

The Political Geography of Protest in Neoliberal Jordan

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The armed services and the security apparatuses will protect the march of reform.
(King Abdullah II on the occasion of Army Day, June 10, 2005)

Studies of protest activities predominantly have focused on police–protestor dynamics and the political opportunity structures of the regime. This article goes beyond those studies by examining two new perspectives about protest activities, using Jordan as a case study. First, I posit that Jordan is less a case of ‘resilient authoritarianism’ than it is an example of new forms of non-democratic governance, with economic rights advanced while political rights are restrained. In this context, Jordan remains a security state, ‘liberal’ economically but not politically. It is also a state in which the reach of security apparatuses is highly varied spatially. Second, protest activities in Jordan are affected not only by the non-democratic nature of the state, but also by the country’s physical changes that are the direct result of rapidly expanding neoliberal economic reforms. This article links these two insights to provide a new framework for understanding the political geography of protest in a neoliberalizing authoritarian state.

Political Geography of Protest

In May 2006, construction crews began tearing up the main north–south road at the western edge of Amman. The road runs through the Seventh Circle (on Zahran Street) north to the neighborhood of Sweileh, extending south toward the airport and eventually Aqaba. It passes two major malls to the east and the King Hussein Medical Center, King Hussein Gardens (with its new King Hussein Mosque), and the posh new neighborhood of Dubuq to the west. Like other parts of Amman, this road used to be well outside the city limits, but now it marks, perhaps only fleetingly, the western edge of a city that continues to expand westward and now downward into the Jordan River Valley. This particular construction widened the road considerably and laid new pavement for a stretch of several miles. The new surface more closely resembled a tarmac than it did some other recently

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paved thoroughfares elsewhere in the capital. Indeed, this public works project was not about much-needed improvements to a road that carried ever more and heavier traffic. As spectator stands were erected midway along the pristine surface in early June, the intention to use the strip for a large-scale parade became clear. The construction unfolded at record pace, and Royal Air Force fighter planes flew in formation over the area daily. The rehearsals and the paving were both in preparation for Army Day on June 10, when soldiers, tanks, and all manners of military equipment paraded along the route past the stands—and past King Abdullah II, Queen Rania, and members of the cabinet and parliament—while fighter planes thundered overhead.

Jordan had not held such a military parade for thirty years. Indeed, similar spectacles of military strength virtually had disappeared since King Hussein ushered in the much-touted (and frequently exaggerated) democratic (re)opening that began in fall 1989 following the nation-wide riots of that spring.¹ But just as the early enthusiasm over the political liberalizations elided serious concerns about just how deep Jordan's democratization program reached, many of the more recent critiques of the regime wrongly have characterized King Abdullah's rule, which began in 1999, as marking a 'democratic reversal' or a 'return to authoritarianism.' The straightforward interpretation of the Army Day spectacle would be that it evidenced the reassertion of a strong military and security presence into Jordanian politics, a trend that gained strength with the outbreak of the second intifada in fall 2000 and especially the hotel bombings of November 2005. Indeed, the symbolism and significance of holding Jordan's first military parade in thirty years just seven months after the bombings that claimed 60 lives (in addition to the lives of three of the bombers) is hard to mistake.

However, examining the state of Jordanian politics through such a lens of 'liberalization' and 'deliberalization'² relies heavily on a conceptualization of the state as located somewhere along a continuum spanning from democratic to authoritarian. The literature on democratic transitions has been extensively critiqued elsewhere: its attention to formal state institutions and practices overlooks considerable change that may continue to unfold even within so-called 'stalled' democracies, and often outside the sphere of formal (electoral) political participation.³ Instead, I am arguing here that this literature also gets the state, as an object of analysis, wrong: there is no zero-sum game between democracy and authoritarianism. The more recent literature on 'liberalized autocracy' does begin to unpack the complex ways in which liberal democratic practices have been selectively adopted by authoritarian regimes. But like the literature on 'robust authoritarianism' in the Middle East, the focus remains on the extent to which such regimes use liberal reforms primarily to ensure the maintenance of their authority. Regimes may be willing to liberalize on some issues—such as women's rights—and these reforms are certainly genuine; but in no case do they compromise the authority of the regime. In this sense the literature on authoritarianism has emphasized that (1) regimes genuinely adopt some reforms that do not threaten their survival, and (2) regimes also

¹ I emphasize this point because it often is forgotten that Jordan had multiparty competitive elections in the 1950s, so its experience with participatory politics is not new.

² On the concept of political 'deliberalization,' see R. Lucas (2003) *Deliberalization in Jordan*, *Journal of Democracy*, 14(1), pp. 137–144.

³ See further Jillian Schwedler (2006) *Faith in Moderation: Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen* (New York: Cambridge University Press).

adopt 'façade' liberal reforms as a mechanism for taming domestic opposition, with the added bonus of satisfying international audiences eager for evidence of political reform. I do not dispute these points, but I wish to shift the attention away from regime survival and toward the ways in which such reforms also entail very real liberalization for citizens, even if the newly guaranteed rights are highly selective and, more importantly, felt by only certain segments of the population. The focus on the authoritarian-to-democracy continuum clouds the complex but real effects of such reforms because they are dismissed as tools of regime survival and thus seldom are taken seriously for how they alter substantive political practices.

I contend that the tendency to characterize states like Jordan as more authoritarian than democratic fundamentally misreads the precise ways in which such states simultaneously have become more liberal *and* more autocratic. As Jean and John L. Comaroff argue, certain kinds of liberalization projects—particularly those that fetishize elections and civil society as markers of democracy—not only proceed under certain kinds of autocracy, but actually thrive there.⁴ Moving from this insight, I examine the changing governmental tactics with a view toward the ways in which policies affect different segments of Jordan's citizenry by expanding rights that effectively reach only certain portions of the population while constraining the (often political) freedoms that only portions of the population are striving to utilize. These varied reform projects entail not only legal reforms (and their enforcement) of the sort that are conventionally held as indicators of a regime's commitment to democratization and 'good governance'—meaning primarily the 'rule of law'—but also the reorganization of public space, changes in the practices and visibility of security services, the construction of particular kinds of commercial zones (free trade zones as well as shopping centers), and the refusal to recognize certain expressions of political dissent. In this regard, the increased visibility of the military and security services in recent years can be understood not as evidence of the regime's abandonment of the democratization project, but as an integral mechanism for the advancement of a particular kind of liberal reform project. This project entails far less participatory democracy than it does the privileging of the activities of certain kinds of citizen-subjects: those who vote regularly, shop even more regularly, and embrace the identity of a united, modern Jordan.

These varied projects are linked through broader state-led campaigns, such as 'Jordan First' and its heir, 'We are all Jordanians,' and the concomitant efforts to construct a particular kind of new Jordanian citizen. My intention in this paper is not to explore the emergence of new forms of citizen subjectivities in Jordan, but to reveal patterns in the more tangible sets of reforms and practices whose differential effects on various segments of the citizenry can be established empirically. I intend to draw connections with similar practices emerging elsewhere in the region and internationally. As Anna Tsing argues, even the most 'remote' of 'frontiers'—spatial imaginings emanating from broader political projects—are seldom disconnected from changing practices at regional and global levels, but nor are local practices simply determined by external forces.⁵ In this

⁴ Jean Comaroff & John Comaroff (2006) *Law and Disorder in the Postcolony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), pp. 1–18.

⁵ The notion of a 'frontier' in Tsing's sense reminds us of the spatial and frontier notions familiar to classic notions of the Orient. See further Anna Tsing (2005) *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

sense Jordan is neither a mere local manifestation of global logics, nor a *sui generis* case isolated from external practices and trends. Rather than a return to authoritarianism, I argue, we are seeing the emergence of an entirely new kind of Jordanian state, one which owes much to neoliberal logics, such as the writing of states of exception into all aspects of the law; the escalation of economic reforms that are altering the physical landscape of Jordan; and the effects of these rights and practices on different segments of the population. Jordan's liberalization is thus as real and substantive as its re-securitization; both are also highly selective in their reach.

This article proceeds in two parts: First, I further discuss the 2006 Army Day Parade and the Jordan First campaigns, examining the ways in which the expanded presence of the military and security apparatus in politics can be seen as supporting rather than inhibiting liberalization of a particular type. Second, I explore the ways in which protest activities unfold on and around the symbolic spaces emerging from the state's broader program of neoliberal exceptions. The analysis here is preliminary in its theoretical formulation and reflects an effort to articulate some ideas that have emerged out of my field research undertaken over the past several years.

The Spectacle of Transformation

Army Day is a national holiday in Jordan, held every June 10. The occasion of the 2006 Army Day was marked by the first large-scale military parade in Jordan in thirty years, a spectacle within the capital city of Amman that was both visible and audible (via the flights of fighter planes) not only on the holiday itself but also during the weeks leading up to the event. As this display of military force followed just months after the November 2005 hotel bombings, the event clearly was intended to emphasize the regime's commitment to security, both domestic and regional. The spectacle also can be understood not only as a public reassertion of state power, but as part of the 'national pride' dimension of the Jordan First campaign underway at the time.⁶ Spatially, the widening of the road on which the parade took place can be understood in connection with the reconstruction of western Amman to facilitate commercial traffic as well as flows of elite consumers to shopping malls, to their large private villas in expensive neighborhoods, and to the airport. I will examine each of these in turn.

Jordan First

The Jordan First campaign, which launched in October 2002, was developed by the US-based advertising firm Saatchi and Saatchi at a cost of some \$US50 million.⁷ The campaign

⁶ The latest campaign is 'We are all Jordanian.'

⁷ In this article I discuss primarily the specific campaign launched in October 2002, but in broad terms I refer to 'campaigns' because this particular effort was not the first one aimed at creating national unity. In my new book project on the political geography of protest, I devote a chapter to tracing these series of campaigns and to exploring issues of authenticity of identity that circulate around them. The manuscript is titled tentatively 'Protesting Jordan: Law, Space, Dissent.' Important work on these issues has been done by Mark Lynch (1999) *State Interests and Public Spheres: The International Politics of Jordan's Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press); and Joseph Massad (2001) *Colonial Effects: The Making of National Identity in Jordan* (New York: Columbia University Press).

was greeted with indifference by many Jordanians, and with mixed reviews from a small number. Those who were keen on the campaign felt that Jordan had long suffered from over-engagement in regional issues—notably the Palestinian conflict but also as close allies of the United States—at the expense of domestic problems. Indeed, a number of influential scholarly studies have emphasized that Jordan’s greatest natural resource is its strategic location, and that its foreign policy has long been based on that recognition. Critics complained that the campaign signaled a turning away from Arab unity in general and a just resolution of the Palestinian cause in particular. Government officials refuted these critiques, emphasizing that the campaign was aimed only at creating a strong and united country. For example, just weeks before the Army Day parade in 2006, King Abdullah’s speech in commemoration of Jordan’s Independence Day (May 25) spoke directly to these criticisms:

When we say Jordan First, we mean that we should complete the building of a Jordan that is strong and invincible, able to provide support and assist the Arab brethren, whether in Palestine, or Iraq, or any other Arab country. It does not mean deserting our duty towards our nation or its just causes, as some short-sighted people believe. Jordan was, and will always be, a sanctuary for all free Arabs; therefore we say Jordan First, Jordan always, and Jordan under all circumstances and conditions. . . . Jordan’s basic pillar of strength is preserving national unity, integrity and steadfastness among the sons of the one Jordanian family, and the achievement of comprehensive development which enhances Jordan’s strength, and enables Jordan to support the Arab brethren and Arab causes, primary among them the Palestinian cause and that of the Iraqi people. Jordan, brothers, cannot forget the union of blood, goals and destiny with the Palestinian brethren; it is also impossible for Jordan to forget the blood of our martyrs on the walls of Jerusalem and in the yards of the Holy Aqsa Mosque. We will not, on any day, under any circumstances, fail to support and assist the Palestinians, until they attain their rights, including the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on Palestinian soil.

The king also repeatedly has invoked the campaign to critique those with foreign ties, from political parties to individuals linked to illegal groups like al Qaeda. In an interview with the private Saudi television channel MBC, he said, ‘The presence in Jordan of parties with non-Jordanian references or that receive orders or financing from abroad is unacceptable.’⁸ Research institutes have been critiqued for accepting ‘foreign’ monies, from such agencies as the Ford Foundation and the Open Society Institute. Laws prohibiting the receipt of funds from ‘foreign’ donors have taken a serious toll on many non-governmental organizations. Likewise in March 2006, members of Jordan’s Senate put forth a draft law in the name of ‘respecting the state.’ Political party members would be banned from participating in any events abroad that insulted Jordan. Although the draft law ended up not being adopted, it illustrates the contours of the political debates. Furthermore, its introduction followed a gathering in Syria of Arab political parties at which Syrian President Bashar al-Asad mocked the Jordan First campaign. On numerous occasions, therefore, the Jordan First campaign has been used as an explicit frame for

⁸ AFP, October 11, 2006.

critiquing any Jordanian citizen or group for a wide range of activities deemed undesirable by various government officials as well as the king. Jordanians must put their own country first in their concern, the argument goes, and those who do not may be suspect for a wide range of violations against the state, including crimes as extreme as treason.⁹

The irony is that simultaneous to the launch of the major Jordan First campaign, the government undertook a series of economic reforms that were aimed primarily at increasing economic ties with foreign entities. The September 11 attacks, for example, entirely eclipsed Washington's granting of Most Favored Nation status to Jordan, which was, for the first time, to an Arab country. More than 200 temporary laws were introduced between June 2001 and June 2003, when the parliament was not in session (and while the elections originally scheduled for November 2001 repeatedly were delayed). The vast majority of these laws introduced economic reforms aimed at expanding foreign trade, encouraging foreign investment, and easing restrictions for business transactions in general. Multiple free trade zones and qualified industrial zones were established, considerably increasing the presence of foreign industry on Jordanian soil,¹⁰ while altering the physical landscape of portions of Amman,¹¹ Aqaba, and southern parts of the country. Foreign aid also dramatically increased. Since the Iraq war, US economic assistance to Jordan famously doubled to \$US250 million in economic assistance and \$US200 million in military assistance. The Euro-Med Partnership provided Jordan with €570 million, making the kingdom the second-largest EU recipient per capita after Palestine. And, in 2006, the Millennium Challenge Corporation qualified Jordan as a threshold country by, providing \$US25 million annually for 'political rights, voice & accountability, and trade policy.'

Together the economic reforms, increased foreign aid, and the Jordan First campaign signal the reorientation of Jordan's liberalization project from its 1990s focus on political participation to a prioritization of neoliberal economic reforms. This broader project has taken primarily the form of legal reforms aimed at both easing trade and investment regulations and tightening control over the expression of political dissent and demands for increased democratic accountability. Contrary to claims that Jordan's waning commitment to democratic practices signals a possible return to martial law, however, the government made no moves to suspend the constitution or to remove rights that had been guaranteed. Rather than a retreat from individual rights, the government has moved in the direction of advancing certain rights while constraining others. Many laws have been rewritten gradually and systematically to include 'states of exception' of the sort articulated by Giorgio Agamben¹² and most clearly manifested in the US' Patriot Act. Jordan passed its own anti-terrorist act in 2002, but the move toward systematically writing security provisions into all dimensions of the law began at least since 1997, when the Press and Publications Law first was seriously constrained.¹³ Changes to the public gatherings law

⁹ This paragraph is based on my interviews with Jordanian lawyers and activists.

¹⁰ Pete Moore (2003) The Newest Jordan: Free Trade, Peace, and an Ace in the Hole, *Middle East Report Online*, June 26. Available at <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero062603.html>.

¹¹ Christopher Parker (2009) Tunnel Bypasses and Minarets of Capitalism: Amman as Neoliberal Assemblage, *Political Geography*, 28, pp. 110–120.

¹² See further Giorgio Agamben (2005) *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

¹³ The contention around the 1997 revisions to the Press and Publications Law included explicit security dimensions in both the punitive measures for violations—huge fines as well as the risk of prosecution under the penal code—but also the continued emphasis of such 'violations' as threatening or harming Jordan's

also made the organization of political protests far more difficult. Together these legal reforms render a suspension of legal rights utterly unnecessary while simultaneously advancing the narrative of ‘rule of law,’ which has become tightly linked to the notion of good governance. Even more, the guaranteeing of certain kinds of individual rights is essential for the economic reform projects in which Jordan has invested so heavily. Within this context, the increased securitization of the state is not anti-liberal so much as it is neoliberal. The Army Day parade, then, was not only a display of power but also an event of national pride, strength, and unity—the themes of the Jordan First campaign. My point is that spectacles such as the parade are integral to the advancement of a particular national narrative, one that emphasizes strength and progress of the sort that go hand in hand with neoliberal reforms and the advancement of selective rights.

The reality, however, is that the impact of both the securitization of the state and the economic reforms has not been felt consistently across the nation, in terms of affecting the citizenry equally as well as in terms of physical reform projects. In the next section I explore some of these differentiations with a particular focus on the privileging of elite consumers in Jordan’s liberalization project, and its manifestations in the spatial reconfiguration of the capital.

Space and Consumerism

What sorts of reform projects have been undertaken, and how have their effects been differentially felt by various segments of the citizenry? Much attention has been given to the lifting of subsidies for basic foods and for petrol products, reforms mandated by Jordan’s agreements with the International Monetary Fund. As subsidies have been rolled back gradually, those least well off economically feel the effects more deeply and acutely. But this is only a portion of the story. Government support for economic reforms that prioritize foreign investment and free trade requires a particular kind of infrastructure to sustain those interactions: specifically, it requires roads, office space, and physical complexes within the zones of economic exception, all of which require electricity, water, and other basic services. With the increased presence of foreign firms comes the need for the sorts of services demanded by the foreign employees of these firms: world-class hotels, restaurants, spas, and so on. Jordan’s own economic, cosmopolitan elite also utilizes these services, and this elite—like its foreign counterparts—demand easy access to a modern and efficient airport. The goal is to create an experience whereby the foreign businessperson ‘doesn’t feel like he is in the third world from the moment he gets off the airplane.’¹⁴

In these ways, large portions of west Amman have been altered physically since 2001 for the dual purpose of facilitating foreign investment while also catering to the service needs and recreational impulses of Jordan’s upper classes. In addition to the opening of a handful of sushi bars, numerous world class restaurants, cigar lounges, and Irish pubs, the luxury products for sale in Jordan rival boutique goods available in any European city: Chanel, Ferragamo, Prada, and so forth. The means of accessing this expanding network of

Footnote 13 continued

relations with a friendly state. In this way, critiquing the United States might be punishable as a crime threatening state security and referred to the state security courts.

¹⁴ Interview with author, name withheld by request, December 3, 2006.

elite goods and services also has been dramatically improved: Zahran street has been entirely repaved with major underpasses added to facilitate rapid flow of traffic into and out of downtown; a bridge connects the Fourth Circle of Zahran street to the posh neighborhood and shopping/dining/clubbing area of Abdoun; overpasses and underpasses speed traffic between residential and commercial areas along Gardens Street, University Road, in Shmeisani, the Third Circle, and elsewhere. The introduction of new projects to speed traffic flow have been disproportionately located in west Amman, home to all of the city's international hotels and the vast majority of offices engaged in international trade and investment. The former General Intelligence Directorate (GID, also known as the secret police or *mukhabarat*) complex in Shmeisani, known informally as Palestine Hotel (*funduk filastin*), was razed in 2002; today, an elaborate multi-use project called 'Abdali Boulevard'—including high-end housing, a shopping mall, business suites, and comprising many gleaming glass towers—is being constructed on the spot. Amman's wealthiest also are concentrated in west Amman, along with its thriving bar and club scene, villas and apartment complexes, numerous large shopping malls, and easy access to the airport south of the city. To be sure, a number of infrastructure improvement projects have been launched in east Amman, but the overall physical landscape of the eastern portion of the city remains recognizable to visitors returning even after years-long absences. Western Amman, by comparison, is barely recognizable from year to year. The reason, of course, is that the rapid movement of these citizens through western Amman (including access to the airport) is far more important to the economy than movement through refugee camps or between villages, or in just about any part of eastern Amman.

While it is easy to justify the commercial development of western Amman as the obvious means necessary to ensure Jordan's economic growth through greater foreign investment and trade, the spatial dimensions of these infrastructure projects map with striking precision on to the differentiated reach of Jordan's liberalization project. As argued above, I am claiming that Jordan has not become less liberal or merely more authoritarian over the past decade, but that it has become more of each in targeted ways. The real issue is that the reach of neoliberal reforms facilitated by increased securitization has created tiers of citizenship and privilege of the sort Aihwa Ong terms 'gradations of citizen rights and benefits.'¹⁵ It is not that the elite, as a function of their wealth, have greater access to the protections and rights accorded by the constitution, but the specific rights being actively advanced, prioritized, and protected by the government are those related to a neoliberal vision of economic growth (foreign investment and cosmopolitan consumerism), at the expense of other rights (such as the freedom of political expression, popular participation, and assembly for the purpose of political protest). As argued below, these benefits do not map neatly or exclusively along class lines, but spatially: those residing, working, or traversing particular spaces, regardless of economic class, may reap at least some of the benefits of these reform priorities.

Meanwhile, political dissent is being harshly repressed. For years political parties have been targeted by reforms aimed at curtailing their ability to win seats, notably through the various revisions to the electoral law and numerous redistricting programs. Political

¹⁵ Aihwa Ong (2006) *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), pp. 75–96.

parties and some civil society organizations also have been subject to criticism, as noted above, for their connections to groups outside of Jordan—all in the name of violating the spirit of Jordan First. The professional associations likewise have been subject to legal attacks by the government for engaging in political activities. Rallies at the Professional Association Complex in Shmeisani, for example, frequently have been shut down, including some small-scale events attended by a few dozen people in the complex's auditorium—well out of sight of those on the street.

In sum, Jordan is not seeing a withdrawal of rights overall, but the adoption of legal reforms and particular practices that accord certain kinds of rights to certain segments of the population while effectively denying them to others. The next section seeks to link these issues to the question of political protest, and particularly the ways in which the government permits or denies protest activities hinges in part on spatial questions connected to reform projects.

Protest and Space

The public spaces in which political protests typically are organized are selected either to facilitate mobilization or because of the symbolic content of the locale. Government officials carefully regulate the spaces in which protests are permitted, so that the contentiousness of events often begins well before the events themselves, when organizers seek to gain permission for the protests they desire.¹⁶ Many protests in Jordan are organized to begin following the noon prayer on Fridays, as it is typically the largest gathering of the week, and few need to return directly to work. Campuses, refugee camps, and the Professional Associations Complex are also common sites of protest largely for similar practical reasons: they are sites with a ready constituency for mobilization. Alternately, marches often are organized to conclude in locales infused with symbolism, such as sites of power being critiqued or the location of individuals responsible for specific policies or actions. In Jordan, common symbolic sites of protest include the parliament, the prime ministry, the Israeli embassy, the US embassy, and the road to the King Hussein Bridge connecting Jordan and Israel. The Palestinian Solidarity March led by Queen Rania in April 2002 was considered a farce by many precisely because its route—beginning near a traffic circle flanked by international hotels and ending at a minor UN office—starkly avoided the prominent sites of other protests that month: the Israeli embassy, the US embassy, and the Jordanian prime ministry.¹⁷

Many organized events—as opposed to spontaneous events, which are in fact relatively rare—take place in western Amman.¹⁸ Political party leaders and independent activists indicate that sites are chosen not only for ease of mobilization and presence of symbols of

¹⁶ Don Mitchell & Lynn Staeheli (2005) Permitting Protest: Parsing the Fine Geography of Dissent in America, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 29(4), pp. 796–813.

¹⁷ Jillian Schwedler & Sam Fayyaz (2010) Locating Dissent: Space, Law, and Protest in Jordan, in: L. Khalili & J. Schwedler (eds.) *Political Prisons and Policing in the Middle East and North Africa*, pp. 275–294 (New York and London: Hurst Publishers and Columbia University Press).

¹⁸ Obviously many protest events take place outside of west Amman, including in refugee camps, around mosques, on campuses, and in other towns to the south, notably Mâan and Karak. Here I wish to draw attention to the dimensions of the events in west Amman; in the future I will examine in greater detail the variations in protest activities, police responses, spatial restructuring, and so forth, in other locales.

domestic and foreign power, but because events in west Amman can be more ‘disruptive’ of the economic activities cherished by the regime, more visible to the political elite, and more likely to receive coverage in the press (domestically as well as internationally). Marches organized by the professional associations are typically initiated in the parking lot of the Professional Associations Complex, a location both convenient for gathering and adjacent to a main commercial street in Shmeisani. The Islamic Action Front has organized numerous rallies outside of its offices in upper Abdali, in west Amman, as well as several marches that have aimed at reaching the Israeli embassy. The literature on social movements, criminology, and legal geography all emphasize that marches and stationary rallies can have very different dynamics. I do not examine those dynamics here, but rather I wish to emphasize the extent to which the spatial restructuring of west Amman—with its widened streets and numerous symbols of foreign power, international capital, and conspicuous consumption—provide ready locales within and around which protest activities are organized. They also provide widened thoroughfares visible to a cosmopolitan citizenry and various foreign agents.

At the same time, the tactics for policing and repressing protests in most parts of west Amman are organized around a principle of preventing or removing protesters from view as quickly as possible. On campuses and in refugee camps—which are located in all parts of Amman—the typical strategy is to keep the protests contained, so those even just outside the area may remain unaware of the demonstrations nearby. In the major commercial parts of west Amman, however, and in the posh neighborhoods where foreign diplomats, political elites, and the wealthy reside—often in proximity to foreign embassies—protesters are not contained but rather dispersed by various security agencies and events are shut down as quickly as possible.¹⁹ In an effort to keep those expressions of political dissent out of sight, arrested protesters are transferred to outlying neighborhoods and often are detained without being charged. Heavy weaponry seldom is used, though on several occasions tanks have been deployed to break up large protests and prevent protesters from reaching rallying sites, particularly foreign embassies.²⁰ While the movement of tanks in most parts of east Amman where protests are held is virtually impossible, west Amman—much like Haussmann’s Paris—has numerous streets designed to carry heavy weaponry.²¹ That this should be the case is neither surprising nor an indicator of the martial aspirations of the Jordanian regime. My aim is rather to explore the ways in which the physical reconstruction of west Amman, which has facilitated the ability to move troops rapidly as well as to shut down political protests quickly, is not anti-liberal so much as neoliberal: Providing rapid protection against the disruption of commerce, property damage, and the embarrassment of protests that critique core dimensions of the regime’s reform agenda (such as foreign investment and relations with

¹⁹ Five main agencies are engaged in policing protest activities: the General Intelligence Directorate (GID, the *mukhabarat*); the Royal Guard; the Riot Police (*darak*); General Security (amn al-am); and the Army. I am engaged in a collaborative project that examines the various repressive practices of these security agencies as they play out in the context of political protests.

²⁰ Jillian Schwedler (2003) More Than a Mob: Political Protests in Jordan, *Middle East Report*, 226(Spring), pp. 18–23; and Schwedler (2005), Cop Rock: Protest, Identity, and Dancing Riot Police in Jordan, *Social Movement Studies*, 4(2), pp. 155–175.

²¹ Author interview with former Army officer (name withheld by request), Amman, November 23, 2006.

foreign states) is deemed essential to security because the reforms must be protected and advanced at all costs.

Conclusion

The dominant approach to studying countries such as Jordan has been to examine them through the lenses of political transitions and resilient authoritarianism. Countries are located along a continuum from authoritarianism to democracy, and analyses emphasize the factors that characterize that location. But these models do not yield enough dynamism to capture multiple characteristics of states such as Jordan: liberalizing in certain places but certainly not becoming more liberal in any sense familiar to those who study politics. How then are we to understand cases such as Jordan, and how do we understand the dynamics of protests in such contexts? Overall, this examination of the political geography of protests in neoliberal spaces argues that the metamorphosis of the Jordanian state is neither more democratic, nor more authoritarian. Nor can it be best described as liberalized autocracy. It is simultaneously more liberal and more autocratic, characterized not as a fully neoliberal state, but as a state marked—quite literally and physically—by neoliberal exceptions. My goal in this article has been to outline basic propositions that will force us to reexamine both the ways in which we think about authoritarian states and our conceptual frameworks for examining protests in such contexts.

First, the past decade of reforms in Jordan should not be viewed as a return to authoritarianism but rather as a deepening of commitment to certain *kinds* of liberal reforms and a de-emphasizing of others. Jordan's economic reform program has emphasized neoliberal reforms of the sort that prioritize foreign investment and a reorganization of capital, particularly the selling off of state enterprises and the lifting of subsidies. The security apparatuses are put to the service of defending these reforms, whose benefits are felt by only a small portion of the population. Perhaps most interestingly, the new cosmopolitan neoliberal economic elite is displacing Jordan's traditional and conservative landholding elite families as the movers and shakers in the Jordanian economy. Even more, democratic advances do not necessarily come at the expense of authoritarian control; indeed, securitization may increase precisely to protect the very rights being advanced by the reform projects. Economic rights may be actively advanced at the expense of political rights.

Second, the differential effects of these reforms and rights are not characterized exclusively by the distribution of wealth—with the rich enjoying expanded rights while the poor watch their rights wither. Rather, the rights are more closely mapped on to neoliberal spaces, largely concerning commerce and foreign relations. While west Amman, for example, is home to the vast majority of wealthy Jordanians, portions of these neighborhoods are also home to middle and lower classes, and they certainly benefit from the improved infrastructure and security provided to these locales. Certain locales nationally also have received more attention than others: Cosmopolitan neighborhoods near or in proximity to the centers of foreign capital have received a disproportionate share of the new services and infrastructures. These inequalities are highly visible to an already economically fragmented population. They spark considerable dissent among the population, including the have-nots who are unable to access these new spaces as freely, as well as among the conservative traditional elite who have seen their share of wealth

decrease at the same time that decadent, cosmopolitan spaces of leisure consumption have flourished.

Third, the geography of protest activities in Jordan may provide an exciting window into the unpacking of these differentiated spaces and the various rights accorded to particular segments of the population—graduated citizenship. While protests are typically viewed as disruptive events that challenge state policies, a micro-examination of variations in the locations of protests and the various security responses actually illustrates that not all protests are equally contentious. Spatial factors significantly affect security responses, as do the economic bases of the neighborhoods in which protests are organized. And economy projects that have nothing to do with protests—such as the neoliberal constructions in parts of Amman and elsewhere in Jordan, have had unintended consequences in closing down public spaces where political protests had long been held.

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