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(Dys)Functional Polities: The Limits of Politics in the Postcolonial Arab Region

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Abstract

Utilising a multidisciplinary approach rooted in participatory action research, :الكيانات الوظيفيّة

حدود الممارسة السياسيّة في المنطقة العربيّة ما بعد الاستعمار * (Bustani, 2021) engages perspectives drawn from sociology, political science, history, geography, and anthropology, to differentiate between Weberian hegemonic states, following both Weber and Gramsci, and what I call (dys)functional polities. These, I argue, are endpoints on the spectrum of successive political positions that characterise modern polities. In the contemporary globalised world, both the monopoly of violence and hegemony cannot be understood in a localised sense. Globally, states inflict violence on others, whether military, economic, or political, and at scales that may undermine sovereignty and sap the notion of independence of any substantive meaning.

Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony is a major differentiating factor between the two kinds of polities, helping us decipher the roles played by a state's political and civil societies, and the centrality of the latter in achieving hegemony, in addition to understanding hegemony in a global, rather than in a local, context. Thanks to its relatively robust political *and* civil societies, a Weberian hegemonic state tends to be a framework for accomplishing local hegemony and for expanding such hegemony regionally and globally whenever possible; Gramsci's notion of hegemony does not accord with a (dys)functional polity, where the ruling group actively impairs or quashes the influence of civil society perceived as threatening to its monopoly of power and tends to be a framework for ensuring its own survival by eliminating potential competition that might emerge from the very civil society undermined. This simultaneously corrodes the (dys)functional polity's hegemony and causes a *chronic* "crisis of authority" since survival depends on the ruling group's ability to walk a tightrope between the often-contradictory roles (functions) that it performs, which are themselves tailored to global, regional, and local changes and/or upheavals. In doing so, the ruling group deploys control mechanisms internally and adaptation mechanisms externally, both of which exacerbate its (dys)functionality and dependency, leading to a (dys)functional paradox.

The Arab region is one of many in which colonial legacies and postcolonial interventionism continue to shape contemporary reality: the ruling groups of what are arguably inherited political entities are highly susceptible to the destabilisation inherent to the roles (functions) they serve in the global, regional, and internal spheres. The research that informs this book explores the impact of colonialism and neo-colonialism on the evolution of (dys)functional

polities in the Arab region; the role of identity politics and societal fragmentation in the survival of such polities; and how reinventing colonial legacies as their national heritage gave them a certain validity.

Examining the failure of every major Arab political current (Islamist, Nationalist, Leftist, Liberal/ Secular) to achieve meaningful change in the last 100 years, the book argues that by the very nature of the limitations placed on them, and their acceptance of those limitations rather than a questioning of them, that is, by accepting (dys)functional polities as a valid political field, these political currents further entrenched and contributed to the survival of the polities' ruling groups.

Finally, the book explores how (dys)functional polities employ, misuse, and manipulate political tools (such as elections, constitutions, and laws), civil society sectors (like the intelligentsia), concepts (like Islam and terrorism), and even opposition protests only to buttress themselves, thereby both deepening and diversifying their internal (local) and external (regional, global) roles (functions).

Using Jordan as the main case study, this commentary focuses on the defining features of Weberian hegemonic states vs. (dys)functional polities. It outlines the former's practice of violence and hegemony on a global scale and contrasts it with the latter's roles (functions) vis-à-vis regional and global power structures. It demonstrates how such ruling groups actively undermine civil society and the adaptation mechanisms they deploy to ensure their survival.

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البستاني، هشام. (2021). *الكيانات الوظيفيّة: حدود الممارسة السياسية في المنطقة العربية ما بعد الاستعمار (جزءان)*، بيروت: المؤسسة العربية للدراسات والنشر.

Bustani, H. (2021). *(Dys)Functional Polities: The Limits of Politics in the Postcolonial Arab Region* (two volumes, in Arabic), Beirut: Arab Institute for Research and Publishing.

The book is the culmination of ten years of multidisciplinary research, drawing on a range of primary and secondary historical and documentary sources, and utilising, expanding on, and benefiting from concepts and ideas in political sociology put forward by thinkers like Max Weber, Antonio Gramsci, Benedict Anderson, Alain Badiou, Rosa Luxemburg, Charles Tilly, Jodi Dean, V.I. Lenin, and Zygmunt Bauman, among others. In conducting this research, the author also drew on the work of Frantz Fanon, Lisa Wedeen, Isa Blumi, Sara Roy, Ali Kadri, Samir Amin, Nazih Ayubi, Antony Anghie, and Mahdi Amel, in addition to engaging the vision and practices of the Paris Commune and the Arab uprisings.

The book appears in two volumes, for a total of 532 pages or around 110,000 words.

Acknowledgements

Note on translation and author's declaration

Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the Arabic are by the author.

The author declares that all the material contained in this commentary is his own work.

Terminology

In the course of my research, I coined a number of terms to express concepts that are not clearly elucidated in Arabic. For example, I coined the term موطنيّ from موطن to express the specificity of the term "national," as opposed to "nationalist" with the ideological undertones conveyed by the standard terms قوميّ or وطنيّ, the former referring to Arab nationalism (pan-Arabism) and the latter to nationalisms of local postcolonial-polities. These Arabic-specific terms did not seep into the English translation, but other, more general terms, did. I list them below.

Weberian hegemonic state: viewed from a global rather than a local perspective, we note that some states inflict violence (military, economic, or political) on other "states", the magnitude of which undermines—to varying degrees—the sovereignty of the latter and their claims to independence. A Weberian hegemonic state can, to a large extent, deter external political-economic intervention in its affairs and/or is able to intervene in the affairs of other political entities, while a (dys)functional polity cannot do those things and is usually on the receiving end of such intervention. A Weberian hegemonic state also has the capacity to extend its civil society-based hegemony to (dys)functional polities through its NGOs, aid programs, and funding institutions. A Weberian hegemonic state and a (dys)functional polity are two ideal positions that comprise the two endpoints of wide spectrum of infinite intermediate situations that are the true, objective situations of existing modern polities. Polities can "move" in either direction of the spectrum based on their political activity and local, regional, and international changes in power relations. A Weberian hegemonic state tends to preserve and respect governing institutions, the rule of law, and constitution, since those are the products of internal power dynamics resulting from the activity of both political *and* civil society, with more weight being contributed by the latter in the establishment of an enduring state ideology. They mediate and bond the relationship between these two wings of the Weberian hegemonic state. In (dys)functional polities, by comparison, institutions are disempowered, constitutions and laws are not respected but rather selectively deployed; control (rather than hegemony) is achieved through the activities of political society which actively undermines civil society (perceived as a threat to ruling groups' monopoly of power), resulting in a *chronic* "crisis of authority".

(Dys)functional polity: in Arabic, the term I use, الكيان الوظيفي (*al-Kayan al-Waẓifi*), is generally regarded as a derogatory term to describe a political entity that is deemed a

fabrication of colonialism that has subsequently been sustained by international and regional powers to serve a specific function or role, usually in service of the former colonial power or its post-colonial interests. The term *al-kayan al-wazifi* has notably been applied to Jordan, Israel, and Lebanon (Muna 2013; Muna 2014; Najem 2015). Utilising this familiar and "organic" term, I have redefined it to express the core concepts addressed by my research. A literal translation of *al-kayan al-wazifi* would be "functional entity", but the English word "functional" implies the proper functioning of the polity, which is not empirically the case for Arab polities; therefore, in English, I opted for a portmanteau word where "functional" means "connected with a function," "designed or developed chiefly from the point of view of use," and "performing or able to perform a regular function" (Merriam-Webster, no date). In this lexical sense, a (dys)functional polity resulted from, and evolved through, what Antony Anghie calls "the colonial encounter" (2007, pp.1-12), a process that shaped and formulated the histories and concepts of both Europe and the colonies, embedding them with the inequalities inherent in them today. The (dys)functional polity is, in other words, a function of colonialism as well as a function for its ruling group's survival, in that it mediates the nexus of internal conflicts and external interests, and also creates internal realities in its adaptation to regional and global roles and power shifts. At the same time, lack of hegemony and a weak internal front make the polity dysfunctional as it unrelentingly undermines, and even attacks, civil society, rendering the polity paradoxically more susceptible to external influence and intervention. The polity is also dysfunctional in terms of realising development, consolidating sovereignty, and advancing the interests of a society oppressed by its ruling group. Therefore, the prefix "dys" in brackets is used to highlight the duality of the functional/ dysfunctional characteristic. Also, I chose the term "polity" rather than "entity" to insinuate a state-like structure and, at the same time, to signal a continuity with the Weberian hegemonic state concept, on which much of my discussion is based.

Ruling group: in Arabic, the governing authority is often referred to as النظام (*an-Niẓam*), literally, "the system", which some Arab commentators use in Arabic transliteration: سيستم (Abu-Rumman 2015; Jaradat 2023; Rawabdeh 2023). Both terms (*an-nizam* and system) have derogatory overtones in Arabic and refer broadly to the agents of power, be they individuals (kings, presidents, etc.) or bodies (like the *mukhabarat*) whose direct mention people avoid for fear of (severe) repercussions. In their usual sense, the two terms imply the existence of a specific well-established order that governs different aspects of the polity in clear and articulated ways. This is not the case for (dys)functional polities in which

constitutions, laws, and governing institutions are selectively deployed and mobilised, in a context of great uncertainly that allows for ruling group adaptation internally and externally in pursuit of survival. A "ruling class" is also not an appropriate term to use here as I tend to agree with Nazih Ayubi that a well-differentiated class structure does not exist in the Arab region (1995, p.34); nor do I use Ayubi's term, "the ruling caste" since "caste" implies uniformity, which is not the case for the groups that control Arab societies, composed as they often are of subgroups with conflicting interests—the ruling group-core of king/president and its retinue, the army, the *mukhabarat*, conservative tribal/sectarian notables, neoliberal businessmen, bankers, etc.—that are implicitly united by the violence meted out by monopolistic rule, a dedication to survival at all costs, and the fear of being removed from power. The term I opted to use in the Arabic book to express this complexity is المجموعة الحاكمة, (*al-Majmu'a al-ḥakima*), the ruling group. I avoid the use of the widespread English term "regime" because it too implies a systematic method of government.

Practicing thinker: I argue that the Arabic term المثقّف (*al-Muthaqqaf,* pl., *al-Muthaqqafun*), refers to what are deemed or deem themselves to be enlightened individuals for whom modernisation is the only path to development and sovereignty. As the products of the colonial encounter, such individuals are generally fascinated with European "progress" which they usually attribute to "cultural differences", are disdainful and contemptuous of their own societies and peoples (whom they consider backward and traditional), and also highly dependent on authority to bring about change from above through the educational system and legal frameworks. Alongside the (dys)functional polity to which they belong, *al-Muthaqqafun* are thus simultaneously bound to colonialism and postcolonial ruling groups and detached from their own society. A practicing thinker (المفكّر الممارس, *al-Mufakker al-mumaris*) is a concept I derive from a synthesis of Praxis (Antonio Gramsci, Rosa Luxembourg), "the dialectic of the lived and the conceived" (Henri Lefebvre), ideas put forward by the Paris Commune and the Arab Uprisings, and my own personal experience as an activist-writer-researcher. *Al-Mufakker al-mumaris* implies a dynamic process of conceptualising change through actual involvement with people in the act of change, a creative process that repositions theory inside the dynamics of movement and history, wherein theory and practice are not just inseparable, but in a process of mutual generation. In other words, *al-Mufakker al-mumaris* is caught inside a mutual feedback loop that yields and responds to change within the historical process in real time. In this conceptualisation, the people become the subjects of change and not merely its object.

Methodology and contribution to knowledge

The book was written over a period of ten years, mainly in the course of intense discussions that took place with, and within, a broad social movement that aspired to effect change in Jordan primarily between 2010 and 2013. The questions driving the discussions were: (a) why does political activism in the Arab region seem futile and ineffective as the outcomes of the Arab uprisings clearly show? (b) what alternative forms of movement and political action can be imagined for overcoming this impasse? The concepts addressed in the process, both by me as an individual and by the movement as a whole, arose "from within", meaning that they constituted an organic form of knowledge production which emerged from discussions with and critiques of the movement and by movement participants. Such a participatory approach obviated the isolation characteristic of the dynamic between the social subject of "study" and the observer doing the "studying," wherein the researcher/scholar remains removed from the movement and comes away with a poor or flawed understanding of its evolution and reality.

The process with and within the movement evolved continuously. First came reflections on the ruling group's resort to identity politics as a fragmenting mechanism, which in turn led to an exploration of the colonial origins of identity-based polities. Activism and political action within the postcolonial polity's severe restrictions culminated in an in-depth examination of the "state" as an entity. The questions here were "How does the state channel attempts at political change?" and "How does it interact with other states in the interconnected yet unequal global arena that is the world today?" The examination of those questions ultimately led to conceptualising the Weberian hegemonic state ↔ (Dys)functional polity spectrum.

As such, this scholarly work is rooted in the methodology of participatory action research, which utilises a multidisciplinary approach to the research subject, including the direct experiences of the researcher as a stakeholder in the society at large as well as in the social movement. Learning from them, the researcher centres *both* society *and* the social movement, with new knowledge being produced *with* society and the social movement and *for the benefit of* society and the social movement. In other words, this scholarly work was *not* produced to advise or aid policy makers, funders, and NGOs, nor to inform an orientalist gaze, by which I mean to enhance "understanding" of the Arab region in order to readjust, sharpen, and potentiate neo-colonial interventions.

The research has benefited from perspectives and research techniques that draw on a broad range of scholarly disciplines (anthropology; history; geography; the social and political sciences; studies of social movements and protest, and of state and state formation; Middle East studies; postcolonial studies; decolonial studies; and Gramscian studies) but it claims no affiliation to any one of these. Informed by a mix of methods and outlooks, my approach is grounded in developing an understanding of the movement for change *as it unfolds* and in amplifying its efforts through insights into the factors that influence, divert, co-opt, fragment, or suppress its functioning.

This study has also benefited greatly from ideas and concepts on the enduring colonial entanglements of post-coloniality formulated by Franz Fanon, Mahdi Amel, Samir Amin and Antony Anghie. It also drew on Sara Roy's and Ali Kadri's conceptualization of "de-development" as well as Isa Blumi's dramatic formulation of Yemen's "controlled demolition," all concepts that connect the postcolonial locality to the bigger picture of global capitalism and power politics.

Positing that postcolonial (dys)functional polities lack hegemony, in this commentary I discuss the work of Sara Salem and Jessica Watkins, both of whom claim that state hegemony (albeit partial) has been achieved in the Arab region, citing as examples the internationalist anticolonial moment of Nasser's Egypt (Salem 2020; 2021) and the police's significant involvement in social arbitration in Jordan (Watkins, 2022). I tend to disagree with them since an active well-established civil society and the resultant presence of robust governing institutions are both essential for hegemony to be achieved. Both Salem and Watkins downplay this decisive element.

Salem also touches on hegemony as a global phenomenon but does not study its local effects in the post-colony. She utilises that notion to side-step the lack of hegemony formation locally, portraying hegemony as a local attempt to "access the international" instead of being a local consolidation of the internal front prior to attempting the international. My counterargument is that rather than being a discourse, hegemony arises locally and is based on material practices and institutions. It might be derived from international or pan-national currents, but without material manifestation locally, hegemony cannot be achieved by going "outside," particularly in light of the outside's well-established and hegemonic intrusions thanks to its own civil and political society instruments (NGOs, international funding institutions, government aid programmes, etc.).

In the first section of this commentary, I lay out what I mean by a Weberian hegemonic state and a postcolonial (dys)functional polity, explaining why a state cannot be defined locally but only in dynamic terms relative to its position on the global power spectrum. The second section describes how (dys)functional polities were a product of colonialism and how they remain structurally linked to the former metropoles thanks to unequal power relations resulting from the colonial encounter. In the third section, I show how colonialism continues operating in the present thanks to international organisations such as the World Bank and the IMF, whose programmes and interventions subvert internal hegemony in and expand external hegemony to (dys)functional polities. This section further outlines how ruling groups utilise whatever means available, including protest movements against them, to maintain their survival. The fourth section examines the mechanisms that a (dys)functional polity's political society uses to attack and undermine primordial civil society, keeping it in check and preventing its maturation, which results in a weak internal front and paves the way for more external intervention and instability. The fifth section explains how ruling groups in (dys)functional polities selectively mobilise the constitutions and laws that are the very binding mechanisms and mediatory tools between political and civil society in Weberian hegemonic states to enhance their own survival, thus voiding them of any real substance. The sixth section explores the functions of *al-Muthaqqaf* (the public intellectual for want of a more accurate equivalent in English) as part of a (dys)functional approach to modernisation; describes the roles of *al-Mufakker al-mumaris*, the practicing thinker who is part and parcel of the collective movement for change; and also outlines the concepts of constructive subversion and the taxpayers' collective. I conclude that the undertakings of the ruling groups in (dys)functional polities lead to what I call "the (dys)functional paradox", that is, the undermining of civil society by political society that leads to a weak(ened) internal front, which in turn furthers external intervention and leads to a chronic crisis of authority that enables external players to enhance their own interests and bars internal players from achieving change.

Gramsci's main critique of the social sciences was that they were always an afterthought, that their observations always occurred in the past of the event that had already changed and become something else (2016, p.101). Predictions, he argued, are based on information and data that represent a specific moment in history and not history itself in its unceasing transformations—transformations, which can only be truly comprehended by practice in action. Gramsci expanded on this idea of *change through practice* and its contribution to the

creation of the predicted result as follows: "Really one 'foresees' to the extent to which one acts, to which one makes a voluntary effort and so contributes concretely to creating the 'foreseen' result. Foresight reveals itself therefore not as a scientific act of knowledge, but as the abstract expression of the effort one makes, the practical method of creating a collective will" (2016, p.101). This, Gramsci argued, changes the "foreseen result" or alters the predicted outcome—in other words, changes history.

This research tries to circumvent the Gramscian conundrum about research and theory production being a "foreseen result" of a collective social effort of which the scholar is an organic constituent and not an "outside observer". In the specific instance at hand, no separation between the scholar and the subject of his study was ever intended nor desired, nor was this endeavour conceived as an *apriori* academic requirement given that the resulting book was not produced with the intention of acquiring a PhD. And it is in this regard that I claim a particular and unique contribution to knowledge production: in this instance, the researcher was a full participant in the movement, experiencing both the punctuated moment(s) of aspired change and the stresses involved. In addition to being subjected to arrest and other vindictive measures, he participated in the development of various, sometimes conflicting, ideas and actions, at different times, in different settings, and in response to the authority's different counteractions. Unlike Gramsci's "organic intellectual" who is both the product and the representative of a certain class and its interests, with the potential thereby developing for him/her to "organize and lead" that class (2016, p.67), the absence of clear class formation in the Arab region means that a practicing thinker can only be *part of* the collective dynamics of change, rather than its robust voice or leader. Hence, the ideas in this book *evolved with and within the movement* and continue to do so to this day. This commentary is evidence of that evolution: written two years after the publication of the book that it presents, it also contains new refinements and concepts.

It is from this unique vantage point that I have studied relations of power and resistance between authority and protest or social movements, conceptualising the state, civil society, (dys)functionality, hegemony, control, authority, ruling groups, violence, legitimacy, and intervention, as well as the notions of the participating thinker and constructive subversion, not just from an observational lens but from the lived experience of a researcher who is an active member of his own society. Therefore, this work and its underlying questions were *experienced* in addition to being observed, *lived through* in addition to being studied.

1. The concept of (dys)functional polities

Max Weber (1946; 2008; 2015; Dusza, 1989) defines the state in terms of its (successful) monopoly on the use of violence within the boundaries of a given political territory, as well as its capacity to claim and enforce the legitimacy of that practice. Antonio Gramsci (2016; 2018) posits a concept of the state based on "hegemony", or the ability of the state to fortify itself and deter internal and external threats by means of two distinct but enmeshed bodies: political (coercive) society and civil (persuasive) society. Gramsci's "crisis of authority" (2018, pp.275-276)—which he also calls "crisis of hegemony" (2016, p.174)—arises when people are no longer convinced of the importance and legitimacy of state power and an "ideological" rift emerges between the two bodies, opening up the possibility for change.

Eliding local contexts and examining states from the perspective of international relations, such approaches deal with global and/or regional powers, on the one hand, and dominated polities, on the other, on an equal footing. These and derivative approaches are insufficient as they ignore the process by which the former exercise violence (military, economic, political, etc.) on dominated polities, often vesting the legitimacy of that exercise of violence in international institutions such as the UN Security Council, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, etc. The exercise of violence results from several factors, the most salient of which include: the dominant powers' colonial history and interventionist present, which largely influenced the creation and evolution of the dominated entities themselves; the leverage "former" colonisers retain vis-à-vis the decolonised polities that succeeded them; asymmetric economic relations that favour former colonial powers and their global/regional hegemonic influence thanks to their aid programs, grants, and so-called support mechanisms; and, last but not least, the sway and say they have within so-called international organisations.

Focusing mainly, but not exclusively, on the case of Jordan, the book الكيانات الوظيفية (Bustani, 2021) differentiates between a Weberian hegemonic state and a (dys)functional polity, situating each at either end of an infinite spectrum of "intermediary states" that make up today's modern polities. The book argues that in a highly globalised world, one cannot understand hegemony or the monopoly on the use of violence in a localised sense. Fleshing out how a contemporary Weberian hegemonic state can deter external political-economic intervention in its affairs and/or intervene in the affairs of other political entities, it contrasts this with a (dys)functional polity that can do neither and remains on the receiving end of such intervention. The book also outlines how (dys)functional polities can be the objects of

external violence and intervention through direct invasion and/or occupation, as well as proxy wars, and become the (un)willing targets of non-negotiable pressure by their patrons.

Sometimes, it is organised "criminal gangs" (as those in the slums of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) or political-military organisations (such as Lebanon's Hezbollah) that practice and monopolise the exercise of coercive force in specific geographical areas. Not only do they derive legitimacy from so doing, they also fulfil roles that constitute the core of a state's functions, such as imposing curfews and enforcing health measures (Barretto Briso and Phillips, 2020), implementing post-conflict reconstruction projects (Fawaz, 2014), or importing fuel supplies (Abdallah, 2021). In the instance of Lebanon, the government itself, implicitly, and sometimes explicitly (BBC News Arabic, 2009), recognises the legitimacy of Hezbollah's coercive apparatus while also allocating cabinet seats to the organisation (Najjar, 2020) and allowing its influence in sovereign sites such as the airport, the central Port, and several land borders (Khatib, 2021). Hezbollah's coercive reach and legitimacy extraction are more advanced than those of Brazil's "gangs", but such often highly organised, hierarchical, bureaucratic, and institutional phenomena (Ahrne and Rostami, 2019) cannot be described as full-fledged states—notwithstanding the fact that the state itself has been examined as one of the highest forms of organised crime (Tilly, 1985). Is it possible to talk reasonably about a "Hezbollah state" based on Weber's specific definition? And can one invoke such a notion while Hezbollah falls within the sphere of influence of another state, namely Iran?

The "gangs" of Rio and Hezbollah's political-military organisation in Lebanon can be viewed as political entities that *aspire* to become states or have embryonic state *potential.* Extending the argument further, Brazil and Lebanon can therefore be viewed as *incomplete* states within the geographical areas of their political borders but outside their monopoly on the legitimate exercise of violence. When such incompleteness extends to arenas that remain hostage external regional/global powers, it can be said that the "state" is lacking in its own monopoly on the exercise of violence. And, more significantly, such a "state" becomes a subject upon which violence is practiced and a space onto which external hegemony can be extended. In a reversal of Weberian roles, it becomes a (dys)functional polity.

Generally speaking, and in contrast with Weberian hegemonic states where internal forces and dynamics led to state formation, (dys)functional polities evolved (post)colonially, comprising what Benedict Anderson has called "the last wave" of nation-states (2006, p.139), i.e., their creation and evolution resulted from their subjugation to colonialism and the

colonial legacy they inherited. Despite nominal independence, such "states" were largely formed thanks to the interaction between external (colonial) dynamics and internal resistance (Pursley, 2015a; 2015b) that highlighted the coloniser's direct and indirect roles. Relationships of dependency were maintained with former colonisers as well as with dominant international and regional powers in the context of post-World War II global power relations. Postcolonial polities are entangled with, and remain heavily dependent on, external factors that can determine economic, political, and social change inside their borders.

In (dys)functional polities that emerged (post)colonially, ruling groups maintained their ties to powerful external patrons and their successors, with their political activity directed at aligning *internal dynamics* with *external interests* thereby facilitating external intervention. Addressing this entrenched connection to external actors, Mahdi Amel has called it "the colonial mode of production"—that is, a structural dependency on the capitalist centres of hegemonic states ("the imperialist bourgeoisie") thanks to "the colonial bourgeoisie," the former colony's dominant representative class (1976, pp.44-45). Using the perspective of international law and the sovereignty doctrine, Antony Anghie (2007) demonstrates how a newly-emergent "Third World" entered the post-independence era from the position of being "bound," wherein sovereignty constituted "the complete negation of power, authority and authenticity" (p.104) that was "most firmly asserted in the context of its ability to transfer it" (p.240). Consequently, the so-called Third World subjects itself directly to inequality through a legal system of oppression that has evolved to its disfavour through the "colonial encounter".

Amel, Anghie, and Samir Amin (1992) point to the limited nature of attempts to break free of colonial dominations, emphasising the former colonial powers' enduring economic grip, international legal armamentarium, and hegemonic global influence following "national liberation" struggles. "In crucial respects, then," Anghie argues, "Third World sovereignty was manufactured by the colonial world to serve its own interests," and through agreements and treaties enforced in the course of liberation struggles by the colonised, "the vulnerable new states often surrendered important rights in order to achieve independence" (p.215), especially in the economic sphere. Talal Asad (2000) takes this further, asserting that even human rights principles and laws are "soaked in complex inequalities of power. And as with all law, it is necessarily dependent on violence."

Amin also describes how newly empowered postcolonial ruling groups blocked any real political development among the masses. He notes that there were "historical limits" to the clash of such ruling groups with imperialism. The clash that could not culminate in the necessary "delinking" between the two, especially as the masses are maintained in an "amorphous, passive condition, mobilized for support but not allowed to organize as a force autonomous from the authorities" (1992, p.90).

Before Amel, Anghie, and Amin, but in less defined terms, Frantz Fanon had observed that newly independent postcolonial nations saw themselves as "obliged to use the economic channels created by the colonial regime (…) [which] must be maintained or catastrophe will threaten" (2001, p.79). Fanon also described the ways in which the native elite (and its merchant bourgeoisie) rises to power and maintains connections with, and remains under the influence of, the metropole's colonial bourgeoisie (p.141).

Such observations are reinforced by concepts put forth by Sara Roy (1987; 2016), Ali Kadri (2015), and Isa Blumi (2018). Deploying the concept of de-development, Roy describes how decades of Israeli rule have transformed the Gaza Strip's economy "into an auxiliary of the State of Israel" (1987, p.56). Using the same term, Kadri explains that ruling groups in the Arab region benefit from de-developing their countries thanks mainly to a merchant class that favours value usurpation and quick private gain, without reinvesting in national productive activity, devalues national assets, and profits from the sale of imports to the local economy. Blumi, for his part, uses the term "controlled demolition" (2018, p.140) to describe the systematic destruction of Yemen's developmental potential and its subordination to the global market economy. While a Weberian hegemonic state builds up a process of accumulation and expansion in favour of its own capitalist economy, (dys)functional polities, through decisions primarily aimed at their survival, lead a process of internal demolition in favour of global capitalism.

It is useful to note how these entities' (dys)functionality in relation to external actors takes on contradictory responses. In the middle of the last century, the main objective of colonial and local authorities alike was to centralise all economic, social, and political activity and planning. The centralised state model translated into the subjugation of so-called ungovernable, autonomous, or self-sufficient communities and their integration into the metropole's economy and/or the global capitalist economy (Blumi, 2018; Alon, 2009). In much of the Arab region, a measure of agricultural self-sufficiency was substituted for

export-oriented agriculture in exchange for importing manufactured consumer goods, a process that folded relatively independent local communities into the dynamics of (dys)functional polities. With the ascendance of global neoliberalism towards the end of the twentieth century, that strategy was turned on its head in favour of a policy known as الانفتاح (*al-Infitah*) or "economic openness". *Al-Infitah* not only eliminated the state's central role in economic planning and ushered in all the hallmarks of neoliberalism (privatisation, deregulation, and purportedly free trade arrangements), it "opened up" the newly emerging polities to deregulated investment by multinational corporations that abused local resources and exploited so-called cheap labour, further deepening the integration of such polities into the now-globalised capitalist economy.

As noted earlier, a state's hegemony in the Gramscian paradigm is achieved not only through the activity of the coercive political society, but to an *even greater extent* thanks to civil society. Gramsci's analysis of early twentieth-century revolutionary action on the European continent notes that despite lagging behind in terms of capitalist transformations, the revolution succeeded in overthrowing the Tsarist regime in Russia because of the weakness of its "primordial" civil society, while in the cradle of industry, capitalism, and the industrial working class, i.e., Western Europe "there was a proper relation between state and civil society, and when the state trembled, a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed. The state was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks" (Gramsci, 2018, p.238).

As such, Weberian hegemonic states achieve hegemony through a combination of the monopoly on the use of force and the effectiveness of a strong, dynamic, and well-established civil society, which secures its internal front. They therefore are better able to deter outside intervention and can, in many instances, expand their regional and global influence after achieving hegemony internally. Gramsci's analysis of hegemony (based on the liberal bourgeois state) does not translate in (dys)functional polities since the survival of the ruling group and the monopoly of authority are achieved by an all-powerful political society that actively obstructs and undermines civil society. Perceived as the fertile soil from which serious competition might emerge, civil society is weakened by ruling group tactics of social fragmentation and identity politics, jeopardising any solid foundation for the polity's internal front. Thus, it is control rather than hegemony that is achieved by such states largely as a result of a coercive political society. As Lisa Wedeen (2015) notes in her study of Syria's Asad regime, dependence on a "strategy of domination based on compliance" (p.6) "cannot

produce 'hegemony'" (p.12), something that Nazih Ayubi (1995) also stresses in his ground-breaking work, *Over-stating the Arab State*. Control without hegemony not only results in chronic instability but also accentuates a (dys)functional polity's disadvantage vis-à-vis regional and global powers that are then able to exploit the "crisis of authority", deepens its susceptibility to performing functions that favour regional/international powers, pushes its ruling group further towards increased dependency and subordination, thus deepening (dys)functionality (Bustani, 2021, pp.439-454).

In (dys)functional polities, the most authority-independent segment of weakened civil society structures is the local NGO that is externally sponsored. The donor agencies that fund the local NGOs are in turn financed, directly or indirectly, by the governments of global or regional powers whose civil society they belong to. Local NGOs' strategies, programmes, and activities are thus beholden to, and aligned with, the interests of their donors, whether institutions or states. This alignment and funding dependency transform the nominally authority-independent segment of the (dys)functional polity's civil society into a hegemonic extension of the donor states and external mother organisations/civil society, providing "backdoors" for internal actors to channel external influence and intervention and further destabilising local ruling groups. Dominant actors in global/regional spheres consequently extend their hegemony into (dys)functional polities using a wide array of tools, not least of which are NGOs and aid programs.

Some scholars have argued some states in the Arab region achieved internal hegemony in certain postcolonial circumstances. Sara Salem, for example, maintains that the regime of Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser was "the first, and only, instance of hegemony in modern Egyptian history" (2020, p.3; 2021, p.82), while Jessica Watkins (2022) argues that the ruling group in Jordan has achieved "integral hegemony" through the mediatory roles played by the police in social arbitration. I find these arguments unwarranted and discuss my reasons for that below.

Salem's and Watkins' propositions disregard the decisive role played by a well-formed civil society in accomplishing hegemony via its persuasive capacity, a capacity that is equal to, if not more important than, the coercive aspects of political society. Civil society's key contribution to hegemony secures the internal front, providing the Gramscian "earthworks and fortifications" against breaches of the state's outer walls. The state is the seat of hegemony, its political-social expression; it is the product of an integrated relationship

between political society and civil society which translates state ideology into legitimacy and provides an overarching and pervasive worldview. In his extensive study of hegemony, Perry Anderson (2017) sums up Gramsci's concept of hegemony as a deep form of consent that is created and cemented by civil society and the intellectual strata, eventually leading to stable forms of rule (pp.19-22). Anderson notes that Gramsci's understanding of hegemony was "unstable" (p.30), oscillating between one that involved violence as well as consent, and another that was based mainly on consent (p.21); still, he affirms that the consent-based concept of hegemony was the predominant form (p.21), concluding that "for Gramsci (…) hegemony was a stronger form of power than domination" (p.31).

Both Salem and Watkins downplay the essential role of civil society in achieving hegemony. To support her argument, Salem also minimises the role of brute force and coercion in achieving "consent". She references Franz Fanon's concept of "stretching" Marxism in the colonial context to deprive hegemony of any substance (2022, pp.80-82). "Hegemony does not imply the absence of coercion, or even lower levels of coercion (…) instead hegemony signals the presence of high levels of consent that do the practical work of legitimizing forms of coercion that co-exist alongside it" (87), Salem writes, adding that "under hegemony, then, coercion exists but is seen as legitimate or necessary" (86). Although these statements need further examination, here I want to stress that hegemony *does imply* the presence of a strong civil society, the "private" political organizations that convert "state ideology" into a deep societal conviction in the necessity of the state, as it mediates the mere idea of hegemony, transforming it into a socio-political dynamic. Salem notes that Nasser "both 'banned' civil society (through coercion), and centralized it (through consent)" (2020, p.120). Yet, it is not evident how consent enforced by coercion (at times performed as an act to avoid harm per Wedeen [1998]), becomes the earthworks and fortifications necessary to the state's hegemonic project. One must, therefore, agree with Randolph B. Persaud's critique of Salem's consent-by-force in authoritarian conditions wherein ruling groups "can never claim anything resembling consent when there are mass arrests and torture" (2021, p.72).

Salem quotes Alia Mossallam (2012) in affirming that Nasser's *ideas* were hegemonic because "people could relate to them and they answered a desire for freedom and growth … [producing] … strong levels of consent" (2021, p.95). Yet, and in the absence of a strong civil society through which they can take political shape, are ideas enough to achieve hegemony? Even if there is an *appearance* of a broad-based popular "conviction" about a ruling group's "project" among individual subjects who fall under the lure of a ruling group's

rhetoric and actions, that are internalised as aspirations and dreams, the absence of civil society prevents such convictions from ever transforming into political dynamics of significance. One should draw a line between individuals falling under the influence of a charismatic leader and internalising his visions, dreams, and aspirations, and civil society as an *institutionalised and organised form of private political power* that is an inherent part of state dynamics in achieving hegemony. Through *Mukhabarat* rule, the banning of political parties and independent labour and political associations, the imprisonment, torture, and killing of political actors, the Egyptian civil society that was emerging before Nasser was terminated under him., If not institutionalised in the private political organisations of civil society, individual rearticulations of a ruling group's ideology thus remain in the domain of "populist jubilation" and "bursts of nationalistic fervor" (Ayubi 1995, p.26), lacking in any real political meaning.

Rather than hegemony, Caesarism might be a more suitable Gramscian concept to understand the Nasserite era (Smet 2016, pp.139-171; Persaud 2021) wherein a "regime rises above society, abandons participation, and 'proceeds to act from above'" (Persaud 2021, p.75). It is this "action from above" that continued undisturbed under Anwar Sadat with his *Infitah* policy, without the earthworks and fortifications of the proclaimed Nasserist hegemony/state ever emerging.

One must also consider Buci-Glucksmann's precise judgment in such situations wherein political society ("the State") is *everything*: "it could not be an integral state in the Gramscian sense" since this everything-ness is considered "a sign of weakness" (quoted in Ayubi, p.7). This judgement applies to Egypt under Nasser, and even more so to Jordan whose ruling group Jessica Watkins (2022) inaptly describes as having achieved "integral hegemony" (albeit incomplete, interrupted, or minimal) based on the police's effective role in social arbitration. It is precisely this role that points to a lack of hegemony since the ruling group is everything and everywhere, horizontally totalitarian, with the tentacular but subtle *Mukhabarat* (General Intelligence Department) system, and security infiltration of everyday life. Watkins' deeply probing research shows the depth of these police mediations which can rightly be described as "indicative of the state's ability to insinuate itself into the interpersonal relations of its citizenry" (p.17), as well as into the interrelations between "rival" societal groups (like clans or tribes) that the ruling group itself has contributed to sustaining, transforming, sponsoring, and (re)producing. Watkins correctly notes that such

interventions also "create" these social institutions and their "norms" and "promote particular kinds of order" (p.15).

Utilising contradictory mediation principles in arbitration processes whose aim is to negotiate the imposition of order, and which are based on antithetical elements such as "tribalism, civic duty and consumerism, patronage networks, civil law, and, in the last instance, coercion" (Watkins 2022, p.150) that sometimes flout officially-celebrated "constitutional rights", "rule of law" and "equality between citizens," in addition to maintaining tribal rivalry and societal fragmentation via a (dys)functional process of police mediation, with the police posing as a tribal sheikh of sorts, is the exact opposite of hegemony since the police replaces "non-state actors in taking ultimate responsibility for handling disputes" (Watkins 2022, p.18). This is an instance of political society's continual undermining and obstruction of civil society's roles, and a further proof of the ruling group walking the tight rope of (dys)functionality, balancing, adapting to, and creating, the different elements it needs for its survival by maintaining the social groups it governs weak, fragmented, and dependent, while simultaneously cementing its internal role as barrier-buffer.

Hegemony is not about apparent stability, nor is it about containment and management of muted dissent, as Watkins concludes (p.159). Syria, for example, was a "stable" (dys)functional polity that managed and contained muted dissent up to the moment the Syrian uprising erupted in 2011. Therefore, the stability taken at face value in Jordan cannot be described as hegemony, let alone "integral hegemony." Watkin's description of "the role of the international in Jordan's domestic affairs (…) [which] has exceeded by far all but a handful of other countries," and her mention of the Jordanian ruling group's obligation "to fall into place with a series of foreign policies which are domestically unpalatable" (p.23) is proof enough of the inexistence of hegemony in the country. In fact, Jordan's ruling group is vulnerable to external intervention and dependent on its externally-required functions in order to survive, as detailed below.

For her part, Sara Salem discusses hegemony as an "international phenomenon" and turns to Fanon to bring to our attention the "*international* context within which Nasserism was produced and reproduced" (2021, p.89, emphasis in original). Salem reads Nasser's interventions in the world arena of politics and his modernising initiatives as posing a challenge to the "colonial international" (p.90), with Nasser's authority owing its presumed hegemony to the "anticolonial moment" (p.93) of the 1940s-60s. Salem asserts that

hegemony is "always already international in its being mediated through global politics. However, because the international has been created in and through empire, hegemony is always tied to histories of imperial rule" (p.93), a statement which dovetails with the discussion of the sovereignty doctrine and international law put forth by Anghie (2007). Yet, Nasser's modernisation attempts cannot be seen as an existential threat to colonialism and the subsequent globalised capitalist order, since they were a (post)colonial intervention, the result of which was an imagined "better alignment" of the postcolony within the international capitalist system. Blumi's detailed account of the catastrophic consequences of Nasser's intervention in Yemen is a clear example of this drive towards modernisation (2018, pp.103-141). Neoliberalism being the direct descendant of modernisation, it was only normal that after consolidating the (dys)functional polity's central power at the expense of locally-independent self-sufficient communities under the banner of central planning, development, and export-oriented production in exchange for imported commodities and incorporating the (dys)functional polity within the global market, the (dys)functional ruling group would naturally take the following step, namely neoliberalisation, as a mechanism of adaptation to the ever-expanding realm of globalised capitalism. In this light, Sadat and his *Infitah* policies cannot be seen as a 180-degrees turn from Nasser's state-consolidating socialism, but an acceleration of events in the same direction. As Persaud concludes: the undercurrent of modernisation bridged the entire period between 1952 (the rise of Nasser) and 2011 (the fall of Mubarak) in Egypt (2021, p.74).

Unlike what this research endeavours to scrutinise when positing hegemony as a global phenomenon, Salem's notion of international hegemony is not studied in terms of its local effects in the postcolony but, rather, to side-step the lack of hegemony formation locally, and the consequent portrayal of hegemony as attempting to "access the international" instead of as a local consolidation of the internal front *prior to that*. By so doing, Salem tries to derive a possibility for a Nasserist local hegemony from the universal anticolonial drive. "If colonialism precluded the creation of hegemony in Egypt pre-1952," Salem writes, "anti-colonialism was – largely – to make hegemony possible post-1952" (202, p.92).

My argument is that hegemony arises locally. It might be derived from international or pan-national currents, but without the establishment of the pillars of hegemony locally, it cannot be achieved by an extension to the outside. Egypt under Nasser is therefore no exception to the numerous postcolonial polities that fell short of achieving full "liberation" and delinking; and, under Sadat, Egypt transformed overnight, launching "complete reversals [or, say,

changes] of domestic policies" (Ayubi, 1995, p.1), without much resistance. Thanks to the anticolonial-international, the people of Egypt became part of an unspecified grand image of global anticolonial politics that diverted them from the realities of their oppressive (dys)functional condition, and the priority (and necessity) of capturing their own local political field as a path to realising the anti-colonial anti-imperialist project.

One aspect of the subtle dissemination and infiltration of external hegemony is cultural, and it is expressed in specific linguistic formulations and meaning systems. Asad (2000) presents an argument by Ignacio Ramonet in which the latter states that "the US has taken control of the vocabulary, concepts and meanings in many fields. *We have to formulate the problems it invents in the words it offers*. It provides the codes to decipher enigmas it created" (emphasis in original). If hegemony, in one of its aspects, is the establishment of a convincing worldview, then the prevalent worldview of modernisation in the postcolony is a reflection and a continuation of what was maintained and advanced by colonial powers. It is tragic, yet true, that thanks to international law and the sovereignty doctrine, but also thanks to the conceptualisation of liberation-through-modernisation, "the Third World comes into existence only through colonialism" (Anghie 2007, p.242). The corollary is that anticolonialism, by way of modernisation, is colonialism internalised.

The modernising developmental project initiated by postcolonial polities in the period right after "independence" is a continuation of the Mandate era, Anghie argues (2007, 115-195; 207-208), an attempt to enter the global economy from a position of weakness. "The vast majority of new states," Anghie writes, "while differing on how development was to be achieved, believed that modernization and industrialization were key to the futures of their people, and their vision of the nation-state corresponded in important respects with the vision propounded by the Mandate System" (p.204). In that light, Nasser's attempt at "accessing the international" was not a moment of hegemony in its global implications, but an attempt to divert the attention of the people from his ruling group's violent capture of the national.

Nevertheless, (dys)functional polities *do* "function", as their survival relies on maintaining a tense balance between internal and external—and often contradictory—roles that are always vulnerable to global, regional, and local changes and/or upheavals. An illuminating example of this can be found in Jordan: in the interest of survival, the monarchy carefully balances externally-required functions—as a member of the U.S.-Israeli axis and as a participant in globalised neo-liberalism (which is harmful internally)—with internally-driven ones that

necessitate fostering clientelism and patronage to secure support for itself (which is opposed externally). As Avi Shlaim concludes in *Lion of Jordan* (2007), the detailed examination of the life and politics of Jordan's King Hussein, the monarchical strongman's reign could be summed up in the word survival. "The key to understanding all four strands to [Hussein's] foreign policy [Israel, the Palestinians, the Arab world, and the Great Powers]," Shlaim writes, "…was the *survival of the Hashemite dynasty in Jordan*. This was the overarching aim; *everything else* flowed from it" (2007, p.xiv; my emphasis). As will be shown below, external factors carry more weight simply because they are critical to the ruling group's survival.

But survival necessitates the ruling groups' adaptation to regional and international change: thus, these adjust their functions in keeping with shifting power balances, sometimes seeking or carving out new functions for themselves or reasserting the importance of former functions even if their nimbleness is circumscribed by their limited leverage in regional/international affairs and by the perpetual internal vulnerabilities that result from their lack of hegemony. Pete Moore makes this clear in the case of Jordan. He shows how its (dys)functional "politics of fiscal weakness" has "evolved into a strategy of rule", asserting that "Jordan's dependency on US, Israeli and Gulf Arab support is not something to transcend but rather something to *manage*" (2018, my emphasis). That notwithstanding, Moore acknowledges the huge power imbalance in US-Jordanian relations and bluntly describes the country as "the *USS Jordan*" and "Washington's protectorate in the Levant" (2014).

Weakened civil society and the resulting absence of hegemony in (dys)functional polities translate into a generalised lack of respect towards governing institutions, the rule of law, and constitutions. In a Weberian hegemonic state, these three factors are the products of internal power dynamics resulting from the activity of both political and civil society, and they mediate and cement the relationship between the two wings of said state. In (dys)functional polities, institutions are disempowered, while constitutions and laws are selectively deployed for the purpose of enhancing the survival of ruling groups. A stark current example is the accelerated regressive process in Tunisia, where the ruling group is rapidly moving to undo the gains of the 2010–11 uprising. In 2021, President Kais Saied activated emergency powers based on Article 80 of the 2014 Tunisian Constitution, which only pertain to the country being "in a state of imminent danger" entitling the head of state to take exceptional measures following consultations with the prime minister and speaker of parliament. Saied in fact used these powers to sack the government, suspend, and then dissolve the parliament (Tamburini,

2022), notwithstanding the specific stipulation of Article 80 that deems parliament to be "in a state of continuous session throughout such a period" and specifies that the government cannot be sacked. The Tunisian president then moved to dissolve the independent Supreme Judicial Council (France 24, 2022), appointing a new one himself (Reuters, 2022) while also firing dozens of judges (Al Jazeera, 2022) and replacing the country's independent Electoral Commission with one he handpicked (Reuters, 2022). Following an online process of constitutional "consultation", Saied also appointed an advisory committee to draft a new constitution (Escalonilla, 2022) whose work was ignored in favour of something the head of the committee described as paving "the way for a dictatorial regime" (France 24, 2022).

In *Overstating the Arab State*, Nazih Ayubi tackles similar questions to my own research to address politics and statehood in the Arab region. He characterises the modern state as a European-capitalist product and, accordingly, poses two questions (pp.10-11): "to what extent can one speak of the state outside this just-mentioned geographic-historical-socio-economic context? (…) [And] are these countries that mimic the European state formula 'real' states?" Contrary to Ayubi who categorises states into "the strong", "the hard", and "the fierce" (pp.447-458), this research tackles the issue as a *dynamic*, a spectrum of global and regional interactions in which states on the stronger side of the spectrum try to influence polities on its weaker side, the latter responding with adaptive mechanisms, manoeuvring, and obstruction. While the former aim at extending their hegemony across their borders and into the interconnected global political-economic arena, the latter's focus is on survival. Anghie states that "international law, like sovereignty, like the colonial relationship itself, is indivisible" (2007, p.315). I apply this conceptualisation to the fields of international power relations and definitions of the state, as represented in my "W-h state↔(D)f polity" spectrum (Figure 1), showing that these relations are indivisible, i.e., a state cannot be defined locally but only through the nexus of its local-regional-international interactions.

It is not the purpose of this conceptual distinction between a Weberian hegemonic state and a (dys)functional polity either to glorify the former or downplay the efficacy of the latter's ruling groups. The two are frameworks of coercion and discrimination that justify inequality, manufacture and manage identities, and manipulate fundamental contradictions. Conceptualising (dys)functional polities and Weberian hegemonic states does not erect a hermetic barrier between the two, as if each exists in the absolute and completely separate from the other, with no possibility of transitioning from one to the other or of oscillating between the two. On the contrary, the concepts discussed here represent "ideal forms" that lie

at either end of a spectrum of infinite intermediary positions, with each state or polity uniquely situated along that spectrum. Positions on the spectrum also shift and change in relation to other polities and states, and to regional and global power dynamics.
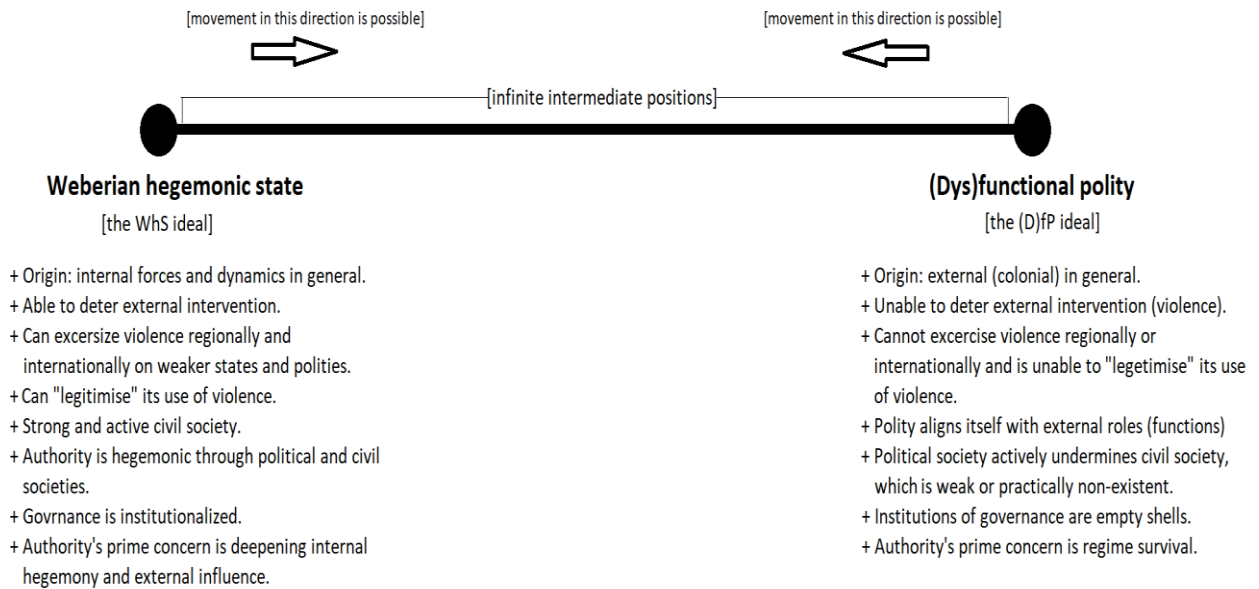
[movement in this direction is possible] ⇒   [movement in this direction is possible] ⇐

├─────────────────[infinite intermediate positions]─────────────────┤

Weberian hegemonic state   **(Dys)functional polity**
[the WhS ideal]   [the (D)fP ideal]

+ Origin: internal forces and dynamics in general.   + Origin: external (colonial) in general.
+ Able to deter external intervention.   + Unable to deter external intervention (violence).
+ Can excersize violence regionally and   + Cannot excercise violence regionally or
  internationally on weaker states and polities.   internationally and is unable to "legetimise" its use
+ Can "legitimise" its use of violence.   of violence.
+ Strong and active civil society.   + Polity aligns itself with external roles (functions)
+ Authority is hegemonic through political and civil   + Political society actively undermines civil society,
  societies.   which is weak or practically non-existent.
+ Govrnance is institutionalized.   + Institutions of governance are empty shells.
+ Authority's prime concern is deepening internal   + Authority's prime concern is regime survival.
  hegemony and external influence.

Figure 1. The W-h state ↔ (D)f polity spectrum

2. Colonial roots of (dys)functionality

It is useful here to compare the emergence of nation-states in South America and of post-colonial (dys)functional polities in the Arab region. Benedict Anderson (2006) considers that the emergence of South American nation-states (the "pioneers" of the modern national state) following creole independence wars in the regions formerly under direct Spanish rule resulted from a host of factors, most notably that the former administrative regions shared more or less the same borders as the subsequent nation-states. These administrative regions existed for two hundred years (sixteenth-eighteenth century) during which the metropole prevented direct inter-regional trade between them: all products traded had to cross the oceans to mainland Spain before going back to their destination on the American continent. Economic isolation was exacerbated by a lack of communication between the regions due to poor means of communication prior to the Industrial Revolution, natural (geographical) barriers, and administrative obstacles. All these elements conferred upon South America's colonial administrative regions a semblance of independence from each other.

On the other hand, many socio-geographical indicators demonstrate the incompatibility of postcolonial borders in the Arab region with the socio-economic and political realities of the time. The following are a few notable examples. In the central and eastern parts of Jordan, the Bani Sakhr and other tribes found their main grazing lands in Wadi al-Sarhan bisected by the colonially-imposed borders in what is now Saudi Arabian territory, leading to numerous disputes and conflicts (Mukaskas, 2016; Bocco and Tell, 1994); the natural roaming grounds of Bedouin tribes in southern Jordan extended into north-western Saudi Arabia, southern Palestine, and the Sinai Peninsula, and to this day, tribal sheikhs from those (now) different countries jointly settle clan disputes that arise in a particular locality (Salem, 2012). Members of these southern tribes have often raised Saudi flags against the ruling group in Jordan (Schenker, 2017; Masri, 2021) to signal their dissent. The Irbid and Ramtha areas of Jordan naturally extend into what is today the "other"—that is, Syrian—side of the border. Movement across the Yarmouk River (now the official border between north-western Jordan and Syria) was a normal practice until the mid-1940s (Masamreh, 2022), and the Yarmouk River basin constituted a single community that was dispersed post-colonially into four different countries (Masamreh, 2021). The farmland of several families on the Jordanian side of the border lies in Syrian territory, and vice versa (Shamaa', 2014; Qallab, 2011). The whole north-western area of Jordan was historically part of the Houran region (Hamarneh, 1985) in the Ottoman Vilayet (province) of Syria (also known as Bilad al-Sham), which comprised a huge area extending from Aleppo in the north to the Hijaz in the south. The work of the region's prominent poet, al-Sha'er al-Duwaqarani (circa 1830–1927), from the village of Duwaqarah now in the northwest of Jordan, is an example of this Hourani locality's natural-social continuum (Duwaqarani, 1985). In his book, *Poetry and Politics in the Modern Arab World*, Atef Alshaer (2016) notes that Arabic poetry written in the context of resistance against colonialism invoked perspectives "which often went beyond the borders of the [postcolonial] nation-state," (53) and that many poets expressed sentiments of Arab affiliation that elided and transcended postcolonial borders, both in the *Mashreq* and in the *Maghreb* (80). Al-Duwaqarani as well as his peers and successors are comparable to modern-day protestors in northern Jordan expressing their dissent by claiming their areas as part of Syria (Abu-Khalil, no date), much like their southern counterparts whose actions were described earlier.

Map 2.1. Detail from the "Arab States (excluding Egypt) Tribes and Administrative Divisions Map", showing cross-border roaming regions of Bedouin tribes in Greater Syria and Iraq superimposed on postcolonial political borders.
Source: United States Central Intelligence Agency Map Branch. (1947). *Arab states excluding Egypt, tribes and administrative divisions* [map]. Available from https://www.loc.gov/item/2001620692/ [Accessed 28 October 2022].

Despite their location in two *different* Ottoman administrative units, the cities of Salt (capital of the Balqa region, now in Jordan) and Nablus (now in Palestine) are well-known for their historical, social, and economic ties (Hamarneh, 1985), which extended to the Balqa Bedouins who provided raw materials for Nablus' famed soap manufacturing cottage industry (Barari, 2013; Mubaidin, 2011; Hamarneh, 1985). Likewise for Karak (now in Jordan), and al-Khalil (Hebron, now in Palestine), whose close socio-economic links go back centuries and are extensively discussed by Gubser (1973).

Politically speaking, the area's inhabitants viewed the region as one natural continuum. Anti-Ottoman movements and those rebelling against British, French, and Zionist colonisation worked in tandem across localities, and their leaders coordinated their actions across a region that is now divided into four post-colonial polities (Bustani, 2020). A 1920 letter from some of the region's political and tribal leaders to the resident British political officer demanded that Britain be the mandatory power over all of formerly Ottoman Syria in order to maintain
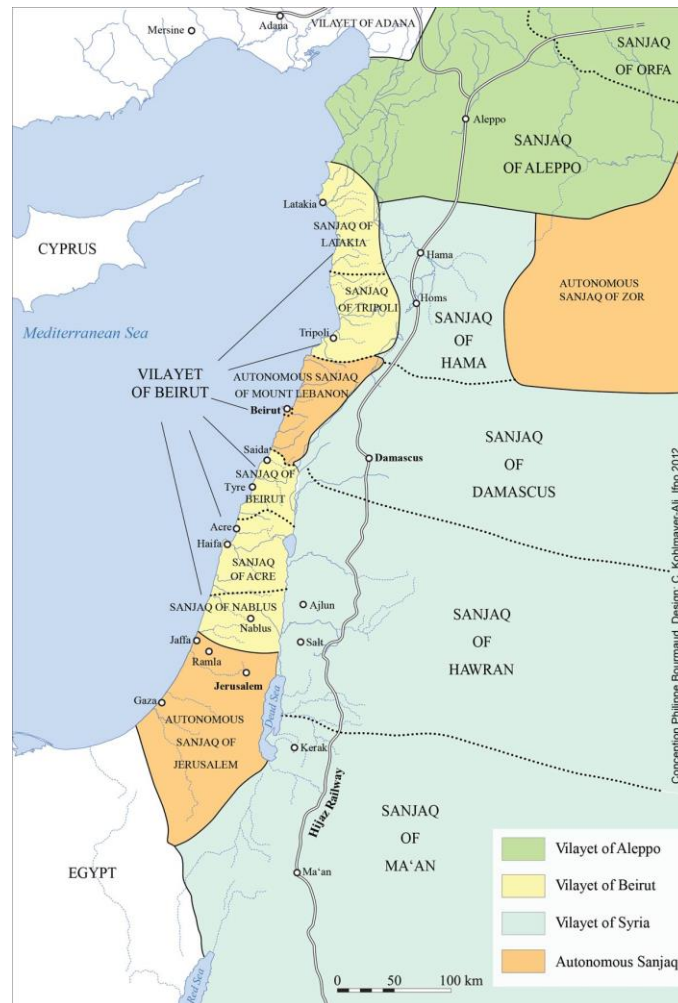
Map 2.2. Bilad al-Sham Ottoman administrative division in 1914.

Source: Ababsa, M. (2013). *Atlas of Jordan: History, Territories and Societies*. Beirut: Presses de l'Ifpo.

unity. The petitioners also demanded the establishment of an Arab government that included the districts of Salt, Karak, Ajloun, and Jerash (now in Jordan), the Houran and Quneitra districts (now in Syria), and the Marjayoun and Tyre districts, now in Lebanon (Madi and Musa, 2017). Similarly, letters and statements issued in 1919-20 by local leaders from different regions in what later became Jordan (Ajloun, Balqa, Karak, Tafeelah), as well as protests in those areas that erupted in the same period, called for preserving the unity of the region, protested the planned "decision to divide the country", and emphasised their rejection of Zionism and the Zionist project for the establishment of the state of Israel (Khreisat, 2020, pp.23-30). Such objections and demands to maintain greater Syria's unity were also voiced in Palestine (Bustani, 2005; Culture Dpt./PLO, 1987, pp.278-279).
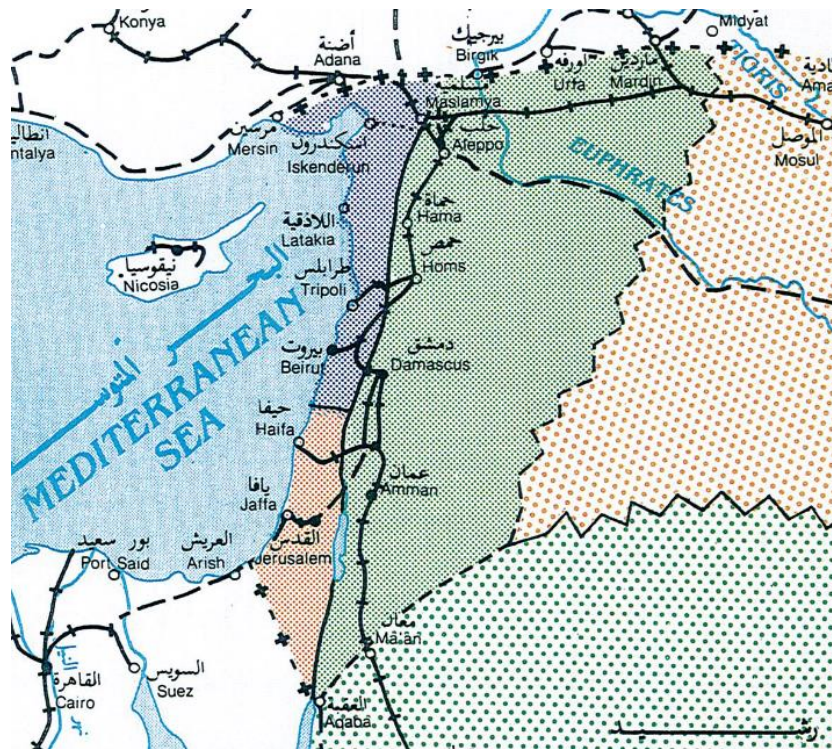
Map 2.3. Detail from the "Arab Territories Administration 1918" map showing the short-lived unified internal Syrian state, extending from Aleppo in the north to Hijaz in the south, under Faisal I, 1918-1920 (in block green).

Source: Royal Jordanian Geographic Center (1984). *The Palestine Question in Maps*, 4th ed. Amman: Royal Jordanian Geographic Center.

In the Arab region, post-colonial polities did not map onto longstanding former Ottoman administrative units, especially in the *Mashreq*. Until postcolonial political borders were put in place after WWI, which have been upheld by the ruling groups of the (dys)functional polities that followed, there were no geographic or administrative obstacles to the economic, social, and communications integration of this area, one that had arguably existed continuously from the dawn of the region's history. Unlike in creole South America, the administrative regional maps put in place for the Arab *Mashreq* did not reflect their inhabitants' intertwined economic-political-social connections and dynamics; nor did these regions exist as isolated commercial or economic units whose emergence as national markets were precursors to nation-states in the manner of the South American region.

Local resistance to colonial machinations was ubiquitous and had some influence on how the European colonisers ultimately drew the borders (Pursley, 2015a; Pursley, 2015b; Schwedler, 2022), but the huge power imbalances, the establishment of foreign mandates and other proxy administrations, and the slow transformation of resistance from regional to local (due to border-related game-changing rules) contributed to borders being upheld in places where they had been non-existent, leaving colonialism—whether direct or indirect—as the principal

driver of the establishment of political borders (Wilson, 1990; Massad, 2001; Alon, 2009; Barr, 2011; Barr, 2019). The process resulted in upsetting resource distribution, disrupting established local governance mechanisms, disturbing ethnic and demographic equilibriums, obstructing development, and ultimately fettering the newly evolving (and now (dys)functional) polities' economies and ruling groups to the former metropoles.

3. The powerful external factor: IMF vs. Jordan's protest movements

A major external function of ruling groups in (dys)functional polities relates to their "commitments" to international or regional powers that sponsor and support their survival and/or benefit from their functions/roles. Although it is usually presented as an "alliance", because of power asymmetries the relationship more closely resembles one of subordination, with the (dys)functional polity yielding to "pressure" while striving to maintain a role that is useful to regional and/or international power brokers. The polity involved is expected to fulfil political and economic requirements, both in terms of global capital and of its own geopolitical limits, that ultimately maintain its (dys)functionality. This is accomplished in several ways, including the selective creation and enforcement of legislative measures, suppressing protests, and participating in wars and interventions as part of a "coalition" or as proxies, etc. Consequently deemed "of value", ruling groups and their (dys)functional polities are thereby fostered, supported, and sustained.

One recurring requirement in Jordan has been the implementation of IMF-imposed "restructuring" plans. IMF policies, using mechanisms such as privatisation, deregulation, and supporting the influx of external commodities, tether peripheral economies to those of strong capitalist centres after dismantling their local self-sufficiency. Through the often violent and vicious cycle of indebtedness, ruling groups are stymied in their ability to control and develop local industrial and economic growth, and "free market" conditions obstruct the emergence of local production forces except in sectors that service the global market and its biggest stakeholders (Stiglitz, 2002; Vreeland, 2003; Cavanagh and Mander, 2003; Kovach and Fourmy, 2006; Kaiser, Knoke, and Kowsky, 2009; UNCTAD, 2020).

IMF interventions usually present themselves as structural economic reform programmes for economically distressed countries, most of them former colonies that have failed to thrive and have become indebted as a result of their ruling groups' mismanagement, ineptitude, and corruption. This is of course a somewhat simplistic diagnosis that does not account for

colonialism and its effects, on the one hand, or for the global capitalist system and its corollary power relations, on the other. Still, the IMF continues providing funding and loans to ruling groups that are often pinpointed as the root cause of the problem, in terms of their mismanagement and corruption, both of which are acknowledged from the outset. Entrusting these ruling groups with implementing its economic programs, the IMF thereby props up and maintains the very actors that have led their countries to ruin. IMF-prescribed austerity measures essentially bail out the ruling groups involved with loans while transferring to taxpayers the burden of decades of colonial after-effects, corruption, and mismanagement.

This is clearly illustrated in a study conducted by Harrigan, El-Said, and Wang (2006) on IMF and World Bank programs in Jordan, which shows how the two organisations deliberately exaggerated the results of the Jordanian ruling group's "performance", both in its commitment to the designated programs' implementation and their outcomes. This bending of the truth was intended to encourage and buttress Jordan's pro-Western stance and to entice other governments in the region to follow its "successful" model. The study explains: "Following the outbreak of the first Gulf War and Jordan's initial refusal to support the Coalition against Saddam Hussein, the Stand-By Agreement with the IMF was terminated on January 13th 1991 with less than half the finance having been disbursed" (p.269). The loans were reactivated after the ruling group repositioned itself fully within Western ranks in 1992. The cash inflow was maintained, despite program slippage, "to support what had become one of the major Western allies in the region after 1992 (...), create paradigms of economic liberalization in the MENA region (…), and enhance the legitimacy of incumbent pro-Western regimes. Even when it became clear (…) that increased capital inflows were undermining the reform effort by causing extraordinary spending and thus magnifying the fiscal deficit" (pp.287-288).

This is but one example of what is effectively a mechanism of extortion, whereby dominant global powers' political and economic interests translate into a vicious feeding cycle for ruling groups in (dys)functional polities through so-called economic restructuring programs and financing by international organisations. If a ruling group falls out of line, loans and monetary facilities are cut off; once back on track, it is rewarded with the resumption of funds.

On the internal front, the (dys)functional roles of ruling groups locally translate into mediating between the conflicting interests of social groups that are sometimes actively

created and always dominated by the ruling group as it undermines and attacks civil society formation; managing the fragile patronage balance thus created; and transforming the ruling group into the indispensable buffer-mediator-barrier and prophylactic against any potential "explosion" of social unrest. In managing the tensions between external economic-political interests and internal forces, ruling groups in (dys)functional polities mediate the necessary compromises between the requirements of the global economy, loan providers, and regional/global hegemonic powers, on the one hand, and the internal tolerance threshold beyond which the ruling group itself becomes vulnerable to a popular uprising or to the eruption of social unrest, on the other. Extending or slowing down the timelines involved allows the ruling group to portray itself as the benign go-between protecting vulnerable social groups against the viciousness of international organisations.

Thus, ruling groups in such polities walk a tightrope between two (dys)functional poles, one representing external (dys)functional roles and the other internal ones. The interests involved are often contradictory and, as we read between the lines of Harrigan et al.'s study cited above, and as will be shown below, Jordan's ruling group managed the IMF reform portfolio in a manner that preserved its (dys)functionality both externally and internally. In its attempt to preserve the external-internal balance, it was at times lenient and at others intolerant, sometimes speeding up implementation, at other times slowing it down. Its decisions were shaped by and tailored to the intensity of the pressure it experienced, whether externally from the multilaterals or internally from the intense resistance represented by protest movements. They were also dictated by the ruling group's ability to extinguish such protests and derail them, and by how effectively it could utilise the protests to extend timetables, acquire more grants/loans, and obtain other external support for its survival.

It should be noted, however, that there was never a reversal of direction in response to the various protests. While it may have slowed at times and quickened at others, neoliberal economic restructuring continued uninterrupted in Jordan. Rapid neo-liberalisation timeframes under IMF agreements might pit a ruling group against affected social groups—thus jeopardising the internal element of its (dys)functional character and causing the collapse of one of the two walls against which the tightrope is braced—but changing course would mean going against the external powers to which such a ruling group is beholden, causing the other "wall" to collapse. Whatever the case may be, the ruling group manages such contradictions in ways that ensure its survival first and foremost: in its calculus, the violent regional/global capabilities and transnational hegemony of external forces carry far more

weight than the weakened internal front whose civil society it keeps in check and attacks directly when necessary.

As elsewhere in the world, IMF restructuring programmes in Jordan translated into higher prices for basic commodities as well as other life necessities; increased tax burdens on the least affluent; and the privatisation of public sector utilities, which all gave rise to protests. Jordan's first uprising against IMF-imposed plans, the 1989 هبّة نيسان, the April *habbeh*/flare-up, was one instance when the ruling group accomplished many seemingly contradictory goals: on the one hand, it demonstrated that it was capable of ruthlessly dealing with dissent when it came to its own survival; and, on the other, it paved the way to political co-optation through a set of purportedly democratising measures, while still advancing the IMF-imposed austerity programmes that caused the uprising in the first place. The army moved into cities and villages, shooting live ammunition, killing and wounding protesters, launching large-scale arrest campaigns, and implementing various forms of collective punishment that included raiding homes, terrorising residents, and imposing curfews (Abu-Rumman, 1989), all in areas and among communities that had traditionally been portrayed as forming the ruling group's "tribal backbone". At the same time, the ruling group took "positive" proactive measures that included dismissing the government of Prime Minister Zaid Rifai; calling for general elections after decades of suspended parliamentary life; suspending the law preventing political parties from fielding election candidates; conducting a highly credible parliamentary election that featured high turnouts; forming a broadly representative committee to draft and approve a National Charter that would "renew the social contract," in King Hussein's words (Haddad, 1994, p.9); lifting martial law; and, lastly, allowing political activism so long as political parties acknowledged the ruling group's legitimacy and restricted their activity and ambitions to Jordan's political boundaries.

However, none of these measures led to change, nor, I will argue, were they intended to. While in the short and medium terms, the results of "reform" processes and "democratic openness" led to the first freely elected House of Representatives (1989–93) in decades (considered by many to this day as the best and most politicised legislature since the lifting of martial law in Jordan), it was this same legislature that eventually *approved* the neoliberal economic policies that had originally precipitated the *habbeh*, endorsing a government budget that included measures laid out in the IMF restructuring plans (Radio al-Balad, 2019). It is useful here to note that the first agreement between Jordan and the IMF was actually signed

in July 1989, three months *after* the *habbeh*, while the first loan agreement with the World Bank was signed in December *of the same year*, as if the protests had never occurred.

Keen to depoliticise the 1989 parliament and defang the recently legalised opposition, the ruling group issued a temporary law regulating the very next election cycle on the basis of the vote-fraction model (discussed below), which undermined political parties and opposition candidates and amplified the significance of tribal and regional ones, thereby weakening the nascent institutionalisation of parliamentary life. The results are visible in the continuously deteriorating versions of Jordan's parliament that are evident to this day.

In 1996, the economic mission of the so-called White Revolution government headed by Abdul-Karim Kabariti was to move forward with the IMF guidelines to abolish subsidies on basic commodities. Now at issue was wheat, a commodity both essential and symbolic as the primary ingredient of bread, Jordan's staple food (Martínez, 2022). The 1996 أحداث الخبز ("bread riots") raised several slogans, most notably demands to revoke the rise in bread prices; to dismiss the Kabariti government; to lift the economic embargo on Iraq (imposed by the United States through the UN Security Council) and resume trade with what was then Jordan's most prominent economic partner; and to protest Jordan's realignment with the Western coalition against Iraq.

These protests, which in a televised address King Hussein vowed to "strike with an iron fist" (*New York Times*, 1996; EnemyOFInjustice, 2015), had a partial result. The new price of bread, set at 25 piasters per kilo just before the protests—a more than 100% increase—was reduced to 16 piasters per kilo, or a 34% increase. Thus, the price hikes were partially reversed, and subsidies were not entirely lifted, but the economic approach that ushered them in was not abandoned. King Hussein stood firmly behind his prime minister, unequivocally supporting his government's economic policies, unlike what had occurred during the April 1989 *habbeh*.

By 1996, the ruling group was more sanguine about its reinstated alliance with Western powers (Daniszewski, 1996) after a short-lived disruption due to the king's refusal to take part in the 1990 Gulf War. Jordan was now hosting Iraqi dissidents (Ibrahim, 1995; Katzman, 2003), it had concluded a peace agreement with Israel, moving steadily towards normalising relations with Tel Aviv, and it was an active participant in the IMF's neoliberal restructuring programmes (Ryan, 1998). There was a token parliament and as former Minister Ibrahim Ezz El-Din summarised in his comment on the 1996 bread protests to the *New York Times*,

internal matters took a different course: "The main difference between this crisis and '89 is that in 1989 there was no democracy (…) Now one expects that the solution should be found within this process" (Schmemann, 1996). A motion by a special House committee to revoke the price increases *failed* as the 23 MPs of the Islamic Action Front (praised by the king for not participating in the protests) boycotted the session, preventing the measure from obtaining a majority vote (Ryan, 1998). In an interview many years later, one of the protest organisers, Shadi Madanat, noted that the 1997 elections had dealt the final blow to the bread *habbeh.* The solution was indeed "found within this [i.e., the democratic] process."

In October 2012, Abdullah Ensour, the fifth prime minister in a row to be appointed in the turbulent years of the Arab uprisings (2010-13), was viewed and presented as a "moderate" figure with a history in the opposition, whom one commentator described as coming from "within [the ranks of] the Jordanian Spring" (Mubaidin, 2012). But from its inception, the Ensour government continued to walk the same IMF-prescribed path, if anything with greater vehemence and dedication. It lifted more subsidies on petroleum products, with the government justifying the hike "as saving the Jordanian economy from imminent collapse and making it easier to obtain a loan of $2 billion from the International Monetary Fund" (Fdeilat, 2012). This, in turn, precipitated هبّة تشرين, the November 2012 *habbeh*, an uprising that lasted for six days (Jarrar and Masamreh, 2017).

The November 2012 protests were unprecedented in that the king was openly criticised and there were calls for the overthrow of the monarchy. But nothing came of it. With the Arab Spring protests losing momentum and either turning into civil wars or culminating in the restitution of autocratic ruling groups elsewhere, the *habbeh* was met with violence and repression one protester was killed, others were arrested, and opposition parties repudiated the uprising's demands (Bustani, 2012). The price hikes were not reversed, the prime minister did not resign, staying in office along with his forward-moving neoliberal agenda for the next four years, and the king offered yet another round of elections as "the decisive moment in the Jordanian Spring" (Alra'i, 2012).

It must be noted here that elections can play a key role in distracting mass protest movements. In addition to the violence which they resorted to during the first round of the Arab uprisings, many ruling groups in the Arab region—notably in Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Syria, and Tunisia—deployed elections as a means to bring angry unorganised masses back into their matrix of control. Jordan's ruling group successfully called for elections in 1989,

1996, *and* 2012 that provided it with breathing room to reorganise, consolidate power, and retract concessions it made in the process. "Against revolution nothing beats an election," Alain Badiou (2010, p.174) famously concluded about the right-wing response in France during a trial to pacify the January 1871 public unrest that led to the Paris Commune. "It is the same maxim that de Gaulle, Pompidou, and their allies on the official left [would] revive in June 1968" (p.174). In the Arab region, ruling groups proffered elections as a means to placate protestors and buttress their own legitimacy.

In 2018, it was the middle class's turn to rise up in protest after years of erosion in its standard of living and a slow descent into genteel poverty. The middle class was targeted by an income tax law drafted in response to IMF stipulations. A call to strike in protest against it, initiated by professional associations (Sa'di et al., 2018), the most prominent organisations representing Jordan's middle class, coincided with yet another increase in the price of petroleum products and electricity, as well as the abolition of bread subsidies and their replacement with cash support for so-called deserving families, per the terms of a new IMF loan agreement signed in 2016 (International Monetary Fund, 2016; Ali and Jarrar, 2018a; Ghazal, 2019). A wave of mass protests, dubbed هبّة حزيران (the June *habbeh*), broke out across class lines and regions. Extending to almost all Jordanian governorates, the new uprising's demands included, most notably, the dismissal of Prime Minister Hani Mulki and his cabinet; the withdrawal of the draft income tax law; the cancellation of fuel and electricity price increases; the downfall of what the protesters dubbed حُكم الصّندوق ("rule by the IMF"); and a radical change in government strategy, with measures guaranteeing social justice, economic equality, political inclusivity, and accountability for corrupt officials.

The 2018 protests produced an internal (dys)functional imbalance that complicated an external one, both of which influenced the ruling group's survivalist outlook. The internal imbalance was produced by the broad class base of the protesters, which included all ranks of the middle class (private sector employees, professionals, small and medium-size business owners), in addition to the financial elite (banking, insurance, and telecom services) affected by the new income tax law, who closed ranks with the impoverished mass of people from East Amman and the governates most impacted by the price hikes. Unlike previous waves of protests, especially those of 1989 and 1996 that started in the governorates and were simplistically tagged "East Bank events", the 2018 protests were ignited in Amman, with wide participation from the rest of the country as activists from the various governorates convened on the capital (Masri, 2018; Ali and Jarrar, 2018b). This was unprecedented in that

it flew in the face of the manufactured identitarian dichotomy between the governorates and Amman—i.e., Jordanian citizens of East Bank descent vs. Jordanian citizens of Palestinian descent—that is often exploited by the ruling group in such circumstances.

This internal imbalance complicated an external one, namely the election of Donald Trump as U.S. president and his administration's foreign policy. In addition to unconditionally backing Israel's hawkish prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, the Trump administration moved the U.S. Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, recognised Israel's annexation of the occupied Golan Heights in Syria, cut funding to UNRWA (the UN agency providing social services to millions of Palestinian refugees), signalled its willingness to recognise illegal Israeli settlements, and pressured Gulf countries into normalising relations with Israel in the context of an anti-Iranian regional alliance. This US foreign policy approach "pulled into question the Hashemite Kingdom's most fundamental strategic interests (…) [with Jordan] (…) essentially side-lined from US efforts" (Borck, 2021), causing "an existential threat to the national security of the kingdom" (Al Sharif, 2020).

In response, the ruling group pivoted and adapted. Attempting to consolidate itself on the internal front, it responded to the protests with a light hand, declaring its "understanding" of the protesters' right to free expression. The crown prince visited the main protest locations and instructed the police not to "encroach on the people's right to express themselves" (Jafra News, 2018). The price hikes were temporarily suspended by royal decree, the government of Hani Mulki was dismissed, and Omar Razzaz, a suave technocrat of neoliberal persuasion popular among the middle class, was appointed prime minister. Razzaz withdrew the draft income tax law and, like King Hussein in 1990, talked about a "new social contract" that would be implemented at the king's behest (Prime Ministry of Jordan official website, no date).

These measures succeeded in quelling the protests and the new government carried on with business as usual. It introduced a new income tax law that several economic experts deemed similar to (if not worse than) its predecessor (Obeidat, 2018; Musmar, 2018). Unlike in 1989, when a national charter was drafted before being shelved, nothing at all came of talk about a new social contract. The liberal Razzaz government's most notable achievement was to clamp down on the Teachers' Syndicate, dissolving the union, and imprisoning its leadership, drawing the curtain on the one and only positive achievement to come out of Jordan's version of the Arab Spring. On the external side of the ledger, the ruling group used the protests to

solicit extra funding from Gulf countries (France 24, 2018) and to extend IMF implementation schedules (Khalidi, 2018). In the process, it sustained itself further.

"عالفاضي", "all for nothing" is how Shadi Madanat had described the outcome of the 1996 bread *habbeh* in the earlier referenced interview. In the absence of organised political forces capable of ushering in change, to attempt change from within a framework embedded in a matrix of power relations and dynamics that wholly favours political society is a form of continuous crisis deflection. Protest succeeds in postponing and prolonging whatever plan is being implemented, but not in changing the ruling group's orientation. As outlined earlier, Jordan scaled back the increase in bread prices from over 100% to 34% after the 1996 protests, but by 2018 it had phased out the subsidies altogether, twenty-two years after first attempting to push through the measure. Over time, most of the April 1989 *habbeh*'s "democratic gains" were dismantled piecemeal, leaving the ruling group as the sole locus of political activity. Having reasserted its dominance of the security apparatus in the public sphere, it simultaneously advanced IMF-imposed programmes which had been at the root of almost every mass protest movement.

For (dys)functional ruling groups, survival means managing and adapting to both internal and external pressures: externally, by attributing more weight to the requirements of external power centres given the severe power disparity; and internally, by weakening internal fronts in their quest to hold onto power.

4. Generating internal instability: political society's attack on civil society

Protests, elections, and parliaments are key arenas for examining how (dys)functionality manifests in the politics of a non-Weberian hegemonic state. The transformations in the historical Transjordan region (and later, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan) are illustrative, and they will be discussed further below.

Socio-political engagements and revolts in the region can be traced to as early as 1867 under the Ottomans (Alon, 2009; Schwedler, 2022). Political engagement with, and resistance to, the British, the French, the Zionist movement, and the Hashemites followed the collapse of the Ottoman Empire during WWI. Political parties and groups emerged in the wake of the regionwide nationalist anti-colonial tide in the middle of the twentieth century, and a party-led parliamentarian government was established in Jordan in 1956. This was the climax of

political participation and civil society formation in the country that was followed almost immediately by a royal coup in 1957. The coup resulted in the imposition of martial law, the persecution of political leaders, a ban on political parties, and the suppression of all independent political activity for the next thirty-two years.

Parliament's reinstatement in 1989, as a result of the *habbeh* that year, was accompanied by the co-optation and consequent weakening of political factions, deeper infiltration of every sector of society by the security apparatus, a transformation of parliament's role from legislative oversight to an essentially clientelist function, the constitutional sanctioning of autocratic rule, and the promotion of an IMF-imposed economic agenda that adversely affected the population. But the mass protests and uprisings that ensued (in 1989, 1996, 2012, and 2018) all lacked the kind of organising that could effectively transform popular demands into political and economic gains, in no small part due to decades-long obstruction of, and attacks on, civil society at the hands of political society.

The ruling group consolidated its dominant political position and achieved broader social and political integration within its sphere of influence as the IMF austerity measures proceeded. It did so by undermining and co-opting the opposition; containing the forces of dissent; co-opting some of the protest leaders into its ranks; revamping its administrative cadre; discrediting and fragmenting the protest movement by creating internal fractures between the protesters themselves and by driving a wedge between them and the rest of society. The ruling group was thus able to break up the emerging movement and its primary organisational framework not only in the moment but also for years to come since any future opposition movement would have to start over from square one following the defeat, fragmentation, and co-optation of its predecessor, which was unable to transform into a sustainable and effective structure. Like an endless departure point that never materialises, the movement, again and again, takes on the form of a هبّة (*habbeh*), a flareup or sudden eruption that is extinguished as quickly as it burst forth, without achieving the desired change in the present or gathering momentum for the future, or even establishing itself as a political player outside the ambit of political society.

Since 1989, Jordan's political situation has deteriorated continuously: a number of laws (detailed below), in addition to the practices and influence of the internal security services and heads of the governorates have gutted Jordan's civil society. The House of Representatives is now run along patronage lines, with parliamentarians largely preoccupied

with extracting small, service-related or regional/clan-based benefits, delivered in the form of government-bestowed privileges or legally sanctioned corruption resulting in personal enrichment. The most outrageous example of this stark conflict of interest is evident in the allocation of government projects and tenders to companies in which legislators and/or their relatives are owners or shareholders. A notorious investigative report on the issue was duly titled, "The MPs of Business" (Shawabkeh and Ghbari, 2016), but aside from garnering public attention, the report led to no investigation, be it legislative, executive, or judiciary. The practice is perceived by all concerned as "fair game" in matters of governance, something that highlights the weakness of legislative and judiciary oversight and renders legislators institutionally ineffective.

Examples of petty government benefits that entrench clientelism and patronage in the legislature include the allocation of university places outside the established "competitive" system (Husban, 2009); providing MPs with assistance coupons for distribution in their constituencies (Dbeisiyyeh, 2021; Al-Ghad, 2021; Mubaidin, 2022); exempting constituents from payment for medical procedures or treatment upon MPs' recommendations (Malkawi, 2018); a "quota" of government jobs for MPs to distribute among their constituents, sidestepping Civil Service Bureau recruitment requirements (As-Sawsana, 2009; Husni, 2011; Khitan, 2012); and many other similar petty benefits (Mansi, 2016; Khaberni, 2008; Sawalief, 2019).

Under such circumstances, the House of Representatives becomes simply "décor", in the words of a former speaker (AlMamlaka TV, 2019), whose very election was the subject of ruling group interference (Masri, 2021). It is a situation where a quick phone call from the *Mukhabarat* is enough to secure the government's desired vote (Rantisi, 2017), a process dubbed "the parliament's 'Hello department'" by the late MP Yahya Al-Saud (Saraya, 2013). Were a measure to be derailed by the House, the king's fully appointed second chamber of parliament, the Senate, is guaranteed to curb or undo any unanticipated or unwanted outcome (Rawashdeh, 2016), and senators who do not tow the official line are simply dismissed (Andoni, 1994; Falastin al-Yawm, 2018).

These practices, which Lawrence Lessig dubs "institutional corruption" (cited in Rothstein and Varraich, 2017, p.146), extend corruption to the relationship between the electorate and their representatives since electoral representation is framed in terms of a narrow and binary "benefit-reward" paradigm. Successful MPs are those most effective at procuring government

largesse and keeping their representation to a narrow constituency of direct family/tribal/ ethnic/sectarian connections, placing them at the mercy of the extortionary demand (electorate)/supply (government) nexus. This not only exacerbates the paternalism and corruption embedded in the benefit-reward paradigm, it also crucially undermines elected legislators' oversight and legislative roles. In answer to why there would "never be a no-confidence vote on any government in the future of this country," long-time MP Fawwaz al-Zou'bi replied: "مصالح (interests)—we work for interests. Whenever I'd sign onto [no-confidence motions], a minister would call asking me to send him the names of four [candidates for employment], he'd hire them, and I'd withdraw my signature. The work of Representatives is oversight, legislation, and *business*, business for the people. How do you think you win [elections] if you don't serve the people?" (Hayat FM, 2022, Zou'bi's emphasis).

Political parties have been weakened by the severe restrictions on their operation ushered in by successive legislation (Political Parties Law 1992; 2007; 2012; 2015; 2022) that places them under direct government supervision and control by the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Political and Parliamentarian Affairs, and the Election Commission. Their organising space is limited, their finances are subject to government scrutiny, and their membership is exposed since parties are legally required to hand over lists of their founders and members. Their participation in the political arena has shrunk even more since the 1993 electoral law (and its successors) which favoured business-, family-, and clan-affiliated candidates over politically affiliated ones. Using the *Mukhabarat*, the ruling group has pushed for the establishment of "puppet" political parties "composed of [loyal] statesmen" (Masri, 2021, pp.317-320) and obstructed parties that are not docile (Athamneh, 2020). Through a process of legalisation and containment, the ruling group has been able to co-opt classic opposition parties—that were radical in their approach, supra-national in their outlook, and extremely critical of (and sometimes openly hostile to the monarchy)—drawing them away from their formerly "illegal" yet more independent spaces into the ambit of the (dys)functional polity. Such parties now acknowledge the ruling group's legitimacy and function but since the ruling group always has the upper hand thanks to its comprehensive and malleable legal arsenal, the playing field is obviously not level. In tandem with the longstanding (and now normalised) practices of governors and the *Mukhabarat* that are legally dubious at best and illegal at worst, the ruling group has successfully deprived "newcomers" to the "system" of any true influence or robust involvement. Gradually, the

activity of such parties becomes more focused on survival within the "system" than on mass political participation or seizing power and implementing novel political programmes—in other words, they now operate as (dys)functional groups within the (dys)functional polity. From seizing or sharing power, their primary goal has been transformed into obtaining a piece of the pie whose management and distribution the ruling group monopolises. The rules of that particular democratic game are mere mechanisms for the co-optation of groups and elites that affiliate with authority from a position of weakness.

The final outcome of this process is that potential contenders, who started out criticising the ruling group's legitimacy, the polity's colonial roots, and its present (dys)functional position as subaltern—all of which can only be undone by "change"—have ended up legitimising the ruling group; they have bowed to the limitations born of their (dys)functional existence and, thanks to some legal sleight-of-hand now derive their own legitimacy from the very polity/ruling group they oppose, bringing along their own members into the ruling group's sphere of control and its security-political apparatus.

Trade unions and professional associations have been similarly weakened. Trade unions were co-opted by the government in the 1970s, with only officially recognised unions that were widely understood as government loyalists permitted to operate (Awad, 2017). An independent trade union movement tried to establish itself with some success in the early days of the Arab uprisings (Adely, 2012). Teachers achieved a notable success, albeit short-lived: after being prohibited from forming a union for decades, the Teachers' Syndicate finally emerged following mass protests in 2011. After an initial period when the ruling group yielded to some of its demands, the Teachers' Syndicate was eventually shut down in 2020. For resisting their co-optation, its leaders were removed, prosecuted, and/or imprisoned (Safi and Tahat, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2020; Gulf Centre for Human Rights, 2020; Gulf Centre for Human Rights, 2021). Professional associations that had once been politically active have been co-opted and weakened with the appointment of many of the council's leading figures as ministers or senators (Bustani, 2010a; Bustani, 2010b).

As for the public debate space, it too remains confined. People who are publicly critical expose themselves to harassment by the security apparatus (including frequent "interviews" by the *Mukhabarat*) and to lawsuits and other legal proceedings facilitated by an arsenal of conveniently ambiguous regulations that include offences such as, literally, "lengthening one's tongue about the king" (إطالة اللسان على الملك), "clouding relations with friendly

countries", and "undermining the regime." Such proceedings often go before the notorious and militarised State Security Court (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Another setback has been at the level of the constitution. The 1952 constitution and its subsequent amendments vested the king with extraordinary powers as the head of all three branches of government, enabling him to appoint and sack governments, appoint the Senate and wield authority over the House of Representatives. A series of putative reforms launched in 2011 in response to the so-called Arab Spring, were aimed at "expanding political participation" (King Abdullah II official website, 2012) but they have vested yet *more power* in the king. As a result, the monarch now has the authority to appoint Constitutional Court judges, the government has been stripped of its already minimal advisory powers as regards appointments to critical security positions, and foreign policy responsibilities have become the domain of a National Security Council whose members are all appointed by the king. Monarchic power extends to appointing the heads and boards of independent institutions with purported oversight responsibilities such as the Independent Election Commission, the National Centre for Human Rights, the Audit Bureau, and the Anti-Corruption Commission (Independent Election Commission Law, 2012; National Human Rights Centre Law, 2006; Audit Bureau Law, 1952; Integrity and Anti-Corruption Law, 2016).

While vested with sweeping executive powers, the king remains above the law as he "is immune from every liability and responsibility" (The Jordanian Constitution, 1952, Article 30). At the same time, unelected, unaccountable authority frameworks, including the Royal Court (*Diwan*) and the security services, and the *Mukhabarat* in particular (Moore, 2019), have the country in such an influential grip that they are able to intervene in almost every aspect of politics down to the daily details of people's lives, using means foul and fair.

The trajectory described clearly demonstrates how the development of a civil society as part of a wider politics has been continually, and deliberately, obstructed in Jordan. The ruling group's main adaptation mechanism to resistance has been a combination of violence and co-optation. All powers are concentrated in the coercive political society, and Gramsci's hegemony model does not really apply since the ruling group achieves survival by using its monopoly of violence internally to prevent the rise of competition from a politically active internal space. This constant erosion of civil society leads to internal instability and a *chronic* "crisis of authority" that can be exploited externally by regional and global powers, deepening (dys)functionality.

5. (Dys)functional legal frameworks: the (in)significance of constitutions and laws

Contrary to what obtains in Weberian hegemonic states, in (dys)functional polities many fundamentally political processes—governance, state building, strengthening state apparatuses, etc.—are the sole domain of political society. In the absence of a robust civil society in such polities, governing institutions, constitutions, and laws become largely superfluous as the mediatory tools between political and civil society. Such institutional structures are no longer central to governance and the resulting weakness of the internal front exacerbates the potential for violence that global and regional powers (can) inflict on (dys)functional polities.

Within (dys)functional polities, legal frameworks remain ruling group prerogatives, representing their "will to life" in the perpetuation of existing power relations and in the co-opting, corruption, subjugation, or oppression of those aspiring to have more influence on, or to change, the status quo. The role of legal frameworks in changing society and social formations while consolidating the power of colonisers, their proxies, and successors is extensively researched in works such as Joseph Massad's *Colonial Effects* (2001). Massad points to laws first devised by the British mandatory authorities, which were later used by the Jordan's ruling group to contain and reconfigure the population of Transjordan in service of the newly established (dys)functional polity. A more recent instance of this phenomenon in Jordan can be observed in the effects of the 200-plus government decrees ("temporary laws") which were issued under Ali Abu al-Ragheb's tenure in 2001–03 in the absence of a convening parliament. These laws accelerated the complete liberalisation of the economy (International Crisis Group, 2003), further suppressed public freedoms (Schwedler, 2002), and enhanced authoritarian control by reconfiguring electoral districts (Faisal and Urbina, 2003).

Electoral laws, in particular, have been central to weakening the very civil society they were supposed to support and strengthen. Formulated by the government as "temporary laws" between 1989-2010 when the legislature was dissolved, the electoral laws were nominally built on the one-person-one-vote model but actually provided voters with what I shall call a vote-fraction, which restricts a voter to choosing only one candidate irrespective of the number of MPs allocated to their constituency, usually between two and nine (Abu-Rumman, 2004). This configuration favoured family- or clan-based voting and the backlash was immense in terms of the resurgence of tribalism and regionalism. Subsequent legislation

(Bank and Sunik, 2014; Hussainy, 2014; Elections Law, 2016) was simply a sophisticated variant of the vote-fraction approach whereby list candidates run *against* each other and turn from allies into competitors.

Jordan's electoral laws are a prominent component of a family of transformative laws that saps the potential for civil society formation and empowerment, accelerates already-falling political participation in the country, and results in further fragmentation as social solidarity units (family, clan, region) are transformed into extremely narrow and patronage-based forms of representation, further undermining broad-based representative organisations such as political parties, unions, and other kinds of civil association. By fragmenting civil society and hampering its evolution, Jordan's electoral laws constitute a prime example of top-down measures that bring about profound and fundamental change and cannot easily be reversed, thereby furthering (dys)functionality and the ruling group's survivalist efforts.

In (dys)functional polities, ruling groups mobilise the law to the extent that it enhances their monopoly on power and props up the status quo. This "rule *by* law" approach establishes or revises legislation to bring it into line with what has already been decided upon a priori rather than establishing a stable, mediatory "rule *of* law". In instances where laws are perceived as a liability, they are amended, disregarded, or transgressed. Laws that are not deemed fundamentally important are ignored. An arsenal of "parallel laws" is also deployed for similar purposes when convenient. These include customary law, social norms, as well as tribal and religious/sectarian laws that sometimes contradict the stipulations of civil laws or the constitution.

In Jordan, there are abundant instances of the ruling group disregarding both the law and the constitution. On the basis of a letter of intent in 2014 that caused widespread popular and parliamentary opposition, in 2016 the government went ahead with a $10 billion agreement to import gas from Israel (Bustani, 2016). It did this despite a constitutional stipulation requiring parliamentary approval (Jordanian Constitution 1952, c.33.2) and three parliamentary votes (and a draft bill) striking down the deal (World Bulletin, 2014; Barakat and Zaken, 2019; Middle East Eye, 2020). Other instances include the violation of the Public Debt Law (2001, c.23) and the disregard of Corporate Law (1997, c.266.a.4), banning the operation of companies whose losses exceed 75% of their capital: the publicly-owned National Electric Company has remained operational despite losses exceeding its capital by 2,017% (Zeidan, 2016), heaping billions of dollars of debt on the Jordanian taxpayer (Zeidan, 2022). Lastly,

while "the rule of law" is an important element of the ruling group's rhetoric, government officials and high-ranking security officers regularly participate in tribal arbitration procedures that enforce unconstitutional measures such as the *jalweh*—a traditional conflict-resolution practice involving the eviction of a criminal perpetrator's extended family from their homes and moving them outside the area of the crime (Jibreel, 2016)—thereby effectively constituting a paralegal system.

The tale here is telling: laws and constitutions are not only selectively deployed, tailor-cut, disregarded, violated, or reinterpreted to say the opposite of what is actually stipulated, but authoritarianism expands simultaneously under the guise of constitutional reform. In the absence of a robust civil society, constitutions and laws are not necessary to mediate or cement the two wings of the state's hegemony: they are simply instrumentalised to enhance the ruling group's survival and to reinforce the monopoly on coercion vested in political society.

6. *Al-Muthaqqaf*, the practicing thinker, and constructive subversion

In this section, I will briefly discuss three other aspects of my research and connect them to the book's main arguments. Specifically, I will outline the functions of *al-Muthaqqaf* vs. those of *al-Mufakker al-mumaris*, the practicing thinker, as well as the concepts of constructive subversion and the taxpayers' collective.

The Arabic term المثقَّف (*al-Muthaqqaf*, pl. *al-Muthaqqafun*), usually, but imprecisely, translated to "intellectuals" or the intelligentsia, refers to what are deemed enlightened and educated individuals. In the historical context of the colonial encounter in the Arab region, *al-Muthaqqafun* of *an-Nahda* era (the Arab renaissance, 1870-1950) and their descendants, have been typically fascinated by European "progress", which they broadly ascribe to cultural differences, and uncritically embrace modernisation as the path to achieving development and independence. Focusing on these specific characteristics which are core to the original understanding of the term coined by Salama Moussa in the 1920s (Bustani, 2023), I argue that *al-Muthaqqaf* has played an integral role in the maintenance and sustainability of the (dys)functional characteristics of the Arab region's postcolonial polities by viewing their own societies as "backward" and in need of rescue from the darkness of ignorance and of propulsion into the light of modernity. This *muthaqqaf* grouping has espoused a largely cultural approach, proposing the enactment of change from above, primarily through the

reform of the educational system and the adoption of legal frameworks, such that the "benighted masses" eventually align themselves with the modernising "state".

Since "backward societies" cannot ipso facto be their partners in effecting change, and are simply the object of change, *al-Muthaqqafun* usually resort to appealing to authority to enact their aspirational changes from above. However, as authority is mainly interested in survival, not in progress or development, it has yielded to *al-Muthaqqafun* in as much as these served their survival. Authority also made use of the "cultural approach" to deflect attention from its pivotal role in de-development and controlled demolition, dubbing society as "retarded", politically juvenile, and not ready to rule itself. Ruling groups have thus co-opted, absorbed, or circumvented this grouping altogether: deriving their function from the imagined traction they possess with authority, and without substantial societal backing or any real power or influence, *al-Muthaqqafun* found themselves naked and at the mercy of authority's whims, the latter making them "visible" or "invisible" according to how well they fit its survivalist agenda. Fettered to the colonial mindset, on the one hand, and to the postcolonial ruling group with its (dys)functional polity, on the other, *al-Muthaqqafun* are caught in a double bind.

The notion of a practicing thinker (المفكّر المُمارس, *al-Mufakker al-Mumaris*) is derived from a synthesis of the following: the concept of Praxis, per Antonio Gramsci and Rosa Luxembourg; Henri Lefebvre's "dialectic of the lived and the conceived"; ideas put forward by the Paris Commune and the Arab Uprisings; and my own personal experience as an activist-writer-researcher. The practicing thinker is an intrinsic part of the dynamic process of conceptualising change through his/her actual involvement with people in the act of change, a creative process that repositions theory inside the dynamics of movement and history, wherein theory and practice are not merely inseparable but in a process of mutual generation, inside a dual feedback loop that yields and responds to change in real time, that is *within* history and not outside it. In such a conceptualisation, rather than being the object of change, the people become the subjects of change, a much-improved position from which to address the "crisis" of internal forces, that is, their inability to replace governing ruling groups owing to the latter's obstruction of, and attack on, civil society.

The book moves on to propose the concept of "constructive subversion" as a path to breaking this impasse. It posits that politics must be engaged from autonomous organisational spaces in order to achieve change. In so doing, it applies and expands on Gramsci's suggestion to

"study the capitalist factory … as the 'national territory' of workers' self-government" (2016, p.23), and it draws on ideas from Alain Badiou (2010; 2012; 2015), Jodi Dean (2012), and the intellectuals of the Paris Commune (Ross, 2016) to amplify the discussion, proposing the concept of a taxpayers' collective as a non-identitarian socio-political arena for achieving change in a collective manner.

In the absence of organised political forces capable of ushering in change, attempting change from within a framework that is imbricated in pre-existing power relations and dynamics is a form of continuous crisis deflection. Such attempts amount to releasing pressure valves to diffuse anger and squelch dissent, conferring further (dys)function on ruling groups which only reinforces their survival (Bustani 2021, 371-392). Constructive subversion entails building ruling group-independent political spaces outside the authority's controlled political field as a necessary corollary to the process of deconstruction—exposing the mechanisms of control and coercion, disassembling "implicit" parliamentarianism and "tacit" party systems, deepening the "crisis of authority".

Autonomous/liberated spaces can be laboratories for experimenting with and practicing new social formations, and for testing, developing, and applying socio-political tools and concepts that prepare people both practically and creatively to tilt the crisis to the point of no return, and thus to *contribute to creating* the conditions leading up to the revolutionary moment as a moment of rupture and departure.

Organising is at the centre of constructive subversion; it is the nucleus of the movement. On the one hand, it embodies the historical awareness of the necessity of change, albeit a partial awareness since the organisation cannot know the timing, conditions, or dynamics of the revolutionary moment to come. On the other hand, the movement also embodies the surpassing of partial awareness as a result of the intellectual activity in the act itself, as it occurs, with effective practical and intellectual involvement in the movement mitigating the knowledge deficit. Thus, the chain linking the movement to the thought-of past is broken as that past becomes constituent material for a current, as well as a forthcoming, creative action.

While the existence of an open historical potential for the revolution's eruption places the movement in a situation of knowledge deficit, at least one element of this deficit—namely, the openness of history to possibilities—means that a movement should work towards that possibility, pushing the "crisis of authority" to a conclusive commencement of change. Such a push can perhaps contribute to the transformation of the knowledge deficit from a

"negative" reactive stand to a proactive one, that is, knowledge-in-action. This would somewhat counterbalance the advantages in favour of authority resulting from its control apparatus, including bureaucracy and trained personnel, and its greater power. Knowledge-in-action partially levels the field between the movement and authority, unlocking the potential for change.

In that vein, I propose the constructively subversive concept of the taxpayers' collective, which I argue has the potential to nullify the identity-based control and identity generation that authority sponsors, and to arrest societal fragmentation since it emphasises and reinforces collectivism. The taxpayers' collective does not include only citizens but also immigrant workers and refugees who pay (indirect) taxes and contribute substantially to the public treasury. Given the ineffectualness of the individual taxpayer, the taxpayers' collective would simultaneously eliminate the "identitarian object" (Badiou 2012, 92-93) and transcend the narrow concept of citizenship linked to a homeland, a nation-state, or a (dys)functional polity.

In (dys)functional polities, authority tends to present itself as the "benefactor of the people," portraying its provision of social goods as مكارم (*makarem*)—acts of munificence and not the citizens' due. The concept of a taxpayers' collective turns this schema on its head and corrects the relationship, with authority becoming the recipient of the people's support. Such an inversion redirects the focus on the extracted public monies that sustain oppressive ruling groups and maintain their (dys)functional roles.

Another fundamental advantage of the taxpayers' collective is that it improves on other descriptors such as the masses, the oppressed, the exploited, the poor, the downtrodden, or the 99% since its clear and specific non-identitarian character can take on material political form. Other concepts may not be able to escape generalisation or abstraction to become an active political material subject. The very concept of a taxpayers' collective almost automatically renders the state/(dys)functional polity a parasitic appendage.

7. **Conclusion: the (dys)functional paradox**

The main conclusion of the research undertaken in الكيانات الوظيفيّة (Bustani, 2021), whose arguments and evidence are condensed in this commentary, is that Weber's definition of the state is insufficient if violence and the legitimacy of its use are not considered on a regional/global scale.

The book also illustrates how the Gramscian notion of hegemony, based on the activity of both political and civil societies, might be valid in certain instances, such as in the liberal bourgeois state, but it does not obtain in polities where political society obstructs and undermines civil society, and where the latter is construed as a threat to the ruling group's monopoly of power. In such (dys)functional polities, legal frameworks are selectively deployed to suit the moment, governing institutions are hollowed out, and crises of authority are chronic, all of which provide generous openings for intervention by external powers.

(Dys)functional polities *do* function, mainly with a view to their own survival, thanks to the support and sponsorship of global/regional powers; adaptation mechanisms that accommodate external interests and keep local resistance in check; undermining local civil society while allowing the activity of external NGOs, funding institutions, and aid programmes; blocking political institutional development; and selectively mobilising and manipulating legal frameworks, sapping the trust of the governed in the "rule of law".

By sponsoring social fragmentation along regional, tribal, sectarian, and ethnic lines and by facilitating the proliferation of clientelism/patronage relations, as well as controlling, manipulating, and co-opting dissent, (dys)functional polities undermine their internal fronts (earthworks and fortifications), ending up short on hegemony. This not only leaves them even more vulnerable to external intervention as they continue seeking further "useful" functions for themselves globally and regionally, but it draws them ever deeper into the vortex of (dys)functionality. This is what I call *the (dys)functional paradox*, wherein ruling groups bolster themselves by undermining local civil society and exerting control but weaken their internal fronts, which leaves the polity exposed and contributes to its subordination to external interests and intervention. The net result for (dys)functional polities is a chronic crisis of authority that can be exploited by external players to further their own interests while local players are unable to bring about change because of their (manufactured/induced) disarray.

Based on this, I devised a spectrum whose "ideal" ends represent the Weberian hegemonic state on one side, and the (dys)functional polity on the other, with an infinite number of intermediate points that mark the true (and interchangeable) positions of polities in between. Adopting such a spectrum could pave the way for a more objective assessment of the modern state since in a world where power is the principal factor in international relations, the state cannot be defined locally but only through the nexus of its local-regional-international

interactions, with the powerful perpetuating violence, exerting influence, and extending their hegemony over the less powerful, and the latter resisting, negotiating, or adapting, depending on each state/polity's relative position on the spectrum.

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