Islam and national identity in Jordan: a clash of discourses?

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Introduction

National identity is a sensitive issue in Jordan. Given the constructed nature of Trans-Jordan, which was first formed as a British mandate after the First World war, a national identity had to be created to generate allegiance to the new-born political entity. Even if Jordan is not the ancestral land of the Hashemite Kings placed to rule it, the national identity constructed was largely based on loyalty to the royal family, including an Islamic component (connected to the royal family through the Hashemites’ descent from Prophet Muhammad), an Arab component, often highlighting the role of the Hashemites in the Great Arab Revolt, and an indigenous, Transjordanian, East Bank, beduin, tribal component (Layne, 1994: 26 Köprülü, 2007: 6, Frisch, 2002).

The Palestinian, “West Bank” identity has however always challenged this constructed Jordanian national identity. After the establishment of Israel in 1948 and the ensuing war, there was a massive inflow of Palestinian refugees to Jordan, and in 1950 Jordan proclaimed the unification of the West Bank with the East Bank. At this point, Jordan was the only Arab country to grant the refugees citizenship, thus accepting Palestinians as Jordanian citizens (BTI, 2010). The flood of Palestinian refugees was exacerbated as a consequence of the 1967 war; however, this time Palestinians were not granted citizenship.

Even if Jordan recognizes the plight of the Palestinian refugees and supports their claims for a state, the official position towards Palestinians has been ambivalent. In more ways than one, the Palestinians are perceived as challenging the Jordanian state structure, both by demographics and Israeli as well as Palestinian calls that “Jordan is Palestine” (supporting the establishment of a Palestinian state in Jordan), but also by acts of Palestinian militias, opposing Jordanian policies vis-à-vis Israel, attacking Israel from Jordanian territory, clashing with the Jordanian army and attacking symbols of the state (including an alleged assassination attempt on King Hussein), particularly during the civil war of 1970-1971, when Palestinian militias even took over the northern city of Irbid, thus asserting a real challenge to Jordan’s sovereignty, prompting harsh military response from the Jordanian army (Robins, 2004: 126-132, Ghadbian, 1997: 119, 124). What is more, age-old stereotypes have remained between Transjordanians and Palestinians, as cited by Robins: “for Palestinians the Transjordanians
were *al-hufa*, the barefoot ones, implying that they were ignorant backwoodsmen; for the Transjordanians, the Palestinians were cowards, who had run like rabbits in 1967” (Robins, 2004: 127).

To come to terms with these frictions between the West Bankers and East Bankers, and in response to regional instabilities, there have been different attempts at including the Palestinian identity in a broader Jordanian civic identity by the Hashemite leadership. First, these attempts took the form of emphasizing the commonalities, by emphasizing Arabist sentiments as defining the Jordanian identity (Köprülü, 2007: 4). Later, both as a result of the civil war and the 1988 severing of ties with the West Bank, a more distinct sense of a *Jordanian* national identity was emphasized; a *Jordanization* of national identity took place (Köprülü, 2007: 4-5, 10-11). This emphasis is epitomized in a range of royal initiatives, starting with the “National Charter” in 1991, which was followed by the “Jordan First” Campaign (2002), among others. In emphasizing the distinct Jordanian character of the national identity, as well as systematically limiting Palestinian representation in the political field, the Hashemite leadership has tried to preserve a balance of identities in its favour. (Köprülü, Layne?)

In relation to the frictions between the West Bank and East Bank identities, the Islamists play a particularly important role, as they both support and are supported largely by the Palestinians. Especially after Jordan rescinded claims on the West Bank in 1988, many Palestinians increasingly felt like second-class citizens in Jordan (Köprülü, 2007: 7). This cemented the bond with the Islamists. The *Jordanization*-policies have thus led to an *Islamization* of Palestinian identity (Köprülü, 2007: 12). In many ways, by virtue of the support to the Palestinian cause and their common critique of the Hashemite leadership, Islamists and Palestinians are natural allies. While not calling for abolishment of the monarchy, Islamists as well as Palestinians both demand fairer political representation and greater influence on the political arena in Jordan. In this way, they are in opposition to the King, calling for an alternative set-up of the political system in Jordan. The King, on his end, is walking a tight rope trying to contain both Islamists and Palestinians politically in order to counteract societal division and unrest.

Especially the attempts at political reform have brought out the conflicts on the national identity into the open. On the one hand, the King holds the authority firmly in hand, both by being the constitutionally sanctioned supreme power and by the plethora of royal initiatives –
circumventing elected bodies – established to deal with issues of national identity and political reform, the latest of which is the National Dialogue and the Royal committee launched in the spring of 2011 (ref). On the other hand, the King is continuously challenged in his efforts by different groups, among the most vocal of which are the Islamists, thus largely supported by Palestinians.

Research problem

Still far from consolidated, the national identity in Jordan is under ongoing construction. A commonly shared sense of Jordanianess among Jordanian citizens, bridging the diverse supra- as well as sub-state identities, has not been forthcoming, despite continuous efforts to that effect by the Hashemite leadership. In Jordan, there is thus a continuing struggle of defining the Jordanian national identity. In this struggle, different actors take different stands, proposing alternative make-ups of the national identity.

One component of particular importance in this regard is Islam. In terms of national identity-building, Islam is, as we will return to, potentially a double-edged sword. Given its supra-state character, it may well be used to challenge the national identity of the state. On the other hand, it may also be construed to support the national identity. Further, as regarding any religion it is at least analytically possible to conceive of cases where Islam is construed to be irrelevant to the national identity, such as in states based on secularism.

In this chapter, the approach of the Hashemite regime, on the one hand, and the Islamists, on the other hand, to the national identity of Jordan is analysed. The analysis is focused on how these actors relate to the role of Islam in the national identity. Is Islam construed to challenge or to support the national identity, or is it regarded as irrelevant in this context? How is this construction of Islam manifested in the discourses and what actions does it motivate on the part of the actors? What are the consequences of the stances of the actors in this respect?

Before analysing Islam as a potential bone of contention between actors in the construction of a Jordanian national identity, we will however briefly look into how the construction of a national identity and the role of religion in this regard have been theoretically perceived.

National identity in a constructed state

In essence, collective identities are generally defined by “a shared sense of ‘one-ness’ or ‘we-ness’ anchored in real or imagined shared attributes and experiences among those who
comprise the collectivity and in relation or contrast to one or more actual or imagined sets of ‘others’ ” (Snow, 2001). As such, the collective identity is, at its very core, more a process than a property; it is a continuous constitutive process acted out by those who consider themselves as belonging to the group.

From a constructivist perspective, and contrary to essentialist or structuralist positions, a collective identity such as a national identity is thus never "natural", based on a priori characteristics that are primordial or structurally given. Instead, it is continuously constructed on the basis of an idea of fellowship. From this perspective, “(c)ollective identities are seen as invented, created, reconstituted, or cobbled together rather than being biologically preordained or structurally or culturally determined” (Snow, 2001). Still, in forging this construction, primordial or structural elements may well be used. In the making of a national identity appeals may thus be made both to attributes like ethnicity and structural commonalities like religion.

A national identity is based on an idea of a nation, famously defined by Anderson as “an imagined political community”, with set, yet flexible, borders (Anderson, 1983: 15-16). The political dimension of the concept is important, the aim is sovereignty for the nation. The nationalist ideal is thus one nation in one (nation-)state, on the basis of a national identity. (Cp Weber in Brykcynski, Gellner in Özdalga)

In the making of a national identity, certain factors have been pointed out as particularly important. Anderson (1983) heavily emphasizes the role of language in the making of imagined communities. Other important elements are history, traditions and religion (ref). Means employed in the construction of national identities include the mass media, the educational system (by the state as well as by religious/secular organisations) and administrative regulations (Anderson, 1983: 194). In different ways, then, a national identity is construed. Different actors can take part in this construction of a national identity, state-actors as well as non-state actors. However, these attempts are not always congruent; they can also be conflictive. Different actors can thus aim at creating national identities of different make-ups in the same political territory. (ref Mandler?)

Even if all national identities thus are social constructs, this is particularly evident in the countries of the Middle East. Middle Eastern states were given their shape under European tutelage in the wake of the First World War, in an era heavily influenced by the nation-state ideal. While some of the states-to-be, carved out as protectorates or mandates by the Allies in
the 1910s and 1920s, had some sense of fellowship, based on history and previous experience of a nationalist movement, like Egypt, others had little of the sort, like Iraq and Syria – and Jordan (Köprülü, 2007: 3). That many of the peoples inhabiting these lands further felt both a sense of supra-state community on the basis of a common language and religion as well as sub-state community based on tribal and other affiliations made the task of creating national identities in the different states even more challenging (Layne?). Thus, here the “imagined communities” were rather related to kinship and religious principles than to a particular nation-state (cp. Frisch, 2002: 88). Until the 1967 war and its aftermath, there were also attempts at creating a greater Arab nation-state, in line with the Pan-Arab sentiments flourishing at the time. However, as these attempts failed and Pan-Arabism evaporated, efforts were increasingly directed at creating a sense of national identity in existing states (Susser, 2003).

In the British mandate Trans-Jordan, there was little of an a priori sense of affinity. Indeed, Jordan has been regarded as the most "artificial" among all Middle Eastern states (Köprülü, 2007: 3, Krämer, 1994: 218). In addition to the challenge posed by supra-state identities motivated by Arab nationalism and Islam, Jordan also had to deal with numerous sub-state challenges, like the Palestinian issue and tribal and minority identities.

National identity in Jordan is therefore a hotly debated issue, and as such it has been analysed from many different perspectives, including the presence in Jordan of an eclectic “fuzzy nationalism” that is adaptable to deal with recurrent tensions in Jordanian society (Frisch, 2002), the role of institutions like the army and the constitution in the making of national identity in Jordan (Massad, 2001), and the connections between Jordanian national identity and foreign policy (Köprülü, 2007, Lynch, 1999). In this chapter, attention is drawn to the role of Islam in the construction of national identity in Jordan. How is Islam, as the majority religion in Jordan, appealed to by different actors in relation to the ongoing creation of a Jordanian national identity?

**Islam and national identity**

The relation between Islam and national identity has been analysed from different perspectives. The Six Days War in 1967 not only led to an increased focus on the different national identities in different Middle Eastern states by state leaderships, referred to earlier, but also to the growth of another alternative to the increasingly waning pan-Arabism, namely Islamism, the use of Islam as a guide in political action.
Islamism has been seen both as part and parcel of nationalism, advocating a nationalist Islamism in a state (or state-to-be, like Hamas) and as an international endeavour, essentially challenging nationalism, because the international set-up (like the offshoots of the Muslim Brotherhood in different Arab states), the advocacy of transnational Islamism in a supra-(present)state entity (like the pan-Islamic Caliphate) and/or the emphasis on Islamist solidarity with suffering Muslims (Palestinians and others) (Burns, cp refs, Brykczyński, 2005). Importantly, some Islamists, like the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood al-Banna, have put forth both, but in sequence: first an instrumental Islamism in the present states – even allowing for cooperation with secular nationalists – as a stepping-stone for the real ideological goal: establishment of the transnational Islamic state. Others, like Qutb, fully reject any nationalism, in favour of the pan-Islamic Caliphate (Brykczyński, 2005). As such, the strong ties between Islamism and nationalism – and the construction of different nationalist Islamisms – have increasingly caught academic interest (Burns, 2005?, Özdalga, 2009), either as proclaimed by the state itself, in a top-down-manner, or used by oppositional movements to challenge the state, bottom-up.

Both states and Islamist oppositions may relate in different ways to Islam in the quest to build a national identity. In non-secular states like Iran, Islam is used by the state to strengthen the national identity (a nationalization of Islam). However, also states not primarily resting on Islamic credentials may relate to Islam in diverse ways in their national identity-constructs, for instance by articulating different “national Islams” (Özdalga, 2009: 417). In both cases, Islam can also be used by an Islamist opposition to dispute state-sponsored national identities, both by challenging the state-structure itself by supra-national appeals and/or by challenging the state’s version of the national identity-construct on Islamic foundations, offering alternative narratives.

In making different uses of Islam, both parties – the state and its opposition – have often proved to be very pragmatic, adapting stances to the political circumstances at hand (Burns, 2005?, Jonasson, 2004). Obviously, there is – at least analytically – also a third possibility, namely that Islam as a religion is to play no role in the construct of national identity, in line with a secularist ideal emphasizing a civic national identity where religion is irrelevant.

Now, how do the parties – the regime as well as the Islamists – in the Jordanian context relate to Islam in the construction of national identity? Is Islam used to support and strengthen the national identity by the regime? How do Islamists make use of Islam in this regard – to
support the national identity provided by the regime, or to counteract the regime’s national identity-construct, offering an alternative? How do the different parties relate to the concept of “secularism”? What are the consequences of these stances?

Next, we turn to how the role of Islam is conceptualised in the Jordanian national identity by the two parties, and with what consequences, taking on both the discourses as well as the activities motivated by these discourses.

Islam in the Construction of National Identity: Discourse and Activities

*Islam and National Identity: State Discourse and Activities*

All through its existence, the Hashemite state of Jordan has struggled to carve out a particularly Jordanian national identity, which is more specific than the general identification with the Arab and Islamic nation prevailing in the region, to create loyalty to the state. As we have seen, this Jordanization of the identity has been particularly acute in the face of the divisive threat posed by the East Bank Jordanian – West Bank Palestinian divide identity-wise; between what will here be called Transjordanians and Palestinians. This threat has been present from the very beginning of the state’s existence with the influx of Palestinian refugees in 1948 and 1967, affected by the unifying and severing with the West Bank in 1950 and 1988 respectively, and by the Wadi Araba peace agreement with Israel in 1994. Under these circumstances, the Hashemite regime has seen as its ultimate priority to maintain stability and keep the unity of the state intact, not to face disintegration of the state. The unity of the state is to be borne on the shoulders of a Jordanian national identity. Especially from 1988, this identity-construct was thus connected to the territorial state, largely rescinding other elements, like the Arab element and tribal and sectarian elements, while keeping the Islamic, under the tutelage of the king. This identity is epitomized in the motto of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan: *Allah, Al-Watan, Al-Malek*, "God, Homeland, the King".

The Hashemite regime has acted in different ways to make for this unity. After 1948, Jordan granted citizenship to the Palestinian refugees, providing them a Jordanian nationality. However, Palestinian refugees arriving since then or those from Gaza, are not granted citizenship (BTI, 2010). Citizations have also at times been arbitrarily revoked, leaving the Palestinians in case stateless (Human rights watch, 2011). Today, the majority of Jordanian citizens are of Palestinian decent (BTI, 2010).
This situation is troublesome for the regime. There is an underlying suspicion, in the regime as well as among many Transjordanians (not rarely feeling like a minority in their own country), regarding the true loyalty of the Palestinians; whether they are indeed loyal to Jordan or only bide their time and use Jordan as a base for creating a Palestinian state, making Palestinians into potential fifth columnists in the eyes of the regime. This has led to that Palestinians in different ways have not been treated equally; reports state that they are not to the same extent included in welfare schemes, that they are excluded from public sector employment and that injustices committed against them are taken lightly (BTI, 2010).

Politically, Palestinians have further been contained by the regime, also because they have often taken on an Islamist ideology. Through devising an electoral system that keeps representation of Islamists and Palestinians down – by over-representing rural, conservative, tribal Transjordanian areas and under-representing urban Palestinian areas – their influence in the political process is reduced.

Islam has also been used in the effort at creating a specific Jordanian identity, both because Jordan is a Muslim-majority society, but also because the main opposition to the regime has come from the Islamists. While this opposition initially was more conciliatory and sympathetic to the regime, it has grown more confrontational over the years. Because of its intrinsic qualities, the legitimacy it brings and in the face of the Islamist challenge, the Hashemite regime has thus constructed its own take on the place of Islam in the national identity of Jordan. The Hashemite regime has done so in different ways, by drawing on its connections to the Prophet Muhammad, by including Islam as one of the sources of the legal system and by promoting the Amman message, outlining the official Jordanian view of Islam.

That Islam is an important element in the national identity of Jordan as conceptualized by the Hashemite regime is highlighted on the King’s website, where he outlines his vision for faith, besides the visions for progress and peace. On the website, it is laid down that as a descendent of the Prophet Muhammad, the King “has made the Islamic principles of justice, peace, social harmony and tolerance central to his agenda for the nation”, underpinning broad initiatives to build a prospering Jordan in a region at peace (Vision – Faith, www.kingabdullah.jo). Acknowledging that Jordanians have different faiths, it is however emphasized that they “share a piety that is powerful and central to their daily lives”; these values are at the heart of the Jordanian society (Vision – Faith, www.kingabdullah.jo).
Apart from emphasizing the role of Islam in Jordan, the King also professes to carry on the role of the Hashemites as champions of Muslim interests internationally. In doing so, he sets out to take on the alarming challenges to the Islamic nation posed by extremism, exemplifying with the use of violence, the use of religion for political purposes and the strife among Muslims. In taking on these challenges and in his work to promote interfaith dialogue\(^1\), the importance of the Amman message from 2004 stands out.

The Amman message was formulated in the wake of September 11, 2001, as Islam was portrayed in much of the world as being intrinsically violent, intolerant and hateful. To stem Islamophobia, the Hashemite regime set out to outline its understanding of Islam. The Amman message, addressed at “the public, … our brethren in Muslim lands and in this whole world”, laments “the dangers and challenges the Islamic Nation is facing today”, both by non-Muslims attacking Islam and by Muslims carrying out “gruesome and criminal acts in its name” (Amman message, 2004: 3, 4). In this situation, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, drawing on its religious and historical legacy, takes upon itself to promote “true understanding of the faith” (Amman message, 2004: 4). It does so by emphasizing that Islam is a religion of tolerance, brotherhood and humanity, embracing life in its entirety, and resting on principles like “unity of the human race, equal rights and obligations, peace, security, social equality, the honouring of pledges, neighborliness and respect for others, and the protection of belongings and property” (Amman message, 2004: 3, 5-6). Supported by verses in the Quran, the Amman message characterizes Islam as a religion that respects all, shuns violence and cruelty, and is based on compassion and tenderness, tolerance and forgiveness, and justice. As such, Islam is opposing extremism, exaggeration and intransigence. The Amman message also characterizes Islam as a modern religion, in line with modern advances in media, education, science and technology as well as human rights.

The Hashemite regime thus uses its religious legitimacy, based on its decent from the Prophet Muhammad, to call for tolerance and respect on the basis of Islam and to support interfaith dialogue. Interpreted in this way, Islam is conceptualized as a cornerstone for Jordanian national identity by the regime. However, Islam is also used in other ways to this effect, namely as a main source of legislation.

\(^1\) In October 2010, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution proposed by King Abdullah on an annual ‘World Interfaith Harmony Week’.
In article 2 of the Jordanian constitution, Islam is laid down as the religion of the state, and Islam is also one of the sources of the legislation. While the Civil Law is based on the Egyptian civil code, which in turn is based on the Code Napoleón, it remains heavily influenced by Islamic laws. Indeed, it is stated in the Civil code that if applicable rules are not found in the code itself, Islamic jurisdiction and the Sharia laws should be consulted (Olwan, 2007: 137). The criminal law is however heavily influenced by the French law, and the laws like the company law, insurance and trade laws are influenced by English law. Civil and criminal matters are dealt with in the civil courts. (Olwan)

Islamic law is applied in matters of personal status (like marriage, divorce, inheritance and child custody) for Muslims, in religious, Sharia courts. As such, this law is very conservative, not least in relation to rights of women. However, attempts at reforming the law have met substantial resistance, both from tribal and religious elements, and the regime is very reluctant to enact legislation that can be perceived as contradicting Islam, according to an Islamist (Masalha). Issues of personal status for other religious communities are dealt with in religious tribunals. Apart from the civil courts and the religious courts, there are special courts, like the state security courts. (Olwan)

While Islam thus plays a significant role on the Jordanian legal system, it by no means makes up the sole foundation for the legislation. Instead, the legal system of Jordan is based on a variety of sources, and it mixes secular and non-secular traits. Still, the importance of Islam in legal matters should not be overlooked. In this sense, Islam is an important element in the national identity as construed by the regime.

The Hashemite regime has thus worked for national unity and national identity, and for including Islam as an important element on which these rest, in different ways. The regime has moreover worked out different royal initiatives to promote political reform on the basis of a sense of Jordanianess in the country. These initiatives include the National Charter (1991), the Jordan First (2002), the National Agenda (2005) and We are all Jordan (2006). Most important from a national identity perspective are the National Charter, and – particularly – the Jordan First initiatives.

The National Charter emphasizes the “broad agreement on the need for the political reflection of Jordan’s cultural pluralism” and the constitutional principles reflecting “the pride of all Jordanians in their national identity as part and parcel of the Arab nation and their faith in Islam as both the religion of the state and a defining civilisation for the people” (National
Charter). To ensure realization of the constitution, democracy is needed and democracy is to be based on a number of principles outlined.

Regarding national identity, the National Charter emphasizes that the “Arab Islamic civilisation, open to world civilisation, is the defining aspect of the national identity of the Jordanian people” (chapter 1). Relations between Jordanian and Palestinians are paid particular attention in the National Charter. In chapter 7, it is stated that “(t)he Palestinian Arab identity is a political identity forged by struggle. It is not and must not be contradictory to the Arab Jordanian identity. The only contradiction lies with the Zionist settler programme”. Importantly, “the Jordanian-Palestinian relationship must not be understood or exploited under any conditions whatsoever to imply any curtailment of the rights of citizenship or to lead to a weakening of the Jordanian state from the inside or to create conditions leading to the realisation of Zionist designs to make Jordan an alternative to the Palestinian homeland. From this perspective, a commitment to Jordan’s national security becomes the responsibility of all citizens and serves to emphasise their continued struggle and sacrifice for the liberation of Palestine and the preservation of Jordan and its identity” (chapter 7). In the National Charter, the regime thus strongly emphasises that the Palestinian issue must not drive a wedge between Transjordanians and Palestinians in Jordan, thus threatening national unity and security and the persistence of the state. Loyalty to the territorial Jordanian state is demanded.

By emphasising the Jordanianess of the national identity, the Hashemite regime thus aims at counteracting any Palestinian subversive activities undermining the Jordanian state: “(N)ational Jordanian unity is the solid base on which close relations must exist among the citizens in the Jordanian state ... (as) it is impossible to distinguish on the ground between the Jordanian Arab people regardless of their origins” (chapter 7). While the distinctiveness of the national Jordanian identity thus is underlined, it was however at this time still emphasised that “Jordan is an indivisible part of the Arab and Islamic nation ... (and that) its national identity is Arab just as Islam is the faith of the nation”; the National Charter further proclaims belief in “the inevitability of union among the Arab states” (chapter 8). While the importance of the Jordanian identity – based on Islam – thus is highlighted, it is obvious that pan-Arab sentiments still held sway.

The work to promote a distinct Jordanianess was taken a step further in the Jordan First initiative of 2002, or, as it is termed by some, “Jordan First, Arab Second” (Köprülü, 2007).
According to Jordan’s Embassy in the US, Jordan First “is an attempt to define a new social accord between Jordanians, as it emphasizes the pre-eminence of Jordan’s interests above all other considerations” (Jordan First, National Campaign, www.jordanembassyus.org). More specifically, “the Jordan First campaign calls upon the government to deepen the sense of national identity among citizens and spread a culture of respect and tolerance to integrate and fortify a diverse, but united, national and social fabric that thrives in an atmosphere of justice, democracy, due process, and equal opportunity” (Jordan First, National Campaign, www.jordanembassyus.org). As such, Jordan First is thus to highlight “the shining link and efficacious bond that enwraps all Jordanian patriots, who see in their belonging to their homeland a gateway to their loyalty to their nation” (Jordan First Document). Again, the regime calls on its citizens to prioritise loyalty to the Jordanian state. Like the National Charter, the Jordan First largely focuses on democratic reforms, and the Jordan First Document produced by the Jordan First Commission put forth a range of reform-proposals meeting the challenges defined.

Jordan First was a response to the difficult situation regionally, after the outbreak of the Palestinian intifada in 2000 resulting in strong calls from the public on the Hashemite regime to end normalization with Israel. According to the intentions of the regime, a campaign emphasising the priority of Jordanian interests over Arab (not least Palestinian) interests would ease domestic tensions, binding citizens together by their sense of loyalty to the Jordanian homeland. In this way, opposition could be contained, and stability, unity – and normalization with Israel – maintained (Köprülü, 2009, BTI, 2010). In the Jordan First campaign, the strong interlinkages between national identity and security in the case of Jordan thus stand out clearly.

However, the Jordan First campaign was not well received. Large segments of the Jordanian public, including the Islamist opposition and many Palestinians, did not appreciate what they perceived as a betrayal of the Palestinian cause (Masalha). Uprisings in support of the Palestinian cause in conservative, tribal and decidedly Transjordanian Maan, considered a bastion of Hashemite loyalty, seriously challenged the Jordan First discourse, and were struck down in a heavy-handed manner by the regime. In the wake of the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, further playing on the Arab sentiments in the Jordanian public, the Jordan First campaign was therefore informally abandoned (BTI, 2010). Later campaigns, like the National Agenda and the We are all Jordan have not addressed the issues of nationality to any greater extent, instead focusing on political and economic reforms to the benefit of all
Jordanians. This goes also for the recent National Dialogue Committee, launched in the wake of the Arab Spring developments.

It can be questioned to what extent these national campaigns have been successful in forging a national identity in Jordan. However, they are not the only avenue attempted to this effect by the Hashemite regime. Also the education has been used as a means to convey a Jordanian national identity to the Jordanians. Indeed, schooling is “increasingly identified … as the pathway by which youth may become empowered and serve Jordan as ‘Knights of Change’”, not least in relation to the formation of a national identity (Shirazi, 2009). In the school curricula, the regime puts forth is official narratives on national identity, emphasising unity and loyalty to the state. However, research shows that such overtures from the regime are challenged at local levels in schools, as they fail to take into consideration the fact that the term “Jordanian” continues to be basically contested. Indeed, it is stated, “these discourses of reform fail to highlight ‘what everyone in Jordan knows and nobody talks about’” (Shirazi, 2009: 3). Also in terms of education, the success of regime attempts at forging a national identity can be questioned.

Despite various efforts by the Hashemite regime at constructing a Jordanized national identity, with Islamic elements at its core, these seem largely to have failed, at least for now. In different ways, if not in others, these efforts have also been challenged by the discourse and activities of the main opposition in Jordan – the Islamists.

*Islam and national identity: Islamist Discourse and Activities*

Over time, Islamists in Jordan – here primarily represented by the main opposition, the Muslim Brotherhood and its political party, the Islamic Action Front (IAF) – have exhibited a far from clear-cut approach to the state and the national identity in Jordan. The Muslim Brotherhood was present in Jordan, as part of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood, at the foundation of the Jordanian state in 1946. Since then, the Brotherhood in Jordan has had organisational links to other Brotherhoods in the area, from 2006 also with Hamas, something which has led to ruptures in the movement (Hattar, 2009). At the same time, it is often emphasised that the state of Jordan and the Muslim Brotherhood were born and grew up together, something which is generally seen as mutually beneficial to both (Jonasson, 2004: 197).
The relation between the Brotherhood and the Jordanian state is thus very complex. On the one hand, the Muslim Brotherhood long remained loyal to the King and the Hashemite state, standing by the monarchy in the face of diverse challenges from Arab Nationalists as well as militant Palestinians, conspicuously so during the 1970-1971 civil war when PLO guerrilla groups waged war on Israel from Jordanian soil, and clashing with the Jordanian army, thereby challenging Jordan’s sovereignty over its own territory (Ghadbian, 1997: 119, 124, Robins, 2004: 126-132). On the other hand, Jordanian Muslim Brothers have also always supported the Palestinians and their claims wholeheartedly, often in open defiance of the regime’s stance (Ghadbian, 1997:127).

Especially since opening up the political process in 1989, the pro-Palestinian stance has led to frictions with the King, notably regarding the 1994 peace treaty with Israel which the Muslim Brothers abhor. However, tensions have increased markedly also on domestic matters. Recently, in the wake of the Arab Spring events, Islamists have raised their voices in demand for true parliamentarianism in Jordan, i.e. that the government should be supported by a representative parliamentary majority, instead of appointed by the King as stipulated in the constitution. On his side, the King has in different ways tried to contain the Islamists as well as the Palestinians challenging his reign, for instance by limiting their parliamentary representation, in particular via the election system.

However, at the same time as there are clear frictions, both the King and the Islamists are anxious to not overplay their differences, in the interest of the endurance of the Jordanian state. While both parties thus support the continuous existence of the Jordanian state, they have very different approaches to how it is to be ruled and on the position towards Israel.

The ultimate ideological objective of the Muslim Brotherhood is the realisation of the Islamic state, based on application of Sharia. Islam is to permeate the state and society alike, and freedom, justice, equality and rule of law are to be based on Islamic tenets (About us, MB, ref). This stance is echoed in the party programme of the IAF, stating the resumption of Islamic life in society on the basis of Sharia as its objective (IAF Party programme). Islamists in general see Islam as a system of life, and Islamic rules are to be applied in all its aspects (Masalha).

As such, the principle of secularism therefore has no place in this Islamic system according to the Muslim Brother-mainstream, instead the legal system should be entirely based on Islam
(Masalha). However, less ideologically rigid reformers in the Brotherhood have called for a civil legal code instead of Sharia (Barari, 2009).

Regarding the issue of the nation and the national identity of Jordan, the approach of the Muslim Brothers and IAF is not straightforward. Indeed, the Islamist use of the concept “nation” is two-pronged. While referring to all Muslims (i.e. the ummah) and the importance of rebuilding the Arab and Islamic society and nation, in a way that connotes to the (re-)establishment of an Arab Islamic state (About us?, IAF party programme), there is also clear emphasis on Jordan as a country and the need for Islamic reform in the country itself, while respecting the present constitution and the sovereignty of the law (IAF 1/17/2011, IAF party programme). In fact, the importance of security and stability – and national unity – in Jordan is much emphasised, indicating that the Islamic movement is not aiming at destabilisation of Jordan (IAF 1/17/2011, IAF 07/15/2010, IAF party programme).

At the same time as the Brotherhood movement is against the “balkanization” of the Islamic and Arab nation, as it leads to Western control, it de facto accepts the countries’ borders as such, and works for Islamic reform at home (Frisch, 2002: 96, al-Anani, 2010). Brotherhood representatives insist that there is no contradiction between Islam and a national identity; indeed different identities can be held simultaneously, even if one is value-based (Islam), one is ethnic (Arab), one is political (Jordanian) and one is local (tribal) (Masalha).

Apart from the emphasis on the establishment of an Islamic society in Jordan, based on Sharia, one particularly important objective of the Brotherhood movement is the liberation of Palestine – it its entirety, seen as the heart of the Arab-Islamic nation. This objective results in a heavy emphasis by the Islamists on the right of return for Palestinian refugees (against resettling in host countries like Jordan), protesting the Israeli occupation, refusal to recognize Israel, resistance against normalization between Jordan and Israel at any level (as instigated by the government) and unconditional support for Hamas (IAF 05/14/2011, IAF party programme, al-Anani, 2010:50, Krämer, 1994: 219, 222).²

² It can be noted that a Hamas representative recently stated that Hamas would be willing to accept a Palestinian state “on any part of Palestine”, which reportedly is the first time Hamas refrains from insisting on a Palestinian state in all of Palestine; however the statement did not imply a recognition of Israel (UPI, 11 May, 2011).
While the realization of the Islamic state and society is the long-term objective of the Islamists in Jordan, their day-to-day program thus has two major foci: opposition to the present political system and support for the Palestinian cause.

This dual focus has however grown into a bone of contention within the movement itself, not least because of the charged situation in Jordan related to the Palestinian issue. While the movement, on the one hand, has been hailed as bridging divisions in Jordan by appealing to overarching Islamic sentiments, the movement, on the other hand, is split on how to relate to the regime and how to deal with the Palestinian issue. In these regards, the movement has always been divided into a more dovish, moderate, pro-regime, largely East Bank Transjordanian-origin group (long dominating the leadership) and a more hawkish, hard-line, confrontational, largely West Bank Palestinian-origin group (dominating the grass roots). In terms of national identity, these two groups represent widely diverging outlooks. While the hawks are close to Hamas, push for its return to Jordan after having been thrown out in 1999 and embrace an agenda prioritizing the Palestinian issue, the doves prioritize a nationalist Jordanian agenda, aiming at developing the party into an Islamist Jordanian nationalist party (Barari, 2009, Hattar, 2009, Masalha).

The leadership in the Brotherhood was long in the hands of the dovish, mainly Transjordanian Islamists. However, since the 2006 victory of Hamas in the Palestinian elections, followed by an increased support for a hard-line approach in the wake of increased state-repression in Jordan, the power-balance in the Brotherhood has shifted in favour of the hawkish attitude, creating severe rifts in the movement. This shift was manifested by the election in the Muslim Brotherhood of a hawkish Palestinian-origin leader in 2008, Hammam Said. In 2010, severe ruptures between hawks and doves, largely on whether to maintain organizational links to Hamas, shook the IAF. At that time, the election of a pro-Hamas hawkish leader, Zaki Bani Rsheid (put forth by the Muslim Brother Shura Council) was however aborted in favour of a more dovish leader, Hamzah Mansour, in order to “preserve the group’s unity” (Ben Hussein, 2010, Hattar, 2009).²

In different ways, the Islamist opposition thus challenges the national-identity construct of the state, by offering an alternative narrative, stipulating a much more profound role for Islam in state and society. However, interestingly, the two trends in the Muslim Brotherhood also represent different narratives between themselves on the national identity. Even if all Islamists

² The Muslim Brotherhood later vowed to not intervene in the party’s internal elections (Ben Hussein, 2010).
support both political reform in Jordan as well as the Palestinian issue, the hawks state that support for the Palestinian cause at all times must take precedence, while the doves argue that focus must be primarily on local Jordanian issues. To exemplify with the stance on Hamas: while the hawks support Hamas in all regards, the doves emphasize that Hamas is a political resistance project in Palestine – not in Jordan (Ben Hussein, 2010, Masalha).

At a general level, all Islamists in the Brotherhood thus agree on objectives. They are further very aware of the delicacy of the regional situation and are unlikely to derail the region’s security balance (Murdock, 2011). Still, the diverging priorities have at times threatened to split the movement, and thus weaken it; such tendencies are fanned by the regime (Curtis, Mezagopian). Islamist appeals to Islam as an over-arching element however works against this rift, uniting Jordanians and Palestinians, doves and hawks. By emphasizing the Islamic identity in its discourse, avoiding talking about a Jordanian vs. a Palestinian identity, unity can be attained in the face of divisive tendencies regarding national identities (Masalha).

Threatened by internal divisions, the Islamists thus decided to bury the battle axes in order to retain political clout, and “focus on pressing issues that face the country and the Arab nation” (Ben Hussein, 2010). They were helped in their efforts to re-unite both by conflict mediation by the international Muslim Brotherhood council and by the 2010 Jordanian parliamentary election, boycotted by the Islamists, which forged the Islamists together in a common opposition to the regime, even if some Islamists decided to break ranks and run as independents (Masalha, Barari, 2009). However, recent events – not least the offer to partake in the new government formed in February 2011 – have also had divisive potential, as some Islamists wanted to participate, while others wanted to stay out. At the end, the movement decided on staying outside, stating that it will only take part in a future Cabinet if it is formed as an elected government chosen by a parliamentary majority (Luck, 2011a).

According to the moderate trend that has recently won out, at least in the IAF, there is no way back to a grand pan-Islamic Caliphate; any potential unity of Islamic states would more resemble the way European states have united in the European Union (Masalha). Even if the Islamists “carry out a program which will at the end lead to the unity of Arab and Islamic countries because we believe Muslims are one nation”, more so than the Europeans, such a Union is far off (Mansour in Shahzad, 2003). Today, present borders must be respected and focus must be on democratic reform and increased the influence of Islam in the states at hand,
in this case Jordan. In this sense, Islamism is nationalized in the discourse of the Jordanian Brotherhood, particularly so in its moderate variety.

The Brotherhood movement aims at pursuing broad activities to work for their objectives of increased Islamisation in Jordan and liberation of Palestine. In these activities, the Brotherhood itself and the IAF work in tandem, however focusing in specific areas, not least for legal reasons (Jonasson, 2004: 231-233). While the main priority of the IAF is activities directly related to politics, the Brotherhood pursues much broader, social, educational and religious activities, in addition to the political activities. In a well-organised manner, the Brotherhood movement thus sets out to pursue both political activities (like campaigns, demonstrations, debates, conferences, media activities, public meetings and festivals) and more social, educational and religious activities (like supporting religious institutions and spreading the Islamic message in mosques and elsewhere, alleviating poverty through charity, initiating recreational activities, supporting professional associations, unions, youth clubs, cultural and sport centres, establishing schools and banks), on a continuous basis. In this way, the Muslim Brothers (and Sisters, organized women sections) aim at being present in all aspects of daily life, on all levels in society, to be a moral power with wide reach.

However, especially since 2006 and the increased repression by the state, pursuing such broad-ranging activities has become more difficult. In different ways, the regime has set out to stem Islamist activities, by obstructing them by legal means. This has contributed to making mainstream Brotherhood activities more secretive, but also to a radicalization of frustrated elements in the Brotherhood movement. In this way, the regime has pushed the Islamists into becoming a secret movement, in the eyes of the Brothers (Masalha). In this context, one activity stands out as particularly important: focus on personal relations. The Muslim Brothers show their concern for individuals, for instance at weddings and funerals, in a way that cannot be prohibited by the government and thus retains influence (Jonasson, 2004; 234-40, Masalha, Shahzad, 2003).

Despite being counteracted by the regime, the Brotherhood in different ways work to put pressure on the government, to make for gradual reforms in accordance with their program of promoting Islamic values on the domestic level. The strategy of the Brotherhood in this regard has differed over time. While at times having participated in the political process, notably in elections, the Brothers have increasingly opted for an oppositional stance, not participating in the political process by way of elections, as this process is ultimately decided on by the King.
The Brotherhood argues that they cannot participate in a process which they find manipulated from the outset, as they then would grant the process legitimacy. Thus, instead of participating in elections under what they – and others – regard as a basically rigged election system, they have recently boycotted elections. They also declined participation in the royal National Dialogue committee, launched in the wake of the Arab Spring in early 2011, declaring that they lost faith in the reform process and calling instead for a national unity government to lead the national dialogue and a “real” elected parliament as a cornerstone for true reform (Dalgamouni, 2011, Ben Hussein, 2011).

In various ways, then, the Muslim Brotherhood thus opposes the regime’s take on the political future of Jordan, instead offering their own alternative. However, they – at least the moderates – do so without challenging the idea of Jordan and the Jordanian national identity. Instead, they offer their own version, a nationalized Islamism.

Internationally, the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood is connected to the International Muslim Brotherhood, which convenes in a majlis (where the Jordanian Brotherhood has one representative) to discuss different topics. The International Muslim Brotherhood primarily discusses issues that engage Islamists world-wide, like the Gaza-issue. In relation to such issues, the Islamists provide material support, like money. Local issues, like whether to boycott elections in Jordan, are left to the local Brotherhood to decide on. However, the International Brotherhood can also intervene in local conflicts, like in the recent split in the Jordanian Brotherhood between doves and hawks, when the International Brotherhood provided mediation and put pressure on the parties to reach a solution and get reunited, lest the Islamic movement becomes significantly weakened in Jordan. In doing so, also the International Brotherhood recognizes the importance of strong, nationalized Islamist movements in the different countries. (Masalha)

Even if there are differences of opinion within the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, mainstream, moderate Islamists thus work for Islamisation in Jordan in line with a nationalized Islamism, not challenging the national identity as such, and they seem to be supported by the International Muslim Brotherhood in doing so. However, the Muslim Brotherhood is not alone among Islamists in Jordan to have entered on a process of nationalization. Also the more militant Jihadi Salafists, sympathizing with al-Qaida, recently stated in a rare public appearance that they are now putting emphasis on “placing the Kingdom under Sharia … and moving away from its traditional messages encouraging
resistance in Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine and elsewhere”, later clashing with security police (Luck, 2011b).

The traditional, peaceful Salafists have always been against opposition to regimes in Muslim states, and are in that sense nationalists, as they do not challenge the regimes in place. Indeed, they steer clear of political activities altogether, as they regard such as dividing the Muslim ummah. Instead, they focus on education, arguing that their objectives only can be reached through education, not politics (Luck, 2011b).

Unlike the Muslim Brotherhood and the IAF, these Salafists – both jihadi and traditional – however both refuse democracy, modernity and human rights. What they aim for is restoration of the Islamic state in Jordan, if in very different ways. Other Islamists, like the Hezb Al Tahrir, banned since 1953, however remains decidedly internationalist – and thus anti-nationalist – in its outlook, as it aims at the establishment of an imperial Islamic Caliphate (Luck, 2011b).

Among Islamists in Jordan, there are thus clear nationalization tendencies. Even if they support Arab Islamic causes, not least the Palestinian, in rhetoric, territorial borders (except Israelis) are largely recognized and focus is on Islamisation of the state and society at hand.

**Concluding discussion: A contested Jordanian national identity?**

The Hashemite regime and the Islamists relate differently to the role of Islam in the rule of the state. While the Islamists aim at an overhaul of the present system, placing state and society solidly on Islamic ground, calling for the state to be ruled fully in line with Islamic rules, the regime emphasises the importance of Islam as a core foundation of state and society, but not to the same extent as the Islamists, taking also other considerations into account. Regarding what role is to be assigned to Islam in the state, the regime and the Islamist thus present different narratives, and the Islamists challenge the Hashemite’s take on how to rule Jordan.

However, regarding the national identity of Jordan the issue is less straightforward. In this regard, there is no sharp dividing line between the regime and many Islamists. Large parts of the Muslim Brotherhood, primarily those of Transjordanian origin, do not challenge the national identity-construct in Jordan, as proposed by the regime, even if they propose a more Islamised version of it. Instead, both the regime and these Islamists agree on working for the persistence of the Jordanian state and on the importance of the unity of the state for it to be sustainable. What they disagree on is how the Jordanian state is to be ruled – and the policy
towards Israel. In these senses, these Islamists challenge the position of the regime, not regarding the national identity.

Although Islam is supranational, many Islamists – particularly doves of Transjordanian origin – thus limit their approach to the Jordanian territory, and calls for Islamism in the territorial state. But this does not apply to all Islamists. Other Islamists – primarily hawks of Palestinian origin – instead appeal to the supranational dimension of Islam in support of the Palestinian claims for the establishment of a Palestine state. By doing so, these Islamists offer an alternative to the Jordanian national identity, namely the Palestinian national identity, also to Palestinians living in Jordan. Islam is used by these Islamists to support the national aspirations of Palestinians, not to bridge the differences between Transjordanian and Palestinian identities in Jordan. In the eyes of the regime, this amounts to an attack on the national Jordanian unity, and thus on the state itself.

This rift between doves and hawks in the Brotherhood in turn reflects the latent simmering political volcano in Jordan, with the potential of destabilizing the whole state and with deep-going repercussions for the national identity: the outlook of the Jordanians of Palestinian origin vs. outlook of the Jordanians of Trans-Jordanian origin.

Several questions, with great ramifications for national identity in Jordan, can be asked in this context: What do the Palestinians want in Jordan? Do they want to be subsumed as citizens in Jordan? Are they loyal to the Jordanian state? Or do they only look upon Jordan as their temporary base in the creation of the Palestinian state? Which state are they loyal to, the existing Jordanian state – or the not yet existing Palestinian state? Or are they as much Jordanian as Palestinian? If so, can they be? And how do the Transjordanians relate to this? Are they willing to let the Palestinians in on equal terms, granting them equal representation and other political rights, effectively making them equal Jordanian citizens in all respects? Or do they look upon Palestinians with mistrust, fearing their take-over in the Jordanian state and society, which threatens to forever consigning the Transjordanians to a minority-position in their own country and eventually breaking down the country itself.

Recent developments – like the December 2010 soccer game which leapt out of hand in clashes between Transjordanians and Palestinians (Bar’el, 2010), the 24-25 of March clashes, where militant pro-regime tribal Transjordanians backed by state security forces attacked reformist youth, including Islamist/Palestinians, causing a severe friction between Islamists (charging the government with attacking its own youth) and the government (charging the
Islamists with acting against national unity, inferring disloyalty to the national identity of Jordan) (Black Iris, 2011, Luck, 2011 c), and East Bank tribal criticism against Queen Rania, a Palestinian, on charges on corruption, insensitivity and claiming public lands for her family (Murdock, 2011) – indicate that Jordan is far from a coherent approach to national identity. Still, there are great divergences between actors on how national identity is perceived in Jordan, even if the different sides in the face of escalation decide to avoid further tensions (Luck, 2011 c). A Jordanian national identity synthesis has thus not been forthcoming.

At the core of the matter is the stance of the regime in relation to the national identity. To work for the persistence of the state in the face of domestic and external challenges, the Hashemite regime has constructed a national identity that it demands allegiance to and proposes political and economic reforms to strengthen the state, urging Jordanians to focus on reform in Jordan, instead of wasting all efforts on Palestine. The crux of the matter is, however, that the people of Jordan do not fully agree with the regime on the demarcated way forward. Indeed, “(t)he fundamental reason for the gap between state’s interests and people’s preferences is heavily derived from the Arabist, Palestinian and Islamic identities that historically, culturally and socially constructed Jordanian identity for a long period of time” (Köprülü, 2007: 283). Thus, Jordan’s state identity in many respects does not coincide with the popular sense of national identity.

Opening up the political process has therefore further exacerbated the tensions, allowing them to surface, instead of alleviating them. The political repression that has subsequently followed further served to crystallise supranational as well as sub-state identities at the expense of state identity (Köprülü, 2007: 286). The Hashemite regime now seems struck in a downward spiral of increasing tensions, and the actions it tries to undertake seem to further aggravate the situation.

In its efforts of building unity, the regime has equated political opposition to opposition to the national identity and unity. However, this analysis shows that these points of opposition do not necessarily coincide. Moderate, primarily Transjordanian Islamists are in opposition to the regime regarding how Jordan is to be ruled and its policies on Israel. However, these Islamists do not challenge the national identity of Jordan; instead, their perception of national identity converge with that of the regime, as long as it is not seen as putting aside the Palestinian issue (Masalha). Islamism is for them nationalised.
The main dividing line as to national identity in Jordan thus does not run between the regime and the Islamist opposition, but within the Islamist opposition itself. Against the moderate, primarily Transjordanian Islamists stand the radical, primarily Palestinian Islamists, calling for precedence of the Palestinian cause, holding out the Palestinian national identity as a foundational challenge to the Jordanian identity, disputing the Jordanian national identity and unity – and thus the Jordanian state – at its core. This conflict is further duplicated in society at large.

The struggle for a national identity in Jordan thus continues. To achieve such an identity, many pieces must fall in place. For one thing, the regime must acknowledge that opposition to its rule does not equal opposition to the state as such and its national identity. Jordan is a conceivable political entity also without a Hashemite King with wide political powers. What is more, Palestinians need to be included on the political arena on equal terms as citizens in Jordan. In turn, Palestinians must accept a national identity as Jordanians first and foremost. Loyalty to the state is the flip side of the coin of representation. One thing is clear, however – in any Jordanian national identity, Islam will play a foundational role.
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