

About being Jordanian

I would not be revealing a secret when I recall a round of elections in the 3rd District of Amman, when I visited the campaign headquarters (a tent) for then parliament candidate Taher Al Masri to listen to the last-minute political debates, declare my intention to vote for him as my representative and wish him luck for the next day.

As he shook my hand he said something that I believe has marked him as a standout politician in Jordan: "Don't worry about voting for me tomorrow. I have my voter base secured. I would like you all to vote for... he needs your support to win the elections. Please spread the word among your friends."

As I went to vote the next morning, I started to scribble the other candidate's name, but then reconsidered.

I worried that he may lose his parliamentary seat because at this critical moment he was more concerned about cultivating a group of like-minded politicians who would collectively lobby for democratic freedoms, honesty, selflessness and, most importantly, who would put the country ahead of their own personal interest and gain.

I jotted Masri's name down and left. Throughout my journalistic career I depended on very few sources for any analysis and was very selective in whom I interviewed, followed or trusted for information.



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to read his parting words at the Senate's farewell event last week, hosted by Senate Speaker Abdur-Ra'uf S. Rawabdeh, in which he again revealed that his Palestinian origins only strengthened and consolidated his Jordanian identity and never diminished it.

It touched me to hear him reiterate — at this very difficult and very important political crossroads to what I hope would be Jordan's maturing and all embracing identity — that being a Jordanian is less about the origin of your family and more about what you do for your country.

I believe he helped define how Jordanians of Palestinian origin would grow to understand Jordan and care for it at a time when his breed were held suspect by both camps — East and West Bank — and many expected

Masri was one of only a handful of politicians who I, and I know many other journalists, trusted to tell us the truth and, more importantly, to be true to themselves and what they stand for politically and on a personal level.

It therefore did not surprise me

that he would prioritise the political aspirations of his "power base" over that of Jordan.

But he did not. He lobbied for government subsidies for fodder for livestock farmers living on the borders with Saudi Arabia with just as much commitment and conviction as he lobbied for any of the multitude of issues that Jordanians of Palestinian origin brought to his table.

I do not write articles that laud any politician. My baseline on all politicians, in the developing world especially, is that they are — in their majority — primarily concerned with furthering their personal, clan, tribal, family, business associates, family friends or ethnic and religious interests.

But I had the privilege of meeting a politician who rose above it all and convincingly worked for decades to further a much more important and urgent cause in Jordan — that of our unity as a people.

He mentions all the hints and allegations circulated against him as he was sidestepped for another term as Senate speaker, and says that he never gave them a minute's thought.

I believe him because his political record shows he never did.

And that candidate he wanted me to vote for, he was not of Palestinian origin.