

We want five!

Kuwait, the internet, and the public sphere

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Abstract

This study explores the relationship between internet communication and democratization, through the notion of the public sphere. It presents a case study of the 2006 Kuwaiti reform movement “The Orange Movement”, and its use of the internet. On this basis, the author argues that during 2006, the internet constituted a public sphere for Kuwaitis, in which to convey unfiltered news, discuss, agitate, expose corruption, mobilize, and more. The protagonists could engage each other in ways impossible offline, and their efforts affected the Kuwaiti reality, enhancing the participatory aspect of Kuwait’s democratic project. Moreover, it suggests that in Kuwait, public opinion can be formed and acted upon, independently of the state and the political elite. Yet, this study also takes care to highlight the limitations of the internet with regards to democratization. Though it argues that the internet may be an important tool, it is not sufficient in itself as a democratizing force. For the Orange Movement of 2006, the internet *was* not a public sphere; it was a *tool* mediating their debate, and a *place* locating it. The rest – the content - is still up to each and everyone.

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A note on transliteration and translation

Throughout this thesis, I have followed the same system for transliteration as used by the International Journal of Middle East Studies, please refer to “University of Oslo” in the list of references. I have done so with all Arabic names from Arabic sources. However, with regards to the names of Arabic authors writing in English, where the authors themselves provide a transliteration of their name, I have used this in stead.

With regards to translation of quotations from blogs, newspapers and other Arabic sources, I do not provide a transliteration of the original quote in general. However, in the case of ambiguous quotes, I provide a transliteration in the footnotes. Moreover, with regards to terms, expressions and slogans used repeatedly in Kuwait and/or by the Orange Movement, I provide a transliteration of these as well. Lastly, I do not provide a transliteration of Arabic words which are generally known and used in English, such as “Emir”.

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1 Introduction

“Invent the printing press and democracy is inevitable”
(Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor resartus*¹).

During the summer of 2006, the Gulf state of Kuwait witnessed some rather intriguing events. Its established political scene was shaken by the appearance of what came to be known as “The Orange Movement” (al-Ḥaraka al-Burtuqāliyya), or “We want five” (nabīhā khamsa²), a popular movement campaigning for political reform. Led by young Kuwaitis, the movement campaigned for a reduction of the number of electoral districts from 25 to five. Trivial as it may seem, the issue was controversial in Kuwait. Nevertheless, the movement firmly believed it would enhance the state’s democratic project. In just three short months, they managed to get the country’s attention, to rally large crowds to their demonstrations and to secure the support of many established politicians. On July 17th, their struggle ended in victory; the Kuwaiti parliament voted to change the number of electoral districts to five.

Though it would be hard to establish that the Orange Movement singlehandedly brought about electoral reform in Kuwait, it seems – at the very least - that they made any other outcome far less likely, as I will discuss in this thesis. In doing so, the OM³ was both important and unprecedented in the Kuwaiti context. The question is then, what made the Orange Movement successful, what did they do?

The Kuwaiti Orange Movement of 2006 was a loosely defined popular movement, united in the cause for electoral reform. The majority of its activists were young Kuwaitis, many from a liberal ideological background. A quick look at their campaign reveals the use of many

¹ As referred to in Dewey (1927): 110

² This slogan presents a bit of a mystery on part of the Kuwaiti dialect. Without exceptions, the OM both pronounced and wrote the slogan “nabīhā khamsa”. However, this does not make much sense in Arabic, as the verb as written here, nabī, is rather meaningless, given that “na” is a prefix for the verb conjugated to the first person plural. As far as I have gathered, the actual verb used is baghā, that is, to seek or desire. This is the translation given by the OM activists as well. As to why the letter ghayn is omitted both in speech and writing in Kuwait, I have found no answer. Moreover, in some instances, “ham” is added at the beginning of the slogan, fully vocalized. However, “ham” does not make sense in Modern Standard Arabic, and I have found no explanation as to what this term might mean in Kuwaiti dialect.

³ The nature of this thesis naturally dictates that the term “The Orange Movement” will be used quite a lot, and for the sake of simplicity, I often use the abbreviation “The OM”. Yet, I sometimes use the term in its entirety as well, for the sake of variation.

innovative campaign tactics, as well as an extensive use of the internet⁴. Through blogs, forums, YouTube and a campaign site, the protagonists/participants discussed, conveyed news, documented their rallies, presented their arguments, instigated action and more.

If we consider that the number of internet users in the Middle East has increased by over 1675 %⁵ over the last nine years, the OM's online activities deserve our attention. What does it mean that the Orange Movement made use of the internet in their campaign? Did the web bring forth new possibilities in terms of political activism? Can the internet contribute to democratization? With the number of users sharply increasing, and much attention being paid to its possible effects for democracy, I believe it is imperative to explore these questions. That is, to study the use of the internet for political purposes, and to identify its actual contributions. Though Carlyle's quote above may seem rather ridiculous today, the same kind of technological determinism has been expressed on part of the internet, as I will discuss below. Obviously, reality is not that simple. Thus, in the following, I present a study of the use and possible contributions of the internet in the campaign of the Kuwaiti Orange Movement of 2006.

1.1 The internet and democratization

“Through the use of chat rooms, any person with a phone line can become a town crier with a voice that resonates farther than it could from any soapbox. Through the use of Web pages, mail exploders, and newsgroups, the same individual can become a pamphleteer”.

(US Supreme Court in *Reno v. UCLA*)⁶

As we can read from the quote above, Thomas Carlyle does not stand alone in history when it comes to optimistic views on new technology. This infamous opinion from the US Supreme Court may be characteristic of the near deterministic view on the democratizing effects of the internet that some expressed in the nineties, but has since been heavily criticized. And rightfully so. Examples from for instance Egypt, Saudi Arabia and China show that the internet in itself is no guarantee of free speech; bloggers have been arrested, and content has

⁴ In term with what Anette Markham refers to as “current trends in internet studies”, I have chosen to spell “internet” with a lower case i. As Baym and Markham points out, spelling “internet” with a capital I grants it “agency and power that are better granted to those who develop and use it”. Baym & Markham (2009): vii.

⁵ Internet Usage and World Stats (2008)

⁶ US Supreme Court (1997)

been censored⁷. And access to the internet is far from universal; as of 2008, only 23.44 % of the world's population was online⁸. In addition, there's the issue of what people actually do online; I find it very difficult to accept that we should assume a priori that people *necessarily* will start campaigns for democracy once they're given the technical ability to do so, and not, say, watch online movies, shop online or visit dating sites. Moreover, we have what Yochai Benkler refers to as the "*Babel objection*": "(...)when everyone can speak, no one can be heard, and we devolve either to a cacophony or to the reemergence of money as the distinguishing factor between statements that are heard and those that wallow in obscurity"⁹.

However, even though the optimism of the nineties may seem overdone, this does not mean that the internet *cannot* be an important tool for democratization. Though Egyptian bloggers have been subject to government harassment, they have achieved considerable success as well¹⁰. Or as Benkler puts it; "(...) (*The internet*) does make the work of authoritarian regimes harder"¹¹. And while internet access is nowhere near universal, there has been a growth in users worldwide of 380,3 % over the last nine years, with the biggest increase taking place in Africa and the Middle East¹². As for the "*Babel objection*", Benkler argues that through mechanisms of peer-review and topicality-based linking, the problems of both "*information overload*" and "*discourse fragmentation*" are being solved¹³.

As we have seen, one might argue that the internet is not necessarily a democratizing force in itself. But on the other hand, it might very well be a useful tool. This underlines two important points. For one thing, we should be careful with general conclusions; properly contextualized case studies seem to be better suited for determining any democratizing effects of the internet. As Robert Stake points out, "(...) case studies are of value in refining theory, suggesting complexities for further investigation as well as helping to establish the limits of generalizability"¹⁴.

Secondly; we must pay attention to which features provided by the internet we are talking about, not just point to "the internet" as such. If the internet indeed is a useful tool for democratization, what does it provide? What has the internet brought with it that was not in

⁷ See for instance Lynch (2007): 9

⁸ International Telecommunication Union (2008a)

⁹ Benkler (2006): 10

¹⁰ See for instance Lynch (2007): 12

¹¹ Benkler (2006): 271

¹² Internet Usage and World Stats (2008)

¹³ Benkler (2006): 212 - 272

¹⁴ Stake (2005): 460

place before? This leads us to what Tim O`Reilly refers to as “*Web 2.0*”, and its user generated contents.

1.1.1 Web 2.0 – user generated content

Web 2.0 is not a system, program or anything clearly defined. Rather, it is a concept, which O`Reilly seeks to explain in his article “*What Is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software*”. At the core of it we find the writeable web, which facilitates user generated content. This is connected to what O`Reilly deems one another central principle of Web 2.0, which is the development of the web as a platform. In it, there is an “*implicit “architecture of participation”*”, and the service providers should act as “*intelligent brokers*” of internet users, or providing “*a context in which (...) user activity can happen*”¹⁵. Other important features are the “*harnessing of collective intelligence*”, and the fact that “*the service automatically gets better the more people use it*”¹⁶. This could mean both that users participate directly in the development of sites and services, such as Wordpress and different open source projects like Linux and Open Office, or that users provide the content for a service, such as YouTube, discussion forums and blogs.

As for blogs, web 2.0 has provided other important innovations as well, especially the *RSS-feed*, the *Trackbacks* and the *Permalink*¹⁷. RSS is a technology that allows users to subscribe to a site, being notified every time it changes. This could be used with respects to both blog entries, as well as comments to a blog entry, allowing users take part in every bit of the debate without being physically present at any location of such a debate. This combined with the permalink, which provides stable links to each individual blog entry, and trackbacks, which informs users whenever someone else have linked to their site(s), it becomes easy for users to discuss each other`s posts, comments, answer back to comments on their own posts and so on.

In addition, and related to the “*Babel objection*” mentioned above, O`Reilly argues that:

If it were merely an amplifier, blogging would be uninteresting. But like Wikipedia, blogging harnesses collective intelligence as a kind of filter. What James Suriowecki calls “The wisdom of the crowds” comes into play, and much as PageRank produces better results than analysis of any individual document, the collective attention of the blogosphere selects for value. (...) The

¹⁵ O`Reilly (2007): 22

¹⁶ O`Reilly (2007): 22

¹⁷ O`Reilly (2007) 25 - 26

world of Web 2.0 is also the world of what Dan Gillmor calls “we, the media”, a world in which “the former audience”, not a few people in a back room, decides what’s important¹⁸

In sum, what we see is that Web 2.0 has provided the tools for an online public sphere.

Internet users can easily express their opinion, discuss, comment on articles, document events etc. And with the numerous free blog hosts, forums, YouTube and other sites that exists, the places – or, if you will, the online coffeehouses - are there as well. As Benkler argues: “(...) *The network allows all citizens to change their relationship to the public sphere. They no longer need be consumers and passive spectators. (...) It is in this sense that the Internet democratizes*”¹⁹.

1.1.2 A public sphere?

Indeed, examining the political use of the internet through the notion of the public sphere seems fruitful. Papacharissi, when discussing whether the internet could revolutionize the political sphere, poses the following question: “*Will these technologies extend our political capacities or limit democracy – or alternatively, do a little bit of both? Such a discussion should be informed primarily with an examination of the notion of the public sphere and the ideological discourse that accompanies it*”²⁰. Mark Poster makes the statement that “*The age of the public sphere as face-to-face talk is clearly over: the question of democracy must henceforth take into account new forms of electronically mediated discourse*”²¹. In other words, it seems that not only is the notion of the public sphere a good approach to study any democratizing effects of the internet, but the internet is also a good venue for studying the development of the public sphere.

Yet, why I have chosen to study the OM through the notion of the public sphere is still a valid question. There are for instance many interesting aspects of the movement which could be illuminated through social movement theory; how the movement notoriously separated between “us” and “them”, how they used video to share and re-live experiences, and so on. However, I believe all this was made possible thanks to what I deem a new online public. Their use of the internet made possible unrestricted discussion across social and gender barriers. It gave them an audience big enough to be relevant, and thus hard to overlook.

¹⁸ O’Reilly (2007): 26 - 27

¹⁹ Benkler (2006): 272

²⁰ Papacharissi (2002): 10

²¹ Poster (1995)

Indeed, if this was the case, it may indicate that people who did not have the status to make it to the front pages of newspapers still could make their voice heard, adding a new dimension to Kuwaiti politics.

Moreover, as established politicians and journalists since have entered this online public, it is a lasting addition to Kuwaiti politics and outlived the Orange Movement. Politicians and journalists enter this arena to communicate more directly with new parts of their society, taking them seriously as voters, voices and participants in Kuwaiti politics. But perhaps most importantly, an online public, even when it does not affect the offline reality, but especially when it does, may give its participants political experience and political expectations. To put it simply; the protagonists get used to express their view, to support or criticize others, and to be heard and to be taken seriously. I find it very difficult to believe that these expectations disappeared when the orange t-shirts were taken off.

1.1.3 The need for case studies of connected sites

As we have seen, Web 2.0 offers some technical features which ease some actions we associate with the term the public sphere, which in turn may have a positive effect in terms of democratization. However, this does not mean that this technology necessarily leads to this outcome:

Different technologies make different kinds of human action and interaction easier or harder to perform. All other things being equal, things that are easier to do are more likely to be done, and things that are harder to do are less likely to be done. All other things are never equal. That is why technological determinism in the strict sense – if you have technology “t”, you should expect social structure or relation “s” to emerge – is false.²²

Practical examples point in the same direction; whereas Facebook has been a successful tool for mobilization and debate in Egypt²³, for many it is perhaps primarily a tool for amusement. And while YouTube was used by the Orange Movement to document their own campaign²⁴, the most viewed video on December 16th 2009 at 15:00 was “*Happy Slip Singalong: Get into*

²² Benkler: 17

²³ See for instance: Shapiro (2009), *The New York Times*. At the moment, there is no consensus as to how one should refer to articles from online newspapers, but the trend seems to be towards citing the author rather than the newspaper. However, in order to separate newspaper articles from academic articles, I have listed the newspaper articles separately in the list of references. Thus, throughout this thesis, whenever a newspaper is cited, I give the author as well as the name of the newspaper. The reader may then find the article in question, with its respective URL, under “List of newspapers cited” in the list of references.

²⁴ See examples in chapter 5.2

*the holiday spirit with Happy Slip and YouTube's first ever virtual caroling event.*²⁵. A random example like this of course, proves nothing else than the fact that YouTube can be a lot of things to a lot of people.

For this reason, one should be careful with general conclusions. Moreover, it is important to be specific of what kinds of sites, which technological features that make out the basis for a study, and not simply refer to “the internet”. Lastly, to only study the technology itself would be insufficient with regards to democratization, as the practical use varies greatly. Thus, I argue that a properly contextualized case study would be a preferable research design in order to identify any democratizing effects brought on by the internet. Moreover, the notion of the public sphere seems to be a suitable framework for a study of this kind. In the following, I seek to present such a study, using the Kuwaiti Orange Movement of 2006 as my case of study.

1.2 Research question and hypothesis

Based on this introduction to my subject of study, the questions I seek to answer through this thesis are as follows:

- For what purposes did the OM use the internet, and what were the opportunities this use of the internet brought forth, that would have otherwise been lost or impossible?
- Did the internet constitute a public sphere for the OM and other engaged internet users in Kuwait, in which to discuss, form opinions, convey news and so on?

The working hypothesis which has guided this study is as follows:

During 2006, I believe the internet constituted a public sphere for Kuwaitis, in which to convey unfiltered news, discuss, agitate, expose corruption, mobilize, and more. The protagonists could engage each other in ways impossible offline, and their efforts affected the Kuwaiti reality, enhancing the participatory aspect of Kuwait’s democratic project. However, even though the internet carries features which facilitate these kinds of communication, it does not make them happen. Its actual usage in this way depends, as with all other forms of

²⁵ This was noted by the author on the exact time given above, at YouTube.com. Unfortunately, there are no permalinks for the most viewed video at any given time. Thus, this is impossible to document in any other way than stating the exact date and time.

communication, on its users. Still, given the abovementioned assumptions, I believe that in Kuwait, public opinion can be formed and acted upon, independently of the state and the political elite.

1.3 Outline of this thesis – limitations of the study

The primary material for this study consists of online content from sites used by the Orange Movement, as well as interviews with key members of the OM, and a Kuwaiti journalist. In addition, I have used various secondary sources such as academic literature, newspaper articles and a documentary on the Orange Movement. The online material I have gathered is mainly from May, June and July 2006, as these were the most active months for the OM. However, I have included some material from the “official blog”²⁶ of the movement from January 2006 and the last days of April 2006, in order to trace the origins of the OM. Thus, even though I briefly discuss the Kuwaiti blogosphere in order to contextualize my study, this is not a general study of Kuwaiti blogs, forums, or other sites of communication. Neither is it a general study of online activism in Kuwait and the Middle East. It is precisely what I have argued for above, a specific case study of a particular movement within a limited time frame, and it is important to bear this in mind when reading this thesis.

Moreover, due to the limited scope of this thesis, the basis for all my discussions is Kuwaiti citizens, not all the country’s inhabitants. Thus, I do not treat the question of foreign workers’ rights, for which Kuwait – in my view rightfully – has received much criticism. One may of course object to the relevance of a study of political participation involving only half of the country’s population. Still, as of today non-Kuwaitis are excluded from the country’s political scene, so if foreign workers are to improve their lot in Kuwait, political changes are needed. And the basis for any such changes is Kuwaiti citizens.

Bearing these limitations in mind, I proceed below to present the study described in the introduction above. First, I discuss the methodological choices I have made, and demonstrate how I conducted this study. I then move on to a consideration of the theoretical context within which I place my findings, that is, the notion of the public sphere. Moving on, I seek to contextualize my study through a brief introduction to Kuwaiti politics and Kuwaiti internet culture, also touching upon the issue of censorship. Having established the methodology,

²⁶ That is, “Kuwaitjunior”, termed the official blog by Mary Ann Tétrault (2006a)

theory and the context, I present the Orange Movement, their main issue, and how they came into being. I then go through the online material I have gathered, and lay out my analysis of its contents. From there, I discuss my findings in relation to my theoretical discussion presented earlier, and explore the relevance of the notion of the public sphere with regard to the Orange Movement. Towards the end of the thesis, I seek to go beyond the movement, and discuss its possible lasting effects on Kuwaiti politics, society and not least internet usage. Lastly, I sum up my findings in my final conclusions.

2 Methodology

2.1 Internet inquiries

My study is based on both online and offline data, with the bulk of my material made out of online findings. According to Shani Orgad, with the term “*online data*”, we refer to “(…) *materials obtained using what have been often described as virtual methodologies: methods implemented by and through the internet*”²⁷. For my study, this includes both analysis of online materials such as discussions, postings, and visual elements, as well as an interview conducted through e-mail. I will return to the e-mail interview below. As for the discussions, posts, and so on, these were carried out and posted in 2006. I have not altered them or interfered in any way, but simply observed, downloaded and analyzed them, without making my presence known in any way I have been aware of. It should be noted that I have done so more than two years after the Orange Movement’s campaign ended.

Studying such online data provides “*some intriguing possibilities*”, as Christine Hine puts it, in the “*many traces of social activities that it preserves, in the form of web sites, message boards, hyperlinks etc.*”²⁸. Thus, even though the Orange Movement were active during the summer of 2006, their discussions, news, pictures, videos and so on is still available online. Nevertheless, this may very well change abruptly, and I have downloaded and saved all the contents included in this study.

However, the ability to “go back in time” is not the only intriguing possibility of the internet as a field of study. As Anette Markham points out: “(…) *the Internet provides new channels for people to communicate with each other, new channels for researchers to communicate with participants, and new venues for conducting research (…)* Thus, researchers can tap into emerging discursive forms and practices (…)”²⁹. There may of course be certain sites, forums and so on that are protected by a password or in some other way, and therefore not accessible. But in many cases, including this study, the researcher is able to “*tap into*” communication

²⁷ Orgad (2008): 35

²⁸ Hine (2008): 11

²⁹ Markham (2004): 96

which takes place or have taken place, without making their presence known and thus altering the conditions for communication.

Yet, it is important to bear in mind that there are difficulties related to a study on the use of internet like this. For one thing, the anonymity provided by the net, though valuable for many reasons, does make it difficult to determine the age, gender, background and so on of online protagonists, as well as questions such as how many *different* users are actually taking part in a debate. Furthermore, the intentions, goals and motivations of the protagonists are not necessarily something one might read out of a discussion. Moreover, online text may of course be edited, removing or adding bits and parts. Especially when studying communication that has already taken place, this may be a very relevant problem. However, I seek to support my online findings with secondary literature, the movement's offline actions and my own interviews, thereby contextualizing my findings in Kuwaiti society, and, hopefully, minimizing any impact of these difficulties. In the following, I seek to illustrate how I have dealt with these and other challenges, as well as how I have used and analyzed the material of my study.

2.1.1 Internet and contextualization

In order to study online findings, one needs to contextualize them in their offline surroundings. As Shani Orgad notes, "*It has become clear that the separation between online and offline cannot be sustained. Researchers have consistently argued for the need to frame the online both in its own right and in relation to other contexts and realities*"³⁰. In other words, the cultural, sociological and political context in which the Orange Movement operated is of great importance for my study. A proper contextualization can help illuminate questions such as why the OM chose to work over the internet as opposed to gather at a café, who uses the internet in Kuwait, why the question of the electoral districts was so important and so on. Moreover, such a contextualization helps illustrate important features of the movement. For instance, one important gain of the movement was that men and women worked together, and discussed with each other online. This would not seem important unless one takes into consideration that Kuwaiti schools and universities are segregated, and that even liberal parliamentary candidates separate men and women at events during their

³⁰ Orgad (2008): 37

campaign³¹. As Orgad points out: “(...) *to gather offline data is based in a perceived need to add context (...), to yield insights into aspects that would otherwise remain invisible, but that may be consequential to the research*”³².

Furthermore, the offline context as well as the movement’s offline activities will of course be important to determine the effect of their online work. One could hardly put an exact figure on the effect of the Orange Movement, and this is not my intention either. But once again, a proper contextualization can be useful. For instance, even though public demonstrations is a common sight in many countries, for instance Norway, this was not so in Kuwait before the OM, due to the law on public gatherings. But following the OM, this has changed. I do not claim that this is solely thanks to the OM, but the point could still be missed if one assumed public gatherings to be a common thing a priori.

In chapter 4, I provide a presentation of the Kuwaiti context, focusing on Kuwaiti politics, history, and internet usage, mainly based on secondary sources. But also my interviews have been very valuable in this regard, and I return to the question of the context during my discussions in other chapters as well. To give an example, the special importance of the concept of *national unity* in Kuwaiti politics influenced the language used by the main blog of the OM, as I will discuss in depth later.

2.2 Studying the Orange Movement

2.2.1 Case study

As mentioned earlier, I intend to use the “Orange Movement” as my case of study. However, as Stake points out; “*Case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied*”³³. And once again, the issue of contextualization is of great importance: “(...) *case study concentrates on experiential knowledge of the case and close attention to the influence of its social, political and other contexts*”³⁴. Yet, as Stakes argue, the phenomena come before the case, whereas the case itself is merely an opportunity “*to study the phenomena*”³⁵.

³¹ Tétrault (2006a)

³² Orgad (2008): 41

³³ Stake (2005):443

³⁴ Stake (2005): 444

³⁵ Stake (2005): 451

The phenomenon behind this study is, at its most basic, the potential of the internet as a democratizing force. But as I have argued above and will argue below, the internet in itself provides tools and places, whereas the content has to be provided by the users, as well as the decision to use it for the purpose of promoting democracy and democratic reforms. Moreover, I believe this is best explored through the notion of the public sphere, and through properly contextualized case studies, as opposed to random examples from here and there. I believe the Orange Movement and their use of the internet make a good case for such a study, for several reasons.

Firstly, the Orange Movement saw themselves as fighting for democratic reforms, and democracy was of great importance to the movement. Secondly, the movement made extensive use of the internet in their campaign, and were very conscious about this. Moreover, the sites they used were accessible to anyone, a may therefore have been used more widely than just the movement in itself. Lastly, this movement was ground breaking in the Kuwaiti context, in terms of using new technology, new campaign tactics, making new voices heard, and so on. For these reasons, I believe the case of the Orange Movement can illustrate both actual usage and future potential of the internet in Kuwait.

It could of course be tempting to generalize my findings to conclude on the potential of the internet more widely than just in Kuwait. However, this would be in contradiction with my arguments above on both contextualization and the necessity of case studies. Yet, the findings of a case study can nevertheless be informative beyond itself: “(...) *Case studies are of value in refining theory, suggesting complexities for further investigation as well as helping to establish the limits of generalizability*”³⁶.

Lastly, in addition to deciding upon the case of study, one also needs to decide upon the “*cases within the case*”, that is, the “*persons, places and events to observe*”³⁷. Below, I will show how I selected the sites I have studied, as well as the persons I have interviewed, and how these interviews were carried out. I then move on to discuss my method of analysis, and

³⁶ Stake (2005): 460

³⁷ Stake (2005): 451

lastly, to discuss how I have used different sources in this paper, the process usually referred to as *triangulation*.

2.2.2 Identifying the Orange Movement – site selection

I have made the selection of sites from a total of 19 blogs, one campaign site, one YouTube Channel and one online forum I have identified as part of and/or used by the movement. I have located these sites through various means; by the use of secondary sources³⁸, by following links on the different sites³⁹ and by Google searches⁴⁰. As criteria for being part of/used by the movement, I have used the following: that the contents revolve around the struggle for five electoral districts and against corruption, and that the site is mentioned/linked to by other sites in the movement. Furthermore, the relevance of the sites has also been confirmed through my interviews. However, this does not mean that I have identified *all* sites that might be part of the movement.

The material for this study consists of the movement's campaign site, its YouTube channel and six blogs which I believe represent the width of the movement, that is, they represent authors of different age, gender, in different situations and with different focus. For the sake of simplicity I have used the names of the blogs that are included in their URL, which do not necessarily correspond to the name they use themselves. URLs for the sites downloaded and other details are not included here; please refer to "blogs" in the list of references. Data on the blogs and their authors are taken from the "profile" pages of the blogs, unless other sources are given. These sites are as follows:

Blogs:

"Kuwaitjunior": URL: <http://kuwaitjunior.blogspot.com>. Arabic name: Sāḥat al-Ṣafāt ("Safāt square") By Tétrault described as the "official" blog of the movement. The blog has four writers, all male. They all provide their e-mail addresses on their profiles. The blog was established in December 2004, and is written in Arabic. During May, June and July 2006 the blog had a total of 68 postings, with 6565 comments all together.

³⁸ See for instance Tétrault (2006a)

³⁹ See for instance "Kuwaitjunior" on the 6th of May 2006 or "Kuwaitvoice" on the 18th of July 2006.

⁴⁰ On for instance "al-Ḥaraka al-Burtuqāliyya + muntadayāt"

“Ma6goog.com”: URL: <http://www.ma6goog.com>. Arabic name: Ṭākh Ṭīkh (“Pow Wow”⁴¹). The blog has one male author, who provides an e-mail address in the profile. The blog was established in August 2004, and is written almost exclusively in Arabic. During May, June and July 2006 the blog had a total of 60 postings, with 1498 comments all together.

“The Ultimate”: URL: <http://3asal.blogspot.com>. The blog has later been moved to WordPress: <http://3asal.wordpress.com>. No Arabic name. The blog has one female writer. She does not provide her e-mail address in her profile, but does provide personal interest. The blog also raises feminist issues. In addition, the author has published several poems on the site. The blog was established in August 2004, and is written almost exclusively in English. During May, June and July 2006 the blog had a total of 49 postings, with 591 comments all together.

“Kuwaitwall”: URL: <http://kuwaitwall.blogspot.com>. Arabic name: al-Sūr (“The Wall”). The blog has one male writer. E-mail address is provided in profile. The blog was established in May 2006, and is written in Arabic. During May, June and July 2006 the blog had a total of 17 postings, with 153 comments all together.

“Kuwaitvoice”: URL: <http://kuwaitvoice.blogspot.com>. No Arabic name. The blog has one male writer. E-mail address is provided in profile. This blog provides large amounts of pictures and videos. The blog was established in May 2005, and is written in Arabic. During May, June and July 2006 the blog had a total of 22 postings, with no comments.

“Miscellaneous”: URL: <http://yaob.blogspot.com>. No Arabic name. The blog has one female writer. No e-mail address is provided in profile, but personal interests are. The blog has a more personal touch than the others, in that the writer provides many pictures of her family, also from events connected to the Orange Movement. The blog was established in June 2005, and is written in Arabic. During May, June and July 2006 the blog had a total of 18 postings, with 363 comments all together.

It is important to note that not all posts on all blogs were related to the OM and the issue of the electoral districts.

⁴¹ According to the author Muḥammad al-Yūsufī, the name is meant as the noise made by punches, thus my translation into “Pow Wow”.

YouTube:

“Kuwaitvoice’s channel”: URL: <http://www.youtube.com/kuwaitvoice>. This channel was started on the 13th of May 2006. As of the 7th of November 2008, it had 28 subscribers, 1717 videos watched and 1727 channel viewers. It contained 13 videos.

Campaignsite:

“Kuwait5.org”: URL: <http://www.kuwait5.org>. The name of the site is registered as ‘asmi‘hum ṣawtaka ... khamṣa dwā’ir (“Make them hear your voice ... five constituencies”)⁴². It was created on the 25th of April 2006, according to domaintools.com⁴³. The site was designed by Jāsim al-Qāmis of "kuwaitjunior".

I have downloaded and saved the entire contents of these sites for the period of May until the end of July 2006.

2.2.3 Interviews

In addition to the sites mentioned above, information gathered through interviews has also been of great importance for my thesis. I have interviewed three different bloggers active in the Orange Movement, an activist, and a Kuwaiti journalist. In the following I will present these informants, as well as how I made contact with them, and conducted the interviews. All these interviews were recorded. Moreover, as one of the interviews was conducted through e-mail, I have archived the entire correspondence.

To begin with the interviews conducted in person in Kuwait, these included blogger Muḥammad al-Yūsufī, author of “ma6goog.com”, Jāsim al-Qāmis, one of the main organizers of the OM as well as one of the authors of “[Kuwaitjunior](http://kuwaitjunior)”, Khālīd al-Faḍḍāla, one of the main organizers of the OM and now leader of the National Democratic Alliance⁴⁴, and Dāhim al-

⁴² As for the transliteration of ṣawtaka, I have placed ṣawt in the accusative as the object of ‘asmi‘. Though I usually do not add the case endings, I believe it is necessary here so that a vowel precedes the suffixed pronoun. Moreover, I have used the masculine of this pronoun, as this is the norm in Arabic when referring to an unknown “you”.

⁴³ DomainTools: “<http://www.kuwait5.org>”. DomainTools is a web site which provides background information on other web sites. In order to find such information on DomainTools, one must simply search on the address of the site in question. Thus, when referring to DomainTools from this point onwards, I refer to DomainTools as well as the address I searched on. Information on DomainTools itself is to be found in the list of references.

⁴⁴ The National Democratic Alliance is a liberal political group in Kuwait. See: Al-Qatari (2008b), *Kuwait Times Online*

Qaḥṭānī, journalist in al-Rāy and founder of “Center for Democracy in Kuwait”⁴⁵. Originally, I had hoped to be able to speak with more bloggers, as well as with what might be termed “average internet users”. Though this is a rather unclear categorization, my intention was to speak with Kuwaiti students, as they have free internet access through their universities. Moreover, as I discuss below in connection with Deborah Wheeler’s study of internet usage in Kuwait, young people make up the bulk of internet users in the country. However, as I made my journey to Kuwait during the summer holidays, students proved difficult to reach. In retrospect, this, combined with Kuwait’s unfriendly summer climate, suggests that my fieldwork might have been better conducted at a different time. Yet, I believe I was able to gather the information I needed through the interviews I was able to conduct.

To get in touch with the bloggers, I started by e-mailing them, in both Arabic and English, to the addresses provided on the profile pages of their blogs. However, I received only one reply to these e-mail, from Muḥammad al-Yūsufī of Ma6goog.com. Yet, it turned out that Mr. al-Yusufi was well connected, both to other bloggers and to the Kuwaiti political scene, and thanks to his kind assistance, I also came in contact with Mr. al-Qāmis and Mr. al-Fadhala. In addition, he provided me with the e-mail address of the blogger “Ayya” of The Ultimate, whom I interviewed through e-mail. In addition, Dr. Kjetil Selvik of the University of Oslo provided me with contact information for both prominent politicians and journalists. Of these, Mr. al-Qaḥṭānī replied, and accordingly, I met with him during my stay in Kuwait.

The interviews in Kuwait were mainly carried out in English. This was not my choice, but the Kuwaitis I interviewed seemingly assumed that as a foreigner, I did not speak Arabic. However, I made them aware that as an Arabic student, I speak Arabic, and from time to time during my interviews, we switched to Arabic. Yet, by far the main part of the interviews were conducted in English.

Then there is the methodological question of what kind of interview would be most suited for my purposes, that is, which design would provide me with the information I needed. Fontana & Frey discusses different kinds of interviews in their article “*The Interview – From Neutral*

⁴⁵ Though Mr. al-Qaḥṭānī himself confirmed for me that he was the founder of an organization by this name, I have not found any information on this organization online. However, I have found some information on an organization called “The Kuwait Association for Developing Democracy”, in connection with Mr al-Qaḥṭānī. See for instance Fattahowa (2008), *Kuwait Times Online*

Stance to Political Involvement”, and points to two basic design patterns, namely structured and unstructured interviews. In their view, the structured interview involves the researcher asking “*all respondents the same series of preestablished questions with a limited set of response categories*”⁴⁶. Unstructured interviews, on the other hand, do not include a dedication to a set of questions, and may “*provide greater breadth than do other types (...)*”⁴⁷. With the very limited number of people I interviewed, quantitative data could not be established, and this was never my intention. Rather, as it turned out, what I would be doing was to speak with a limited number of key figures in the movement, as well as one journalist/activist. Given this, I believed the most productive approach would be to hear their own version of the work of the Orange Movement, and their own thoughts on their use of the internet. Moreover, the interviews provided a great opportunity for me to ask about subjects and details that were unclear to me, and to ask rather open questions in order to discover points and angles I myself had overlooked. Still, it would be important, especially when asking about events, articles and the like which were known to me, not to let my interpretation be evident in my questions. Thus, I concluded that neither structured nor unstructured approaches were ideal.

Rather, a design placed somewhere in the middle, the so-called semi-structured approach⁴⁸, would be the most suitable. That is, I prepared a list of questions which I used as a basis for the interviews, but at the same time, I did not commit myself to these questions alone, and allowed for the respondents to talk rather freely on the subjects raised. As it turned out, this led to the respondents mentioning details and views I hadn’t thought of beforehand, but at the same time gave me the time to ask all the questions I wanted. I have included my list of questions in the appendix.

As for the interview conducted through e-mail, this naturally became somewhat different from the ones made in person. I first contacted the respondent on e-mail after getting the address from Mr. al-Yūsufi, author of “ma6goog.com”. I did not know then, and still do not know, the identity of the blogger I interviewed. All I knew was that she used the same nickname in her e-mail address as did the blogger, and that Mr. al-Yūsufi told me that she was the very same person, which I have no reason to doubt. Moreover, the answers I received

⁴⁶ Fontana & Frey (2005): 701-702.

⁴⁷ Fontana & Frey (2005): 705

⁴⁸ Economic and Social Data Service: *Semi-structured interview*

from her were consistent with what I would expect from this particular blogger, both in style and content. As for the interview itself, it consisted of me sending her questions, to which she replied. She then decided to answer the questions in a form similar to an essay, which naturally gave her answers a more literary character than the other interviews. Moreover, when conducting interviews in this fashion, one loses the opportunity to follow up directly interesting points. On the other hand, this gives the respondent the opportunity to focus on the issues important to her, which again provides new information to me.

Lastly, it is important to note that all respondents have given me permission to use both their names and their quotes in my thesis. I asked for this permission both when the interviews were made, as well as through e-mails.

2.3 Analysis

I have shown above how I found and made contact with my informants, conducted my interviews, as well as how I identified and downloaded the sites I have studied. However, with regard to these sites – the blogs, the campaign site, the YouTube channel – the most important part remains; how to make sense of the material I have gathered. Put simply, I must choose a methodological approach to texts I study in this thesis. This choice in turn depends on my research question; what do I seek to find out by analyzing these texts?

My research questions are rather open ended, and so should my methodological approach be. If I am to find out to what ends the OM made use of the internet, and if the internet indeed constituted a public sphere for those activists, my analysis needs to be able to capture a wide variety of meanings conveyed. And perhaps most importantly, ideally it should not exclude any of said meanings. Though this ideal may be hard to live up to, it should guide the choices I make in terms of methodology.

Peräkylä suggests that an “informal approach” might be a sound alternative when analyzing texts: “*An informal approach may, in many cases, be the best choice as a method in research focusing on written texts*”⁴⁹. When scholars use such an “informal approach”, they do so “(...) *by reading and rereading their empirical materials, (...) try to pin down their key themes and,*

⁴⁹ Peräkylä (2005): 870

thereby, to draw a picture of the presuppositions and meanings that constitute the cultural world of which textual material is a specimen”⁵⁰. This seems like a preferable approach when the goal is to identify as much as possible of what is conveyed in the text, rather than looking for any particular elements. Yet, some of the concerns that need to be addressed in such an analysis, even though mentioned by Peräkylä, are more clearly articulated in the approach generally referred to as hermeneutics. These are concerns such as who the text is addressed to and why, what is conveyed and why, and not least, how I as a researcher deal with my own expectations and prejudice when reading the text. Thus, a hermeneutical approach offers useful tools for my analysis, and a brief discussion on the subject is needed.

2.3.1 Hermeneutics

In ”*Hermeneutics – an introduction*”⁵¹, the editors Sissel Lægreid and Torgeir Skorgen provide both a translation of the term *hermeneutics*, as well as a discussion and an interpretation of how the concept embodied in the term should be applied. The translation provided gives three meanings, all related to their interpretation: *expression, interpretation and translation*⁵². As for their interpretation, their main concern seems to be the prejudice and the expectations of any reader of any text. In their view, “(...) *there are no experiences that aren't in some way or another dependent upon prejudice or predisposal*”⁵³. However, before I discuss the issue of my own prejudice as a reader, I start with the opposite question, which follows naturally from the quotation above: what is actually possible to deduct from a given text? In doing so, I will illustrate my own approach by giving an example from my analysis in chapter five. I will return to the question of my own prejudice in chapter 2.4.

When reading through the material I have gathered, I seek to answer questions such as who are talking to whom and why, what are they saying and why, do they use any particular words and if so, why, what could be their intentions and why, and so on. To give an example; the authors of the “Kuwaitjunior” blog notoriously use the first person plural, “*we*”, and often speak to or on behalf of “*the people of Kuwait*”, or “*the sons and daughters of Kuwait*”. They often stress the unity of the people, and that they run their campaign for the sake of their

⁵⁰ Peräkylä (2005): 870

⁵¹ Authors own translation from Norwegian. The original title is “Hermeneutikk – en innføring”.

⁵² Lægreid & Skorgen (2006): 9

⁵³ Lægreid & Skorgen (2006): 32. The quotation is translated by the author. The original quote reads as follows: “(...) *at det ikke finnes erfaringer som ikke på en eller annen måte er betinget av fordommer eller forutforståelse*”.

country. They even use the slogan “5 – *for the sake of Kuwait*”⁵⁴. Applying the questions given above to these particular parts of text, what can they tell me?

Firstly, these questions help the reader identify such careful use of particular words. Extensive use of the same words is hardly a coincidence, and certainly important in order to answer the questions given above. Yet, the reason behind these precise words is by no means self-evident. They may indicate that the authors sincerely believe that they are running their campaign for the sake of their country, that they believe they can gather wider support if they do so, or both. They may indicate that the authors believe they have a majority of the country behind them, that they believe they will be taken more seriously if it seems like they have a majority behind them, or both. In other words, these bits of texts may by themselves carry important information for my thesis, but they may be interpreted differently, and do not by themselves provide enough information to determine which interpretation(s) seems the most likely. Thus, I must widen the scope and look at the wider context of which these bits of text are a part.

I then quickly discover that in addition to some undefined “*we*”, the authors also speak of some undefined “*them*”, who work against their cause, and constitute their opponents. This adds more information on the use of “*we*”; there is a division between those who are united in their struggle for reform, and those who are against them. Thus, an enemy, though ambiguously through an undefined “*them*”, is pointed out, and anyone who supports their cause is made part of a community. Through my interviews it was confirmed that this was no coincidence; for the authors of this blog, it was important to make people feel an important part of a movement. However, if we widen the scope further, we learn even more on the use of these particular words.

Properly contextualized in Kuwaiti society and politics, these particular words not only seem natural to use, but perhaps almost mandatory. As I will discuss below, the question of national unity, and the fear of sectarian unrest, is of great importance in Kuwaiti politics. Anyone coming across as instigating such unrest not only stands the risk of losing support, but also of severe reactions from the authorities. In this context, this careful selections of words is hardly surprising, not using these words could have harmed the campaign.

⁵⁴ See for instance “Kuwaitjunior” on the 14th of May 2006. The translation of the slogan is done by the author, from the original quote “khamisa li-’ajl l-kwayt”.

As we have seen, different interpretations are possible, and they are not mutually exclusive. The reason behind these words may be that the author believe they represent a majority, that they believe this will bring them more support, that they wish to create a community *and* in order to avoid a sectarian appearance. Widening the scope and bringing in new sources of information have brought more information, and also help me substantiate some interpretations. This is an important part of the hermeneutical approach; studying both the individual bits of text, as well as the whole body of texts, and by doing so, answering the questions mentioned above. But as I have shown, other sources than the text itself is of importance in this process, not least in terms of minimizing the impact of one's own prejudice. Below, I provide a discussion of this method, most often referred to as triangulation.

2.4 Using different sources – triangulation

As mentioned above, Læg Reid and Skorgen claim that no experiences can be separated from one's prejudice. Though interesting, I will not focus on whether or not their claim is accurate, but rather on how to minimize this influence of one's own expectations. Firstly, awareness in itself is important. In my research on the OM I need to take into account that I have certain expectations about how a political campaign is run, based on my experiences from Norwegian society. These expectations will likely guide my view on what is important for such a campaign. But Kuwait and Norway are two different societies, and my expectations may misguide me.

For instance, growing up in Norway, I am used to what I myself perceive as a democratic and egalitarian society, values I also perceive as just. Thus, I might be inclined to be sympathetic towards what I sense as a struggle for a more democratic society. This might in turn affect my view on the Orange Movement, as well as my view of those who disagreed with the Orange Movement. In addition, I may not appreciate the significance of events, such as holding a public demonstration, which could seem trivial in Norway, but was of great importance in Kuwait. Moreover, I most certainly have had other expectations as well, some of which I might not even be aware of myself. Thus, I might end up misunderstanding, misinterpreting, overlooking important information and overemphasize unimportant information. Ideally, I would be able to overlook my expectations, but more realistically, methodological tools can help minimize their effect.

One such tool is triangulation, and as Robert E. Stake points out, it is an important procedure to “*reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation*”⁵⁵. Moreover, Stake argues that:

Triangulation has been generally considered a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of and observation or interpretation. But acknowledging that no observations or interpretations are perfectly repeatable, triangulation serves also to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the case is being seen⁵⁶.

This has been my intention as well. Through the use of different sources, I seek to minimize the effects of my own prejudice, as well as to properly contextualize the material I analyze. As I have shown above, this contextualization has added important information to my interpretation of the texts I read, such as the importance of national unity with regards to the use of the first person plural and expressions like “*For the sake of Kuwait*”.

Moreover, the use of different sources together helps substantiate claims made by myself as well as my informants, and to make probable some interpretations over others. In addition, it helps establish the events that took place, though this is of course also a question of interpretation. To give an example; how did the OM decide it was time to take to the streets, and hold their first demonstration? As I show below (chapter 5.2.5, “Discussions”), the suggestion to do so was made in a comment to an article on the “Kuwaitjunior” blog. A few hours later, after some discussion in the comments field, a new post was published on the same blog, announcing the demonstration, and informing readers of when and where to gather. Does this mean that the decision to hold a demonstration was taken online? The online material, that is, the posts and the comments, suggests so, in that the suggestion was made, discussed, and then the demonstration announced. Also Amir al-Zuhair’s documentary on the OM, entitled “*When the people spoke*”, highlight this online discussion⁵⁷. Moreover, my informants all point to the importance of online discussions with regards to decision making within the movement. Yet, the example of such online decision making given by one of the authors of this particular blog was the choice of the color orange to represent the movement. In addition, through my interviews, I know that the authors of the blog – together with some other key organizers of the movement – discussed the subject of holding a demonstration. One of their concerns was whether or not people would show up if they announced it, given that no one knew who they were at the time.

⁵⁵ Stake (2005): 453

⁵⁶ Stake (2005): 454

⁵⁷ Al-Zuhayr (2006)

Thus, I know that the suggestion was made online, that it was discussed online, that the demonstration was announced online, that the participants in the OM hold that online decision making was important, but also that it was discussed offline. And it is of course impossible to say whether or not those who supported the idea online would have arranged their own demonstration, had not the blog announced the one that actually took place. To sum up, I cannot with certainty establish when the decision was made, and by who. However, it seems probable that the idea appeared online, and that the online support it received was important, all the time the ones who in the end announced that a demonstration would take place were insecure about whether or not people would show up. Moreover, the use of different sources has confirmed for me that this represents an important feature of the OM. Although my expectations may have affected me when I first noticed this incident and thought it important, its relevance has been confirmed by online material, interviews and secondary sources.

Above, I have described the methodological choices I have made with regards to gathering and analysis of material for this thesis. In order to further treat this material, a theoretical context for its interpretation is needed. As I have argued, I believe the notion of the public sphere offers good perspectives for the study of a movement such as the OM. However, the notion of the public sphere is not a clearly defined concept. This thesis is not primarily meant as a contribution to any theoretical debate on the public sphere, but a brief discussion on the subject is nevertheless needed.

3 Theoretical framework

3.1 The public sphere

My point of departure is Habermas, who argues that with the term “*the public sphere*”; “*we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed*”⁵⁸. According to Habermas, a public sphere should be inclusive, its participants should be guaranteed freedom of speech and freedom of opinion on matters of general interest. It should be guided by a principle of rational-critical discourse striving for consensus, participants’ status’ should be overlooked, and it should be free from state intervention. The matters (of general interest) upon which participants reach consensus through rational-critical discourse should ideally be implemented in society. However, though one could hardly overlook the importance of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, many have criticized Habermas’ normative ideal.

Among the critics, Nancy Fraser argues that the bourgeoisie public sphere, upon which Habermas based his work, was not inclusive neither in terms of participants nor issues. Therefore, subordinated social groups “*have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics*”, which she terms “*subaltern counterpublics*”⁵⁹. As for issues, she argues that the idea that “*matters of general interest*” should be discussed in the public sphere is somewhat misleading, as issues which are now debated in the public previously were considered to be private, such as domestic violence. Therefore, “*(...) there are no naturally given, a priori boundaries here*”, and minorities must be guaranteed opportunities to “*convince others that what in the past was not public in the sense of being a matter of common concern should now become so*”⁶⁰.

Her view is supported by Dahlgren, who points out that “*The term “public sphere” is most often used in the singular form, but sociological realism points to the plural*”⁶¹. Dahlgren also criticize the ideal of rational consensus, noting that “*in the advocacy/activist sector of the*

⁵⁸ Habermas (1989): 73

⁵⁹ Fraser (1992): 123

⁶⁰ Fraser (1992): 129

⁶¹ Dahlgren (2005): 148

online public sphere” - though “*these organizations strives for internal consensus (...) - Externally (...), the thrust of their political address (...) is not to attain consensus, but rather to affect policy*”⁶².

Thus, we might view a public sphere as one of potentially many of its kind, in which opinion is formed for this particular public. The issues raised are determined by the concerns of the participants, and an important feature is to lift these issues into the public at large. While this sphere should be open and formally inclusive, it may be based mainly on one social group in society. Seeking consensus internally, this may not be the goal externally. As for freedom of expression and opinion, and freedom from state intervention, these are contested freedoms for many – especially in the Middle East – and may be the very issues a particular public seeks to affect, and should therefore not be assumed a priori.

3.2 The public sphere and the internet

“In a part of the world where print and broadcast media traditionally have been controlled by the government, digital networked spaces offer the possibility of a much richer public sphere than existed before, providing a venue for all manner of opinions and ideas, covering love, life, culture, economics, religion, and politics”

(Mapping the Arab Blogosphere⁶³)

The quotation above, taken from the *Mapping the Arab blogosphere* project, clearly states that a public sphere is to be found online, a view supported by other scholars as well. In his book on American blogging, Aaron Barlow sticks to the original and uses Habermas’ three institutional criteria to identify whether or not blogs constitute a new public sphere. He notes that “*What the blogs have managed to do, in some respects, is re-establish the public sphere much in the way that the coffeehouses, salons, broadsheets, and pamphlets (and more) first established it three hundred years ago*”⁶⁴.

With regards to the Middle East in specific, Salvatore and Le Vine notes that “(...) there would seem to be an emerging consensus among scholars of Islam and the Middle East that the “public sphere” offers a problematic field for investigating the thematic area of democratic development in the region that possesses greater analytical clarity and depth than has been

⁶² Dahlgren (2005): 157

⁶³ Etling, Bruce et. al. (2009): 46

⁶⁴ Barlow (2008): 5

achieved utilizing the civil society framework”⁶⁵. Eickelman and Anderson argue that there is an emerging Muslim public sphere, aided by the new media (which includes the Internet):

(...) This combination of new media and new contributors to religious and political debates fosters an awareness on the part of the actors of the diverse ways in which Islam and Islamic values can be created and feeds into new senses of a public space that is discursive, performative and participative, and not confined to formal institutions recognized by state authorities⁶⁶.

However, there is no consensus on online public spheres. Jodi Dean, in her tellingly entitled essay “*Why the Net is not a Public Sphere*”, states that the “*the notion of the public sphere is (...) not applicable to the Net (...)*”⁶⁷. She attacks the idea of not one but many public spheres, arguing that “*(...) These attempts to save the concept by adding an “s” to it are not successful*”⁶⁸, because different counter publics either have the same norms, making them part of the same Habermasian sphere, or have different norms, in which case “*(...) they are not publics but different sorts of groups – interest groups, say*”⁶⁹. In her view, the “*Net*” is the “*architecture for communicative capitalism*”, and should be theorized as a “*zero institution*”⁷⁰.

Not wanting to take part in a theoretical debate, I will not discuss her static view of the public sphere. However, though I believe there are public spheres to be found on the internet, I agree with Dean that the internet as such cannot be viewed as one. For one thing, many possible online activities have little to do with a public sphere (though the act of doing them may be the subject of public discussion), such as paying bills, finding a recipe or – for that matter – surfing for porn. Secondly, not everyone on the internet communicates with each other, they are not part of the same public, there are many publics online.

Since the advent of “Web 2.0” and its user generated content, the tools for an online public sphere have been in place. Internet users can easily express their opinion, discuss, comment on articles, document events etc. And with the numerous free blog hosts, forums, YouTube and other sites that exists, the places – or, if you will, the online coffeehouses - are there as

⁶⁵ Salvatore & Le Vine (2005): 4

⁶⁶ Eickelman & Anderson (2003): 2

⁶⁷ Dean (2003): 95

⁶⁸ Dean (2003): 96

⁶⁹ Dean (2003): 96

⁷⁰ Dean (2003): 105

well. However, the internet does not provide neither content nor participants. To constitute a public, the sites involved as well as the participants involved must be connected; random examples of debate does not constitute a public, neither does a blog no one reads.

Furthermore, the sites must be open and formally inclusive, participants must be able to raise issues, in short; the sites must constitute a public in line with the characteristics of a public sphere given above.

Still, although the internet makes this possible online, it does not necessarily happen. Many – as I have shown above – were extremely optimistic about the prospects of democratization being aided by the internet. But the internet merely provide the tools and the places, the rest is still up to each and everyone.

3.3 Applying the public sphere framework

Given that public spheres may exist online, how does one identify them? Dahlgren provides three dimensions that “*provide an analytical point for examining the public sphere of any given society or analyzing the contribution of any given communication technology*”⁷¹: the structural, the representational and the interactional. The structural dimension has to do with “*formal institutional feature*”, raising issues of “*freedom of speech, access, and the dynamic of inclusion/exclusion*”⁷². With regards to the internet, this has to do with “*such things as the manner in which cyber-geography is organized in terms of legal, social, economic, cultural, technical, and even Web-architectural features*”⁷³. As for the representational dimension, this deals with media output, raising questions of “*(...) fairness, accuracy, completeness, pluralism of views, agenda setting, ideological tendencies, modes of address, and so forth*”⁷⁴. Lastly, the dimension of interaction deals with both “*citizens’ encounters with the media (...)*”, as well as interaction between citizens, with the important point being that Dewey’s argument that a public is “*something other than just a media audience*”⁷⁵ In what follows later, I intend to make use of Dahlgren’s three dimensions as I present my analysis in chapter six, always bearing in mind the features of a public sphere given above.

⁷¹ Dahlgren (2005): 150

⁷² Dahlgren (2005): 149

⁷³ Dahlgren (2005): 149

⁷⁴ Dahlgren (2005): 149

⁷⁵ Dahlgren (2005): 149

3.4 Summing up – how I studied the Orange Movement

This thesis is an inquiry into any possible democratizing effects the internet might bring forth, with the Kuwaiti Orange Movement of 2006 as my case of study. As I have argued above, I believe a limited and properly contextualized case study of connected sites is the preferable design for such a study. I have shown how I have gathered online material, and exemplified how I can analyze these texts using a hermeneutical approach. Through the use of different sources – triangulation – I seek to minimize the effects of my own prejudice and expectations, as well as the effects of the insecurity online data carries with it, as explained above.

Triangulation further helps me establish the events that took place, and to substantiate my claims and those of my informants.

Through the notion of the public sphere I further investigate the relevance of my findings in terms of political participation and democratization. In the discussions above, I provide certain characteristics I believe are essential for any public sphere, online or offline. Though I argue that such publics may be situated and mediated online, this do not necessarily happen due to the internet in itself, it is dependent upon the users involved. Thus, a study of the actual usage of connected sites and the effects of this usage offline is needed, and I have presented the research design I believe is best suited to enable such a study. As I believe contextualization is an important part of this design, I start by providing a brief presentation of the Kuwaiti context the OM operated within.

4 The context

4.1 Kuwaiti politics

The still ruling Al-Ṣabāḥ family has “*played a role in ruling Kuwait*” for more than 200 years⁷⁶. The country gained its independence from Britain in 1961, and the “*fairly democratic constitution*”⁷⁷ instituted a parliament, even though parliamentary elections also were held in 1938. Since independence, 12 parliamentary elections have been held in Kuwait, but the parliament and the constitution have also been suspended twice; between 1976 and 1981 and between 1986 and 1992⁷⁸.

Oil is of course an important feature in Kuwaiti politics. Originally, the Emirs were economically dependent on the merchants, who naturally demanded their say in the affairs of the state. However, with the transition to oil, Crystal points out that a new deal was struck as the rulers became economically independent of the trading families: “*[i]n exchange for receiving a sizeable portion of oil revenues, the merchants renounced their historical claim to participate in decision making*”⁷⁹. In her 1990 (new edition 1995) study of Kuwait and Qatar, Crystal examines the impact of oil on political coalitions and state institutions. She argues that “*[o]il revenues, by precluding the coalition and institution building that is crucial to stability, have left these regimes vulnerable*”⁸⁰.

Even though the oil revenues in Kuwait, in contrast to for instance in Saudi Arabia, goes to the state and not to the ruling family directly, they are of course of every importance to the Emir. According to Wheeler, as of 1975, “[t]he Kuwaiti government controls 100% of the oil industry’s profits”⁸¹. Furthermore, “[t]he government (...) owns 97 % of the land of Kuwait

⁷⁶ Freedom House (2008)

⁷⁷ Salem (2008): 211

⁷⁸ Tétrault (2000): 60

⁷⁹ Crystal (1989): 433

⁸⁰ Crystal (1990): 195

⁸¹ Wheeler (2006): 72

*and employs 95 % of the Kuwaiti population*⁸². The same author notes that *“the primacy of economic concerns over political aspirations continues in contemporary Kuwait”*⁸³.

Salem points out that *“Kuwait has a long history of consultative government, constitutionalism, and participatory politics unique among the monarchies of the Gulf Region”*⁸⁴. Michael Herb also expresses a somewhat positive view on the democratic aspects of Kuwaiti politics, as well as on the prospect of an emerging constitutional monarchy in the country⁸⁵. In his study of Middle Eastern monarchies, he criticizes the rentier state theory, arguing that:

The logic, for individual citizens, behind the desire for wise expenditure of state revenue is the same whether or not the government’s main activity is “tax and spend”, “borrow and spend” or “sell oil and spend”. In short, the formula “No representation without taxation,” needs a decent burial⁸⁶

Tétrault also looks positively on the prospect of a constitutional monarchy in Kuwait, and refuses the notion of Arab *“exceptionalism”*⁸⁷. Furthermore, and interestingly for my study, she points to populism as an important force for democratization, and claims that *“(…) populism and constitutionalism are interconnected strategies for democratization”*⁸⁸. She also makes the argument that the Iraqi occupation, although obviously a traumatic experience in the history of Kuwait, enhanced the pro-democratization forces in the country⁸⁹.

However, different sources point out that Kuwait is not yet an electoral democracy, and that politics still is dominated by the ruling family⁹⁰. The 50 member parliament is elected for four years in general elections, whereas the cabinet – which has 15 seats in parliament as well – is appointed by the Emir. Important ministries such as defense, interior and foreign affairs, are traditionally reserved for members of the royal family, as is the post of prime minister. Still, Freedom house notes that since the restoration of parliament in 1992, *“the parliament played an active role in monitoring the Amir and the government, often forcing cabinet ministers out*

⁸²Wheeler (2006): 72

⁸³ Wheeler (2006): 66-67

⁸⁴ Salem (2008): 211

⁸⁵ Herb (1999): 267

⁸⁶ Herb (1999): 259

⁸⁷ Tétrault (2000): 237

⁸⁸ Tétrault (2000): 237

⁸⁹ Tétrault (2000): 76-77

⁹⁰ Freedomhouse (2008) & Brown (2008)

of office and blocking legislation proposed by the ruling family”⁹¹. Also Michael Herb points out that the parliament “has been increasingly enthusiastic about using the tools it does have”⁹², though these powers are, as he notes, “largely negative”⁹³. The result is a power struggle between the royal family and the parliament which has given Kuwait three elections and seven governments since 2006, all governments headed by the Emir’s nephew Sheykh Nāṣir Muḥammad al-’Ahmad al-Jābir al-Mubārak al-Ṣabāḥ⁹⁴. As al-Jazeera’s Hashem Ahelbarra puts it: “Kuwait faces the challenge of maintaining a relatively democratic system while preserving quasi-absolute powers of the ruling family”⁹⁵. This seems to indicate one of the main issues in Kuwaiti politics: the distribution of power within the system. Whereas the Emir blames parliament for hindering development by blocking initiatives⁹⁶, the Parliament seems determined to have their say in politics.

The power struggle is often played out through MPs use of one of their constitutional tools, interpellation of ministers (Arabic: ’istijwāb, often referred to in Kuwaiti english newspapers as “grilling”). Kuwaiti MP’s have the right to interpellate ministers in parliament on a particular issue, such as alleged squandering of public funds or corruption, and the interpellation may be followed of a vote of no confidence if ten MPs demand so⁹⁷. With the government wanting to avoid the humiliation of such a process, interpellations - especially when directed at cabinet members from the ruling al-Ṣabāḥ family - have notoriously led to the cabinet resigning, or the Emir dissolving parliament⁹⁸. However, if the government is confident in gaining a majority, the vote of no confidence might take place, as it did in the summer of 2009⁹⁹. Moreover, the Kuwaiti political scene has witnessed some encouraging events lately, as the Prime Minister himself chose to face a vote of confidence in parliament in December 2009¹⁰⁰. Though there is no reason to doubt that the government was confident a majority would back the PM, it is nevertheless a big step in terms of the government and the

⁹¹ Freedom House (2008)

⁹² Brown (2008)

⁹³ Herb (2009): 380

⁹⁴ Herb: *Kuwait Politics Database*

⁹⁵ Ahelbarra (2009), *Aljazeera.net*

⁹⁶ Brown (2008), see also Kholaf & Ibrahim (2008), *Arab Times Online*

⁹⁷ Al-Diwan al-Amiri: *The Constitution*, §99 – 103

⁹⁸ See for instance: Izzak, B. (2010a), *Kuwait Times Online*

⁹⁹ I m referring to the no confidence vote directed against Sheikh Jabir on July 2nd: Izzak, B. (2009a), *Kuwait Times Online*

¹⁰⁰ Izzak, B. (2010a), *Kuwait Times Online*. To be precise, the vote that was held was not called a vote of no confidence. When it comes to the PM, the Kuwaiti constitution states that the parliament can only vote on a motion of no cooperation. However, the lack of confidence would be just as clear from such a vote, and the PM would be forced to resign.

ruling family accepting the right of the parliament to monitor their work. Still, this was yet to come when the OM campaigned in 2006, and political stalemate was – and perhaps still might be – a part of Kuwaiti politics.

However, other political struggles were also part of the picture in 2006. Kuwait has been described as a “*deeply divided*”¹⁰¹ society, both along sectarian and tribal lines, as well as between secular and religious elements in society. To begin with the dispute between religious and secular parts of society, it is often displayed in parliament as struggles between islamists and liberals. Tétrault points out that one of the first victories of islamists after they, in her account, entered parliament in 1981, was the total prohibition of alcohol in 1983, which until then was legal for foreigners in the country¹⁰². As late as in 1996 segregation between male and female students were introduced in all levels of education¹⁰³. To give a more recent example; after women for the first time were elected to parliament in 2009, islamist MPs demanded they wear veils in the national assembly. Two of the four women elected, ‘Asīl al-‘Awaḍī and Rūlā Dashtī, refused, and the issue is still being debated¹⁰⁴.

Then there is the issue of members of the big tribes of Kuwait versus the city dwellers, or as it is known in Kuwait, of *badū* versus *ḥaḍar*¹⁰⁵. This is a very sensitive issue in Kuwait, and any activity that might stir tensions between the two groups is not viewed favorably, hence the importance of national unity, as I have mentioned earlier. A recent example of the importance of this issue occurred in December 2009. On a show on his own TV-channel, *al-Sūr*¹⁰⁶, the former electoral candidate Muḥammad al-Juwayhil charged that only city dwellers were real citizens of the country. Not surprisingly, this sparked an outrage among prominent tribal representatives¹⁰⁷. Al-Juwayhil was arrested, and the government, with the support of several law makers, proposed amendments to the country’s media laws, by many viewed as restrictions on the freedom of expression¹⁰⁸. In addition, the minister of media had to face interpellation in parliament followed by a vote of no confidence, for his alleged inability to deal with the issue¹⁰⁹. As for sectarianism, tension between the country’s 70 % Sunni majority

¹⁰¹ Brown (2008)

¹⁰² Tétrault (2000): 110

¹⁰³ Al-Qatari (2008), *Kuwait Times Online*

¹⁰⁴ See for instance: Spencer (2009), *The Daily Telegraph Online*

¹⁰⁵ See for instance: Izzak (2009b), *Kuwait Times Online*

¹⁰⁶ Literally: The Wall (authors own translation). The title refers to an old city wall of the city of Kuwait, Izzak (2009b), *Kuwait Times Online*

¹⁰⁷ Izzak (2009b), *Kuwait Times Online*

¹⁰⁸ See for instance: Saeid (2010), *Kuwait Times Online*

¹⁰⁹ Al-Ramīzān et. Al. (2010), Al-Jarīda

and 30 % Shia minority¹¹⁰ is yet another sensitive issue, and another part of the national unity which is not to be stirred up¹¹¹.

The Orange Movement must be viewed against this background of a power struggle, alleged corruption and political stalemate, and not least the sensitivity concerning national unity. The declared goal of the movement was to change the number of electoral districts from 25 to five, and to work against corruption. Importantly, the issue of the electoral districts is closely linked to both corruption and the power struggle in Kuwait. Furthermore, the issue circulated for years in Kuwaiti politics, exemplifying the political stalemate in the country, as I will show below. Moreover, the movement needed to make sure it did not come across as attacking the unity of the Kuwaiti people in any way. Lastly, if they were to build a wide alliance, they would need to bridge the gap between liberals and islamists.

4.2 Kuwait and the internet

Whereas Kuwaiti politics is one part of the context within which the OM must be viewed, the internet culture of the country is another, no less important part. Kuwait was one of the first countries in the region to make the Internet commercially accessible to the public, in 1992¹¹². Furthermore, the country has for many years offered free Internet access to all university students¹¹³. As of 2008, there were more than 280 000 Internet subscribers in Kuwait, including 25 000 broad band subscribers, and approximately 31.57 % of the population was online¹¹⁴. The country experienced a user growth of 500 % between the years 2000 and 2008¹¹⁵.

¹¹⁰ Central Intelligence Agency (2009)

¹¹¹ See for instance: Izzak (2010b), *Kuwait Times Online*

¹¹² Wheeler (2006): 38

¹¹³ Wheeler (2006): 38

¹¹⁴ International Telecommunication Union (2008a)

¹¹⁵ Internet Usage and World Stats (2008)

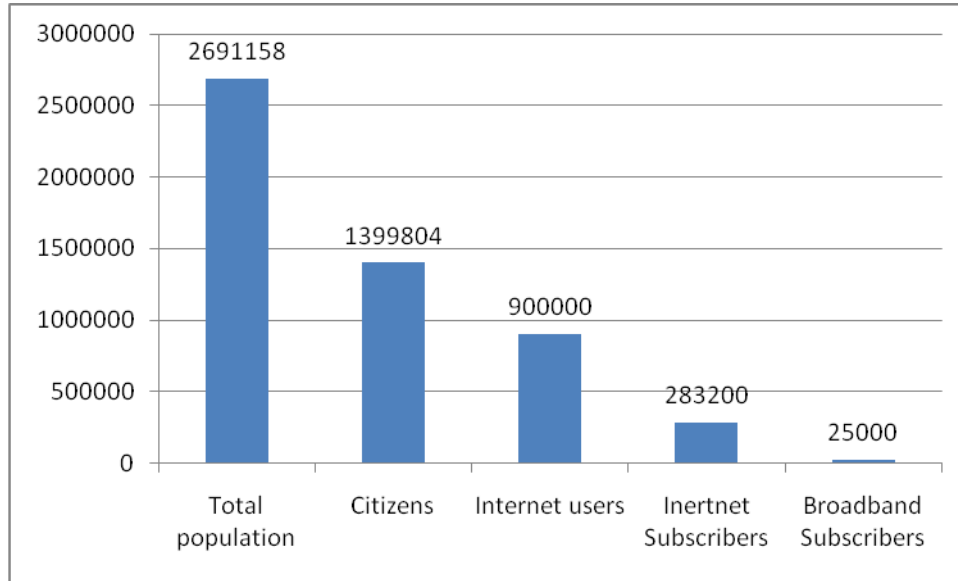


Figure 1: Internet penetration in Kuwait, 2008¹¹⁶

With regards to censorship, article 36 of the Kuwaiti constitution states that “*Freedom of opinion and scientific research is guaranteed, and all people have the right to express their view and to propagate their view in writing or speech or otherwise, in accordance with the conditions and regulations made clear by/evident in the law*”¹¹⁷. Article 49 states that “*Compliance with the public order and respect for public moral is a duty upon all inhabitants of Kuwait*”¹¹⁸. It is perhaps not surprising then that Freedom House reported in 2009 that the government has “*directed Internet service providers to block certain sites for political and moral reasons*”¹¹⁹.

FILTERING	No evidence of filtering	Suspected filtering	Selective filtering	Substantial filtering	Pervasive filtering
Political			●		
Social					●
Conflict/Security			●		
Internet tools					●

Figure 2: Kuwait, results at a glance, from OpenNet Initiative¹²⁰

¹¹⁶Central Intelligence Agency (2009), International Telecommunication Union (2008a), Internet Usage and World Stats (2008).

¹¹⁷Al-Diwan al-Amiri: *The Constitution*, § 36 (translation by the author).

¹¹⁸Al-Diwan al-Amiri: *The Constitution*, § 49 (translation by the author).

¹¹⁹Freedomhouse (2009)

¹²⁰OpenNet Initiative

This is confirmed by the OpenNet Initiative as well, which points out that private ISPs “*freely block*” sites deemed to be immoral, whereas the Ministry of Communication focuses on sites “*critical of the government or seen to support terrorism*”¹²¹. The OpenNet Initiative also points to the issue of surveillance: “*(...) There are cases of internet surveillance efforts as well as calls from officials to monitor online activities*”¹²². The issue of surveillance reached the headlines in the fall of 2009, with Kuwaiti bloggers launching a 24 hour no-blogging strike protesting alleged surveillance and in solidarity with blocked bloggers¹²³. As for filtering, a recent example occurred in September 2008, when the Ministry of Communication ordered Kuwaiti ISPs to block YouTube, due to content which could insult Muslims¹²⁴. However, as of July 2009, YouTube was accessible in Kuwait.

Still, despite these constraints on Kuwaiti internet users, the Orange Movement activists did manage to express their view almost unhindered on the internet during 2006. The one exception was the blogger “Ayya” of “The Ultimate”, whose blog was blocked for two days. I will elaborate more on this in chapter five. In addition, some activists did experience government harassment, as I discuss in chapter six. Lastly, having the freedom to express oneself online is one thing, how this freedom is put to practical use may be quite another. Thus, some comments on Kuwaiti internet culture are needed.

4.2.1 Internet culture

Deborah Wheeler has studied the Internet culture among Kuwaiti youths. Her ethnographic study highlights the view of Internet as a social construct, and further “*attempts to push Internet studies over the borders of Western centrism*”¹²⁵. Her study shows that the Internet is important in the youth subculture, and “*especially as a tool for leisure and communicating with the opposite sex*”¹²⁶. However, in interviews she conducted with Kuwaiti youths, political issues were mentioned as well, for instance that the Internet might help Kuwaiti women to get the vote¹²⁷. Furthermore, though Wheeler notes that the Internet culture is shaped by the user’s surroundings and the norms in their society, she also points out that “[t]o

¹²¹ OpenNet Initiative

¹²² OpenNet Initiative

¹²³ See for instance “Ma6goog.com” on the 1st of December 2009.

¹²⁴ Etheridge (2010), *Kuwait Times Online*

¹²⁵ Wheeler (2006): 189 - 190

¹²⁶ Wheeler (2006): 136

¹²⁷ Wheeler (2006): 143

*a degree, students' cyber relations reveal that the Internet supports decentralization, individual empowerment, resilience and self-sufficiency" (...)*¹²⁸.

Mark Lynch also points to politically engaged internet users in Kuwait: “(...)In Egypt, Bahrain, and Kuwait, for example, bloggers have played a key role in mobilizing contentious politics”¹²⁹. However, he argues that this is a relatively new phenomenon in Kuwait, originating with the Orange Movement: “The Kuwaiti case is particularly interesting since prior to 2006, most observers had seen the Kuwaiti blogosphere as relatively disengaged from politics and marginal to the public realm”¹³⁰. What made this flip come about will naturally be of importance in the following presentation and analysis of the Orange Movement.

4.3 The Orange context

In the next chapter, I will give a thematic presentation of my findings from the sites' contents, that is, both the subjects treated on the sites as well as the features provided. The themes I present are those I found to be repeated frequently. I give at least one example of each of the elements I highlight, but, unless otherwise is evident from the text, this example is but one of many. However, in order to properly contextualize the online content, I start by discussing both the issue of the five districts as well as the origins of the Orange Movement in more detail.

4.3.1 Why do they want five?

The issue of the electoral districts has been controversial in Kuwait ever since the late Emir Jābir al-'Ahmad al-Jābir al-Ṣabāḥ changed the number from ten to 25 in 1981. According to Mary Ann Tétrault, the intention was to “hobble what at the time was a predominantly secularist political opposition”¹³¹, though one unforeseen consequence was that it paved the way for islamists' entry to parliament. In addition to the redistricting, a large number of Bedouins (*badū*) – traditional allies of the al-Ṣabāḥ – were given full citizenship, which

¹²⁸ Wheeler (2006): 139

¹²⁹ Lynch (2007): 11

¹³⁰ Lynch (2007): 15

¹³¹ Tétrault (2000): 110

entails the right to vote and run for office¹³².

However, the above mentioned gerrymandering was not the only reason why reformers demanded five districts; vote buying and clientalism played a part as well. With 25 districts in such a small country as Kuwait, a relatively low number of votes were needed to win one of each district's two seats in parliament. According to many OM activists, this in turn set the stage for widespread vote buying. For instance, when interviewing the OM leadership I was told of one candidate in particular who used to “*win easily, used to by 500 votes, 500 KD pr vote*”. Though this is quite a lot of money, this was not a problem for him, because he would get it back “*ten times more*” after being elected¹³³. Also Tétrault point to vote buying as one of the important reasons behind the reform campaign¹³⁴.

As for clientalism, a well known phenomenon in Kuwait is “*Service members*” whose stock in trade is to channel favors to constituents in return for votes¹³⁵. With larger districts, the number of favors to be returned naturally increased sharply; while 1461 votes could secure a seat in parliament in the last election with 25 districts, 3636 were needed when the number of districts became five. Going back in time, even smaller numbers were needed to succeed under the 25. Naturally, being a service MP became very difficult, and after two elections with five districts, OM activists hold that their number has decreased substantially¹³⁶.

In all, the 25 districts were widely seen as a major problem for Kuwait's democratic project. As journalist Dāhim al-Qaḥṭānī told me: “*We have so many diseases because of the (25, ed. rem.) constituencies*”¹³⁷. Still, not much happened until the 2003 parliament raised the issue, though their attempt at redistricting ended in failure. But when a new cabinet was named following the January 2006 emiri transition, the issue was high on the agenda, and the cabinet formed a committee to “*(...) deal with the issue*”¹³⁸. However, even though the committee suggested five constituencies, the entire cabinet was not easily persuaded, and launched other proposals, confusing the process. Suggestions were put forward for ten districts, for directing the issue to the constitutional court and to change the number of seats in parliament, leading then Minister of Information Dr. 'Anas al-Rashīd to resign in protest.

¹³² Tétrault (2000): 110

¹³³ Al-Qāmis & al-Faḍḍāla (2009)

¹³⁴ Tétrault (2006a)

¹³⁵ Tétrault (2006a)

¹³⁶ Al-Qāmis & al-Faḍḍāla (2009)

¹³⁷ Al-Qaḥṭānī(2009)

¹³⁸ Al-Najjar (2006)

On May 15th, in what later became known to OM activists as “*the historical session*”¹³⁹ the parliament was set to vote on whether or not to direct the issue to the constitutional court. Instead, 29 MPs supporting the five districts rose and left the session, leaving OM activists on the gallery in jubilation and the parliament with a lack of quorum. Two days later, the Emir dissolved parliament and called for new elections on June 29th.

4.3.2 How it all began

The Kuwaiti Blogosphere

As we now know, the number of electoral districts was eventually changed from 25 to five, and in this regard the Orange Movement was successful in their campaign. Yet, the campaign and the movement did not come into being in a vacuum, and to trace its origins, I start with a quick look on the Kuwaiti blogosphere *before* the OM. I then move on to discuss how the issue of the constituencies grew during the spring of 2006, and how the soon-to-be movement grew with it.

Unfortunately, not too much has been written about the Kuwaiti blogosphere as of before 2006. As mentioned above, Mark Lynch holds that it was predominantly apolitical at the time. The *Mapping the Arab blogosphere*-project has studied the Kuwaiti scene, but at a later time. However, the Kuwaiti daily *al-Jarīda* recently featured an article on the development of Kuwaiti blogs. In this paper's view, it all started in 2003¹⁴⁰, when the Kuwaiti blogosphere at first came into being. The article attributes much credit for its development to a young blogger named *Badr al-farīh*, who it claims founded the first Kuwaiti blog aggregator in 2004; <http://safat.kuwaitblogs.com>. The founding of this site in 2004 is confirmed by domaintools.com¹⁴¹. Then, however, the article jumps ahead to the Orange Movement of 2006, perhaps indicating that not much worth mentioning took place in the meantime.

This view is supported through my interviews as well. According to Muḥammad al-Yūsufī of “*ma6goog.com*”, there were probably between 30 and 50 blogs running before the OM. For her part, “Ayya” of “The Ultimate” gave the following description of pre-OM Kuwaiti blogs:

¹³⁹ In arabic: ”al-jalsa at-ta’rīkhiyya”

¹⁴⁰ Al-Mulayfy (2010), *Al-Jarīda*

¹⁴¹ DomainTools: “<http://safat.kuwaitblogs.com>”

(...) bloggers before the beginning of the Orange [M]ovement were total strangers yet became close cyber-friends, and that was the beauty of that group. That early group was mostly of the intellectual group, no more than a handful, some were university students, others grads, some others had artistic hobbies like writing, poetry and drawing. Talented in one field or another, mostly youths, but it contained all age groups¹⁴²

In other words, it may seem that the Kuwaiti blogosphere before the OM was limited in size, and though an attempt was made to promote and gather the bloggers through the blog aggregator, it was not a close knit community. As for thematic content, none of the sources above provides much information. However, as mentioned above, Mark Lynch holds that these blogs were predominantly apolitical before the summer of 2006. In order to trace how the OM emerged from this apolitical, limited and fragmented blogosphere, we need to start with some dramatic events of January 2006.

The Emiri transition

Whereas the issue of the electoral districts can be traced back, at the very least, to 1981, the OM laid its foundations in January 2006, with the Emiri transition. The transition in itself was something out of the ordinary, as Tétrault notes: “*For the first time in an Arab monarchy, an elected body effectively deposed the monarch, and empowered a new one, without anyone firing a shot*”¹⁴³. On January 15th, Sheykh Jābir al-’Ahmad al-Jābir al-Ṣabāḥ died, and Sheykh Sa’d al-’Abdallāh al-Sālim¹⁴⁴ succeeded him. However, Sheykh Sa’d was himself very sick, and was replaced by then Prime Minister Sheykh Ṣabāḥ al-’Ahmad al-Jābir on January 29th. This was of course no small issue, especially since it in effect meant skipping one branch of the family for the other¹⁴⁵. Even so, these events were kept out of the media. This was before Kuwait's 2006 liberalization of the press law, and the five newspapers that existed were, according to journalist Dāhim al-Qaḥṭānī, controlled by the Government in some way or another to the extent that they did not cover these events¹⁴⁶. Thus, according to the

¹⁴²“Ayya” (2009)

¹⁴³ Tétrault (2006b)

¹⁴⁴ The name al-’Abdallāh provides a challenge in terms of transliteration, as the name ‘Abdallāh is a genitive construction and as such should be transliterated ‘abd l-lāhi. However, with the article “al” added in front of the name, it can no longer be such a construction. Thus, I have chosen to write it as a single word, as this is how I believe it should be understood. Moreover, I have added the accusative case to ‘abd, in line with the norm of pronunciation of the name.

¹⁴⁵ Tétrault (2006b)

¹⁴⁶ Al-Qaḥṭānī(2009)

documentary “*When the People Spoke*”¹⁴⁷, many people turned elsewhere for information, namely to the “Kuwaitjunior” blog.

According to Jāsim al-Qāmis of “Kuwaitjunior”, they had “(...) *information access to circles the newspapers didn’t have access to*”¹⁴⁸. This view is supported by Dāhim al-Qaḥṭānī, as well as ‘Āmir al-Zuhayr’s documentary on the OM mentioned above, in addition to other OM activists. This built a readership for the blog, which, according to al-Qaḥṭānī, continued also after the succession crisis, and into the issue of the five districts.

4.3.3 The build-up: the spring of 2006

As the issue of the constituencies grew during the spring of 2006, many people were disappointed that, once again, it seemed to go nowhere. All OM activists I’ve talked to have given this frustration, both with this issue in particular and more general frustration with corruption and an ineffective Government, as the main force behind their involvement; “Ayya” of “The Ultimate” speaks of being “*fed up*”, and Jāsim al-Qāmis notes that “(...) *frustration was always the motivation that we played in order to launch a movement*”¹⁴⁹, but also that “(...) *the idea wasn’t to launch a movement as much as just blogging about what’s happening*”¹⁵⁰.

This was exactly what they did. However, by the end of April, when it became clear that the Government probably would not support five constituencies, perhaps not even ten, many wanted to do something. On the 25th of April 2006, the authors of “Kuwaitjunior” posted questions on whether or not people were ready to do something and take action. In the 36 comments to the post, readers answered in the affirmative, but also asked about what to do: “*shabāb, Take the lead, and we will be with you (...)*”¹⁵¹. The same day Jāsim al-Qāmis launched the campaign site “Kuwait5.org”, on which I will elaborate below, which provided contact information for politicians and ministers, asking the readers to lobby them. According to al-Qāmis himself, the motivation thought behind “kuwait5.org” was as follows: “*I’ve lived in the states for some time, I’ve seen how they do their work over there, and basically*

¹⁴⁷ Al-Zuhayr (2006)

¹⁴⁸ Al-Qāmis & al-Faḍḍāla (2009)

¹⁴⁹ Al-Qāmis & al-Faḍḍāla (2009)

¹⁵⁰ Al-Qāmis & al-Faḍḍāla (2009)

¹⁵¹ Comment by “Q8Maverick”, 25th of April 2006

implemented the things that I've learned over there towards formulating a grass root movement over here"¹⁵².

Also Dāhim al-Qaḥṭānī points to the experience from the US as an important factor, noting that these bloggers had experience from the Kuwaiti student union in America, which gave them organizational knowledge, a view supported by Muḥammad al-Yūsufī of "Ma6goog.com"¹⁵³. Then, according to "Ayya" of "The Ultimate", "*a wave of new bloggers in support of the movement joined the cyber community*"¹⁵⁴. However, as the cabinet session on the issue on the 1st of May ended without a decision, many wanted to take it "*to the next step*"¹⁵⁵. At 5:49 AM on the 3rd of May, the user "Tareq" suggested in a comment that they should take to the streets, and at 10:12 PM the same day a new post was published on "Kuwaitjunior", entitled "*To the streets we go, your presence is very, very, very important*". The readers were asked to meet outside the Prime Minister's palace on the 5th of May, when the cabinet would meet again, to show their support for the five districts. In the comments to this post, after Muḥammad al-Yūsufī of "Ma6goog.com" asked if they should wear clothes of any particular color, orange was suggested.

¹⁵² Al-Qāmis & al-Faḍḍāla (2009)

¹⁵³ Al-Yūsufī (2009)

¹⁵⁴ "Ayya" (2009)

¹⁵⁵ See for instance comment by "A3sab" on "Kuwaitjunior", 3rd of May 2006

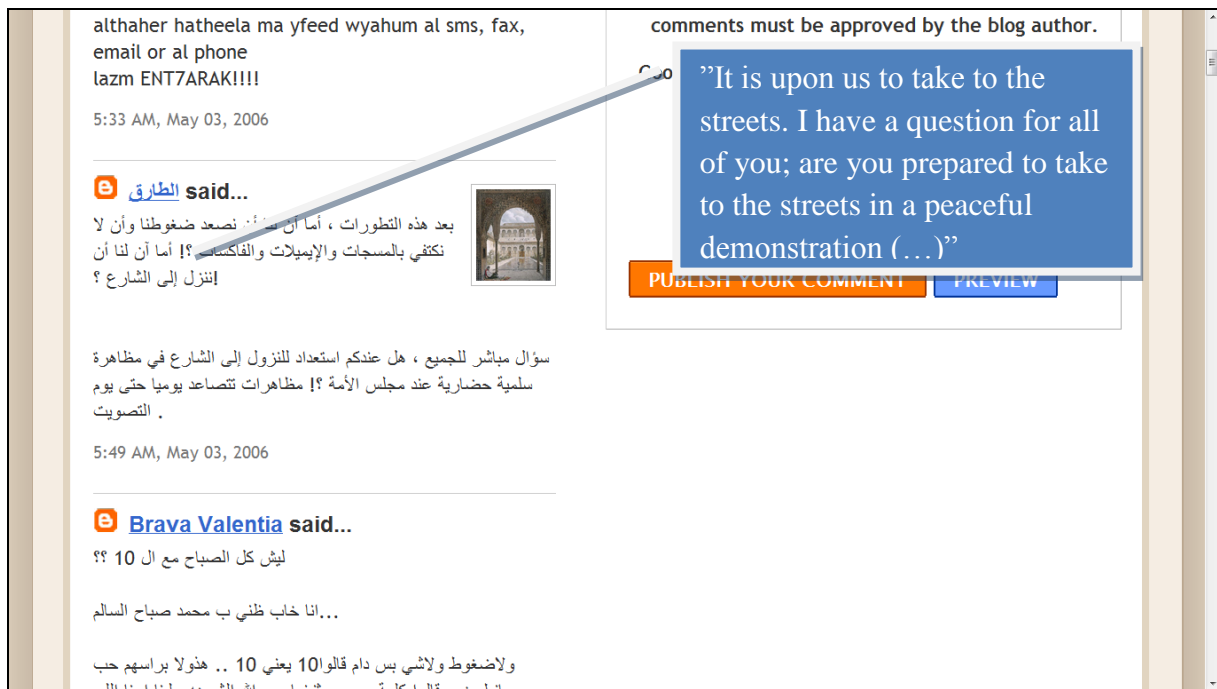


Figure 3: The user "Tariq" suggests to take to the streets

This was a huge step in the Kuwaiti context – the constitutional court had lifted the ban on public gatherings only days before. Furthermore, the organizers were worried that the anonymity of the net would discourage people from coming; they did not know who had asked them to be there¹⁵⁶. Still, around two hundred people showed¹⁵⁷, marking the start of a series of demonstrations and events that were ground breaking in Kuwait.

According to Dāhim al-Qaḥṭānī, the OM was created by accident¹⁵⁸, whereas Jāsim al-Qāmis of “Kuwaitjunior”, and Khālid al-Faḍḍāla, one of the main organizers, points to a “*lot of favorable circumstances*”¹⁵⁹. Evidently, this holds a lot of truth. The Emiri succession built a readership for their blog, but their prominent role in covering the events might not have been, had the liberalization of the press occurred earlier. The ban on public gatherings was lifted with perfect timing to their first rally, though this was not their doing. The frustration with corruption, inefficiency and not least the electoral districts grew with good help from the

¹⁵⁶ Al-Qāmis & al-Faḍḍāla (2009)

¹⁵⁷ Tétrault (2006a). However, the number of participants is difficult to determine, as different sources give different figures. I will comment more on this in chapter 5.1.

¹⁵⁸ Al-Qaḥṭānī(2009)

¹⁵⁹ Al-Qāmis & al-Faḍḍāla (2009)

Government's inability to reach a decision, and, not least, they had returned from the US¹⁶⁰ just in time with fresh experiences from political work there. This being said, it was the ability of these organizers as well as other activists to capture the opportunity that arose that made the OM possible, the circumstances can only be just what they were; favorable.

Thus, it might be difficult to single out any particular reason as to why the OM came into being, and why Kuwaiti bloggers turned political. Rather, a set of different factors seems to have played their part. For one thing, even though they were few and unorganized, Kuwaiti bloggers were active at the time. And it seems reasonable to believe that they were well aware of each other's existence, through the blog aggregator. This is further substantiated by the fact that they were able to team up on the issue so quickly. Adding the audience brought on by the succession crisis, the foundation for a movement was in place.

For their part, Kuwaiti politicians appear to have played their role perfectly. Against the backdrop of what many Kuwaitis perceived as a corrupt and paralyzed political scene, the government once again stalled the issue. As Jāsim al-Qāmis put it:

But the Government kept on postponing and delaying and playing around and changing things, so it even fuelled people even more. Like a gathering of some 200 was up to 3000 in say a few weeks, that wouldn't have happened if not the Government antagonized the people in a certain way, to even be fuelled even more¹⁶¹

This fueled many young Kuwaitis' frustration, just at the time when Khālid al-Faḍḍāla and Jāsim al-Qāmis returned from the US with fresh organizational experience, influenced by what they had seen of American grass root politics: “(...) *our minds were really fresh with all those ideas*”¹⁶². As it turned out, this was the mix of events needed for young bloggers to organize a campaign.

Thus, all my sources agree with Mark Lynch's view that the Orange Movement marks a distinct shift within the Kuwaiti blogosphere. Yet, there is no single answer to my question as to what made this flip come about; it was the combination of many events. Interestingly, this might help explain another claim made by all my informants; that Kuwait will not witness “a new OM” any time soon. Though they all agree that their movement introduced lasting

¹⁶⁰ Not all the authors of “Kuwaitjunior” were back in Kuwait by May 2006, but, by the 5th of May, Jāsim al-Qāmis and Khaled al-Fadala was.

¹⁶¹ Al-Qāmis & al-Faḍḍāla (2009)

¹⁶² Al-Qāmis & al-Faḍḍāla (2009)

changes in their country, they do not believe it will happen again, pointing out that it was a product of its time¹⁶³. I will explore this question in more detail in chapter seven.

Firstly, however, I move on to discuss the campaign of the Orange Movement and their use of the internet. I start by providing a chronological account of the events that took place, and then move on to an analysis of the contents of the sites I have studied, arranged thematically around the issues repeated most often.

¹⁶³ Al-Qāmis & al-Faḍḍāla (2009)

5 The orange campaign

5.1 The chain of events

I have argued repeatedly for the importance of proper contextualization when analyzing online findings. Thus, I have presented a discussion of Kuwaiti politics, internet culture, the issue of the five constituencies and the background for the Orange Movement. However, these online texts notoriously refer to and respond to different events that took place during, or as parts of, the campaign. Consequently, these events are important to the understanding of the online material, and must be given the proper attention. For this reason, I provide a brief survey of the most important events that took place. Yet, some of these events, staged by the Orange Movement, in themselves represent innovations in Kuwaiti politics, and deserve more consideration. These particular events will be discussed further in chapter 5.3, *Offline Action*.

I have used different sources in order to establish the chain of events. Perhaps not surprisingly, these sources agree on which events took place when, but not much more. There are occasionally different opinions with regards to who organized it, who took part, how many took part, why they took part and so on. In such instances, I make these uncertainties known to the reader. This aside, the chain of events presented below is confirmed by the blogs I have studied, through my interviews, and through the secondary sources I have used¹⁶⁴.

The events that lead up to the first demonstration are given in the previous chapter, and it took place according to plan on the 5th of May. As already mentioned, this was a big step in Kuwaiti politics, and the organizers themselves were by no means confident in its success. Yet, many people turned up, and they were duly noticed. According to the organizers, around 200 people took part in the demonstration. Though this number is hard to verify, the photographic evidence provided by some blogs¹⁶⁵, as well as the aforementioned documentary on the OM, clearly shows that a substantial amount of people were there. Moreover, the pictures show people of different ages, old people and young people, as well as families, perhaps indicating that the OM managed to mobilize people of different backgrounds, as I will discuss further in chapter 5.3.

¹⁶⁴ Good examples being Al-Zuhayr (2006) and Tétrault (2006a)

¹⁶⁵ See for instance "Miscellaneous" on the 5th of May 2006

From this point on, the OM moved rapidly. For one thing, they mobilized to many *Diwāniyyāt*, that is, the traditional Kuwaiti gatherings¹⁶⁶, arranged by politicians and other prominent Kuwaitis who supported their cause. One prominent example occurred on the 6th of May, when the “Kuwaitjunior” blog mobilized for such a gathering to be held on the same day. The particular *Diwāniyya* was named “*The reconquest of a nation*”¹⁶⁷, and featured prominent speakers such as MP ‘Aḥmad al-Sa‘adūn, who all agitated support for five constituencies. Then, perhaps encouraged by the first demonstration, a new event was announced, this time with the intention to keep it going through an entire night.

The first “*Night of will*”¹⁶⁸ was held on the 14th of May, the first day of what turned out to be a very eventful week. Different blogs mobilized for the event, which bore the reoccurring slogan “*We want Five – for the sake of Kuwait*”¹⁶⁹. It took place in front the parliament, and photos on the blogs give the impression that many people, from children to elderly, took part¹⁷⁰. ‘Amir al-Zuhayr’s documentary gives the same impression, and also shows how some people stuck to the plan and spent the night outside parliament. In addition, many MPs took part, and according to the “Kuwaitjunior” blog, different ideological persuasions were represented¹⁷¹. Their list of political participants included, among others, ‘Aḥmad al-Sa‘adūn (liberal¹⁷²), Walīd al-Ṭabaṭabā’ī (Salafi¹⁷³), and ‘Abd l-lāh al-Rūmī (conservative Sunni¹⁷⁴). According to Muḥammad al-Yūsufī, the organizers took the opportunity to make sure the politicians present pledged their support¹⁷⁵, a support which was tested as soon as the next morning.

On the 15th of May, the Kuwaiti parliament held the session which later came to be called “*the historical session*” within the Orange Movement. As mentioned above, 29 MPs who supported the five constituencies left the session and thus prevented a vote on whether or not to defer the issue to the constitutional council¹⁷⁶. The scenes from the gallery may very well

¹⁶⁶ A *Diwaniyya* is, according to Tétrault, “*the traditional men’s meeting usually held in individual homes*”. Such meetings are “*informal spaces for political action*”, and though not very inclusive, they are still “*crucial to political participation in Kuwait (...)*”. Tétrault (2000): 60.

¹⁶⁷ See “Kuwaitjunior” on the 6th of May 2006. Original quote “‘*isti’ādat waṭan*”

¹⁶⁸ In Arabic: *laylat l-’irāda*

¹⁶⁹ See for instance “Kuwaitjunior” on the 14th of May 2006

¹⁷⁰ See for instance “Kuwaitvoice” on the 15th of May 2006

¹⁷¹ See “Kuwaitjunior” on the 15th of May 2006

¹⁷² Herb: *Kuwait politics database*

¹⁷³ Herb: *Kuwait politics database*

¹⁷⁴ Herb: *Kuwait politics database*

¹⁷⁵ Al-Yūsufī (2009)

¹⁷⁶ Al-Zuhayr (2006)

be characterized as overwhelming; OM activists stood up jubilation, sung the national anthem, and even shouted slogans such as “*Down with the government*”¹⁷⁷. The speaker of parliament, Jāsim al-Khurāfi, was unable to restore order, and the session was adjourned.

Perhaps in order to avoid any further humiliation on part of the government, the parliament was surrounded by riot police the next day, when the session was to continue¹⁷⁸. This did hinder the OM from entering the building, and it did enable the parliament to vote on whether or not to send the issue to the constitutional council. Yet, even though the government won the vote, this was only due to the fact that those who opposed once again were absent¹⁷⁹. Instead, some of these MPs joined the activists, and supported their right to enter “*the people’s house*”¹⁸⁰. In the evening, a new demonstration was held outside the parliament. This time, the OM claimed 4000 participants¹⁸¹. Whether or not this was accurate is hard to determine, but the message was clear to the government. Three days later, Friday the 19th, the movement held a new “*Night of will*”, this time with the slogan “*The night of will continues*”¹⁸². Eventually, the government caved in, and on Sunday the 21st of May 2006, the Emir dissolved parliament, and called for new elections on June 29th¹⁸³.

It should be noted here that the government might have made another attempt at turning the tide in their favor. As mentioned above, it did try to refer the issue of the constituencies to the constitutional council, seen by their opponents as an attempt to kill the OM by stalling the issue¹⁸⁴. In addition, there was the “Blue Movement”. I have not been able to fully establish what the Blue Movement actually was, and who organized it. What is clear, however, is that it held at least one gathering, and that it argued for ten rather than five districts¹⁸⁵. According to all my informants, it was set up by the government as an attempt to counter the OM. One informant specifically pointed to Sheykh ’Aḥmad al-Fahd, then minister of Energy, as the

¹⁷⁷ Al-Zuhayr (2006)

¹⁷⁸ See for instance “The Ultimate” on the 16th of May

¹⁷⁹ Herb: *Kuwait Politics Database*

¹⁸⁰ See video on “Kuwaitvoice” on the 3rd of May 2006

¹⁸¹ Tétrault (2006a)

¹⁸² See for instance “The Ultimate” on the 19th of May 2006. Original quote: “*tastamirru laylatu l-’irāda*”.

However, this quotation might be read differently: “*tastamirru laylata l-’irāda*”, meaning “(You) continue the night of will”, i.e. the verb conjugated to the 2. person, masculine, singular, , with *laylata l-’irāda* as its direct object. As the quotation is not vocalized in the original source, both readings might be true. Still, I have chosen the first translation as I believe this to be more in line with other slogans used by the movement.

¹⁸³ BBC (2006a), *BBC*

¹⁸⁴ Herb: *Kuwait Politics Database*

¹⁸⁵ See “Kuwaitjunior” on the 24th of May

man behind it¹⁸⁶. The choice of the color blue might have been hurtful for many OM activists, as this color was until then, and for many still is, associated with the women's movement¹⁸⁷. Whatever the truth might have been, the Blue Movement does not seem to have made much of an impact. Nevertheless, it caught the attention of the OM at least once, as I will show in chapter 5.2.2.

Leaving the Blue Movement for now, the election campaign dominated the activities of the Orange Movement from the 21st of May and onwards. The main concern was, naturally, to support candidates who pledged support to five constituencies. Thus, the events announced on the blogs were mainly held by different candidates of this persuasion, with the OM mobilizing its supporters to their campaign meetings. Still, the activists did take some initiatives of their own, among other things a stunt to expose the alleged corruption of parliamentary candidate Jamāl al-‘Umar. However, I will deal with these events under chapter 5.3, as there is no indication that they affected the turn of events in the same way as the demonstrations mentioned above.

On the 29th of June, a new parliament was elected, with a majority supporting five constituencies. Still, this did not stop the OM from arranging yet another “*Night of will*” on the 7th of July¹⁸⁸. Then, ten days later, came the end of the Orange Campaign, in more than one way. The government, well aware of the will of the majority of the parliament, itself proposed five constituencies, and on the 17th of July 2006, the law was passed with 60 of 65 MPs supporting it¹⁸⁹. The next day, OM activists met with the PM in an apparent attempt to bury the hatchet¹⁹⁰. However, this was controversial within the movement, and according to Muḥammad al-Yūsufī of “Ma6goog.com”, this was the beginning of the end for the Orange Movement, as I will discuss in chapter 7.3. Nevertheless, the main aim of the movement was met, as the number of electoral districts was reduced to five. Seemingly, the OM was a successful popular movement, able to affect Kuwaiti politics substantially. Later, I will discuss the effects of this success, both in terms of the new electoral districts as well as the example set by the OM. First, however, I turn to the online campaign. In the following, I will analyze the online material I have gathered, and discuss its relation to the notion of the public

¹⁸⁶ Al-Yūsufī (2009)

¹⁸⁷ Al-Qāmis & al-Faḍḍāla (2009)

¹⁸⁸ See for instance “The Ultimate” on the 6th of July 2006

¹⁸⁹ BBC (2006b), *BBC*

¹⁹⁰ See “Kuwaitjunior” on the 22nd of July 2006

sphere. As already mentioned, the presentation of the online material is organized thematically.

5.2 Online content

5.2.1 Taking action

Throughout the sites I have studied, the call for action is repeated notoriously. The campaign site of the Orange Movement – “Kuwait5.org” – agitated individual action. On the site, the general framework and the main aims of the movement was presented, a demonstration announced, it was linked to the “official”¹⁹¹ blog, but the main focus was that *you* – the reader - take action by making your voice heard. The site provided contact information for cabinet members, MPs and columnists and urged the reader to convey his or her support for five districts to them. Furthermore, the site also provided contact information for newspaper editors, again calling upon the reader, this time to thank those supporting five, and to lobby those who don't, or are undecided.



Figure 4: You - the reader - must take action. From the campaignsite “Kuwait5.org”.

¹⁹¹ That is, “Kuwaitjunior”, Tétrault (2006a)

This call for action was also evident on the blogs. For one thing, all six blogs except one¹⁹² announced demonstrations and gatherings taking place. This mobilization often focused on the individual; “Kuwaitjunior” repeatedly stated that “*your presence is important*”¹⁹³, “The Ultimate” stated that she would “*see you there*”¹⁹⁴, and the posters for the demonstrations asked “*you*” to bring five friends, and send SMS to five people¹⁹⁵. This continued throughout the campaign; “Kuwaitjunior” urged “*you*” to attend meetings of pro-reform candidates during the election campaign¹⁹⁶, whereas “The Ultimate” almost made it an individual duty: “*Kuwait has done a lot for us; it’s time for us to repay*”¹⁹⁷. “Kuwaitjunior” could even inform the readers that “*Kuwait expects a lot from you*”¹⁹⁸. According to the authors, this was no accident, but a well planned strategy to give people ownership to the movement and to the work. As Jāsim al-Qāmis put it: “*(...) we made sure that there was always an action being asked from people, there was always something that is needed from them*”¹⁹⁹.

In this regard, it is perhaps natural that the use of blogs seems to have been most important at the *beginning* of their work, when they launched the movement and the issue, discussed tactics and promoted rallies, and, not least recruited activists. Though the blogs were used continuously throughout the three months, the postings and comments dropped from May until July, as the following graphs show:

¹⁹² The exception being “Kuwaitwall”

¹⁹³ See for instance the 3rd of May 2006.

¹⁹⁴ “The Ultimate” on the 5th of May 2006.

¹⁹⁵ “The Ultimate” on the 5th of May 2006.

¹⁹⁶ See for instance “Kuwaitjunior” on the 26th of May 2006

¹⁹⁷ “The Ultimate” on the 19th of May 2006

¹⁹⁸ “Kuwaitjunior” on the 24th of May 2006

¹⁹⁹ Al-Qāmis & al-Faḍḍāla (2009)

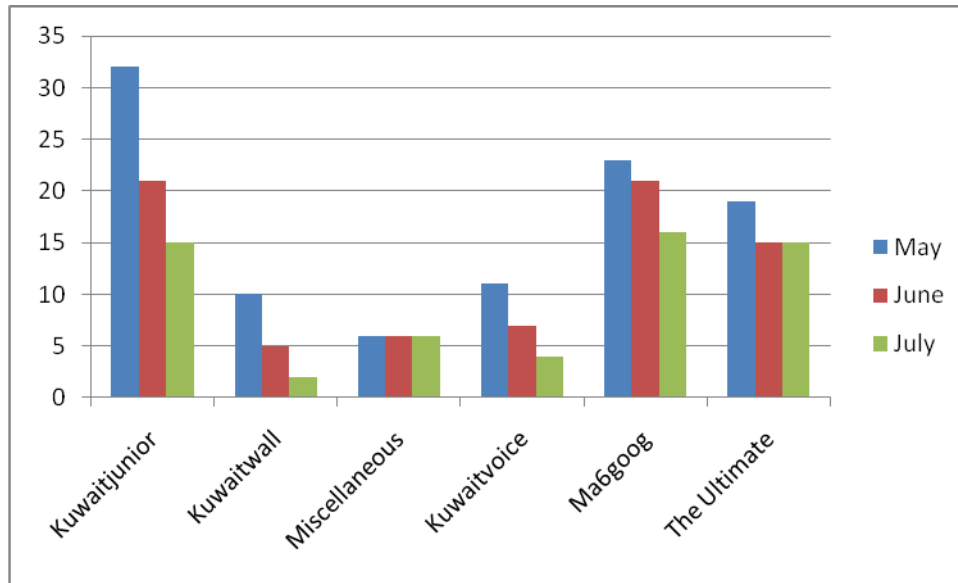


Figure 5: Postings, May until July 2006

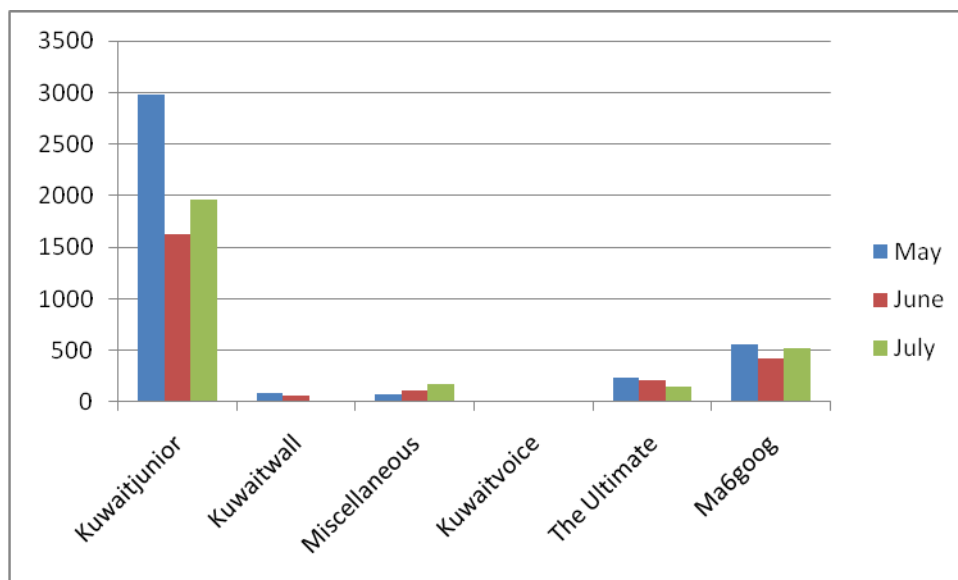


Figure 6: Comments, May until July 2006²⁰⁰

5.2.2 News and information

Agitation for the cause, as well as explaining it, was another important feature of the blogs. On the 1st of May, “The Ultimate” not only argued for five districts, but also explained why it was important. “Kuwaitjunior” addressed the Prime Minister directly when arguing for five

²⁰⁰ Both this figures are based on a manual count of posts and comments made by the author.

districts on the 9th of May, whereas “Kuwaitwall” explained the importance of a constitution – and the problems with Kuwait’s – on the 29th of May. On the 19th of May, “Ma6goog.com” looked into history, providing a short presentation of Kuwaiti politics in the 80’s, adding that “*God willing, there is a lesson in it*”. However, these explanations could also concern practical details; on the 21st of June “The Ultimate” explained how to vote.

The blogs were also used to convey news: there were numerous accounts of meetings and demonstrations that took place²⁰¹, and news from the election campaign around the country were presented²⁰². Furthermore, pictures and videos were used actively to broadcast speeches²⁰³, to expose alleged corruption and vote-buying by candidates²⁰⁴, and to document various events. Two interesting examples were the coverage of the police prohibiting demonstrators from entering the Parliament²⁰⁵, and the destruction of pro-reform candidates’ election-posters²⁰⁶. In both cases, the pictures posted substantiate the claims made by the movement; that they were prevented from entering parliament, and that posters of pro-reform candidates were destroyed. Though pictures may be manipulated, the posts appear rather credible when their claims are backed up by what is presented as photographic evidence. Moreover, the blogs used YouTube in order to broadcast their videos, which allowed for different sites to link to the video²⁰⁷, as well as to comment on it. In this way, any video evidence backing their stories is easily distributed widely, with many access points to the same video.

As for exposing corruption, one interesting example was posted on “The Ultimate” on the 27th of June. In two posts, the author claimed to expose that election candidate Marzūq al-Ghānim, with the help of his family, falsely registered supporters as living in his constituency, in order to boost his votes. The posts were once again backed by photographic evidence.

Interestingly, as I will discuss below, this very candidate was also endorsed by the OM due to his support for five constituencies. Still, publishing these posts turned out to be an unpleasant experience for the author of the blog:

²⁰¹ See for instance “Kuwaitvoice” on the 6th of May 2006 and “Ma6goog.com” on the 25th of June 2006

²⁰² See for instance “Kuwaitwall” on the 18th of June 2006 and “Kuwaitjunior” on the 19th of June 2006

²⁰³ See for instance “Kuwaitjunior” on the 20th of May 2006

²⁰⁴ See for instance “Kuwaitjunior” on the 25th & the 27th of June 2006, or “The Ultimate” on the 27th of June

²⁰⁵ See for instance “Kuwaitvoice” on the 18th of May 2006

²⁰⁶ “The Ultimate” on the 17th of June 2006

²⁰⁷ For instance, the video exposing MP Jamāl al-‘Umar’s alleged vote-buying is linked to by both “Kuwaitjunior” and a thread on a Kuwaiti online forum called “al-Ummah”.

I published the two posts late at night and next morning my blog was blocked by one of the two Net providers (the only two at the time- both owned by the candidate's family) in Kuwait, and before noon next day the other Net provider blocked it. In Kuwait no Network provider by law has the right to block any site without the written approval of the Ministry of Communication, and surely there was no time to get the approval at night and in few hours. So it became a scandal that other bloggers protested against, and took both of the posts I wrote and published them on their own sites, some even translated them. In few hours the articles were circling the Net, blogs, forums as well as in the forwarded e-mails and the talk of the Diwanias²⁰⁸

Though these claims are very difficult to substantiate, it seems the blog was blocked for some time. Posts on other blogs refer to this, and to "Kuwaitjunior" publishing some of the material while it was down²⁰⁹. In the same posts, it is linked to a PDF of the post on the file hosting site RapidShare²¹⁰.

For one thing, this illustrates that the OM did have some trouble with the authorities, all though they mostly were able to publish freely online. Moreover, it illustrates how the networked public of the OM made any censorship difficult. While the Internet Service Providers seemingly could block one blog easily, they could not block the content, that is, they could not prevent this content from spreading online. Moreover, this was not the only attempt made by the OM to expose corruption, as I will show in chapter 5.3.

In this way, the bloggers used their opportunity to bring the news as they perceived them, and they could convey news ignored by mainstream media. Furthermore, they could respond to reports given in mainstream media, as "Kuwaitjunior" does on the 24th of May. In the post, they expose what they claim are manipulated photos from a rally for the "Blue Movement", printed in al-Waṭan newspaper. The "Blue Movement" emerged as a reaction to the OM, arguing that 10 districts were favorable to five. However, OM activists dismiss the movement as something set up by the Government, in order to counter the OM²¹¹. Whatever the truth, the blogs gave the OM a platform in which to counter what they perceived as false reports in the traditional media.

²⁰⁸ "Ayya" (2009)

²⁰⁹ See for instance a blog called "Kuwaitism" on the 28th of June 2006. URL: <http://www.kuwaitism.com/2006/06/28/ayya-3asalblogspotcom-marzouq-alghanims-blocked-post/>

²¹⁰ See for instance a blog called "Kuwaitism" on the 28th of June 2006. URL: <http://www.kuwaitism.com/2006/06/28/ayya-3asalblogspotcom-marzouq-alghanims-blocked-post/>

²¹¹ Al-Yūsufi (2009)



Figure 7: Exposing manipulated photos in al-Waṭan Newspaper.

Interestingly, “Kuwaitjunior” went even further and used a language typical of the more traditional news outlets when conveying news, with titles such as “*breaking news*”, and referring to “*sources close to*” so-and-so that “*confirm*” so-and-so²¹². Furthermore, the site seems to have been able to actually break news; on the 1st of May it reported from a cabinet session on the electoral districts before it even ended, and on the ninth of July it presented the new cabinet, the day before it became official²¹³. An interesting approach to this news coverage is what Atkinson & Coffey refers to as “*implied claims of authorship*”. That is, how rhetorical devices are used to persuade the readers, and how a text “*implicitly claims a special kind of status – as factual, authoritative, objective (...)*”²¹⁴ and so on. From the examples given above, it seems “Kuwaitjunior” often used a language one would recognize from newspapers, TV and radio. Thus, the text seems to claim the same status as these media traditionally are associated with, namely as factual and objective.

The blogs were also used to respond to different developments throughout the campaign. For instance, when the information minister pressured one broadcaster to stop carrying the

²¹² See for instance the 16th of May 2006

²¹³ See cabinet of the 10th of July, 2006 on Herb: *Kuwait politics database*

²¹⁴ Atkinson & Coffey (2004): 73

programs of private, oppositional satellite stations, “Kuwaitjunior” not only brought the news of these events, but gave instructions on how to receive signals from the new broadcaster of the stations²¹⁵. Furthermore, as the campaign went from being just a reform campaign to also include an election campaign, the strategy was – though after heated debate - adjusted to this new reality; pro-reform candidates were endorsed by the movement. For instance, on the 27th of May, “Kuwaitjunior” presented a rather passionate posting arguing for cooperation regardless of any differences other than the position on the electoral districts. In this post, as in many others, the text was written in the first person plural: “*we wish to cooperate*”.

5.2.3 On behalf of...?

The use of the first person plural was a common feature in all six blogs I have studied. As for “Kuwaitjunior”, the blog repeatedly spoke on behalf of the “Orange Movement”, as well as directly to the movement. However, “Kuwaitjunior” also took upon them to speak on behalf of the nation. For instance, on the 18th of May they declared that “*the Kuwaiti people wants five*”, and on the 29th of June, they addressed the “*sons and daughters of Kuwait*”. One interpretation of this may be that by doing so, their message gains weight as expressing the will of the people. One might even justify this rhetorical device by pointing out that pro-reform candidates actually won the elections, and changed the electoral districts in accordance with the campaigns goal.

However, there could be another, more important reason behind these words, which is the issue of national unity. As mentioned, an ever reoccurring and extremely sensitive theme in Kuwaiti politics, as well as in the Emir’s speeches, is indeed national unity, and every threat against this unity must be stopped. In such a situation, it might be unwise for a popular movement to divide the people or challenge the system, both with regards to their chances for success and in order to avoid trouble with the authorities. It makes sense then, to speak on behalf of a united people, to use the slogan “*five for the sake of Kuwait*”²¹⁶, to stress that they do it for the sake of their country²¹⁷, and to build a wide coalition, even though doing so presented the movement with huge difficulties internally. By doing so, the movement could hardly be accused of instigating sectarian unrest, or plotting Bedouins against city dwellers. “Kuwaitjunior” addressed this directly on the 19th of May, stating that the movement is for all

²¹⁵ See for instance the 7th of June 2006.

²¹⁶ This is used repeatedly; see for instance the opening page of the campaign site.

²¹⁷ See for instance “Kuwaitvoice” on the 18th of May

the people and justifying their own actions. Furthermore, when the battle was won, they apparently made efforts to bury the hatchet, as I will below. First, however, I turn to the how the movement sought to build a community for those involved in their struggle.

5.2.4 Building a community

The use of the first person plural may also be an expression of belonging to the movement, to a perceived group or even a community. Michael D. Ayers stresses the importance of a collective identity for social movements and communities, and points to shared definitions of reality and of right and wrong, boundaries marking off the group from others and consciousness about itself as a group, as important features of such a collective identity²¹⁸. I argue that the Orange Movement's sites meet these criteria.

As I have shown, it seems they perceived their campaign as one against corruption, thereby enhancing democracy, carried out for the sake of the country. And when the police denied the demonstrators access to the parliament, this is unanimously perceived as wrong²¹⁹. In fact, "Kuwaitjunior" goes as far as to describe police and government interference as something resembling Ṣaddām Ḥussayn's Iraq, and the perception that the Government's actions are wrong are largely backed up by the 370 comments on this post²²⁰. Moreover, politicians such as Jamāl al-ʿUmar are portrayed as corrupt and common enemies for all who want five districts, and their demand for reform is seen as the rightful alternative to the corruption represented by these common enemies.

Furthermore, a clear distinction was made between those who supported five districts and those who did not. Both "Kuwaitjunior" and "Ma6goog.com" stated which candidates supported five districts, thereby earning "our" support, and those who did not and therefore should be fought against. Moreover, the notion of "us" was used notoriously, for instance in slogans such as "*united we stand*"²²¹, as opposed to some undefined "them". For instance, "Kuwaitjunior" wrote that "they" compared the Orange Movement to – among other things – Hitler's followers, but "we" only say that "*we want five*"²²². Still, it does seem that opposing "them", those who do not want five, was easier than defining "us". On the 2nd of June, a post

²¹⁸ Ayers (2003): 150

²¹⁹ See for instance "The Ultimate" on the 16th of May 2006, or the video on "Kuwaitvoice" on the 30th of May 2006.

²²⁰ See "Kuwaitjunior" on the 20th of May 2006

²²¹ See "The Ultimate" on the 20th of May 2006

²²² See "Kuwaitjunior" on the 23rd of May 2006

on “Ma6goog.com” discussed who should be given credit for the reform movement: “Kuwaitjunior”, the liberals, or someone else? The post concluded that this is not important, and that one should rather focus on working together for five districts. Although this was largely supported in the 26 comments to the post, the question of who the OM was, and who deserved its support was indeed a difficult one for those involved.

As I discussed in chapter 4.1, there are some rather harsh ideological differences in Kuwaiti politics. For instance, I gave the example earlier of how ’Asīl al-‘Awaḍī and Rūlā Dashtī have met criticism from islamists after being elected to parliament. In fact, many islamists were against women’s right to vote and run for parliament in the first place²²³. On the other hand, the liberals long campaigned for female suffrage, and as mentioned, the core of the OM organizers was placed well within the liberal camp. In fact, two of the main organizers played an important part in ’Asīl al-‘Awaḍī’s successful 2009 campaign²²⁴. Nevertheless, the OM did manage to build an alliance across these ideological differences, as illustrated by their demonstration on the 14th of May²²⁵. Ultimately, this was made possible because this was seen as a strategic choice, and the issue of the constituencies was deemed more important than anything else: “*Whoever is with us is with us, whoever is not with us is against us, is against the reform, is against the movement*”²²⁶. Yet, this decision was not an easy one, and stirred much heated debate, as I will discuss below.

As for the movement’s consciousness about themselves, Ayers states that “*a group becomes aware of itself through a series of self-revaluations of shared experiences*”²²⁷. In this respect, I find the sites’ use of visual elements interesting. The blogs, in particular “The Ultimate”, “Kuwaitvoice”, “Miscellaneous” and “ma6goog.com” made extensive use of videos and pictures to document the events that took place. The pictures were typically of smiling youths wearing orange clothes, and waving orange flags²²⁸. “Kuwaitvoice” even presented a video of dramatic pictures accompanied by even more dramatic music²²⁹. This allows for participants to relive the experience, but is also intended for “*those who missed it*”²³⁰. According to Jāsim

²²³ Tétrault (2000): 121 - 122

²²⁴ That is, Khālid al-Faḍḍāla and Jāsim al-Qāmis: Al-Qāmis & al-Faḍḍāla (2009)

²²⁵ See chapter 5.1

²²⁶ Al-Qāmis & al-Faḍḍāla (2009)

²²⁷ Ayers (2003): 151

²²⁸ See for instance “Kuwaitvoice” on the 16th of May 2006 or “The Ultimate” on the 20th of May 2006

²²⁹ See “Kuwaitvoice” on the 30th of May 2006

²³⁰ See “Miscellaneous” on the 5th of May 2006

al-Qāmis of “Kuwaitjunior”, the making and posting of these videos and pictures were in no way organized or planned, “*people just went out and did it*”²³¹.

Another interesting aspect is the sense of a community of bloggers which “The Ultimate” referred to when speaking about how she met some of her “*dear bloggers*” she really wanted to meet²³², and how a “*bunch of free thinkers behind the net*” moved the country²³³. In an interview with the author, she also told of how “*(...) bloggers before the beginning of the Orange Movement were total strangers yet became close cyber-friends*”²³⁴. Or as Muḥammad al-Yūsufi of “Ma6goog.com” expressed it: “*We met at the Orange*”²³⁵.

5.2.5 Discussions – forming an opinion

With regards to the public sphere, perhaps the most important feature of the blogs was the discussions and comments that took place on the sites. Three blogs in particular stand out in terms of number of comments on their postings; “Kuwaitjunior”, “Ma6goog.com” and “The Ultimate” with 6565, 1498 and 591 comments respectively, during the three months I have studied. Again, it should be noted that not all postings are related to the subject of this paper. Moreover, the number of comments does not equal the number of participants in the discussion. For instance, of the 68 comments on “Kuwaitjunior” on the last post of the 3rd of May, 39 different nicknames were represented. Undoubtedly, some were more active than others. Still, the number of comments does indicate the volume of discussion, if not determining the number of participants.

In order to post a comment on the blogs, one needs to have a Google or BlogSpot account, which in turn contains a profile. However, the access to this profile may be restricted, enabling some anonymity. In addition, nothing prevents a user from providing false information in these profiles. Furthermore, the administrator has the possibility to remove comments at will, but this will be shown on the comments site²³⁶. In terms of usage, the comments do seem to represent both discussion and more open exchange of opinions. For instance, on the 6th of June “Kuwaitjunior” posed the question of whether those who sell or

²³¹ Al-Qāmis & al-Faḍḍāla (2009)

²³² See The Ultimate on the 5th of May 2006

²³³ See ”The Ultimate” on the 21st of May 2006

²³⁴ “Ayya” (2009)

²³⁵ Al-Yūsufi (2009)

²³⁶ See for instance comments on ”Kuwaitjunior” on the 6th of June 2006

those who buy votes bear the responsibility for such corruption, and readers expressed their view in the 33 comments posted²³⁷.

Furthermore, expression of support and airing of frustration was done through the comments as well, on which “The Ultimate”’s post on the 1st of June is an interesting example. In the post, she denounced a professor at Kuwait University’s faculty of Sharī‘a for having issued a fatwā stating that wives should vote in accordance with their husbands’ wishes. Although it turned out that her version of the story was somewhat incorrect, it is still remarkable that the support for her meanings was overwhelming, as many readers expressed their support for her opinions and aired their frustration with such religious interpretations as this fatwā.

But the main point of discussion was strategy, and “Kuwaitjunior” was the place to be. As I have shown above, this was evident during the beginning of the OM campaign, and continued to be so as the campaign evolved. As mentioned earlier, widening the movement proved difficult, especially for the core organizers, all firmly situated within the liberal camp. And even though the organizers on “Kuwaitjunior” pushed for cooperation with anybody who supported five districts, this was not an easy decision:

(...) if the politicians were islamists or liberal or whatever they are, it wasn’t our issue. We wanted to get in to parliament as many orange people as possible. We went to some islamist rallies during the election in support of them. If it was up to us personally, we wouldn’t have gone there, because this is not what we support, but it’s because of an issue. Our campaign was basically based on that issue and that issue only, and that was what we pushed for. So it wasn’t really a concern for us; of what political ideology this person comes from²³⁸.

On two occasions in particular, this discussion of both who the OM were and what their strategy should be became crucial. First, on the 26th of May, “Kuwaitjunior” posted an article with the heading “*Marzūq al-Ghānim: I support the five districts*”, which sparked a heated debate over the 108 comments posted. The article told of how activists from the OM waited outside the office were candidates registered for the parliamentary election, and asked for their view on the five districts. Marzūq al-Ghānim, a nationalist running for the first time in this election, pledged his support. The post also call on the readers to show up and show their support for Fayṣal al-Muslim, an independent islamist MP running for re-election, who

²³⁷ ”Kuwaitjunior” also comment on their own comments on the 31st of May 2006, asking people not to post links or news here, but to participate in the discussion.

²³⁸ Al-Qāmis & al-Faḍḍāla (2009)

supported five districts as well. Furthermore, a part of the controversy in the comments was a video of the activists questioning candidates that was later removed.

A main point in the discussion was that some readers thought the article to be too positive on al-Ghānim, and many also questioned how wise it would be to support an “unproved” newcomer. Still others worried about the heated debate itself, and its possible consequences for the unity of the movement:

Please guys, lets continue what have been started on the right way! What have been accomplished has never been done before! lets not ruin it now! take it easy guys, and "talk" to each other rather than attack!²³⁹

However, the debate seems far more civilized than such worries should indicate. The authors of the blog took part, and defended and explained their views. The tone of the debate was respectful, and in the end, one of the fiercest critics of the article thanked the author for his clarifications during the debate, and more or less accepted his view, almost leading one’s thoughts to Habermas’ rational critical discourse.

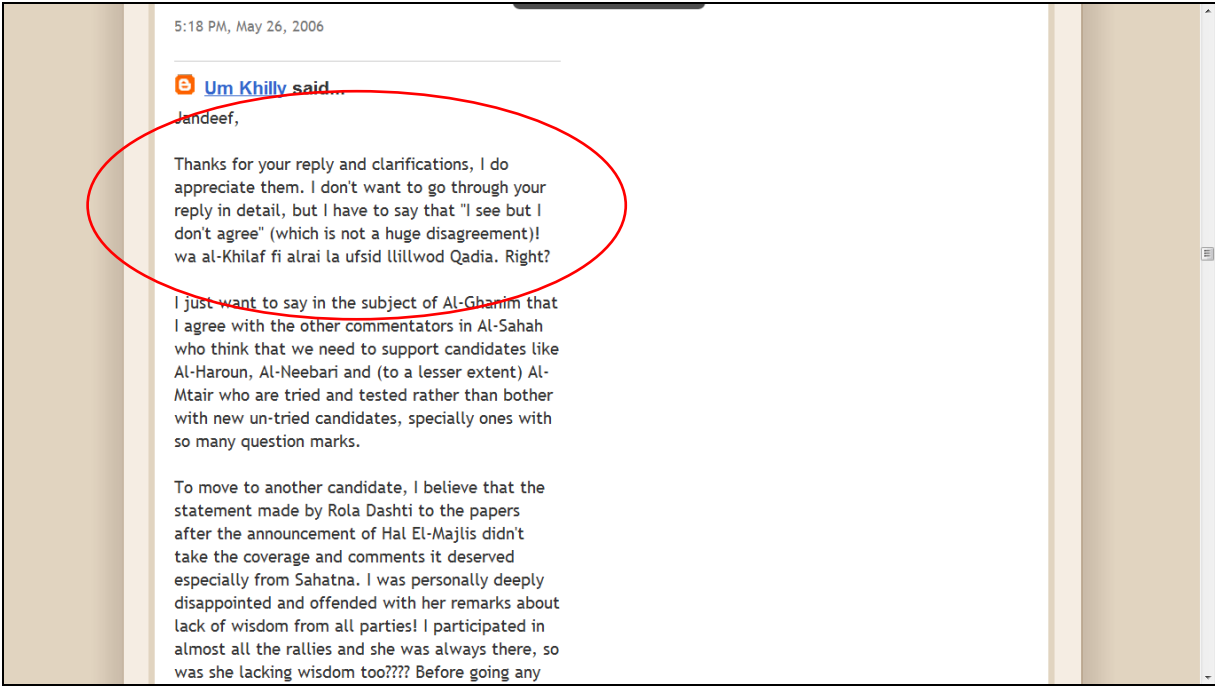


Figure 8: The user "Um Khilly" thanks the author for his clarifications, and respectfully disagree.

²³⁹ Comment by "Orange Revolution" on the debate, 26th of July 2006 on "Kuwaitjunior".

However, the discussion on strategy, cooperation and endorsement of candidates was not limited to this post only. For instance, in the comments to a post entitled “*Cooperation now for the sake of nicer differences in the future*” on the 27th of May on “Kuwaitjunior”, the question of cooperation with for instance islamist MPs was discussed further. Furthermore, readers’ engagement was actively encouraged; in the comments to a post on the 23rd of May, readers were asked to participate in three different discussions on three different sites, relating to different candidates positions on the electoral districts, and the future program for the reform movement.



Figure 9: Readers are encouraged to take part in different discussions.

A second heated discussion took place on the 22nd of July, around a post on “Kuwaitjunior” telling of the meeting between OM activists and the Prime Minister, complete with a photo of the activists and the PM together, smiling and holding a “nabīhā khamsa” t-shirt. According to Muḥammad al-Yūsufī of “Ma6goog.com”, this was “*the first hit*” the OM took. Over the 122 comments to the post, many expressed their disappointment with the decision to meet the PM, and questioned the right of some to decide to do so, as well as whom the alleged activists on the photo were. The authors again participated in the debate, defending their actions, as well as the activists on the picture. One of the main points brought forth by the authors was that the intention of the OM never was to fight against the royal family or the political system

of Kuwait, but to reform it. As mentioned earlier, national unity was and is important in Kuwait, which may also explain the decision to meet with the PM.

Both discussions referred to above were difficult yet important strategic discussions for the movement. My informants all point to the importance of such discussions, and the involvement of the authors of the blog indicate that they deemed it essential to win support from the rest of the movement. But even though it seems likely that these discussions influenced the strategic choices of the OM, neither of the two examples discussed above led directly to a decision being made online. Still, as I have pointed out above, this occurred as well. I have given the example of the decision to take to the streets, for which online discussion was, at the very least, of the utmost importance. Moreover, there was the choice of the color orange to represent the movement, as referred to in chapter 2.4.

Thus, the movement discussed both general issues, such as strategies of cooperation, and specific actions, about which they most likely made decisions. But when specific actions were discussed, this did not always lead to a decision and consensus on what to do. One example of a discussion in which specific action was suggested but no decision was made, occurred on the 24th of May on “Kuwaitjunior”, in the debate on the article in al-Waṭan about the Blue Movement. As already mentioned, the post on the “Kuwaitjunior” blog claimed to expose that al-Waṭan used manipulated photos, which exaggerated the strength of the Blue Movement. In the 61 comments to the post, different actions of protest against the newspaper were suggested. Some favored organizing a boycott of the newspaper by politicians allied with the OM²⁴⁰, some agitated for a coordinated campaign of cancellations of subscriptions²⁴¹, whereas some deemed a more dramatic demonstration covered by other media most suitable²⁴². However, others argued any such campaign would be counterproductive, and would only be used against the OM²⁴³. Moreover, not all comments expressed faith in the claims made in the post, and refused that the photos were manipulated²⁴⁴.

In this debate, as in the others, the authors took part, and explained and defended their view. In addition, different participants addressed each other directly, the authors of the blog directly, or everyone else in general. Some comments attacked other comments, but once

²⁴⁰ See for instance comment by the user “q8links”

²⁴¹ See for instance comment by the user “kwtia”

²⁴² See for instance the user “deleted” (not a post which has been deleted, but an seemingly ironic nick).

²⁴³ See for instance the user “ma6goog”

²⁴⁴ See for instance the user “Abdou basha”

again, others acted as voices of moderation, and called for unity and focus on the all important issue of the constituencies: *“Please guys save your breath for a worthy cause! your time and energy are much more valuable to wasted like this. With my love!”*²⁴⁵.

In all, the discussions that took place mainly on “Kuwaitjunior” were more than just exchanges of views or airing of frustration, they were the site of important decisions regarding the movement’s strategy and its definition of itself. As Jāsim al-Qāmis put it: *“(…) it was what you`d call collective leadership”*²⁴⁶. However, as I will show below, some took more responsibility in that collective leadership than others.

5.3 Offline action

An important feature of the Orange Movement was undoubtedly their use of innovative campaign tactics, which gave them attention, and made them a force that could not be ignored. For one thing, the many rallies were something new in Kuwait, and drew a lot of attention. Furthermore, they evolved.

For instance, whereas the first demonstration on the 5th of May was a daring step in itself, they developed the concept further on the 14th of May, when they arranged the first *“Night of will”*. At this event, speeches were held, people were invited to show their support by planting Kuwaiti flags in the ground, and some dedicated activists even spent the night there. By constantly renewing their events and notoriously introducing new tactics on the Kuwaiti scene, the OM secured lasting attention. According to Jāsim al-Qāmis of “Kuwaitjunior”, this was no coincidence: *“And then the movement moved on as you`ve seen ya`ni [sic], bas [sic] it was always a challenge going forward; “Ok, what do we do next”? And people always expected something. They wanted another rally (...)”*²⁴⁷.

However, not everyone appreciated these public displays of opinion. On the 16th of May, after the 15th of May *“historical session”* in parliament, they once again tried to enter the national assembly. This time however, riot police were waiting. According to Khālid al-Faḍḍāla, the movement had an *“open line”* to the police, and cooperated well in order to avoid any

²⁴⁵ The user “Um Khilly”

²⁴⁶ Al-Qāmis & al-Faḍḍāla (2009)

²⁴⁷ Al-Qāmis & al-Faḍḍāla (2009)

disturbances. Still, even though MPs came out to show their support for the demonstrators, according to Tétrault, at least one person was beaten by the riot police²⁴⁸.

Another daring new tactic was applied when the organizers tried to expose candidate Jamāl al-‘Umar’s alleged vote buying. A micro-camera was purchased, and a female activist brought it with her to al-‘Umar’s campaign staff. However, the camera failed, and she had to use her phone camera instead, capturing little more than the voices. Even so, the video was projected on to the wall of the local police station, to let the officers – who declined to investigate the alleged vote buying – battle with their own conscience²⁴⁹.

Even though the rallies and other events looked spontaneous and unorganized, according to Khālid al-Faḍḍāla and Jāsīm al-Qāmis, they were not:

(...) you won't just all of a sudden have a microphone or speakers for free. People actually paid for it. There were someone who actually went and booked the speakers, someone actually went and bought the flags, someone went and did the banners, there was an organization behind it. It was not public, it was not seen, it blended in, but people sometimes missed that part²⁵⁰.

Moreover, some core organizers worked “24 hours” from the headquarters of the National democratic Alliance to make it all happen²⁵¹. So even though some participants in the reform struggle might not recognize any leaders of the movement, they all benefitted from the organizational work being done. Whether or not this was what made the movement successful is of course difficult to determine, but it did give them both attention and new followers; in their own estimate, the number of participants rose from 200 on the first rally to close to 4000 on the 14th of May. Undoubtedly, the interplay between online and offline was of great importance to the movement. Online, they argued their case, discussed strategy, brought news, shared their experiences and so on. And although they seemed to have reached many people online, their offline activities made sure their voice was heard regardless of people’s internet connections.

Moreover, even though a small group did much of the organizational work, the will formation as well as strategy decisions were – to a large degree – done online in public, mainly on the “Kuwaitjunior” site. Below, I will discuss whether or not this online public constitutes what might be termed a public sphere.

²⁴⁸ Tétrault (2006a)

²⁴⁹ Al-Qāmis & al-Faḍḍāla (2009). See also “Kuwaitjunior” on the 27th of June 2006

²⁵⁰ Al-Qāmis & al-Faḍḍāla (2009)

²⁵¹ Al-Qāmis & al-Faḍḍāla (2009)

6 An orange sphere?

In order to apply the notion of the public sphere to the sites I have studied, I will make use of Dahlgren's three dimensions; the structural, the representational and the interactional. As discussed in chapter 3.3, Peter Dahlgren argues that these three dimensions can help identify both the publics of any given society, as well as the contributions made by communication technology. According to Dahlgren, the structural dimension deals with issues such as access, freedom of expression and other institutional features. Then there is the representational dimension, which raises questions of fairness, accuracy, pluralism of views and the like. Lastly, we have the interactional dimension, which addresses interaction between the citizens and the media, as well as between the citizens themselves. In the following, I discuss my online findings analyzed above in the light of each of these dimensions.

6.1 The structural dimension

Applying Dahlgren's three dimensions to my case of study, I start with the structural one. The question of access is obviously problematic; as noted earlier, only 31.57% of Kuwait's population is online. However, this figure includes all foreign workers living in the country. Given the difference in living standards, we may assume that the percentage is higher among Kuwaiti citizens. Furthermore, the OM was initiated by young people and students, and as noted above, Kuwaiti students have free internet access. Moreover, as the movement originated on the net, access to the internet could hardly have been an issue for those taking part from the beginning.

In addition, SMS was also used to mobilize for events, and in Kuwait, there are 99.59 mobile phone subscriptions per every 100 citizens²⁵². This may be part of the reason why so many different people joined in on the movements' demonstrations; the pictures from these events show men and women, old and young, families etc. Still, an SMS is - as is inherent in the name - a very short message, it does not allow for much persuasion on an issue. So the people that showed up were either already familiar with the issue, or the OM reached them through the internet as well.

²⁵² International Telecommunication Union (2008b)

Moreover, even though the internet may not be accessible for everyone, one could hardly say that about the public debate in any given country. Or, at the very least, access is not equally distributed. But by using the internet, each and everyone can easily convey news and opinions, or mobilize for events. When this, as was the case with the OM, is combined with a substantial readership, new voices can make themselves heard. This new public may not have a wider reach than other, more traditional public spheres, but it may have a different reach, as I believe was the case with the OM. Tellingly, the politicians came to the OM, not the other way around²⁵³.

As for freedom of expression, the OM seems to have been able to publish their opinions freely in general. However, as I discussed above, it seems the blog “the Ultimate” was blocked for a couple of days after publishing a post on the alleged gerrymandering of a candidate in the elections. Still, this did not stop the post from being spread through the other blogs, and the file hosting site Rapidshare. Moreover, thanks to the decision of the constitutional court, they were able to stage demonstrations as well. Yet, this does not mean that the OM did not encounter troubles with the authorities. For one thing, the riot police did keep the activists out of parliament on the 16th of May. Secondly, the core organizers told of receiving threats from the security services, as well as of phone lines being tapped²⁵⁴. In addition, as noted above, the government did try to limit their citizens’ access to some private TV-stations. Still, the movement as a whole was not stopped from expressing their opinion neither online nor offline.

However, when using the internet like the OM did, limits to the freedom of expression may be enforced by others than the authorities. As mentioned above, though it was very easy for readers to post comments on articles, the owners of the blog had the opportunity to remove any comment. On “Kuwaitjunior”, this opportunity was used, though not very extensively. From the debate on al-Ghānim’s embrace of five districts on the 26th of May, 7 out of 108 comments were removed, whereas 4 out of 122 comments were removed from the 22nd of July debate on OM activists meeting with the PM. There may of course be many different reasons for the removal of these comments; they may have been insulting, obscene, or, for that matter, blasphemous, but it may of course also be that they were too critical. Still, in both

²⁵³ Al-Qaḥṭānī(2009)

²⁵⁴ Al-Qāmis & al-Faḍḍāla (2009)

cases mentioned above, critique of the organizers was both accepted and debated, allowing different views to be expressed.

6.2 The representational dimension

This brings us to Dahlgren's second dimension, the representational. As shown above, different views were expressed in the debates on "Kuwaitjunior", as well as on other blogs such as "The Ultimate" and "Ma6goog.com". However, most protagonists did undoubtedly agree on some main questions; the need for reform, the need to fight corruption, and, for most of the participants in the debate; that five electoral districts was the preferred choice. This is perhaps not surprising, given that the movement and its public arose on these issues. Still, as noted earlier, I do not believe that a public such as this need to include the entire society, the main point is for those taking part to be able to discuss, form an opinion and promote the issue. Given the number of participants on the OM's demonstrations, and not least the success of their campaign, it seems they succeeded in lifting their view into the public at large. Even though the OM alone hardly was responsible for making the issue public, they did make it impossible for anyone to sweep it under the carpet.

Another point here is the extensive alliance that was built around the issue of the districts when the OM embraced anyone from liberals to islamists that supported their cause. Given that the core organizers all belong to the liberal camp, this undoubtedly broadened the ideological tendencies represented in the movement. Though this sparked some heated debate, politicians of other persuasions seem to have taken the opportunity; Tétrault even speaks of islamists that "*went orange*". Thus, even though it was controversial, and even though the movement did not last long after the number of districts was changed, it did manage to include different views and different ideological tendencies around this particular issue.

As for fairness and accuracy, the "Kuwaitjunior" blog seems to have been viewed as a credible source for news, for instance with regards to the succession crisis of January 2006, and it continued to bring news throughout the campaign. According to Jāsim al-Qāmis, conveying unfiltered news and information was "*(...) something that we worked on*", adding that the OM "*had contacts in newspapers, (...) sympathetic to us*"²⁵⁵, which they sought to utilize. Interestingly, as discussed earlier, "Kuwaitjunior" sometimes used a language usually

²⁵⁵ Al-Qāmis & al-Faḍḍāla (2009)

associated with established newspapers. Though this in itself tells us nothing of the accuracy or fairness of the article, it may be convincing for the readers.

Moreover, the “see-for-yourself” spirit of blogging – that is, documenting one’s claims through direct links to sources, pictures and so on - was evident on both this and other OM blogs; different events were often documented with pictures, videos or sound clips.

Furthermore, “Kuwaitjunior” also took upon itself to challenge the accuracy of an established media outlet, such as the case with al-Waṭan newspaper. Yet, as these sites were part of a campaign, this did of course influence their content. With agitation and mobilization being main features, fairness and accuracy becomes difficult to determine. Just as I have no doubt that the OM blog authors saw themselves as being both fair and accurate, it would only be natural if their opponents deemed it otherwise.

6.3 The interactional dimension

Dahlgren’s last dimension deals with interaction, both between citizens and the media and amongst citizens themselves. As shown above, readers repeatedly interacted with the authors of “Kuwaitjunior”, but they also interacted with each other. Many comments were addressed directly to either one of the authors, or a fellow participant in the debate. This was also true for the other blogs, with a good example being the debate on “The Ultimate” on the 1st of June, concerning the Fatwā ordering women to vote in accordance with their husband’s wishes.

As mentioned earlier, the support for the author’s denunciation of this fatwā was overwhelming in the comments. Yet, as I also mentioned above, the author’s version of the incident was somewhat incorrect. One discussant in particular took notice of this, and argued that one should take care to stick to the facts²⁵⁶. This started a rather heated debate involving this discussant, the author, and a third discussant, stretching over several hours and many comments.

Though they never agreed, the blog gave them the opportunity to have the discussion. In Kuwait, this is by no means a given possibility. As noted earlier, even liberally oriented MPs separate men and women on their campaign rallies, and the sexes are formally segregated in

²⁵⁶ See the user “Zade” on “The Ultimate”, on the 1st of 2006

all levels of education. Thus, the blog created a space in which men and women could discuss unhindered, without the restrictions of their offline reality. This is not to say that communication between the sexes does not occur in Kuwait, naturally, it does. But the online public brought on by the OM undoubtedly carried with it a very accessible space for such direct communication. Moreover, when compared to the public of the traditional media such as TV and newspapers, blogs offers much easier interaction between the readers, and between the readers and the authors. Whereas anyone, at any time, can take part in an online debate, and receive an answer instantly, this could hardly be said of a newspaper or a TV show. Thus, the OM created an arena for interaction between the media outlets – in this case the blogs – and the readers, and between the readers themselves. In line with Dahlgren’s and Dewey’s point on the nature of a public, the OM readership was more “*than just a media audience*”²⁵⁷.

In this chapter, I have sought to apply the notion of the public sphere on my case of study, that is; I have discussed my findings in relation to Dahlgren’s three dimension presented in chapter 3.3. However, before I present my conclusions, I will take a quick look beyond the Orange Movement. In the following, I briefly discuss the results of the Orange Movements campaign; the five constituencies, the OM’s impact on Kuwaiti politics, and not least, how the Orange Movement came to an end.

²⁵⁷ Dahlgren (2005): 149

7 Beyond the Orange Movement

In order to look beyond the Orange Movement, I will briefly discuss the results it brought. However, one could hardly substantiate that any particular change in Kuwaiti politics since 2006 is a direct result by the OM and the OM alone. Rather, I will look at some key elements of the OM and their impact on Kuwaiti society over the last four years. These themes are the electoral constituencies, online campaigning, and youth participation in Kuwaiti politics. Yet, as the main theme of this thesis is the events of 2006, the discussions will be rather brief. Lastly, before my conclusions, I will look at how, and why, the OM ended.

7.1 Five constituencies

The most obvious effect of the OM seems to be that the number of electoral districts was changed from 25 to five. Whether or not the OM was *the* factor that caused this change is impossible to determine, but their successful mobilization of both the people and many politicians undoubtedly made any other option much less likely. However, the problem of corruption and ineffective government has not gone away. As Muḥammad al-Yūsufī of “Ma6goog.com” told me; “*At that time we thought five would solve 95 % of the problems with the elections, but in truth, it didn’t*”²⁵⁸. Journalist Dāhim al-Qaḥṭānī has a more optimistic view, stating that on the effect of five districts, “*we need more time to know that, (...), but it seems good*”²⁵⁹, a view supported by Jāsim al-Qāmis and Khālid al-Faḍḍāla²⁶⁰.

Two elections have been held with the new system, and one of them brought a major change; women were elected to parliament for the first time. In the election of May 2009, Salwā al-Jassār, Rūlā Dashtī, ’Asīl al-‘Awaḍī and Ma’sūma al-Mubārak were elected as members of parliament, in the third election since the introduction of female suffrage. As we shall see below, at least three of these women made extensive use of the internet in their campaigns. Moreover, former OM activists played a leading role in one of the campaigns. Yet, it is fair to assume that there were a number of reasons as to why women were finally elected to parliament, not just the number of constituencies, and the experience of the orange campaign.

²⁵⁸ Al-Yūsufī (2009)

²⁵⁹ Al-Qaḥṭānī(2009)

²⁶⁰ Al-Qāmis & al-Faḍḍāla (2009)

In addition, all my informants hold that vote buying and so called “service MPs” is a much smaller problem with five constituencies than with 25. As I discussed in 4.3.1, reducing the number of electoral districts undeniably makes such practices harder, if not impossible. Whereas one could get elected with 1461 votes in the last election with 25 constituencies, 3636 were needed in the election of 2008²⁶¹. If one were to buy votes, either through money or favors, it has become much more difficult with the new electoral districts.

Still, one might argue that the success of the OM not necessarily depends on the success of the new constituencies, but rather that the new constituencies came in place. As I have discussed above, this was obviously not the solution preferred by the government. They attempted to stall the issue, to find a compromise, and even dissolved parliament.

Nevertheless, no compromise was made, and it is difficult not to see it as a defeat on part of the government, and a victory for the OM. Had the goal of the OM not been achieved, their legacy would have been somewhat different; a popular movement which almost made it. Had the issue the OM campaigned for not been important and difficult for the government, again, its legacy would have been different; a popular movement able to cause a change no one opposes. But as things were, the issue was of great importance, and the goal of the OM was achieved. Thus, its legacy is that of a successful and influential popular movement in the Middle East, which is something out of the ordinary. And as I discuss below, their example instituted lasting changes on the Kuwaiti political scene.

7.2 Online campaigning

In all likelihood, Kuwaiti politicians would have gone online at some point, regardless of the OM. However, as it happened, it seems the Orange Movement introduced the internet as a field for political campaigning in Kuwait. According to Jāsim al-Qāmis, online campaigning is now widespread in Kuwait, with one example being MP ’Asīl al-‘Awaḍī’s campaign last election. It should be noted that Jāsim al-Qāmis himself played an important role in this campaign²⁶². Nevertheless, as ’Asīl al-‘Awaḍī received the second highest number of votes in

²⁶¹ Herb: *Kuwait politics database*. It should be noted here that these numbers represent the lowest number of votes that still secured a seat in parliament in each of the two elections.

²⁶² Al-Qāmis & al-Faḍḍāla (2009)

her district²⁶³, it does indicate the importance of online campaigning in Kuwait today. Moreover, I will provide other examples as well.

But to start off with 'Asīl al-‘Awaḍī’s campaign, Jāsim al-Qāmis holds that online campaigning was of great importance. In fact, so strong was the belief in online campaigning, that she even announced her entrance into the electoral race on her YouTube channel²⁶⁴. In the video, entitled “*Dr. 'Asīl al-‘Awaḍī announces her entrance into the 2009 elections*”, she speaks directly to her online audience, explaining that she wanted them to be the first to know that she is running for parliament²⁶⁵. The front page of her channel bears to color blue, assumingly a reference to the women’s movement²⁶⁶, and includes a link to her campaign site, aseel09.com²⁶⁷. In addition, all her videos start with a picture of her as well as her campaign slogan; “*country from anew*”²⁶⁸, making them all recognizable as part of her campaign. Throughout the campaign, the YouTube channel was used both to spread her own views and ideas, as well as to respond to attacks on her candidacy.

An example of the latter occurred only two weeks before the election, when a video allegedly exposing her as unreligious was posted on YouTube. The video, taken by one of her students at Kuwait University, was taken without her knowledge, and one can hear her talking on the issue of whether or not women should wear the ḥijāb²⁶⁹, and the interpretation that the obligation to wear the ḥijāb only applied to the wives of the prophet (PBUH). Not surprisingly, this caused uproar. Her first move was to complain to the prosecutor general²⁷⁰. However, this was not unproblematic, as she then had to defend herself as supporting freedom of expression, while at the same time complaining about views expressed about herself.

She then moved on to face the charges were they originated; online on YouTube. Through her YouTube channel, she posted several videos were she explained her views on the situation,

²⁶³ Herb: *Kuwait politics database*.

²⁶⁴ 'Asīl al-‘Awaḍī: YouTube channel, video posted on the 30th of March 2009. In this chapter, whenever I refer to sites used by politicians in their online campaigning, I give the name of the politician, as well as the name of the site in question, or the date any specific video in question. For a complete list of sites and their respective URLs, please refer to the list of references, under: “List of websites of Kuwaiti politicians, after 2006”.

²⁶⁵ 'Asīl al-‘Awaḍī: YouTube channel, video posted on the 30th of March 2009.

²⁶⁶ As mentioned earlier, the women’s movement in Kuwait have for years used the color blue

²⁶⁷ Unfortunately, this page does no longer exist.

²⁶⁸ Original quote: “*waṭan min jadīd*”

²⁶⁹ 'Asīl al-‘Awaḍī: YouTube channel, video posted on the 2nd of May 2009

²⁷⁰ 'Asīl al-‘Awaḍī: YouTube channel, video posted on the 6th of May 2009

and answered questions²⁷¹. In addition, some of her supporters threw themselves into the debate, with videos that supported her²⁷². Given her success in the election, this seems to have been a rather favorable strategy; she utilized the internet to be able to answer her critics, perhaps in a more structured way than what is possible in the mass media. Moreover, the internet allows for others to help her, as mentioned above. According to Jāsim al-Qāmis, this was one of the main goals with the online campaign. They used the same strategy as did the OM; give people a chance to contribute, and they will²⁷³.

However, as mentioned above, 'Asīl al-'Awaḍī was not the only one who made use of the internet in the 2009 election. The examples of other politicians who made use of sites such as YouTube, Facebook and the like during the last election campaign are plentiful. However, a study of all the candidates in the last election and their use of the internet is not within the scope of this paper. Thus, the examples given below are random, and does not necessarily tell the whole story. Nevertheless, they do indicate that politicians of various backgrounds deemed online campaigning useful, they may serve as a starting point for further studies into Kuwaiti politicians' use of the internet since 2006.

In addition to 'Asīl al-'Awaḍī, two of the other female candidates who were elected had their own YouTube channels; Rūlā Dashtī²⁷⁴ and Salwā al-Jassār²⁷⁵. It should be noted here that only one video is posted on Rūlā Dashtī's channel. Moreover, both channels have links to the candidates' respective websites²⁷⁶, though Rūlā Dashtī's is no longer working. Both these channels were, according to DomainTools.com established in March and April of 2008²⁷⁷, in ample time before the 2009 election.

Yet, online campaigning was not the domain of female candidates alone. 'Aḥmad al-Sa'adūn, the 76 year old nationalist who been a MP since 1975²⁷⁸, seemingly makes extensive use of the internet in his political work. He has a home page²⁷⁹, created just after the OM's

²⁷¹ 'Asīl al-'Awaḍī: YouTube channel, video posted on the 6th of May 2009, and the 7th of May 2009

²⁷² See for instance: 'Asīl al-'Awaḍī: YouTube channel, video posted on the 8th of May 2009

²⁷³ Al-Qāmis & al-Faḍḍāla (2009).

²⁷⁴ Rūlā Dashtī: YouTube channel

²⁷⁵ Salwā al-Jassār: YouTube channel

²⁷⁶ Salwā al-Jassār: Official Site. Unfortunately, Rūlā Dashtī's site <http://www.roladashti.com> is no longer available.

²⁷⁷ DomainTools: "<http://www.roladashti.com>" and "<http://www.saljassar.com>"

²⁷⁸ Herb: *Kuwait Politics Database*

²⁷⁹ 'Aḥmad al-Sa'adūn: Home page

campaign²⁸⁰, a YouTube channel²⁸¹, and even a Facebook group²⁸². Also Marzūq al-Ghānim, the controversial MP discussed above, has his own YouTube channel²⁸³, as well as an official site²⁸⁴, created during the heat of the orange campaign in 2006²⁸⁵.

Thus, even though this is a random selection of sites and not an exhausting study, it seems Kuwaiti politicians from different backgrounds have learned to appreciate the value of online campaigning. This is important for more than one reason. For one thing, as these sites all followed the OM, or coincided with the OM, one might argue that the Orange Movement successfully introduced a new arena for Kuwaiti politics. And as I have argued above, and will argue below, this arena is in many ways more accessible than the traditional mass media. Through the YouTube channels of these politicians, Kuwaiti internet users can comment on the videos, and discuss the respective candidates and their views. In other words, it facilitates direct interaction between the politicians and their audience, and amongst the audience. Moreover, the status needed to be able to take part in such a debate in the traditional media is not a question; all one needs is internet access.

In addition, Kuwaiti politicians' use of the internet is important with regards to the view on young Kuwaitis as both voters and political actors. Given that the OM activists who introduced online campaigning in Kuwait were mostly young people, and that Kuwaiti students have free internet access, one might argue that the online campaigning of politicians primarily is aimed at the youth. In this regard, the effort made by the politicians online indicates that they view young people as an important segment of the population.

However, this was not the only contribution to the status of young people on the Kuwaiti political scene made by the OM. According to journalist Dāhim al-Qaḥṭānī, “*Because of what happened with nabīhā khamṣa, the parties now trust the young people. (...) Not to join, to lead*”²⁸⁶. That the PM agreed to meet with the OM certainly supports the view that they made themselves relevant on the Kuwaiti political scene. Accordingly, Khālīd al-Faḍḍāla is now the

²⁸⁰ DomainTools: “<http://www.ahmedalsadoun.com/>”

²⁸¹ Ḥamad al-Sa‘adūn: YouTube channel

²⁸² Ḥamad al-Sa‘adūn: Facebook group

²⁸³ Marzūq al-Ghānim: YouTube channel

²⁸⁴ Marzūq al-Ghānim: Official site

²⁸⁵ DomainTools: “<http://www.marzouq-alghanim.net/Default.aspx>”

²⁸⁶ Al-Qaḥṭānī (2009)

leader of the liberal *National Democratic Alliance*, which even makes clear references to the OM in their material²⁸⁷.

In all, the Orange Movement seemingly was a great success, of which many of the participants express great pride, and a desire to continue. For instance, in the debate on “Kuwaitjunior” following the meeting with the PM, the participant “D” argues that “*Ladies and gentleman [sic], we just all entered history over the past 2 months.. Now it time to make sure we continue to make history as a united collective group we have proven to be☺*”²⁸⁸ Yet, it ended together with their main issue, raising the obvious question of why.

7.3 The fall of the Orange Movement

All my informants agree that the Orange Movement ended with its main issue, the constituencies, in august 2006. For one thing, though the quote by “D” above expresses a different view, not all intended for the OM to outlast its issue. Both Jāsim al-Qāmis and Khālid al-Faḍḍāla stressed that the OM was all about the issue of the districts. This in turn, as I have shown above, greatly influenced their tactics; they built a coalition with little in common other than this particular issue. And as we have seen, to build this wide coalition was in itself difficult for many involved, dividing those who did have more than the issue in common as well. Moreover, as I have discussed earlier, the OM was a result of a set of different circumstances working together; the succession crisis, the government’s handling of the issue of the constituencies, the experience from the US and so on. Thus, the momentum that drove the movement in the spring and summer of 2006 could not last forever, as the circumstances changed. In addition, when the key organizers had no intention of continuing the movement, it could hardly be surprising that it ceased to be.

However, there are issues that might be similar with the districts in terms of gaining wide support, such as the legalization of political parties, or an elected rather than an appointed government. Yet, no such movement has appeared, and my informants expressed doubts of whether it will appear in the near future:

²⁸⁷ For instance, the alliance have named their TV-channel ”We want an alliance”, using nearly the same slogan as the OM did: “Nabīhā taḥāluf”, as compared to the OM slogan “Nabīhā khamṣa”. Al-Qatari (2008), Kuwait Times Online.

²⁸⁸ ”Kuwaitjunior” on the 22nd of July.

(...) in the future I doubt there would be a movement of a similar basis. There might be other movements that have different strategies, or different ways of gathering, but it takes a while you know, for thing[s] to boil up²⁸⁹.

Once again, it comes back to the circumstance, to the particular situation in which such a movement would arise. The OM undoubtedly has shown that a popular movement is possible in Kuwait, and that it can be able to affect important decisions. But just as the OM arose due to many different factors, so will any future movement; things need to “*boil up*”.

Nevertheless, I find it hard to believe that this will not happen. As I have shown, the OM has introduced some lasting changes in Kuwaiti politics; online campaigning has become the standard, and politicians have learned to appreciate young voices. Moreover, many young Kuwaitis earned political experience through the OM, and learned that they can make their voice heard, and affect the politics of their country. With this in mind, it would be strange should not a new movement arise if the right circumstances are in place. Thus, the possibility of popular movements is now undeniably a part of Kuwaiti politics.

Above, I have presented how I have conducted this study, how I gathered my material, and the theoretical framework I have analyzed it within. I have contextualized my study, and on this basis; presented my online findings, my analysis, and its relation to the notion of the public sphere. Moreover, I have looked beyond the OM, and discussed its lasting impact on Kuwaiti society. Below, I will draw my conclusions from this study, answering my research questions posed in chapter 1.3.

²⁸⁹ Al-Qāmis & al-Faḍḍāla (2009)

8 Conclusion

"The newest computer can merely compound, at speed, the oldest problem in the relations between human beings, and in the end the communicator will be confronted with the old problem, of what to say and how to say it."

Bill Gates²⁹⁰

Bill Gates' quote above rather precisely articulates the limitations of new forms of communication. Even though the internet allows rapid conversations across physical as well as non-physical barriers, each and everyone must still have something to say. Yet, this does not prevent new forms of communications from being improvements; new technology may enable easier, faster and more direct communication, and as such constitute a useful tool in terms of democratization. This has been my subject of study, and below, I will sum up my findings, and draw my conclusions.

Firstly, it is clear that the OM made use of the internet for a variety of reasons, and that their online presence fulfilled a series of functions. Through their blogs, the OM activists were able to agitate their cause, and present their arguments at length. Importantly; they were able to present their cause as they perceived it. Regardless of how other media covered the issue of the constituencies, the blogs provided a platform in which gave the OM the opportunity to not only explain the issue in detail, but also discuss it amongst each other. And when the media spoke of the constituencies, or the OM, the blogs provided a platform for them to respond. Moreover, the blogs enabled the OM to bring the news as they perceived them, to document their own events – both in words and visually – and to expose what they perceived as misleading stories in the traditional media.

The blogs and the campaign site also provided a tool for mobilization and direct action. Through the campaign site, each and every Kuwaiti was encouraged to make their voice heard, and the site provided all the information needed to do so. Through the blogs, demonstrations were announced, and their success shared afterwards. Through films, pictures and words, the OM sought to expose corruption as well as what they perceived as undemocratic behavior on part of the government. And through these same videos and

²⁹⁰ Hillwatch.com: *Internet and Politics Quotes*

pictures, as well as some very carefully chosen words, a community were offered the activists; a “*we*” which fought a just cause against “*them*”. But perhaps most importantly, the blogs, and in particular “Kuwaitjunior”, offered an ideal platform for discussions. Through the blog posts and their comments field, engaged Kuwaitis discussed the issue of the constituencies, the strategy of the OM, the stands of different politicians, the corruption of other politicians, and much more. And they did so without any formal constraints with regards to age, gender or background.

Whether or not this would have been possible without the use of the internet, is naturally difficult to determine. But the Kuwaiti context provides some helpful clues; in a country where education is segregated and even liberal politicians separate men and women at their rallies, it seems likely that the internet enabled more direct discussion than would otherwise have been possible. Moreover, it is not likely that any other media could have offered the same possibilities as the internet. Kuwaiti newspapers or television stations would hardly have given the OM all the time and space they needed to present their cause, let alone to agitate direct, political action. This does not mean that a reform of the electoral districts could not have happened without the internet. But it does suggest that the internet provided an important tool when this reform was championed by young Kuwaitis, without the status of established politicians.

Secondly, I hold that the sites used by the OM constituted an online, public sphere. As I have argued above, I do not believe that a public sphere needs to encompass the entire society. There can be sub-spheres, which are concentrated around special issues, special strata of society, special geographic locations and so on, though they must not be formally inaccessible for anyone. These may in turn form an opinion and bring it with greater strength into a “larger public sphere”, the public debate of the country.

I argue that the Orange Movement constructed such a sphere through their blogs, their campaign site and the YouTube channel. These sites were all connected, both through links and users. The sites were used to discuss, agitate, convey news and events, argue, recruit and more. Though this movement was built around a particular view on a particular issue, the sites were open and could be read and commented upon by everyone with internet access. As I have shown, it seems likely that the movement made decisions on these sites which were later put in to life. And though there were disagreements, the debates were marked by a respectful tone, as well as a desire to move on in spite of any differences, at least during their campaign.

Importantly, the movement conveyed news and mediated discussions outside the traditional media, and outside the domain of the established politicians.

However, it should be noted that not everyone makes use of the internet, or have access to the internet. But in line with my argument above, I do not believe that a public sphere must include all members of any given society, as one would have a hard time finding any public doing so. In many ways, it is a question of our basis for comparison. If we identify a public sphere on the basis of Habermas' normative ideal; the internet may very well fall short. But if we compare to the mass mediated public of newspapers and TV, the picture changes. It is easier to comment on a blog than to get air time on TV. Therefore, this public may exclude previously included parts of society. But it almost certainly includes previously excluded parts of society. As such, it – at the very least – changes the access to the public spheres.

Yet, the internet *was* not a public sphere; it was a *tool* mediating their debate, and a *place* locating it. In itself, the internet does not provide communication and debate, it provides a technology which enables – and in the case of the OM, eases - communication and debate. People still need to log on, to find the relevant sites, to take part in the debate, voice their opinion and so on. These limitations are important to be aware of; the internet will not in itself bring democracy to Kuwait, the Middle East or any other part of the world. Though it might be an important tool, it is not a sufficient one. First and foremost, it is the actors, the people, which are the key actors in any struggle for democracy, and they may or may not make use of the internet. In this regard, contextualization is of every importance when assessing any possible democratizing effects of the internet.

As I have shown in this thesis, the OM was a result of many different but coinciding circumstances; the Emiri transition, the lift of the ban on public gatherings, the government's inability to decide on the issue of the constituencies and the decisions of the OM activists to take part. Thus, there is no single answer as to why – as Mark Lynch argues - Kuwaiti blogs turned political in 2006; it was a series of circumstances. Moreover, another very important part of this Kuwaiti context was the relative freedom enjoyed online, that is, a rather limited degree of censorship exercised by Kuwaiti authorities. I have shown above that at least one blog experienced to blocked due to its content. But in all, the OM activists were able to express themselves freely online. If not, the OM might not have been. Although experienced internet users may be able to circumvent censorship, the number of people that took part in the OM would hardly have been so. Thus, if the internet is to be an important tool in

democratization, the fight against censorship may be just as important as to increase internet access.

Returning to Kuwait and the summer of 2006, the Orange Movement did more than discuss online. They seem to have been able to affect their offline reality; the number of electoral districts was eventually changed from 25 to five. Even though it would be hard to substantiate that this happened due to the OM alone, they certainly made any other outcome much less likely. Thus, I believe that the Orange Movement showed that in Kuwait, public opinion can be formed and acted upon independent of the state and the political elite. They successfully lifted the issue around which they gathered into the Kuwaiti public, and saw it through until its implementation as law.

As it happened, the Orange Movement introduced a new public sphere in Kuwait, using new technology and innovative campaign techniques to create new channels for a new audience. But well known voices have also since entered this online public; politicians and journalists are now blogging, and YouTube videos have become a part of many electoral campaigns. In this way, the movement introduced lasting changes to the political scene of Kuwait. In addition, they proved successful political campaigning possible for Kuwait's younger generation, and paved the way for young people into the established political scene. Lastly, the OM gave many young Kuwaitis political experience, political expectations and ownership to the political process of the country. And the online public space is still there, as a constant opportunity for politically engaged Kuwaitis. These are factors that should be considered when assessing Kuwait's political and democratic future.

Moreover, it is the hope of this author that this and similar studies might serve as a starting point for further investigations into the relationship between internet mediated communication and democratization, both in Kuwait and in other countries of the Middle East. Whereas the internet proved a successful tool for the Orange Movement, this may not be the case in other places. And while this new technology served a series of functions in Kuwait in 2006, it may fulfill others in a different country. Through comparisons of contextualized case studies, local differences may be established, and structural similarities identified. Thus, the contributions made by the internet may be examined without stepping into the over-optimistic technological determinism as exemplified by Thomas Carlyle; new forms of communication are nothing more than their name indicates, they do not come with pre-fabricated, democratizing contents.

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June: http://kuwaitjunior.blogspot.com/2006_06_01_archive.html

July: http://kuwaitjunior.blogspot.com/2006_07_01_archive.html

Downloaded and saved on the 28th of October, 2008.

“Ma6goog.com” URLs:

May: http://www.ma6goog.com/2006_05_01_archive.html

June: http://www.ma6goog.com/2006_06_01_archive.html

July: http://www.ma6goog.com/2006_07_01_archive.html

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In addition:

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“Kuwaitwall” URLs:

May: http://kuwaitwall.blogspot.com/2006_05_01_archive.html

June: http://kuwaitwall.blogspot.com/2006_06_01_archive.html

July: http://kuwaitwall.blogspot.com/2006_07_01_archive.html

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“Kuwaitvoice” URLs:

May: http://kuwaitvoice.blogspot.com/2006_05_01_archive.html

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“The Ultimate” URLs:

May: http://3asal.blogspot.com/2006_05_01_archive.html

June: http://3asal.blogspot.com/2006_06_01_archive.html

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July: http://yaob.blogspot.com/2006_07_01_archive.html

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YouTube:

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URL: <http://www.youtube.com/user/KuwaitVoice>

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Campaign site:

“Kuwait5.org” URLs:

<http://www.kuwait5.org/>

<http://www.kuwait5.org/framework.htm>

<http://www.kuwait5.org/goals.htm>

<http://www.kuwait5.org/execution.htm>

<http://www.kuwait5.org/act.htm>

<http://www.kuwait5.org/ministers.htm>

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'Asil al-'Awadī:

YouTube Channel:

URL: <http://www.youtube.com/user/aseelalawadhi?blend=2&ob=1>

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YouTube video of March 30th 2009 (الدكتورة أسيل العوضي تعلن خوضها انتخابات 2009)

URL: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d8NZTogDosc>

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YouTube video of May 2nd 2009 (حقيقة اسيل العوضي الجزء الاول 2009):

URL: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=83voHSOWU4Y>

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YouTube video of may 6th 2009 (د. اسيل العوضي ترد على المقاطع المفبركة)

URL: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6kXtikUAfAU>

Downloaded and Saved: 07.04.2010.

YouTube video of May 7th 2009 (د. أسيل العوضي ترد على التسجيل المفبرك - الجزء الأول)

URL: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4kA8kmhG2Ss>

Downloaded and saved: 07.04.2010.

YouTube video of May 8th 2009 (حقيقة أسيل العوضي الجزء الثالث والآخر)

URL: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZKvsYrUaIBA&feature=related> .
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Facebook site:

URL: <http://www.facebook.com/people/Aseel-Alawadhi/1228154490>
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Rūlā Dashtī:

YouTube channel:

URL: <http://www.youtube.com/user/RolaDashtiCampaign>
Downloaded and saved: 07.04.2010.

Salwā al-Jassār:

YouTube channel:

URL: <http://www.youtube.com/user/DrSalwaAlJassar>
Downloaded and saved: 07.04.2010.

Official site:

URL: <http://www.saljassar.com/>
Downloaded and saved: 07.04.2010.

Marzūq al-Ghānim:

YouTube channel:

URL: <http://www.youtube.com/user/marzouqalghanimnet>
Downloaded and saved: 07.04.2010.

Official Site

URL: <http://www.marzouq-alghanim.net/Default.aspx>
Downloaded and saved: 07.04.2010.

'Aḥmad al-Sa'adūn:

YouTube Channel:

URL: <http://www.youtube.com/user/ZwaiZ>
Downloaded and saved: 07.04.2010.

It should be noted that it is unclear whether or not this is an official site of 'Aḥmad al-Sa'adūn.

Home page:

URL: <http://www.ahmedalsadoun.com/>
Downloaded and saved: 07.04.2010.

Facebook group:

URL: <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2448311061>
Downloaded and saved: 07.04.2010.

Appendix I

Questions for interviews, fieldwork in Kuwait

Bloggers/OM:

What sparked the Orange Movement, and your involvement in it?

- Did any particular event cause you to take action?
- Why did you organize around this particular issue?
- Did the campaign and/or your involvement in it start online or offline?
- Were you a group that collectively decided to campaign on the issue, or did an interest in the issue bring you together to campaign?
- If not, who decided on the issue, and how did you become involved?

Who is the OM?

- Did you know your fellow reformers before the campaign started?
- Is there an inner and outer circle of the OM?
- If so, who is in the inner, and how was this circle formed and expanded?
- How well do you know your fellow campaigners?
- Do you know all online and offline, or is there some you know only online (and perhaps not their identity)?
- What do the OM-campaigners have in common (do you all study, live in the same area etc)?
- Was men and women working close together within the OM ever an issue?
- How would you describe the difference between the OM and the “Blue Movement”?

Why and how did you use the internet?

- For what purposes did you make use of the internet?
- Which sites did you use in connections to the OM?
- Did you use al-Ummah? If so, for what purpose, and did you use it before the OM?

- Who set up kuwait5.org?
- Was the internet a preferred medium, or was what you had at hand?
- Did your involvement in the OM change your net habits, or did you use your knowledge and habits to the advantage of the OM?
- Did you use your own personal computer, or did you go to an internet café?
- Did you have an agreed-upon strategy?
- Did you involve yourselves in each other's writings?
- If so, how? Through comments, or through directions? And if so, who had the authority to give such directions?
- Who do you believe read your writings?
- Did you use the internet, or mainly other sources to mobilize?
- Did people join you through the internet, did they participate offline due to your online activity?
- Did you experience any attempts from the authorities to censor your online activity?
- Did the involved politicians also involve themselves online?
- How important would you say the use of blogs, youtube etc was to your campaign?
- For instance, the videos showing the security forces hindering demonstrators from entering the parliament, and the video documenting vote buying, how were the reactions to these videos?
- How did you engage with the traditional media in your coverage of the OM and the election campaign?
- How have your relationships been to the other campaigners since July '06?

How did you build your alliance?

- The OM obviously managed to unite people and politicians of different ideological, sectarian and economic backgrounds. How was this possible?
- What do you feel about the Islamists' involvement in the campaign?
- Did you make specific efforts to build an alliance, or did people join in on their own initiative?
- How close did you work with nationalists and liberals such as Basil Al-Rashid and Ahmad Al-Saadoun?

- Given that you managed to unite around this issue, why don't the same forces unite around, for instance, the demand for a cabinet based on a parliamentary majority, or the demand to legalize political parties?
- Did you experience any attempts from your opponents to either split the alliance, or hijack your cause?
- Why didn't the OM "resurrect" during this winter's political crisis, and the rumors on an unconstitutional dissolving of parliament?
- Has the OM "died"? And if so, why?
- Do you think such a movement will erupt again? If so, what is needed to spark it?

Journalists/Commentators:

- How did you hear of the OM?
- Who was the OM in your eyes?
- Did you yourself engage in the campaign struggle?
- Did you read the blogs of the OM, if so, which?
- Did you ever use them as a source?
- Did you ever comment on a blog, or participate in a debate on al-Ummah or any other forum?
- Did you ever cite any of the OM following blogs or pages?
- How do you deem the impact of the OM campaign?
- In your eyes, was the OM most visible online or offline?
- How did the traditional media react to the OM's coverage of their campaign, and of the election campaign?
- When speaking to politicians, did they ever cite blogs, or refer to the OM's campaign online or offline?
- In your view, what built the campaign for 5 districts, and what held them united?
- Why haven't such a coalition come together over other issues, such as legalization of political parties or a cabinet based on a majority in parliament?
- Do you think such a movement will erupt again? If so, what is needed to spark it?

Politicians:

- What was your position on the 5 districts?

- How did you come to this conclusion?
- Did you participate actively in the campaign for 5 districts, and did you raise the issue in your own election campaign?
- How do you view the so called OM?
- Did you yourself take part in their rallies, e-mail campaigns, write for them etc?
- Did you ever meet with the leaders of the OM, and did you discuss strategy?
- Did you read any of the following blogs/sites?
- Were you contacted by the OM?
- How did you react to the OMs writings about you?
- Did you yourself use the internet in your election campaign? Do you use internet today to communicate with the electorate, to blog etc?
- How did you feel about cooperating with the other politicians in “the 29”, those supporting 5 districts?
- What kept your alliance together?
- Why haven` t the same alliance, or a similar one, erupted on the issues of legalizing political parties and an elected cabinet?
- How important, in your view, were the popular engagement for the result of the campaign? And how important were the campaign of the OM?
- Do you think such a movement will erupt again? If so, what is needed to spark it?