

**Carnavalesque politics and popular resistance: A
Bakhtinian reading of contemporary Jordanian
political humour**

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Abstract

This thesis examines contemporary Jordanian political humour in the context of the political history of Jordan and the 2011 Arab Spring revolutions. It applies Mikhail Bakhtin's mid-20th century theory of carnival and the carnivalesque (folk humour) as a framework for thinking about Jordanian politics and political humour in social media spaces following the Arab Spring. The Bakhtinian approach to humour has predominantly focused on the role of humour as a revolutionary impulse that aims to attack and expose the shortcomings of established political power, as well as to highlight public attitudes towards that power. The analysis undertaken here of Jordanian politics and political humour in Jordanian social media spaces after the Arab Spring found that Bakhtin's 'marketplace' is no longer the streets and material public spaces, but rather the social media spaces. The nature of the carnivals in social media spaces is in many ways just as carnivalesque as the 'marketplace' of Bakhtin's Medieval France, characterised by polyphony, the overturning of social hierarchies and the presence of dialogism (and monologism) and the grotesque.

To more fully address the relevance – and some of the limitations – of application of Bakhtin's ideas about carnival to the Jordanian socio-political context after the Arab Spring, this thesis analyses key political cartoons, satirical articles, comedy sketches, politically satirical videos and internet memes produced by Jordanians from the start of the Arab

Spring to early 2019. The analysis reveals five salient qualities of carnivalesque political humour in Jordanian social media spaces following the Arab Spring: praising the government (intentionally satirical), parodying the government, mocking the government, scatalogising the government and, finally, dethroning the government (the temporarily and metaphorically comic death of the government). These five qualities collectively and individually provide us with a useful framework to think of contemporary Jordanian political humour as a time and place for socio-political 'flattening' and cathartic hedonism (but not revolution) that have led to changes in Jordanian society where people are more willing to criticise and mock the government. Such humour has allowed ridicule of the government but not of the monarch and allowed individuals (carnival-goers) in social media spaces to cope with socio-economic inequalities and the absurdities of political power.

Declaration

Whilst registered as a candidate for the above degree, I have not been registered for any other research award. The results and conclusions embodied in this thesis are the work of the named candidate and have not been submitted for any other academic award.

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In loving memory of my mother. You are so much loved and missed!

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List of acronyms and abbreviation

HKJ	Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan
HKT	Hashemite Kingdom of Transjordan
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IAF	Islamic Action Front (Jordan)
IEC	Independent Election Commission (Jordan)
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JAF	Jordanian Armed Forces
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
PPL	Press and Publication Law (Jordan)
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organisation

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Note on transliteration and translation

The transliteration of Arabic words used in this thesis is based on the transliteration system outlined in the International Journal of Middle East Studies, with some modifications and adjustments to accommodate the transliteration of some local expressions and phrases found in Jordanian Arabic and folk humour. These local phrases are untranslatable because they are culture-specific and do not have direct or indirect equivalents in English. Therefore, these local phrases have been italicised so that the Jordanian ambiance is maintained to reflect the socio-cultural context and specificities of Jordanian humour. The translation technique and explanation of humour and jokes from Jordanian Arabic is kept as simple as possible so that the analysis can be accessible to Arabic and non-Arabic speakers. To facilitate reading, I have omitted all diacritics and long vowels except for the transliteration of the *'ayn* (') and *hamza* ('). The most common English spelling and usage for all geographical places, proper names and organisations are used in this thesis rather than transliterated. All translations from Arabic into English are my own, unless otherwise stated.

Dissemination

I have presented the substance of my research and ideas to date at the following international conferences:

Carnavalesque politics in Jordanian political humour after the Arab Spring, *On laughter*, Institute of Advanced Studies, University College London, UK, 10–12 July 2019.

Carnavalesque political humour in Jordan after the Arab Spring, *Politics and popular culture in the Middle East: Power and resistance post-2011*, University of Warwick, Coventry, UK, 7–8 May 2019.

The use of humour in Jordanian society after the Arab Spring, the 30th conference of the International Society for Humor Studies, Tallinn University, Tallinn, Estonia, 25–29 June 2018.

The politics of humour and satire in post-Arab spring Jordan, the annual conference of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies, King's College, London, UK, 25–28 June 2018.

Jordanian humour and the Arab Spring, the 1st International Conference for Arab Graduate Students in Western Universities, the Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies, Doha, Qatar, 24–26 March 2018.

Carnavalesque satire in contemporary Jordanian satirical literature, the 16th International Bakhtin Conference, Fudan University, Shanghai, China, 6–10 September 2017.

Introduction

Background and rationale

Humour has become a staple of Jordanian culture following the Arab Spring, a major transformative period of social and political changes and turbulence in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) since 2011. Many Jordanians have used social media spaces to produce counter-narrative discourses against the government and its economic and political reform programmes. The counter-political climate of the Arab Spring has rejuvenated Jordanian interest in using humour and satire as a tool to counter state repression and as a subversive tool for popular resistance to the official discourse and its articulations.

The political context of the Arab Spring in Jordan, which took the form of a series of protests against the government from 2011 onwards calling for the reform of the regime and launch of far-reaching government economic and political reform programmes, raises questions about the effectiveness of humour and satire as a tool to challenge power and undermine government control and authority. Despite the significance of the Arab Spring and social media spaces in forging counter-political discourses, there is still a dearth of research that examines humour and satire in the post Arab Spring period, and more specifically in the use of humour in social media spaces, despite the fact that many media commentators and humourists have argued for the post-2011 period being one of change.

Early Jordanian literature was devoid of political humour. It was imbued instead with cynicism, melancholy and a disinclination to life, social norms and proper manners (Abu Khalil, 2006). It can therefore be argued that Jordanian political humour and satire has a relatively short historical tradition. Jordanian political humour flourished following the country's political opening, economic growth and liberalisation, and after the relaxation of martial law from 1989. The early practices of Jordanian political humour were rooted, among other things, in ethnic joking, Gulf War jokes, politically satirical theatre by Nabil Sawalha and Hisham Yanis, tabloid newspapers, and a few political cartoons and satirical articles that rarely engaged ordinary Jordanians with political humour and satire. Early Jordanian humour had been mostly characterised by joke-telling and funny show performances, but satire (as a tool for political resistance against power and the government) had never been popular among Jordanians before 1989.

However, with the start of the Arab Spring revolutions from 2011, Jordanian political humour and satire has grown both quantitatively and qualitatively in larger parts of Jordanian society, and to a large extent in social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. To reflect on the development of Jordanian humour after the Arab Spring, four Jordanian humourists gathered at the non-governmental cultural centre at Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation in Amman on the 13 January 2014 for a public forum on the development of Jordanian humour after the Arab Spring (Khoshman, 2014). The humourists were

Yousef Ghishan (socio-political satirist), Musa Hijazin (comedian), Ahmad Hassan Al-Zou'bi (socio-political satirist) and Omar Adnan Abdallat (political cartoonist). In the forum, the humourists discussed the driving forces and motives that seemed to have influenced the production of Jordanian humour and satire in the streets, and most predominantly in Jordanian social media spaces since 2011. The forum was also aimed at challenging the stereotypical and widely held notion about Jordanians for being serious, po-faced and unable to produce humour and laughter. In particular, the four humourists reflected on the significant rise and development of Jordanian humour and most importantly the reception of humour and satire among Jordanians following the Arab Spring.

Yousef Ghishan, the moderator of the session, who works for the pro-government newspaper *Ad-Dustour* (The Constitution), argued that Jordanians have become funnier because of the Arab Spring. He provides evidence from the large flow of daily satirical comments and posts that Jordanians make in social media spaces about local and regional politics. Musa Hijazin, a veteran Jordanian comedian better known for his two comic characters, Abu Saqer and Som'a, argued that the central government has played a significant role in the development of Jordanian production and reception of humour since the Arab Spring. According to Hijazin, the government has rather (unintentionally) turned every Jordanian into a satirist (Khoshman, 2014).

Ahmad Hassan Al-Zou'bi argued that the weak performance of the Parliament as a 'rubber stamp' for the government is the one major factor that has most motivated the production and reception of Jordanian humour and satire following the Arab Spring (Khoshman, 2014). Al-Zou'bi is Jordan's most famous socio-political satirist and online activist and has worked for the government-owned newspaper *Al Ra'i* (The Opinion) since 2007. In addition to many politically satirical articles, he is best known for his influential, politically satirical play *Al-an Fahemtukum* (Now I Understand You) that was staged in Jordan at the beginning of the Arab Spring in 2011.

Abdallat, who produces comic and satirical animations and cartoons, argued that elements of frustration and bitter reality have played a significant role in the production of young Jordanians' comedy videos and sarcasm in Jordanian social media spaces following the Arab Spring (Khoshman, 2014). The four humourists have reflected on how social media platforms (as alternative spaces free from the state-run media) have greatly facilitated and perhaps encouraged the production of humour and satire against power and authority in post Arab Spring Jordan.

These observations merit being tested through academic research.

Employing Mikhail Bakhtin's mid-20th century theory of carnival and the carnivalesque (folk humour), this thesis focuses on contemporary Jordanian political humour and satire before, during and after the Arab Spring in social media spaces. The main objectives of this thesis are the following:

- (1) To offer a new reading of contemporary Jordanian political humour and satire that is based on Bakhtin's theory of carnival and the carnivalesque
- (2) To develop Bakhtin's theory of carnival in order to understand modern-day carnivals in social media spaces
- (3) To discuss the relevance – and some of the weaknesses – of the application of Bakhtin's theory of carnival and the carnivalesque in understanding contemporary Jordanian political humour and satire.

These objectives will be met through the following research questions:

- (1) To what extent has the Arab Spring influenced the volume/frequency and discursive changes in the formation of socio-political humour against power and government in Jordan?
- (2) In what capacity has the popular politics of resistance affected the production and development of Jordanian political humour and satire against power and government in Jordan?
- (3) How has Jordanian society responded to this increase after the Arab Spring in quantity, content and forms of humour against power and government in social media spaces?

- (4) How can we critically evaluate the use of Bakhtin's theory of carnival as a framework to understand the role of socio-political humour in political protests and change in pre-and post-Arab-Spring Jordan?

What purposes does humour serve?

Humour is a core aspect of social life and social relationships. It performs multiple social, psychological and political functions. It can affect family bonding, personal relationships and social environments. It also enables tensions to be released and helps to counter depression and mental illness, and support individual wellbeing (Carroll, 2014; Eagleton, 2019). Satire can be defined as a literary genre that makes use of humour, irony and exaggeration as a tool to criticise a person, thing or quality, particularly in the context of contemporary politics and absurdities of political power (Oxford English dictionary online, 2014). The term 'carnival' is usually used to describe a celebratory, ritual and yearly festive practice that preceded (and in some places still does) the season of Lent in Catholic countries in Europe and Latin America. The word 'carnival' is originally derived from the Latin phrase *carne levare* which means 'farewell to meat' (Oxford English dictionary online, 2014).

The word 'humour' (British English) or 'humor' (American English) comes from the Latin word 'humor', which means 'liquid' or 'fluid' (Oxford English dictionary online, 2014). In medieval science and medicine, physicians thought that the human body was composed of

four bodily humors (liquids). These were blood, phlegm, black bile (believed to be associated with a melancholy temperament) and yellow bile (believed to be associated with irascibility and anger). These physicians believed that if these bodily fluids are unbalanced, certain personality traits are more pronounced. For example, an increase of blood makes one a hopeful or sanguine person. The term 'humour' has therefore been associated with the idea of deviation or eccentricity that accounts for the ways we understand much humour today.

In humour research and scholarship, humour is primarily viewed as a social phenomenon that can build and facilitate communications and social relationships (e.g. Martineau, 1972; Al-Khatib, 1999; Kuipers, 2008). From this perspective, we might think about the use and positive functions of conversational humour and humorous personal experiences in strengthening family bonding, interpersonal communications and relationships with others. At the same time, humour can also destroy interpersonal communications and cause harm to others. From this perspective, we might think about the role and function of ethnic and racist humour to undermine target groups and criticise their *perceived* personal traits.

In his article 'Humor as a double-edged sword: Four functions of humor in communication' (2000), John Meyer calls this ability to both build and destroy "the paradox of humor" (Meyer, 2000, p. 323). This paradoxical nature of humour indicates the contrasting functions of humour in social

life and social relationships. Therefore, the role played by humour can be an ambiguous one. It can help to create stronger personal relationships or in other situations, it can be perceived as a threat to a healthy relationship.

The paradoxes of humour continue when we think about the two aspects of humour in social life. Humour is universal and found in all cultures. It is, at the same time, culture-specific and has a culture-bound influence. For example, we might think about mimicry of others as a universal aspect of humour, found in all cultures around the world, past and present. At the same time, we might think about the degree of reception and appreciation of humour and jokes only among people who share the same culture (or subculture). Given the simultaneously universal and culture-bound nature of humour, it seems likely that there are a number of socio-demographic and psychological variables that could enhance and further influence the reception and appreciation of humour, irrespective of whether it is considered to be universal or culture-bound phenomenon. These variables could include, but are not limited to, age, gender, level of education, place of living, intuition, disposition, personal taste and one's (dis)inclination towards humour and laughter.

In their book *The psychology of humor: An integrative approach* (2018), the American psychologists and humour scholars Rod Martin and Thomas Ford provide one of the most valid and useful definitions of

humour, which highlights the complexities and nuances of humour in social life. They define humour as a “multifaceted term that represents anything that people say or do that others perceive as funny and tends to make them laugh, as well as the mental processes that go into both creating and perceiving such as amusing stimulus, and also the emotional response of mirth involved in the enjoyment of it” (Martin & Ford, 2018, p. 3). This definition of humour is useful because it acknowledges the core components of humour: the social context, the cognitive-perceptual process and the emotional aspect of humour that is expressed through mirth and laughter. This definition of humour explains the authors’ overriding fascination with the role of humour as a psychological and social tool that releases tensions and facilitates relationships with others.

The Dutch humour scholar Giseline Kuipers highlighted (at the 30th Conference of the International Society for Humor Studies in Tallinn, Estonia in 2018) the problems in various definitions of humour in research in the field of humanities and social sciences. She argued that all definitions have tended to ‘essentialise’ humour and laughter by providing descriptive and small-scale explanations. Instead of attempting to give a straightforward definition, she provided what she called the ‘ingredients’ of humour. These are incongruity, uses of seriousness, pleasure and social ability that views humour as a tool to decrease (or increase) social distance and isolation. She demonstrated that these ingredients do not necessarily constitute a “theory of humor,

but rather a theory *about* humor, which tries to understand how humor works” (Kuipers, 2009, pp. 220–221). These ingredients tend to conceptualise humour and laughter as reflections of social interactions and social boundaries. As a result, humour can be considered as one of the major demarcators of social, moral and cultural boundaries that are central to supporting and perpetuating durable social relations and institutions.

According to Kuipers (2018), humour and laughter are among the strongest markers of social boundaries and relationships: those who laugh together feel connected and intimate, whereas those who do not feel excluded or alienated from the same cultural group. Kuipers’ view that humour cannot be clearly defined, but can be analysed, constitutes just one of the complexities and nuances about the question of humour in socio-political research. It draws upon concepts of humour similar to Bakhtin who argues that laughter has a deep philosophical meaning due to its relationship to socio-cultural politics and dissidence.

Political humour can be defined as a branch of humour that emerges from and in response to periods of national turmoil, political turbulence, political tension and uncertainty at times of politically volatile situations (e.g. Bakhtin, 1984a; Benton, 1988; Davies, 2007). As such, it encourages popular resistance to political legitimacy and power by exposing contradictions and inconsistencies that arise in the gap between political articulations and political actions. The Bakhtinian

approach to political humour has predominantly focused on the role of humour as a revolutionary impulse that aims to attack and expose the shortcomings of established political power, as well as to highlight public attitudes towards that power (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his world*, 1984). The Bakhtinian approach to political humour, according to Trisha Wheelock (2008, p. 25), represents a distinctive form of “popular counter-culture” that is marked by opposition, and where the use of the language of the marketplace and grotesque imagery are pervasive.

Why Bakhtin?

My main motivation for the study of contemporary Jordanian political humour was the study of power and popular resistance post the 2011 Arab Spring revolutions. My background in language and literature has led me to an appreciation of the language and counter-political discourse that have been used against power and authority in Arab countries (post the Arab Spring). As a Jordanian national, I was particularly struck by the rapid growth of humour and satire against the government in Jordanian social media spaces after the Arab Spring.

This led me to read about the existing scholarship on humour and resistance (e.g. Draitser, 1978; Kishtainy, 1985; Scott, 1990; Oring, 2004; Davies, 2007; Badarneh, 2011), and most importantly about Bakhtin and his theory of carnival because of its relevance to the themes of power and resistance. Bakhtin was a Russian philosopher, discourse theorist and a literary critic. He was one of the most influential

and controversial Russian thinkers of the 20th century (Clark & Holquist, 1984). He lived almost all of his adult life in a totalitarian state and under a repressive regime. He is best known for his theory of carnival and the carnivalesque, which is based on analysis of the works of the Renaissance French writer François Rabelais writing in a time of extreme political and social division (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his world*, 1984) and of the nineteenth-century Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky (Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics*, 1984). Bakhtin was also using the idea of 'carnival' to talk about repression and cultural politics during Stalin's reign by exploring how humour could be used as a coded critique of oppression and censorship in the USSR and thus a form of popular resistance. The reason why Bakhtin's theory of carnival is applicable to the Jordanian context is because the Soviet Union and/or Medieval Europe shared certain similar conditions that are applicable to the Jordanian situation. These conditions are:

- (1) The particular form of the regime (autocratic or semi-autocratic regime) that cracks down on resistance
- (2) The role of religion (for example, within the Jordanian context, religion plays an integral part in social and political life, perhaps as much as it did in Medieval Europe)
- (3) The existence of a dissatisfied public that holds resistant views against power (in this case Jordan, and many people during the then Soviet Union in the 20th century).

The theoretical framework used for the analysis of contemporary Jordanian political humour and satire before, during and after the Arab Spring is influenced by Bakhtin's work on carnival and the carnivalesque, as discussed in his influential and highly-acclaimed two books about carnival theory: *Rabelais and his world*, which was first written in late 1930s but was only published in Russian in 1965 and translated into English in 1984, and *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics*, which was first published in Russian in 1963 and translated into English in 1984. For brevity's sake, I will refer throughout this thesis to *Rabelais and his world* as (1984a) and *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics* as (1984b). The analysis in this thesis highlights the relevance – and some of the weaknesses – of application of Bakhtin's theory of carnival and carnivalesque humour to the Jordanian situation. It also sheds light on the distinctiveness of the Jordanian social and political context before and after the Arab Spring revolutions, which unsurprisingly go beyond Bakhtin's original context and classic framework.

Existing studies into Jordanian humour

Research into Jordanian humour has tended to over-emphasise linguistic and translational points of view. The prior research has extensively focused on the application of two linguistic theories of humour: the semantic script theory of humour, which was developed by Victor Raskin in 1985, and the general theory of verbal humour, which was developed by Salvatore Attardo and Victor Raskin in 1991. In the context of research into Jordanian humour, there have been up to the

date of this thesis seven academic studies conducted by Jordanian linguists at various Jordanian universities: Abdullah Shakir and Mohammed Farghal's (1992) study on the cohesion and coherence of Gulf War jokes; Mohammed Farghal and Abdullah Shakir's (1993) study of Gulf War jokes in Jordanian streets; Abdullah Shunnaq's (1996) study on the translatability of Jordanian rural jokes into English; Mahmoud Al-Khatib's (1999) sociolinguistic study on joke-telling in Jordanian society; Aladdin Al-Kharabsheh's (2008) study on accidental humour as displayed in Jordanian shop signs; Yousef Bader's (2014) study on linguistic pun expressions in Jordanian satirical articles, and Kawakib Al-Momani, Muhammad Badarneh and Fathi Migdadi's (2016) semiotic study of Jordanian political cartoons before and after the Arab Spring. These studies have demonstrated an overarching emphasis on and overriding fascination with the application of linguistic theories of humour to the Jordanian situation. The emphasis on using the linguistic theories of humour with analysis of Jordanian humour is due to first, the researchers' background on linguistics, and second, due to their relevance and substantial applicability to the Jordanian humorous context. Most Jordanian jokes and humour have tended so far to utilise linguistic and translational points of view to achieve their humorous effects.

In examining the past literature on Jordanian humour, I have identified two main approaches that were used to analyse social and political humour. These two approaches I shall call the linguistic approach and

the translational approach. The linguistic approach is concerned with the analysis and use of linguistic puns, polysemy, homophony and the role of stereotyping in generating ethnic humour and stereotypes, including local jokes and intrinsic stereotypes about the people of As-Salt, At-Tafilah and As-Sarih. The studies conducted by Shakir and Farghal (1992), Farghal and Shakir (1993), Al-Khatib (1999), Bader (2014) and Al-Momani, Badarneh, and Migdadi (2016) are among the examples that reflect this linguistic approach. This approach highlights the role and function of humour as a safety valve for expressing unallowable issues and taboos in Jordanian society, whether political, religious or sexual.

To a large extent, the linguistic approach has supported Freud's theory of release, which views humour as a way of venting for the release of tensions and individual repressions. For example, in their collaborative article 'Gulf War jokes in Jordanian streets' (1993), Farghal and Shakir argued that the Gulf War jokes provided Jordanians with an "escape hatch" for explicitly talking about taboos in Jordanian society and culture (Farghal & Shakir, 1993, p. 15). Jokes that made fun at the then Arab presidents were widely circulated in Jordanian streets as a way to vent anger and frustration about the consequences of the war that ultimately went against their ideological inclinations in supporting Saddam and Ba'athist Iraq at the time of the war.

The second approach I call the translational approach. This approach is particularly concerned with the study of the language of humour and the (un)translatability of Jordanian Arabic and jokes into English. The studies conducted by Shunnaq (1996) and Al-Kharabsheh (2008) are two examples that reflected the method and methodology of such an approach. The translational approach has highlighted various problems and challenges in translating (rendering) Jordanian Arabic and Jordanian jokes into English. According to the authors, most problems are due to language and cultural specifications that make Arabic and English not only linguistically different, but also culturally remote. For example, in his article 'Unintentional humour in the translation of Jordanian shop signs' (2008), Al-Kharabsheh demonstrated how the English translations of Jordanian shop signs have infringed some notable linguistic and orthographic rules that have as a result provoked humour and satire among the educated people. According to Al-Kharabsheh (2008), the linguistic violation has not only broken one language maxim, but also evokes humour in translation to the target language.

In addition to the seven case studies highlighted in the two approaches above, Jordanian humour has also attracted the attention of many young postgraduate researchers in various public and private universities in Jordan. These studies have tended to adopt similarly linguistic and translational approaches that have focused exclusively on linguistic and translational theories of humour, as used by previous

Jordanian linguists. These works include mainly Masters dissertations, including: Bilal Sayaheen (2009) on the translation of Jordanian culture-specific ironic expressions from colloquial Jordanian Arabic into English; Mohammad Al-Shra'ah (2011) on the translatability of puns in Jordanian satirist Kamel Nusairat's satirical columns from Arabic into English; Ala'a Telfah (2011) on the linguistic analysis of engagement devices in Jordanian satirical columns published in Jordanian daily newspapers; Wafa' Rawahneh (2016) on linguistic analysis of the metaphoric expressions used in Jordanian satirical literature; Rana Qawasmeh (2017) on the translatability from Arabic into English of ironic expressions in Mohammad Shawaqfeh's (1996) satirical play *Hi Muwatan* (Hi Citizen). Whilst undoubtedly insightful, studies like these also tend and understandably so to be focused on very restricted examples of Jordanian humour, and often only from a linguistic perspective of one kind or another. In other fields of social sciences, such as folklore, literature, psychology and sociology, Jordanian humour has not yet received much academic attention. Research in this field therefore remains scarce and the phenomenon of Jordanian political humour continues to be largely unexamined. The scope and focus of the works cited above arguably reflects an 'over-extension' of the application of linguistic theories of humour to the study of Jordanian humour and satire from the Gulf War period to the present. Most importantly, the role of humour and satire in countries that have been less affected by the Arab Spring (such as Jordan which did not witness

an overthrow of the regime but rather a series of government reshuffles and façade reforms) has not been researched sufficiently in literature.

Neither the linguistic approach nor the translational approach suffices as lenses or methodologies to understand the role and function of political humour and satire in Jordanian social media spaces in the recent and ongoing period of protests since the 2011 Arab Spring. This is because the linguistic and translational approaches have understandably focused on the linguistic devices used in humour, such as puns, polysemy, prosody and the role of stereotypes in generating humour and laughter. There is therefore little academic research about how humour has been used as a method of political analysis and a tool for resistance in the context of post Arab Spring Jordan. This line of research is particularly worth considering when we think about the role and function of humour in revolutionary times, such as the Arab Spring more widely, and its potentially profound implications for Jordanian government policies, where calls for substantial political and economic reforms and the end of gerrymandering politics have been in circulation in Jordanian streets and social media spaces from 2011.

This research on Jordanian political humour after the Arab Spring thus builds and expands on the existing literature on Jordanian humour, but it sets out to engage more rigorously with the role and function of humour as a method of political analysis and as a counter-political force and tool for popular resistance against power in the context of post

Arab Spring Jordan. It argues that Bakhtin's 'marketplace' is now the social media space, and to a much lesser extent the street and conventional public spaces. This research on Jordanian political humour examines the ways in which humour has been used as a counter-political force against the government's rhetoric about reform and its processes, and against the weak function of Jordan's parliament as a rubber stamp for the government.

This research utilises five salient qualities of carnivalesque politics in Jordanian political humour and satire after the Arab Spring in social media spaces: praising the government (intentionally satirical), parodying the government, mocking the government, scatalogising the government and, finally, dethroning the government (the temporarily and metaphorically comic death of the government). These five qualities of post Arab Spring Jordanian humour reveal the applicability of Bakhtin's ideas about carnival in modern social media spaces. The analysis also highlights some moments where Bakhtin is weak and offers therefore areas for development to make Bakhtin's theory of carnival and the carnivalesque a more useful approach for analysing modern-day carnivalesque political humour and satire in social media spaces. The contribution made by this line of research is original and without it, attempts to understand Jordanian politics online and Jordanian political humour after the Arab Spring would be much less effective and useful. Bakhtin's theory of carnival and the carnivalesque offers, because of the context of its making, a somewhat ecologically

valid and useful framework for the analysis of Jordanian political humour and satire after the Arab Spring.

Research methodology

Researching digital humour presents some quantitative and qualitative differences to researching humour in the public sphere more broadly because of its reactive and interactive nature, as well as the potentially huge datasets it can produce. In her study of the first cycle of internet disaster jokes, Kuipers (2002) argues that digital humour can be best understood as a reaction to news coverage of disasters, such as the attack on the World Trade Centre in 2001. She argues that these jokes represent a combination of visual collages of media culture, and comments on this culture. In *Memes in digital culture* (2013), Shifman considers internet memes in social media spaces as a new form of digital participation and civic engagement in democratic and non-democratic regimes. Internet memes, she argues, are among the agents of globalisation, because they are universally the most fundamental type of digital humour in the participatory culture of social media platforms.

This thesis on contemporary Jordanian political humour and satire is based on qualitative internet research on digital humour, within the framework of Bakhtin's theory of carnival and the carnivalesque, and an exploration of how Bakhtin's theory of carnival would benefit from adaptations in terms of its applicability to the analysis of modern-day carnivals in social media spaces. Social media platforms, such as

Facebook and Twitter, have played an influential role in what has been described as 'post-truth' politics in political communication and mobilisation against power and governments in the Middle East since 2011 (Salem, 2007, p. 7). For many Jordanians, I argue in this thesis, the mode of carnival against the government is now provided by social media platforms, primarily Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, and much less the streets and conventional public places.

The researcher chose Facebook, Twitter and YouTube and not the print press because these online platforms have been the most widely used in Jordan from the start of the Arab Spring in 2011. For example, there are more than 5 million active users of Facebook in Jordan, out of the country's population that stands at 10 million, according to the most recent Arab Social Media Report, making it the most popular social media platform in Jordan (Salem, 2017, p. 35). Most Facebook users in Jordan, according to the Arab Social Media Report (Salem, 2017, p. 38), are young people between 15 to 29 years old. Most Facebook users in Jordan are men with 59.4%, while women only represent 40.6 % of the users, according to the Arab Social Media Report (Salem, 2017, p. 40). This reflects the fact that social life in Jordan is dominated by men, although this is slowly changing at the present. Other social media platforms, such as Instagram, were excluded in this research because these platforms are not widely used in Jordan. There are only 260,000 Instagram users in Jordan, according to the Arab Social Media Report (Salem, 2017, p. 59).

Around 86% of internet users in the Middle East use Facebook to express their views on the government (Salem, 2017, p. 14). In the context of Jordan, social media spaces are relatively free from government control and censorship, with some Jordanians using their social media accounts to rally against the government. There are nevertheless some widely accepted limits where the king and members of the royal family are often beyond criticism (what can and cannot be said within legal frameworks and societal expectations).

The data for this research was collected from the internet and well-known Jordanian spaces in social media platforms. These spaces include but are not limited to: Emad Hajjaj's Facebook page (Emad Hajjaj Abu Mahjoob), Dr Maen Qatamin's Facebook page (Dr. Maen Qatamin *الدكتور معن قطامين*), Ahmad Hassan Al-Zoubi's Facebook account (*احمد حسن الزعبي*), Osama Hajjaj's Facebook page (Osama Hajjaj), Omar Abdallat's Facebook page (Cartoonist Omar Abdallat *رسام الكاريكاتير عمر العبدالات*) and a comic Jordanian YouTube channel called (*تقارب*) Takarub), which hosts the Jordanian comedian Musa Hijazin's videos. All the writers/creators/performers selected for this research are famous Jordanian humourists and have significantly contributed to the development of Jordanian humour since the Arab Spring. The language used for making humour in Jordan is Jordanian Arabic, and the average video length was 8 minutes for politically satirical videos and 1 minute for short comic videos.

This research was based on a corpus that consisted of 861 online examples of humour (see Table 1 below). The dataset was compiled between June 2016 and May 2019 and drew upon the practices of netnography. This is the adaptation of ethnographic research design and methods to study the online world and people's practices in internet and social media platforms (Kozinets, 2019). Netnography heightens our awareness to the performativity of online, and also the limitations of working in a medium in which users are often anonymous. It was also particularly suited to deal with politically sensitive topics that characterise some texts that are analysed in this research. The limitation of this research approach draws from its narrow focus on the online community, in this case Jordanian people online. There is also a difficulty in generalising the results of this research outside the sample collected, because netnographic research findings are often limited in scope and focus. The researcher undertook significant desktop research and used his social media accounts and presence on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to collect data. He was, of course, also an actor in this online world and this shaped the selection of material in the dataset. It is therefore important to discuss the researcher's positionality.

Table 1. The size of the corpus collected for this research

Category of humour	Frequency	Percentage
Politically satirical videos	215	24.97%
Comic sketch videos	175	20.33%
Satirical articles	166	19.28%
Internet memes	117	13.59%
Political cartoons	98	11.38%
Socio-political jokes	83	9.64%
Politically satirical plays	7	0.81%
Total	861	100%

The researcher is a native Jordanian and therefore an insider to the socio-political and cultural context of Jordan. His interest in and motivation for this research topic was influenced by his life experiences having lived and worked both inside and outside of Jordan. For example, as someone from a rural area who studied in an urban university, this made him particularly alert to jokes which mocked rural Jordanians and their lifestyles. He was also particularly tuned in to

jokes which tapped into more universal themes, and for which he was familiar with the existence of corresponding jokes in other languages and contexts. He was also aware of who were considered the best-known comics in present-day Jordan. That does not mean that he selected jokes that he was best familiar with and found the funniest (or the most offensive). Rather, having identified what he thought were the most popular comic figures and channels, he then verified this using popularity metrics. Then, for each comic or channel, a number of jokes were selected based on their popularity (measured in the number of followers, likes, views and shares of their posts in Jordanian social media spaces) to be put in the dataset, regardless of theme or the researcher's personal taste. One of Dr Qatamin's videos, for example, was selected for the analysis in this research because it was liked by 15,100, received comments from 4,200, shared by 8,900 and viewed by 51,800 people on Facebook. Of course, it cannot be known for sure (without inside information from Facebook) that the followers and commentators on Qatamin's Facebook page are all Jordanian nationals and residents, but not least because of the language and cultural context, it seems very likely that almost all are. The main types of comic material are outlined in Table 1 above.

The coding of political jokes into types of humour emerged from a preliminary analysis of the dataset. The initial coding framework threw up many types of humour, such as social humour, ethnic humour, humour about the government and economic reform, humour about elections and the parliament, situational comedy and humour about the

absurdities of everyday life. Some of these themes, such as social humour, were excluded from this research because they appear to go beyond its scope and analysis. The final analytical framework identified five themes (qualities) of Jordanian humour in which they provide a framework to think about Jordanian politics and the use of humour against power and government in Jordanian social media spaces: praising the government (intentionally satirical), parodying the government, mocking the government, scatalogising the government and, finally, dethroning the government (the temporarily and metaphorically comic death of the government). These five themes were also developed in relation with Bakhtin's theory of carnival in order to test its continuing relevance and potential weaknesses to Jordan and the Arab Spring.

The methods of data analysis included thematic analysis and discourse analysis. The thematic analysis was used to aid the researcher in analysing the key themes and techniques of Jordanian humour after the key qualities of Jordanian political humour began to emerge from the data. In the dataset, these qualities sometimes overlapped or co-occurred because the categorisation was not always clear-cut. The thematic analysis was conducted manually without using assisted qualitative data analysis software. It was done through categorisation to index the texts analysed into themes and connect them to a theoretical framework. The discourse analysis was a critical part of the data analysis strategy in relation to the broader social and political context of Jordan after the Arab Spring. It was mainly used to identify patterns or

themes in the data selected, as well as to analyse the use of language and figures of speech used in Jordanian political humour that target power and the government. It also helped the researcher to review and refine the themes identified during the thematic analysis and data analysis period. The final process of data analysis involved the constant comparison of the data with the existing theme as it emerged from the data analysis. This process was important in making connections between the themes emerged, until data saturation was reached.

The data collected for this research have required minimal protections and therefore raised few ethical issues. There was no need to be a member of these sites to access information. The data have already been in the public domain and they are still available to a broad population online. The type of data used for this research therefore requires minimal protections for keeping track of data online. There were no issues of confidentiality that led to the protection of identity and private information. In their analysis of the norms for collecting data from popular accounts of public figures, Williams, Burnap & Sloan (2017) critique the idea that informed consent is not requested when using data from Twitter, although the information is in the public domain. They point out that the boundary between public and private life is often blurred for online users as they participate virtually. This important critique is less relevant for my research on Jordanian humour and politics as the channels and the humourists I use are seen (and see themselves as) public figures and opinion leaders in Jordan. The researcher does not have or hold any direct relationships with any of

the Jordanian humourists and activists that are analysed in this research, and which may lead to a conflict of interest, such as promoting specific anti-government views and particular public attitudes that may have imparted bias on the findings of this research.

Organisation of the thesis

In addition to this introductory chapter, this thesis is composed of five chapters that are seeking to examine the relevance – and some of the weaknesses – of Bakhtin’s theory of carnival and its applicability to the Jordanian context. Chapter 1 seeks to establish a theoretical framework for considering how humour has been used and presented in Jordan before and after the Arab Spring revolutions. This chapter examines first Bakhtin’s theory of carnival and the carnivalesque to create a theoretical framework for the empirical analysis used in this thesis. It then attempts to marry some elements of Bakhtin and Freud to show the relevance of individualism to the Bakhtinian analysis of carnival as a collective political experience. Finally, it examines Jordanian ethnic humour in the context of Davies’ earlier work on ethnic humour, as well as the two dominant theories of humour: the superiority theory and the incongruity theory to consider the value of these theories to understanding the functions of Jordanian humour.

Chapter 2 presents the context of this research and offers a new reading on Jordan and the Arab Spring from the perspective of Bakhtin’s theory of carnival. It introduces political grammars and forms of political contestation: city versus rural areas; indigenous Jordanians

versus Jordanians of Palestinian descent and Jordan before the Arab Spring. These frameworks are key in understanding Jordanian politics and the humour which emerges, and then make a case for the Arab Spring. It argues that there is a clear limitation affecting the application of Bakhtin's theory of carnival to the Jordanian socio-political context after the Arab Spring. This is because of the difference in the cultural and socio-political context: Jordan in the last twenty years is different from the Soviet Union in the mid-20th century and from Medieval Europe in many respects. This difference matters; nonetheless, Bakhtin's theory of carnival, as evidence will show in this chapter, can be still highly relevant. To show this, this chapter maintains a regular contact point with the political history of Jordan and the significance of using Bakhtin's theory of carnival as a framework to analyse it.

Chapter 3 examines the development of Jordanian political humour prior to and after the Arab Spring. It examines Jordanian political humour before and after Jordan's 1989 political opening, during and after the First Gulf War (1990–91), and during and after the Arab Spring, in order to talk about the relevance – and some of the weaknesses – of Bakhtin's theory of carnival and its application to the Jordanian socio-political context. It argues that Jordanian political humour and satire prior to the Arab Spring was less 'carnavalesque' in nature: it operated within a framework I shall call 'affectionate satire' that maintained a respectful stance towards power rather than attacking it. Based on this observation, this chapter argues that Jordanian

political humour before the Arab Spring can be best explained through the traditional vantage point of 'internalised orientalism' and/or through Freud's theory of humour that highlights the concept of safety valve as a means to release tensions and bring people together in times of wars and political uncertainties (in this case the Gulf War). Such a view of political humour sheds light on the limitations and problems of the application of Bakhtin's theory of carnival on the Jordanian context before the Arab Spring. This is largely because Bakhtin did not acknowledge (perhaps because of the oppressive and dangerous regime in which he lived) how humour is exercised in a culture and how changing political contexts (in this case Jordan's political opening, the First Gulf War and most recently the Arab Spring) could influence the expression of certain types of humour and satire against power and authority.

Chapter 4 examines Jordanian politics and carnivals after the Arab Spring in Jordanian social media spaces by focusing on the popular politics of resistance against power and the government from 2011. It argues that Bakhtin's concept of 'marketplace' can now be considered the social media spaces, and much less the streets and conventional public places. This chapter demonstrates that social media spaces have certain qualities that go (unsurprisingly) beyond Bakhtin's ideas about carnival. This is because these spaces permit anonymity and online users' contributions are even more individualised. By drawing on this argument, this chapter demonstrates how Freud's work on humour

can help us to understand the relevance – and some of the weaknesses – of application of Bakhtin’s theory of carnival. This is evident when it comes to investigating humour in social media spaces, particularly following periods of significant social and political transformations (in this case the 2011 Arab Spring revolutions).

The last chapter further demonstrates the relevance – and some of the weaknesses – of application of Bakhtin’s theory of carnival in the context of using humour as a counter-political force and tool for popular resistance against the Jordanian government and its rhetoric about economic and political reform. To show the relevance of Bakhtin, this chapter utilises the application of Bakhtin’s theory of carnival on five salient qualities of Jordanian political humour and satire: praising the government (intentionally satirical), parodying the government, mocking the government, scatalogising the government and, finally, dethroning the government (the temporarily and metaphorically comic death of the government). The analysis of these five qualities of Jordanian political humour suggests that Bakhtin’s carnival can be considered as more than just ephemeral, even though its consequences are, in Jordan, as yet, slow and indirect. This chapter concludes that Bakhtin’s theory of carnival and the carnivalesque would benefit from amendment (or development) in terms of its applicability to the analysis of modern-day carnivals and political humour and satire shared in social media spaces. This is the key contribution of this thesis and one of its major research implications in the fields of Bakhtinian studies and humour research.

Chapter 1 Political and personal humour: Theoretical foundations

1.1 Introduction

In his most influential book *Rabelais and his world* (1984a), Mikhail Bakhtin defines humour and laughter in the context of 16th century France and the Renaissance as a distinctive form of knowledge and cultural politics that can covertly imply a coded critique of power and that can create civil and political dissidence. In Bakhtin's terms, laughter has "a deep philosophical meaning, it is one of the essential forms of the truth concerning the world as a whole, concerning history and man; it is a peculiar point of view relative to the world; the world is seen anew, no less (and perhaps more) profoundly than when seen from the serious standpoint. Therefore, laughter is just as admissible in great literature, posing universal problems, as seriousness" (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 66). Bakhtin's analysis of humour and laughter has remained very relevant to many socio-political contexts in Europe, Asia and Latin America, due to the wide applicability and universality of his carnival theory beyond its original context: 16th century France and the works of François Rabelais.

This chapter seeks to establish a theoretical framework for considering how humour has been used and presented in Jordan before and after the Arab Spring. It explains the relevance of Bakhtin to studying humour in Jordan, within the broader context of humour studies, including the

context of research on political humour and satire under authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes around the world over the last few decades. This framework moves from the collective to the individual to ethnic and cultural differences and makes Mikhail Bakhtin, Sigmund Freud and Christie Davies complementary to the study of Jordanian humour before and after the Arab Spring.

The framework opens with the work of Bakhtin and his notion of the carnivalesque, where humour is seen as a force for collective political resistance and infers a revolutionary zeal. The Bakhtinian approach to humour has predominantly focused on the role of humour as a revolutionary impulse that aims to attack and expose the shortcomings of established political power, as well as to highlight public attitudes towards that power. However, Bakhtin's argument does not acknowledge the role of individual agency and the personal which is important in shaping modern-day capitalist societies. This deficiency is noticeably evident when his work is put in conversation with Freud who views humour in his theory of release as a means of regulating dissatisfactions and helps deal with the constant anxieties in the unconscious.

Taken together, the collective revolutionary *impulse* is primarily used by Bakhtin while the role of individual *agency* is emphasised by Freud. This framework provides useful vantage points to make sense of the roles of humour in society and, in particular, the role it plays in societies

which might be seen at a turning point in their histories – and this is potentially the connection between Bakhtin in the earlier stages of construction of the Soviet Union and Jordan in the period of societal and political change and liberalism which followed the 2011 Arab Spring. Bakhtin and Freud (if converged) provide us with a theoretical framework that acknowledges the social, political and personal effects of humour, which are also applicable in digital societies which did not exist when either author was alive. That said, neither Bakhtin nor Freud take into account the purposes of all forms of humour, and notably that which dominated in Jordan from 1989 and during the Gulf War and which played on perceptions of ethnic and cultural differences. This is where Davies' earlier work on ethnic humour becomes particularly useful. Whilst I argue for the relevance of Bakhtin, Freud and Davies for understanding Jordanian humour, we also need to remain closely attuned to how humour varies in impact, across time and place.

The discussion in this chapter is divided into four sections in order to create a theoretical framework to study contemporary Jordanian humour. In the first section, I outline and critically examine Bakhtin's theory of carnival and the carnivalesque to create a framework for the empirical analysis in this thesis. In the second section, I discuss, in greater detail, Freud's ideas about humour and the unconscious and their interconnections and relevance to the thesis. I attempt to marry some elements of Bakhtin and Freud to show the relevance of individual psychology to the Bakhtinian analysis of carnival as a

collective political experience. In the third section, the discussion of Bakhtin's carnival and Freud's theory of release is enhanced by exploring how existing research on political humour and satire under authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes around the world over the last few decades have applied these concepts.

In the fourth section, I examine the emergence and development of ethnic humour and joking in Jordan after the country's political opening from 1989 and during the Gulf War. Jordanian ethnic humour, I argue, provided a source for pressure relief from the Iraqi failure and defeat. It also functioned as a platform for socio-political commentary on global and regional powers, and more specifically on Jordan's declining economic conditions and opportunities following the political opening that was closely associated with economic liberalisation and neoliberalism. In this section, I critically evaluate the validity of two dominant theories of humour – the superiority theory and the incongruity theory – and their usefulness for the study of Jordanian ethnic and political humour particularly in relation to urban-rural tensions and divide. Ethnic humour is an important component of the post-1989 development of humour in Jordan, and the two dominant theories of humour – the superiority theory and the incongruity theory – play a role in explaining such use of humour before the emergence of more carnivalesque joking in Jordan after the Arab Spring.

1.2 Bakhtin and the carnivalesque

Bakhtin's theory of carnival was formulated to talk about 16th century France and the works of François Rabelais in an exceptionally repressive political climate, that of 20th century USSR under Stalin. In reading Rabelais, Bakhtin takes the historical origin and significance of carnival and tests it in the Medieval context of France by exploring the culture of Middle Ages in comparison with the Renaissance. In his book *Rabelais and his world* (1984a), Bakhtin introduces his theory of carnival and the carnivalesque as a framework to understand the works of Rabelais, and Renaissance culture, as being opposed to the established culture of the Middle Ages in Western Europe. Bakhtin conceptualises carnival as a collective festivity and experience that brings together people from all walks of life against power and authority. He indicates that the primary function of carnival during the Middle Ages was as a "temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 10). In Bakhtin's carnival, the carnivalesque life functions as a medium for liberation and a subversive force against all hierarchies in society.

Despite its age, Bakhtin's theory of carnival and the carnivalesque has remained relevant in humour studies and the field of literature and applicable to many socio-political contexts around the world. This is due to the wide applicability and universality of carnival theory beyond its original framework. Studies demonstrating this ongoing relevance

include Mbembe (1992) on Africa, Taylor (1995) on Europe, Badarneh (2011) on the Arab world (but not Jordan), and Goldstein (2013) on Latin America. One of the potential weaknesses of Bakhtin is his exclusive focus on the collective purpose of humour, paying little interest to the functions it serves for individuals. It seems particularly important to address this in the era of social media, when an individual is behind a screen and often not participating in the collective 'marketplace,' at least literally. In this context, it is useful to engage with Freudian-inspired theories of humour.

The reason why Bakhtin's theory of carnival is applicable to the Jordanian context is because the Soviet Union (and indeed Medieval Europe) shared certain similar conditions that are applicable to the Jordanian situation after the Arab Spring. These conditions are: (1) the particular form of the regime (autocratic or semi-autocratic regime) that cracks down on resistance, (2) the role of religion (for example, within the Jordanian context, religion plays an integral part in social and political life, perhaps as much as it did in Medieval Europe) and (3) the existence of a dissatisfied public that holds resistant views against power (in this case Jordan, and many people during the then Soviet Union in the 20th century).

In Bakhtin's terms, carnival refers to the "people's second life" in the sense that it transcends the traditional forms and conventional styles of everyday life (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 8). It is free from established orders,

conventions and rules that otherwise restrict the self. Bakhtin expounds his relational concept of carnival life to include the binary themes of the 'official life' and 'nonofficial life' of a medieval person (Bakhtin, 1984b, pp. 129–130). He argues that a medieval man lived, as it were, "two lives." One was the *official life* which is serious and subordinated to strict hierarchies and orders from official power and authority; the other is called the *life of the carnival square*. To demonstrate its ongoing relevance, Bakhtin identifies four broad qualities of the carnival life in the carnival square (Bakhtin, 1984b, p. 123). These qualities are described as follows:

1. *Free and familiar contact among people*. Life in the carnival square promotes a special form of communication that maintains equality among people who are taking to the streets. It advocates egalitarian principles among all people who are participating in the carnival in the carnival square
2. *Eccentricity*. Life in the carnival square promotes a special category of carnival life that permits many forms of eccentric and otherwise unacceptable behaviours among people who are taking into the streets to partake in the carnival
3. *Carnavalesque mésalliance*. Life in the carnival square brings together people from different walks of life. From this perspective, it "unifies, weds, and combines the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid" (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 122). In this way, all people in the carnival square are collectively unified and interconnected

4. *Profanation*. Life in the carnival square strips the powerful of their 'sacred' authority and encourages instead resistance against them.

In his analysis of Rabelais and 16th century France, Bakhtin demonstrates that both lives are "legitimate, but separated by strict temporal boundaries" (Bakhtin, 1984b, p. 130). They are confined to some strict and limited boundaries, which make the life of carnival an ephemeral and fleeting period of popular resistance against power. Bakhtin's perception of the carnival life in the carnival square can be further discussed in the contexts of 'carnival time' and 'other times.' To illustrate this point, he points out that many forms of barriers and restrictions imposed in ordinary life, such as power, age and distance, are 'temporarily' suspended in the carnival life in the carnival square.

In reading the nineteenth-century Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky, Bakhtin further developed his conception of carnival in the particular context of a 'square' (a place) and a 'pageant' (an event) where everyone in the carnival square is an active participant. Life in the carnival square (as Bakhtin analyses it) can be considered as a counter-political force and tool of popular resistance. It is opposed to many forms of power and social and political hierarchy promoted by the official system and its discourse that often re-emphasises its social and cultural hegemony over the middle and lower classes.

In reading Dostoevsky's works, Bakhtin argues that the *carnavalesque life* promotes a "new mode of interrelationship between individuals, [which is] counterposed to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of noncarnival life" (Bakhtin, 1984b, p. 123). This mode of communication among the carnival-goers in the carnival square, according to Bakhtin, is exceptional and unavailable in everyday life and realities. In Bakhtin's terms, the life in the carnival square is free, transgressive, and overall unrestricted by many forms of power in society. It advocates egalitarian principles among all people who are participating in the carnival and carnivalesque politics in the streets. This carnivalesque life is full of humour, offense and debasement, often used against many people in power. It eventually calls for popular resistance against power. It includes myriad carnivalesque activities: ritual spectacles and carnival pageants, comic compositions and parodies, and other various uses of abusive language (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 5). It also contains many forms of degradation inherited primarily from grotesque realism. This explains why abusive language is considered an important part of carnivalesque political humour and folk culture.

Rather than isolating the reality and meaning of 'carnival' in the carnival square, I argue that Bakhtin first had a particular need, an intention (Rabelais, or indeed whatever alternative context Bakhtin might have had in mind) and then tried to use carnival to meet that need (to talk about political repression and the regime's cultural politics during the

contemporaneous reign of Stalin). His various definitions of carnival emphasise a special language use in the carnival square (a metaphorical space – where the ‘square’ just means any space in which the carnivalesque behaviour happens). Carnival (as Bakhtin conceives it) can be considered ‘heteroglot’ in the sense that it combines at least two different voices and viewpoints. It also acts in opposition to monologism, which celebrates one source’s voice and considers it as final and thus unopposable.

Bakhtin’s theory of carnival has been strongly contested by various literary critics. The scholars of Bakhtin such as Burke (1978), Clark & Holquist (1984), Mbembe (1992), Gardiner (1993) and Condren (2002) argue that Bakhtin was writing to support Marxist ideology. Other Bakhtinian scholars, such as Simon Dentith argue that Bakhtin’s book about Rabelais was not specifically aimed at analysing Rabelais and 16th century France, but rather offered a very critical lens to understand state repression and the popular politics of resistance during Stalin’s rule. In his book *Bakhtinian thought: An introductory reader* (1995), Dentith demonstrates how Bakhtin’s book about Rabelais shows a “strong coded attack on the cultural situation of Russia in the 1930s under Stalin ... The book is to be read as a hidden polemic against the regime’s cultural politics” (Dentith, 1995, p. 71). This claim can arguably be valid to some point because it explains why Bakhtin’s book about Rabelais was not published until the early 1960s, by which time Stalin’s reign had ended. There are also debates about the authorship of

Valentin Voloshinov and Pavel Medvedev's works on Marxist ideologies, with Bakhtin being suggested as the real author of these works. However, this claim about the authorship is far from being resolved.

The existing literature on humour in the internet and social media is growing exponentially. It often focuses on the relationship between the personal and collective voices in digital environments. In her book *Memes in digital culture*, Shifman (2013) makes a connection between the role of individual and collective actions by considering internet memes as "units of popular culture that are circulated, imitated and transformed by individual internet users, creating a shared cultural experience in the process" (p. 367). For meme diffusions, she argues, individuals can play a greater role to scale up memes to mass levels within hours. In his article 'ironic humor on social media', Gal (2019) argues how social media spaces have been constituting places for individual and collective identity work and drawing boundaries for personal and collective actions. Such features, he argues, have varied social and political implications in relation to power structures in digital environments. Taken together, these studies support the notion that social media spaces are both individual and collective places.

In the context of Jordanian political humour in social media spaces after the Arab Spring, I have found that there are five qualities of Jordanian political humour that are highly relevant to the Bakhtinian carnival:

praising the government (intentionally satirical), parodying the government, mocking the government, scatalogising the government and, finally, dethroning the government (the temporarily and metaphorically comic death of the government). These five qualities show the relevance of individual psychology to the Bakhtinian analysis of carnival as a collective political experience in social media spaces. These qualities are often highlighted in the existing literature on irony, parody, scatological humour and exclusionary or destructive humour (e.g. Wickberg, 1998; Kuipers, 2002; Badarneh, 2011).

1.3 What can Freud bring to Bakhtin?

Freud's writings in the second half of the twentieth century came to plant personal and psychological issues firmly at the centre of how we can further understand the role of the individual in social life. Freud views humour as a tool to control individual anger and repression (a pressure valve release). Freud presented his first theory of the conscious and unconscious mind, which played an important role in the development of psychoanalysis theory and interpretations of dreams. In his book *The interpretation of dreams* (1999/1905), Freud viewed the structure of the human mind as an 'iceberg' where much of its density (the unconscious mind) lies beneath under the surface (the conscious mind). He argues that the unconscious is the place where socially unacceptable ideas, desires and wishes are being repressed. These repressed wishes and pleasures, according to Freud, are released in dreaming or in daydreaming. This repression in the unconscious,

according to Freud, stems from the feeling of guilt and from taboos that are imposed by society.

Freud's model of the mind consisted of three parts: the *id*, *ego* and *superego*. In his book about Freud, Anthony Storr (1989, p. 60–63) argues that the *id* is the oldest part of the mind from which the other two parts (*ego* and *superego*) are derived. It is the innate and instinctive part of the mind that includes all the pleasures and desires in life. The *ego*, however, represents the conscious and its primary function is self-preservation. It acts an intermediary between the *id* and the external world. The *superego* is the regulating agent of the mind. It is the self-critical conscious that reflects morals, social standards and injunctions. The primary function of the *superego* is to control the impulses of the *id*, especially those that are forbidden in societal terms, such as sex and aggression. Freud demonstrates that where the *id* is the pleasure principle and the *ego* is the reality principle, the *superego* represents the morality principle that always feels guilty.

In his book *Jokes and their relations to the unconscious* (2002/1905), Freud differentiates between two types of jokes: innocent jokes and tendentious jokes. Innocent jokes are dependent on verbal ingenuity and wordplay. They give us little pleasure and amusement because they usually employ neurotic symptoms, slips of the tongue and dreams. Tendentious jokes, Freud argues, are offensive based on the use of indirect expression of hostility or obscenity. In his analysis of the

techniques of jokes, Freud argues that there are several techniques for joking, including the use of condensation and displacement in jokes. He argues that whereas condensation jokes make use of the multiple meanings of the word to make humour, displacement jokes focus on the formation of composite words to make humour. Freud argues that humour functions as a release for thoughts that are usually suppressed by the *superego*. To release the tension of the suppression, the *superego* then allows the *ego* to generate humour to avoid 'explosion.' To show this, he argues that humour is inextricably bound up with the realm of the unconsciousness. According to Freud, humour represents the capacity of the *superego* to console the *ego* at times of adversity and repression.

Freud's theory of humour (often called the release theory of humour) is similar in many ways to Herbert Spencer's view of humour as a pressure valve release of nervous energy (catharsis). The theories of Freud and Spencer are based on the idea of negative mental energies that function like 'water,' moving around in different channels in the mind before seeking an outlet to discharge a nervous energy at times of pressure. The two theories suggest an accumulation of something that is being repressed. The release theory of humour has been criticised by some humour scholars because there is little academic research that supports its arguments. In his book *Humour: A very short introduction* (2014), Noël Carroll argues that "the theories of Spencer and Freud have the liability of presupposing hydraulic views of the mind which are

highly dubious. Both postulate the existence of mental energy that behaves like water—flowing in certain channels, circumventing blockages, and seeking outlets as the pressure builds. Their language, though couched in the scientific jargon of their day, seems at best metaphorical from the viewpoint of the present” (Carroll, 2014, p. 38). The release theory focuses on the role of humour as ‘catharsis’ that provides an outlet for the release of repressed emotions and tensions. According to the release theory, humour results from the freeing of accumulated nervous energies and negative feelings in the mind, which views humour as a pressure valve release. The release theory is useful for talking about individualism in the context of the effects of neoliberalism in Jordan, from the country’s political opening in 1989 to the idea of carnival for the late modernity that characterises Jordan after the Arab Spring.

In the context of Jordanian political humour and satire during and after the Arab Spring, the release theory of humour provides a very useful framework that helps us to understand and think about the proliferation of humour and satire in Jordanian social media spaces. From the start of the Arab Spring in 2011, young Jordanian people have resorted to, and continue to use, humour as a tool to release their anger and frustration with the government. Many Jordanians in social media spaces use humour to express their resentment and discontent about the effectiveness of government economic and political reform programmes, accompanied by the weak function of Jordan’s parliament

as a 'rubber stamp' for the government. I argue that such humour has been used as a safety valve that releases the tension of Jordanian young people online because it provides a 'discharge' for restive views about the government and the parliament.

From this perspective, we might think of the function of online hashtag activism and Jordanian social media humour as a tool that released frustration and anger during Hani Al-Mulki's government. This online activism was particularly notable following the government's decision to increase the prices of fuel, bread and electricity, as a part of its wider economic reform programme managed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Politically satirical hashtags such as #الزجاجة_عنق (bottleneck), #الملقى_بريزة (Mulki's ten pennies) and #عمو_ما_بدياك (uncle, we do not want you anymore) were famous among Jordanian young people in social media spaces as a means to release frustration and anger as well as to make fun and jokes about the government's economic decisions. Although release is an internal and private quality, I argue that the function of hashtag activism in Jordanian social media spaces can be considered as an individual release to the wider collective protests and vice versa.

Carrol's (2014) critique of the release theory is undoubtedly right to question the idea of 'fluid' temper that must at some point be 'released' by an individual, but that does not necessarily mean that the release theory is entirely discredited for the discussion of political humour and

satire. The fact of the growth of political humour and satire in the stressful economic and socio-political contexts (time and place) studied in this thesis suggests that the release theory still has some validity, at a group level, if not for individuals. Release theory can in fact be more applicable to groups, as my application of Bakhtin's ideas will show in chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis.

Indeed, despite the contested debates around the release theory, I have found it very useful when we think about humour in Jordanian social media spaces, and how individuals express themselves online, whether through real names or aliases. Social media technology has allowed people to communicate freely and share their feeds without necessarily revealing their personal identity, seemingly as a way to relieve their pressures about things that upset them in real life: to be angry without needing to shoulder the responsibility that being identifiable requires. This framework has made social media humour dependent on the role of avatars and not primarily on the users' identifiable 'voices.' Social media spaces have allowed people to say things they would not say face to face. Social media can be both individual and collective at the same time.

The release theory of humour is notable when we think about the roles and functions of humour and satire in social media spaces. For example, political humour and satire shared in Jordanian social media spaces after the Arab Spring has exposed an internalised and

psychological component of resistance against power. It may have allowed young Jordanian people online to cope with socio-economic inequalities and political repression, rather than calling for regime change or revolution. It may have sometimes functioned as a safety valve that has both released tensions (which can in fact be useful to those people with political power) and been used as a tool for resistance against many forms of power in the government.

By the same token, social media activism in Jordanian social media spaces after the Arab Spring may have sometimes allowed people to use humour as a tool perhaps for personal sanity and wellbeing so they can 'play at resistance' rather than taking part in actual protests in streets and public spaces. This suggests that the function of humour in Jordanian social media spaces can be considered as a time and place for socio-political 'flattening' and cathartic hedonism that has provoked significant changes in Jordanian society after the Arab Spring, where more people have become more willing to criticise and mock the government. The individual can repress their political views and then 'release' them through humour.

Bakhtin's theory of carnival and the carnivalesque has a functional similarity to Freud's theory of humour because both seem to agree on the role of repression to influence the production of humour. Although repression is being understood differently (for Bakhtin it is political repression, which is usually a conscious decision, and for Freud it is

self-repression, which is usually unconscious), humour can provide us with a strong mechanism for overcoming repression, or at least, giving the individual or the crowd the impression that they are challenging repression. The relationship between humour and the repressed is therefore crucial to understand the role and function of the carnival and the carnivalesque in a repressive context. Humour provides us with a 'safe haven' for breaking what is forbidden or taboo in social and/or political terms without necessarily challenging the status quo.

Freud's work on humour helps us to understand the relevance – and some of the some of the weaknesses – of application of Bakhtin's ideas about carnival and the carnivalesque being collective. Freud focuses on the role of individual agency, which Bakhtin ignored because of his overriding fascination with collective expression and engagement. Neither Bakhtin nor Freud lived in the era of social media and the boundaries between the individual and the collective, and the political and non-political, in the production and function of humour have arguably become even more inseparable. Equally, some of the ideas which Bakhtin explores in relation to Medieval France, such as the anonymity of the masked crowd in the street carnival have become even more relevant in the online world. In his seminal work *Weapons of the weak: Everyday forms of peasant resistance* (1985) *Domination and the arts of resistance: Hidden transcripts* (Yale UP, 1990), James C. Scott explores how people with little political power indirectly undermine those with power through small acts of sabotage, gossip, rumour and

refusing to participate in official displays of subservience – indirect, disguised, and fugitive forms of resistance which he terms “infrapolitics”. Like Bakhtin, Scott’s work on modes of subaltern resistance and the ‘weapons of the weak’ suggests that humour has little power to change reality but does give those who engage in this humour a sense of agency and control over their lives. In a special issue of “Infrapolitics and mobilizations”, Scott (2012, p. 115) explicitly makes the connection between Rabelais, Bakhtin and contemporary social media by asking:

“Does the contemporary proliferation of electronic media and cyber communities represent, in this sense, a vast new terrain of anonymous individual and collective actions?”

As Scott underlines, individual action does not exclude collective action or vice versa. The modern carnival is about the collective participating in the (virtual) community through individual expression – the online account for example. Although the modern carnival is less about social and community participation and more about individual presence and expression, taken together the contributions shared in modern day carnivals in social media spaces are more collective than individualised because they create collective voices. At the same time because social media spaces are primarily individualised spaces with a proliferation of different voices and permit greater anonymity than Bakhtin’s street carnival, there is a greater role for individual identity and expression.

Freud's work on humour and the metaphorical language of 'release' also helps us better understand how the relative anonymity of social media functions as a disinhibiting factor in how individuals express themselves online, whether through real names or aliases. They can be angry without needing to shoulder the responsibility that being identifiable requires. By the same token, social media activism (in this case in Jordan after the Arab Spring) has sometimes allowed people to use humour as a tool perhaps for personal sanity and wellbeing so they can 'play at resistance' rather than taking part in actual protests in streets and public spaces.

1.4 The application of Bakhtin and Freud

Research on political humour and satire is vast and broad in scope. A significant amount of research is in English and is based on the American and British contexts (to cite only the most recent examples: Wagg, 2002; Plumb, 2004; Conners, 2005; Brassett, 2016; Hall, Goldstein & Ingram, 2016; Davis, 2017). Research on political humour and satire in those two domains has found that political humour proliferates exponentially in times of political instability and unrest, such as wars, protests and political tensions and uncertainties. In Jordan, for example, humour has grown rapidly after the Arab Spring. Political humour increases in times of unrest because humour as a form of political resistance highlights the absurdities of political power and people's attitudes towards power. The most useful contexts to compare Jordan to when examining how humour is used, however, are not

democratic political systems such as that of the contemporary UK and US, but rather authoritarian and semi-authoritarian political systems.

In examining the past literature on political humour, I have identified two main approaches that have been used to analyse humour under authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes around the world: the Bakhtinian approach (or the collective approach) and the Freudian approach (or the individual approach). The Bakhtinian approach is concerned with using humour as a tool for popular resistance against power and government. It also focuses on the circulation of disaffected views and emotions about political power that cannot be expressed directly and openly in public spaces. The Bakhtinian approach also provides a way for building an 'alternative world' and narratives outside the repressive world of exaggeration, flattery, obedience and subservience. The Freudian approach is, however, particularly concerned with the function of humour as a safety valve that releases the tension of oppressed people under authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes around the world. Both these aspects of the reaction to political humour are important. However, only Bakhtin provides a possibility of influence in the political sphere.

In his article 'Funny, but not vulgar' (1968/1945), Orwell takes the idea of 'resistance' in political humour and captures very beautifully the key aspects of political humour as well as the idea of blending humour with resistance. He highlights the potentially subversive capabilities of

humour and jokes shared under authoritarian regimes and the idea of humour as an active form of popular resistance. He argues that “every joke is a tiny revolution ... Whatever destroys dignity, and brings down the mighty from their seats, preferably with a bump, is funny. And the bigger the fall, the bigger the joke” (Orwell, 1968/1945, p. 284).

According to Orwell, political humour and jokes have tiny moments of revolutions and seemingly active forms of popular resistance, but of course these kinds of revolutions are symbolic and do not lead to the actual overthrow of political power and regime. These tiny jokes can upset dictators and help to undermine some of a regime’s established orders.

The Bakhtinian approach suggests that political humour permits emotions that cannot be expressed openly. For example, in his article ‘Laughter behind the iron curtain: A sample of Romanian political jokes’ (1971), Alan Dundes (p. 51) found that under politically stressful circumstances, “people were reluctant to tell jokes to strangers. Informants usually spoke in low tones after glancing around to see if there was anyone else listening.” He argued (1971, p. 51) that “in political jokes in Iron Curtain countries, one frequently finds said what many individuals feel but dare not utter.” He demonstrated that Romanian political jokes “provide a much-needed vent for emotion,” because “they provide a socially sanctioned frame which normally absolves individuals from any guilt which might otherwise result from conversational ... articulations of the same content.” This line of

argument suggests the precarious act of sharing political jokes under repressive regime, and how humour is considered as a tool to release repressed tensions and emotions, and therefore linked to Freud. This might explain why the cultural art of joke telling under some authoritarian regimes has been (and still) considered a perilous and a very risky business, “with a keen eye as to who is within listening distance” (Brandes, 1977, pp. 334–335). For the fear of losing their control and dignity, I argue that many dictatorships and authoritarian regimes around the world have repressed humour and criticism.

The Bakhtinian approach to political humour thus sees political humour as neither resistance nor sublimation of aggression, but rather as a form of *metaphoric* substitution of a real political act that allows the creation of a controlled symbolic reality. Where the Bakhtinian approach has been applied in the context of the Arab world, this lack of change to the status quo has often been underlined. For example, the humour scholar Khalid Kishtainy argues against the effectiveness of political humour and jokes under repressive regimes. In his book *Arab political humour*, he argues (1985, p. 7) that “people joke about their oppressors, not to overthrow them but to endure them. People who have guns do not need jokes.”

In his collaborative book with C. Branc [pseud] *First prize: Fifteen years! An annotated collection of Romanian political jokes* (1986), Dundes analysed Romanian political jokes under communist suppression and

found that political humour provided people with a tool that let them speak the 'unspeakable' to political power. The two authors argued that "criticism can be uttered only sotto voce and that is why political jokes play so important a role in Eastern Europe ... One can speak in jokes when one cannot speak otherwise In Eastern Europe, what one cannot talk about are the inadequacies of the government. Hence there are far more political jokes in Eastern Europe than in the United States" (Banc & Dundes, 1986, p. 10).

In his article 'What courage!' Romanian "Our leader" jokes' (1989), Robert Cochran argues that political humour and jokes under the long-time ruler Nicolae Ceausescu offered a time for self-expression. He points out that political humour is "at once an assertion of defiance and admission of defeat ... No public change is affected" (Cochran, 1989, p. 272). Writing about Russian political humour and jokes, Alexander Rose argues that political humour offers one of the best exercises for popular endurance and regime repression. He argues that humour provides "temporary pain relievers [that can serve] as a substitute for being allowed to participate in real politics" (Rose, 2001–2002, p. 68). This form of carnivalesque political humour offers some sorts of alternatives to the regime's policies and practices, but only fleetingly, and only in certain, limited spaces.

In his article 'Political jokes under communism' (2007), Davies extends this notion of political humour and satire further and argues that political

humour and satire can be considered as a form to reflect disaffection, and not resistance. He sees it as a sign of regime instability, but not as a call for regime change or revolution. In the light of this claim, he argues that political jokes are “thermometer not a thermostat; they can be used as an indication of what is happening in a society but they do not feed back into the social processes that generated them to any significant extent” (Davies, 2007, p. 300). This argument helps us to assert the negligible impact of political humour and satire in Jordan (and probably nearly everywhere) to achieve any change or significant impact in the near to medium term. This line of thought is found similar to those in Bakhtin’s and Scott’s theories about ordinary people’s resistance to power and its impact when Bakhtin and Scott spoke about the ephemerality of carnivals against power.

Explicitly drawing on the Bakhtinian theory of carnival and the carnivalesque, Muhammad Badarneh (2011) argues that contemporary Arab political humour has provided a form of “hidden dialogue” between the oppressed (and their marginalised discourse) and the regime (and its dominant power and its unilaterally autocratic discourse). Badarneh argues that the political humour shared under some Arab authoritarian and repressive regimes act against state repression and monologist discourses. Political humour, shared under these regimes, provides a tool for the proliferation of covert acts of popular resistance by creating counter-narratives and promoting the ordinary politics of alternatives.

According to Badarneh (2011), contemporary Arab political humour has built an alternative second world, outside the regime's autocratic and monologist world. In the light of Badarneh's argument, the people who are participating in this carnivalesque second world aim to disturb and potentially undermine the power of the regime using puns and irony that make fun of the regime and its institutionalised discourse. Although these acts of resistance occur momentarily, people who use anti-regime jokes demonstrate a profound act of popular resistance against many structures of power and regime policies. Such form of political humour may succeed in escaping regime crackdown on and prosecution of dissenting voices. This is because it uses 'play with words' using puns and metaphors and does not therefore directly attack political power and government.

At the same time, much work by historians, anthropologists and political scientists on the language of politics and political debate in the MENA underline the importance of not taking at face value superficially subversive discourse. 'Licensed disruption' is referred to using different terms (each of which mean something slightly different) by various scholars of Middle East Studies. Miriam Cooke (2007), for example, uses the term 'commissioned criticism' to talk about when those in power actively encourage a certain degree of criticism in order to boost their 'democratic' credentials. Cooke (2007) draws on an example from Syria under Hafiz Asad's regime, which facilitated the expression of anti-government views and sentiments in order to pre-empt any wider

popular protests against the regime. 'Commissioned criticism' goes beyond 'licensed disruption' – a concept commonly employed by scholars of Bakhtin – as it is actively encouraged ('commissioned') rather than simply allowed. Sometimes those engaging in 'licensed disruption' can believe they are more subversive than they actually are. Discussing post-independence Algeria, Benkhaled and Vince (2017) talk about 'consensual criticism,' whereby different parties and people appear to be presenting opposing points of view but are in fact reinforcing core ideas about political legitimacy and Algerian identity. This discussion highlights the importance of avoiding coming to sweeping conclusions about the extent to which humourists are subversive, and the extent to which they think their humour is subversive. It also underscores the importance to paying close attention to the specific contexts in which jokes are being told and the codes which they play on. Carnavalesque politics do not necessarily destabilise political system nor do they prop it up. Indeed, they can function as a form of 'licensed disruption'. For example, in the context of Jordan after 2011, I argue that the carnival humour of Jordan after the Arab Spring can be considered a form of 'licensed disruption' that allows ridicule of the government whilst the 'red lines' of criticising the monarch which would be profoundly subversive and a direct attack on a political system rather than 'just' holders of government office is never crossed. This has been seen when a certain degree of criticism is allowed by those in power, to allow the population to 'let off steam' during socio-political unrests.

The Freudian approach of humour sees humour as a mode of psychological defence: a defence against anxiety and repression. This approach originated in Freud's work and analysis of humour, which views humour as a safety valve (catharsis) that releases tensions and individual anger. This approach was applied by Antonin Obrdlik during the Second World War (1939–45), when he analysed Czechoslovakian political humour under the rule of Nazi Germany. In his article 'Gallows humor: A sociological phenomenon' (1942), Obrdlik argued that Czechoslovakian political humour took the form of a psychological mode of resistance and "morale booster," and served as a source of "liberation" for the Czech people who were resisting the Nazi occupation during the war. George Mikes (1971, p. 109) considers this type of political humour as "the only weapon the oppressed can use against the oppressor. It is an aggressive weapon and a safety valve at the same time".

In his article 'Peaceful protest: Spanish political humor in a time of crisis' (1977), Stanley Brandes (p. 345) arrived at a similar conclusion about the role of political jokes under repressive contexts. He argued that political jokes shared in Franco's Spain functioned as "a safety valve for anti-regime sentiment." In his article 'Political humour in a dictatorial state: The case of Spain' (1977), Oriol Pi-Sunyer (p. 185) found similar observations to those in Brandes and argued that "humor in such circumstances ... helps to alleviate anxiety and there were periods during the long Franco rule when levels of anxiety were very

high.” These observations about political jokes suggest the precarious act of political humour shared under repressed contexts.

In her book *Folklore fights the Nazi* (1997), Kathleen Stokker makes similar observations to those of Obrdlik and explains how political humour was used by the Norwegian people as a secret and covert weapon of resistance during the German occupation of Norway (1940–45). According to Stokker, “the Norwegian material portrays instead the oppressed taking the upper hand, deprecating the occupiers to their faces and refusing to be intimidated or even to alter the slightest details of their lifestyles in deference to German regulations” (Stokker, 1997, p. 104). In his article ‘Wit and politics’ (1998), Hans Speier refers to this theory of political humour that is shared clandestinely under oppressive regimes and stressful circumstances as “whispered jokes” (Speier, 1998, p. 1384). According to Speier, such humour has critical views about power that cannot be shared publicly. It characterises the power of the oppressor and the weakness of the oppressed. This approach of political humour highlights the role and function of humour as an active form of ‘internalised resistance’ against dominant power. Although the effect of political humour is minimal in the short to medium term, people under repressive regimes continue to use this form of humour to display, even if only to themselves, their resistance and noncompliance with power.

The existing literature on political humour under repressive regimes thus provides us with a means to understand the connections between the social, political and personal effects of humour, and whether this is explicitly or implicitly acknowledged, much of this draws upon or make similar arguments to Bakhtin on the collective revolutionary impulse and Freud on the role of individual agency and psychological benefit. However, this framework ignores specific ethnic and cultural differences, and how humour varies in impact because of those differences. Davies' (1990) work on ethnic humour plays a role in explaining Jordanian humour before the Arab Spring because it considers how humour functions in varying social and political contexts and in relation to urban-rural divide.

1.5 Ethnic jokes and superiority theory

Jordanian ethnic humour is an earlier type of Jordanian political humour, where urbanites in the capital city Amman often make jokes about the people in the Jordanian steppe and the hinterlands and view them as culturally inferior and less civilised. I argue that this type of ethnic humour can be highly politicised because it is connected to the ideas of the postcolonial elite, class struggle and political polarisations and the tensions between urban and rural dwellers: the urban who are largely composed of Jordanians of Palestinian origin and the rural people who make up the majority of original Jordanian tribal nationals. Before examining this type of political humour in Jordan during the Gulf War, I first examine the definition of ethnic humour and some of the

existing research into ethnic humour around the world. I then focus on the application of Davies' 1990 theory of humour because ethnic humour in Jordan is based on binary oppositions and on the creation of stereotypes and urban-rural division. Davies' 1990 theory of humour focuses on urban versus rural, and canny versus stupid. For the application of this theory, I aim to review examples of ethnic jokes in Jordanian society that target the people of As-Salt, At-Tafilah and As-Sarih to demonstrate the idea of identity politics and its representation in Jordanian political humour after the 1989 political opening.

First, such ethnic humour emphasises the political notion of 'internalised orientalism,' with its in-built notions of 'the other' and superiority over that other. Second, this humour sheds light on several socio-demographic and linguistic variables that are political, including, most importantly the idea of identity politics amongst Jordanians. Third, Jordanian ethnic humour has some relationships with the rise of the Gulf War jokes and political humour in Jordan after the 1989 political opening. For example, the people of the town of At-Tafilah in the south west of Jordan have been used as a target for humour and laughter by the Jordanian urbanites in some Gulf War jokes.

Ethnic humour is operationally defined as a "type of humor in which fun is made of the perceived behaviour, customs, personality or any other traits of a group or its members by virtue of their sociocultural identity" (Apte, 1985, p. 198). This suggests that this type of humour is based on

the creation of stereotypes about other people who are often perceived as 'lower': culturally ignorant and underdeveloped. A stereotype can be defined as a presupposed mental image created by powerful people in order to describe a world that is beyond their knowledge or reach (Lippmann, 1922, pp. 31–38).

Jordanian linguists and humour researchers, such as Mohammed Farghal and Abdullah Shakir (1993, p. 18), have acknowledged Lippmann's 1922 definition of stereotype and argued that some stereotypes are culturally determined in the sense that they can provide a 'kernel of truth,' but this form of truth is subjective to individual cultural perspective and presupposition. Therefore, stereotypes offer most often factually incorrect interpretation and knowledge. Sometimes, these interpretations have nothing to do with the target group's reality and empirical truth. Examples of ethnic jokes around the world are myriad: consider English jokes about the Irish, French jokes about the Belgians, Canadian jokes about the Newfies (people from Newfoundland), Russian jokes about the Georgians and Tajik, and many more.

In his book *Ethnic humour around the world* (1990), Davies expounds there are three key themes that influence the creation of ethnic humour and jokes around the world: stupidity, canniness and sexual behaviour. He maintains that ethnic jokes about stupidity are dependent on three important factors: (1) geography (e.g. urbanites versus rural dwellers), (2) language and culture (e.g. urban dialect versus rural dialect), and

(3) economy: the joke-teller is often an urbanite and wealthier than the target who is a rural dweller and less wealthy (Davies, 1990, p. 10). The dominant people in urban centres often make jokes about the people who live in peripheral, rural areas by viewing them as linguistically and culturally underdeveloped and therefore less civilised. This is evident in the case of Jordan because ethnic humour was based on the creation of stereotypes and urban-rural division: Jordanians of Palestinian origin in urban centres make jokes about Jordanians of Transjordanian origin in rural areas for being culturally inferior and backward.

In his analysis of the Tunisian ethnic jokes that target Libyans, Ibrahim Muhawi (1996) makes observations that are similar to those in Davies (1990). He shows how the themes of stupidity, canniness and economy have impacted the creation of Tunisian ethnic jokes about Libyans. He argues that the Tunisians' sense of superiority has not been based on materialistic resources (in this case because of the oil in Libya) but rather on wit, intelligence and the use of language in the marketplace (Muhawi, 1996, p. 40). Ethnic jokes in Tunisia are based on the supposed ignorance, ill-manners and inferiority of Libyans, compared to Tunisians who view themselves as more educated and cultured, and too canny to be outsmarted. Ethnic humour seems therefore to be part of political humour because of its relevance to the question of identity politics and power relations (the more powerful make jokes about the more powerless).

I argue that the study of Jordanian ethnic humour can be usefully explained through Davies' earlier theory of ethnic humour (1990), and Muhawi's (1996) framework, because it focuses on the creation of stereotypes and tensions between urban and rural dwellers. In Jordan, as elsewhere, many urbanites in the capital city Amman consider themselves to be canny and smart in comparison to people who live in rural areas, many of whom are viewed by many city dwellers as ignorant and naive. Urbanite ethnic humour in Jordan often targets the people of As-Salt, At-Tafilah and As-Sarih.

The people of As-Salt are stereotypically perceived as savage and tactless, the people of At-Tafilah are as stupid and lacking discretion, and the people of As-Sarih as naive and primitive. Examples of this type of urbanite humour are to be considered later in this section.

Before then, I present in Figure 1 below a map of Jordan, which shows the geographic locations of As-Salt and As-Sarih in the north west of Jordan, and At-Tafilah in the south west. These three areas are the targets of urbanite humour because they are rural and peripheral areas, if compared to urban areas such as Amman.

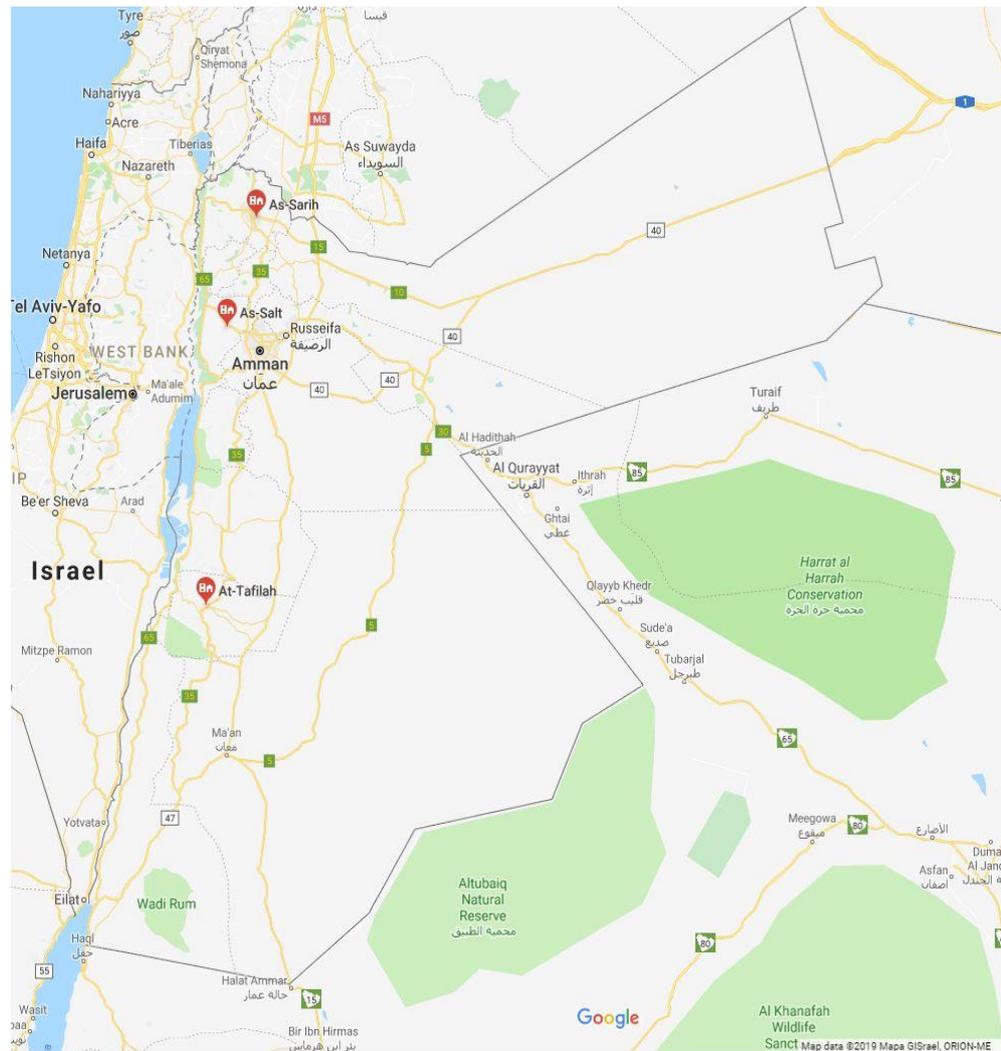


Figure 1. Map of Jordan showing the localities of As-Salt, At-Tafilah and As-Sarih (the targets of Jordanian urbanite humour)

According to the Jordanian linguists Hassan Abdel-Jawad (1986) and Enam Al-Wer (2007), the 1921 naming and subsequent growth of Amman as the capital city of Transjordan (now Jordan) gradually deprived As-Salt from its privilege as being at that time the largest Transjordanian town. Abdel-Jawad (1986) and Al-Wer (2007) have argued that the urbanites who live in the capital city Amman did not have an indigenous dialect and population to speak of. Rather, they have developed for themselves a dialect that is largely influenced by

Palestinian Arabic and Palestinian dialects. These observations about the formation of the dialect of Amman are important to the study of ethnic humour in Jordan because they have created new fault lines and cultural differences between urban and rural dwellers.

It is also presently observable that the people of Amman have developed for themselves an economic and political 'aristocracy' that is based on their fortune and regime favourites, compared to those who dwell in the hinterlands who are viewed as less fortunate and economically deprived and stagnated. Notwithstanding the existence of this self-assured 'aristocracy,' Jordanian society in Amman can be considered fragmented and culturally diverse. Most of the residents of Amman come from Palestine, and from other multi-ethnic groups from outside Jordan, including Armenians, Chechens, Circassians and Turkomans. The population of the city rapidly increased after the influx of Palestinian refugees after the 1948 war and the 1967 war with Israel (Alon, 2007, p. 152; Tell, 2013, p. 22). Over time, the city has developed a heterogeneous urban political identity, albeit largely identified with Palestine and with mild opposition to the regime. Of course, one way in which a heterogeneous group can find 'common ground' is by opposition, that is, by the identification and mocking of a group from elsewhere.

Ethnic humour in Jordan is predominately politically motivated. It is based on urban-rural divide and tensions: Jordanians of Palestinian origin in urban centres and Jordanians of Transjordanian origin in rural areas. I argue that this type of ethnic joking sheds light on the nature of political humour in Jordan after the 1989 political opening: the powerful make jokes about the powerless. This type of political humour (ethnic) is highly politicised because it sheds light on cultural stereotypes and sense of superiority over the rural dwellers who comprise the majority of Transjordanian people in As-Salt, At-Tafilah and As-Sarih. These people are 'original' Jordanian nationals who often work for the military and for the security services. They are the bedrock of the regime.

Furthermore, it can be argued that ethnic humour in Jordan is related to regional division in order to reflect politically cultural ideologies, geographic origins and regional identities. I have noticed that some urbanites in Amman make jokes and laugh at the Bedouin and the dialects of rural areas and use them as a source for their urbanite humour and jokes. In his analysis of the linguistic practices used on contemporary Jordanian radio stations, Jona Fras (2017) found that Jordanian urbanites tend to laugh at the coarse pronunciation of the affricate consonant letter *Č* in the rural dialect instead of *K* as in the refined urban dialect in words, illustrated in words such as *Ča'āčīl* instead of *Ka'ākīl*. This word refers to a traditional Jordanian dish that is made of fermented yoghurt and goats (Fras, 2017, p. 183). The humour in the rural pronunciation of the word *Ča'āčīl* designates an

element of *Jordanity*, which refers to the original Jordanian culture and identity that is being viewed by Jordanians of Palestinian origin in urban centres as backward and unrefined.

In his book *The Jordanian satirists* (2013), the Palestinian-Jordanian writer Jamil Swais, who writes under the pseudonym 'Nazih Abu Nidal,' provides a (relatively short) analysis of urbanite ethnic humour and about the creation of stereotypes in Jordan. He found that the people of As-Salt are among the key targets of Jordanian urbanite ethnic humour (Abu Nidal, 2013, p. 11). He demonstrates that throughout the last few decades, the people of As-Salt in Jordanian ethnic humour have been mockingly viewed as 'culturally backward' and 'ignorant.' They eat Mansaf, 'attack' with their heads (a metaphor to describe their savagery and inconsiderate social behaviours) and often die of strokes as a result of their stressful and hostile temperaments.

For some Jordanians, stereotype has a 'kernel of truth' in Jordanian local cultural politics, which considers the people inhabiting the mountainous areas, such as As-Salt and Ajloun, to be stubborn and hard-headed. They are often perceived to have an oak-like constitution because of the hardness of the tree and its numerousness in the Jordanian mountainous areas. The residents of these mountainous areas in Jordan are believed to be strongly opinionated, if compared to the easygoingness and cultural familiarity of the residents of urban areas, such as the residents of Amman. This assumption is based on

the impact of mountainous environments and wildlife on culture, everyday life and social interactions among the residents of these areas. Jordanian ethnic humour seems to be a part of earlier Jordanian political humour that emerged after the country's 1989 political opening. This form of ethnic joking reflected a new kind of humour that acted as a tool for social and political commentary about the rural people from the Jordanian hinterlands.

First, the people of As-Salt were among the earliest targets of Jordanian ethnic humour (Abu Nidal, 2013, pp. 11–12). One joke portrays the people of As-Salt as savage and often dying as a result of stroke due to their overly rich diet (Mansaf). They are sometimes stereotypically perceived as uncivilised and tactless in their relationships with others. Here for example are two urbanite jokes about the stubbornness of people of As-Salt: A too intransigent man heard there is another person in the town of As-Salt who is more stubborn than he. Feeling curious, he headed to the Salti's (a person from As-Salt) home of residence and knocked at the door. The Salti asks the man "who are you?" The man said, "it's me." The Salti said, "No, it's not you" (Abu Nidal, 2013, p. 12); a Salti's father has been asked by his own son about a few questions in life. "What do you know about pluralism, father?" "I do not know, son." "What do you know about email, father?" "I do not know, son" "What do you know about reincarnation?" "This is the first time I heard such a term, son." At this time, the Salti's wife interfered and asked her son not to bother his father anymore. The

father replied, “No, wife, let our son develop his “No’s” in life” (Abu Nidal, 2013, p. 13). These two examples show the stereotypical notion held by the Jordanian urbanites about the people of As-Salt for being stubborn and hard-headed.

Second, the people of At-Tafilah in the south of Jordan are also mocked by Jordanian urbanities for their presumed stupidity and lack of discretion. Although urbanite jokes about the people of As-Salt are more prominent and widespread in Jordanian jocular discourse, jokes about the people of At-Tafilah have grown in number in the last few decades. Urbanite jokes about the people of At-Tafilah focus on the indigenous people’s ignorance, lack of discretion and stupidity that sometimes overtakes that stereotypically held to be true of the people of As-Salt. Consider the following three urbanite jokes about the people of At-Tafilah.

The first joke was disseminated during the Gulf War when the Jordanian government and most people in Jordan chose to side with Iraq in the war: A Tafili in the Iraqi missile force receives orders to economise in the use of missiles against Israel because of their high cost in the Gulf War. However, one night he was ordered to launch ten missiles at Tel Aviv, but, using his discretion, he launched them at At-Tafilah (Farghal & Shakir, 1993, p. 22). The second joke is politically oriented because it highlights a political stance in relation to the people of Gaza who are more identified with the Muslim Brotherhood and Iran

(Iraq's regional rival during the war). One Tafili's salary statement showed a deduction of 20% to the people of Gaza in Palestine. Feeling outraged, he decided to donate his entire salary to the Jews in Israel. The third joke, however, highlights the political notion of 'internalised orientalism' with its notions of 'the other' and superiority over those who live in the hinterlands. A student from At-Tafilah used to fail his exam every year. His fellow citizens went to the student's headmaster and begged him to help the student. The headmaster agreed, provided that the student could answer a simple question. The headmaster said, "If the student can provide the correct answer to this question, then he will be passed without sitting for an exam." Everyone, including the student, accepted this condition. So, the headmaster asked, "What's the sum of one and one?" "Two," the student answered quickly. However, before the headmaster could say anything, all the people of At-Tafilah who accompanied the student shouted, "Please sir, give him another chance" (Al-Khatib, 1999, p. 268). These three examples show the stereotypical notion held by some Jordanian urbanites about the people of At-Tafilah for being stupid and naive.

Jokes that combine the people of At-Tafilah with their counterparts (the people of As-Salt) were also widespread in Jordanian urbanite humour after the 1989 political opening. These types of jokes often resonate more strongly and achieve a greater audience impact and engagement than one single joke about the people of At-Tafilah or the people of As-Salt. Consider the following two jokes: One Salti and one Tafili were

heading to a train station. Upon arrival, they both started chasing the train. The Tafili outran the Salti and got in the train. When asked why he laughed hysterically, the Salti indicated that the Tafili was supposed to give him a lift. (Abu Nidal, 2013, p. 11); A Tafili Sheikh once asked the people of his town at one Friday's prayer to multiply their prayers and supplications to Allah Almighty. When he was asked about the reason, he logically stated [sic] that he does not want to see that the entire people of paradise are from As-Salt. I think those people who view themselves as 'elite' in Jordanian urban centres have tended to accept the stance of orientalism and influence from Western modernity as a form of power that has enabled them to stereotype, whilst rural dwellers lack the power to challenge that stereotype.

Third, the people of As-Sarih in Irbid have become the subject of a considerable number of Jordanian urbanite humour and jokes. As-Sarih is a former village and now suburb, located at the outskirts of the city of Irbid. The people of As-Sarih are therefore the suburbanites to the city dwellers of Irbid in northern Jordan. The people of As-Sarih are stereotypically perceived by the urbanites in Irbid to be too naive and ignorant. Consider the following two urbanite jokes about the people of As-Sarih: Why do the people of As-Sarih put their beds outside and sleep inside during the summer? Because, in this way, they can conceal their presence, and get away from the mosquitoes; a Sarihi (a person from As-Sarih) once cancelled his wedding party because the invitation cards had been leaked. These two examples show the

stereotypical notion held by some urbanites in Irbid about the people of As-Sarih for being naive and ignorant. The Jordanian socio-political situation after 1989 shows evidence of the existence of ethnic humour that took advantage of the country's political opening and freedom of speech and expression.

After 1989, some Jordanian urbanites who are mostly Jordanian of Palestinian origin view the people of Hebron in Palestine as a target for their urbanite humour and ethnic jokes. The people of Hebron (in Arabic, the people of Al-Khalil) are stereotypically known for their greed, avarice and poor discretion. For the last few decades, they have been the subject of an increasing number of urbanite jokes in Jordanian-Palestinian jocular discourse. For example, consider the following three jokes: A Khalili (a person from the town of Hebron in Palestine) built a mosque and after he saw many people coming into it, he transformed it into a restaurant; a Khalili was informed by his friend that tomorrow will be Valentine's Day. The Khalili asked his friend if there is a special prayer to be performed with reference to prayers performed by Muslims on Eid days; a Khalili invited a Jew for a meal at his home. Having experienced the generosity of the Khalili, the Jew asked the Khalili if his religion requires him to do so. The Khalili replied in a heartbroken manner "Yes." The Jew replied, "I do not have to do such thing in my religion." After that, it has been reportedly said that the Khalili embraced Judaism instead of Islam. The examples above show the role of stereotypes in the creation of Jordanian ethnic jokes about the people

of As-Salt, At-Tafilah, As-Sarih and the people of Hebron in Palestine for being greedy and tight-fisted, which often compares to or exceeds the stereotypical notion held about the Jews. The emergence of these jokes gives a clear indication of the role of stereotyping and other regional influences in generating Jordanian ethnic humour that targeted the people of Hebron in Palestine. These indications reflect the key moments of diversification in Jordanian society and its reception of humour, and how humour has been both reflective of and participative in this complex of cultural forces. This discussion matters for the issues in this thesis because these jokes later influenced, in ways explained in chapter 3 of this thesis, the development of Jordanian political humour.

The superiority theory of humour is among the oldest theories of humour and laughter. It originates in the classical and philosophical works of Plato and Aristotle, who viewed humour as a pleasure derived from someone else's misfortune or calamity. The 16th century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes was one of the main proponents of this theory of humour. In Hobbes' words, laughter "is nothing else but sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly [self-deprecatory humour]" (Hobbes, 1650/1987, p. 20). The Hobbesian "sudden glory" resonates to me with the Arabic word '*shamateh*' (gloating), which denotes the same feeling of pleasure derived from someone else's misfortune or calamity. In one of his politically satirical articles 'Thanks to all corrupted people' (2011),

Jordan's most famous socio-political satirist Ahmad Hassan Al-Zou'bi compared his profession, social satirist, to that of a winch driver. He argued that both (the satirist and winch driver) earn their livelihood through the misfortune and adversities of others. Al-Zou'bi's description of his profession is notable here for its relevance to the superiority theory of humour and laughter.

In the context of Jordanian humour, we might think of several domestic ethnic jokes by the urbanites in the capital city Amman, that target the inferiority and stupidity of the people of As-Salt and At-Tafilah in the rural areas in Jordan, as examples relating to the superiority theory. In the view of this theory of humour, Jordanian urbanites laugh at the people of At-Tafilah because they are stereotypically perceived as stupid, ignorant and backward. They are popularly assumed by the Jordanian urbanites to be simpletons and less clever. According to this theory, humour is derived from the feeling of superiority, which can be best understood in the larger context of 'moron jokes' and binary oppositions: the cunning of the joke teller as well as the listener, compared to the stupidity of a target group (Carroll, 2014, p. 9). Moron jokes (as the name suggests) stem from stereotypical perceptions about others. They highlight the role of stereotypes as a motif for generating humour and satire over the other.

Indeed, the superiority theory of humour has a great capacity to explain the politics of ethnic jokes (e.g. urban-rural tensions), disability jokes, 'lightbulb' jokes and the like. The superiority theory of humour provides therefore a valid perspective to think about political humour and satire in the Jordanian socio-political context. This theory combines elements of two social groups: the superordinate over the subordinate people (the more powerful and the more powerless). However, because one of the functions of the 'carnival' is to flatten power and eliminate social superiority, the Bakhtinian perspective on humour superficially dents the relevance of the superiority theory when thinking about humour in Jordan on social media spaces. Such humour has mocked and criticised power and the government.

Nonetheless, in the country (and region) under consideration in this thesis, jokes readily explainable by the superiority theory of humour can be considered a form of elitism, or a home-grown Arab identity that emerged following the departure of western imperial powers in the mid-twentieth century. People who live in urban centres hold the belief that they are 'modern' and more influenced by western modernity. From this perspective, Guido Rings (personal communication, 15 May 2013) thinks that the Jordanian urban elite reveal in their *urbanised* discourse a tendency towards the idea of 'internalised orientalism' through the assimilation of western views about modernity and progress. This has eventually led to a marginalisation of, if not discrimination against, larger parts of traditional Jordanian society in the steppe and the

hinterlands. The superiority theory of humour is therefore valid for understanding ethnic joking as well as the urban-rural divide in Jordan. And with a post-colonial lens, as suggested by Rings, above, ethnic joking in Jordan can be understood as theoretically 'political'. However, superiority theory is invalid for analysis of the *particular* humour phenomenon that is the subject of this thesis because much humour after the Arab Spring in Jordan has tended to flatten power, eliminate social superiority and challenge the dominant power discourse.

1.5.1 The incongruity theory

The incongruity theory of humour can be considered as one of the most informative and useful approaches for thinking about jokes that are now in Jordan predominantly located and disseminated in social media spaces. Much humour in these social media spaces has tended to result from two elements: expectation and surprise. From my observations, I have seen many Jordanian people laugh at things that are least expected. They laugh at the joke about the Tafili who heard about the death of 100 people during the annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia and hoped if they were Jews. These two examples and more demonstrate the wide applicability of the incongruity theory of humour, even when other theoretical lenses like superiority are also valid, in the Jordanian social context.

In the light of the incongruity theory of humour, consider the following Jordanian joke, which is based on the use of oxymoron used to misplace 'elephants' in the category of things that can fly. The joke

reads as follows: a schoolteacher in a Jordanian town once asked his students to name a few things that can fly. Most students in the class responded with reasonable lists of things that can fly. However, one student listed 'elephants' in the category. The schoolteacher (who is presented here as canny) asked the student about his father's job. The student responded: "My father works for the intelligence service." Feeling intimidated, the schoolteacher said: "Well, then, elephants can fly, but you know (and your father knows, for sure) that their altitude in the sky will not be that high if compared to birds."

The incongruity theory of humour provides a useful approach to think about political humour and satire, as well as the absurdity of political power, through exposing the contradictions between political articulation and official declarations. In this case, we might think one political cartoon that was drawn by Jordanian cartoonist Omar Abdallat on 21 February 2018 as an example to understand the incongruity theory of humour. The cartoon mocks the political discourse and statements of Jordanian Prime Minister Hani Al-Mulki when he proclaimed in a televised interview in 2018 that "Jordanian economy will recover and get out of the bottleneck by 2019" (Prime Ministry of Jordan, 2018, 19:09). The 'man in the bottle' cartoon can be understood using incongruity theory because a man cannot actually fit inside a bottle, so the image is incongruous. The cartoon depicted an image of a very depressed Jordanian young man inside a bottle waiting for his exit from the bottleneck in 2019, with a mocking statement that reads "It is

getting nearer, Boss” (Abdallat, 2018). The incongruity theory of humour can expose in a very subtle way the contradictions and inconsistencies between political discourse and political actions. Political humour is an important component of the post-2011 development of humour in Jordan, and incongruity theory plays a role in explaining such political humour, but it is not at all sufficient for analysis of ‘carnavalesque’ political humour in Jordanian social media spaces since the Arab Spring. Alternative theoretical perspectives are needed: Bakhtin and Freud.

Of the three theories of humour, I find that the incongruity theory of humour provides the most comprehensive and informative approach to understand humour in modern everyday life and in many social domains. People generally tend to laugh at incongruent jokes. For example, in British humour, we might think of ‘a horse walks into a bar...’. In Jordanian humour, we might think of several incongruous jokes that start with an opening passage, such as ‘once upon a time there was/were ...’. For example, ‘one upon a time, there was an elephant who got married to an ant. After a few months of marriage, the elephant decided to divorce his ant wife. The ant got angry and cried out: “...and what about the little elephant in my abdomen.”’ Jordanians often laugh at these jokes because they highlight an element of incongruity that often contradicts the joke’s subject-matter or the narrative that sets up the joke (in this case, an ant and elephant).

The incongruity theory is valid when we think about ethnic joking in Jordan before the Arab Spring. For example, Jordanians laugh at the Tafili who was sitting with his beloved at a public space. After seeing her father from afar, he told her “Listen, tell your father I am your brother.” This joke utilises the element of ‘stereotype’ about the stereotypically held notion in Jordan about the people of At-Tafilah being stupid and having poor discretion in various social situations. It also reveals an element of incongruity when the Tafili proposes a stupid solution for his girlfriend’s feeling of embarrassment. This joke highlights some social codes about male and female as well as the social construction of gender in Jordan.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter has presented a theoretical framework for considering how humour has been used and presented in Jordan before and after the Arab Spring. This framework has moved from the collective to the individual to cultural difference. It has used Bakhtin, Freud and Davies: Bakhtin on the collective revolutionary impulse, Freud on the role of individual agency and Davies on specific ethnic and cultural differences. This framework will inform our approach to understanding how humour functions and what purposes it serves in Jordan. The Bakhtinian approach views humour as a tool for non-violent resistance as well as a tool that admits the defeat of resistance in the face of an undefeatable oppressor because it explains how political humour can provide a 'safe haven' to comment on social and political structures and escape prosecution. This approach has a few connections with Freud's theory of humour as a safety valve that releases tensions and repressed emotions and Scott's view of humour as a weapon of the weak.

Furthermore, this chapter has explored the marrying of Bakhtin's theory of carnivalesque humour to Freud's theory of humour, which views the latter as a pressure valve release to reduce individual anger and repression. The way in which Bakhtin's theory of carnival is discussed from the perspective of Freud reveals the relevance – and some of the weaknesses – of application of Bakhtin's ideas about carnival and the carnivalesque when we think about humour as a safety valve that releases tensions and repressed emotions in modern-day carnivals in

social media spaces. Although social media spaces permit greater anonymity and have more individualised distinctive qualities that go (unsurprisingly) beyond Bakhtin's theory of carnival, this does not make Freud more important than Bakhtin, but rather, the collective experience of social media spaces makes Bakhtin more important than Freud.

This chapter has examined Bakhtin's conception of carnival and the carnivalesque in the context of the existing research on political humour, the dominant theories of humour, and how they can be applied to Bakhtin's ideas about the carnival and the current Jordanian economic and socio-political situation before and after the Arab Spring. It has considered the extent to which Bakhtin's carnivalesque humour might be considered an active form of popular resistance when we think about the recent and ongoing period of protests and sometimes revolutions in parts of the MENA region. It has argued that Bakhtin's theory of carnival and the carnivalesque offers, because of the context of its making, a valid and useful framework to think about the proliferation of political humour and satire in Jordanian social media spaces after the 2011 Arab Spring revolutions.

Ethnic humour, where the urbanites in the capital city Amman make jokes about the people who live in the steppe and the hinterlands, is an older type of Jordanian political humour and satire. The urbanites in Jordan, as it is elsewhere, often reinforcing their cultural advantage and sense of superiority over those who live in rural areas and those who

dwell in the Jordanian steppe and the hinterlands in small towns or villages in the periphery. Jordanian ethnic humour is (and always has been) 'political' because it concerns with power between different groups. It is used by a more empowered (or wealthier or better educated) group to create a collective sense of superiority over the 'other.' It is important for this thesis on Jordanian political humour and satire in the sense that the street protests and resistance since 2011 has enabled the dis-or less empowered rural people in the Jordanian hinterlands to develop a *counter*-superiority tendency and laugh at the powerful in urban centres. The development of 'carnavalesque' political humour in Jordan since the Arab Spring brings such humour in close in some respects to Bakhtin's carnival. Jordanian social media spaces, as will later be shown, have become places for socio-political 'flattening' and cathartic hedonism that has provoked significant changes in Jordanian society after the Arab Spring, where more people willing to criticise and mock the government.

In the next chapter, I highlight the legal frameworks and societal expectations, political and social fault lines, and the languages and metaphors that are used to (and still) articulate Jordanian political humour discourse. I argue that the specificity of the Jordanian context after the Arab Spring needs to be considered when talking about the application of Bakhtin's carnival. This is because this theory was postulated in a pre-IT and pre-internet age as well as the notable differences in the cultural and socio-political context of Bakhtin's Soviet

Union and Jordan after the Arab Spring. Nonetheless, this has not altogether negated the relevance of this theory due to its relationship to the idea of power and popular resistance.

Chapter 2 Jordan and the Arab Spring

2.1 Introduction

During the First World War (1914–18), the Middle Eastern countries were created and controlled by a patchwork of foreign imperial powers. Britain and France divided the Arab provinces and territories (that were formerly under the Ottoman Empire) into British and French protectorates. Britain created what would become Transjordan (later Jordan), Iraq, Palestine and all the Gulf countries, while France created what would become Syria and Lebanon. Eventually, these Middle Eastern countries developed independence and political autonomy, native cultural politics and new forms of national identities that emerged to reflect different social and political changes (Yapp, 1987; Hourani, 1991). The Middle East thus underwent profound social and political transformations in accordance with British and French designs after the First World War.

In this chapter, I examine how Jordan as a new state-nation (rather than nation-state because the state was created before the nation) is represented in and important for the study of political humour and satire. Throughout this thesis, I argue that whilst Bakhtin's carnival is not perfectly descriptive of Jordan and the Arab Spring, it is certainly very relevant in several ways. Bakhtin's theory of carnival can be considered very relevant in several ways to the study of social and political humour in contemporary Jordan since the Arab Spring.

Bakhtin's ideas about carnival seem a valid lens to view the role and function of political humour in Jordan since the Arab Spring, although there is a clear limitation affecting the application of the Bakhtinian carnival: the difference in the cultural-political contexts (the cultural and political contexts of Jordan and the Soviet Union have some similarities but also some differences because Jordan in the last few decades is not like the Soviet Union in the mid-20th century under Stalin, as summarised in Table 2 below). Nonetheless, carnival is highly relevant to the socio-political context of Jordan after the Arab Spring. I made a choice in the Table below to 'end' the Soviet Union at 1975 because that is when Bakhtin died. I think whatever happened between 1975-91 could have no influence on Bakhtinian thought. For this reason, I tried to compare *the contexts when political humour was actively emergent*, and not to compare the countries themselves because they are very different: Jordan is an Arab Islamic country under a constitutional monarchy, and the Soviet Union was a communist state that was ruled under an authoritarian regime. That is why I selected 1989 for Jordan and I wrote in the Figure title 'Bakhtin's Soviet Union' rather than 'the Soviet Union.'

Table 2. Overview comparison of selected aspects of Bakhtin's Soviet Union and Jordan from 1989

	Soviet Union 1919– 1975	Jordan 1989–
Politics and government	Communist state	Constitutional monarchy
Socio-political structure	Authoritarian regime	Semi-democratic, semi-authoritarian regime
Cultural practices, including religion	Orthodox Christianity, Soviet culture	Islam, Arab culture
Level of freedom of expression	Severely limited	Less limited
Forms of censorship	Strict state censorship	Limited government censorship
Diffusion of political humour	Whispered jokes, coded criticism	Direct jokes and criticism in public and social media spaces

Bakhtin's framework and concepts enable us to examine how groups create spaces in which to express dissent in contexts where straightforward opposition is problematic. For example, in terms of the limits on freedom of speech and expression, Jordan is partially free, and the regime can be viewed as semi-democratic compared to the authoritarian regime in the Soviet Union during Stalin's de facto reign.

This difference in the cultural and political contexts matters; nonetheless, carnival is still highly relevant because of its relationship to regime cultural politics, level of freedom of speech, the existence of a disaffected public, political repression (though differing in degree) and mobilisation against political power. Bakhtin provides a valid and useful framework to understand the context of the socio-political history of Jordan and the shifting political environments instigated by the 1989 country's political opening, and more recently the 2011 Arab Spring revolutions.

To explore the applicability of Bakhtin in this way, I first provide some background information on the 1921 creation of and subsequent history of Transjordan. I then examine Jordan's struggles with identity politics, managed elections and economic and political reforms, from 1989, to demonstrate the idea of using humour and satire against political power, and for resistance. I then argue that Jordan, despite its inauspicious beginnings in 1921 and constant domestic and regional challenges, has proved to be the most stable and resilient regime in the Middle East region. The resilience of the Hashemite regime in Jordan is important for the study of political humour and satire because it has influenced a new type of humour (resilience humour) in Jordanian streets and predominantly in Jordanian social media spaces since 2011, a humour that has constantly called for reform but not for regime change or revolution.

The discussion in this chapter is divided into four sections in order to examine the key themes and language ('political grammars') in the political history of Jordan, and how Jordan as a new state-nation is represented in contemporary humour. The first section focuses on the historical context and creation of Transjordan by the British after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in Southeast Europe, Western Asia and the MENA in the early 20th century. The second section examines the question of identity politics in Jordan in relation to the indigenous people (better known as East Bankers) and Jordanians of Palestinian descent (better known as West Bankers). This section demonstrates the idea of identity politics (urbanites versus rural dwellers) and its representation in Jordanian ethnic and political humour, as well as the division of Jordanian society between pro- and anti- Palestinian sentiment.

The third section examines the formation of general elections and gerrymandering politics and the distribution of constituencies in Jordan's elections. It discusses how Jordan's electoral law and reform (since 1989) has constantly tended to favour the overrepresentation in the House of Parliament of Transjordanian nationals in rural areas and the hinterlands over the majority of Jordanians of Palestinian origin in urban centres, such as the capital city Amman, and Az-Zarqa. This section argues that there is a degree of 'façade reform' that has taken place in Jordan since the 1989 political opening, and humour has been

used as a tool to address the negligible impact of reform programmes on Jordanian social and political realities.

In the last section of this chapter, I examine in detail Jordan before and after the 2011 Arab Spring revolutions to demonstrate the ideas of political mobilisation and the use of humour and satire as a counter-political force and tool for resistance against the government and its official discourse about economic and political reforms. In this section, I focus on how Jordan can be considered a forerunner of the Arab Spring. This is demonstrated through the examination of the politics of protests and political mobilisation started in 2009 by labourers' and schoolteachers' strikes, and the 2010 'revolt of military veterans' against the state's neoliberal policy and the de facto project that aims to transform Jordan into an 'alternative homeland' for the Palestinians. I also analyse struggles over reform, and how the Jordanian regime responded and successfully weathered the Arab Spring street protests and youth activism that started in Jordan from 2011. In terms of Jordan before and after the Arab Spring, I demonstrate how 'carnavalesque' political humour has been used to critique neoliberalism, fixed elections and a weak parliament that has automatically approved many government dictates without consideration.

2.2 The making of Transjordan

Before 1921, Transjordan (also hyphenated Trans-Jordan) did not exist.

The Emirate of Transjordan (Arabic: *Imarat Sharq al-'Urdunn*, literally 'Emirate of East Jordan') emerged as a very new state after the First World War and division of the Ottoman Empire in the MENA. The Emirate of Transjordan was established, on 11 April 1921, as a protectorate under British administration (Alon, 2007, p. 40).

Transjordan was created as an 'artificial state' in the area that is located to the east side of the Jordan River (Tal, 2002, p. 2). The British created Transjordan as a separate entity that was severed from the already British-controlled territory of Palestine.

When created in 1921, Transjordan had only a small population and no urban centres to speak of. The population was estimated to be in the neighbourhood of 200,000 people (Wilson, 1990, p. 229). The majority of the population comprised Transjordanian nationals who lived in rural and nomadic tribal areas in the steppe and in the hinterlands, and around 10,000 of the population originated from various non-Arab minorities, including Armenians, Chechens, Circassians and Turkomans (*Mandate for Palestine*, 1924). Although the majority of the population was Muslim, there were around 15,000 Christians, who lived in proto-urban towns, such as Amman, As-Salt, Irbid and Karak (*Mandate for Palestine*, 1924). The provincial town of As-Salt was considered the largest populous area in Transjordan. Amman, the newly established capital of Transjordan was in 1921 sparsely

populated. According to Hassan Abdel-Jawad (1986) and Enam Al-Wer (2007), Amman at that time had no defining local dialect, and comprised only a few tens of thousands of people, of whom the overwhelming majority were non-Arab nationals.

Transjordan was ruled (nominally) by the Hashemite Emir Abdullah bin Hussein, the son of Sharif Hussein, from 1921 to 1951. With the help of the British, Abdallah created the Emirate of Transjordan and installed himself on the throne in 1921. The Emirate of Transjordan remained under the British Mandate from 1921 to 1946. In his book *The making of Jordan: Tribes, colonialism and the modern state* (2007, p. 52), Yoav Alon argues that with the assistance of the British army and the British Royal Air Force, Emir Abdallah was able to successfully defeat the two local rebellions, the Adwan and Kura rebellions between 1921 and 1924, that called for 'Jordan for Jordanians,' along with various irregular Wahhabi incursions into Transjordan by tribesmen of Najd in present day Saudi Arabia.

In her article 'Choice, loyalty and the melting pot: Citizenship and national identity in Jordan' (2008), Stefanie Nanes argues that Emir Abdullah achieved the loyalty of Transjordanian nationals through the enlistment of tribal members into the national regular army of Transjordan (Nanes, 2008, pp. 88–89). The Emir was therefore very successful in creating "deep bonds" between the Hashemite regime and the Transjordanian nationals in nomadic and rural areas. The loyalty of

Transjordanians was therefore dependent on employment by and the patronage of the Hashemite regime. This early-established patronage has maintained an influence right into the present through the loyalty of the Transjordanians in the hinterlands to the Hashemite regime.

Writing about the artificial creation of Transjordan in 1921, the American historian Mary Christina Wilson argues in her book *King Abdullah, Britain and the making of Jordan* (1990) that Jordan “had no reason to be a state on its own rather than a part of Syria, or of Palestine, or of Saudi Arabia, or of Iraq” (Wilson, 1990, p. 3). She asserts that the establishment of Transjordan served and fulfilled Britain’s imperial interests in the Middle East. She demonstrates that Transjordan served as an important regional link to facilitate British imperial communications in the region. This includes the securing of the Suez Canal and the ‘Fertile Crescent’ after the discovery of oil fields in Iraq at the beginning of the 20th century.

Transjordan remained under British administration for almost 25 years, from 1921 to 1946. After gaining independence on 25 May 1946, Transjordan became known as The Hashemite Kingdom of Transjordan (HKT). In 1949, the HKT was constitutionally renamed to become The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (HKJ). To this date, the HKJ remains under Hashemite rule. The British army and some of its generals, such as Captain Frederick Peak and Sir John Bagot Glubb (known as Glubb Pasha), had a considerable impact on the creation of Transjordan as

well as the establishment of the Jordanian army, the (then) Arab Legion, in 1921. The Jordanian army was created, led and financed by the British (Avi, 2007, p. 17). In 1921, Captain Frederick Peak had created the Arab Legion, which was the regular army of the Emirate of Transjordan. In 1939, John Bagot Glubb had succeeded Peak and became the Commander-in-chief of the Arab Legion, later the Jordanian Armed Forces (JAF). Under the command of Glubb, the Arab Legion became one of the best-trained armies in the Middle East. After independence from Britain, for example, it conducted significant military actions in the 1948 Arab War with Israel by annexing the West Bank to Jordanian rule.

In his book *Glubb Pasha and the Arab Legion* (2017), Graham Jevon argues that the British generals “stood out as the real powerbroker in Jordanian politics as all those interested in Jordanian affairs looked towards Britain as the arbiter of Jordan’s future” (Jevon, 2017, p. 205). This suggests the tremendous impact of the British on the creation and construction of Transjordan as a new political reality at the heart of the Middle East. In his analysis of Glubb’s legacy in Transjordan, Joseph Massad in his book *Colonial effects: The making of national identity in Jordan* (2001) offers some interesting insights into the role of the military and the forces of law and order in state-building and more specifically in the construction of Jordanian national identity during the 1940s. He argues that unlike his predecessor Peak, who favoured townsmen in the Transjordanian army, Glubb sedentarised the formally

nomadic Bedouin by enlisting them in the army (Massad, 2001, p. 52). In doing so, Glubb has been seen as a creator of a new cultural tradition that later defined the national culture and identity of Jordan, which since then has been based on the Bedouin culture and the traditions of people in the Jordanian steppe and the hinterlands. This lasting cultural identity matters for this thesis because many Bedouins have remained loyal to the Hashemite regime, a loyalty that has contributed to the scope, source and targets of Jordanian political humour.

It was not until 1956 that King Hussein (in power from 1952 to 1999) declared the Arabisation of Jordanian Army command and dismissed Glubb and other senior British officers commanding the Arab Legion (now the JAF). From 1957, King Hussein began the process of consolidation of the power of the Hashemite regime in Jordan by strengthening his role within the Arab world more generally. At that time, King Hussein (then aged 20) had “no intention of playing the pliant puppet role the British had intended for him” (Jevon, 2017, p. 208). Within three years of his accession to power in 1953, Hussein had dismissed Glubb from command of the Jordanian army. According to Jevon, Hussein’s decision “was not simply about striking a blow against Britain. Rather, it was about reacting against British obstinacy, breaking free of British constraints, and Glubb was the perceived personification of this problem” (Jevon, 2017, p. 242). The necessity of this action

suggests the previous extent of the impact of Britain on the formation of Transjordan and its military, domestic and foreign policies.

2.3 The regime's resilience

Despite its inauspicious beginnings in 1921, the Hashemite regime in Jordan has proved, at many times, to be unexpectedly resilient and stable. King Hussein traversed the difficult period from 1955 to 1967 with a surprisingly stable country (Tal, 2002, p. xi). The King faced many local and regional challenges, including the loss of a prototype Hashemite throne in Iraq in 1958, his survival of many attempted coups and planned assassinations, and, overall, the rising tension between Jordanians and Jordanians of Palestinian origin, which continues to this day, and which has directly influenced the development and nature of political humour in Jordan.

In 1957, a battalion of the Jordanian army that consisted mostly of Bedouins foiled a military coup, formed by Arab nationalist units, against King Hussein and the Hashemite regime. That coup resulted in the dismissal on 10 April 1957 of the first elected government of Suleiman Nabulsi of the Nationalist Socialist Party (Tal, 2002, pp. 39–44). At that critical time, martial law was imposed to restore order, political parties were suspended, and all Palestinian military units involved in the 1957 coup were disbanded. Jordan's move towards a constitutional monarchy, as existed in the 1952 Constitution, was therefore curtailed.

Later, in the early 1960s, King Hussein barely survived the significant impact of Gamal Abdel Nasser's Arab socialist enterprise that promoted radical pan-Arabism and anti-imperial agendas (Tal, 2002, p. 6).

Nasser's strong regime in Egypt, through his popular radio service *Sawat al-Arab* (Voice of the Arabs), rejected outright the occupation of Palestine and the annexation of the West Bank to Jordanian rule in the aftermath of the 1948 Arab war with Israel. He also called for and popularised the liberation of Arab monarchies in Jordan, Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula from western imperial powers and influence.

Some Middle Eastern political scientists who have studied Jordanian politics and affairs have attributed the resilience of the Hashemite regime to several crucial socio-political factors. For example, in his book *The social origins of the modern Middle East* (1987), Haim Gerber focused on the unquestionable loyalty of the Jordanian army in imposing order and repressing unruly peoples. In his book *Al-tahdith wa al-'Istiqrar al-siyasi fi al-'urdunn* (Development and political stability in Jordan, 1989), Muhanna Bani Hassan made similar observations and emphasised the role of King Hussein's personal and political qualities, which were evident in his policy of co-optation and reconciliation with opposition figures, whether at home or abroad.

In his analysis of the resilience of the Hashemite regime in Jordan during the turbulent years 1955 to 1967, Lawrence Tal (2002, p. 10) focused on the cohesion of the national security establishments, the political elite and the military in preserving the Hashemite regime. He argued that the security establishments and the policymaking body played a significant role in maintaining the Hashemite regime and protecting the territorial integrity of Jordan and its national unity.

However, the resilience of the Hashemite regime has also always rested on the family's lineage. The Hashemite royal family in Jordan are direct descendants of the Prophet Muhammad's lineage through his daughter Fatimah (wife of the fourth and last caliph Ali ibn Abi Talib, who reigned over the Islamic Caliphate from 656 to 661 A.D). The incumbent King Abdullah II of Jordan (son of the late King Hussein) belongs to a branch of the Hashemites who ruled the Emirate of Mecca from the tenth century in 968 until 1924. Having lost their power in Mecca at the beginning of the 20th century, the Hashemite family in Jordan declared their custodianship of Jerusalem's holy sites, which includes the sponsorship of Muslim and Christian religious sites.

The resilience of the Hashemite regime in Jordan can also be understood in relation to foreign grants that supported and continue to support the country's budget, financially and militarily. Jordan has been a recipient of many international grants and donations, primarily from the United States, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the

European Union and other world contributors, such as Canada, Japan, Kuwait and Qatar.

According to Tariq Tell (2013), these cultural, historical and political factors have all contributed to the creation of the “Hashemite Compact” (Tell, 2013, p. 132). This survival strategy has enabled the Hashemite regime to act as an external, neutral powerbroker that stabilises ethnic tensions and maintains the loyalty of the Transjordanian nationals in the hinterlands who are considered the bedrock of the regime. This regime strategy has been very successful in achieving the resilience of the Hashemite monarchy in Jordan since 1921. It has ensured the loyalty of Transjordanian nationals who control the army and security services. This strategy has to a great extent created a unified and collective identity for Jordanians, irrespective of their origins and descents, exemplified in the implementation of two important royal slogans and initiatives: *Jordan First* in 2002 and *We are all Jordan* in 2006.

These represent one way in which the Jordanian regime has used national identity discourse to broker some kinds of settlement in domestic unrest. The regime has always resorted to the reinvigoration of Jordan’s national identity discourse as a tool to renew the loyalty of the Jordanian people and the military. In his article ‘Identity politics, reform and protest in Jordan’ (2011b), Curtis Ryan, a renowned American political scientist of Jordanian affairs, argues that the Hashemite regime in Jordan has always presented itself as

a unifying force [that brings] together multiple communities - Palestinians and East Jordanians, urbanites and Bedouins, Muslim and Christians, secularists and Islamists, and Arabs as well as Circassians and Chechen minorities. [This survival strategy] is not a matter of divide and rule, but [rather] a deft royal policy of pluralism and inclusion. (Ryan, 2011b, pp. 568–569).

Many Transjordanian nationals have been in favour of the Hashemite strategy of unity, but at the same time worried about the increasing numbers of Palestinians in Jordan, as well as their empowerment in the government. They fear that one day Jordan will be an 'alternative homeland' for Palestinians (Alon, 2007, p. 156). The Hashemite form of apparently inclusive governance has at times been fiercely challenged by Transjordanian peoples in the hinterlands. In 1989, a public revolt erupted in the Transjordanian city of Ma'an over price increases, cuts to food subsidies and government austerity measures. In 1996, bread riots occurred in the Transjordanian city of Al-Karak in the south of Jordan over an increase in bread prices and the government's neoliberal policy, implemented to comply with IMF requirements and government austerity measures.

The East Bankers in Jordan have always been discontented with the government's increasingly neoliberal policies that have tended to favour urban centres, such as the capital city Amman, and neglect therefore the hinterlands where the majority of Transjordanians live. This neoliberally biased strategy has produced a divergence in Jordan's

domestic politics and challenges to the Hashemite loyalty and governance among the East Bankers. It has affected most directly the livelihoods of people living in rural areas, after price hikes, cut subsidies and increased taxes. Many Jordanians from the East Bank have already voiced their outrage and called for the 'Jordanisation' of the state, better known in Jordanian Arabic as *Ardanat Ad-Dawlah* (Sayigh, 1991, p. 148). Many Transjordanian people have argued that the country is moving towards neoliberalism, which is of a greater benefit to Palestinians who mostly live in urban centres and who largely control the economy and the private sector.

In their book chapter 'Jordan: Evolving activism in a divided society' (2014), Mohammad Yaghi and Janine Clark argue that this neoliberal regime policy has caused the majority of Transjordanian people to feel that they are "losing their own state to a small circle of elite Palestinian Jordanians close to King Abdullah II" (Yaghi & Clark, 2014, p. 242). This form of disaffection has recently paved the way for more complex patterns of popular resistance in Jordanian social media spaces, from many disaffected young people from several rural and remote areas in Jordan. Economic hardship, coupled with economically liberal government policies, has influenced (and continues to influence) the primary sources of social and political unrest in Jordan from 1989, mainly in the hinterlands where the majority of East Bankers dwell.

In an interview, Tariq Tell (2012, August 22), labelled these troubles in the East Bank hinterlands as “signal revolts,” that aimed to attract the attention of the Hashemite regime, rather than challenging its rule (Abu-Rish, 2012). Economic hardships from 1989 have forced Jordan to renegotiate deals with the IMF and other international lenders to reduce the country’s burgeoning fiscal deficits and improve its monetary policies. The government’s goal has always been to reduce the country’s burgeoning fiscal deficit after a fall in foreign aid, mainly from wealthy gulf countries, the United States and the European Union. Turning to IMF loans (since 1989) resulted in economic stagnation and consequently eroded living standards for most Jordanians.

The surprising resilience of the Hashemite regime in Jordan has given rise to a new form of, in Bakhtinian terms, ‘carnavalesque’ political humour in Jordanian streets and social media spaces, which I call ‘resilience humour’, a humour that has constantly called for reform and not for regime change or revolution. The loyalty of the army to the Hashemite regime, the political elite and the wider population and Jordan’s overall stability in the region, have all contributed to the emergence of this type of humour among Jordanians. Only very few ‘carnival-goers’ in Jordanian streets and (predominantly) in Jordanian social media spaces have actually wanted to challenge or dethrone the Hashemite regime. This is a testament to the solidity of the regime, itself the result of the combination of social, historical and cultural factors addressed above.

2.4 Ethnicity and identity politics

Jordanian society can be viewed as a patriarchal, tribal society that is mainly controlled by men. In his book *The social and economic origins of monarchy in Jordan* (2013), Tariq Tell writes about the tribal structure of Jordanian society and emphasises how the society is made up of various 'groups', rather than 'individuals'. He argues that "the population of Trans-Jordan was everywhere tribal, and both *Fallah* [residents of rural areas] and Bedouin recognized the authority of customary law and prominent *shaykhly* houses" who were in control of districts, localities, or even small neighbourhoods (Tell, 2013, p. 31). This explanation suggests that power was divided and socially constructed among local, powerful men during Ottoman rule and early Transjordanian period. For example, in the Transjordanian town Ajlune, Tell (2013) notes that "the villages were organized into defensive communes (*nahiyats*), each headed by the *Za'im* or leader of the locality's most powerful clan" (Tell, 2013, p. 31). This fact speaks of the very tribal nature of Jordanian society and the communal identity that continues to have considerable impacts on the construction of relationships among groups, clans and tribes.

Jordanian society can be considered heterogeneous. In addition to Arabs who make up most of Jordan's population, the country hosts a small number of non-Arab ethnic and religious minorities. These include Armenians, Chechens, Christians, Circassians, Druze and Kurds. These minority groups have long supported and preserved the

Hashemite monarchy in Jordan. For example, the Chechens and Circassians formed the early military units that made up the regular army of Transjordan in 1921 (Shami, 2009, p. 145). The successful integration of non-Arab minorities into Jordanian society has enabled them to attain high-status government and military posts. Most of these minority groups speak Arabic, while still maintaining their native languages, such as Chechens and Armenians at home (Dweik, 2000; Al-Khatib, 2001). Jordanian electoral laws have always designated special quota seats in the House of Parliament for Chechens, Christians and Circassians, whereas other minorities, such as Kurds and Druze, are left under-represented in the Jordanian parliamentary system and elections.

In the aftermath of the 1948 Arab war with Israel, Jordan received a significant number of Palestinian refugees (Alon, 2007, p. 152). Most were not in fact considered to be 'refugees,' because Jordan annexed the West Bank to its rule after the 1948 war. Rather, they were considered 'migrants' who travelled from one city (or town) to another. They soon became Jordanian nationals through the legal naturalisation of their national identity. Indeed, the 1948 Arab War with Israel dramatically changed the social and political structure of Jordanian society. According to Tell (2013), the War had a "profound impact effect on Trans-Jordanian society - feeding political unrest in the Arab Legion, curtailing migration for work in the Palestinian coastal plain, and transforming cities, such as Amman, Irbid, and al-Salt through inflows of

settlers and refugees” (Tell, 2013, p. 22). This explanation gives an overview of the tremendous impact of Palestinian refugees on the population of Jordan after the 1948 Arab War with Israel.

The population of Jordan witnessed an exponential increase after 1948. Yaghi and Clark (2014, p. 240) indicate that the population of Jordan increased suddenly from 375,000 to 1, 270, 000 in 1948. The 1950 annexation of the West Bank to Jordanian rule functioned as a tool to protect the remaining part of the Palestinian territories and to re-assert the Hashemite custodianship of Jerusalem. This control is sometimes known as the ‘Jordanisation’ of the West Bank (Alon, 2007, p. 152). The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan then included the East Bank and the West Bank. The seats of the Chamber of Deputies (now the House of Parliament) were equally divided between the two peoples: the people of the East Bank (Transjordanian nationals) and the people of the West Bank (Palestinian Jordanians). The population of Jordan was further increased after a second wave of Palestinian refugees after the Six-Day War in 1967 (Tal, 2002, p. 4). This war resulted in a decisive military victory for Israel (Alon, 2007, p. 153). Jordan lost the West Bank. Egypt lost the Gaza Strip, which had been under its control since the 1948 war. Syria lost the Golan Heights.

After the 1970–71 civil war in Jordan between the Jordanian army and members of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), Jordan’s national identity discourse became highly contested (Alon, 2007, p.

156). As mentioned above, identity politics in Jordan mainly comprises difference and increased tension between Transjordanian nationals who are the indigenous people and generally live in rural and nomadic areas in the hinterlands, and Jordanians of Palestinian origin who generally live in urban centres, in major cities such as Amman, Irbid and Az-Zarqa.

In the aftermath of the 1970 civil war, the Jordanian government began a process I call a 'national purge' that favoured the employment of Transjordanian nationals in the army and security forces. Jordanians of Palestinian origin were left, however, to create their own business establishments and stay away from political power. This political strategy was part of the government's wider approach that has aimed since then to reunite Transjordanian nationals in opposition to Jordanians of Palestinian origin. Transjordanian nationals have always seen themselves as "one Jordanian family" (Massad, 2001, p. 65). The Bedouin culture of Transjordanian nationals was thereby re-promoted to attain the image of 'Jordanianness' at both national and international levels. The project to 're-transjordanise' the country as a whole has implications for the humour that is the focus of this research because it demonstrates the relationship between ethnic joking and identity politics in Jordan.

King Hussein's 1972 federation plan, based on his argument that 'Jordan is Palestine and Jordan represents Palestine,' further influenced the question of identity politics in Jordan (Sayigh, 1991, p. 144). This political plan was based on the establishment of a Jordanian-Palestinian federation named 'The United Arab Kingdom.' However, King Hussein's idea was highly controversial and rejected by the most involved parties in the aftermath of the 1974 Arab League Summit in Rabat, Morocco (Sela, 2002, pp. 158–160). The Arab Summit gave the Palestinian people the right for self-determination and establishment of their own state in the Palestinian territories. Arab leaders voted unanimously for the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. According to Yaghi and Clark (2014),

Transjordanian nationals after 1974

came to believe that the state was theirs and developed a narrative of national identity revolving around the role of the Hashemite family in building Jordan and their traditional tribal origins, while Palestinian Jordanians maintained a Palestinian national identity, one revolving around the conflict with Israel (Yaghi and Clark, 2014, p. 241).

Transjordanian nationals have had always a fear that Jordan may turn one day in the future into an 'alternative homeland' for Palestinians. This geopolitical project has been commonly referred as the 'Jordanian-Palestinian Confederation' (Ryan, 2018c). This option is frequently promoted and popularised by the United States administration and Israel as one of the most workable and feasible solutions to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the problem of Palestinian refugees in

the Middle East. Quite recently, this plan was reintroduced again by the Trump administration under 'the deal of the century' as a tool to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, at, of course, Jordan's expense (Ryan, 2019). However, this option has remained strongly opposed and rejected by the Hashemite regime and the Jordanian people, as well as by the people of Palestine. These people fear that the alleged confederation plan would attempt to solve the Palestinian question at the expense of Jordan, and eventually lead to the erosion of Palestinian identity, and Palestinians' right of return to their homeland. The issue of this locally unwanted 'plan' is potentially of relevance to the development of satire in Jordan because it may have impacted the use of humour against people in power.

The process of 'Jordanisation' of the army and security forces started in the aftermath of the 1970–71 civil war between the Jordanian army and the PLO. East Bankers began dominating the military and security forces. The army, police and intelligence services are now largely recruited from the East Bankers in the hinterlands, and from non-Arab minorities, such as the Chechens and Circassians. Many Transjordanian nationals have since then seen their role as "the guardian, protector, and stronghold of Jordanian nationalism in the face of a demographic or political Palestinian takeover of Jordan" (Tell, 2004, p. 16). This indicates the rising tensions between Transjordanian nationals and Palestinian Jordanians: the deep-rooted source of Jordan's identity problem.

Although there is no official census about the number of Palestinians in Jordan, Luisa Gandolfo, in her book *Palestinians in Jordan: The politics of identity* (2012), claims that the number of Palestinian Jordanians and Palestinian registered refugees was, in 2013, approximately 60% of Jordan's population (Zarali, 2013, para. 1). In 2016, the population of Jordan reached 9.523 million (Ghazal, 2016, January 30). It included more than 1.4 million registered Syrian refugees and a few tens of thousands of Iraqi refugees. Borders with Syria and Iraq were sealed in 2015, but in the summer of 2018, Jordan reopened them, to facilitate trade relations and encourage a voluntary return of Syrian refugees after the defeat of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. The regional turmoil in the Middle East has necessitated Jordan's implementation of what Ziad Abu-Rish (2016) called a "public relations campaign" in both domestic and foreign policies. This state campaign was aimed to position the Jordanian regime at "the forefront of reform, stability and security in the Middle East" (Abu-Rish, 2016, para. 13). To some extent, the security paradigm has revealed itself in a somewhat authoritarian regime that cracks down on opposition and regime critics.

In section 1.5 of chapter 1 on ethnic jokes and superiority theory, I examined how ethnicity and the idea of ethnic joking were more relevant than after the Arab Spring. This was explained through the rising tensions between Jordanians and Jordanians of Palestinian origin in relation to the formation of ethnic joking that is based on the idea of urban and rural division in Jordanian society. The discussion in this

section has argued that the people of some Transjordanian towns, such as As-Salt, At-Tafilah and As-Sarih, became the butt of many ethnic jokes by the urbanites in Amman and elsewhere, who make up the majority of Jordanians of Palestinian origin. The people of these small towns and villages have been often stereotyped for their backwardness, lack of discretion and stupidity, compared to the cleverness, modernity and high culture of the Jordanian urbanites.

2.5 Façade reforms

There is a degree of 'façade reform' that has taken place in Jordan since 1989, and parliamentary elections can be considered as the best example to reflect on this type of illusive and cosmetic reform (Milton-Edwards, 2011, pp. 195–199). Elections in Jordan are based on social alliance, in which the most powerful and dominant tribes and clans are likely to support tribe's candidates unconditionally (Fathi, 2005, p. 892). Election, therefore, exemplifies one's loyalty to the tribe and family. In Jordanian political affairs, 'elections' refers to the general elections of the House of Parliament and other local elections that produce mayoralties and municipal and government councils. Because election in Jordan is based on a form of tribal patronage, it sometimes mirrors the increased tension between Transjordanian nationals and those of Palestinian origin.

Elections in Jordan are as old as the Emirate of Transjordan. However, they have been intended to produce pro-government, loyalist legislative

bodies, rather than strong parliaments (Gao, 2015, p. 56). For example, the first general election was carried out in 1929, after the 1928 Treaty with Britain that shifted the power (nominally) to Emir Abdullah.

Although the Treaty defined Transjordan as a would-be constitutional monarchy, the 1929 elections occurred in the form of the election of a pro-government legislative council that served as a supervisory authority and consultation body loyal to the government and the Emir. There were several elections of legislative councils until 1946, when Transjordan gained its formal independence from Britain and became known as the HKJ. In 1946, Jordan's House of Parliament was created with bicameral chambers: the House of Representatives (*Majlis al-Niwab*) and the House of Senators (*Majlis al-A'yan*).

During the 1948 Jordanian annexation of the West Bank, there were several elections of the House of Parliament and constituencies were equally divided between the two sides of the River Jordan: the East Bank and the West Bank. In 1957, Jordan witnessed the formation of its first elected parliamentary government, led by Suleiman Nabulsi from the socialist party (Tal, 2002, p. 37). Although the government of Nabulsi won the greatest share of votes in the House of Parliament, the cabinet was short-lived and Nabulsi was later dismissed by King Hussein over controversial government policies, such as the decision to establish diplomatic relations with the then Soviet Union (Hiro, 2003, p. 352). After the dismissal of Nabulsi, Hussein declared martial law, and banned all political parties in 1957 after the alleged coup against the

regime. Between 1957 and 1967, all these previous measures to liberalise political life had been rescinded. However, after 1967, national advisory councils were formed to replace the role of the House of Parliament in overseeing the performance of governments; these councils remained in place until 1984.

In 1988, Jordan witnessed a major political transformation. The country disengaged from the West Bank after the PLO had created the first Palestinian government in-exile, in Algeria in 1987 (Sayigh, 1989, p. 247). The PLO has been proclaimed ever since to be the sole legitimate representative of Palestinian people. A year after this disengagement, in 1989, Jordan witnessed a return to democracy that has since put an end to martial law and the ban on political parties. The implications of these changes were demonstrated in the outcomes of the 1989 general election and the state's democratic transition. That period is better known in the Jordanian context as *al-Infitah al-Isyassi* (political opening), a period of political opening and a return to democracy and liberalisation as stipulated in the 1952 Constitution. It has also involved an 'open-door' policy towards foreign investments and privatisation of state-owned enterprises from public to private ownership and control.

In 1992, Jordan moved from the idea of a block voting electoral system to the single non-transferable vote system, better known as 'one-man one-vote' (Gao, 2015, p. 56). The move can be interpreted as a means first to curb the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood, which achieved most

seats in the 1989 general election, and second to increase the representation of Transjordanian nationals from the rural areas and the hinterlands. The 1993 general elections produced therefore a loyalist parliament, formed mainly from Transjordanian nationals who supported the regime. The electoral system favoured the overrepresentation of rural areas (mainly inhabited by Transjordanian nationals and tribes) over urban centres (mainly inhabited by Jordanians of Palestinian origin). The 1997 and 2003 general elections also produced loyalist parliaments that did not have the power to challenge the government. Tribal candidates who represented Transjordanian nationals achieved the largest share of seats in the House of Parliament. Jordanians of Palestinian origin in urban centres remained significantly underrepresented.

In his article 'A decade of struggling reform efforts in Jordan' (2011), Marwan Muasher points out how the 2007 general elections were notorious for gerrymandering politics and the unequal distribution of electoral districts. He demonstrates the fact that despite the re-participation in the 2007 elections of the Islamic Action Front (IAF), the political arm of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood, the IAF suffered "its worst defeat, with its representation in parliament falling from seventeen seats to just six in the 110-member legislature" (Muasher, 2011, p. 16). Ma'rouf Bakhit, Jordan's then Prime Minister, later resigned following allegations of fraud in the 2007 election, which favoured Transjordanian

nationals in rural areas and the hinterlands over 'non-Jordanians' in urban centres.

To reset Jordan's internal political problems, King Abdullah II, in 2009, dissolved the unpopular House of Parliament and called for a snap election to be held in November 2010. According to Muasher (2011), the 2007 elections had been widely perceived as "the product of systematic rigging by the intelligence services" (Muasher, 2011, p. 17). However, the then government, that of Samir Rifa'i, produced an "election law that once again retained the one-person, one-vote formulae" (Muasher, 2011, p. 17). As a result, the 2010 general elections produced another pro-government parliament that consisted mainly of tribal representatives of Jordanians in the hinterlands.

In the aftermath of the 2011–12 protests in Jordan, King Abdullah II dissolved the House of Parliament in 2012, and called for early general elections in January 2013. The 2013 general election was based on a new electoral system that allowed a voter to cast two votes: one for the candidate in his/her constituency and the other for party lists elected by the implementation of a proportional representation scheme at a national level. Although the 2013 parliamentary elections were overseen by an independent body, the Independent Election Commission (IEC), the 2013 elections produced another loyalist parliament that included many pro-government representatives from the hinterlands.

In 2015, the government of Abdullah Ensour introduced significant changes to the electoral system that had marred past elections with fraud and vote rigging. This was due to the 'one-man one-vote' system. In the light of these changes to the electoral system in Jordan, Ryan (2015) argues that the electoral reform to the following 2016 general election was run under proportional representation, and it seemed to many local and international observers as a return to the 1989 election law that was based on a block voting.

In conclusion, the House of Parliament in Jordan has been structurally weak and has little power in reality. The weak function of Jordan's Parliament can be seen through its automatic approval and authentication of many government decisions and dictations without any proper consideration. In chapters 4 & 5 of this thesis, I argue that such a highly manipulated political context of managed elections and economic and political reforms has produced and perhaps even necessitated many examples of what is, in Bakhtinian terms, carnivalesque political humour and satire against the government. Furthermore, voting under this disproportionate electoral system can be considered, in Bakhtinian terms, monologist, because it enforced gerrymandering politics and an overall official discourse that favoured Transjordanian people in the hinterlands over Jordanians of Palestinian origin in urban centres. Many young people in the streets and more in Jordanian social media spaces have used humour and satire as a

counter-political force and tool for resistance to voice their frustration and disaffection about government control and authority.

2.6 Jordan and the Arab Spring

The Arab Spring refers to a series of revolutionary waves against long-term and autocratic regimes in the MENA between 2011 and 2012. Arguably, the Arab Spring, like many significant social and political transformations in history, did not have a single and straightforward beginning, but rather a series of transnational moments of popular resistance to power and government. The key trigger for these revolutionary 'waves' started in Tunisia on 17 December 2010 with the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, a street vendor who set himself on fire in protest against the confiscation of his wares by a municipal authority (Lynch, 2014, p. 1). This individual act quickly turned into nationwide protests that formed the Tunisian Revolution (also known as the Jasmine Revolution), which toppled on 14 January 2011 the long-time regime of Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali (in power since 1987). The swift success of the Tunisian Revolution profoundly influenced other peoples in MENA to take to the streets and demand regime change. For example, the 2011 Egyptian Revolution that began on 25 January managed to overthrow on 11 February 2011 the long-time and autocratic regime of Hosni Mubarak, who had been in power since 1981.

Before attempting some explanation of the Arab Spring and its impact on Jordan (and thus on Jordanian humour and 'carnavalesque' politics and popular resistance), it is important to know where the term 'Arab Spring' comes from, as well as its specific meaning(s) and context(s). The American political scientist Marc Lynch, who specialises in contemporary Middle Eastern politics, was the first to coin and popularise the term. In a newspaper article 'Obama's 'Arab Spring'?' (2011, January 6), he created the term to label the series of transnational, regional protests and clashes with security forces in several Arab countries in response to inflation, economic desperation and political freedom.

Although the term 'Arab Spring' is of non-Middle Eastern and non-Arab creation, many people in the MENA have used and continue to use the term (*al-Rabi' al-'Arabi*, the Arab Spring) to describe the revolutions that swept in various Arab countries since 2011. The fact that the term was created by a 'foreigner,' someone who looks at the region from afar, gives a clear indication of the tremendous impact that foreign nations and actors (in the political sense) have in the creation and construction of the MENA and its politics. As will be shown, however, the 'carnavalesque' response in Jordan, seeded by the Arab Spring, has been less steered by extra-national forces, and is more 'indigenous.'

Extending the metaphor, many people in the region have already signalled that the 'Arab Spring' has turned into an 'Arab Winter,' given the resurgence of totalitarian regimes and the rise in Islamic fundamentalism since 2014 (Grinin, Korotayev & Tausch, 2019, pp. 1–24). The 'Arab Winter' has referred to the gloomy ends of many 'Arab Spring' revolutions that ended with despair and frustration with political power. The Arab Winter has referred more specifically to the crisis that began in Egypt with the removal of President Mohamed Morsi and seizure of power by the military, in addition to other developing stories from the Syrian Civil War, Libyan Crisis, Yemeni Civil War and the Iraqi insurgency.

In the context of research on international relations and Middle Eastern politics, there are several explanations that attempt to demonstrate the 'Arab Spring:' the phenomenon itself and the term. One of the first and early explanations of the phenomenon was proposed by Mohamed Elbaradei, a renowned Egyptian scholar and senior diplomat. In an interview with the German magazine *Der Spiegel* on 25 January 2011, Elbaradei used the Domino Effect Theory as a framework to describe the phenomenon of the 2011 Arab Spring revolutions. He argued, "perhaps we are currently experiencing the first signs of an 'Arab Spring,' similar to the so-called Prague Spring of political liberalization in Czechoslovakia in 1968" (Bednarz, 2011). This suggests that Elbaradei's explanation is historically based, drawing on the metaphorical use of the word 'spring' in many world cultures. This

argument constitutes therefore a simple and surface-level claim to describe the phenomenon and not just the term. His explanation focuses on the significance of these past transnational moments of ordinary people's resistance to power, though it is notable for this thesis' use of Bakhtin that Elbaradei drew upon the example of protest in a then-Communist country.

Elbaradei's explanation of the term can be further expanded to many historical references to the term 'spring' in previous revolutionary periods. For example, first, the revolutions of 1848, known often as the 'Spring of Nations,' that took place in western and central Europe against absolute monarchies; second, the 'Berber Spring' during the 1980s, which called for state recognition of Berber identity and language in Algeria; third, the 2009 'Persian Spring,' that demanded the removal of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad from his post.

In his book *The second Arab awakening and the battle for pluralism* (2014), Marwan Muasher, a senior Jordanian diplomat and former foreign minister, uses a similar historical framework to analyse the phenomenon of the 2011 Arab Spring revolutions. He uses the context of the 19th century 'first' Arab awakening, which called for revolution and independence from western imperial powers. He argues that the contemporary Arab Spring should be referred to as the 'Second Arab Awakening' because of its demands for pluralism and freedom from

autocratic regimes that took power after the departure of colonial autocracies in the mid-20th century.

A second explanation of the Arab Spring phenomenon was put forward by Koert Debeuf, the Director of the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy in Washington D.C. In his article 'The Arab Spring seven years on' (2017), Debeuf uses a useful historical framework to better understand the Arab Spring: Crane Brinton's (1965) analysis of the 1789 French Revolution. He argues that the Arab Spring is very similar to the French Revolution because the Arab Spring stemmed from "a younger generation aspiring for more political freedom and rights" (Debeuf, 2017, p. 41). This explanation suggests that the Arab Spring revolutions should be understood in the context of young people, politics and their fight against marginalisation and political repression. This too has repercussions for the use of Bakhtinian 'carnival' as an analytical lens.

In his intriguing analysis of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, he identifies four similarities between the Arab Spring in Egypt and the French Revolution. These four phases are "the rule of the moderates; the reign of terror and virtue; Thermidor; and the end of the revolution" (Debeuf, 2017, p. 44). The "rule of the moderates" was manifested in Egypt through the interim rule of the military between 2011 and 2012. The second "reign of virtue" signals the inauguration of Mohamed Morsi from the Muslim Brotherhood as the first democratically elected

President of Egypt from 2012 to 2013. The third phase he termed as “the Egyptian Thermidor,” which refers to the counterrevolution of 30 June 2013 that ended Morsi’s rule and pronounced a return to autocratic regime. The fourth phase is explained through the military coup d’état by the Field Marshal Abdul Fattah El-Sisi (in power since 2014). This last phase, in Briton’s words, signals “the end of revolution.” Debeuf’s application of the four stages to Egypt suggests a gloomy end for the Arab Spring revolution in Egypt.

In his article ‘Are we seeing a second wave of the Arab Spring?’ (2019), Georges Fahmi provides a very useful explanation of why the Arab Spring remains an ‘unfinished business.’ He argues that there are four main characteristics of the 2011 Arab Spring revolutions: (1) the protests were nationwide because they spread over many different cities and areas; (2) sustainability which is evidenced by the continuity of protests; (3) development of clear political demands that went beyond the socio-economic grievances that triggered the early protests; (4) interconnection (or inspiration) which means that the protests were influenced by one another. In the light of these four qualities, he argues that the pan-Arab protests after 2011 draw parallels with the 2011 Arab Spring revolutions. They show evidence that we are still experiencing the impact of the 2011 Arab Spring, but the significance and outcomes of these protests are yet to be known.

In the context of Jordan after the Arab Spring, Jordanian political scientists and scholars such as Tariq Tell (2015) have argued that Jordan was a forerunner of the 2011 Arab Spring revolutions. In his article 'Early spring in Jordan: The revolt of the military veterans' (2015), he shows that the protests, strikes and sit-ins of schoolteachers and other workers, were active from April 2009– a year and a half before the 'actual start' of the Arab Spring in Tunisia. Jordanian schoolteachers were demanding the establishment of a national teachers' association and an increase of their salaries, and other workers were protesting their disenfranchised rights and against social exclusion.

In addition to schoolteachers' and workers' strikes and active demonstrations before the Arab Spring, the Jordanian National Committee for Retired Servicemen issued on 1 May 2010 a highly controversial statement (petition) that was critical of the role of King Abdullah II (in power since 1999). The petition condemned privatisation, high-official corruption and most importantly the 'plot' that was being manipulated by high state officials to turn Jordan into an alternative homeland (*al-watan al-badil*) for Palestinians. The petition became widely known by the people of Jordan as the "veterans' uprising" or "the revolt of Jordan's military veterans" (David, 2010) or "the revolt of the military veterans" (Tell, 2015). The protest against the regime was unprecedented. It emerged from the military, the traditional and long-standing power base for the Jordanian regime from 1921, as explained

above. According to Yaghi and Clark (2014, p. 249), the petition included a committee of 60 signatories that harshly criticised the state's neoliberal policies and the appointment of Jordanians of Palestinian origin to high government posts, as well as the policy of naturalisation (*Tajnis*) of tens of thousands of Palestinians in Jordan since 1999.

In Bakhtinian terms, the Arab Spring revolutions led to the formation of various forms of 'carnavalesque' politics of popular resistance in the streets and more in social media spaces. These include the launch of strikes and most importantly the use of counter-narratives in social media spaces against the government and the House of Parliament. For example, some public squares, such as Tahrir Square in Egypt and the Pearl Roundabout in Bahrain, and Gamal Abdel Nasser's Roundabout in Jordan and the Fourth Circle in the capital city Amman, became sometimes popular 'carnival' places for revolutionary politics and political mobilisation against political powers. Young people in several Arab countries have used and continue to use these public spaces, along with social media spaces, to express their restive views about government. They use politically humorous placards (in real space) and memes (in virtual space) against regime and government. In Bakhtin's theory of carnival and the carnivalesque, real public space is highly significant; I argue in chapter 4 of this thesis that Bakhtin's marketplace is now made up of social media spaces, and much less the streets and conventional public spaces.

2.6.1 The 2011–12 protests

In January 2011, Jordan witnessed a series of nationwide peaceful protests in several urban and rural areas, including the capital city Amman, Al-Karak, As-Salt, At-Tafilah, Irbid, Ma'an and Theiban. The protests happened like clockwork, set off after each Friday midday prayer in various Jordanian towns and cities. These protests were often dubbed 'Fridays of rage' against the government (Jordanians brace for a 'day of rage' Friday, 2017). The protests were believed to have started in the Transjordanian town of Theiban in Madaba in the south west of Jordan in early January 2011, when a group of young people gathered outside a main mosque to protest unemployment and poverty. Yaghi and Clark (2014) explain that

the Jordan Spring began in a small southern town in January 2011. Seven young men independently gathered in front of the main mosque of Thieban to protest unemployment and the rise of gas [petrol] prices (in excess of 30% in 2010). The seven became seventy when bystanders, who shared their frustrations with the regime's economic policies, joined them; by the time Friday prayer had finished, the group had become five hundred. By the second week, the IAF had joined the protests. By the third week, there had been protests in Jordanian cities from Irbid to Maan (Yaghi and Clark, 2014, p. 244).

Later, when the protests grew in number, those young people in Jordanian streets arranged a 'sit-in' in an attempt to emulate an Egyptian-style revolution, with a protest camp in *Diwar Ad-Dakhiliyyeh* (also known as Gamal Abdel Nasser's Roundabout) in Amman. The

protests initially called for the dismissal of the government of Samir Rifa'i because of deteriorating economic conditions and alleged corruption charges, along with the rising unpopularity of the government of Rifa'i. In the words of Muasher (2011),

the choice of Rifai [for Prime Minister] was particularly controversial, given his lack of government experience and his affiliation with the conservative school of thought, led by his father, Zeid Rifai, who had led the fight against reform for decades. His unpopularity, almost from the day he was appointed, reflected a widespread sentiment that he was ill-equipped to carry out a genuine reform process (Muasher, 2011, p. 17).

The protests became known as 'the 2011–12 Jordanian Protests.' They were inspired by turmoil and instability in the wider region that had started earlier in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Yemen and Syria. However, Jordan's version of the Arab Spring was different from those experienced in the aforementioned countries because the Jordanian protests called for government reform and not for change of the Hashemite regime, or revolution. According to the Middle East scholar Asher Susser (2011), Jordan, in relation to the 2011 Arab Spring, has proved to be a case unto itself (Susser, 2011, p. 1). The country has weathered the political turmoil of the Arab Spring surprisingly well, despite the greater regional challenges. The Hashemite regime has been very resilient and has tended to enjoy large and popular support among Jordanians.

In his article 'Revising activism in Jordan' (2016), Ryan argues that "the crowds [in the Jordanian 2011–12 protests] were small compared to those in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen and Bahrain, but the turnout was sustained and marked a significant uptick for Jordan, where peaceful protests had not been uncommon" (Ryan, 2016, p. 1). This argument suggests that the 2011–12 Jordanian protests marked the beginning of significant political mobilisation in Jordan, but without fully amounting to an Egyptian-style revolution of the kind that removed Mubarak's authoritarian and autocratic regime from power.

Ryan (2011b) argues that the 2011–12 Jordanian protests witnessed two important instances of protests against the government. The first occurred when a group of young people, identifying themselves as 'March 24 Movement', took to the streets and marched in demands for government reform and end of state corruption. The second was the demonstrations arranged by the Muslim Brotherhood, who are mainly Jordanians of Palestinian origin. The first wave of protests, which was led by Transjordanian nationals, was "non-partisan and national in focus, while the second was often seen as ideological and Palestinian rather than Jordanian" (Ryan, 2011b, p. 571). This explanation suggests a division of Jordanian society in 'carnavalesque' politics and popular resistance against the government.

The 2011–12 Jordanian protests were largely informed by economic and political grievances. Unlike the protests in neighbouring Arab countries, such as Egypt and Syria, the Jordanian protests called for substantial and far-reaching economic and political reform programmes, but not for regime change or revolution (Ryan, 2011, p. 367). The protests were met by peaceful security confrontations and resulted in no casualties among the protestors who took to the streets against the government.

Previous marches for political reform in Jordan had had little impact in changing the government's political programme and the regime's powerful stance. For example, the 2005 National Agenda provided a holistic approach for reform programmes, but successive governments did little to implement reform programmes or to change Jordan's economic and political directions. The heads of governments in Jordan have often paid lip service to a wide range of economic and political reform programmes (Muasher, 2011, p. 2). The King's directives for implementation of wider comprehensive economic and political reforms were often "ignored, diluted, and at times directly opposed" (Muasher, 2011, p. 4). They have often resulted in a "watered-down version of reform, or no reform at all" (Muasher, 2011, p. 12). According to Yaghi and Clark (2014), the 2011–12 Jordanian protests called, at times, for the implementation of "constitutional reforms aimed at limiting the King's executive authorities, namely his prerogatives to appoint and dismiss the government, dissolve the parliament, and appoint deputies

to the Upper House of Parliament” (Yaghi and Clark, 2014, p. 236). I argue that the 2011–12 Jordanian protests called for further several reform initiatives and demands, including

1. A return to democracy, as stipulated in the 1952 ‘original’ Constitution, that characterised Jordan as a parliamentary monarchy
2. The combating of endemic corruption, cronyism and nepotism in state appointments and posts, and prosecution of officials involved in corruption cases
3. The need to build a system of checks and balances which ensures that power is not concentrated in the hands of certain individuals or elite groups
4. The swift dissolution of the House of Parliament, after the 2007 and 2010 general elections were marred with fraud and vote rigging through an increase in vote shares from the hinterlands, where the East Bankers dwell
5. The end of gerrymandering politics and unequal electoral districts between urban and rural areas.

The 2011–12 Jordanian protests made an unprecedented and unusual call in the history of Jordanian protests and political mobilisations against the government. The protests began mildly to criticise King Abdullah’s rule as well as the legitimacy of the Hashemite royal family. This suggests that the King and other royal family members were no longer immune from the indirect criticism of people participating in the

protests and strikes against the government. Yaghi and Clark (2014, p. 246) support this claim by referring to the fact that in some rallies against the government, protesters chanted “Hey Abdullah, the son of Hussein: Where is the people’s money?” Some protestors also arranged a popular dance, inspired from *dabka* [folk dance], and named it the ‘corruption *dabka*,’ in which the dancers (protestors) chanted “Ali Baba and the forty thieves.” The last metaphor is powerful and suggests an allusion between the King and Ali Baba (the sponsor of corruption) who is assisted by his forty thieves, some of whom were explicitly named as royal family members.

I argue that the Arab Spring in Jordan presented itself in the context of political concessions made by the Hashemite regime. Throughout 2011 and 2012, King Abdullah II led many political reform initiatives. He dissolved the House of Parliament and called for an early general election, to be held in 2013. He granted a license for the establishment of a teachers’ association. He established the IEC, which has been responsible for supervising and monitoring parliamentary and municipal elections since 2011. The King also responded to the 2011–12 Jordanian protests with a top-down reform initiative. He sacked the unpopular liberal government of Samir Rifa’i on 9 February 2011, a few weeks after the government had received the vote of confidence at the House of Parliament. The government of Rifa’i had broken the record and unexpectedly received 111 out of 119 votes of confidence at the House of Parliament (David, 2011, para. 11). This information suggests

the extent to which the House of Parliament was almost entirely controlled and managed by the government.

The government of Samir Rifa'i had been insufficiently committed to the launch of a comprehensive political reform based on the King's directives. In his letter of designation to Rifa'i, the King had tasked Rifa'i with acceleration of "the process of reform and modernization started several years ago." The King had highlighted the importance of building "the plans, programs and objectives of the National Agenda that can achieve prosperity and progress for our country" (King Abdullah's letter of designation to Samir Rifa'i, 2009). However, the choice of Rifa'i was unsuitable for Prime Minister, as explained above.

The King then named Ma'rouf Bakhit, an ex-army general, to lead a new reforming government that would expedite reform. In the King's letter of designation to Bakhit on 1 February 1, 2011, the King tasked Bakhit "to take practical, swift and tangible steps to launch genuine political reform, reflecting [Jordan's] vision of comprehensive reform, modernization, and development" (King Abdullah's letter of designation to Ma'rouf Bakhit, 2011). The choice for naming Bakhit for Prime Minister was highly controversial because of his little experience in economic reform programmes.

The precise difference in wording between the King's designation letter to Rifa'i and that to Bakhit reflects an interesting and qualitative step in the King's discourse about the significance of reform in Jordan after the Arab Spring. It reveals 'change' in the King's attitude about reform. For example, his use of adjectives 'swift' and 'tangible' in the later letter suggests a recognition of the need for genuine action that was not present in the much less urgent-feeling letter to Rifa'i. His use of 'higher-gear' adjectives can be analysed in terms of his direct response to the protests and demands of people in the streets. What was novel about the letter of designation to Bakhit was its abundant references to the significance of political reform. The King emphasised, more than once, that the whole process of political reform in Jordan "has been marred by gaps and imbalances" (King Abdullah's letter of designation to Ma'rouf Bakhit, 2011). He pointed out that these were as a result of the "fear of change by some [people] who resisted [reform] to protect their own interests ... costing the country dearly and denying it many opportunities for achievement" (King Abdullah's letter of designation to Ma'rouf Bakhit, 2011). The language of the letter implied the King's seeming change in attitude in response to the protests and significance of political reform.

However, the expectations of Bakhit's government were very low in the eyes of protesters who continued to take to the streets and demanded change. For many people and protesters in Jordan, Bakhit was not the answer. Bakhit was an army general, security-oriented and according to

one commentator a “politically [ultra] conservative leader to the point of inertia” (Muasher, 2011, p. 16). He was not, also, an economic expert. He had been accused of approving the first casino in Jordan, although the establishment of such business violates Jordanian law (Carlstrom, 2011). His government had been viewed as responsible, as mentioned above, for the oversight of the controversial and forged 2007 elections that produced a loyalist parliament. Despite these concerns, the government of Bakhit survived an impeachment vote at the House of Parliament. This suggests again the weak role of Jordan’s parliament as a ‘rubber stamp’ for the government.

According to Muasher (2011), the government of Bakhit had shown that it had “no intention of doing so [political reform], having been one of the most vocal opponents of this very initiative.” Prime Minister Bakhit “paid lip service” to the King’s reform initiative and dropped all references to reform in his government work and programme (Muasher, 2011, p. 15). This suggests the way in which the King’s directives can be opposed by heads of governments and result (most often) in a moderate version of reform or no reform at all. Thus, whilst the ‘carnavalesque’ but relatively modest protests of 2011 and beyond had seemingly influenced the King, the Bakhit government’s unwillingness to respond to the former’s unquestionably sharper request for reform resulted in no substantial political change. The ‘carnival of protest’ seemed in its early iteration to be mostly impotent, so the protests continued.

After weeks of protests, the King, on 24 October 2011, again sacked the government, this time that of Ma'rouf Bakhit. Awn Khasawneh, a senior judge of the International Court of Justice at the Hague, was entrusted to placate protesters and lead a new reforming government (*King names The Hague judge as new prime minister, 2011*).

Khasawneh appeared to take the job very seriously and led a new type of reforming government: technocrat government. He also reopened dialogue with Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood, one of the largest groups of opposition forces that took to the streets during the 2011–12 Jordanian protests (Satkowski, 2011, para. 3). However, after a few months in office, Khasawneh abruptly resigned, on 26 April 2012. It was argued that he had had many confrontations and disagreements with powerful security forces and the anti-reform elite (Deasy, 2012).

Khasawneh was then replaced by Fayez Tarawneh, a conservative politician and a former prime minister of Jordan (between 1998 and 1999). Tarawneh led a short-lived caretaker government from May 2012 to October 2012.

The King then appointed Abdullah Ensour to lead a new, reforming government. Ensour was a respected independent politician. He was an economist, who had previously worked for the IMF and the World Bank. He had held many ministerial portfolios in the past. He had been one of the most vocal opponents of the government's inertia towards fighting corruption when he was a member of Jordan's Parliament in 1989, 1992, and 2010 (*Jordan's parliament chooses PM for the first time,*

2013, para. 2). I argue that the appointment of Ensour was a pragmatic move by the King to stave off an Arab Spring scenario in Jordan that could have led to regime change, like those experienced in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya.

For the first time in the country's political history, the appointment of the prime minister came as a result of negotiations between the King and the House of Parliament. Ensour was also set to remain in office for four years, the longest period for a prime minister in office since the establishment of Transjordan in 1921. However, the appointment of Abdullah Ensour was shortly denounced by the majority of people who took to the streets, and many young people in Jordanian social media spaces (O'Toole, 2014). The government of Ensour re-struck deals with the IMF and increased the government's neoliberal policies, resulting in tougher austerity measures. The government implemented a wide range of austerity policies as a tool to cut government spending and reduce the country's fiscal deficit and insecurity. The government of Ensour resorted to increasing taxation to comply with IMF requirements about economic restructuring and reform. Thus, protestors were not placated even during this more politically stable period.

Table 3 below shows the rapid governmental changes in Jordan between 2011 and 2018, a period that was marked by the largest street protests in the country's history. Political scientists such as Sean Yom argue that the principle role of prime ministers in Jordan is structurally

weak. In a newspaper article ‘Jordan’s protests are a ritual not a revolution’ (2018), Yom argues that “the resignation of any country’s premier is newsworthy, but in Jordan it happens frequently because the true role of prime ministers is to implement policies while serving as shock absorbers for popular anger” (Yom, 2018, para. 11). This interpretation of the role suggests that prime ministers in Jordan have little power in reality. The nature of satirical comedy in such a volatile political context can itself be considered farcical, because the truth is to some extent more unlikely or ridiculous than any satirical scene. Prime ministers are changed so quickly and readily to the point that they change (metaphorically) quicker than Google logos, it seems!

Table 3: Governmental changes in Jordan since 2011

Prime Minister	Duration in office
Samir Rifa'i	October 2010–February 2011
Ma'rouf Bakhit	February 2011–October 2011
Awn Khasawneh	October 2011–May 2012
Fayez Tarawneh	May 2012–October 2012
Abdullah Ensour	October 2012–June 2016
Hani Al-Mulki	June 2016–June 2018
Omar Razzaz	June 2018–present

Ryan (2011b) compared the 2011–12 Jordanian protests to those of 1989 that led to political opening and liberalisation (Ryan, 2011b, p. 565). He argues that both protests were driven by price increases and increasing government austerity measures taken by the two Rifa'i governments. (In 1989, the government was led by Zaid Rifa'i, and in 2010, it was led by Samir Rifa'i, son of Zaid Rifa'i). Although the 1989 and 2011 protests differ significantly, I argue that the protests themselves were very similar: to release tension for the East Bankers. King Hussein responded to the 1989 protests by sacking the government of Zaid Rifa'i, lifting martial law, loosening restrictions on media and freedom of speech, and most importantly, launching the first round of parliamentary elections in 1989. Likewise, King Abdullah responded to the 2011 protests by dismissing the government of Samir Rifa'i, and initiating a more comprehensive reform programme that aimed to implement a system of checks and balances in the country.

In total, the 2011–12 protests remain the most widespread and vigorous wave of 'carnavalesque' resistance in modern Jordan. Despite its significance, the Arab Spring in Jordan resulted in little political change, but it did bring about significant social changes that continue to challenge the government's political authority. Jordan remains, however, a would-be constitutional monarchy and all the reform programmes initiated so far have had little impact on everyday political realities. The Jordanian government started reforming the regime in 2012, but then halted its reforms. The controversial 2016 changes to

the Constitution reaffirmed the King's sole power over the military, parliament and the overall performance of government. The Jordanian regime remains, as Curtis Ryan (2018) describes it, a "hybrid regime" that is neither fully democratic nor fully authoritarian (Ryan, 2018a, p. 15). In Bakhtinian terms, political humour in Jordanian streets and in particular in social media spaces after the Arab Spring has been used as a counter-political force and tool for popular resistance against the regime's powerful stance, the government's weak role, and against the function of the parliament as a rubber stamp for the government.

2.6.2 The 2018 protests

The 2018 Jordanian protests were a series of demonstrations that began on 30 May 2018, called 'a single-day strike' (Ryan, 2018b, para. 2). Although the 2018 protests took after the 2011–12 protests, they were largely influenced by the new tax bill and increased government austerity measures backed by the IMF. The 2018 Jordanian protests were organised by more than 30 trade unions and professional associations after the government of Hani Al-Mulki forwarded the new tax bill to the House of Parliament for enacting.

In a newspaper article 'Why Jordanians are protesting' (2018b), Ryan describes the economic crisis and hardship in Jordan by asserting that "the economic crisis in Jordan is severe, and national debt is almost as large as GDP [Gross Domestic Product]. Amman is routinely ranked as one of the most expensive cities to live in the entire region, even though

Jordan is not a wealthy oil state. This makes day-to-day living for most Jordanians a real challenge” (Ryan, 2018b, June 4, para. 8). This explanation suggests the significance of the economic factor in influencing the 2018 protests.

Former Prime Minister Hani Al-Mulki’s motive for enacting the IMF economic restructuring programmes was the fact that “Jordan was headed toward insolvency” (Sowell, 2018). In a televised interview on Jordan Television on 14 February 2018, Al-Mulki officially declared Jordan’s economy weak, and explained how his predecessors had endangered the country’s economy and brought it to the brink of bankruptcy. He also pointed out that his government would manage to “get out of the bottleneck by 2019.” Without tax reform and further austerity measures, he asserted, Jordan would suffer a debt crisis that could destroy the country (Prime Ministry of Jordan, 2018, 19:09). The Prime Minister’s declaration suggests Jordan’s economic difficulty stems from inadequate former government policies towards genuine economic reform.

Ryan (2018b) identified the motives for the 2018 Jordanian protests and related them to shifts in regional alliances. He argues that, “the appearance of a U.S.-Saudi-Israel axis has at least partially marginalized Jordan, forcing the state to scramble to establish more avenues of external support.” As a result, Jordan was obliged to implement “domestic taxation as an essential source of revenue” (Ryan,

2018b, para. 11). The main impetus behind the 2018 Jordanian protests, as Ryan highlighted, was the economic austerity measures, introduced after the government re-structured loans with the IMF in late 2016. Austerity was reflected in the cuts in subsidies and increases in the prices of food, fuel and electricity from 2017. These factors led to protests against the controversial new tax bill by Jordanian young people in several towns and cities nationwide.

Unlike most of the previous protests that had marched for reform by political parties, there was something special about the 2018 Jordanian protests: first, the way they were organised as sit-ins in the vicinity of the government house, and second, the way they were spontaneous and unpredictable and led by young people and low-wage earners. The 2018 protests began as a rejection of the new tax bill that the government of Al-Mulki was planning to introduce, but the protests developed into something bigger than this sole demand, calling for a change in the whole style of government (*nahij*). The young people were particularly protesting against the government's economic approach and methodology that had tended (and continues) to resort to ordinary people's pockets, not the political elites, to reduce the government's fiscal deficit and insecurity.

Unlike the 2011–12 protests, the 2018 Jordanian protests gathered many people from all levels of society, and from several urban and rural areas in Jordan. The protests were largely peaceful and staged at night because they occurred during the holy month of Ramadan when everyone goes to prayers in the evening. The protests continued to the early hours of the next morning. According to Ryan (2018b), the 2018 protests were not rooted in “older or traditional sources of opposition, such as leftist parties or the Muslim Brotherhood” (Ryan, 2018b, para. 2). The broader nature of the 2018 Jordanian protests matters for the analysis of Jordanian humour after the Arab Spring because the protests were diverse. The use of real public space (public squares) and virtual space (Jordanian social media spaces) was highly significant.

The street protests and young people’s ‘protest performance’ in Jordanian social media spaces have produced many instances where Bakhtin’s ideas about carnival are relevant. For example, young people in Jordanian streets and social media spaces have used humour as a counter-narrative to power and tool for popular resistance against the government. The protests in streets have used various forms of humorous placards (in real space) and memes (in virtual space) that make Bakhtin’s ideas about the carnivalesque highly relevant, in terms of using humour and satire against power, and for showing popular resistance.

The 2018 protests were further influenced by the government increasing the prices of fuel and electricity on 31 May 2018. This led to the rapid escalation of protests. The protestors arranged sit-ins and gathered at the Fourth Circle where the Government House (Office of the Prime Minister) is located. (In this case, the Fourth Circle can be linked to Bakhtin's carnival square). The protests demanded the overthrowing of the government of Mulik, as well as the withdrawal of the controversial new tax bill that aimed to enforce new taxes on the middle and poorer classes.

King Abdullah responded to public demands as articulated by the 2018 protestors initially by freezing the price hikes and then by dismissing the unpopular government of Hani Al-Mulki, on 4 June 2018. Omar Razzaz, Mulki's Education Minister, was then entrusted to lead a new, reforming government and re-open dialogue for the amendments to the controversial tax bill. However, little has changed, and an only slightly modified version of the controversial tax bill was issued on 18 November 2018. So, there is a kind of endless cycle of somewhat carnivalesque protest causing prime ministers to be dismissed, followed by new appointments that make minimal changes that result in further protests. The apparent futility of protest thus calls into question its purpose.

In conclusion, the timing and place where protests in Jordan have taken place are important if analysed alongside Bakhtin's ideas about the carnival and the carnivalesque. The 2011–12 Jordanian protests occurred on Fridays after afternoon prayer. Friday Prayer is one of the important weekly prayers that gets people together (social cohesion). The 2018 Jordanian protests, however, occurred in the holy month of Ramadan, the Islamic spiritual time for fasting, reflection and social connections. The timing of the Jordanian protests is significant because it takes place at the time of spiritual reassessment and emotional prayers. The 2018 protests were staged at night, a time that can be considered carnivalesque, when the usual day routines are not applied. Taken together, the 2011 and 2018 protests produced various carnivalesque acts that aimed to challenge state-led reform and its processes, and the overall power of the government. At the time of writing this thesis, protests continue to be held on each Thursday (the last working day in Jordan) near the vicinity of the Prime Ministry Office in the Jordanian capital Amman.

2.7. Conclusion

This chapter has examined the political and geo-cultural context of Jordan, which is key to understanding contemporary Jordanian political humour and satire, including from a Bakhtinian perspective. It has presented some background information about the political history of Jordan, notably its creation by the British fiat in 1921, the regime's resilience, and Jordan before, during and after the 2011 Arab Spring revolutions. This chapter has identified the key political issues in Jordan that are most linked to (and the root cause of) Jordanian political humour and satire. Although these issues are the most prominent in Jordan and are expressed in specific ways as a result of the Jordanian context, they are shared across the region, or even universal.

Furthermore, this chapter has investigated how Bakhtin's carnival (despite not being perfectly descriptive of Jordan and the Arab Spring) is very relevant to understand the post-1989 politics, and more the new shifting political environments as instigated by the 2011 Arab Spring revolutions. The difference in the cultural-political context between Jordan and the Soviet Union matters and probably affects the application of Bakhtinian carnival; nonetheless, carnival is still highly relevant due to its relationship with regime cultural politics and the role of disaffected public in their mobilisation against political power and repression.

To further investigate the context of this research and its key contribution, this chapter has examined the regime's resilience, ethnicity and identity politics, gerrymandering politics, elections and Jordan's struggles with economic and political reform programmes. Most importantly, it has addressed the 'façade reform' that has taken place in Jordan since the 1989 political opening, and why Jordanians have used humour to talk about the negligible impact of government reform. Jordan, as a small country located at the heart of the Middle East, has been selected as a site for the study of political humour and satire not least because unlike other countries in the Middle East, Jordan has experienced a sharp rise in the production of political humour and satire since the 2011 Arab Spring revolutions.

The following chapter examines the relevance and some of the limitations of an application of a Bakhtinian lens by highlighting the social and political contexts that have affected the evolution of Jordanian political humour from the 1989 political opening to the start of the Arab Spring from 2011. It focuses on the way in which Jordanian political humour has become more *subversive* (although they are still some redlines) since the 2011 Arab Spring, and how it has demonstrated some aspects of Bakhtinian ideas in relation to the carnivalesque themes of degradation, the grotesque, and subversion of political power. Bakhtin and the carnivalesque have therefore become more relevant after 2011, as the next chapter shows in greater detail.

Chapter 3 Development of Jordanian political humour, 1989–2011

3.1 Introduction

In his book *Rabelais and his world* (1984a), Bakhtin makes a generalised point and claim about his theory of carnival and the carnivalesque. He expounds that “in the Middle Ages, folk humor [the carnivalesque] existed and developed outside the official sphere of high ideology and literature, but precisely because of its unofficial existence, it was marked by exceptional radicalism, freedom, and ruthlessness” (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 71). By doing this, Bakhtin focused on the carnivalesque as a particular social and political genre that occurs predominantly in carnivalesque cultural sites, such as carnivals, outside the official world and its ideology.

Despite the significance of his analysis of carnival and the carnivalesque, Bakhtin did not or probably could not (because of the oppressive and dangerous regime in which he lived) have really taken into account how humour is exercised in a culture and how a political context could influence the expression of certain types of humour. He also seems to have overlooked (or not targeted): (1) how humour changes with social and political developments, (2) how wider regional and international pressures provide space for new forms of humour, and (3) what happens to humour over the longer term once those new spaces have been established. Hence, he argued for it as being

ephemeral (Bakhtin, 1984a, pp. 89–91). To identify these omissions and oversights is not to criticise Bakhtin directly. It is acknowledged, of course, that to consider such factors was neither his intention nor in some cases indeed even possible, given that his theories were developed in very different global and regional political contexts. Nonetheless, all these areas of contention are key challenges to the application of Bakhtin's theory of carnival and the carnivalesque in a context of a semi-democratic and semi-authoritarian country like Jordan.

In this chapter, I provide an overall account of Jordanian political humour and satire from three historical moments: Jordan's political opening from 1989, the Gulf War (1990–91), and more recently the Arab Spring since 2011. I discuss in detail the socio-political and cultural contexts that influenced the development of Jordanian political humour and satire from 1989 to the present date. I then discuss the implications of the 2011 Arab Spring regarding the use of subversive humour and satire that challenge the Jordanian government in Jordanian social media spaces.

The discussion in this chapter consists of four sections. In the first section, I analyse the relationship between humour and Jordanian culture and focus on why Jordanians have conventionally been having an aversion to humour and laughter. I refer to the stereotypical idea of Jordanians' humourlessness as a tool to discuss the links between the

imposition of strict cultural traditions and people's aversion to humour and laughter. I focus most importantly on how Jordan's difficult economic conditions and economic liberalisation from 1989 have produced more humour and ultimately made Jordanians funnier.

In the second section, I review the early sources of Jordanian political humour and then focus, in relation to themes of progression and modernity, on the development of Jordanian situational comedies as a distinctive TV genre that poked fun at the then economically and socially underdeveloped Jordanian society during the 1980s. In this section, I argue that the Jordanian humour scene has been over-painted with an entirely new kind of humour: political humour, after the country's political opening from 1989. This period of political democratisation witnessed a significant increase in the role of political humour and satire as a tool of resistance against the government and its rhetoric about economic reform and economic liberalisation.

In the third section, I examine the emergence and development of Jordanian political humour during and after the country's political opening from 1989 and the Gulf War. I argue that jokes after the Gulf War provided Jordanians with a source of pressure relief from the Iraqi failure and defeat and a platform for socio-political commentary on the global and regional powers, and most noticeably on Jordan's economic conditions and opportunities after the 1989 political opening. To explain how ethnic joking was relevant to pre-2011 Jordanian society, I

demonstrate how earlier joking before 1989 was less ‘carnavalesque’ and did not target the government, while joking after 1989 has become more carnivalesque and featured the emergence of carnival joking that mocks and criticises power and the government. The emergence of carnival joking after 1989 has provided an element to the application of Bakhtin’s ideas about carnival and the carnivalesque in Jordanian society after the country’s political opening and the Gulf War.

In the final section of this chapter, I examine the recent evolution and significant development of Jordanian political humour after the 2011 Arab Spring and the 2011–12 Jordanian protests that demanded a set of substantive reforms of the regime. I analyse the shifts in political and cultural forces that have contributed to social expectations, taste and tolerance of political humour and satire in wider Jordanian society in social media spaces. I argue that humour and laughter has become a staple of Jordanian culture in the streets but is now predominantly located in social media spaces, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

The post Arab Spring period in Jordan, as the last section will show, has marked a significant shift in the use of subversive humour as a tool for counter-political expression and resistance against the government and the establishment. The use of subversive humour that has challenged the government in Jordanian social media spaces indicates how political humour after the Arab Spring has provided a

carnavalesque mood of resistance. It has utilised carnivalesque themes of degradation, the grotesque and subversion of political power and authority. However, the effect of this carnivalesque political humour and satire on real-world Jordanian politics has (so far) been minimal and ephemeral.

3.2 Are Jordanians humourless?

Humour seemed not to be a part of Jordan's early political history and resistance. Jordanians have been stereotypically known for being po-faced and unable to produce humour and laughter. In her article 'Performativity and public space: Interventions as performative gestures for political engagement in Jordan' (2015), Samah Hijawi argues that Jordanians have long maintained the image of seriousness and machismo that has ultimately helped to define their own frown and humourlessness as defining national characteristics. She asserts that "the mechanisms and feeling that 'big brother is watching you' is in fact quite effective in regulating both the private and public space and helps impose a self-policing system by the inhabitants themselves" (Hijawi, 2015, para. 1). It is observable therefore that early Jordanian culture was not explicit with humour because it was more a culture of 'seriousness' (sternness) with a strong inclination to accept conventional manners and adhere to strict cultural traditions and established norms.

In early Jordanian culture, laughter was equated with social informality, impropriety and immaturity. Humour in early Jordanian culture has been given little respect, due to what I shall call three cultural reasons. First, the Jordanian cultural tradition has been influenced by nomadic and tribal lifestyles and behaviours. This popular tendency was linked to adherence to strict and proper social manners, and interpersonal interactions occurred in a serious and humourless tone. Second, humour has been often equated with social informality, impropriety and immaturity. This made an inclination towards humour as socially unethical and sometimes awkward. Third, Jordanian people have been mostly characterised by their aversion to humour and laughter, and satire (as a form for social critique or commentary) has been unpopular. One well-known Jordanian proverb ‘no-one’s face smiles even to a hot loaf of bread,’ is often used to describe people’s disapproval of jokes and joke-telling in many social contexts (Al-Khatib, 1999, p. 267). It is also a way to metaphorically describe ordinary people’s faces, which sometimes look stern and have little appreciation for humour and laughter in some social spaces and settings.

In his book *Arab political humour* (1985), the Iraqi writer and satirist Khalid Kishtainy addressed the stereotypical and widely held negative image about Arabs in the minds of westerners. He argued that “despite a rich and varied literature, the Arabs are not so readily associated in the minds of westerners with humour or wit, which usually makes up a sizable chunk of any nation’s literature and oral folklore. Indeed, one

can even perceive that the opposite, i.e. temper, ill-humour, melancholy, gloom, stern looks, etc. is a generally accepted picture with the Arab character” (Kishtainy, 1985, p. 11). Kishtainy’s argument is notable here because it emphasises the role of stereotypes, which tend to neglect important issues, such as ‘objective truth,’ historical reality and literary legacy, when the superior people make jokes, stereotypes and prejudices against the inferior.

Humourlessness in Jordanian culture can arguably be linked to several cultural variables concerning dignity and manhood (masculinity) that Jordanian males are typically trying to assert. This is apparent in Hijawi’s (2015) claim about the role of machismo, which seems to have contributed to the overall stereotypical picture of Jordanians being frowning and humourlessness, in Jordanian culture. For example, some Jordanian male and proper names convey Jordanians’ culture of seriousness and inclination towards accepting conventional manners and strict cultural traditions. Popular nomadic proper names, such as *Za’el* [literally ‘angry’], *Muhawesh* [literally ‘troublemaker’], *Udwan* [literally ‘hostile’] and *Miteb* [literally ‘always tired’], demonstrate the idea of strict Jordanian culture and the politics of naming people in the Jordanian tribal culture and nomadic traditions. This notion about the politics of naming people in Arab culture is noted in Kishtainy’s (1985) argument about the limited transferability of Arab popular humour and culture. He argues that “To the Arabs, a true Arab gentleman is one who gets his money without ever working for it. Arabs give themselves

names like Stone, Hill, Sword and Lion, but never Smith, Tailor, Mason, Silverman or Carpenter” (Kishtainy, 1985, p. 14). This suggests, according to Kishtainy, the cultural idea about aspiration and poetry in naming some people in the Arab world.

In contemporary Jordanian urbanite modern culture, one can easily observe that the use of some nomadic names is one of the most satirised things among culturally educated people, because these names provide an easy way for humour and laughter to proliferate. Furthermore, other proper names that are primarily used for food and culinary arts are also among the butt of humour in Jordan’s urbanite culture. Some Jordanian food names, such as *Mansaf* (traditional Jordanian dish that is made of rice, meat and fermented yogurt) and *Maqluba* (a traditional Jordanian dish that includes rice, meat and fried vegetables) give a clear indication that could define Jordanian culture as a culture of seriousness and sternness. To explain, the urbanites in Jordan often make humour and jokes about the reasons for naming food in Jordan. They often relate and translate the word ‘Mansaf’ to ‘invasion,’ given people’s rush and speed in finishing the meal in no time, and ‘Maqluba,’ to ‘upside-down,’ given the flipping of the dish when served.

Other examples of Jordanians’ humourlessness rest on the people’s aversion to humour and laughter in some instances of interpersonal

communications. There, we might think of several popular phrases and their potential responses among Jordanians to see how ordinary Jordanians have been conventionally grown up lacking a general sense of humour as a way to reflect *Jordanity* (the original Jordanian culture and people). These phrases include but are not limited to: ‘Only in Jordan if you smile at a stranger’s face, he might ask you ‘are you all right, man,’ and if you smile at your brother’s face, he might ask you “what’s wrong with you, you idiot,’ and if you smile at your father’s face, he might ask you ‘what have you done behind my back? Confess now, son.’ From 2011, these phrases have been widely shared in Jordanian social media spaces to mockingly explain Jordanians’ past aversion to and reception of humour and satire in social spaces.

The other factor that seems to have influenced Jordanians’ aversion to humour and laughter was the implementation of almost permanent *de facto* martial law (in effect from 1957 to 1989) to control public order and repress any attempts to replace the Hashemite regime. However, since Jordanian political opening and economic liberalisation, from 1989, a growing number of Jordanians have used humour as a tool of resistance: to mock and lampoon the government and its institutionalised discourse about economic reform and liberalisation. That change in trajectory has also been accompanied by a growing theme of self-deprecation about Jordanians’ past aversion to humour and jokes.

I argue that the difficult economic conditions and increasing pressures after the 1989 political opening have produced more humour and carnivalesque politics against power and the government. These economic problems and hardships have challenged the stereotypical notion of Jordanians being humourless and po-faced. However, it was not until 2011 that a larger number of ordinary Jordanians began more fully to engage with carnivalesque subversive humour and satire, thanks in large part to the revolutionary moment of the Arab Spring and the development of social media technology, which has offered an alternative and independent platform for people to make fun about themselves and about people in power. In conclusion, Jordanians (before 1989) were just like Bakhtin (in the sense of living in an oppressive regime), not least because they had arguably lived under almost permanent *de facto* 'martial law,' which had led to their aversion to humour and laughter. They could not engage (perhaps because of the implementation of martial law and the already strict and cultural traditions) with humour and laughter for the fear of breaking the already established social and political norms and orders.

3.3 Political humour before 1989

Early Jordanian culture and literature were not explicit with transparent humour, but rather implicit with cynicism and socio-political grievances. In his book *The poverty of philosophy: Exercises on Jordanian satirical writings* (2006), Jordanian literary critic Ahmad Abu Khalil provides evidence that the genre of 'politically satirical writing' existed in the cultural life of Jordanians after the establishment of Transjordan by the British in 1921. Abu Kakhil (2006) argues that the then famous nationalist poet of Transjordan (later Jordan), Mustafa Wahbi Al-Tal (1897–1949), was considered by many contemporaries to be a 'cynical poet.' Al-Tal's poetry was infused with complaints and grievances about social life and norms, particularly in relation to social injustices and the exclusion experienced by a few marginalised groups in Jordan, such as the *Ghajar* (Gypsies). Writing concerned with politics and social injustice seems thus to have had a long tradition in Jordan before the 1989 political opening.

In its earlier forms, however, as in Al-Tal's poetry, Jordanian writing seems not to have used humour and satire *per se*. There seemed to be no Jordanian satirical literature at the time of Transjordan (1921–46) when the country was still under British administration. In his analysis of cultural life and media productions during the period of Transjordan, Abu Khalil (2006) demonstrates that although media freedom during the 1940s and 1950s gave rise to a proliferation of some alternative media outlets, such as tabloid and weekly magazines, humour had never been

popular. Some of the then prominent journalists, such as Minawer Owais, Lutfi Malhas and Hashim Sabi', had not utilised any techniques of humour and satire. Rather, they were more identified with their cynicism and critical reflections on social and political structures.

Without humour, cynicism (alone) cannot be considered satire and its users are not classified as 'humourists.' This evidence might indicate that because the people of Jordan were not in their nature 'carnavalesque' or satirical, there was no literature of this kind during the period of Transjordan. Rather, the Arabs, including the people of Jordan, were perhaps more inclined and interested to the growing body of resistance literature that emerged against western imperialism and more specifically against the Israeli occupation of Palestine, from 1948. Humour seemed therefore not to be a part of political resistance at this time.

Jordanian political humour that challenged power was not produced until the early 1960s. That period of Jordan's political history witnessed the first formation of Wasfi Al-Tal's reforming government, on 27 March 1963. Prime Minister Wasfi was the son of Mustafa Wahbi Al-Tal, the famous Transjordanian cynical poet. Wasfi Al-Tal's government was received very positively among Jordanians because it implemented King Hussein's vision of Jordan as a "model homeland" (Susser, 1994, p. 36). King Hussein's then vision focused on the adoption of far-reaching economic and political reform programmes, decentralisation

and media freedom that allowed the government to tolerate feedback and criticism from local media alternative outlets, such as weekly newspapers.

The opinion articles of Fakhri Qu'war, published at that period of Jordan's history in the *Amman Evening Newspaper* during the early 1960s, can be considered one of the earliest examples of Jordanian political humour that included light criticism of the government and the establishment. That form of political satire existed in a context of socio-political commentary and critical reflections rather than directly opposing, mocking or attacking the political power of the government and the King. Qu'war's articles used to direct 'mild' but 'weightier' criticism towards the government using a limited element of political satire and mockery. It was not until 1982 that Qu'war first published his humorous work *Diaries of a happy man*, which was later adapted into a soap opera comedy broadcast on Jordanian state-owned radio. That form of radio drama depicted the life journey of an indigenous person named Farhan from his early childhood to his admission to a psychiatric hospital. It also sheds light on his naivety and his acts of resistance against marginalisation. The early works of Quwar in humorous literature suggest how political humour and satire existed in a form of social commentary and mockery in relation to modernity. It also acted as a springboard for the dramatisation of Jordanian humour and satire on radio and later on television.

During the early 1980s, the Jordan Radio and Television Corporation (the state-owned radio and television network) produced two influential situational comedies (sitcoms) that I argue have influenced the development of Jordanians' overall sense of humour and use of satire in relation to power and domination. The first was *Haret Abu Awad* (The neighbourhood of Abu Awad), broadcast from 1981. It tackled the customs, culture and social problems of Jordanian rural society in a very subtle and comic way that highlighted indirectly the tensions between urbanites and rural dwellers. The second was *Al-'lem Noor* (Knowledge is light), broadcast from 1984. This sitcom was heavily influenced by the then famous British sitcom *Mind your language*, broadcast from 1977. For many decades, those two Jordanian sitcoms have resonated greatly in Jordanian collective identity and achieved popularity among many Jordanians.

For example, *Haret Abu Awad* narrated the story of the family of Abu Awad (a typical Jordanian father) and his neighbours in a very comic way that highlighted social classes and the greed of urbanites compared to the naivety of rural dwellers. It was also intended to make people laugh about the life in the Jordanian countryside where the majority of Transjordanian nationals live. However, *Al-'lem Noor* focused on the role of state and non-government organisations in fighting illiteracy in Jordan: a group of elderly people are summoned to attend evening classes and learn basic Arabic language and grammar. The series was notable for its inclusion of all the dialects of Jordan:

urban dialects, which are more influenced by Palestinian Arabic, and rural and nomadic dialects, which are the original dialects of Transjordanian nationals in the steppe and the hinterlands. The class was taught by young and beautiful Miss Warda, portrayed by Jordan's most famous actress Abeer Issa, who was employed by the Ministry of Education to teach the elderly students. Humour seemed to be a growing part of Jordanian social life and society at this time.

Comedic media and satirical television productions in Jordan in the 1980s were growing faster than in the 1960s. The expansion and transmission in full colour of Jordan Television was among the most important factors for the development of Jordanians' engagement with a TV sitcom. Therefore, the style, and targets of that situational comedy became embedded and perhaps normalised. The development of Jordanian sitcoms made acceptable certain formerly taboo kinds of language and behaviours about 'the other' and in relation to government and power relations, especially in the late 1980s. During this era, Jordanian political humour was not only confined to broadcast on television but also became available in newspaper articles and columns.

Jordanian literary critics, such as Iyad Nassar (2009), consider columnist Mohamed Tomalieh (1957–2008) to have influenced the development of the genre of journalistic, politically satirical writing in Jordan from the mid-1980s onwards. Tomalieh was known for his use

of colloquial language and clichés that were new to the techniques and style of formal writing used in newspapers and articles up until that time. He was a Jordanian of Palestinian origin who had lived in refugee camps in Jordan. He used to work for *Ad-Dustour* (a pro-government daily newspaper) under a daily and mildly politicised ‘satirical’ commentary opinion column entitled *Shahed Ayan* (Eyewitness). His articles provided socio-political commentary on life in Jordan using cynicism and self-deprecatory humour. In one commentary article, he considered himself as a “bridegroom who went on his honeymoon on his own, and a soldier who died as a result of his last bullet that celebrated a cease-fire” (as cited by Nasser, 2009, para. 6). His articles highlighted more the culture of cynicism and melancholy experienced at many Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan. This development in Jordanian humour scene was a result of the combination of many socio-political and cultural factors discussed above.

In examining some of Tomalieh’s journalistic articles, I have observed that some of his cynicism should be understood in the context of the highly controversial question of identity politics and the idea of marginalisation of poorer sections of Jordanian society, such as Palestinian refugees. Some of his satirical articles, such as ‘The third bullet’ (published in his book *Shahed Ayan* (Eyewitness), 2007, p. 84), focused on the rising tensions between Jordanians and Jordanians of Palestinian origin, including the hard lives of some marginalised Palestinians in refugee camps in Jordan. Addressing this important

socio-political phenomenon in his vignettes, Annani (2006) argues that Tomalieh used to poke fun at his 'double identity disorder' (Annani, 2006, para. 6). He demonstrates that Tomalieh cynically viewed himself as 'Jordanian of Palestinian origin,' based on his difficult living experiences in one Palestinian refugee camp in Amman, and as 'Palestinian of Jordanian origin,' because his family had emigrated from the town of Ramla in Palestine, which fell under Jordanian rule following the outcomes of the 1948 Arab war with Israel.

The nature and especially the targets of Tomalieh's writing were significant for the development of Jordanian political humour in during the late 1980s. This is because he focused more on the role of socio-political agents in the formation of political divisions and alliances between Jordanians, Jordanians of Palestinian origin, and Palestinians in refugee camps. Instead of engaging in regime-based cultural politics, many Palestinians in Jordan have targeted the government and other parts of the regime in order to promote their own political interests. These resistance movements can be best seen through the government-opposing actions and dissenting voices of Jordanians of Palestinian origin and Palestinians in refugee camps. Jordanian humour seemed to have grown as a tool for criticism against the government, but this development was not accelerated until 1989 when Jordan launched its political opening and economic liberalisation.

3.4 Political humour after 1989

In this section, I analyse how Jordanian political humour after the country's political opening functioned as a tool to mock the government. I also analyse how the Gulf War jokes functioned as a tool to promote national unity and solidarity among Jordanians against pressures from outside. These jokes provided Jordanians with a source of relief from the Iraqi failure and defeat. They also provided a medium for socio-political commentary on the regional and global powers that took part in the war, including the United States, France, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. To analyse the functions of humour in post-1989 politics and the Gulf War, I refer first to the socio-political and economic changes and liberalisation that took place after Jordan's 1989 political opening that promoted freedom of speech and expression and the relaxation of state censorship on media production. I also refer to the implications of the Gulf War on the generation and development of political humour and ethnic jokes in Jordan after 1989.

After the 1989 protests, Jordan witnessed a vital democratic transition that started with nationwide protests against the unpopular government of Zaid Rifa'i over price increases and cuts to food subsidies to meet the government's austerity plan, as required by the IMF. In that year, Jordan experienced what was known as a 'political opening,' comprising the resumption of parliamentary elections and the cessation of martial law, which had been officially declared in 1967 after the loss of the West Bank to Israel. This watershed moment in Jordan's political

history witnessed the legalisation of freedom of speech, promoted alternative media outlets, and re-granted the establishment of political life and parties, which had been suspended after the dismissal of Suleiman Nabulsi's government, the first elected government in 1957.

In addition to the 1989 political opening, the 1993 Press and Publication Law (PPL) promoted, to a great extent, a widespread increase in media freedom and freedom of speech and expression in Jordan. From that year (1993), Jordan experienced a steady rise in alternative media (as well as the emergence of political opposition voices), including, but not limited to, the rise of tabloid journalism and satirical journals such as *The Shihan* that were critical of mainstream government discourses and senior government officials. The rise of *Shihan* (a tabloid weekly newspaper) in the early 1990s is a perfect example to reflect on this socio-political change and to think of Jordanians' reception of political humour and satire after the country's political opening and the relaxation of martial law from 1989.

This period also resulted in the growth, proliferation and wider circulation of Gulf War jokes in Jordanian streets from 1990. In their analysis of Gulf War jokes in Jordanian streets, Farghal and Shakir (1993, p. 15) argue that these represented a new genre of political humour and satire in Jordan, targeting the structure of political powers and conflicts in the Middle East. At that time, Jordanian political humour promoted the supremacy of the Iraqi arsenal, despite their military

defeat and loss in the war. It enabled Jordanians metaphorically to convert the Iraqi military defeat into a 'psychological victory' that celebrated the Iraqi military.

To explain Jordanians' peculiar attitudes towards the Iraqis, consider the following four war jokes that were popular during and after the Gulf War. The humour of the first joke resides in the double meaning of Arabic word *yafrah* as both 'conquer' and 'deflower.' It reads: Saddam Hussein's secretary applied for a four-day leave to get married. However, Saddam granted her only a four-hour leave. When she complained about this, Saddam responded, "I conquered (*fataht*) Kuwait in four hours, can't the groom deflower (*yafrah*) you in four hours?" (Farghal & Shakir, 1993, p. 16).

The second and third jokes are about the alleged supremacy of Iraqi missiles over the U.S. They show the ineffectiveness of the American Patriot missiles as inaccurate and therefore inefficient compare with the more 'advanced' Iraqi weapons and missiles. The second joke reads: An Al-Hussein missile (Iraqi) and a Patriot missile (American) met over Tel Aviv. The Al-Hussein asked the Patriot whether he knew where the Ministry of Defence was. The Patriot answered: "No." Then the Al-Hussein responded: "Then follow me" (Farghal & Shakir, 1993, p. 19). The third joke reads: One of the Arab Gulf sheikhs suffered from a nightmare in which he shouted names like Al-Hussein (Iraqi missile), Al-Abbas (Iraqi missile) and Sadam (President of Iraq). He was taken to a

doctor, who, after examining him, prescribed a Patriot missile as a suppository (Farghal & Shakir, 1993, p. 19).

The last joke highlights a stereotypical perception held about the French in Jordanian culture (the Iraqis are over sexual, and the French are sexy). It reads: During Saddam's inspection of his forces in Kuwait, he noticed that the members of one of the military units there were nude. When he asked them about this, they told him that they were expecting French paratroopers (Farghal & Shakir, 1993, p. 21).

Collectively, these examples demonstrate the role of stereotyping in the generation of political humour and satire during the warfare. They also highlight differences between socio-cultural groups and ethnicities for the purposes of achieving national unity and solidarity against pressures from outside.

Jordanians have been (and are still) very sympathetic to Iraq and Saddam because the image of Saddam prototypically symbolised Pan-Arabism and the Arab nationalism that promoted the unity of Arabs against western imperialism and other external regional powers. Jordan (and then King Hussein) was a key ally of Ba'athist Iraq against the expansion of Iranian influence and Shia Islam in the region. The King supported Saddam unconditionally during the Iraq-Iran War in the 1980s in order to stem Iranian influence in the Middle East. Furthermore, Jordan and Iraq have maintained historically close relations with frequent attempts to unify the two states when Iraq was

ruled by the Hashemite family, better known as the Hashemite Kingdom of Iraq (1921–58). These historical moments show how the Jordanian government and people have inclined towards support of Pan-Arabism and the celebration of Saddam and Iraq against western imperialism.

It can be argued that Jordanian political humour and satire during and after the Gulf War can be more related to the release theory of humour, helping Jordanians to cope with or release frustration and anger about the Iraqi failure and defeat during the war. However, the Jordanian socio-political context and political transition during the 1990s provides a better explanation for the proliferation of Gulf War jokes and reception of humour in wider Jordanian society. This idea about how social and political developments influence the circulation of political humour and satire shows one of the points of weaknesses of Bakhtin's theory of carnival and the carnivalesque, which views humour as a product that results from the temporary overturning of social and political hierarchies in an otherwise unchanging wider context.

In addition to the wider circulation of Gulf War jokes, Jordan was among the first Arab countries allowing sensitive political topics to be addressed on stage. After fleeing from Kuwait during the Gulf War, Jordanian stand-up comedians Nabil Sawalha and Hisham Yanis returned to Jordan and established the first politically satirical theatre in the capital city Amman, at the Concord Theatre in 1991. They were theatrically professional, enthusiastic and very energetic personalities.

They achieved fame and audience engagement through their perfect imitations and personifications of several Arab rulers, and their very comic treatment of highly sensitive political topics on the stage.

In one politically satirical play *Welcome to an Arab summit* (1993), the two actors, as Peter Ford (1993) described them in his 1993 newspaper article 'Jordan political satire packs 'em in with lampooning of Arab leaders' (1993), "bound onto [the] stage as if they have just been freed from captivity" (Ford, 1993, para. 1). The actors' rush and bounding onto the stage suggest (perhaps) that the Jordanian political theatre emerged as a tool to celebrate the end of state censorship and the relaxation of laws concerning freedom of speech and expression in Jordan after the 1989 political opening. It can be argued that the Jordanian regime and society shifted its tolerance of political humour and satire after King Hussein of Jordan attended and seemed to enjoy one of the plays. The attendance helped to end government restrictions and end state censorship on political humour and satire in public domains.

In favour of the new liberalism, Hisham Yanis made a light-hearted observation, saying "For the first time in 30 years, we are making a profit with a theatre play;" he also pointed out humorously that "We can't afford to go back to dictatorship" (cited by Ford, 1993, para. 31). Yanis's comment is interesting here because he chose to use 'we,' a seemingly innocuous first-person plural pronoun, but a politically loaded

term because it potentially also refers to ‘we’ (the people of Jordan). It is even more interesting that he made a self-deprecating joke about theatre being normally very unpopular. He mocked the very genre in which he was succeeding. This level of meta-awareness combined with self-deprecation (i.e. awareness of the limitations and perhaps futility of one’s own efforts) seems to represent a highly sophisticated level of political humour and satire on stage. Therefore, he not only encapsulated (by talking openly about the political past and future of Jordan) the new freedom of speech, but also the growing sophistication of Jordanian political humour, as well as the growing theme of self-deprecation in Jordanian society after the 1989 political opening.

During the early 1990s, the duo (Nabil Sawalha and Hisham Yanis) staged several influential, politically satirical plays that became the cornerstone for the development of the art of political theatre and comic production in Jordan, as well as in the wider region. These included *Ahlan huqooq insan Arabi* (Welcome to the rights of Arab citizenry), *Ahlan barlaman wa mezanayah* (Welcome to parliament and government budget), *Ahlan mu’tamar qimah Arabi* (Welcome to an Arab summit), *Ahlan tatbey’* (Welcome to the normalisation of relations with Israel) and *Ahlan nizam ‘alamy jadeed* (Welcome to a new world order). The choice for titles in these series of politically satirical plays (all starting with ‘welcome’) is notable and ironic in Jordanian culture.

These political plays were highly satirical in terms of their use of pun and hyperbole as methods of political analysis. They demonstrated a new genre of Jordanian political humour and satire that perhaps helped to release the tensions of Jordanians. It also functioned as a method of political analysis and as a transient tool for political resistance, but of a kind that did not provoke any changes on everyday political realities. There were thus close in nature to aspects of Bakhtin's carnival, without being overtly confrontational. The plays also functioned as a trigger for the promotion of two types of political humour in Jordan after the Gulf War: affectionate satire towards Arab leaders, and another form of antagonistic humour against the Americans and their allies in the region (Egypt and Saudi Arabia).

In addition to lampooning Jordanian government figures, the duo were most famous for their perfect mimicry of the then Arab leaders, such as King Hussein of Jordan, Saddam Hussein of Iraq, Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and Yasir Arafat of Palestine. These imitations were not by and large considered derogatory and offensive, according to Jordanian social norms. Rather, they helped to establish a peculiar type of 'affectionate satire' that ultimately defended power rather than attacking it. Both Nabil Sawalha and Hisham Yanis showed their full respect to the characters they impersonated on stage, without overstepping social and political boundaries. For example, in one showing of the political play, 'Welcome to the rights of Arab citizenry,' Hisham Yanis mimicked King Hussein's husky voice and appearance in *the King's presence*

(*Jordan comic feared pokey*, 1997). The King's reaction was lenient and very tolerant. He clapped and laughed (*Jordan comic feared pokey*, 1997, para. 5). The King's reaction could be interpreted as a sign of the state's growing tolerance of political humour, satire and comedy after the 1989 political opening and economic liberalisation. This moment also strongly influenced later developments of media freedom in relation to lessening state censorship on media and comic productions, as well as the promotion of freedom of speech and expression in public spaces. Figure 2 below shows a still image from the politically satirical play (*Welcome to the normalisation of relations with Israel*), where in 1994 Yanis impersonated and dressed as King Hussein of Jordan (*Jordanian history*, 2018).

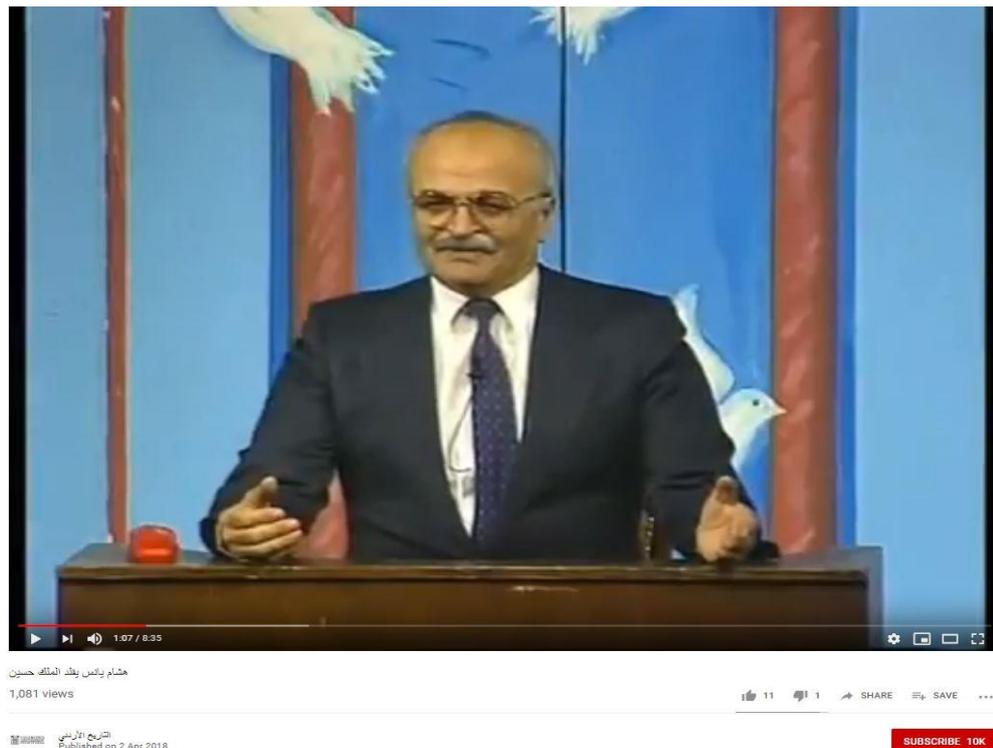


Figure 2. A still of Jordanian comedian Hisham Yanis impersonating and dressed like King Hussein of Jordan [Video file], 1994

In an interview with Abu Dubai-based English newspaper *The National* in 2011, Jordanian veteran comedian Nabil Sawalha described his politically satirical theatre during the 1990s as a way to burnish the halos and sanctity that surrounded the regimes and the establishments in Arab countries (Naylor, 2011, para. 6). That form of political humour had for most of the time maintained a respectful stance that functioned as an affectionate satire alongside political authority. It can be argued that political humour and ethnic jokes that emerged in Jordan after the 1989 political opening provided a 'safe haven' for expressing commentary on sensitive social and political issues, rather than actively *degrading* politicians and other authority figures. Sawalha and Yanis's 1990s comedy skits stopped short of such degradation, but instead functioned as a springboard for the rise of the cultural art of mockery and lampooning the government and the establishment in Jordan, albeit in a very respectful way.

Alongside the bloom of politically satirical theatre as instigated by Nabil Sawalha and Hisham Yanis, Jordan's socio-political satirist Yousef Ghishan established in 1996 the first Jordanian photojournalistic and politically satirical newspaper (*Abd Rabbo*). In an interview with *Tiber* (an online Jordanian independent magazine) in 2017, Ghishan, the newspaper's editor-in-chief, pointed out that his *Abd Rabbo* was the first Jordanian politically satirical newspaper that was issued regularly (Jibril, 2017, para. 9). The newspaper was popular for its use of grotesque and thus carnivalesque composite photos (a new satirical

genre which was fashionable at that time). The photos were used in a way to challenge the authority of government officials and the establishment, including the power of the Prime Minister, senior government officials and members of the House of Parliament. Once, Ghishan lampooned, albeit in a very respectful way, the official Jordanian government position towards the American bombing of Iraq in 1998, a position that did not go beyond 'expressing condemnation and concerns.' He argued that this type of government political articulation is one of the most popular elements of discourse not only in Jordan but also in many Arab governments' official statements. This example shows an extension to the peculiar Jordanian type of 'affectionate satire' in print media. Despite its popularity among the Jordanian readership, the newspaper soon ceased publication following amendments to the PPL between 1997 and 1998. The amendments made to the 1998 PPL largely censored media freedom and allowed the government to regulate all media productions and begin a crackdown on opposition.

During Abdul Karim Al-Kabariti's tenure as Prime Minister (February 1996 to March 1997), Jordanian political humour emerged as a tool to poke fun at the government's economic reform and the IMF requirements, which stipulated measures for economic corrections, and significant cuts in government expenditures. These measures caused controversy after the government's decision to lift subsidies on food, including bread. For example, at that time, Jordan's Prime Minister

Kabariti declared, in a public press conference, the new government economic strategy that aimed to compensate the poor by saying *ad-daf' qabel al-raf'*, which can be literally translated into 'paying [the people] before raising [the prices].' This government articulation about prospective economic reform was quickly changed by many ordinary Jordanians in the streets into mockery of the entire government's economic plan and reform.

The phraseology was grotesquely interpreted as "the government want to fuck us [the people]" (Farghal, 2008, para. 8; Badarneh, 2011, p. 319). The interpretation of the Prime Minister's phraseology was rude and brutal because it resonated in style with a sexual act of penetration where the government is striking a deal with a prostitute, who is depicted here as 'the Jordanian people.' It can be argued that this representation of the government as a 'sexual actor' in the political scene was unprecedented in the history of Jordanian political humour and satire. It was influenced by various social and political developments and emerged from and in response to the 1989 political opening and economic liberalisation that negatively impacted the lives of many Jordanians. It showed not only how Jordanians were poking fun at the government, but also how they had started to use grotesque metaphors, imageries and sexual analogies - carnivalesque behaviours - in political humour after the political opening and the Gulf War.

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, the production of political humour and satire in Jordan retreated due to renewed censorship and the impact of the 1998 PPL on freedom of speech and expression. However, a few years after King Abdullah ascended to the throne in 1999, he relaxed state censorship on media and freedom of speech and expression. In 2005, he launched an initiative - *freedom that touches the sky* - to promote freedom of speech and expression among Jordanians. It can be argued that the 2005 royal initiative resulted in another rise of Jordanian political humour and the renewed use of grotesque socio-political commentary and satire as a tool to target the government, but not the King and royal family.

This period was notable because it witnessed the emergence of satirical columns even in Jordanian *state* media newspapers as a method of political analysis and for providing social and political commentary about the actions of the government. For example, *Sawaleif* (Parables), a satirical column by Ahmad Hassan Al-Zou'bi, started to appear in the government-owned newspaper *Al Ra'i* (The Opinion) from 2007. At that period, Al-Zou'bi rose to prominence and became one of the most famous Jordanian social and political satirists. Throughout the discussion in chapters 4 & 5, I will frequently refer to Al-Zou'bi's works about political humour after the Arab Spring, in greater depth and detail.

Inside the context of Jordan after the 1989 political opening, there has been a rise in various forms of popular culture using humour as a voice of cultural resistance and marginalisation. The earlier practices in Jordanian political humour and satire in this period highlighted the significance of using humour as a tool for releasing tensions (safety valve) and a recourse for expressing taboos in Jordanian society, whether political, religious or sexual, as evident in the Gulf War jokes, Nabil Sawalha and Hisham Yanis' politically satirical theatre and Yousef Gishan's first politically satirical magazine. These key areas are clearly challenging to the application of Bakhtin's ideas about carnival and the carnivalesque because they show how humour, which was exercised during and after social and political developments, is different from or counter to Bakhtin's ideas of carnival because Jordan in the last few decades is not like the Soviet Union in the mid-20th century under Stalin (see Table 2, p. 118). Although Bakhtin did understand and acknowledge the political structure of medieval Europe, he did not target how humour is exercised in a culture and how a political context could influence the expression of certain types of humour against power. This is perhaps because he lived under an oppressive and dangerous regime. However, his ideas about carnival are highly relevant to Jordan. For example, the theatre of Sawalha and Yanis was rather similar to Bakhtin's carnival in one respect at least: it was joyous and fleeting.

These elements of political humour in Jordanian humour before the start of the revolutionary moment of the Arab Spring were, however, not at all *subversive*. Rather, they maintained, sometimes, a very respectful stance that defended power rather than attacking it (in this case Hisham Yanis' imitation of King Hussein's appearance and his husky voice). However, the use of bodily images and especially sexual analogy (in this case the popular idea that the government wants to 'fuck us') have made the application of Bakhtin's theory of carnival and the carnivalesque relevant for the discussion of political humour and satire in Jordan after the 1989 political opening and the Gulf War. In some respects, Jordanian political humour before the Arab Spring was less engaged with the themes of degradation, the grotesque and subversion of political power and authority. However, with the start of the Arab Spring and emergence of social media technology from 2011, carnival joking has developed exponentially in Jordan. Carnivalesque humour has been predominantly disseminated on social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, to poke fun at the government, as the discussion in the following section shows.

3.5 Political humour from 2011

In this last section of the chapter, I suggest there has been a notable evolution of Jordanian political humour that started with the 2011 Arab Spring revolutions and that is ongoing. I argue that the emergence of social media has played a key role in this phase of the development of Jordanian political humour. It has made it more carnivalesque and subversive. This is due to the nature of the social media spaces as independent and user-oriented free platforms that function away from the direct government control and censorship.

Examples of carnivalesque Jordanian political humour and satire disseminated since 2011 in Jordanian social media spaces have included animated cartoons, politically satirical programmes and plays, satirical parables and anecdotes, sketch comedies, radio comedies and many internet memes. Some of these new genres of political humour in Jordanian social media spaces have provided a mood of resistance to the government and the establishment, using degradation, the grotesque and the temporary subversion of political power and authority. That is more apparently carnivalesque than the previous phase in the development of political humour in the post- 1989 political context. In this section, I argue that the evolutionary moment of the Arab Spring and the advancement of social media technologies have together changed forms of online expression and changed Jordanian people's attitudes towards the government and dominant powers. These attitudes are liberal and anti-government.

Political humour in Jordan witnessed a major ‘breakthrough’ after the Arab Spring, thanks in large part to social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Because of the counter-political culture of the Arab Spring and nature of social media spaces, Jordanian political humour and satire has grown both quantitatively and qualitatively since 2011 as a counter-political force and tool for popular resistance against power and the government. Social media spaces have provided platforms, notably free from government monitoring and censorship for carnivalesque political humour to proliferate and circulate repeatedly without adhering to the principles instigated by the state in relation to freedom of speech and expression.

Carnavalesque politics and humour used in Jordanian social media spaces have demonstrated since 2011 a strong element of carnivalesque political humour and satire, using digital activism and *individualised* voices, which have ultimately helped to create *collective* voices against power and authority. This form of online humour and satire has, mainly, challenged the government’s rhetoric about economic and political reform and its processes, from 2011. As a result, carnivalesque humour has become a staple of Jordanian culture after the Arab Spring. This is apparent in the Jordanian people’s performance and activities online, as well as the comments in Jordanian social media spaces. This is largely due to developments in modern digital technology and use of social media as places for not only socialising, but also (frequently) as platforms for influencing

resistance, political communication and political participation against the actions of the government.

Inside the context of social media space, many young Jordanian people have used their social media accounts as a platform for influencing counter-narrative against the government and to promote calls for the reform of the government and the regime by returning to constitutional monarchy, as stipulated in the 1952 Constitution. Some of the leading Jordanian humourists and political activists have also taken to social media spaces their resistant actions to power and the government.

These include but are not limited to Ahmad Hassan Al-Zou'bi, Omar Abdallat, Emad Hajjaj, Osama Hajjaj, Maen Qatamin and Musa Hijazin.

These people have used their social media spaces to express their opposition opinions to their public, to disseminate their works and sometimes to support or initiate strike actions against the government through the use of hashtags, in order to try to achieve improvements for the society.

The use of humour and satire in Jordanian social media spaces has infused Jordanian political humour after the Arab Spring with a 'carnavalesque' mode of resistance against power and government.

Such humour has tended to be more subversive and less respectful than the above-analysed, earlier forms of political humour and satire in the twenty-three years after the 1989 political opening. It has sought to express young people's dissenting views, despair and frustration about

the effect of government policies on reforms. Post Arab Spring political humour in Jordanian social media spaces has utilised more carnivalesque themes: degradation, grotesque and temporary and imaginary subversion of political power and authority.

First, Jordan's most famous political satirist and activist Ahmad Hassan Al-Zou'bi is a perfect example to reflect on the rise of subversive humour and satire as a tool for resistance against power and government. Al-Zou'bi is a social and political satirist who has developed his politically satirical profession since the Arab Spring. At the start of the Arab Spring in 2011, he wrote an influential, politically satirical play *Al-an Fahemtukum* (Now I Understand You), in order to talk about Jordan's economic and political woes as well as the country's political uncertainty and unrest after the Arab Spring. The title for this play was inspired by the Tunisian President Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali's famously cynical quote when he proclaimed, in what turned out to be his last televised speech, that he had listened to the people of Tunisia and their demands and was ready to make concessions. The play achieved great popularity amongst many Jordanians and in late 2011 King Abdullah himself attended and apparently enjoyed the play (Brand & Hammad, 2012, para. 2). The play portrays the hard life of Abu Saqer, a retired combatant from the army who behaves towards others with a strict, military style that evokes humour and laughter. Abu Saqer, played by veteran comedian Musa Hijazin, is presented as a Jordanian

father whose family decides to rebel against his 'dictatorship' and strict family rules.

Al-Zou'bi's (2011) politically satirical play marked a significant shift in the use of subversive humour and satire as a tool to express dissent and frustration. It also uses humour as a form of resistance to mock the government and the process by which Jordan's prime ministers, government officials and ministers are chosen for their portfolios. The play includes a considerable number of potent scenes that 'cross red lines' by addressing themes such as land acquisition by the regime and the disappointing outcomes of the 2011 National Dialogue Committee that launched what were viewed as 'cosmetic' reform programmes that did not result in any substantial reforms to the actual political reality.

The play cleverly disguises these domestic political themes by turning them into family issues where Abu Saqer (the protagonist) is presented as a 'dictator' and his family (the people of the country) decides to rebel against his authoritarian rule. The play achieved more than 4,497,758 views on YouTube at the time of writing this thesis. The success of the play shows not only evolution in public taste for humour and satire, but also how the Jordanian regime has tolerated the rise of political humour, perhaps as a means for releasing the tensions of many Jordanian young people who took to the streets during the 2011–12 protests to demand change.

Al-Zou'bi's satirical productions have so far included one politically satirical play, hundreds of politically satirical articles and many comedy shows, including *Man-saf Baladi* (malapropism of Mansaf), *Ramadan Parables* and recently *Watan 3D* on London-based Al Arabi TV.

Jordanian political humour after the Arab Spring has included other satirical and media productions that have poked fun and created laughter among Jordanians in social media spaces. Other popular Jordanian comedy shows and programmes that contributed to the rise of humour and subversive satire in Jordanian social media spaces have included Mohammed Laham's *Nukat Shawar'* (street jokes) on Roya TV, Kamel Nusairat's politically satirical play *La Sharqia wala Gharbiah* (Neither east nor west), *Nahfat Som'a wa Abu Saqer* (The wits of Som'a and Abu Saqer), *Sawaleif Ramadan* (Satirical parables), Ahmad Hassan Al-Zou'bi and Musa Hijazin's radio comedy *Khaliha ala Allah* (Leave it to God) on Rotana Radio, and hundreds of thousands of composite photos shared by disaffected young people in Jordanian social media spaces about the government and the parliament.

Second, the Jordanian cartoonist Osama Hajjaj is another example to reflect on the use in social media spaces of subversive humour and satire against the government. In 2012, he posted in his social media accounts on Facebook and Twitter a notably carnivalesque political cartoon that grotesquely ridiculed the government of Fayez Tarawneh. The political cartoon mocked Prime Minister Tarawneh, who was on a mission to oversee the 2013 parliamentary elections and install a

successor. The cartoon, shown below in Figure 3, depicts Tarawneh as a 'blacksmith' in charge of making a prime minister for Jordan.

Abu Saqer, a Jordanian comic character played by veteran comedian Musa Hijazin on television, approaches Tarawneh and asks him for more special requirements that would be highly appreciated if included in the character of Jordan's future prime minister. Hijazin says in the speech balloon "Please Tarawneh, we need him as tall as Bakhit, his eyes as Abdullah Ensour's, his head as Faisal Fayez's, his hair as Kabariti's and his lips as Khasawneh's." It should be noted that all the names mentioned in the cartoon are those of Jordanian former prime ministers who were the subject of heated debate over economic and political reforms during their tenures. The humour in this cartoon below resides on the depiction of the prime minister as a 'blacksmith.' Such depiction is highly carnivalesque because it helps to challenge the lofty image of the prime minister through degradation. Tarawneh (then prime minister) is presented as a blacksmith, and the 'new' prime minister (which Tarawneh is making) is constructed as an 'iron man' whose mission perhaps is to suppress the protests.

The cartoon was particularly funny for many Jordanians in social media spaces because the 'new' prime minister should be (according to Abu Saqer) a mix and match of the previous prime ministers. It also emphasises the widely held belief among Jordanians that the 'new' prime minister for Jordan is often restored or appointed from previous

prime ministers. This regime strategy of recycling and shifting of government officials has been the norm in Jordan politics since the establishment of the state in 1921. Tarawneh ultimately re-installed Ensour to lead the government from October 2012 to June 2016.

The re-appointment of Ensour caused major frustration and disappointment for many Jordanians in social media spaces, at a revolutionary period that witnessed (in other Arab countries) major regime changes, and implementation of new reform programmes. It sparked controversy and an unprecedented number of productions of carnivalesque political humour and satire against the government in Jordanian social media spaces, as chapter 5 of this thesis will show in greater depth and detail. It influenced other politically satirical productions, such as the internet memes created after the government of Ensour implemented austerity measures and increased the prices of food, electricity and fuel as part of meeting IMF requirements for economic reform and restructuring.



Figure 3. Prime Minister Faysal Tarawneh is constructing a 'new' prime minister for Jordan [Cartoon], Osama Hajjaj, 2012

Third, the rise of *Kharabeesh* (scribbles) is another hallmark in the development of online Jordanian social and political humour after the Arab Spring. *Kharabeesh* is an online Jordanian company that has produced many animated cartoons and satirical content tackling domestic political issues in Jordan since the 2011 Arab Spring. For example, *N2O* comedy, produced by *Kharabeesh* in 2011, featured notable Jordanian stand-up comedians, such as veteran political comedian Nabil Sawalha and emerging stand-up comedian Rajae Qawas. The company has also broadcast other important works of Ahmad Hassan Al-Zou'bi, including *Muni' fi Es-Seen* (Prohibited From Being Broadcast in China) and *Fatawa Siyassiah* (Political Fatwas). At the time of writing this thesis, *Kharabeesh* was followed by more than

4,442,664 on Facebook and with 994,469 subscribers on its YouTube channel. The rise of Kharabeesh since 2011 gives a clear indication of the evolution in Jordanian taste and public engagement with humour and satire in social media spaces.

Fourth, the establishment of Jordanian Roya (a private TV channel) in 2011 gave rise to a new form of liberal media that is different from the state-run media outlets. The channel is liked on Facebook by more than 4,730,465 and is followed by 5,100,802 people. Roya television has been highly critical of government discourse and of domestic politics. From 2011, it has broadcast a wide range of programmes, including talk shows, news bulletins and a considerable number of entertainment and comedy shows that have influenced the growth and development of online Jordanian humour and satire.

One of the shows which achieved wide popularity among Jordanian young people in social media space was Mohammad Laham's *Nukat Shawar'* (street jokes). The programme ran from 2011 to 2016. One of the most viewed episodes on YouTube was *Sabaya 2* (2013), in which the presenter asked several female university students about their favourite jokes. This episode achieved more than 2,284,579 views on YouTube at the time of writing this research (StreetJks, 2013). The programme had also featured a wide range of social jokes told in Jordanian streets, including jokes about stupidity and naivety, and other jokes that are primarily derived from the elements of incongruity and

irony. In every episode, Laham (the presenter) visited a Jordanian city and asked its inhabitants (usually young people) if they have a joke and would like to share it on television. The success of Laham's street jokes is another example to reflect Jordanians' growing appreciation and reception of humour after the Arab Spring, and the developments in social media technology.

In post Arab Spring Jordan, humour and satire has a variety of functions. It functions as a method of political analysis, and a tool for popular resistance and the expression of subversion in social media spaces. It has also become a tool for resistance and counter-political force (illustrated here with Ahmad Hassan Al-Zou'bi's politically satirical play *Al-an Fahemtukum* and Osama Hajjaj's political cartoon in Figure 3 above). These instances of carnivalesque political humour support the usefulness of a Bakhtinian lens, and at the same time, challenge the application of Bakhtin because they arise from large scale socio-cultural shifts, from dynamism (unlike Bakhtinian carnival). These instances emphasise how humour changes with social and political developments, and how a political context, such as the Arab Spring, can influence the expression certain types of humour against power and authority. Nonetheless, Bakhtin's conception of the carnivalesque helps us to think about how humour functions outside the realm of power and authority, and how humour can function as a counter-political force and tool for resistance against power and the government.

Bakhtin's theory about carnival is static because it 'ignores' social and political developments. These omissions and oversights are perhaps because he was looking back in time (16th century France). He was trying to analyse literature (the works of François Rabelais), not history or politics *per se*. His own political environment felt static and unchangeable (life under Stalin's autocratic rule). To identify these omissions, as chapters 4 & 5 will show, is not (of course) to critique Bakhtin because he seems not to have considered socio-political dynamics, but to consider the development and expansion of his theory of carnival and the carnivalesque to understand modern-day carnivals in social media spaces.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has traced the development of Jordanian political humour from the late twentieth century to the present, and then showed that some (not all) of it can be considered ‘carnavalesque.’ It has provided a detailed analysis of the socio-political and cultural contexts that have influenced the development of Jordanian political humour from Jordan’s political opening in 1989, through the period of the Gulf War, and finally to the start of the Arab Spring, from 2011. It has also analysed how humour after 1989 has been used as a tool to satirise and lampoon the government and its institutionalised discourse.

I have argued in this chapter that ethnic humour, where the urbanites in the capital city Amman make jokes about the people who live in the steppe and the hinterlands, is an older type of Jordanian political humour and satire. Jordanian ethnic humour is (and always has been) ‘political’ because it concerns power between different groups. It is used by a more empowered (or wealthier or better educated) group to create a collective sense of superiority over the ‘other.’ It is important for this thesis on Jordanian political humour in the sense that the street protests and resistance since 2011 have enabled the dis-or less empowered rural people in the Jordanian hinterlands to develop a counter-superiority tendency and laugh at the powerful in urban centres. The rise of initially gentle and later more subversive political humour has, in other words, also permitted the previous ‘victims’ of an earlier-established kind of humour (ethnic humour) to ‘shout back’ in a

larger and only recently *politicised* arena at the very powers that used (and use) humour to ridicule them in what was formerly a more restricted *cultural* arena. The expansion, literal and metaphorical, of the Jordanian comedic arena – its size and scope – seems to underpin and at least partially explain the trajectory of political humour and humour more generally in Jordan in the last thirty years.

The last section of this chapter explained how the growth of social media use in Jordan has created a vast new and ubiquitous space, the real-world part of the ‘arena’ mentioned above, for carnivalesque political humour that has targeted the government and the weak function of Jordan’s parliament as a rubber stamp for the government. This chapter demonstrated that Jordanian political humour before the Arab Spring and the rise of social media technology was less engaged with carnivalesque themes of degradation, the grotesque and the temporary and imaginary subversion of political power and authority. Before the start of the Arab Spring in 2011, political humour maintained a more respectful stance and a tendency to what I have called ‘affectionate satire’ that ultimately defended power rather than attacking it.

In discussing the significance of the implications of the 2011 Arab Spring and social media spaces on the development of Jordanian political humour and satire, I have demonstrated how carnivalesque humour has become a staple of Jordanian culture after the Arab Spring.

I have indicated how Jordanian political humour in social media spaces has provided an alternative platform, free from government monitoring and censorship, for the promotion of socio-political commentary and counter-political expression and resistance against the government and the establishment. I have found that Jordanian political humour after the Arab Spring has created a carnivalesque mood of resistance that has utilised and engaged with the carnivalesque themes of degradation, the grotesque and the temporary and imaginary subversion of political power in social media spaces. The next two chapters will present and analyse more examples of these kinds of themes, as a focus on the empirical reality of specific examples. Jordanian political humour and satire has become more subversive after the Arab Spring. This is due in part to the counter-political culture of the Arab Spring, and in large part to the nature of social media spaces as free, independent and hard-to-censor social platforms.

In the next two chapters, I more closely examine politics in Jordanian social media spaces in the light of the application of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnival and the carnivalesque. I argue that Bakhtin's 'marketplace' has become the social media space, and much less the streets and conventional public spaces. I draw on examples on acts of resistance, digital activism and online collective voices, such as hashtags, that users of Jordanian social media spaces have used to rally against the government. In chapters 4 & 5, I provide more detailed information and discussion about Bakhtin's theory of carnival and the

carnavalesque and its relevance to Jordanian political humour shared in social media spaces. The interesting thing to conclude here is that ethnic jokes have become less apparent in Jordanian social media spaces after the Arab Spring. As argued above, they may have diminished because the newly-enlarged comedic arena, which now embraces national politics and (most of) its actors, has made them less effective, because former victims of ethnic jokes find themselves newly empowered by culture and technology to 'joke truth back to power'. Carnavalesque political humour has become more engaged with acts of popular resistance against power and government in Jordan since 2011. It has after the Arab Spring offered therefore a platform, an arena, for expressing taboos, whether political, religious or sexual, in Jordanian political humour. This arena both like and unlike Bakhtin's carnival square, as the next two chapters will, in detail, show.

Chapter 4 Jordanian politics in social media spaces

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explore Bakhtin's theory of carnival and the carnivalesque as a framework for thinking about Jordanian politics and political humour in Jordanian social media spaces. In his book *Rabelais and his world* (1984a), Bakhtin emphasises the significant role of the streets and physical public spaces in his theory of carnival and the carnivalesque. He argues that all the "feasts of fools" during the Middle Ages, after they had been banned from being held in the churches, continued to "exist [in larger amounts] in the streets and in taverns, where they were absorbed into carnival merriment and amusements" (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 74). In the socio-political context of Jordan after the Arab Spring and the exponential growth in the use of social media spaces, I argue that social media spaces have become the new 'carnival squares', replacing to a large extent the streets and conventional public spaces. Many people in Jordanian social media spaces have enthusiastically used (and continue to use) social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube for socialising, and most importantly in the context of this thesis as places for political mobilisation challenging the government's rhetoric about reform and its processes of change.

Taking a series of examples from Jordanian social media spaces, I demonstrate that Jordanian social media spaces are in many ways just as carnivalesque as the 'marketplace' of Bakhtin's Medieval France, characterised by polyphony, the overturning of social hierarchies and the presence of dialogism (and monologism) and the grotesque. This online carnivalesque political humour and satire challenge social and political structures and attempt to undermine the power of government and official figures by using ridicule and irony.

As set out in chapter 1, we might think about the use of Facebook groups, WhatsApp groups and hashtags on Facebook or Twitter as a medium for self-promotion and for creating social groups, collective voices and solidarity among carnival-goers online. Although modern-day carnivals in social media spaces are about individual presence and expression, the mode of carnivals has tended to emphasise social and community participation. (The audience is now the act.) This brings into the discussion the significance of Freud when we think about Jordanian politics in social media spaces. Bakhtin is useful when we talk about collective groups and resistance and Freud is useful when we talk about individual voices and reactions (often behind pseudonyms) in social media spaces. Social media spaces, I argue, can be considered both individual and collective at the same time (we might think of the use of a hashtag to show this).

In the final section of this chapter, I identify some areas of contention and problems in the application of Bakhtin's theory of carnival and the carnivalesque to the Jordanian socio-political context after the Arab Spring. These problems include, but are not limited to, (1) Bakhtin's conception of carnival as a utopian experience and an overwhelmingly positive act (or performance) that brings people together against power, (2) the representation of the population as 'social groups' who are collectively united and interconnected, (3) the absence of women in the carnival square, and (4) the extent to which the carnivalesque can be considered as an 'effective' counter-political force and tool for popular resistance against power and authority.

4.2 Jordanian street protests

In the socio-political context of Jordan after the Arab Spring, we might think of Bakhtin's use and elucidation of carnival to mean a literal space (an actual town space) or a 'metaphorical' space where the 'square' just means any space in which carnivalesque behaviour happens. As a metaphorical carnival place, we might think of the mosque, which for many years since the Arab Spring has been used as a carnivalesque space that allows heteroglossia (the presence of two or more voices) that unite and bring Jordanian protesters together, irrespective of their class, gender and origin. Jordanian mosques, such as the Grand Hussein Mosque in central Amman has been used since the time of the Arab Spring as an assembly point after each Friday prayer to express views against the government's rhetoric about economic and political

reform and its processes of change. Although religious spaces are quintessentially considered monologic, the specific context of the mosque in the recent Jordanian protests has demonstrated some of its carnivalesque and heteroglossic properties. In Jordan, the mosque is not just a place of worship, but rather a primary space for education, teaching the Islamic sharia and group meetings, and a place for donations and helping the needy during the holy month of Ramadan.

In discussing the Arab-Islamic context, we might think of Friday midday prayer (congregational prayer), Hajj (pilgrimage), Eid (festival) and Ramadan (the month of fasting and spiritual connection with God) as potential 'carnival times.' These religious rituals demonstrate some elements of Bakhtin's carnival because these religious celebrations are collective activities, filled with an extreme amount of enjoyment, and characterised by the overall suspension of normal activities and routines. From this perspective, we might think of other carnivalesque festive activities at the mosque, such as hosting *Iftar* (the evening meal that breaks fasting during Ramadan), *Suhoor* (the dawn meal before fasting in Ramadan), *Tarawih* (additional prayers at night time during Ramadan), *I'tikaf* (the practice of staying at the mosque especially in the last ten days of Ramadan). Sometimes, during times of domestic unrest and wars, the mosque can be considered as a political space for grouping and unifying people against an enemy. It can also be considered as a socio-political 'safety valve' for everyday life pressures built up in other spaces, such as home or the workplace. In the field of

community building, the mosque can also reflect a perfect example of the 'third place' for both men and women to congregate away from home (first place) and the workplace (second place). The mosque, in the context of the Jordanian socio-political context after the Arab Spring, has played an important role in Jordanian street protests against power and the government. All Jordanian protests have so far occurred after Friday prayers when people have time and place to converge together into groups and take into the streets.

In the Jordanian socio-political context after the Arab Spring, we might think of the following physical public squares as occasional 'carnival squares': first, Gamal Abdel Nasser Square, which is also better known among the Jordanian public as *Diwar Ad-Dakhiliyyeh* (the Ministry of Interior's Roundabout); second, the Fourth Circle, which is a metonymy for the prime minister's office and other government institutions; third, the Jordan Hospital Plaza, which is located in the vicinity of the prime minister's office in Amman; fourth, and most recently, the vicinity of the Royal Hashemite Court, where young Jordanian people have recently used this exceptionally 'private' space to protest against unemployment and marginalisation.

The 2011–12 Jordanian protests occurred after the Friday Prayer at *Diwar Ad-Dakhiliyyeh*, while the 2018 protests were staged at night during the holy month of Ramadan at the Fourth Circle. After the government banned protests gathered at the Fourth Circle in late 2018,

young Jordanian protesters continue (at the time of writing this thesis) to gather in weekends every Thursday evenings and Fridays at the Jordan Hospital Plaza near the prime minister's office at the Fourth Circle, to protest against the government's economic austerity measures and its negative impacts on people. From February 2019, young Jordanian protesters have taken a big step up from their previous series of street protests against the government and converged at the vicinity of the Royal Hashemite Court to demand employment. This movement has been unprecedented in the political history of Jordan.

These four public 'squares' were sometimes used by protestors as 'carnival sites' and places for rallies against the government, political critique and modes of popular resistance. In these public and private squares, protestors who were (are) mostly young people who comprise around two-thirds of Jordan's population) chant anti-government slogans and fly high humorous placards to voice their anger over the government's economic reform, and its negative impact on the poor and living standards. For example, one much circulated placard shows the map of Jordan as a dairy cow with a line that reads 'Jordan is not a dairy cow'. In Bakhtin's terms, these protestors are 'social groups' who are collectively unified and united against the government's rhetoric about economic reform and its processes of change.

The Arab Spring in Jordan gave rise to a new 'social group' involved in civil resistance and popular mobilisation that collectively became known as the *Hirak* (the protest movement). The members of this social group were commonly referred to as the *Harakis* (street activists). This social group consisted primarily of young Jordanian people from various Transjordanian tribes and towns in the hinterlands, such as Madaba and At-Tafilah. Those people used to gather at *Diwar Ad-Dakhiliyyeh* in central Amman every weekend in Fridays from 2011 to call for the implementation of genuine economic and political reform programmes. If compared to the organised political street marches by members of Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood (the main opposition party in Jordan, with a Palestinian origin and orientation), the *Hirak* protests were largely from Transjordanian nationals and were more spontaneous and reform-oriented but they lacked effective leadership. The protests held by people who took to the streets in Jordan during and after the Arab Spring were largely peaceful and non-violent. They have never (so far) called for the change of regime or encouraged revolution against the Hashemite monarchy. Rather much of the street protests in Jordan have called (and continue to call) for economic and political reform and against austerity measures backed by the IMF. In the socio-political context of Jordan after the Arab Spring, the 'carnival of protest' seemed to have gained its greater force from social media spaces, and much less the streets and conventional public spaces because of constant social media connectivity in our social media age.

4.3 Jordanian social media activists

Jordanian social media spaces can be considered in many ways 'carnavalesque', characterised by polyphony, the overturning of social hierarchies and the presence of the grotesque. Jordanian social media spaces have been used by individual young people and protestors as a platform to challenge social and political structures, initiate strike actions and, through online satirical activism, undermine government control and power. From this perspective, we might therefore think of social media spaces, in addition to the streets, as the new 'carnival square' albeit with some carnivalesque qualities that go (unsurprisingly) beyond Bakhtin's concept of the nature of the carnival in the 'actual' carnival square in the streets. For many Jordanians after the Arab Spring, the mode of protest is now provided by posts, comments and hashtag activism on social media platforms, primarily by Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and WhatsApp, and much less the streets and material public spaces.

During the 2018 protests that led on 4 June 2018 to the overthrow of Hani Al-Mulki's government, some members of the Jordanian online community (mainly on Facebook and Twitter) initiated several popular satirical hashtags to act against the government, following the proposal to implement a new tax bill and increases in the prices of fuel and electricity. These popular hashtags on Facebook and Twitter included, but are not limited to: #الدوار_الرابع (the fourth circle), #معناش_وبدناش (we do not have and we do not want), #مش_ساكتين (we will not be silent),

#خميس_الشعب (people's Thursday), #صفها_واطفيها (park it [car] and switch it off), #اضراب_الاردن (Jordan's strike), #هاجر_يا_قتيبة (leave the country, Qutaiba) and many more. These hashtag activisms can be both individual and collective moments of popular resistance against the government and its reform programmes. These politically satirical hashtags have been very active and used by many individual Jordanians on social media platforms as a tool to challenge government decisions, express resentment and frustration, and often to poke fun at the increasingly neoliberal government policy: price and tax hikes, and austerity measures backed by the IMF. Some Jordanian users in social media users have been actively engaged with these hashtags to increase their online participation and commentary on the government's rhetoric about reform and decisions. Amongst the most prominent Jordanian commentators and humourists in social media spaces are Dr Maen Qatamin, Ahmad Hassan Al-Zou'bi and Musa Hijazin. Their social media spaces and have attracted the attention of tens of thousands of Jordanian people on social media platforms since the time of the Arab Spring in Jordan.

4.3.1 Maen Qatamin

Maen Qatamin (b. 1968–) is a famous Jordanian economic analyst and political activist from the Jordanian town At-Tafilah in the south west of Jordan. He considers himself as an opponent to the government's economic and administrative approach from 2016. Qatamin completed his PhD in investment from the University of Warwick, UK in 1998. He

then lived and worked in the United Arab Emirates for many years before his return to Jordan in 2014 to serve for a short period of time as the private office manager for Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour but resigned abruptly the same year.

Qatamin has acquired a certain fame on Jordanian social media spaces for his short videos that analyse Jordan's weak economy and the mismanagement of former and incumbent governments on dealing with economic reform programmes and protest demands. In one video (see the still in Figure 4 below), posted on 16 January 2019, Qatamin ridiculed the recent government's decision that mitigated price increases and dropped the prices of more than 60 items that had been seen by the government as 'essentially important for living' in Jordan. By this government decision, he argued that the incumbent government of Omar Razzaz (in office since June 2018) deceived the public, because the list contains blatantly unnecessary food items, such as snakes, turtles, and other luxurious foods.

Qatamin's style and mode of analysis are based on factual analysis of statistics and government-released reports. He uses quite simple infographics to convey his message directly to the Jordanian public. Many Jordanians on social media spaces often like, comment and share Qatamin's Facebook posts and videos on their social media spaces to achieve a maximum impact. This is evident from the number of likes, comments, shares and views of Qatamin's videos (see Figure 4

below). Qatamin's style is noted for its innovation, and it has a strong impact on the formation of public opinion in Jordan (as seen from people's interaction with his videos in Jordanian social media spaces). He often uses deadpan humour to ridicule the government's rhetoric about economic reform and renaissance after the Arab Spring. In Bakhtin's terms, Qatamin's videos are 'carnavalesque' because they aim to attack and expose the shortcomings of established power and highlight public attitudes towards that power.



Figure 4. A still of Maen Qatamin's Facebook post 'Turtles, snakes and others' [Video file], 2019

4.3.2 Ahmad Hassan Al-Zou'bi

Ahmad Hassan Al-Zou'bi (b. 1975–) is a well-known Jordanian social and political satirist from the Jordanian town of Ar-Ramtha in the north west of Jordan. Al-Zou'bi studied in Jordan and completed his first degree in accounting from Jerash Private University in 1998. He rose to prominence in 2004 when he started writing for the state-owned newspaper *Al Ra'i* (The Opinion). His political satirical column *Sawaleif* (parables) addresses many social and political problems in a very ironic way. Al-Zou'bi is most famous for his politically satirical play *Al-an Fahemtukum* (*Now I Understand You*, 2011). The play was inspired by the Tunisian President Zine El- Abidine Ben Ali's famously cynical quote when he proclaimed, in his last televised speech, that he had listened to the people's public demands and was ready to make concessions. The play is available on YouTube and at the time of writing in this thesis in 2019 it had been viewed by 4,589,207 people. Al-Zou'bi is also famous for his satirical YouTube show *Man-saf Baladi* (malapropism of Mansaf, a traditional Jordanian dish) that resembles in style Jon Stewart's news satire television programme *The Daily Show*, where he often pokes fun at government decisions and officials. *Man-saf Baladi's* Facebook page has, at the time of writing this thesis, 74,320 followers and 61,024 likes. The popularity of this Facebook page tells us about humour and its broader political impacts on Jordanian social media spaces after the Arab Spring.

In the information provided in his online Sawaleif news website, Al-Zou'bi states that the purpose of his satirical website is to attempt to erase the glorious aura and shadow that surrounds the life of a *mas'ul* (government official) who often sees himself as an idol who is believed to be worshipped by people. He continues his description of the website as an alternative platform for those people who feel they are marginalised and whose voices are not heard by authorities. Such description, I argue, demonstrates a carnivalesque theme of degradation because it challenges the power of authority and its hegemonic discourse. This is evident from the information provided in the website under the category "who we are."

We began 'thinking' about the creation of *Sawaleif* news website in early 2007 as an alternative media against the mainstream mass media. We want this website to serve as platform that allows satire and criticism as well as a platform for the publication of articles that have been banned from circulation. We want the website as a 'resistant' and 'collective' platform that uses the same language that is being consumed by ordinary people in neighbourhoods. We want the website to trivialise things and actions in addition to eliminate the aura that hedges the life of a *mas'ul* (government official) in Jordan (www.sawaleif.com).

4.3.3 Musa Hijazin

Musa Hijazin (b. 1955–) is a veteran Jordanian comedian and actor from the Jordanian town Al-Karak in the south west of Jordan. He studied in Egypt and graduated with a first degree in music from the University of Helwan in late 1970s. Hijazin started his professional career in music and acting in the early 1980s and was noted for his two comic characters: Som'a and Abu Saqer (the father of Saqer). Abu Saqer is a fictional character and is presented as a retired combatant from the army who behaves towards others with a strict military style that evokes humour. Som'a is another comic character and is presented as a naive person who lacks experience of life and trusts other people, including government officials, too easily.

In the politically satirical play *Al-an Fahemtukum*, Abu Saqer is presented as a Jordanian father whose family decides to rebel against his 'dictatorship' and strict family rules (The state is represented as a family that is controlled under a patriarchal system). This family revolution is designed to resemble that of the Tunisian revolution that removed President Ben Ali from power in early 2011. Hijazin's two comic characters: Som'a and Abu Saqer, which have attracted the attention of many Jordanians in social media platforms, such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. According to the information available on Hijazin's verified Facebook page (موسى حجازين - Musa Hijazin), the comic characters of Som'a and Abu Saqer are designed to represent the largest segment of Jordanian society. These

two characters embody the image of an oppressed man whose rights have been stolen by the state. They represent the struggle for dignity for each Jordanian. In other words, they depict, in detail, the stumbling daily life and suffering of each Jordanian citizen.

In one YouTube video entitled *Som'a is a Jordanian refugee in Jordan*, uploaded to YouTube on 5 January 2016, Som'a is shown disguised and seen queuing with several Syrian refugees at the front door of the Canadian Embassy in Amman, Jordan (Takarub, 2016). In this satirical video clip, Abu Saqer approaches Som'a and asks him why he looks Syrian in clothes and accent. Som'a told Abu Saqer about his hidden intentions to apply for asylum visa to travel to Canada, considering the new fact that Som'a is now a Syrian refugee in Jordan. Figure 5 below explains the above characteristics and shows Som'a (left) in a traditional Syrian-Shami's (Damascene) dress at the front on what it looks like a Canadian Embassy in Amman, Jordan. The humour of this video resides in Som'a being both a Jordanian national and a Jordanian refugee in Jordan.

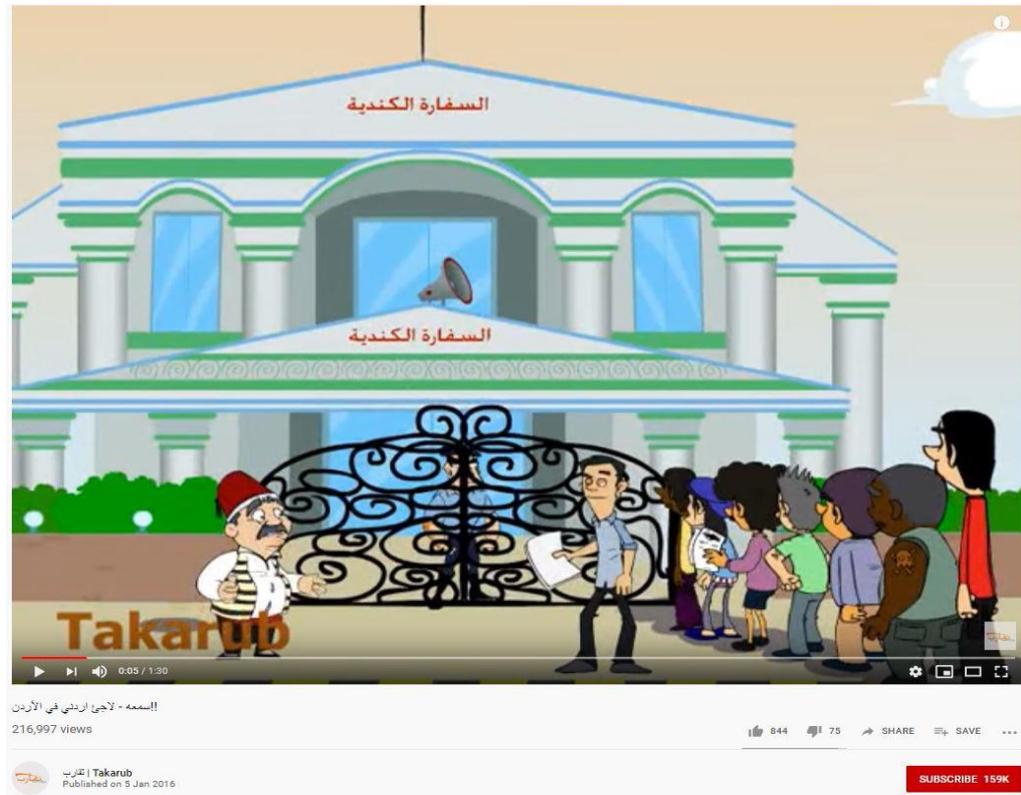


Figure 5. A still of Musa Hijazin's comedy sketch 'Som'a is a Jordanian refugee in Jordan' [Video file], 2016

To conclude, Jordanian social media spaces have become a venue for 'the carnivalesque' that underpins young activists' initiatives against the government's rhetoric about the economy and its processes, and most importantly, against the IMF requirements that have increased austerity measures and taxes. The carnivalesque style of this online activism has often emphasised the deconstruction of socio-political relationships, including those between young people activists and the Jordanian government. It has highlighted the crisis of mistrust between the Jordanian citizen and the government. This latter theme has reflected in the polarisation of the relationship between the government and people.

Jordanian people in the streets, and predominantly in social media spaces, have become aware of one aspect of government discourse: if it confirms or denies something, this often understood to mean that the opposite is true. For many Jordanians, the 'truth' has thus now come to refer to any prevailing 'rumour' that has been denied by the government. In addition to mistrust in government, many Jordanians have no confidence in the role and function of parliament before the government. The Jordanian government has almost never been challenged by its House of Parliament. For many Jordanians, the role of parliament is to function as a 'rubber stamp' for the government. Consider, for example, Jordan-IMF deals (since 1989), the significant increase of prices of food and taxes (since 2012), and the Jordan-Israel gas deal (signed in 2016). From 2011, members of the House of Parliament have thus become the subject of an increasing amount of ridicule and mockery in post Arab Spring Jordanian political humour in Jordanian social media spaces, as the discussion in chapter 5 shows.

4.4 The applicability of Bakhtinian theories

The Bakhtinian theory of carnival is connected to a number of other Bakhtinian theories and ideas: dialogism (and monologism) and the grotesque. These two concepts, I argue, are highly relevant to Bakhtin's carnival and Jordanian politics in many ways. In Jordan, policy in theory aims to reopen dialogue with the people, and promotes themes of freedom of speech and transparency, but in reality, the government is re-emphasising its monologic discourse and crackdown on critics.

4.4.1 Dialogism

In *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics* (1984b), Bakhtin analysed the works of Dostoevsky from his philosophical perspectives. He proposed two notions about language: dialogism (as an opposite of monologism which asserts one's voice) and polyphony (multiple voices). According to Bakhtin, monologism refers to any discourse that "denies the existence of outside itself and pretends to be the *ultimate word*" (Bakhtin, 1984b, p. 293). In her book *The Bakhtinian reader* (1994), Pam Morris argues that monologism is a typical discursive feature of authoritarian regimes (Morris, 1994, p. 247). Dialogism (as Bakhtin views it) is better explained in the context of polyphony which allows the multiplicity of voices. Bakhtin conceptualises dialogism in the context of everyday life and human experiences which are based on active dialogues, interactions and civic engagements between people. These utterances are communal; they are made by all members in a carnival square.

Dialogism (and monologism) are among the Bakhtin's ideas about language that can be applied not only in novels, but also in other forms of literature and life experiences. Bakhtin considers the carnivalesque element of 'truth' as an opposite of the official monologism, which reflects, in principle, the "ready-made truth," that is composed by official authority (Bakhtin, 1984b, p. 110). According to Bakhtin, truth is thus "not to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born *between people* [who are] collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interactions" (Bakhtin, 1984b, p. 110). The acknowledgement of other voices is therefore the main feature of dialogism as well as the carnivalistic life and literature more generally. Dialogism, in its basic value and definition, generates and develops new meanings outside the monologic world of the first-person 'I.' It always "creates something that never existed before, something absolutely new and unrepeatable" (Bakhtin, 1986, pp. 119–120). The Bakhtinian description of dialogism suggests its dynamism in comparison to the state of inertia that characterises monologism.

In his theory of carnival, Bakhtin explains that the development of discourse in societies began with 'monoglossia,' that is characterised by a unified language discourse, and then shifted to 'polyglossia' that engages two or more discourses in the same society, and finally 'heteroglossia,' which shows conflict between the official and nonofficial discourses (Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics*, 1984b). From this perspective, Bakhtin considers Dostoevsky's work as a perfect

example to reflect the state of heteroglossia. He notes that Dostoevsky's work contains many different voices, unmerged into a single perspective, and not subordinated to the voice of the author. Each of these voices has its own perspectives, its own validity, and its own narrative weight within the novel. According to Robinson (2011a, para. 8), Dostoevsky's works are one of the best examples to reflect the multiplicity of voices and viewpoints in a text, as summarised here:

The author [in Dostoevsky's novels] does not place his own narrative voice between the character and the reader, but rather, allows characters to shock and subvert. It is thus as if the books were written by multiple characters, and not a single author's standpoint. [Therefore] instead of a single objective world [that is] held by the author's monologist voice, there is a plurality of consciousnesses, each with its own world. The reader does not see a single reality presented by the author, but rather, how reality appears to each character.

Dostoevsky's novels, as Robinson (2011a, para. 9) analyses them appear as "an interaction of distinct perspectives and ideologies borne by the different characters. The characters can speak for themselves, even against the author; it is as if the 'other' speaks directly through the text. Therefore, the role of the author is fundamentally changed, because the author can no longer monopolise the 'power to mean'". Bakhtin extends his analysis of dialogism through his elucidation of the concept of *heteroglossia*. In his book *The dialogical imagination* (1981), he focuses on the construction of 'different-speech-ness' which reflects viewpoints that are combined in a text. Bakhtin defines heteroglossia as "another's speech in another's language". This explanation serves to

express “authorial intentions, but in a refracted way” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 324). Bakhtin identifies the direct authorial voice, which often arises from a monologist point of view rather than the dialogue between characters, as one of the primary challenges of heteroglossia in novel-writing.

Bakhtin criticises the work of Ferdinand de Saussure which views language as a product of a ‘closed system’ (Robinson, 2011a, para. 31). Bakhtin sees such views as biased and involved in the configuration of a ‘unified language’ that serves the interests of centralised power. For example, the ‘standard’ language (such as Standard English or Standard Arabic) that is used in most formal speeches of the elite. Furthermore, the kind of Arabic that is used in folk humour is different from the ‘standard’ language that is used in news and newspapers. Such an elevation of the language of the elite and the hegemonic power is doomed to curb the heteroglossia of everyday informal speeches. Everyday speeches are thus commanded to comply with ‘official style’ to recognise that privilege and the “closed-off speech-community” (Robinson, 2011a, para. 32). In Marxist ideology, this potential closure of language is associated with the power of the elite who are controlling the culture of that society, so that their imposed culture becomes the norm of that society. This is reminiscent of Antonio Gramsci's cultural hegemony theory, which views the elite class as the dominant social group over other classes.

One aspect of this analysis of heteroglossia is Bakhtin's theory of speech genres. In *Speech genres and other late essays* (1986), Bakhtin defines 'speech genres' as the construction of specific language forms and particular conventional norms in a specific sphere or context. These speech genres embed particular social values, perceptions and decisions, as well as a set of time-space references (known in Bakhtin's terms as 'chronotopes'). In this context, the use of folk humour is often permitted, but it should conform to some uses and vocabularies that are deemed harmless. An example of a speech-genre would now be the social media spaces. Things must be said in certain ways in social media platforms such as Twitter. The word count, for example, is limited in Twitter so that each tweet tends to be sometimes more concise than the use of everyday language in general. Differences in speech genres (as I understand it) often limit what can be said within a discourse in a particular way.

In the economic context of Jordan after the Arab Spring revolutions, we might think of the government's neoliberal rhetoric about reform as a perfect and salient example of Bakhtin's monologism. The nature of the government discourse and articulation sounds as if the direction of government reform, and therefore its rhetoric, reinforces or even strengthens economic inequalities. It thereby maintains existing social and political inequalities too. These possible effects of the government's rhetoric make that rhetoric 'monologicistic' in the sense that discourse was implemented despite popular outrage and protests. For example,

the government, in late 2018, endorsed a new tax bill that fights, in principle, tax evasion and tax exemption, but it has in reality imposed taxes on middle and poor classes. Economic liberalism in Jordan has grossly increased austerity measures, privatisation and price hikes, and not economic equality and successes.

Quite often, the government discourse about economic reform and the IMF requirements are constructed around the assertion of a 'non-debatable demand,' sometimes analysed as a fundamental rejection of dialogue and dynamism. In many ways, the government, for most Jordanians, is an epitome of monologism, and the King and the Queen are epitomes of dialogism. The government is insisting on IMF requirements and implementation of austerity measures even if these decisions have negative impacts on the poor and on the overall quality of life for most Jordanians.

In addition to economic inequalities, parliamentary elections in Jordan (from 1993 to 2013) were held under a 'one-man, one-vote' electoral system. In Bakhtin's terms, voting under this disproportionate electoral system can be considered monologist in the sense that it had enforced gerrymandering politics and an overall official discourse that favoured Transjordanian nationals from the hinterland over the majority of Jordanians of Palestinian origin in urban areas. The impact of electoral system has demonstrated a degree of façade reform that takes place in

Jordan, and the consequent governments have done little to reform Jordan's elections laws.

In the political context of Jordan after the Arab Spring revolutions, the state media can be considered another example of monologism in the sense that it often conforms to the limitations imposed by the government. In post-independence Jordan, the state media was harnessed by the government to promote the native Jordanian cultural and media productions. For example, the Bedouin life and culture were set to define and later promote tourism in Jordan (Massad, 2001, p. 74). Other differences in ethnic, linguistic, and cultural identities were marginalised in the state media to impose Modern Standard Arabic (first national language) and English (foreign language) as the defining languages of Jordan.

From its inception in 1968, the Jordan Radio and Television Corporation was designed to celebrate and reflect the government's unilateral discourse. Therefore, state radio and television grew as a government-controlled forum that has distanced itself from any dialogic programmes and/or critical discussions that attempt to challenge the government's discourse and power. Some young people in Jordan therefore grew (albeit reluctantly) alienated from the state media and its productions. Perhaps this might explain how social media spaces (as an alternative and dialogic forums) have empowered young Jordanians after the Arab Spring to act against the government's hegemonic

discourse after the emergence of social media technologies in the last decade.

However, we can think of dialogism when King Abdullah responded to the Arab Spring protests in Jordan and sacked several governments following the 'Jordanian Spring' in 2011. The King responded to the protests and placated the protesters when he embarked on a reforming policy of the regime from above. In the context of post Arab Spring Jordan, we can also think about dialogism in respect of the growing, dynamic dialogue between the government and people on the internet. Over the last few years, the government has significantly enhanced its e-government services and now has a social media presence.

For the first time in the country's political history, Prime Minister Omar Razzaz has both a public Facebook page (Omar M. Razzaz الدكتور عمر الرزاز) and a verified Twitter account (@OmarRazzaz), where he often posts (or tweets) and sometimes interacts with people online. One time, he responded to a Jordanian university student named Qutaiba Bashabsheh and urged him not to leave the country and do not think about going abroad, as Jordan is now on the threshold of a new age and renaissance. This response has influenced a large number of humorous posts and comments in Jordanian social media spaces as evident in the hashtag above [هاجر يا قتيبة #](#) (leave the country, Qutaiba).

Since he came into office, Prime Minister Razzaz has also initiated two government 'dialogic' social media accounts on Twitter: @HaggakJO (your right to know), as a platform to fight rumours and false news, and @Bekhedmetkom (a platform that serves you). These two accounts have aimed to re-open dialogue with the government where the citizen has the right to ask and the government has a duty to respond.

Although these accounts can (but not always) function as dialogic spaces between the government and the people, they have not been particularly popular among many Jordanians in the streets and on social media spaces. My reading is that perhaps some people think of these accounts as government platforms designed to urge the Jordanian public to believe the government's 'monologicistic' discourse and therefore think about the 'ultimate' version of its truth.

Dialogism in Jordanian politics can also be demonstrated in a number of royal reform initiatives, such as the launch of dialogue activities from 2011 to inform people about politics, including Jordan's electoral laws as a means to enhance the role of political parties and thereby social inclusion after the Arab Spring. In the education sector, however, Queen Rania's initiatives, such as *Madrasati* (My School, from 2008) and *Edraak* (Realisation, from 2014) have focused on the reforming of the traditional education system and improvement of learning environments in Jordanian public schools in the last decade. In these royal initiatives, the Queen has advocated for the abandonment of the power of the teacher as 'knower' of curriculum; instead, she has

promoted a student-centred approach that creates a 'multi-voiced' education system that puts students at the heart of the education process in Jordanian public schools. This approach to education has emphasised the role of individual agency and demanded dialogism to contextualise learning in a relational, more dynamic and creative way. In Bakhtin's terms, the Jordanian government wants to give the impression of being dialogic, but in fact it is the royal initiatives that are calling for being dialogic interactions and being open with the people. The government has, however, re-emphasised its monologic discourse and cracks down on critics, as demonstrated above.

4.4.2 The grotesque

Grotesque imagery is a central theme to Bakhtin's theory of carnival and the carnivalesque. Such images comprise one of the most essential elements of Bakhtin's carnival. In Bakhtin's terms, grotesque imagery is basically influenced by the notion of 'degradation,' which is "the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract to the material level" (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 19). These grotesque images celebrate transgression, incompleteness and debasement to disrupt expectations. In his analysis of Rabelais and carnival during the Middle Ages, Bakhtin argues that the tales of Gargantua and Pantagruel, two giants, are an example here. In grotesque realism, the carnival world is associated with the lower body functions, such as eating, drinking, defecation, urination, birth, regeneration and so on.

In the context of Jordanian political humour and satire after the Arab Spring, we might think of political cartoons, internet memes and satirical television news programmes as some of the best examples of uses of grotesque imagery. Some government politicians and officials are portrayed in a way that is filled with exaggeration and hyperbole that degrade their personalities. They are presented as 'giants' with deformed and large face qualities and big buttocks. Consider, for example, the political cartoons of Emad Hajjaj, Osama Hajjaj and Omar Abdallat as examples of uses of grotesque imagery in Jordanian social media spaces. Some Figures in chapter 5 of this thesis show these grotesque qualities.

In his politically satirical YouTube show *Man-saf Baladi* (read 'who robbed my homeland', not as Mansaf), Jordan's most famous socio-political satirist Ahmad Hassan Al-Zou'bi creates some of the best examples of such grotesque imagery. In the introductory animation of the comic show, the view of the inside of a mouth suggests the grotesque in Bakhtinian terms. The mouth contains more food than actually would be possible. The national dish (Mansaf) is there metaphorically to connote gluttony and greed. Spittle (a bodily fluid), which is dribbling out of the mouth as it closes, suggests a greedy elite who robbed the country in the same way that Jordanians excess in overeating the Mansaf. The promotional trailer shows quite a lot of other satirical visual metaphors, such as the reduction in the availability of oil (smaller oil containers), increases in the prices of electricity and

bread, as well as censorship on literary expression, as shown in the image of a pen in a cage. In Jordanian political humour after the Arab Spring, the use of interaction between the body and food has been a key part and a component of carnivalesque politics and thus of carnivalesque political humour and satire in social media spaces.

Modern carnival in the context of online and televisual Jordanian humour satire draws upon similar sources of counter-power, albeit mainly using entirely modern technologies. However, this approach has been challenged by the appropriation of such technologies by some of the powerful, and their monologism. This appropriation can even be cleverly disguised as dialogism because of its use of seemingly dialogic tools, for example Facebook and Twitter. However, the lack of enthusiasm for such monologism 'dressed up as dialogism' stands as evidence for an ongoing, popular appetite for 'truly' dialogic or even polyphonic carnivalesque resistance in Jordanian social media spaces after the Arab Spring.

4.5 Problems of the Bakhtinian carnival

Despite the universality and wide applicability of Bakhtin's ideas in cross-cultural contexts, Bakhtinian thoughts about carnival are full of controversies. This is perhaps because he was writing about an idea of 16th century France and using, at the same time, a method of coded criticism to talk about the cultural politics and regime repression in the Soviet Union during Stalin's reign. There is a heated debate and controversial dispute among literary and cultural theory scholars about whether Bakhtin was writing under the influence of Karl Marx to avoid communist censorship (Emerson, 1994, p. 302). This argument is valid and largely apparent when we think about Bakhtin's critique of monologism, as opposite to dialogism.

Bakhtin's theory about carnival may seem static because it 'ignores' social and political developments. At first glance, this theory of carnival may seem ecologically invalid and even ethically questionable for the study of non-western empirical texts, such as Jordanian political humour and satire. Bakhtin's cultural context is Medieval Europe and the Renaissance, and his analysis of carnival focused exclusively on 16th century France and the works of François Rabelais. The specificity of that context needs to be taken into account when talking about the limitations that affect the application of Bakhtin's theory of carnival to Jordan in the 21st century (notably, after the creation of IT and the internet), and the distinctiveness of the Jordanian socio-political climate after the Arab Spring. Nonetheless, Bakhtin's theory of carnival is still

highly relevant. It provides a very useful reference point for thinking about the many forms of political humour and satire that have been disseminated in Jordanian social media spaces since the Arab Spring. In this final section of the chapter, I focus on some of the problems and some of the weaknesses associated with the application of Bakhtin's theory of carnival and the carnivalesque to the Jordanian socio-political context after the Arab Spring, in terms of the followings: (1) the carnival's overall positivity, (2) the idealisation of the populace who are participating in the carnival, (3) the question of women in the carnival square, and (4) the incarnation of the carnivalesque as an 'effective' tool for popular resistance against power and authority.

First, Bakhtin describes carnival as an overwhelmingly positive act (or experience). He argues that the concept of carnival envisions the people participating in the carnival as "a unified [and] subordinate entity, whose homogeneity is in fact reinforced through the imagery of carnival" (Taylor, 1995, p. 34). This conception of carnival is influenced by Bakhtin's analysis of the carnival square as a site for promoting collectivist culture among social groups who resist the elite and ruling classes. However, this representation of carnival as an overwhelmingly positive experience is problematic because it raises some issues in terms of the cohesion and consistency of social groups, and, sometimes, the state of dystopia in the carnival square. Bakhtin's representation of carnival has tended to overlook other negative

aspects of carnival in the actual carnival square, such as the potential turn to violence, disruption and hostility among social groups.

For example, some Jordanian street protests have resulted in significant localised disruptions, numerous road closures and violent confrontations between police forces and protestors, which led to several injuries and deaths. In many ways, the Jordanian police and government have reflected the state's monologic approach that is opposite to the dialogic interaction with people in the streets. The power of the police and other security forces in the actual carnival squares has been constructed around the idea of the illegitimacy of protests against power and the government.

Some of the Jordanian street protests were banned on the grounds that protests and demonstrations lead to further social divisions, nationwide unrest, increase in injuries, traffic congestion, and an increase in the national sense of instability and insecurity among many people who are not participating in street carnivals against the government. For some Arab ultra-conservative Islamic religious leaders who are affiliated and identified with their links to regimes, taking to the streets or transgression against power can be considered a 'sin' and therefore illegitimate on the grounds that this transgression opposes the ruler, who is presumably considered as Allah's vicegerent (shadow of God) on the earth. This divine incarnation, I argue, has bolstered power and helped some Arab rulers to be removed from public scrutiny. Consider,

for example, the surprising stability of Arab monarchies in Jordan, Morocco and the Gulf countries.

In the case of post Arab Spring Jordan and Morocco, Muasher (2017, para. 3) demonstrates that the governments have resorted to silencing their protests through the implementation of 'cosmetic' façade reforms that have not been intended to affect (or change) the fundamental structure of power and domination of political elite, but rather as a way to reinforce the status quo. He argues that the governments in Jordan and Morocco have in many times resorted to stoking fear in the public sphere and among the protestors. The fate of Egypt and Libya was used to quieten (and suppress) the Moroccan protests, and the fate of Egypt and Syria was used to quieten (and tend) the fire of the Jordanian protests. In Bakhtin's terms, this state policy can be considered as monologic because it has reinforced the government's discourse that fundamentally refuses dialogism with protestors and asserts therefore a non-debatable and often insignificant public demands for change.

Second, Bakhtin's idealised representation of the population as consistently united is problematic on the grounds that individuals who participate in Jordanian protests and in social media activism differ in their demands (although some similarities remain). Freud is important here to talk about the role of individual agency and motivation for the expression of individual anger and release as a result of political

repression and economic inequalities. From the perspective of Freud, I argue that this description of the folk (as Bakhtin conceptualises it) as an 'idealised' social group is questionable because individuals are different, and identity in social media spaces is more a matter of individual influences and decisions. It shows Bakhtin's seeming dependence on a social duality: the 'folk' and the 'authorities' (in the context of this thesis Jordanian protesters or carnival-goers and the government). Indeed, his use of a social duality suggests that Bakhtin was heavily influenced by Marxist thinking: he insists on a uniform proletariat.

In his description of carnival, Bakhtin neglected to take into consideration the politics of carnival perhaps because of the extreme political oppression of the Stalinist regime. He argues for its being ephemeral, and that the carnival is mainly "apolitical" and less oppressive (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 6). To get his work past Soviet censorship, Bakhtin was perhaps obliged to make this point about carnival being apolitical and ephemeral. Bakhtin's geopolitical context must therefore be taken into consideration when we think about the production of cultural politics during Stalin's reign. I argue throughout this thesis that the concept of Bakhtinian carnival against power and repression remains very political. The nature of carnival joking in Jordanian social media spaces is itself politically loaded because many Jordanian carnival-goers have shown (and continue to show) resistance to power and authority.

Third, we might think of the impact of the Arab Spring as a significant social and political transformation on gender equality between men and women to talk about some problems and weaknesses of application of Bakhtin's theory of carnival to the Jordanian socio-political context after the Arab Spring. A feminist reading of Bakhtin's theory of carnival raises several issues about the masculinity of Bakhtin's ideas of carnival and popular resistance against power. Bakhtin's marketplace represents a masculinist discourse, where the streets are largely controlled by men. The way in which Bakhtin presents his theory of carnival and the role of the marketplace intensifies this ideology (carnival-goers are normally referred to with male pronouns).

In a feminist reading of Bakhtin's carnival and the marketplace, Ruth Ginsburg (1993) argues that an analysis of Bakhtin's carnival reveals masculinist features and, overall, a masculinist discourse (Ginsburg, 1993, pp. 169–170). She argues that despite the significance of female imagery in Bakhtin's analysis of Rabelais, the images of women in carnival and the grotesque are male dominated. This leaves women under-represented in carnival theory and in the carnival's ideological orientation and significance. The absence of women from the carnival square can be understood in line with the masculinisation of public places during the Middle Ages in Western Europe and in Bakhtin's particular focus on Rabelais and Dostoevsky (both men). This tendency might have imposed a hegemonic and masculinist discourse about street carnival and the marketplace, which is a very early 20th century

lens. The broad trends about the masculinity of carnivals are therefore unlikely to remain true in today's time.

In modern-day carnivals in streets and in social media spaces, protestors and carnival-goers are mostly young, and both male and female. As such, political participation in street protests is no longer, in Arab countries, restricted to men (Pratt, 2013). For example, in post Arab Spring Jordan, women took part in the 2018 protests that led to overthrow of Hani Al-Mulik's government over new tax bills and price increases (Kuttab, 2018). With the rise and development of modern digital technology in the last decade, the mode for modern-day 'carnivals' is now the social media spaces, and much less the streets and conventional public spaces. According to the most recent Arab social media report, the percentage of women who are using social media spaces in Jordan are more than men. 59.4% of Facebook users in Jordan are women (Salem, 2017, p. 40). This statistic is a testimony on women's active participation and interaction online, and perhaps even more in popular resistance against power and social orders. The fact that all humourists and commentators in this thesis are male has some methodological reasons. The researcher has only selected famous Jordanian humourists who have significantly contributed to the development of Jordanian humour since the Arab Spring.

On one hand, the Bakhtin's theory of carnival treats the carnival square and public spaces (whether physical or metaphorical) as places for

political struggle and rallies against dominant power (the government in today's context). On the other hand, the carnivalesque humour functions as a safety valve that both releases tensions (which can in fact be useful to those with political power) and can be a tool for resistance against many forms of power in government. This view on the carnivalesque makes Bakhtin and Freud complementary (Bakhtin on the collective psyche and Freud on the individual psyche). Bakhtin is useful when we talk about the collective experience of the social media and on using humour as a counter-political force and tool for resistance, while Freud is useful when we talk about some individual reactions experiences on using humour as a safety valve that releases individual repression and frustration about power and the government.

Finally, the extent to which Bakhtin's theory of carnival and the carnivalesque can be considered as an *effective* counter-political force and tool for popular resistance is highly debatable. Although Bakhtin understands this, not least in his frequent references to the ephemera of carnival, he tended to be empiricist in his argument about Rabelais and Dostoevsky. In his book chapter 'The origins of the political joke' (1988), which analyses political humour and satire under the Soviet authoritarian regimes, Gregor Benton arrived at a perfect and pertinent conclusion about the real impact of political humour and jokes on real life and politics. He argues that a

political joke will change nothing. It is the relentless enemy of greed, injustice, cruelty and oppression. It is not a form of active resistance. It reflects no political programme. It will mobilise no

one. Like the Jewish joke in its time, it is important for keeping society sane and stable. It cushions the blows of cruel governments and creates sweet illusions of revenge. It has the virtue of momentarily freeing the lives of millions from tensions and frustrations to which even the best organised political opposition can promise only long-term solutions, but its impact is as fleeting as the laughter it produces (Benton, 1988, p. 54).

Benton's description of political joke function is notable not least because it combines elements of those humour theories that stress the psychological purpose of humour with elements of those that argue for a socio-political dimension in humour. The most important difference with Benton rests on his emphasis on the fleeting and ultimately illusory nature of humour's contribution to political resistance and change. This notion fits well with Bakhtin's carnival, arguably another kind of transient 'playing at rebellion.' However, there is one problem with this line of argument. Benton seems to treat 'impact' rather simplistically, as if it is a linear and uni-directional phenomenon, when he talks about the fleeting moment of laughter and its negligible impact on the long term.

Humour in political resistance has almost never achieved any change in the real world. It probably is almost always fleeting and illusory. It probably almost never has, in the near to medium term, any direct impact on politics. However, I think political humour can have, in the longer term, indirect impact on politics. If members of a society become more sophisticated in their sense of humour, many people can become better critical thinkers in political analysis. For example, political

cartoons can be considered as one of the fastest and easiest 'windows' for understanding politics. Hence, political humour is certainly more cognitively complex than, say, lightbulb jokes, blonde jokes or elephant jokes. It can help people to become more courageous and confident when taking to the streets or online and demanding change through the expression of critical comments and concerns about political power. It can help them to become literate and cognizant of their socio-political and economic conditions as a result.

Although its impact is slow and indirect, with dispersed and hard-to-articulate effects, the people who are accustomed to political humour and satire can be liberated and empowered to create actual political change in the long term. As Bakhtin and Benton have explained, political humour rarely if ever has a direct and/or immediate impact on real life or politics. Perhaps it can have a slow and indirect impact through its subtle intellectual and psychological effects on people. This is because such resistance has an internalised and psychological component. It can allow people in the short to medium term to cope with socio-economic inequalities and political repression, but in the long run it can allow people to be more confident about themselves, to resist power and demand change.

In his analysis of political humour and satire under communism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, Christie Davies (2007) arrives at somewhat a similar conclusion about the role of political

humour shared under repressive regimes. He argues that political humour and socialist jokes, despite being apparently resistant, tend to have a negligible impact on reality. According to Davies (2007), political humour can therefore be considered, to a great extent, as *ineffective* form for popular resistance against power and authority. Here, Bakhtin and Davies' view on political humour and satire is a little problematic. I argue that political humour can be considered *ephemeral* if 'resistance' is linked to tangible effects on external structures and processes. However, if 'resistance' has an internalised and more individual and psychological component, then political humour can be considered *effective* because it allows individuals to cope with socio-economic inequalities and political repression. This Freudian individual focused analysis can be best understood when we think about the psychological effects of humour and popular resistance. This explanation suggests some weaknesses in the application of Bakhtin and Davies' theory about political humour and its impact on everyday life and politics against power.

In the context of post Arab Spring Jordan, social media humour has routinely suggested subversion that critiques social order and the government's rhetoric about reform and its processes. This form of subversion has ultimately been contained and resulted in minimal changes. Jordanians have resorted more to humour and satire in social media spaces (virtual spaces) because they might have unconsciously or consciously 'chosen' political resistance through social media spaces

due to the temporary suspension for time of carnival in the streets. Jordanian society has tended and continues to use political humour and satire for personal sanity (Freud's theory of humour provides a useful framework to understand this) so they can 'play at resistance,' rather than genuinely fighting for it in the actual carnival squares and public spaces. Perhaps the Bakhtinian framework in this thesis allows us to see a certain strand of Jordanian 'carnivals' on social media spaces (politically satirical humour) as intentionally non-potent resistance against the government. This form of online resistance against power may represent an effective tool for popular resistance if we think about humour and its relationship to the unconscious.

Bakhtin's account of carnival has focused on its ephemeral nature. According to Bakhtin, carnival acts as a kind of safety valve through which people 'let off steam' at times of protesting against power. By providing a temporary space for hedonism, carnival ultimately functions for and sustains the dominant system and its political inequalities. It can sometimes reinforce regime dominant values by contrasting them with their rule- and value-free opposites. Alternatively, that temporary nature of carnival can turn into rebellion by demonstrating its potency for counter-hegemonic actions against power and authority. Freud's ideas about humour provide a useful approach to think of the fleeting nature of carnivals in social media spaces. The role of the individual agency is important as a tool to control individual anger and repression (a pressure valve release).

In the context of Jordan after the Arab Spring, street and predominantly social media 'carnivals' reveal functional similarities to those that occurred in the Middle Ages in Catholic Europe in the sense that they were/are a time and place of socio-political 'flattening' and cathartic hedonism that did not/ does not provoke any social and political changes in reality. Very few 'carnival-goers' in Jordanian social media spaces have actually wanted to challenge (or change) the power of the King or the royal family. The carnival humour in Jordanian social media spaces has performed what has been called by scholars of Bakhtin as 'licensed disruption' because it has allowed ridicule of the government but not of the monarch, as chapter 5 shows.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored Bakhtin's theory of carnival and the carnivalesque as a framework for examining Jordanian politics and political humour in social media spaces after the 2011 Arab Spring revolutions. In discussing the significant role of social media in digital politics and online activism against the government in post Arab Spring Jordan, this chapter has argued that Bakhtin's 'marketplace' is now predominantly located in social media spaces, and much less the streets or conventional public spaces. The nature of the 'digital carnival' is in many ways just as carnivalesque, characterised as it is by, for example, polyphony, the overturning of social hierarchies, and the presence of the grotesque. This is evident from the examples of Jordanian social media spaces analysed in this chapter.

This chapter has identified some of the weaknesses that are associated with applications of Bakhtin's theory of carnival and the carnivalesque to the Jordanian socio-political context after the Arab Spring in terms of the representation of carnival and the populace as idealised and overwhelmingly positive, the absence of women in Bakhtin's carnival and marketplace, and the negligible impact of carnivalesque humour on Jordanian social media spaces. These weaknesses suggest that Bakhtin's theory of carnival would benefit from amendment or development in order to make it more useful as a tool for analysing modern-day carnivals in social media spaces. The applicability of Bakhtin and Freud to social media spaces shows how the

carnavalesque experiences can be both collective and individualised. Bakhtin is useful when we talk about the collective experience of social media and using humour as a counter-political force and tool for resistance, while Freud is useful when we talk about the individual's voices in it and how humour can function as a safety valve to release individual repression and frustration about power.

In the last chapter of this thesis, I set out to examine further the politics of popular resistance against the government in Jordanian political humour after the Arab Spring. I focus on what is 'done' in the space of the carnival in social media and how power is undermined but not necessarily brought up. The analysis of Jordanian political humour focuses primarily on the role of humour as a counter-political force and a tool for popular resistance against the government's rhetoric about reform and its processes of change in Jordanian social media spaces.

Chapter 5 Jordanian political humour after the Arab Spring

5.1 Introduction

In his book *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics* (1984b), Bakhtin highlighted the four major themes of the carnivalesque understanding of the world as demonstrated in his classic theory of carnival: familiar and free interaction between people, acceptance of eccentric behaviour, carnivalistic *mésalliances* or conjunctions/ combinations, and admittance of the sacrilegious (Bakhtin, 1984b, p. 123). These themes set by Bakhtin identify the four broad qualities of carnival life in the carnival square as well as the human relationships between those who participate in the carnival. In the context of Jordan after the 2011 Arab Spring revolutions, I have found that these carnival qualities offer a useful (but not perfect) approach to understand a wide range of politics and political humour shared in Jordanian social media spaces.

In this chapter, I address in much greater detail the application of key aspects of Bakhtin's theory of carnival to specific examples of Jordanian political humour available in Jordanian social media spaces. Jordanians' use of political humour against the government reveals counter-narratives that can be seen more specifically in relation to challenging state corruption (including cronyism, nepotism and embezzlement of government-funded projects), parliamentary elections, inflation, gerrymandering politics, and, most importantly, the

government's rhetoric about reform and its processes. To show the relevance and some of the weaknesses of the application of Bakhtin's ideas about carnival, this chapter examines key political cartoons, satirical articles, comedy sketches and internet memes that were produced by leading Jordanian humourists in Jordanian social media spaces. These include the works of Ahmad Hassan Al-Zou'bi (socio-political satirist and online activist), Emad Hajjaj, Omar Abdallat, Osama Hajjaj (all political cartoonists) and some examples of comedy sketches performed by Jordan's most famous comedian Musa Hijazin. The analysis in this chapter utilises the examination of five salient qualities of carnivalesque political humour in Jordanian social media spaces: praising the government (intentionally satirical); parodying the government; mocking the government; scatalogising the government and, finally, dethroning of the government (the temporarily and metaphorically comic death of the government). These five qualities emerged from the analysis of Jordanian political humour in the dataset (see the research methodology section in the introduction).

Analysis of these five qualities reveals the relevance and some of the weaknesses (in the Jordanian context) of Bakhtin's understanding of the carnival life in the actual carnival square in the streets or conventional public spaces. These qualities are (1) free and familiar contact among people that maintains equality and promotes egalitarian principles among all people who are participating in carnival; (2) eccentricity where life in the carnival square permits all forms of

eccentric and otherwise unacceptable behaviours; (3) carnivalesque *mésalliance* where life in the carnival square brings together people from all walks of life and unifies them; and (4) profanation where life in the carnival square helps carnival-goers strip the powerful people of their 'sacred' authority, and encourages instead resistance against them (Bakhtin, 1984b, p. 123). Considered in the context of political humour in Jordanian social media spaces after the Arab Spring, these four qualities make Bakhtin's theory of carnival and the carnivalesque a useful (but not perfect) framework for the present study of contemporary Jordanian political humour after the Arab Spring.

5.2 Qualities of Jordanian political humour

The analysis in this section examines ordinary people's resistance and its relation to Bakhtin's themes of degradation, the grotesque and subversion. It also scrutinises the extent to which Jordanian people online have shifted their tolerance of subversive political humour and satire against power and government from 2011. The analysis reveals that carnivalesque political humour in Jordanian social media spaces has been used as a tool to challenge people in power and poke fun at government articulation and official discourses, but not to overthrow (or attempt to) the entire regime. I argue that carnival humour in Jordanian social media spaces that allows ridicule of the government but not of the monarch appears to be as a form of *licenced disruption*, an idea that is used extensively by scholars of Bakhtin to talk about the popular politics of resistance and its limits and targets. In this section, the

analysis of Jordanian political humour after the Arab Spring focuses on the examination of five salient qualities of carnivalesque politics against the government and of political humour and satire in Jordanian social media spaces. These five key qualities are described as follows:

1. **Praising the government** (intentionally satirical): This quality focuses on a peculiar type of political humour and satire that defends power, rather than attacking it. It implies by intention an element of subversive humour and satire, but it never challenges government and its mainstream discourses. This quality was overlooked by Bakhtin, perhaps because he was writing in (disguised) opposition to the production of cultural politics and regime repression under the Stalinist regime
2. **Parodying the government**: This quality underlines Bakhtin's use of parody as a carnivalesque political tool that can deflate the serious tone of official discourse. The analysis in this quality focuses on three key sub-themes: corruption, inflation and parliamentary elections, including the weak function of Jordan's House of Parliament as a 'rubber stamp' for the government
3. **Mocking the government**: This quality deals with Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque as a counter-political force and tool for popular resistance against power (in this case, the Jordanian government's rhetoric about economic reform and its processes). It also focuses on other related carnivalesque qualities, such as degradation, the language of the marketplace and the hypocrisy

(the two lives) of the government's official discourse and statements

4. **Scatalogising the government:** This quality relates to Bakhtin's acknowledgment and analysis of the use of lower bodily functions for the purposes of making insult, degradation and expressions of resentment and frustration. This can be applied to the criticism of the Jordanian government's rhetoric about economic reform and its processes during and after the Arab Spring. The discussion of this quality includes a wide range of taboo topics, such as defecation, flatulence and urination, in order to highlight certain aspects of Jordanian political humour and satire in the context of social media spaces
5. **Dethroning the government:** This quality extends the application of Bakhtin's notion of decrowning in order express the popular resentment, frustration and restive views about the government. Although this dethroning (or overthrowing of political power) is not real, it shows how the Jordanian government's discourse about reform has been challenged, and how the Jordanian authorities have sometimes been stripped of their power in a very comic way, albeit temporarily and metaphorically.

5.2.1 Praising the government

This first quality focuses on three aspects of Bakhtin's notion of false "crowning," but develops the Bakhtinian notion of power and popular resistance to include praising the absurd and glorifying humour that defends power rather than attacking it. In political humour shared under repressive regimes, the celebration of the ruler and/or the repressive regime suggests what Bakhtin (1984a, p. 18) called a moment of insincere praise or false crowning and evaluation that is intentionally satirical and derogatory. Instead of ridiculing and mocking the ruler, jokesters use hyperbole or exaggerated claims to 'glorify' their ruler and elevate him to a godlike status that does no wrong. This glorification is false, inauthentic and sycophantic towards people in power. It brings to the fore the arrogance of the ruler and the audience's laughter at his actions that evoke humour and not celebration. This aspect of political humour and satire highlights the unpopularity of regime and ruler. It also reflects a growing disaffection with the regime in the eyes of the people. This form of 'exaggerated praise' where a comic effect is achieved not by challenging or inverting the status quo, but just by the unempowered overdoing of the praise is ironic. This is because irony, as evidence in this section shows, emerges from the exaggerations of power differentials and not from the subservience to the powerful. Ironic praise and criticism are two types of verbal irony (For recent application of verbal irony, see Bruntsch and Ruch, 2017 and Braun and Schmiedel, 2018).

In Bakhtin's notion of crowning, this exaltation aims to unexpectedly challenge the ruler and his power. This glorification is therefore ridiculous and insincere. In the context of political humour and satire in Jordan after the Arab Spring, the humourist (or jokester) is forced to live the *official life* that is often sanctioned by the ruler, and avoids therefore the *life of carnival square* that is free, unrestricted and full of ambivalent laughter towards power (Bakhtin, 1984b, p. 129). The humourist in this "monolithically serious and gloomy" world is ironically "subjugated to a strict hierarchical order, full of terror, dogmatism, reverence and piety" (Bakhtin, 1984b, pp. 129–130). As a result, the humourist exaggeratedly exalts the ruler, and chooses not to mock or ridicule the political system and power directly.

Examples of Bakhtin's notion of false crowning in Jordanian political humour in social media spaces after the Arab Spring can be seen in Figures 6, 7 and 8 below. The cartoon in Figure 6 was drawn by Jordanian political cartoonist Osama Hajjaj in 2014. Hajjaj used to work for the Jordanian government-owned daily newspapers, such as *Al-Ra'i* (The Opinion) and *Ad-Dustour* (The Constitution), and more recently for the privately-owned newspaper *Al-Arab Al-Yawm* (Arabs Today) before its shutdown in 2015. He is now working for London-based *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* (an independent pan-Arab daily newspaper).

In Figure 6 below, Hajjaj uses Musa Hijazin's well-known comic character Abu Saqer (father of Saqer) to comically 'celebrate' Prime

Minister Abdullah Ensour's birthday. Addressing Ensour using flowery language and embellished discourse that is intentionally satirical, Abu Saqer (left) quips in the callout "I have lit the people of Jordan on your auspicious birthday, Prime Minister." In Bakhtin's terms, this political cartoon highlights a moment of 'false crowning' that is flattery in nature. Instead of using a set of candles on a birthday cake, Hajjaj uses the ordinary people of Jordan in order to demonstrate the Jordanian government's repression and even aggression against its own people. The public disapproval of the government of Abdullah Ensour was growing after the government implemented strict austerity measures and increased the prices of food and fuel as part of a wider economic reform programme and restructuring, guided by the IMF, from 2012.



Figure 6. *Happy Birthday Prime Minister* [Cartoon], Osama Hajjaj, 2014

In Figures 7 and 8 below, Bakhtin's notion of false crowning can be seen with reference to the use of hyperbole and flattery as explained in the colloquial Jordanian Arabic word *Sahij* (a blind loyalist to the regime). Etymologically, the word *Sahij* is derived from the meaning of other Arabic words, such as applause or clapping. It is used locally among Jordanians in the streets and now, predominantly, in Jordanian social media spaces, to comically define a type of person who celebrates the actions of the government and exaggerates their decisions, although these actions are widely unpopular and sometimes seem to be unreasonable.

In Figure 7 below, Emad Hajjaj, another Jordanian political cartoonist who works for the government-owned newspaper *Al-Ra'i* and its sister daily *The Jordan Times*, resurrects the image of the notorious Abbasid caliph Al-Mutawakkil in order to make fun of those few Jordanian people who remain loyal to the government. By doing so, he recalls elements of false crowning and the use of hyperbole in past Arab civilisations, and comically links them to the current Jordanian socio-political situation after the Arab Spring. Today, Al-Mutawakkil is best remembered for his authoritarian regime style, as well as his insignificant government reform programmes that did not satisfy the public during the late period of the Abbasid Caliphate in the 9th century.

In this Figure, although the Abbasid caliph Al-Mutawakkil is presented as an idiot, he is exaggeratedly 'glorified' for his hunting incompetence by one of his accompanying ministers while on a desert trip. Here an anonymous minister (in this case a Jordanian *Sahij*) is seen greatly glorifying the tremendous incompetence of the caliph (in this case a Jordanian government official). The image of Al-Mutawakkil as incompetent is used here to reflect on today's Arab rulers and senior government officials, who were either removed or existed in disgrace during the 2011 Arab Spring revolutions.

The translation of Emad Hajjaj's political cartoon in Figure 8 below reads as follows: The Abbasid caliph Al-Mutawakkil was reported to have hit a little bird with a stone. However, the stone missed the bird. Fearful of calling the caliph an incredible idiot, the minister who accompanied the caliph chose to exaggerate the caliph's blatant incompetence by saying "You did a great job, caliph." He [the minister] claimed enthusiastically that the caliph had done the right thing to the bird. He indicated that the caliph had in fact *willingly* chosen to "let the bird remain alive and unharmed." Here occurred the punch line by the cartoonist: "It had been reported that this act of blind loyalty (known in Jordanian local context as *Tashija*, an act of applause or clapping) was considered amongst the earliest acts of wild loyalty in Arab history." The inclusion of Hajjaj's most famous comic character (Abu Mahjoob) is notable in this cartoon because it draws parallels between the minister and the developing group of the *Sahij* that has unconditionally

supported the regime and the government in Jordanian society from the time of the Arab Spring revolutions since 2011.



Figure 7. The first applause to people in power [Cartoon], Emad Hajjaj, 2015

In Bakhtin's terms, Emad Hajjaj's political cartoon (in Figure 7 above) provides an example of praising the absurd. The cartoon focuses on the tremendous incompetence of Arab rulers and official autocratic discourses. It criticises the mistakes of some contemporary Arab rulers that are sometimes 'glorified' and seen as miraculous with brilliant acts of heroism by a few people who remain loyal to their regimes after 2011, and who are too conservative about change. Some contemporary Arab rulers are set to rule for life and enjoy absolute monarchies, and in cases where there are elections, most elections are to varying extents fraudulent and manipulated for regime and government interests. For example, consider the results of the 2014 Syrian presidential elections

that kept the brutal regime of Bashar al-Assad in power, and the controversial 2018 Egyptian elections that renamed Abdel Fattah El-Sisi as President of Egypt and extended his rule for two additional terms, until 2034.

The third example of this quality depicts the carnivalesque act of Bakhtin's false crowning, but in the context of using a sacred formula that produces an explicit mockery of regime and structure of political power. In Figure 8 below, the internet meme portrays a new carnivalesque aspect of 'deferential humour' in Jordanian social media humour that defends power rather than attacking it. This carnivalesque aspect is seen through the total allegiance of one anonymous Jordanian *Sahij* to power and the government. The *Sahij* exalts a ruler's incompetent actions and pronounces them as 'incredibly great,' despite the ruler's blatant failure.

In Figure 8, the *Sahij* celebrates the inability of anonymous Arab ruler to hunt a wild rabbit at a close range. By showing flattery to the ruler, the *Sahij* has enthusiastically expressed his utmost surprise and glorification using the Arabic sacred religious formula "Subhan Allah," meaning 'Allah is perfect and free of defects.' The *Sahij* then exclaims "This is the first time I see a 'dead' rabbit running." The evocation of the sacred phrase in this internet meme is important because it is mainly used in Arabic to express excitement and admiration for someone else's works or deeds. The placing of the Arabic sacred formula

“Subhan Allah” aims to destabilise the genuine meaning of the expression in its normal religious discourse in Islam. Instead of admiring someone or something sincerely, the phrase is evoked to reflect an act of flattery and insincere praise to power.

This internet meme produces a profound element of praising the absurd which was impossible for Bakhtin to take into account in his theory of carnival and the carnivalesque. Here the carnival world is not reversed and mocked, but rather the ridiculous actions are being praised and glorified to achieve flattery and sycophancy that is understood by the viewer as ironic. The ruler is exalted to a godlike status, free of defects. The humour in this meme is an example of exaggerated praise that may have a hidden irony. People under authoritarian regimes can grow ‘fearful’ and scared of the regime. Because this false exaltation is insincere and crude, it implies in reality a fierce critique to power. It may also cause a ‘hidden’ laughter amongst the ruler’s entourage, and in the contemporary readership alike.



Figure 8. The loyalist's mindset [Internet meme], 2013

In Bakhtin's terms, this element of false crowning includes an aspect of *mésalliance*, where contradictory things are combined, as if they are homogenous. This carnivalesque act shows the use of a peculiar language that praises the absurd, as well as, in these examples, the use of some local Jordanian expressions that add further mockery to the situation. This notion about the carnivalesque is discussed in further detail under Bakhtin's notion of using the language of the marketplace in the carnival square.

In this first quality of Jordanian social media humour, political humour is based on a peculiar type of carnivalesque political humour that has tended to defend power rather than attacking it. This form of carnivalesque political humour was omitted from Bakhtin's ideas about carnival and the carnivalesque. It creates an imaginary world of

exaggerated praise for the purposes of promoting pleasure and entertainment among people who take to the carnival marketplace, which, in the modern period, predominantly comprises social media spaces.

The quality of carnivalesque political humour and satire does not lead people out of the existing social orders that are thoroughly managed by the ruling authority. It does not create a second world for carnival-goers. It shows how people's behaviours and attitudes towards power, surreptitiously ironic, are often imposed by some of the regime's existing patterns (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 9). In this carnivalesque understanding of the world, political humour asserts "all that was stable, unchanging, perennial: the existing hierarchy, the existing religious, political, and moral value, norms and prohibitions" are disputable (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 9). The autocratic discourse of the ruler and regime is, however, predominant and always tends to the triumphant.

This quality of the carnivalesque shows an interesting type of glorifying humour that presents itself in the context of Bakhtin's notion of false crowning and flattery. Here, the political power and authority, its official discourse and its ridiculous actions, are surprisingly celebrated by a small number of people who remain loyal to the regime, and who too have conservative views about change. The ruler (in this case a Jordanian government official) is depicted as infallible and therefore

exalted. The sanctity of the ruler is promoted and yet ridiculed in order to make fun of the ruler and his actions.

This type of carnivalesque political humour, which is shared under a repressive regime, can be linked to “the early period of the Roman state [when] the ceremonial of the triumphal procession included on almost equal terms the glorifying and the deriding of the victor ... The funeral ritual was also composed of lamenting (glorifying) and deriding the deceased” (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 6). In this type of glorifying humour that is intentionally satirical, the serious and the humorous are treated equally as sacred and ‘official.’ In Bakhtin’s terms, this ceremonial of the absurd implicitly represents a fierce type of criticism against the regime’s established orders and laws that ban the freedom of expression and criticism. It therefore encourages resistance against the regime’s repression. The humour expounded here in this quality about praising the government appears as a form of *licenced disruption* because it allows ridicule of the government but not of the monarch. It may be that this form of political humour has arisen because of the particularly Jordanian political context, with split power and leadership, with one branch ‘untouchable’ by, in this case, exaggerated praise or ironic praise.

5.2.2 Parodying the government

This quality focuses on the use of parody in Jordanian political humour shared in Jordanian social media spaces after the Arab Spring. In Bakhtin's theory of carnival and the carnivalesque, parody is considered as a kind of style that belongs to the culture of carnival and the carnivalesque. It represents a subversive form of humour that sheds light on the double-voicing discourse of political power and authority. It deflates the serious tone of official discourse and changes it into irony for further carnivalesque comic effects. According to Bakhtin, this can be done through the act of insertion, "a new semantic intention into a discourse which has, and which retains, an intention of its own" (Bakhtin, 1984b, p. 189).

Furthermore, in Bakhtin's terms, this type of parody reflects a carnivalesque discourse which recognises the idea of dialogism i.e. the multiplicity of voices that challenges the discourse of dominant power. This quality focuses on three key themes that are most parodied in Jordanian political humour and satire in Jordanian social media spaces: government corruption, inflation, and parliamentary elections. The last of these is notable because it draws on a popular perception of Jordan's House of Parliament as a 'rubber stamp' for the government.

As the discussion of this section will show, the use of parody, when referring to these issues, introduces an *antithetical* discourse that refutes the government's official discourse and invokes resistance against it. These issues are "re-evaluated and reinterpreted" to become "a ridiculous image," and "a comic carnival mask" that challenges people in power (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 77). The examples below show the relevance of Bakhtin's theory of carnival and the carnivalesque and its applicability to Jordanian political humour and satire after the Arab Spring.

Government corruption is one of the most parodied themes in Jordanian social media humour. Corruption in Jordan is not channelled through the direct involvement and actions of government, but rather through other illegal interpersonal actions that are often covered using interpersonal connections. This is known in the Jordanian context as *wasta*, which is defined as the intervention of a middleman. These informal interpersonal networks occur in several ways, including cronyism, favouritism, nepotism and bribery, in order to gain influence and advantage from people in power (Jones, 2016, p. 20). This explanation highlights the predominance of state corruption in Jordan.

In the context of Jordanian political humour after the Arab Spring, the government's rhetoric about challenging state corruption sometimes triggers carnivalesque politics and popular resistance. It thus promoted the use of parody to mock government actions towards fighting

corruption. The popular discourse about the government fighting corruption often sheds light on a type of government that tends to 'reward' the corrupt, and which has been unable to prosecute them. Through highlighting this ambivalence in the government's stance, Jordanian political humour in social media spaces has sought to challenge its discourse about fighting corruption. Social media humour has also introduced into that discourse a "semantic intention that is directly opposed to the original one" (Bakhtin, 1984b, p. 193). This element highlights the government's inability to fight corruption in Jordan.

For example, in the comedy sketch from which a still is shown below (Figure 9), the famous Jordanian humorous character Som'a (left), played by veteran comedian Musa Hijazin, is seen holding a floor wiper in an attempt to drive waves (for which, corruption) away from the shore (for which, Jordan). The use of the sea metaphor and waves refers to the impossibility of fighting corruption in Jordan. Feeling outraged, Abu Saqer (right), another humorous character that is played by Hijazin, approaches Som'a and rebukes him, and his useless actions. He (Abu Saqer) tries to convince Som'a that the Jordanian government itself is not 'fighting' corruption, but rather sponsoring it.

The parody in this comedy sketch resides in the use of homonym of the two Arabic words: *yukafy*' which means to 'reward', and *yukafeh* which means to 'combat.' The signpost in the video image below is indicative

of parody about the government's corruption and its inability to fight it. The sign reads as *The sea of corruption*, an implicit reference to the lenient actions of the Jordanian government towards fighting corruption and prosecution of the corrupt. The still image below is from a famous comedy sketch available at a Jordanian YouTube channel called *Takarub*, with a title that reads 'Som'a wants to "reward" corruption ... I mean to "challenge" government corruption' (Takarub, 2017).



Figure 9. A still of Musa Hijazin's comedy sketch's 'Som'a wants to reward corruption ... I mean to challenge government corruption' [Video file], 2017

Another example of carnivalesque political humour shared in Jordanian social media spaces after the Arab Spring is the famous politically satirical programme *Man-saf Baladi* (malapropism of Mansaf). This

programme is written and presented by the renowned Jordanian socio-political satirist Ahmad Hassan Al-Zou'bi. The title of the programme is itself ironic because it produces a humorous utterance and amusing effect. Mansaf (the name of a famous Jordanian dish) is being pronounced by the presenter as *Man-saf*, which is to be understood as *Who robbed my country?* In his interview with Jordan's *Al-Ghad* Newspaper on 10 June 2015, the satirist Al-Zou'bi indicated that the aim of this politically satirical programme is to "challenge corruption and expose the corrupt before the new generation" (Ali, 2015). He claimed that government corruption, not the IMF loans and deals, is the root cause of Jordan's economic crisis and thus the government's severe austerity measures. This programme highlights Jordan's economic problems and the negative consequences of the government's reform programmes that have proved to be disadvantageous to Jordan's economic independence and autonomy.

In one notable episode that parodies WikiLeaks, entitled 'Corruption offshore' (2016, April 10), Al-Zou'bi openly criticised the government's anti-corruption strategy. He argued that corruption is state-sponsored and more often fostered by some government officials for their own interests and not the country's. He maintained that the government is rather 'supporting' corruption, and not fighting it. In Figure 10 below, a still from the video, where he states that, "whenever we [people] disclose a corruption case, a government official will stand up and wrap up the case by any possible means." This comic parody indicates the

lack of confidence in the government's intentions about fighting corruption and prosecuting of the corrupt.

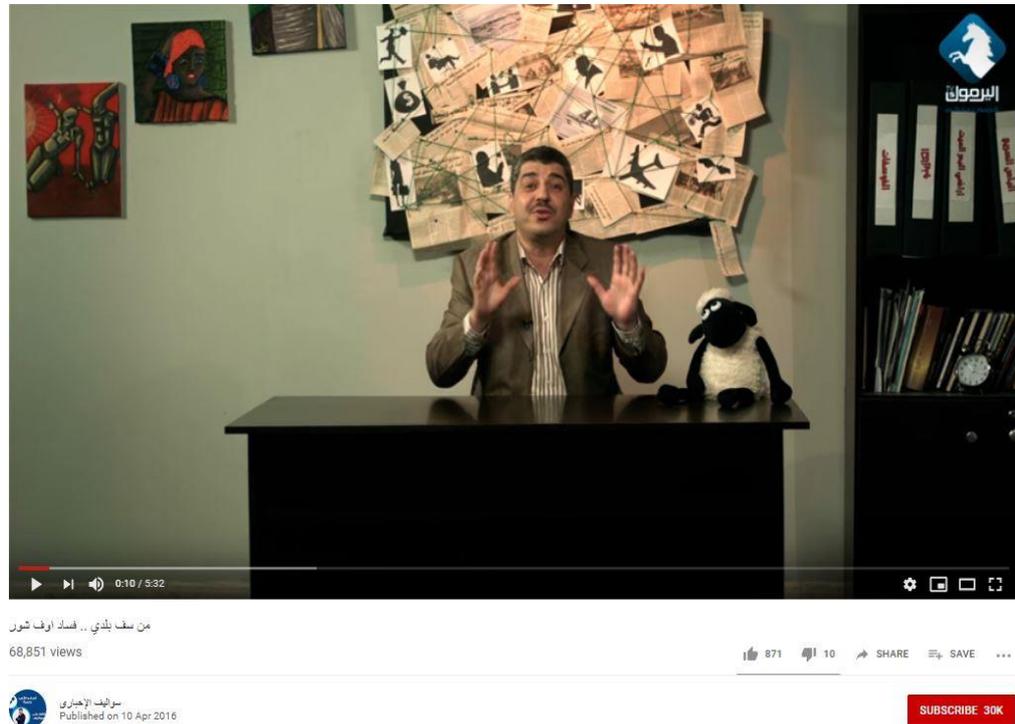


Figure 10. A still of Ahmad Hassan Al-Zou'bi's Man-saf Baladi [Video file], 2016

The second most parodied theme in Jordanian political humour in social media spaces after the Arab Spring is inflation. This economic term is concerned with the rise of prices and it has been accompanied by other austerity measures after each Jordan-IMF deal. For example, in Figure 11 below, one famous Jordanian internet meme shared in Jordanian social media spaces parodies government rhetoric about economic reform and its processes that have, contrary to expectations, resulted in negative consequences that ultimately hit the poor in Jordan.

The meme focuses on the rapid increase in the price of clothes during Eid (Muslim religious festival). The meme draws connections between Jordanian citizens and the fictional character of Tarzan, with a line that reads as “If someone sees a Jordanian who looks like Tarzan during Eid, one should not be surprised. Thanks to the government of Abu Zuhair (Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour), May Allah lengthen his term in power.” The meme below produces a specific type of carnivalesque political humour and satire that parodies the government’s economic plan that led unexpectedly to an increase in the prices of clothes during Eid. It also deflates the government’s official tone about the positive impact of government economic reform after the IMF loans since 2012.



Figure 11. The new customs fees on clothes [Internet meme], 2013

In the above Figure, the title of the Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour is crudely reduced to *Abu Zuhair* (Father of Zuhair). This caustic turn, which drops the PM's name and title and refers to him through his first-born son 'Zuhair,' is a rare indiscretion about those in power in Jordan. The reference to his premiership is erased here for the purposes of "uncrowning" and degradation, as the last section of this chapter on dethroning the government will show in greater detail. The meme strips the Prime Minister of his power and honorific title as Jordan's prime minister. The use of the language of the marketplace (in this case the Jordanian vernacular) is ambivalent and endowed with resistance to power. The Jordanian citizen who is dressed like Tarzan (where the body is emphasised and uncovered) shows the use of grotesque imagery, which Bakhtin highlights in his description of the carnivalesque.

The third most parodied theme in Jordanian political humour and satire in social media spaces after the Arab Spring is parliamentary elections. Jordanian parliamentary elections have become one of the core targets for carnivalesque politics and resistance against power in Jordanian social media spaces after the Arab Spring. Elections in Jordan are often gerrymandered to increase the number of MPs from tribal and rural areas where East Jordanians dwell, who are largely considered the bedrock of the regime. Jordan's electoral system has tended to safeguard the over-representation of Jordanians from the hinterlands against Jordanians of Palestinian origin in urban centres. Hence, most

of the notable results of Jordan's elections, such those that took place in 2007, 2010 and 2013, were somewhat 'forged,' in fear of producing a house of parliament from Jordanians of Palestinian origin from the urban centres, who may oppose traditional Jordanian political power and the government.

After the Arab Spring, the Jordanian government implemented a plan to reform Jordan's electoral law and system. In the last legislative elections in September 2016, Jordan moved onto a more democratic electoral design, through the implementation of electoral rolls and proportional representation, where voters have the right to select candidates from a voting bloc based on their preferences. Although this radically significant shift has been applauded by many local and international observers, the results of the 2016 election again produced a largely loyalist, weak and compliant house of parliament with little power in reality.

The results of the 2016 elections have led many Jordanians to continue to perceive their House of Representatives (*Majlis An-Nuwaab*) as a 'rubber stamp' for the government. For example, Omar Abdallat's political cartoon in Figure 12 emphasises this public issue through the representation of the members of Jordan's parliament as 'puppets' that are controlled by the central government. The cartoon portrays Jordan's House of Parliament as weak and incompetent, and whose decisions are heavily influenced by the central government's dictates.



Figure 12. Jordan's House of Parliament as a puppet to the government [Cartoon], Omar Abdallat, 2014

Jordan's most famous socio-political satirist Ahmad Hassan Al-Zou'bi made similar observations about the 2016 parliamentary elections. In one Facebook post published on 23 July 2016, he argued that the results of the 2016 parliamentary elections led in reality to no real democratic transition and change, as the government promised. In this Facebook post (see Figure 13 below), Al-Zou'bi parodied the 2016 parliamentary elections, stating that "Jordanian elections are *ba'el* (fruitless)." He noted that Al-Kalaldeh, [Chairman of the IEC], proclaimed that the possibility of one candidate's victory without receiving any votes would be possible. Here the satirist is parodying: "Yazem, what is wrong with you?" *Yazem* is a comic shorthand for *ya zalameh*, man in the Jordanian vernacular. He goes on: "under this

prejudiced electoral law (meaning the proportional representation electoral law), a candidate, as Al-Zou'bi proclaimed, can even win without running for an election." Figure 13 below shows Al-Zou'bi's Facebook post on his news satire agency (Sawaleif), which he established in 2011 as an online platform for criticising and making fun of the government and its official discourses.

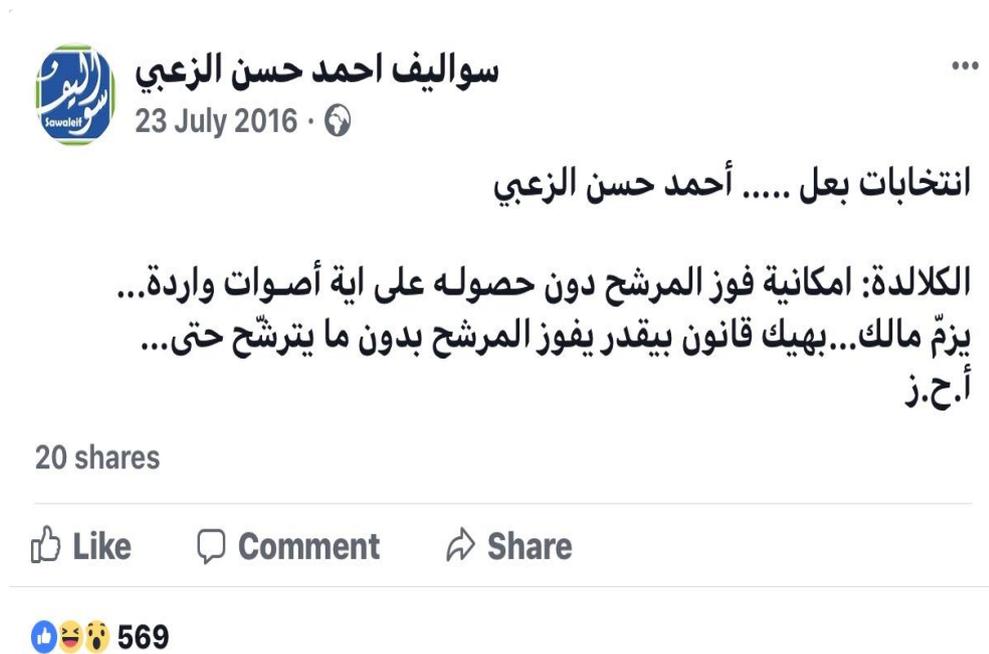


Figure 13. Jordanian parliamentary elections are *ba'el* (fruitless) [Facebook post], Ahmad Hassan Al-Zou'bi, 2016

Jordanian political humour and satire in social media spaces has produced some carnivalesque politics that are similar to those highlighted by Bakhtin in his analysis of Rabelais and 16th century France about “carnival festivities and the comic spectacles and rituals [that are] connected with them” (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 6). In the light of Bakhtin’s ideas about carnival, it can be argued that the Jordanian

elections have turned into comic protocols and a set of formalised, affirmative and cosmetic practices for reform that have produced so far little impact on the freedom of choice and democracy.

In Figure 13 above, the official tone of Khaled al-Kalaldeh, the Head of the Jordanian IEC, has been comically parodied to the extent that the entire process of electing in Jordan has been stripped of its prerogative for change. The placing of the local phrase “*ba’l*,” as used by the satirist Al-Zou’bi at the beginning of his Facebook post, parodies the end result of such elections. The reference for the Arabic word “*ba’l*” is farcical here. It represents an experiential metaphor that is borrowed from the agricultural domain. It refers to a plant (read elections) being left without being watered and nurtured, and thus dependent on rainfall to survive (read the execution of elections without proper government oversight and supervision). The metaphor shows the government’s apathy towards the result of the elections, as the would-be elected MPs will be entirely controlled by the central government. The would-be elected MPs are understood therefore to work for the government and not for the people.

Elections in Jordan have tended to sanction the government’s official stance about reinforcing the regime’s established norms. In Bakhtin’s terms, this stance has tended to present “the triumph of a truth [that is] already established, [which is] the predominant truth that was put forward as eternal and indisputable” (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 9). In this way,

elections in Jordan have consequently led to the perception of reinforcing the stable, hierarchical and the monolithic nature of the regime. In the light of Bakhtin's ideas about carnival, such perception is intolerant and oppressive because it can restrict the language of change and progress for modernity. As a result, the whole process of elections and democratisation in Jordan, in Bakhtin's terms, has become like "an entire system of crooked mirrors, elongating, diminishing, distorting in various directions and to various degrees" (Bakhtin, 1984b, p. 127). The views of Al-Zou'bi about elections in Jordan suggest that the later have had in reality little impact on political change.

To sum up, the use of parody in Jordanian political humour in social media spaces after the Arab Spring has targeted, mostly, three key themes: government corruption, inflation and parliamentary elections. This form of carnivalesque parody against power was not expounded and developed by Bakhtin. This is perhaps because of the oppressive and dangerous regime in which he lived, or, more likely, because it was just not part of the texts he studied (in this case the work of Rabelais and Dostoevsky). Jordanian political humour and satire after the Arab Spring has exposed to the people the true meaning of the government's rhetoric, and parody has embodied its lower credibility among carnival-goers in Jordanian social media spaces.

From a Bakhtinian perspective, the use of parody in Jordanian political humour and satire has replaced the semantic intention of the government's rhetoric about reform with a set of words and phrases that have produced comic and parodic effects among the carnival-goers in Jordanian social media spaces. Such parody has some connections and links with the counter-political culture of carnival in the Middle Ages, and the disaffected public in the Soviet Union. In the context of Jordanian political humour after the Arab Spring, parody has functioned as a tool for counter-political force against the government's rhetoric about reform and its processes. The use of parody in such context has become a subversive tool that has enabled many Jordanian people online to fiercely critique the manipulative use of language produced by government officials when addressing the public. Such use of parody relates to Bakhtin's theory of carnival and the carnivalesque and its application to understand modern-day carnivals in social media spaces. The humour expounded in this quality performs a *licensed disruption* because it allows parody of the government but not of the monarch. Such parody appears to be presenting opposing points of view but are in fact reinforcing the regime's core issues and norms.

5.2.3 Mocking the government

In this quality, Jordanian political humour moves from 'glorifying' the government to provocatively challenging the power of government. This is done through the degradation of the lofty image of, in these examples, the Prime Minister, and some government officials. In contrast to the earlier form of glorifying humour, the mocking in this quality is expressed using the use of unironically crude language (the language of the marketplace), ambiguity and indirect speech acts to promote popular resistance against political power. This approach makes Jordanian political humour after the Arab Spring more subversive than infringing in nature because it implies a strong degree of disrespect that speaks truth to power.

This quality of Jordanian social media humour relates to three context-relevant applications of Bakhtin's notion of mocking dominant power and its hegemonic discourse: (1) the use of the carnivalesque as a counter-political force and tool for resistance against the government's rhetoric about economic reform, which has had negative impacts on the livelihood of many Jordanians, (2) the use of the grotesque for mocking senior government officials, and (3) the use of hypocrisy (Bakhtin's two lives) against government statements: one official, and the second evoking the life of carnival.

In this quality as applied to this context, carnivalesque political humour plays out as a counter-narrative against the government's rhetoric about economic reform. It implies particular popular resistance against government austerity measures that lifted subsidies and increased the price of food and fuel after the Jordan-IMF deals from 2012. The Jordan-IMF deals were meant to introduce new, reforming fiscal and monetary policies to reduce the country's burgeoning fiscal deficit and national debt (The IMF, Press Release, 2012). However, the deals have proven to be repressive and disadvantageous to Jordan's economic independence and autonomy. For example, in Figure 14 below, government rhetoric about economic reform has been comically mocked, ridiculed and called into question.

The cartoon shows a Jordanian citizen engaged in a hypothetical conversation with the Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour. The Jordanian citizen, seen in a skeleton form, asks Prime Minister Ensour about the end result of the government's economic reform programme. The citizen claims that "We (Jordanians) are about to disappear." The Prime Minister (left) responds too coldly to the Jordanian citizen and asks him to be patient about the result of the economic reform programme. Addressing the citizen, the Prime Minister says, "No man, I can see that you still have a little bit of spirit (soul) to support government economic reform programmes."



Figure 14. The impact of Jordan's economic reform programme [Cartoon], Alaa Tabash, 2014

In Bakhtin's terms, this cartoon uses the carnivalesque and the language of the marketplace as a counter-narrative to the government rhetoric about economic reform and its processes. The mockery in this cartoon above resides in the implicit meaning of the Jordanian Arabic colloquial expression "*Ihna khalasna 'ala el-akher*," meaning "We [Jordanians] are about to disappear." The Jordanian citizen looks skeletal and nearly dead, reflecting his poor health and economic status following government economic reform. This colloquial expression has a meaning in local Jordanian culture. It connotes the demise of someone or something due to the impact of an external and greater power (in this case the government). The expression conveys the message that many Jordanians are no longer able to bear the

government's economic reform programme and the IMF-guided financial policy.

In Figure 14 above, the carnivalesque political humour resides in the cold response received from Jordan's Prime Minister Ensour when he replies "*La ya zem ... ana shayef inu dhayel feek shwayet rouh,*" which can be literally translated as "No man, I can see that you still have a little bit of spirit (soul) to support government economic reform programmes." The mockery in this cartoon is noted when the Prime Minister uses the colloquial shorthand "*la ya zem*" for "*la ya zalameh* (No man)" in order to denote an element of informal fraternity between the Prime Minister and the Jordanian citizen. In local Jordanian culture, the use of informal language connotes an element of 'bromance' between men.

Here the conversation divorces the Prime Minister from his 'glorified' status and achieves therefore an element of Bakhtin's theme of the carnivalesque as a tool against political power and people in authority. The Prime Minister is portrayed as apathetic and careless. He uses the informal language of the marketplace that further enhances the mocking of the dominant force and its attitudes towards the ordinary people. This discourse represents, in Bakhtin's terms, an "internally persuasive discourse" in which the Jordanian citizen's use of colloquial linguistic expression provides "newer and more novel ways of meaning" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 346). The colloquial discourse in the cartoon above is

infused with persuasive double-voiced words. This wording in the cartoon represents, in Bakhtin's terms, a counter-discourse that is "half-ours and half-someone else's" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 345). In other words, part of the meaning in the citizen's words belong to the denotative meaning about 'the demise of Jordanians,' but the other part, belongs to the connotative meaning about the negative impact of economic reform programme.

The carnivalesque politics against government emerges from the evasive use of language that echoes two different voices, implicitly challenging the government's rhetoric about economic reform, and explicitly confronting the result. This interplay triggers, in Bakhtin's terms, an element of "festive laughter" that both mocks and derides the political power. The result is similar to what Badarneh (2011) termed in his analysis of Arab political jokes a "centrifugal" unofficial discourse (Badarneh, 2011, p. 308). The words of the Jordanian citizen are infused with an implicit act of resistance against power, which is an essential element of Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque.

The mode of Bakhtin's carnivalesque resistance is primarily achieved using satire and ridicule, and not through direct opposition in the streets. As such, the cartoon reflects the use of carnivalesque political humour and satire as a subversive communication strategy against the government. The words of the Jordanian citizen show an attitude of

irreverence toward the official discourse of the government, and a desire to mock the government and its economic reform programme.

In post Arab Spring Jordan, it should be noted that the government has been given some 'derogatory' labels, such as 'the government of collection,' 'the government of corruption,' 'the government of high prices' and 'the government of taxation.' As a result, Jordanian political humour and satire in Jordanian social media spaces after the Arab Spring has always tended (and continues to) emphasise a type of government that frequently resorts to ordinary people's pockets, rather than the elite's, as a means to reduce the country's fiscal deficit and public debt.

For example, in one politically satirical article 'Why the people of Jordan reject the government's nuclear programme' (2014), Jordan's most famous political satirist and online activist Ahmad Hassan Al-Zou'bi mocks the government's narrative about the guaranteed success of Jordan's nuclear reactor in saving energy. In this article, he refutes the official statements made by Dr Khalid Touqan, the President of Jordan Atomic Energy Commission, about Japan's mistakes. Al-Zou'bi argues that Jordan, given its new experience in this field, will not overcome the problems that faced Japan. The satirist Al-Zou'bi mocks Touqan's unconventional and hard-to-believe explanation that the failure of Japan's nuclear programme was attributed to a small 'administrative'

mistake that could have been avoided if managed properly by the Japanese government.

In this satirical article, Al-Zou'bi mocks the Jordanian government's rhetoric about the safety of its nuclear programme, compared to Japan's programme. He argues that "if the Japanese people, who know how to do kohl for one lice's eyelid, have committed a small administrative fault in their nuclear programme, how can Jordan, which has little experience in this field, be immune" (Al-Zou'bi, 2014). It is observable that the satirist's use of mockery of the official government statements about reform suggests that many Jordanian people do not now trust their government.

Most Jordanians, according to an opinion poll conducted by the University of Jordan's Centre for Strategic Studies in 2019, remain very sceptical about the government's reassuring statements regarding the guaranteed success of Jordan's reform programmes and the country's future. The survey shows that 65% of the Jordanian people believed the government is going in the wrong direction (Husseini, 2019). Overall, the results show that level of trust between the government and people in Jordan is decreasing rapidly.

Omar Abdallat's political cartoons in Figures 15 and 16 below perfectly reflect this type of carnivalesque political humour that challenges the power of the government and the regime's established idea about

Jordan being the only oasis for peace, security and stability in the Middle East region. In Figure 15, the political cartoon mocks the state of inertia of the Jordanian government amid growing fears of nuclear attacks in neighbouring Syria. The cartoonist allegedly reports that even the government of Israel (Jordan's enemy) has managed to distribute nuclear masks to its citizens. However, the government of Jordan has not even distributed *Hisn al-Muslim* (Fortress of the Muslim), which refers to supplications from the Quran and the Sunnah (narrations of Prophet Muhammad's sayings and acts and those of his companions) in times of fear and insecurity.

The humour in this political cartoon resists the regime's promotion of the idea of Jordan's security and stability. In contradiction, the cartoon highlights the greater state responsibility for the safety and security of its citizens in non-Arab countries (Israel in this context) than those in Arab countries, such as Jordan. The cartoonist has implied therefore that living in Israel is better than Jordan, when it comes to the state's responsibility for the safety and security of its citizens at times of war.



Figure 15. Distribution of nuclear masks to the people of Israel [Cartoon], Omar Abdallat, 2013

In Bakhtin's terms, the humour in the above cartoon is subversive because it challenges the established regime's idea about Jordan's security and stability. By the same token, in Figure 16 below, the cartoonist Abdallat mocks the very basic idea of the government's discourse about its economic reform programme. He is pessimistic and implies in the cartoon below that "waiting for a progressive government reform programme is like waiting for Haifa Wehbe to appear on the Al-Resalah Satellite Channel." The cartoonist reflects that waiting for the implementation of a genuine government economic reform programme in Jordan is difficult, if not impossible. This explanation is based on the failure of past government policies on economic reform, and how they have adversely impacted ordinary people's living.

In this cartoon, Abdallat mocks Jordan's economic reform and compares it with the unlikely act of waiting for Haifa Wehbe, infamous Lebanese singer and actress, to appear on Al-Resalah, an Islam-based satellite channel that airs from Saudi Arabia and which would never sanction the appearance of Ms Wehbe in its broadcasts. The view of Wehbe's chest and body suggest a powerfully sexualised image. The notion of the use of over-sexualised images, taboos and scatological humour in Jordanian political humour after the Arab Spring is discussed in further detail in section 4 of this chapter: scatalogising the government. In Figure 16 below, the cartoonist is asserting that a genuine economic reform programme has not and will never be achieved in Jordan, given the government's unwillingness to implement real reform programmes. Hence, the cartoon directly reflects the lack of confidence in official discourse about economic reform, based on the current government approach that has benefited only the political elite and their entourage.



Figure 16. Waiting for a Jordanian government progressive reform is like waiting for Haifa Wehbe to appear on Al-Resalah [Cartoon], Omar Abdallat, 2015

Furthermore, in Jordanian political humour after the Arab Spring, the image of the belly has been a source for the grotesque, with reference to the corruption of some government officials and the political elite. Figure 17 below shows a Jordanian citizen, pointing to the belly of a government official, and asking him “Where did you get that from?”, as an indication of government corruption. The government official is clearly represented with a grotesque image that is related to overeating and greed. The cartoonist has also made the official’s belly a safe to show the corruption political elite. In Bakhtin’s terms, the belly relates to acts of pregnancy and birth, which Bakhtin highlighted in Rabelais’ *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, two giants. The image of the belly is also central to Bakhtin’s notions of the grotesque body, and the belly-laugh.

In Bakhtin's ideas about carnival, the belly is fundamentally linked to carnivalesque politics against power because it represents an element of subversion and resistance to people in power.

According to Bakhtin, the belly is one of the essential sources for degradation. It is also sometimes used in grotesque realism to draw reference to the lower bodily acts of defecation and excess. The belly has also been related to other acts of regeneration and production. To substantiate this claim, Bakhtin has argued that degradation "digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only destructive, negative aspect, but also regenerating one" (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 21). Therefore, the image that presents the government official with a belly suggests a perfect way for degradation and debasement in Bakhtinian terms, as reflected in political humour and satire in Jordanian social media spaces after the Arab Spring.



Figure 17. This is from the blessing of my God [Cartoon], Osama Hajjaj, 2013

In political humour and satire shared under repressive authoritarian regimes, Bakhtin highlights (rather indirectly because of the oppressive and dangerous regime in which he lived) the state of ambivalence and duplicity of the official discourse of these regimes. His argument is outlined through his concept of the “two lives” of regime: one official, which is filled with fear, and the other the life of carnival, which he defines as a permitted violation of established norms that are often endorsed by a repressive regime (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 96). Bakhtin’s notion of licensed transgression is useful when we think about the degree of criticism that is allowed, increasingly albeit inconsistently in Jordan, by those in power to enable the people to let off steam and to cope with socio-economic inequalities and political repression.

In Figure 18 below, Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour is said to have proclaimed two official (but different) statements about his opinion on military actions and interventions in Syria. In the morning, he officially states that “We are with any military actions in Syria.” At night, however, he officially declares that “We are against any military actions in Syria.” Here, the Prime Minister gives two official statements, one public and one private, which makes Bakhtin’s conception of the “two lives” pertinent. These two statements aim to express an equivocal position

and to distract public opinion about a particularly sensitive issue for many Jordanians.

To explain Bakhtin's ideas about carnival, the internet meme in Figure 13 below mocks the gap between the government's public discourse and its private position. The placing of the famous Egyptian actor Saeed Saleh (right) from the comedy play *Madrasat el-moshaghebeen* (The school of the mischievous, 1973) further mocks the Prime Minister's two official statements. This is done by inserting a 'new third life' that calls for opposition and resistance towards the government because of its two different stances: 'for' and 'against.' The inclusion of the Egyptian comedian is intentionally farcical because it makes fun of the government's two opinions about military actions and interventions in Syria.



Figure 18. Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour's position towards military actions and interventions in Syria [Internet meme], 2013

According to Badarneh (2011, p. 314), Bakhtin's ideas about carnival highlight two different approaches. The first is "the official life," which "sanctions and supports what the foreigner is about to commit against a 'fraternal country,' the term favoured by the official discourse of the regime." The second life, as Bakhtin conceptualises it, is "the life of carnival square," which is "free and unrestricted, [and] full of ambivalent laughter" (Bakhtin, 1984b, p. 129). In the view of the meme above, the second approach is apparent when the Prime Minister stands in support of public demands (albeit falsely) and is portrayed as saying "We are against any military actions in Syria."

According to Bakhtin (1984b, p. 130), "both these [two lives] are legitimate" for carnival-goers. These two lives contribute to the carnivalesque theme of *mésalliance* which combines the opposites or the grotesque in order to create a mockery of political power and its official discourse. As such, Bakhtin's concept of the *two lives* is necessary to understand differences in the government's official discourse and its carnivalistic *mésalliances*, which have created mockery among many Jordanians in social media spaces.

As evidence analysed here shows, Jordanian political humour and satire shared in Jordanian social media spaces after the Arab Spring has thus become a tool for carnivalesque politics and power resistance. It uses a subversive tool for expressing resistance and disaffection with the government and its official discourse about reform. The mode of

resistance here is the mode of satire and critique, and above all the use of mockery as a tool to challenge the legitimacy of political power. This quality has identified the relevance and the application of Bakhtin's ideas about carnival to Jordanian humour after the Arab Spring. The humour expounded here about the mocking of the government performs a *licensed disruption* of accepted societal and political norms because it allows mock of the government but not of the monarch. Such mockery encourages a certain degree of criticism, but within the confined limits and accepted societal norms in Jordan.

5.2.4 Scatologising the government

In this fourth quality, I focus on how Jordanian political humour after the Arab Spring has used bodily functions to degrade, disrupt, and express resentment and frustration over the government's economic and political reform programmes. Scatological humour (also known as toilet humour) uses a wide range of taboo topics, such as defecation, flatulence, urination and other types of lower body functions (Badarneh, 2011, p. 321). Jordanian scatological humour has involved a wide range of references to body parts, similar to those identified by Bakhtin, such as "apertures or convexities, or various ramifications and offshoots: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, [and] the nose" (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 26).

In Bakhtin's terms, scatological humour and satire can be considered a key and effective device for degradation and insult to people in power. Through degradation, the sanctity and solemnity of a government's official discourse is ridiculed and put into question, with the purpose of challenging and deflating it. The official discourse becomes therefore the subject of comic parody. According to Badarneh (2011), this type of humour is associated with a high level of risk because it "associates the regime with the lower stratum of the body, which is extremely insulting in social and cultural terms" (Badarneh, 2011, p. 321). This explanation suggests that such a type of carnivalesque political humour is precarious because it involves the use of the grotesque and sexual analogy in describing political power and official discourse.

Examples of scatological humour can be found in earlier Jordanian political humour during the 1996 Bread Riots. That year witnessed a crucial government economic decision that removed state subsidies and offered a compensation mechanism to mitigate the impact on the poor of the subsequent increase in prices. For the purposes of clarifying the government's intention and proposed plan, the then Prime Minister, Abdul-Karim Al-Kabariti (in office from February 1995 to March 1997), unintentionally stated in a news conference "... *ad-daf' qabel al-raf'*," which can be literally translated as paying [the people] before raising [the prices]. The Prime Minister was meant to say that the government would first compensate the poor, before raising the subsidies. However, the phraseology was deliberately interpreted by many ordinary Jordanians in the streets as carrying out a sexual act of penetration and "striking a deal with a prostitute" (Farghal, 2006, para. 7; Badarneh, 2011, p. 319). The phraseology was derived from the local Jordanian culture and pertains to the interpretation of heterosexual intercourse, where the man raises high his partner's leg before penetrating her.

As a result, the government's solemn statement about economic reform was comically and mischievously viewed by many Jordanians as a symbolic act of prostitution, where the government aimed to penetrate the poor. Since then, that phrase has been widely used by many ordinary Jordanians to poke fun at the government's intentions and economic plans and woes. Drawing on Bakhtin's notion of the grotesque, the carnivalesque images of prostitution and copulation

portrayed in such contexts are used to comically challenge the authoritative role of the government, and its lofty image. This form of scatological political humour and satire is notable because it has created what Charles Schutz (1976, p. 67) called a “psychological equality” between the lofty and the low, where the government and the poor are equal. The transformation of the government’s rhetoric about economic reform into grotesque images and acts of sexual intercourse serves to challenge the government’s rhetoric about economic reform, and further degrade the dominant power and its superiority over the ordinary people.

Jordanian socio-political humourists and satirists have used their social media spaces as a platform to present a wide range of scatological humour and satire in order to make fun of the government and its rhetoric about economic and political reforms. For example, in Figure 19 below, Omar Abdallat's political cartoon pokes fun at the negative impact of economic reform on the poor through the depiction of government economic reform as *khawazigs* (impalements) that aim metaphorically to ‘penetrate’ the people. This cartoon refers to what Bakhtin calls “the transfer of every high ceremonial gesture or ritual to the material sphere” (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 20). The image of the triangle (in the form of an impalement) that touches the anus indicates a sexual allusion to the negative impact of economic reform in Jordan after the Arab Spring. The cartoon aims to criticise Prime Minister Abdullah

Ensour's statement about the government's willingness to persist with its subsidy removal and overall economic reform.

To achieve its carnivalesque scatological parody, the cartoon uses the voice of one Jordanian citizen (sitting as if impaled) ironically urging the Prime Minister to keep penetrating. Furthermore, the cartoon involves a sexually motivated allusion based on the implicit meaning of *khawazig* (impalement) in the Jordanian socio-cultural context. It should be noted that the act of impalement is an old method of torturing that involved the act of penetration of a human in order to achieve a partial or complete perforation as a punishment for major crimes against the state.

In the light of Bakhtin's theory of carnival and the carnivalesque, the cartoon achieves its humorous effect from the voice of the citizen who urged the Prime Minister to keep penetrating. The Jordanian colloquial phrase "*rouh ya kbeer,*" which literally can be translated as "Go on, big boss," implies a surprising degree of the citizen's satisfaction despite being impaled. Many Jordanians in social media spaces have used the term 'impalement' as a tool to scatologise the government's decisions after each increase in prices, including electricity, food and fuel.



Figure 19. Jordan's Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour: There will be no more increase of prices [Cartoon], Omar Abdallat, 2013

A second scatological example analysed here comes from another widely circulated local phrase which reads as *As-Sha'ab makel kharaa doultak*, which can be translated as "The people of Jordan are hungry ... They are eating shit, Prime Minister" (Malkawi, 2017). The phrase has been widespread in Jordanian social media spaces and its first recorded use was viewed by thousands of people on YouTube at the time of writing this thesis. The phrase was uttered directly by a local Jordanian citizen to the Prime Minister Hani al-Mulki when he visited the city of Irbid, in the north of Jordan, in April 2017. The phrase metaphorically depicts the effect of the government economic reform programme on the poor, and links it with the lowering act of defecation, as in the case of carnivalesque, scatological political humour and satire. It was also used frequently as a subversive tool by young Jordanian

people in social media spaces after the 2011–12 protests that demanded political reform, and after the 2018 protests over tax increases and increasing IMF-backed reform and austerity measures.

Using scatological humour, carnivalesque Jordanian political humour in social media spaces has been notable because it has created a grotesque image of the government's rhetoric about economic reform, and its negative impact on the poor. In their book *The politics and poetics of transgression* (1986), Peter Stallybrass and Allon White argued that the grotesque body has a "transformative power" that helps to challenge the lofty and their divine status, and treats them as normal human beings (1986, p. 43). From this perspective, the grotesque in carnivalesque Jordanian political humour in social media spaces after has operated as a vehicle to critique the government's dominant power and its overall economic methodology about reform.

In this quality, the government has been transformed into a perpetrator of sexual act as in the two local phrases: "*ad-daf' qabel al-raf'*" and "*As-Sha'ab makel kharaa doultak,*" and also as in Figure 19 above. These examples have demonstrated the relevance of Bakhtin's theory of carnival and the carnivalesque as a framework to understand the negative impact of the Jordanian government's rhetoric about reform and its processes among carnival-goes in Jordanian social media spaces. The reaction of some Jordanian people to these phrases was evident in the number of views, likes and shares in social media

spaces. Many comedy videos have implied sexual analogies of the government's rhetoric about economic reform and its negative impacts on people.

Other corporeal and sexual references can be found in political cartoons that were drawn by Jordanian political cartoonist Omar Abdallat. For example, in Figure 20 below, the cartoonist parodies the Prime Minister's official discourse about the proposed economic conditions that were set to get improved after a period of 9 months with an inserted comic line that reads as "I do not know if this is *tasrih* (official statement), or *talqih* (fertilisation)." This scatological humour comes from the use of two rhyming Arabic words: *tasrih* which can be literally translated as 'declare' and *talqih* which can be literally translated as 'impregnate.' These two words give reference to the act of copulation between the government and Jordanian people. That nine-month period here is indicative to the meaning of scatological humour because it relates to the life cycle of a foetus and the process of pregnancy, which Bakhtin highlighted in his analysis of Rabelais' 16th century *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. As the political cartoon below shows, the government is metaphorically seen as a 'sperm,' and the local Jordanian citizen is depicted as an 'ovum,' in order to create this notably carnivalesque sexual imagery of power.



Figure 20. Jordan's Prime Minister Hani al-Mulki: Economic and living conditions will get improved after 9 months [Cartoon], Omar Abdallat, 2017

The use in Jordanian political humour of the lower functions of the body is significant because such functions are extremely offensive, pejorative and insulting in local Jordanian cultural norms. References to sexual organs and other sexual behaviours and imagery have been extremely taboo in Jordanian society and in public settings. Jokes of this type were restricted to intimates before the Arab Spring. However, with the notable political influence of the counterculture of the Arab Spring and emergence of social media spaces in the last decade, jokes that allude to sexual analogies have become more prominent in Jordanian social media spaces. They have been used as a tool to further critique the government and the negative impact of its economic and political reform programmes on people's lives.

Today, these sexual jokes are sometimes shared overtly in public discourses, and predominantly in Jordanian social media spaces, with less attention to individual reservations and local cultural restrictions. This usage suggests that this kind of scatological humour was always there in Jordan before the Arab Spring, but it was hidden by local cultural norms that prohibited its wider circulation. I argue that there are two factors that gave rise to the development of scatological humour in Jordanian society since 2011: (1) the Arab Spring, which has instigated a lasting socio-political and cultural shift, and (2) social media technology, which can, if used wisely, permit anonymity. These two factors have arguably liberated this kind of latent humour, which seems not to have been imported from other cultures. This kind of scatological humour has been widely used as a tool for criticising the government and the negative impact of economic reform programmes, perhaps because it has created a lasting cultural shift in Jordanian society after the Arab Spring. The humour expounded here about scatologising the government performs a *licensed corruption* because it allows scatologising the government but not of the monarch. Such use of scatological humour that alludes to sexual analogies and the lower body functions was found in earlier Jordanian political humour but grew even faster after the Arab Spring and advancement in social media technology from 2011.

5.2.5 Dethroning the government

In this final quality, examples of carnivalesque political humour and satire in Jordanian social media spaces will be linked to Bakhtin's notions of decrowning and the comic death of the lofty (temporary and imaginary). In the first quality identified in this chapter, it was shown that the lofty image of the prime minister has been exaggeratedly glorified and exalted by some Jordanian humourists in order to poke fun at the government. However, political humour that demands the metaphorical dethroning of prime ministers can arguably be considered unprecedented in the relatively short historical tradition of Jordanian political humour since 1989.

Early Jordanian political humour and satire tended to maintain a very respectful stance towards the government and the political elite, using affectionate satire that defended power rather than attacking it.

Examples of this satire are available in the politically satirical theatre of Hisham Yanis and Nabil Sawalha in the early 1990s. However, the 'new' form of political humour and satire that calls for the dethroning of political power could not have existed without the socio-political impacts of the Arab Spring revolutions and the resulting 2011–12 protests that removed the state of sanctity around government officials.

In this last quality of Jordanian political humour and satire in social media spaces, the Jordanian prime minister, in Bakhtinian terms, "is beaten and mocked" (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 207). It prepares the "carnival

king” (read Jordan’s prime minister) for “mock crowning and subsequent decrownings” (Bakhtin, 1984b, p. 124). This explanation emphasises that the glorifying humour, outlined in the first quality, is intentionally satirical and insincere to power. It alludes to the prime minister’s ‘comic death’ and dethroning from power.

In the context of Jordanian political humour shared in social media spaces, the act of dethroning happens when the prime minister is no longer appreciated and celebrated by the public at large. For example, one recent Jordanian political cartoon by Emad Hajjaj portrayed Jordanian prime ministers as ‘light bulbs’ with external hands (most probably by the royal hands) controlling them, replacing one bulb after another, when convenient. This example relates to Bakhtin’s notions of decrowning and comic death because it strips the prime minister of his power in a very comic way, albeit temporarily and metaphorically.

In the context of post 2018 Jordanian protests that removed Prime Minister Hani al-Mulki from power in June 2018, the Jordanian cartoonist Emad Hajjaj wanted to emphasise that the replacement of Hani al-Mulki with Omar Razzaz was not going to make a real difference to the people of Jordan. Razzaz served as al-Mulki’s Education Minister. According to Hajjaj’s political cartoon (shown in Figure 21 below), they are both seen as two sides of the same coin. It should be noted that political humour that critically targets the King or the Hashemite royal family is categorically unavailable in Jordan. This is

perhaps due to the Hashemite religious legitimacy, being the direct offspring of the Prophet Muhammad. In Bakhtin's terms, such use of carnivalesque humour which allows the metaphorical death and dethroning of the government, but not, here, of the monarch, performs a licenced disruption of the carnival humour in Jordanian social media spaces.

In his newspaper article 'Jordan's protests are a ritual not a revolution' (2018), Sean Yom argues that the primary role of Jordan's prime ministers is to "implement policies while serving as shock absorbers for popular anger" (Yom, 2018, para. 11). The political cartoon below views Jordanian prime ministers as very 'fragile' whose main role is to absorb public discontent and dissatisfaction. Such metaphor is new to Bakhtin's theory of carnival and the carnivalesque. One authority (in this case the power of the Hashemite regime in Jordan) can remain 'crowned' and untouchable whilst a parallel authority (in this case the power of Jordan's prime minister) can be regularly decrowned and mocked for the purposes of safeguarding the higher power. Such use of carnivalesque political humour challenges the application of Bakhtin's notion of crowning (and decrowning) to contemporary Jordanian political humour in social media spaces, because there is no one, single leader to be 'crowned' and 'uncrowned'. More complex structures of *de jure* and *de facto* political leadership, as with that in Jordan, necessitate a more subtle articulation of the Bakhtinian idea of 'decrowning'.



Figure 21. The 'new' government of Omar Razzaz [Cartoon], Emad Hajjaj, 2018

Another example of Bakhtin's "decrowning" can be seen in Figure 22 below. The former Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour is being stripped of his power and authority in a very comic way that triggers his dethroning and comic death. The dethroning is even encouraged by a member of Ensour's government, the Minister of Islamic Affairs. This internet meme is presented in the form of a joke-telling when King Abdullah of Jordan, the Prime Minister, and several government ministers happen to be on an aircraft. The King is seen to be preoccupied with a way to placate the people of Jordan. To do so, the King suggests throwing a 20 Jordanian Dinars note from the plane to placate one of his people. At this time, the Minister of Finance intervenes and says, "Your Majesty, why don't you divide the 20 note into two, and placate two people instead on one?" The King concurs. However, the Minister of

Agriculture intervenes, and suggests “Your Majesty, why don’t you divide the 20 note into four, and placate four people instead of two?” The King concurs again. However, the Minister of Islamic Affairs intervenes, and suggests “Your Majesty, why don’t you throw Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour off the plane in order to placate the entire people of Jordan.”

This joke reflects Bakhtin’s notion of decrowning and the comic death of a ruler. Such humour reflects, according to Bakhtin, “the defeat of power, of earthly kings, of the earthly upper class, of all that oppresses and restricts” in the people’s short-lived life in the carnival square (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 92). This type of carnivalesque political humour and satire achieves in imaginary world an element of psychological victory over those in power, over death and over all the sacred things in life. In his essay ‘Wit and politics: An essay on laughter and power’ (1998), Hans Speier describes this death-wish as a type of carnivalesque political humour because it plays “with death thoughts and mocks the enemy for rejoicing about his morality, or even treating his death as a comic death” (Speier, 1998, p. 1396). This explanation about dethroning humour can be found in Figure 22 below.



Figure 22. Jordan's King Abdullah on a plane with Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour and senior government officials [Internet meme], 2013

Another political cartoon by Omar Abdallat (See Figure 23 below) takes a slight detour from the moment when the government official is being exalted to the moment of decrowning and comic death. This political cartoon presents a conversation between a government official and a Jordanian citizen. The government official is seen using a religious expression “*hadha min fadhle rabb*”, meaning “this is from the blessing of God” while making a reference to his belly. The official figure wants to highlight that all his wealth and fortune has come to him from the blessing and grace of the God. This representation is depicted through a special reference to grotesque imagery of his belly, which can be seen sticking out from his clothes. Seen invoking God too, the Jordanian citizen yells at the government official “*Allah yokhdhak*,” which can be translated as “May God take you then.” In this way, the

Jordanian citizen has voiced his disaffection with those people in power. He expressed his resentment and wished death for government officials because of their corruption and wealth. It should be noted that the use of colloquialism in the citizen's phrases reminds us of Bakhtin's views and thoughts about the use of the language of the marketplace in the carnival square against power and in resistance to those people in power.

In his book about Rabelais and 16th century France, Bakhtin argues that this type of language has a peculiar ability to "mock and insult the deity [sacred figures]" (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 16). In addition to the grotesque images of the belly and the buttock as sources of degradation, as in Bakhtin's theory of carnival, this cartoon relies on the use of a religious phrase "*Allah yokh-dhak*" to achieve its carnivalesque political humour effect. The placing of "*hadha min fadhle rabbi*" as a sacred religious formula by the government official has produced an implicit mockery that is meant to destabilise its genuine meaning in Islamic religious discourse. The invocation from the Jordanian citizen, however, has produced a carnivalesque image of decrowning and comic death to that government official. This is shown when the death of a government official becomes a 'blessing' and a source of happiness for many carnival-goers in Jordanian social media spaces.



Figure 23. The fortune of a Jordanian government official is blessed by God's grace [Cartoon], Omar Abdallat, 2013

The last political cartoon presented here can be best analysed through Bakhtin's concept of comic death, but this time using a unique phraseology that aims to put an end to the Prime Minister's tenure. In Figure 24 below, the comic dethroning of Jordan's Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour happens when *Abu Saqer* (right), a fictional humorous character played by Jordanian veteran comedian Musa Hijazin, engages in a hypothetical conversation with the Prime Minister Ensour. Abu Saqer, who looks shabby and tramp-like in appearance, asks Prime Minister Ensour about the end date of his post as a prime minister for Jordan, indicating from his clothes a worsening economic situation for many Jordanians under Ensour's government. The humour in this last political cartoon resides in the multiple meanings of the

Arabic word (Eid) and its humorous derivatives in Jordanian culture and vernacular. The word can either refer to a time of religious festival celebration that marks the end of the fasting month of Ramadan and the beginning of the new Islamic lunar calendar, or it can be used as a humorous adjective to indicate an interrogative linguistic expression that conveys a wish to end someone's duty. This semantic ambivalence resonates with Bakhtin's theory of carnival and his notion about the dethroning and the comic death of political power. It expresses people's disaffection and frustration with people in power.



Figure 24. We [the people of Jordan] are about to be penniless [Cartoon], Osama Hajjaj, 2015

As evidence analysed in this chapter shows, Jordanian political humour after the Arab Spring has some distinctive qualities that (unsurprisingly) go beyond Bakhtin's concept of carnival. Bakhtin's ideas about carnival can be considered static because they understandably 'ignored' how socio-political and technical developments could influence the expression of certain types of humour and satire against power and authority. For example, humour in social media spaces permits greater anonymity and its contributions are more individualised than Bakhtin could ever conceptualise. The way humour is shared, liked or even retweeted in social media makes the role of individual agency important. However, that does not make Freud more important than Bakhtin, but rather, the collective experience of social media spaces makes Bakhtin more important than Freud. Carnivals in social media spaces and in most online platforms can be archived and therefore can be easily retrieved. These qualities that characterise modern-day carnivals in social media spaces are among the biggest challenges to the application of Bakhtin's ideas about carnival and the carnivalesque.

Furthermore, there have been some significant changes in the development of the role of humour in socio-political spheres in Jordan after the Arab Spring. The country has implemented a series of socio-political and economic reform programmes since 2011. These developments have caused only 'façade' reforms and little changes to the real political scene, which has not changed much in the direction that protesters have hoped. However, this does not mean that the 'new

humour' has no effect. Its very continuation and expansion can suggest it has had some indirect effects. These include some 'soft' psychological changes to what is considered a suitable target for humour, to what is and is not too risky and to what is considered rude and unacceptable in societal norms. Such humour has performed, nevertheless, a licensed disruption because the Hashemite regime has remained 'crowned' and untouchable, whilst the government has been regularly decrowned and mocked to safeguard the higher power.

Given the extreme political oppression and unpredictability of the Stalinist regime, Bakhtin did not really discuss the impact or legacy of carnival: he argued for its being ephemeral. Nonetheless, the application of Bakhtin's ideas about carnival to the (less oppressive and increasingly less so) modern Jordanian context suggests that this 'carnival' can be considered more than just ephemeral, even though its consequences are, in Jordan, as yet slow and indirect. His carnival qualities can sometimes be problematic because both the Arab Spring (a major political and social transformation period) and social media spaces (which were unavailable in Bakhtin's time) are two of the biggest challenges to the application of Bakhtin's ideas about humour on the Jordanian socio-political context after the Arab Spring. In his theory of carnival and the carnivalesque, Bakhtin did not and perhaps could not acknowledge, first, how political dynamism and change (in this thesis the Arab Spring) could influence the expression of certain types of political humour and satire against political power and

authority, and second, how carnivalesque political humour is exercised in open and social platforms (in our age, social media spaces). Bakhtin overlooked (and, probably, had to for his own safety) how the political act of popular resistance and quasi-rebellion could enable the creation of a newly barbed, radical kind of political humour and satire against power. The use of humour in Jordanian social media spaces has led this research to conclude that such humour has had slow and indirect impacts on people's lives. Political humour shared in social media spaces helps people to express critical comments about political power and its absurdities. It can help them to become literate in and more cognizant of their socio-political and economic conditions. These findings help us better gauge the impact of political humour and satire in Jordanian social media spaces after the Arab Spring. Therefore, it could be argued that Bakhtin's theory of carnival would benefit from amendment or development to make it as a more useful tool for analysing modern-day carnivalesque political humour and satire in social media spaces.

5.3. Conclusion

This chapter has explored Jordanian political humour in social media spaces after the Arab Spring in the light of the application of Bakhtin's theory of carnival and the carnivalesque. In the context of Jordan after the Arab Spring, the analysis in this chapter has found that Bakhtin's ideas about carnival are sometimes problematic for an analysis of political humour in Jordan after the Arab Spring. This is perhaps because Bakhtin was writing about different times and places. He could not acknowledge how a different political context, time and social platforms could influence the expression of certain types of humour against power. His ideas about carnival are static, perhaps because he was trying to analyse historical fictions (the work of Rabelais and Dostoevsky), or perhaps because of his own political environment, which was static and unchangeable (life under Stalin). To identify the relevance and some of the weaknesses of Bakhtin's ideas about carnival, the analysis in this chapter has addressed five salient qualities of Jordanian political humour after the Arab Spring: praising the government (intentionally satirical), parodying the government, mocking the government, scatalogising the government, and, finally, dethroning the government (the temporally and metaphorically comic death of the government). Such humour, I found, has performed a *licensed disruption* because it has ridiculed the government but not the monarch. The Hashemite regime remains 'crowned' and untouchable whilst the Jordanian government has regularly been decrowned and mocked for the purposes of safeguarding the higher power.

The analysis of political cartoons and comedy sketches has revealed that Jordanian political humour has been imbued with several carnivalesque qualities that demonstrate relevance, but also some of the weaknesses, in the applicability of Bakhtin's theory of carnival to Jordan and the Arab Spring. To identify some of these weaknesses is not to criticise Bakhtin directly, but to show how Bakhtin's theory of carnival would benefit from amendment and development in order to make it more useful as a tool for analysing modern-day carnivals in social media spaces. The use of carnivalesque political humour against the government in Jordanian social media spaces has been evident especially in relation to the following qualities: government corruption, inflation, the government's rhetoric about reform and its processes, gerrymandering politics, and last but not least the representation of the Jordanian House of Parliament as a 'rubber stamp' for the government.

Jordanian political humour after the Arab Spring has had a number of functions: (1) it has functioned as a subversive tool that helps to challenge the government's rhetoric about reform; (2) it has reflected an ambiguous kind of resistance that is reactionary in effect and has had (so far) little impact on everyday realities; (3) it has offered a solace, a space for growing alternative opposition voices against the government. These functions, I argue, sometimes challenge Bakhtin's ideas about carnival the carnivalesque. The use of political humour in Jordan after the Arab Spring has offered a platform to highlight the socio-economic inequalities and the absurdities of political power, but it has done little to

destabilise or change that power directly. Nonetheless, the Jordanian economic and socio-political situation since the Arab Spring has offered an interesting and original reading of Bakhtin by considering something that he obviously could not and that few if any scholars of Bakhtin have: the significant impact of social media technology on the nature of the carnival and (here) the development of political humour and satire. Most importantly, it shows how Bakhtin's theory of carnival would benefit from amendment and development to make it more applicable and useful as a tool for analysing modern-day carnivals in social media spaces. Such development is potentially the key contribution of this thesis.

Conclusion

Jordanian humour has a relatively short research history. Previous attention given to Jordanian humour has tended to over-emphasise linguistic and translational analyses (e.g. Shakir & Farghal, 1992; Farghal & Shakir, 1993; Shunnq, 1996; Al-Khatib, 1999; Al-Kharabsheh, 2008; Bader, 2014; Al-Momani, Badarneh & Migdadi, 2016). These studies have utilised the application of two linguistic theories of humour, the 1985 script and semantic theory of humour and the 1991 general theory of verbal humour as a framework, to analyse Jordanian humour and jokes from the perspective of a linguistic approach. In these studies, Jordanian humour has been studied exclusively from the perspective of language that has highlighted the problems in the translation of Jordanian humour into English. What was largely missing, however, is the analysis of Jordanian humour from the socio-political and cultural approach, where humour has been used as a counter-political force and tool for popular resistance against power and the government in Jordan through social media in the aftermath of the Arab Spring revolutions.

This thesis has offered a different reading of contemporary Jordanian humour before, during and after the 2011 Arab Spring revolutions. It has utilised the application of Mikhail Bakhtin's mid-20th century theory of carnival and the carnivalesque as a framework for thinking about Jordanian politics and contemporary Jordanian political humour in

social media spaces. It has particularly focused on how humour has the potential to be used as a counter-political force and tool for popular resistance against the government during and after the Arab Spring revolutions.

The Arab Spring and the subsequent Jordanian protests (in this case the 2011–12 Jordanian protests) had a significant impact on the development of Jordanian political humour, and the extent to which Jordanian society has increased its tolerance of subversive political humour since the Arab Spring. This thesis argues that before 2011, ethnicity and the idea of ethnic jokes are more relevant than after.

Based on a corpus of material that has not been previously subject to an academic analysis, the analysis undertaken in this thesis has shown how humour has challenged people in power and poked fun at the Jordanian government's political discourse about economic and political reform programmes since the Arab Spring.

The analysis has focused on five salient qualities of popular politics against hegemonic power and the government. These qualities have been described as follows:

1. **Praising the government** (intentionally satirical): This quality has focused on a peculiar type of carnivalesque political humour that has only superficially defended the power of the government. It could be considered mocking rather than reinforcing its legitimacy. Such humour has intentionally carried out subversive satire

against power, but it has never challenged its legitimacy and its mainstream discourses. This is not a quality which Bakhtin discussed in the context of his work: Rabelais and 16th century France

2. **Parodying the government:** This quality has been concerned with the application of Bakhtin's use of parody as a counter-political tool against the Jordanian government to deflate the serious tone of official discourse and its articulations. The analysis in this quality has focused on three key sub-themes: challenging corruption, inflation and parliamentary elections (including the weak function of Jordan's House of Parliament as a 'rubber stamp' for the government)
3. **Mocking the government:** This quality has focused on carnivalesque-related themes, such as degradation, the language of the marketplace and the hypocrisy (the two lives) of the government's official discourse and statements
4. **Scatalogising the government:** This quality relates to Bakhtin's acknowledgment and analysis of the use of bodily functions for the purposes of making insult, degradation and expressions of resentment and frustration about power. This quality sheds light on the application of Bakhtin's conception of parody to the criticism of the Jordanian government's rhetoric about economic reform and its processes from 2011. The discussion of this quality has included the use of a wide range of taboo topics, such as defecation, flatulence and urination, in order to highlight certain

aspects of Jordanian political humour and satire in the context of social media spaces

5. **Dethroning the government:** This quality extends the application of Bakhtin's notion of decrowning as a tool to express resentment, frustration and restive views about the government. Although this dethroning or overthrowing of power is unreal, it has shown how the Jordanian government's discourse about reform has been challenged, and how the Jordanian authorities have been stripped of their power in a very comic way, albeit temporarily and metaphorically.

This thesis has found that Bakhtin's marketplace, which existed traditionally in the streets and in conventional public spaces, is now the social media spaces, and much less the streets. Whilst many Jordanian people have used their social media spaces as platforms to mobilise politically and initiate strikes and demonstrations, the government's rhetoric about reform and its processes have mostly been challenged online using 'hashtag activism', the most common form for internet activism. The mode of modern-day carnivals can be both at the same time about social and community participation and about individual presence and expression. (The audience is now the act.) That said, social media carnivals are in many ways just as carnivalesque, being characterised by their polyphony, the overturning of social and political hierarchies and the existence of the grotesque. The analysis in this thesis has also found that many Jordanian people have used their social media spaces (since 2011) for social and political 'flattening' and

cathartic hedonism against the government, and not for revolution (i.e. overturning the whole system).

Jordanian people online have used extensively their social media accounts as places for social and political commentary about the weak performance of the government and the House of Parliament (originally described as an oversight body to the actions of the government). This existence of a 'new' form of carnivalesque political humour in Jordanian social media spaces, that calls for the 'dethroning' of political power, could not have been developed before the Arab Spring and the advent of the social media spaces in the last decade. In Jordan, both the Arab Spring and social media spaces have changed the way of people's engagement with politics. In that sense, it can be argued that the purely political act of popular resistance and quasi-rebellion against power had to happen first to enable the creation of a newly barbed and radical kind of political humour and satire. Humour did not give rise to the politics, but the politics of resistance gave rise to the humour.

The Jordanian protestors' use of humour in placards (in real space) and memes (in social media space) has reflected a collective sense of dissent and frustration that helped them to break down barriers and socio-political differences. Such use of folk humour has achieved a shared comic relief and solidarity among people who took to the streets and more among carnival-goers in Jordanian social media spaces. This form of carnivalesque political humour is highly relevant to Bakhtin's

ideas about carnival against power because it highlights the role and function of humour as an active form for promoting collectivism, political mobilisation and resistance against the government.

For example, we might think about how the Jordanian social media activism provoked a public furore through active engagement in political mobilisation against government discourse following the appointment of three people to high positions with high salaries in the government in early 2019. A government climb-down on the decision came after nationwide public anger and a leak, shared widely on Jordanian social media spaces, of official documents that indicated the appointments. In one famous Facebook video post entitled *The Government Farm* (posted on 5 February, 2019), Dr Maen Qatamin, a famous Jordanian economist turned online activist, rebuked the government of Omar Razzaz (in office from June 2018) and asked it to cancel what he called a very shameful government decision. In the video, he compared the actions of the government to that of a farm where people are allocated certain lands and rights, based on their social and political privileges. This Facebook video was liked by more than 10,000 people, with 1,700 shares at the time of writing this thesis. The Jordanian people's anger and outcry on social media came at an extremely difficult time when hundreds of young people from remote rural towns and areas were heading on foot to the Jordanian Hashemite Royal Court to demand employment and end of marginalisation politics. This example shows how the popular politics of resistance in Jordanian social media spaces

has turned into an element of subversion that ultimately challenged the government action.

The impact of this subversion is not easy to quantify or unambiguous in its implications and impact. Based on my findings, I would argue that:

1. It has represented a form of subversion which has helped to undermine the power of government and its rhetoric about reform and its processes
2. It has reflected an ambiguous kind of resistance which does little to definitively overturn the dominant discourse of the government. One of the features of the carnival – as Bakhtin argued – was its ephemerality
3. It has offered solace and a space for growing alternative opposition voices using social media technologies. Such humour has offered a platform to highlight the absurdities of political power, but does little to destabilise or change that power
4. It has functioned as a safety valve that both releases tensions (which can in fact be useful to those people with political power) and can be used as a tool for popular resistance against many forms of power in government
5. It has functioned as a time and place for socio-political ‘flattening’ and cathartic hedonism (but not revolution) that has led to changes in Jordanian society where people are more willing to criticise and mock the government. This has not (so far) in Jordan provoked any significant social and political changes in reality. In

this respect, very few carnival-goers in Jordanian social media spaces have actually wanted to undermine (or change) the power of the King or the Hashemite royal family. The resilience of the Hashemite regime in Jordan in place since 1921 has given rise to a new form of carnivalesque political humour which I called in chapter 2 'resilience humour' in Jordanian social media spaces that has constantly called for reform and not for regime change or revolution. Such humour has allowed ridicule of the government but not of the monarch. This enables us to draw some parallels between Jordanian carnivals in social media spaces and those experienced in Western Europe during the Middle Ages

6. The target is not just the government in contemporary Jordanian political humour. One of the interesting findings which has emerged from the research in this thesis is the intersection between laughing up and laughing down. Some of the jokes examined in this thesis mocks the government and groups with less power (e.g. rural people) whilst others also mock urbanites and the government so 'laugh up' two-fold. This is shown when one kind of power relationship can be broken down or flattened out through humour, at the same time, as another kind of power relationship that is being reinforced. Since the Arab Spring in Jordan, many rural young people in Jordanian social media spaces have developed a *counter*-superiority tendency to laugh at urbanites and their feminised accent.

Political humour rarely if ever has a direct and/or immediate impact on real politics, as many humour scholars have argued (e.g. Benton, 1988; Davies, 2007). Jordanian society online has perhaps tended to, and continues to use, subversive humour for personal sanity (Freud's theory of humour as a safety valve is an important theoretical framework for consideration here) and a coping mechanism to deal with socio-economic inequalities, political absurdities and political repression, a means of 'playing at resistance'. The use of the Bakhtinian framework of carnival allows us to see a certain strand of Jordanian 'carnival' on social media spaces (politically satirical humour) as intentionally non-potent resistance.

Political humour can be considered ephemeral if 'resistance' is linked to tangible effects on external structures and processes. However, if 'resistance' has an internalised and psychological component, then political humour can be considered effective precisely because it allows individuals to cope with socio-economic inequalities and political repression. In this respect, political humour in Jordan after the Arab Spring can be best placed in the context of the indirect effect(s) of psychological humour and political resistance, which Bakhtin's theory of carnival and the carnivalesque do not really take into account.

Humour can have a slow and indirect impact through subtle intellectual and psychological effects on people. For example, political cartoons can be considered as one of the fastest and easiest windows to

understand contemporary politics and the politics of popular resistance. The nature of political humour and satire is certainly more complex (cognitively) when compared to other forms of social humour, such as lightbulb jokes, blonde jokes or elephant jokes. Political humour helps people to express critical comments and concerns about political power and its absurdities. It can help them to become literate and more cognizant of their socio-political and economic conditions.

In the context of power and resistance in Jordan since 2011, Asef Bayat's work, influenced by James C. Scott work, on popular resistance provides (in the broader context) a useful framework to think about the application of Bakhtin's theory of carnival to the Jordanian context following the Arab Spring. In his book *Life as politics* (2013), Bayat (2013, p. 33) coined the term "quiet encroachment of the ordinary" to describe how ordinary people in the Middle East have succeeded in violating rules and tapping into power in public spaces. He describes how ordinary people, such as street vendors and slum dwellers, have benefited, improved their lives and enhanced their local businesses on the pavements and in rural areas, through the transgression of established orders and laws imposed by the state and local authorities.

Such people, he found, sometimes sell counterfeit merchandise, compromise major international brands, and build their houses without seeking permission from local authorities. He argues that ordinary people in the Middle East have used and continue to use these

transgressive acts as part of their everyday life and politics to survive without guidance from a certain ideology, or from leaders. This makes the idea of resorting to public carnivals against power in the Middle East another form of 'survival strategy' that helps ordinary people to cope with their hard lives under the autocratic regimes.

According to Bayat (2013), these quiet and encroaching actions against power have changed the lives of ordinary people in the Middle East and helped to transform the societies of many developing countries worldwide. By so arguing, Bayat applies Scott's (1990) notion of infrapolitics and other forms of covert strategies of popular resistance that often go unnoticed by political authority. Bayat (2013) argues that most ordinary people in the Middle East are apparently not protesting in the streets and calling for their demands. Instead, they are creating these infringements daily in order to survive and to weather difficult economic conditions and state repression. These findings are important because they provide a medium to enhance the application of Bakhtin's theory of carnival to the Jordanian context after the Arab Spring.

"Every joke is a tiny revolution," and in contemporary Jordan, some (but by no means all) jokes, those that constitute satire and other kinds of political humour, are exactly against power. The idea of 'tiny revolutions,' viewed through a Bakhtinian lens, reveals itself by tiny moments of carnival, conducted in the traditional carnival squares (streets or public spaces), and now predominantly located in the new

carnival space (social media spaces) in virtual platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube (these are now fairly conventional and accepted platforms for popular resistance). The internet does seem to speed up this circular process of new and accepted forms for popular resistance against power.

Political humour and satire disseminated in Jordanian social media spaces after the Arab Spring can be considered as catharsis and as a safety valve to release tension at an individual and/or group level. Political elites can even permit or encourage such release to preserve their own longer-term power. They can also be politically intentional, but the evidence of this context suggests that such intent rarely if ever translates into genuine political change. Whilst there have been significant changes in and development of the role of humour and satire in Jordanian socio-political spheres after the Arab Spring, these developments have only corresponded to the 'façade' changes to the real political scene, which has not changed much in the direction that protestors in the streets and carnival-goers in social media spaces hoped.

It would be easy, therefore, to dismiss political humour as politically meaningless. But this would be to miss something. Carnavalesque political humour can look impotent and feel fleeting, but when the music, jokes, feasting and social levelling are over, what might have changed is (some of) the people's minds. Political humour and satire

can after all be transformative, because whilst it does not liberate the oppressed, it can, slowly and almost imperceptibly, perhaps even unconsciously, liberate the way that everyday people conceptualise power and its role in their lives. Its very existence and expansion can suggest that it has had indirect, e.g. 'soft,' psychological changes and cumulative effects on what is considered a suitable target for humour, what is and is not too risky, and what is considered rude or unacceptable.

Bibliography

For the purposes of organisation and clarity, the present bibliography lists all sources referenced in this thesis in three separate sections: primary sources, Arabic sources and social media sources. It also provides shorter and more legible links for the very longest URLs through a web service called 'TinyURL' available at tinyurl.com

- (1) **Primary sources** include all academic sources that are originally published in English or translated from German or Russian. It includes all works that have been published by or attributed to Sigmund Freud which are originally found in German, while all the works published by or attributed to Mikhail Bakhtin are originally found in Russian.
- (2) **Arabic sources** include all sources that are written or available in Arabic, such as books, journals or newspaper articles. All titles in this section, for the purposes of clarity, are provided in translation but not in transliteration.
- (3) **Social media sources** include all sources that are available in Jordanian social media spaces in alphabetical order. The tags in round brackets indicate where the source exists in Facebook pages, individual Facebook or Twitter accounts or individual YouTube videos or official channels

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethical review approval letter



14th March 2017

Dear Yousef Barahmeh,

Study Title:	The Dynamics of Socio-political Humour and Satire in Contemporary Jordan
Ethics Committee reference:	16/17: 25

Thank you for submitting your documents for ethical review. The Ethics Committee was content to grant a favourable ethical opinion of the above research on the basis described in the application form, protocol and supporting documentation, revised in the light of any conditions set, subject to the general conditions set out in the attached document.

The Ethics Committee provides a favourable ethical opinion with the following requirement:

1. Data from human participants to be anonymized when it is reported in the thesis.

There is no need to submit any further evidence to the Ethics Committee; the favourable opinion has been granted with the assumption of compliance

The favourable opinion of the EC does not grant permission or approval to undertake the research. Management permission or approval must be obtained from any host organisation, including University of Portsmouth, prior to the start of the study.

Documents reviewed

The documents reviewed by The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Ethics Committee.

<i>Document</i>	<i>Version</i>	<i>Date</i>
Application Form	2	15/02/2017
Peer/Independent Review	N/A	30/01/2017
Supervisor Email Confirming Application	N/A	30/01/2017

Statement of compliance

The Committee is constituted in accordance with the Governance Arrangements set out by the University of Portsmouth

After ethical review**Reporting and other requirements**

The enclosed document acts as a reminder that research should be conducted with integrity and gives detailed guidance on reporting requirements for studies with a favourable opinion, including:

- Notifying substantial amendments
- Notification of serious breaches of the protocol
- Progress reports
- Notifying the end of the study

Feedback

You are invited to give your view of the service that you have received from the Faculty Ethics Committee. If you wish to make your views known please contact the administrator ethics-fhss@port.ac.uk

Please quote this number on all correspondence – 16/17: 25
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Yours sincerely and wishing you every success in your research

Chair

Dr Jane Winstone

Email: ethics-fhss@port.ac.uk

Enclosures: *“After ethical review – guidance for researchers”*

Appendix 1

After ethical review – guidance for researchers

This document sets out important guidance for researchers with a favourable opinion from a University of Portsmouth Ethics Committee. Please read the guidance carefully. A failure to follow the guidance could lead to the committee reviewing and possibly revoking its opinion on the research.

It is assumed that the research will commence within 3 months of the date of the favourable ethical opinion or the start date stated in the application, whichever is the latest.

The research must not commence until the researcher has obtained any necessary management permissions or approvals – this is particularly pertinent in cases of research hosted by external organisations. The appropriate head of department should be aware of a member of staff's research plans.

If it is proposed to extend the duration of the study beyond that stated in the application, the Ethics Committee must be informed.

If the research extends beyond a year then an annual progress report must be submitted to the Ethics Committee.

When the study has been completed the Ethics Committee must be notified.

Any proposed substantial amendments must be submitted to the Ethics Committee for review. A substantial amendment is any amendment to the terms of the application for ethical review, or to the protocol or other supporting documentation approved by the Committee that is likely to affect to a significant degree:

- (a) the safety or physical or mental integrity of participants
- (b) the scientific value of the study
- (c) the conduct or management of the study.

A substantial amendment should not be implemented until a favourable ethical opinion has been given by the Committee.

Researchers are reminded of the University's commitments as stated in the [Concordat to Support Research Integrity](#) viz:

- maintaining the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research
- ensuring that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards
- supporting a research environment that is underpinned by a culture of integrity and based on good governance, best practice and support for the development of researchers

- using transparent, robust and fair processes to deal with allegations of research misconduct should they arise
- working together to strengthen the integrity of research and to reviewing progress regularly and openly

In ensuring that it meets these commitments the University has adopted the [UKRIO Code of Practice for Research](#). Any breach of this code may be considered as misconduct and may be investigated following the University [Procedure for the Investigation of Allegations of Misconduct in Research](#).

Researchers are advised to use the [UKRIO checklist](#) as a simple guide to integrity.

Appendix 2: Ethics review checklist

FORM UPR16

Research Ethics Review Checklist

Please include this completed form as an appendix to your thesis (see the Research Degrees Operational Handbook for more information)



Postgraduate Research Student (PGRS) Information		Student ID:	758373			
PGRS Name:	Yousef Barahmeh					
Department:	SASHPL	First Supervisor:	Dr Maggie Bowers			
Start Date: (or progression date for Prof Doc students)	1 October 2015					
Study Mode and Route:	Part-time	<input type="checkbox"/>	MPhil	<input type="checkbox"/>	MD	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Full-time	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	PhD	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Professional Doctorate	<input type="checkbox"/>
Title of Thesis:	Carnavalesque politics and popular resistance: A Bakhtinian reading of contemporary Jordanian political humour and satire					
Thesis Word Count: (excluding ancillary data)	75,987					
<p>If you are unsure about any of the following, please contact the local representative on your Faculty Ethics Committee for advice. Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the University's Ethics Policy and any relevant University, academic or professional guidelines in the conduct of your study</p> <p>Although the Ethics Committee may have given your study a favourable opinion, the final responsibility for the ethical conduct of this work lies with the researcher(s).</p>						
UKRIO Finished Research Checklist: (If you would like to know more about the checklist, please see your Faculty or Departmental Ethics Committee rep or see the online version of the full checklist at: http://www.ukrio.org/what-we-do/code-of-practice-for-research/)						
a) Have all of your research and findings been reported accurately, honestly and within a reasonable time frame?	YES	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO	<input type="checkbox"/>		
b) Have all contributions to knowledge been acknowledged?	YES	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO	<input type="checkbox"/>		
c) Have you complied with all agreements relating to intellectual property, publication and authorship?	YES	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO	<input type="checkbox"/>		
d) Has your research data been retained in a secure and accessible form and will it remain so for the required duration?	YES	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO	<input type="checkbox"/>		
e) Does your research comply with all legal, ethical, and contractual requirements?	YES	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Candidate Statement:						
I have considered the ethical dimensions of the above named research project, and have successfully obtained the necessary ethical approval(s)						
Ethical review number(s) from Faculty Ethics Committee (or from NRES/SCREC):	16/17:25					
If you have <i>not</i> submitted your work for ethical review, and/or you have answered 'No' to one or more of questions a) to e), please explain below why this is so:						
Signed (PGRS):					Date:	23 September 2019