the official presentation text of the campaign, Jordan First consisted in an overarching, action-oriented philosophy of governance aiming at defining "a new social contract among Jordanians" through the promotion of "unity in diversity," and the assumption of public-private partnerships as the new linchpin of the national economic and social development (Jordan Politics – Jordan First). The campaign placed "Jordan's national interest at the forefront of all considerations of civil society," including the press. Along with reiterating the formal commitment to the democratization of the kingdom, the campaign also placed a number of "small d" socio-economic development programs at the core of its implementation plan. These programs were previously approved by the government to speed up the pace of the country's neoliberal transition. This gave the regime the power to both declare neoliberal governance as the new cornerstone of the state-citizens relations; and to scale up its repressive policies against any form of diversion from the official domestic and foreign agenda, by placing "national interest," in all its ambiguity, at the core of collective duties. The testing ground for this authoritarian shift merging economic liberalization and political de-liberalization (Kienle 2008) first materialized during the Ma'an riots.

The grounds for the protests sedimented upon the opposition of Ma'ani citizens to Jordan's participation in the US invasion of Iraq – all of this against the backdrop of the drastic socio-economic consequences of Second Gulf War in the country. The clashes lasted for several days between October and November 2002, leaving six dead and several injuries behind. Furthermore, the city was put under military siege, and hundreds of citizens were arrested (International Crisis Group 2003). The state justified its "iron fist" approach by claiming the military operation was needed to eliminate a lawless gang of armed smugglers, which had been allegedly terrorizing the local authorities and population for months. As a matter of fact, it provided an anticipation of the further restriction of political freedoms that the kingdom would undergo hereafter. Freedom of the press, which was severely repressed for the first time since the liberalizations of the early 1990s, was especially impacted (Tufaro 2021a). Second, while party pluralism was formally maintained, the political space for opposition groups, most notably Islamists and leftists, was "softly" but inevitably reduced through various administrative initiatives that

were conceived to limit their access to electoral politics (Yom 2009, 157-58; Kienle 2008). A similar process also involved the proliferation of a number of CSOs and NGOs during Abdallah's mandate, which nonetheless were subjected to increasingly tight bureaucratic-administrative constraints aiming at preventing or sanctioning their politicization. For the international audience, this helped to conceal Abdallah II's autocratic shift, making it look like his mandate was speaking the language of liberal democracy. At the same time, controlled pluralism and neoliberal reforms were used to refurbish the ruling pact between the crown and its historical East Bank constituencies against the backdrop of a shrinking civic and economic space. In particular, the King sought to bolster tribal leaders' loyalty, and compensate for their progressive marginalization from economic decision-making. He did so by guaranteeing them continued privileged access to political power and by advancing their participation in the privatization of welfare and state assets (Meliàn Rodríguez 2018, 211-230; Yom 2009 and 2020; Baylouny 2006; Shih 2020, 210–35; Yorke 2016). In a similar vein, the bulk of aid and development projects was redirected towards rural provinces, and the military sector was further expanded. The most important initiative in this sense was the institution of the King Abdallah II Design and Development Bureau (KADDB) in 1999, a state-owned company affiliated to the Jordanian Armed Forces, tasked with managing and developing the national defense industry and the economic and research activities associated with it. The KADDB came to include an industrial park, a research and academic unit, and an investment group aimed at boosting public-private partnerships (PPT) also in the non-military industry. Its expansion was enabled first and foremost by US military aid, in addition to a number of other foreign sources of investment and technology transfers, such as technical partnerships with Western defense firms, defense agreements with the Gulf countries, and the export of weapons and subsidiary defense equipment (eg. helmets and uniforms, surveillance technology, etc.) (Amara 2008; Marshall 2013 and 2012). This played a pivotal role in incorporating the skilled labor force, which had otherwise been unable to join the civil labor market, into the royal compact. It also further entrenched both the remnants of public welfare to the military, and the Jordanian economy to the international capital (Marshall 2012). Finally, a lot of effort was put to train and incorporate in the Hashemite power base a new generation of urban educated Transjordanian middle classes through the promotion of social and youth entrepreneurship, civic and human rights initiatives, as well as prizes, scholarships, and awards, that aimed at promoting royal patronage and producing docile neoliberal subjectivities (Tauber 2019; Kreitmeyr 2019; ??leyen and Kreitmeyr 2021). In this context, the robust network of royal charities, foundations, and NGOs played a central role, since their position of privilege in securing partnerships with INGOs and orient the distribution of funds was carefully strategized to penetrate the structures of civil society (Wiktorowicz 2002). Royal charities and NGOs also became one of the main non-state actors providing social assistance to vulnerable households and rural areas against the contraction of state welfare. Despite these efforts, King Abdallah II's upgrading of the Hashemite authoritarian pact ultimately struggled to fully affirm itself against the erosion of the material bases of consensus triggered by the neoliberal transition.

4 – From neoliberal transition to structural crisis: global recession, the *Hirak*, and the return of the IMF

For all the signs of social distress that had begun to emerge in the late 2000s, the uncanny combination of social repression and a favorable economic climate ensured Jordan a sense of peace until the end of

the 2010s. The situation began to change drastically in the wake of the global financial crisis of 2008-2009.

After the successful graduation from the IFIs' first SAP in 2004, Jordan continued its path towards neo-liberalization by launching a house-made three-year economic plan aimed at pushing forward the extraverted and private sector-centered structural transition launched in the previous phase. The plan envisaged the acceleration of the privatization of state-owned enterprises and public utilities, the expansion of SEZs and enclave-based exports, and the removal of the remaining forms of subsidization, most notably tax exemptions on the VAT on some basic goods. In addition, the plan worked towards the establishment of fiscal and public expenditure policies based on deregulation and austerity, respectively, in close continuity with the political economy pursued in the previous fifteen years (Powers 2020, 176-79). This phase was also characterized by a rapid expansion of neoliberal urbanism (Peck et al. 2009) and of the touristic sector, whose development – as much as the privatization of SOEs and public utilities – was predominantly financed by Gulf capitals (Daher 2016, 52–56). Finally, from the point of view of social policies, the plan elaborated on and consolidated the schemes of cash assistance, microfinancing, and capacity-building as the privileged means to fight poverty and unemployment. However, despite an average yearly nominal growth of the GDP by 8.5% from 2004 to 2007, both poverty and unemployment continued to soar. High unemployment rates were closely linked to the failure of the rentier, extraverted, and militarized developmental model adopted by the kingdom. In fact, Abdallah II's sponsored neoliberal political economy failed in producing a labor market rich and dynamic enough to decently absorb the new yearly entrants, and compensate for the freezing of public sector jobs. Major evidence of this failure emerges from the rates of youth unemployment, informal labor, and working poor which, by the mid-2000s, respectively accounted for about 30%, 55%, and about 30% of the bottom quintile of the active population^[7] (World Bank – ILOSTAT; Charmes 2010; World Bank 2009).. Furthermore, this stagnation of the labor market developed against the backdrop of an increasing unaffordability of higher education, patriarchal social norms and policies, and the centralization of employment opportunities and investments in Amman and the central provinces. Therefore, to be affected the most were particularly the educated youth, women, and individuals living in rural areas (Husseini 2014). The only labor-intensive expanding economic activities (the construction sector and the SEZs/QIZs manufacturing compact) relied predominantly on cheaper foreign workforce^[8] (Egyptian nationals in construction and South-East Asians in the QIZs) who did not have the adequate labor and social protection as well as the right to unionize (al-Wreidat and Rababa 2011; Zohry, Abou Hussein and Hashem 2020; Al-Qatarneh and Bataineh 2021). These structural vulnerabilities were partially concealed by the positive economic conjuncture triggered by the war on Iraq, which engendered an unprecedented influx of foreign aid in the Jordanian economy boosting public expenditure and the GDP. Also, the war brought to Jordan thousands of affluent Iraqis reinvesting their capital in the real estate and the service sector. The bubble burst with the onset of the global financial crisis of 2008-2009 which, in just two years, halved the GDP annual growth from 5% to 2.3% (World Bank - Data). This led the kingdom to face yet another debt crisis, more austerity measures, and inflation, paving the way for a wave of labor unrest which anticipated the large anti-government social movement - the so-called *Hirak* - that started in 2011.

Labor dissent first arose among the workers of the private sector, most notably of the QIZs, who, between 2009 and 2010, were hit by a wave of dismissals under the pressures of the economic crisis and the restructurings and closures that it caused (Jordan Labor Watch 2010 and 2011). The sudden

deterioration of the average living conditions and social protections triggered the protests of other workers' categories, most notably public sector workers and retirees as well as recently privatized state-owned enterprises employees, that positioned themselves at the forefront of the Transjordanian opposition (Adley 2012; Tell 2015; Lacouture 2022). In this process of activation and radicalisation, a crucial catalyst was the strike of the Aqaba Port Corporation workers, in late 2009. The strike erupted to demand better wages and guarantees of social protections against the privatization of the Phosphate Section of the company. Despite the initial repression, their mobilization ended with a success (Jordan Labor Watch 2012.) This encouraged other workers in the public sector to take (or retake) to the streets, creating the conditions – quoting Lacouture – “to build a shared community of fate between workers and their communities”, since their grievances voiced the economic frustrations of the impoverished strata of the Jordanian population (Lacouture 2022, 50). From April 2010, the struggles of public employees converged within a wider opposition movement led by military veterans (Tell 2015). The movement of military veterans exploded in April 2010, against the backdrop of the voices of an incumbent plan to definitively make Jordan an alternative homeland for the Palestinians. Within this framework, on May 1, they issued a public document-manifesto in which, together with abandoning their traditional Transjordanian nationalist positions, they also expressed sharp critiques of the latest socio-economic policies and the ruling political elite, accused of nepotism and corruption. In so doing, they managed to gather an opposition front bringing together workers, dissatisfied Transjordanian elites, anti-normalization activists, and opposition parties around the common demand for political and economic reform. This front grew further in the wake of the first wave of Arab uprisings, whose revolutionary winds took their toll on the kingdom (Tell 2015).

Following the same spatial dynamics as in 1989 and 1996, the first protests of the Jordanian *Hirak* erupted in late January 2011 in Dhiban, spreading to other peripheral towns until they finally reached Amman. In addition to the various constituencies mentioned earlier, tribal leaders also joined the protests, as well as a wide network of youth activists that self-organized through a number of informal platforms, collectives, and territorial coordination committees in rural and urban areas alike (Yom 2015; 2014). Their demands converged around three main political claims which, though reformist, still represented an unprecedented challenge to King Abdallah's authoritarian neoliberal governance. First, protestors claimed some form of constitutional curb on royal authority; second, the resignation of the government of Samir Rifai and the organization of new elections with a fairer electoral law; and third, an end to corruption. This early wave of protests peaked on 24 March 2011 when thousands of citizens in Amman took to the streets in response to the call for protests that was launched on social media by youth activists. The protests' intensity and frequency varied up until the parliamentary elections allowed by King Abdallah in 2013 (Ryan 2018, 25–35). The elections were allowed within the framework of a broader strategy of “defensive democratization” whereby King Abdallah II attempted to contain the spread of protests by partially accommodating popular demands (Josua 2016).^[9] Also, some subsidies on basic goods were reinstated, and the wages and pensions of public employees were increased. The funds came yet again from the Gulf and the US who, amid the regional turmoil, rushed to provide the kingdom with the necessary financial means to ensure its political stability. In the mid-term, however, neither cosmetic reformism nor pay-offs managed to appease social unrest. The main source of instability came yet again from socio-economic pressures.

Due to the deep vulnerability of the Jordanian economy to external shocks, the country entered a phase of irreversible economic stagnation beginning in the year 2010. The causes of this limited growth were

multiple, and included, among the most important, the economic backlashes of the protracted regional turmoil – most notably the contraction of touristic revenues –, the cessation of the gas inflows from Egypt, and the loss of the Syrian trade routes. These intertwined dynamics triggered a significant reduction in state revenues, in addition to an increase in energy costs (Mansur, Al-Khatib and Abu Anzeh 2019, 16-22). State revenues were equally affected by the decline of remittances from the Gulf following the fall of global oil prices, whose share in the GDP dropped from 16% in 2008 to 8% in 2016. Finally, after 2012, the kingdom hosted 1.2 million Syrian refugees, who added further pressure on public services and infrastructures while propelling the rise in inflation. This compelled the kingdom to resort once again to the IMF, launching yet another decade of strict fiscal and austerity measures going to further worsen the social costs of the economic crisis. The first program of financial assistance was initiated in July 2012, imposing a sharp rise in indirect taxes and a drastic cut on public expenditures, including the recently reinstated subsidies. This resulted in an immediate rise in consumer prices, especially fuel, triggering the resurgence and the radicalization of anti-government protests (Ryan 2018, 34). The height of these protests occurred in mid-November 2012, as a fierce wave of riots ravaged the country for days, demanding, for the first time, the downfall of the monarchy (Reuters 2012). This was a crucial turning point in the *Hirak*, as it transgressed the hitherto established norms of self-censorship vis-à-vis the monarchy (Legrand 2015).

The regime responded to this radical shift with brutality, leaving a protestor dead in Dhiban. This anticipated yet another repressive shift in the management of socio-political dissent embraced by Abdallah after the elections of 2013, against the backdrop of a state of permanent – yet increasingly atomized – socio-economic unrest. The most significant of these repressive actions were the ban on public gatherings without prior authorization, and the cybercrime law which further curbed press and internet freedoms (Tufaro 2021a).

Amid this hostile environment, mass protests against the country's socio-economic policies resurged from May to June 2018. The protests were prompted by a controversial project of a new income tax law, as part of the second wave of austerity measures agreed upon with the IMF in 2016. Though some protests also took place in rural areas, the majority of mass mobilizations were centered in Amman, bringing together diverse social groups, ranging from the urban poor to working professionals and CSOs. Furthermore, this wave of anti-austerity protests shifted its core grievances from the government to the IMF and to the neoliberal “politics of impoverishment” systematically pursued by Jordanian lawmakers in the past two decades. In doing so, protestors’ demands indirectly - but steadily - attacked the official monarchical rhetoric that attributed the roots of the ongoing economic crisis to the regional economic climate (Ababneh 2018). The anti-austerity revolts de-escalated on 7 June 2018, when the new prime minister Omar al-Razzaz temporarily withdrew the income tax Law following the resignation of PM al-Mulki on 4 June 2018. The Law was ultimately amended and approved in December 2018, after a long ministerial tour in peripheral governments that intended to convince residents of the advantages of the measure. However, social protests were meant to resume soon.

5 – Towards a rise of the unprotected? Trends in Jordanian labor contention

As discussed in the previous section, the Jordanian *Hirak* emerged against the backdrop of a steady

intensification of labor contention, following decades of relative calm. This calm can be attributed, in the first place, to the overwhelmingly large number of public sector employees, which made up 40% of the overall national employment structure, despite the sharp decrease in new hires from the 1990s onwards. It is worth noting that the public sector offered employees high salaries, strong social protections, and a number of individual and familial fringe benefits. Second, the expanding private sector produced, for the most part, low-paying, informal, and low-skilled jobs, which were predominantly occupied by foreign workforce from South-East Asia who could not legally unionize and whose organizational capacity outside of the syndicates was strongly limited by their bureaucratic vulnerability. Last but not least, beginning in the 1970s, the formal trade union movement was co-opted and restructured to secure its political neutrality (Al-Hourani 2002, 11-21).

This precarious social peace was compromised from 2010 onwards by the economic crisis on the one hand, and IMF-backed austerity measures on the other. The first and most pressing issue at hand was the drastic obliteration of the purchasing power of wages, which, due to the rising inflation and stagnating wages in the private and public sector alike, caused the working poor to make up about 68% of wage earners by 2016 (Kawar, Nimeh and Kool 2022). The impact of this collapse of citizens' purchasing power was further worsened by a sharp rise in informal labor and the subsequent deterioration of social protections whereby, by 2018, only about half of formal wage earners were covered by Social Security (Razzaz, Pellerano and Byrne 2021, 13). This precarization resulted in an increasing number of Jordanian workers becoming increasingly reliant on daily and casual contracts from the early 2000s onwards, including in the public sector. Furthermore, the partial privatization of state-owned enterprises caused a sharp split within the involved companies between workers with full labor rights and workers with partial rights (or none), despite the equivalence of workloads for the same positions. Last but not least, youth unemployment kept rising, reaching 39% by 2018.^[10] This paved the way for a phase of intense labor mobilizations, driven primarily by the demand for higher wages, employment opportunities, and social protections. These mobilizations peaked during the *Hirak* triennium (2011-2013) with an average of over 800 protests per year, and then decreased to a smaller, yet, still sustained scale up to today.

Even though the mobilizations cross-cut economic sectors and employment statuses, they were still led by public sector workers until 2013. Tensions were initially felt among the daily workers employed at the Ministry of Agriculture who, starting from 2006, organized themselves into the Daily Workers Labor Movement (DWLM), demanding permanent employment and equal labor rights with their formal counterparts (Ababneh 2016). Similar claims were also raised by the workers of the Aqaba Port Corporation and the Jordanian Phosphate Mines Company (JPMC) in the wake of the privatizations. Along with demanding the protection of their social rights against outsourcing and precarization, these workers also called for the right to unionize (Jordan Labor Watch and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2012; Fioroni 2015). The struggle for unionization gained further momentum throughout the *Hirak* when, prompted by the Arab uprisings, 12 new independent unions were created, leading to the founding of the General Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (Adley 2012; Awad 2017). Equally importantly, this wave of mobilizations directly called into question both the neoliberal policies and the moral economy of the Hashemite pact, through which the state provision of decent labor to Jordanian nationals was conceived. In the context of this surge of protests, the monarchy sought to appease public sector workers by combining selective concessions with different forms of soft coercion. Among the latter, the most notable ones were the denial of legal licensing to most of the independent unions

that were set up during the *Hirak*, and the controversial amendments of the Civil Service Regulation that was approved in 2014, which added more penalties against public employees engaging in protest actions (Jordan Labor Watch 2015, 10). This played a significant role in downsizing, but not eradicating, the scale of the mobilizations in the public sector.

Among the groups who remained the most active are public school teachers. Contrary to most of the independent unions that were established during the *Hirak*, public school teachers managed to register their grassroots organization in 2011 (Jordanian Teachers Association, JTA), which became the main representative body for about 100,000 public school teachers. In 2014, following two weeks of strike, JTA members were promised an adjustment to their salaries by the state, with the understanding that this amendment would reflect the ongoing inflation. As their salaries were never adjusted, JTA resumed the mobilizations in 2019, staging the longest strike (100 consecutive days) ever performed in Jordan until that moment. Tensions regularly arose among the workers of the Aqaba Port Corporation and the privatizing state mining and quarrying industry, following the progression of the outsourcing of manpower (Jordan Times 2014; Civil Society Knowledge Center – Mapping of Collective Actions in Jordan).

Since 2014, mobilizations led by public sector workers have diminished, though they were partly compensated by the resurgence of protests led by employees of the private sector. The transportation sector was the one that mobilized the most and most accurately represented the pressures and vulnerabilities affecting the private labor market. Indeed, the transportation sector alone accounted for at least 18% of the yearly labor protests registered from 2015 onwards (Jordan Labor Watch 2016, 2017, 2019).

As mentioned in a 2012 report, despite the high fragmentation within the sector, land transportation workers in Jordan have historically suffered from particularly poor labor conditions, characterized by low wages and high precariousness, exhausting working-turns, and a chronic lack of labor and social protections (Jordan Labor Watch and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2012). Following the closure of the trade and passenger routes with Iraq and Syria, and the partial privatization of the public transport services, there was a steady increase in the number of unlicensed working drivers. These consisted, for the most part, of unemployed or underemployed citizens in rural areas seeking additional sources of income to cope with the worsening socio-economic situation. The sector was further fragmented in the mid-2010s with the arrival of ride-hailing apps to Jordan - Amman being the first city in which services such as Uber and Careem began operating. Due to the legislative vacuum concerning ride-hailing app drivers' licensing, the relatively advantageous fares for drivers, and the growing consumers' demand, Uber and Careem employed more than 10,000 drivers within the span of just two years (Zintl 2022, 76). These were primarily well-educated male citizens, including fresh graduates, freelancers, retired public employees, and former drivers affected by the borders' closure due to the Covid-19 pandemic. They approached platform jobs predominantly as a transitional solution before finding better opportunities in their field of specialization or as a brand-new opportunity to keep exercising their lifetime job, respectively (Ibid.). The number of drivers registered with these two apps decreased significantly in mid-2018, following a first regulatory legislative initiative which, together with requiring Careem and Uber drivers to obtain an ad hoc license to operate, also set a limit to the number of licensed drivers. Moreover, licenses were only to be provided to the drivers with new or big-engine cars. This law's purpose was twofold: first, appease Yellow Taxi drivers who, due to the increasing competition since

the advent of apps such as Uber and Careem, had initiated a number of protests demanding that they be banned. Second, maintain an increasingly important cushion against the spiking unemployment, especially among educated youth (Zintl 2022, 78). Instead, the regulation set the foundations for app drivers to also mobilize, becoming an integral part of the current contentious labor scenario. App drivers' discontent first arose around the wave of dismissals that followed the implementation of this new regulation, whereby half of the Careem drivers were laid off. This was aggravated by a hike in commission fees imposed by both Uber and Careem in an attempt to compensate for the fleets' reduction. It also overlapped with the grievances against the new licensing policies and the reduction of the operational life of the vehicles from ten to seven years, triggering a series of mobilizations and claims that remained unaddressed by the companies and the state (Civil Society Knowledge Center – Mapping of Collective Actions in Jordan).

The vulnerabilities of the transportation sector were further exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. The protracted closure of the borders, the reduction of the passenger capacity of vehicles, the restrictions on citizens' mobility, and the structural lack of labor protections and adequate social security coverage left thousands of drivers partially or totally deprived of their main source of income for months. In the case of public and transnational transportation, mobilizations demanded adequate compensations for the heavy losses caused by the state containment policies affecting mobility (Tufaro 2021b). Regarding Uber and Careem drivers, instead, protestors demanded the state's intervention to stop the rise of the commission fees imposed by the companies, and to adequate the fares to the tariffs established by the Land Transportation Regulatory Authority. All of this took place against the backdrop of yet another restructuring plan by the two companies to compensate for the severe contraction of the revenues triggered by the Covid-19 mobility restrictions (Zintl 2022, 79). Since summer 2021, Uber and Careem drivers were joined in protest by their counterparts of the ride-hailing app Jeeny, which also saw a sharp rise in commission fees (Civil Society Knowledge Center – Mapping of the Collective Actions in Jordan).

Apart from the transportation sector workers, a prominent group in socio-economic protests was the unemployed, who since the *Hirak* have become an established presence in the labor arena. Among unemployed, protestors primarily belong to rural as well as educated youth, taking part in different forms of mobilizations ranging from continuative sit-ins and marches, to individual protest actions, including self-harming. A wave of protests erupted in the summer of 2016 in Dhiban where, in the month of June, unemployed youth erected a tent in the town's main square, demanding better job opportunities and development policies in favor of rural areas. This protest was brutally dispelled by security forces who stormed the tent and arrested dozens of activists (Phillips 2019). The mobilizations acquired a nation-wide dimension in February 2019, as unemployed youth from all the governorates organized huge marches towards the Royal Hashemite Court in Amman with the aim of initiating an open-ended sit-in to make their demands heard and addressed. The first march started from Aqaba, eventually spreading to the rest of the governorates, regardless of the distances and the adverse weather conditions (al-Sharif 2019). The sit-in lasted for over a hundred days, ending only with the government's promise to address the protestors' demands. When the government failed to do so, however, mobilizations resurged.

Conclusion

Through a historical examination of the changing patterns of socio-economic contention in neoliberal Jordan, this paper shows how the economic reforms initiated by King Abdallah II, and the structural crisis of Jordan's neoliberal capitalism triggered by the global 2008-2009 financial crisis, have plunged the kingdom into a continuous state of socio-economic turmoil. This took the shape of a steady upsurge of labor contention, despite the sharp contraction of the political and associational freedoms which followed the 2011 *Hirak*. Until the mid-2010s, unemployed individuals comprised the majority of participants in street protests, followed by precarized and impoverished public sector workers. Given that their demands for better salaries and increased social protections were tightly entrenched with the moral economy of the Hashemite authoritarian bargain, the common nature of their claims and grievances paved the way for solidarity among the aforementioned workers' groups, and laid the foundations for the Jordanian *Hirak*. Following this unprecedented wave of mobilizations, the state successfully managed to deliver a severe blow to the protests of the workers in the public sector. The protests were suppressed by force on the one hand, and through the occasional accommodation of protestors' demands on the other – all of this against backdrop of severe restrictions to public and political freedoms. This played a major role in shifting labor contention towards the most unprotected segments of the Jordanian labor market, most notably the unemployed youth and the expanding arena of informal low-skilled workers of the private sector. Although unprotected workers and unemployed demands still remain highly insular and sectorized, these social groups are undergoing a gradual process of informal organizing and radicalization. This is especially the case for informal low-skilled workers. Along with the worsening of the overall socio-economic conditions, a prominent trigger of this double-process is being represented by a continuous lack of state responses to the polycentric and multidimensional demands for greater social protections. The political dissatisfaction triggered by socio-economic hardships and its implications on social protection needs was made clear on March 14 2020 when the death of seven Covid-19 patients due to a shortage of oxygen triggered two days of anti-government protests on a national scale (Al-Khalidi 2020). Prompted by the reinstitution of martial law under the pretext of the pandemic, this latest wave of protests remained limited in scope. However, as the second wave of Arab uprisings has taught us, it is reasonable to think that without a comprehensive revision of the existing socio-economic policies in a more equitable and sustainable sense, new surges of protest may re-emerge at any moment.

Yet another important element that emerged through our investigation is the increasingly relevant share occupied by the mobilization of low-skilled platform workers in the national contentious labor arena. This rise in mobilizations resonates with global and regional trends and dynamics recorded in recent years, most notably in Egypt which has also witnessed the progressive activation of ride-hailing app drivers' protests (Charbel 2016; Hamama 2019). However, while scholarly investigations of the phenomenon in the Global North do exist (See, *inter alia*: Haidar and Keune 2021; Jones 2021; Forsyth 2022), platform labor remains widely understudied in the case of the MENA region. This prevents us from fully grasping how this new form of neoliberal recrafting of the regional socio-economic fabric is impacting both the forms of labor organization and the process of continuous re-articulation of the regional authoritarian pacts. Although in Egypt and Jordan platform capitalism was initially welcomed by both citizens and political decision-makers as a win-win solution against spiking unemployment rates, the progressive unveiling of their new and highly exploitative mechanisms of surplus extraction has turned platform workers into a new prominent actor in the contentious arenas of these two polities.

In that perspective, it is also worth noting that the reshaping of labor struggles is taking place against the backdrop of a structural lack of social protections, a widespread normative vacuum appropriately framing platform workers' employment status, and high labor instability. Furthermore, in both countries, the advent of ride-hailing apps triggered the contentious counter-mobilization of traditional taxi drivers who, until that moment, had enjoyed a position of monopoly historically embedded in the moral economies of the respective authoritarian traditions. Currently, this latest contradiction has taken the shape of a "war among the poor," preventing taxi and ride-hailing apps drivers from building a common claiming front. While the evolution of the respective mobilizations and their political implications is difficult to predict, what is certain is that platform capitalism is becoming an increasingly unavoidable elephant in the room, further destabilizing the fragile socio-economic balance within which the region has been navigating for years.

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^[1] The paper uses the notion of incorporation mechanisms as theorized by Prof. John Chalcraft, to indicate the finite means and strategies whereby established political institutions, procedures and norms win consent among subordinated polity members (Chalcraft 2017).

^[2] The terms Nakba (disaster) and Naksa (setback) are conventionally used in the MENA historiography to indicate the birth of the State of Israel and the Arab defeat of the Six-Days War, respectively.

^[3] The so-called "Eisenhower Doctrine", from the US president who elaborated it, refers to the US foreign policy agenda on the Middle East inaugurated in 1957 which, within the framework of the Cold War, offered economic and military aid to the MENA states eager to defend themselves from the threat of "international communism".

^[4] Starting from the late 1960s, the Palestinian national liberation forces united in the PLO underwent a steady process of radicalization, resulting in the adoption of armed struggle as privileged mean to achieve the liberation goal. Against the subsequent increase of guerrilla actions against Israel from the

Jordanian territory, in September 1971 the Hashemite monarchy launched a massive military operation (the Black September) against the PLO fighters, which ultimately led to the evacuation of its cadres from the kingdom in favor of Lebanon.

^[6] In social sciences, the notion of “authoritarian upgrading” indicates a shift in authoritarian practices of governance aimed at restructuring the relations among rulers and ruled in a given polity, and to establish an “upgraded” social contract.

^[6] Between the late 1970s and the late 1980s, the SAPs triggered “bread riots” in a variety of MENA and African countries. See: (Dakhli and Bonnecase 2021).

^[7] In the mid-1990s, the rate of youth unemployment and the working poor were estimated at about 27% and 13%, respectively (World Bank - ILOSTAT, Taghdisi-Rad 2012)

^[8] Contrary to the South-East Asian workforce, the massive migration to Jordan of low-skilled Egyptian laborers dates back to the 1970s, to replace Jordan manpower first in the agricultural and then in the construction sector. For a historical overview of the Egyptian migration to Jordan see: (Aken 2005)

^[9] It is worth noting that a similar approach was adopted by King Hussein in the wake of the above mentioned riots of 1989.

^[10] See World Bank Open Data website accessible here: <https://data.worldbank.org/>.