# The Arab Spring in Israeli Media and Emergent Conceptions of Citizenship[1]

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## Abstract

This article returns to 2011 and the beginning of the Arab Spring in order to ask how the Israeli middle class came to draw similarities between their conditions and those of the Arab citizens who had risen against authoritarian rule. This question is also about the movement of ideas through the media and their incorporation into a dominant culture, or what Raymond Williams saw as the emergent elements of culture. Specifically, it examines the way the conception of citizenship traverses national boundaries. Whereas most studies of citizenship in this context focus on the imaginary of citizenship of the Other, and on 'Western' perceptions of citizens of the 'South,' we inverse our outlook. By offering a textual analysis of Israeli media coverage of the uprisings, we seek to shed new light on the cultural conceptions of citizenship in Israeli society.

## Introduction

On 17 January 2011, a month after the Tunisian uprising erupted, renowned Israeli feminist and journalist, Merav Michaeli, made an unconventional, even surprising, link between the civil unrest in Tunisia and conditions that would later lead to an event at home: The Israeli Tents Protest. The events in Tunisia, indicative of a deepening divide between state and society, manifested in unrest within trade unions and amongst civil society organizations. Michaeli's text leapfrogs between the already politically formed civil society resistance movement "there," and the protest that ought to come "here." In this boldly titled, somewhat prophetical op-ed: "Israel may be on the eve of a revolution[2]*,"* she draws similarities between a revolt against a long ruling dictatorship, and a sense of unrest in Israeli society towards its elected government, "that evades its duty to care for all of its citizens and to end the occupation." She continues:

> If only [PM Benjamin] Netanyahu's and [MK Avigdor] Lieberman's bad intentions of restricting personal freedom and civil rights in Israel would lead to the opposite result. Perhaps, if they don't permit the pressure to escape, the much-needed revolution will finally happen here. (Michaeli, *Haaretz,* January 17, 2011)

Events later that summer proved Michaeli right. The decision of one woman to call upon her friends to pitch tents on Rothschild Boulevard, soon snowballed into a country-wide protest. Israelis of

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[2] All translations from Hebrew throughout the article are ours.

mostly middle-class background camped in protest demanding "social justice." (Rosenhek and Shalev, 2014) Thus after the *indignados* in Spain in May 2011, and before what would become in September 2011 a global phenomenon, Israelis took to the street to protest against plutocracy, neo-liberalism, and the failures of representative governments to rule in the name of the people.

This article, however, is not about the protest in Israel. What we find unique and striking are the analogies made in the public discourse between Tel Aviv's Tent City and Cairo's Tahrir Square (figure 1). More than six years after the Arab Spring, it is fair to say that the scholarship is more realistic and critical. (Esposito et al 2015) But at that time, the magnitude and global resonance of the civil action was striking in the collective imagination, (Barnett 2003) and in the Israeli mindset, which forms our starting point.



*Figure 1*

While the analogies between Tahrir Square and Rothschild Boulevard grew during the summer protest, this did not happen from the start. Indeed, in early 2011 Michaeli's voice was unique. She, to be sure, was not prophetical, but rather one of the few who dared to see the events in the Arab world as acts of citizenship. (Isin & Nielsen, 2008) Where others were observing the unfolding events with fear, stemming from a view of the "Arab street" as irrational and demonic, (Bayat, 2010: 3; 2011) Michaeli saw a civic struggle for rights and human dignity. This unique observation and connotation which became part of the vocabulary of the Israeli social protest in summer 2011, triggered our investigation into the culture of citizenship in Israeli society, as manifested in what may be termed, "an Israeli gaze" on (Arab) acts of citizenship.

By asking how activists from the Israeli middle class came to draw similarities between their condition and that of the people of Egypt in 2011, we must first ask about the travel of ideas and ideologies and their incorporation into a dominant culture, what Raymond Williams (1977) referred to as the emergent elements of culture. In particular, we are interested in the way conceptions of citizenship may traverse national boundaries, especially between antagonistic states. Secondly, while most studies of citizenship in this context focus on the imagery of citizenship of the "Other," and

specifically on how citizens of the 'South' are seen through 'Western' eyes, (Alexander 1992; Isin, 2012a) we inverse our outlook. By examining the Israeli media discourse of the events in Tunisia and Egypt we hope to shed light on the cultural and symbolic aspects of citizenship in Israeli society. Thus, we do not ask how Israelis understand citizenship in the Arab world. Rather, we argue that their understanding of citizenship as a political concept is being informed by a wanting conception of citizenship in Israeli political culture.

**Theoretical background**
1. Citizenship Studies beyond rights and acts
Recent decades have seen a shift away from 'the relative disinterest of academic theory in the nature of citizenship, citizen politics, and citizen communities.' (Roche, 1987: 364) The understanding that every aspect of our lives is politicized brought about a burgeoning scholarship on citizenship. The task of this scholarship, as it has been taken by the emerging area of citizenship studies, (Isin & Turner, 2007) was to extend the concept of citizenship beyond its formal, institutional, and legal aspects. (Cushion, 2009: 140-141) This meant two things in particular, both of which, in our view, still call for more empirical grounding: One is the investigation of cultural, symbolic, and everyday lived experiences of citizenship; the other is research into the extension of citizenship in non-democratic societies. Thus, the expansion and the extension of citizenship rights within societies calls for a better understanding of its cultural immersion, otherwise our understanding of these processes remains superficial and formalistic. The need for a cultural perspective is pertinent in the context of our research because its absence results in scholarship marked by orientalist presuppositions. (e.g. Isin, 2002; 2012a; and also Bayat, 2010) Our aim is to adopt a theoretical prism that is not limited and narrow in two main ways.

Citizenship studies evolved in two broad directions, focusing either on patterns and modes of inclusion or on practices of exclusion. (Turner J. 2016) According to the former, the image of the citizen is shaped by that of the Western, male rights-bearing bourgeois subject, whereas the rest seek to emulate this figure. In the latter, citizenship is a means of exclusion, where racialized, gendered, and other ethnicized groups are seen as de-humanized and subject to state violence, which determines the boundary between inside and outside. (Turner 2016: 142) These perspectives, important and fruitful as they are, focus primarily and sometimes solely on the condition of lacking citizenship and therefore are limited to aspects of rights as a legal structure.

Another strand has focused on acts of citizenship, and more particularly on the enactment of citizenship through rights-claiming. (Isin & Nielsen 2008) This perspective has proved useful in exploring how non-citizens were enacting their political subjectivity and becoming citizens not necessarily by obtaining formal rights but rather by "doing citizenship" and thus securing their status within given polities. (ibid) The focus and the importance of this strand is in its account of the extension of citizenship beyond its legal boundaries. These acts however are still embedded in an understanding of citizenship through the prism of the acquisition of rights as an almost linear evolution, while telling us little about where and why those with rights may or may not enact their citizenship. To do so, we propose, there needs to be a (new) conception of citizenship that is not limited to the question of rights, but rather to an emergent political desire and a need to be represented. We thus see the Arab Spring as an instance of an emergent political culture, what can be also termed as a Fanonian moment, for Israelis, too.

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Isin reminds us, Fanon has announced the need 'to try to set afoot a new man.' (Fanon, 1963: 316) This new man (and Isin justly adds, also woman and citizen) ought to be:

> A subject who is neither nationalist nor national and neither colonial nor cosmopolitan; a subject who becomes a citizen by participating in the formation of a people to come, a people that has not yet been imagined or invented. (Isin, 2012a: 565)

The possibility to not only imagine but also bear witness to an emerging new horizon, when anti-dictatorial and anti-neoliberal protests were unfolding, each 'oriented toward specific local conditions [and still speaking] to one another,' (Hardt & Negri, 2012: 3) created a Fanonian moment. At this perhaps singular moment, images, slogans, and gestures were traversing national and cultural borders rendering the world flattened, thus allowing transcendence of national hierarchies, as well as an ability to re-imagine society as a whole (yet, not as a unitary concept). It was a moment when the possibility for the enactment of citizenship through acts that envisaged a new political order, and which enabled the emergence of a new political subjectivity, opened at once in different political and social settings. (Hardt & Negri, 2012; Achcar, 2013; Challand, 2013)

The citizens who occupied the public space in 2011 sought to reclaim and demonstrate a new political subjectivity. (Harvey, 2012; Challand, 2013) This moment, for instance, materialized in the social protest in Israel in one banner that was carried in a rally in July 2011, which exclaimed in Arabic and Hebrew 'Go away; Egypt is Here.' (see figure 1) However, the possibility of mingling the two languages, and the idea that Tahrir Square would become a point of reference for a protest of the Israeli (Jewish) middle class, was deemed inconceivable only seven months before. In early 2011 the unfolding events in Tunisia and Egypt, where indeed the uprisings prompted a change in the conception of citizenship, (Cole 2013) were framed with an orientalist gaze in the Israeli media, and as a result, not understood as enactments of citizenship, (Isin & Nielsen, 2008; Isin, 2012b) let alone as a model for political action. This discrepancy, we propose, calls for an explanation, which we seek to address by exploring and discussing the mirroring of representations of citizenship, as reflected in the Israeli media.

2. Mediated Citizenship
Media systems circulate shared social imaginaries that establish collectivities. In this respect they are essentially political. (Dahlgren, 1991: 16) Politics, argues Bruce Gronbeck (1990, cited in Jones, 2006: 369) "may shuffle money, votes, territory, and other material entities, but politics *itself* is a symbolic process wherein cultural entities—myths, ideologies, values, attitudes, beliefs—are evoked, rearranged and ordered in ways that produce political decisions. Politics is thus not *about* symbolic matters but is in essence symbolic." (also Valaskivi & Sumaila, 2013: 2) Media scholars also agree that in recent decades the mediatization of society has significantly intensified, thereby advancing the merging of politics and mass media. (McNair, 2011; Jones, 2006: 379) As Shapiro (2000: 83) writes "informational nodes displace boundaries and frontiers as the zones where practices of exclusion are concentrated." Hence the importance of the media for understanding "contemporary meanings of citizenship," (Jones, 2006: 367; Pajnick, 2005) both dominant and emerging.

Citizenship after orientalism is one such novel social conception—an emergent cultural element, to use the terminology of Raymond Williams. According to Williams, historical cultural analysis should focus not only on the dominant culture but also on emerging "new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationships [that] are continually being created." (1977: 123) Williams opens up a space for moments and instances of non-dominance when new cultural patterns and codes surface in the cultural arena in a specific conjuncture, (see also Hall & Massey, 2012) creating an order, starting from the amorphous, through the emergent, to the totally

established and dominant. In this order, emergent culture already gained some social shape and a transgressive potentiality, but it is yet to be fully incorporated into the common sensibility. Seeing the enactments of citizenship in Tunisia and Egypt as emergent conceptions of citizenship, we ask how these imaginaries transpired and circulated in the Israeli media. The media, as both "a means and content for circulation," (Valaskivi & Sumiala's, 2013: 7) organizes circulated contents through recurring patterns and specific frames "that ritualize certain actions over others, as well as certain actors as carriers of this ritualized action." (Valaskivi & Sumiala's, 2013: 6, see also Avraham & First, 2010; Couldry, 2004; Entman, 1993, Jones, 2006) We therefore ask whether the Israeli press embraced the emergent new imaginary of citizenship or adhered to existing, dominant frames of the Arab as Other?

Citizenship is a pertinent issue in media studies. (Dahlgren, 1991; Jones, 2006; Pajnick, 2005; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2006) Usually approached from an explicit normative perspective, this scholarship is centred on the facilitation of deliberative democracy. (See Dahan et al., 2012, Fenton, 2010; St. John, 2008: 410) It is interested in the media as an instrument of rational political participation and active citizenship. (Cottle, 2001: 61-63; Cottle, 2011: 651; Dahlgren, 1991; Fenton, 2010; for critical assessments see Jones, 2006; McNair, 2011; Pajnick, 2005) It rests on the assumption that news and news-making play a major role in the democratic political culture by shaping the public's opinions thereby also facilitating citizens' virtue, political knowledge, and action. (Jones, 2006: 365-6) Also significant is the literature focusing on the complex effects of new media on social movements, communities, and democracy. (Fenton, 2010; Greer & McLaughlin, 2010; Jones, 2006; Pajnick, 2005; Svensson, 2011) A second approach to the study of media and citizenship focuses on media images as engendering a sense of national belonging and collective membership by delineating the boundaries of citizenship and giving them a symbolic efficacy. (Avraham & First 2010: 483, Rosie et al, 2006) In the Israeli context, research shows that Arabs and Muslims—both within and without Israel—are either underrepresented or represented as the ultimate Other of Israeli Jewish society, usually through a securitized, 'law and order' frame. (Avraham & First, 2010; also Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005; Shapiro, 2000: 88; Wolfsfeld et al., 2000)

Our research however, diverts from these two perspectives. Unlike the normative perspective, we do not ask what the media "ought to be doing," (Fenton, 2010: 3) a dominant question in studying the function of new media in the Arab Spring. (Cottle, 2011; Pace & Cavatorta, 2012) Similarly, our study does not focus on the media as a mechanism of Othering, engendering in-group political affects. Rather, we ask to read into the Israeli media coverage of the Arab uprisings in the context of Israeli citizenship itself. Such a cultural approach to citizenship, according to Jones, (2006: 379) may indeed emphasize "the mediated nature of that engagement" but it also "recognizes the continued importance of political messages and symbolizations that citizens routinely use to make sense of politics in older, still-dominant forms of media." In this regard, it is important to ask "how the news media frame protests; how they display their spectacle and drama; how they give voice to oppositional views, values and grievances that drive them and the contention that surround them - all are integral to the media politics of dissent." (Cottle, 2008: 854)

Research into the mediated coverage of riots, revolutions and the framing of protests in the media tends to focus on internal social and political conflicts in Western states. (Boykoff, 2006; Boyle et. al., 2005, Cottle, 2008; Dahan et. al., 2012; McCarthy et al., 1996; Shinhar & Stoiciu, 1992; Waddington, 1992) Thus, even if, "mass demonstrations also remain the forefront of struggles for citizenship rights and democracy in non-democratic regimes around the world," (Cottle, 2008: 853) we know relatively little about media representations of non-Western acts of citizenship. This gap

can be explained, according to Pace and Cavartora, (2012: 125) in the tendency to research the political culture of the Arab world using the democratization paradigm and, since the 1990s, "the paradigm of authoritarian resilience." In both paradigms the emphasis is put on high-politics rather than citizens' acts and "street politics" from below. (Bayat, 2010) Obviously, the Arab uprisings have challenged these common research tendencies. Still Western media framings of non-Western acts of citizenship remain underrepresented in scholarship.

**Research questions and methods**
Our study assumes the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt to be 'acts of citizenship,' (Isin & Nielsen 2008) and, whether successful or not, processes of democratization. Yet, in real time, no one could tell in which direction things would evolve. Hence, their representation in the media, as a reflection of the public discourse, is telling, insofar as it is grounded in existing scripts of politics and citizenship on the side of the observer. Thus, we ask two main questions:

1. What frames dominated in the Israeli media coverage of the Arab uprisings in its nascent stage?
2. How does the wanting in Israeli political culture of a universalistic terminology of citizenship impact the Israeli discourse on these events?

To answer these questions, we set out to account for the ways in which the Israeli media reported on, and interpreted, the Arab uprisings, understood as a "political wave," namely "sudden and significant changes in the political environment that are characterized by a substantial increase in the amount of public attention centred on a political issues or event," which is a politically-contextualized way to address mediated political issues. (Wolfsfeld & Sheafer, 2006: 335) We compiled a corpus by systematically collecting reports on the events in online media outlets in Hebrew, given our interest in the ways the media approach the Israeli, mostly Jewish audience. Importantly, we limited our corpus to the first weeks of the uprisings, from the eruption of the *Révolution de Jasmin* in Tunisia in December 2010, to three days after the fall of Hosni Mubarak on February 14, 2011. We concentrated on the early phase of this political wave in order to identify prevalent cultural assumptions regarding Israeli conceptions of citizenship, before new models and norms of reporting were articulated and crystallized and before a clear public opinion on these events was established.

The corpus was made of all the reports and commentaries on the events in five major online outlets. In the cases of *Makor Rishon* and *Israel Today*, the websites offer a scanned version of the print edition. The websites of *Haaretz* and *Globes* almost full parallel to the print edition, and only *Ynet*, which is a part of Yedioth Ahronot group (Israel's second leading daily), has its own independent staff and editorship. The choice also reflects a diversified political outlook. *Haaretz* is a liberal-progressive, left-leaning daily, whereas *Makor Rishon* and *Israel Today* subscribe to a nationalist, right wing and conservative perspective. *Globes* is a privately-owned business and economic newspaper (resembling the British *Financial Times*), and *Ynet* is one of the most popular portals in Hebrew. (See http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/ynet.co.il) In making this choice we rely on an established analytic tradition utilizing newspaper-based event data for studying collective action. (Earl et. al. 2004) Thus, compiling this comparable corpus we follow a recommendation to "employ multiple newspapers in an effort to attain more detail on a greater number of events be sensitive to possible causes of variation across the sources used (e.g., time, region, type of newspaper, and political biases). (Earl et.al. 2004: 75)

We collected a total of 177 articles, 41 about Tunisia and 136 on Egypt. We initially divided them into three subgroups, to differentiate between different contexts of meaning: *Report*, including reportage of the events (30 and 45 for Tunisian and Egypt respectively); *Interpretation* (10 and 47 respectively); and *Response*, including articles that respond to the events and offer commentary on them (1 and 44, respectively). The articles were compiled into Atlas.ti files and were searched for recurrent discursive patterns of reporting on, or interpretation of, the events. The qualitative content analysis rendered our initial subdivision redundant, as no particular pattern in which the themes emerged in the different kinds of texts was found. Nor did we identify a significant difference between the surveyed outlets. In the next section we present and exemplify the main frames that were used in the newspapers. This is followed by an analysis that ties these framings to the discourses of citizenship in Israeli society.

**Findings**
The popular uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt at the turn of 2011 caught the Israeli, as well as the international media and elites by surprise. (Bayat, 2011: 50) Being accustomed to viewing the Arab world as a single Islamic entity, and to portraying it in orientalist terms (Bayat, 2010: 3), the Israeli media too were lacking the vocabulary to describe in real time, let alone explain, what would become known as the Arab Spring. Our textual analysis thus revealed familiar terms and frames through which the events were scrutinized. The most prominent of which were frames relating to observations on the flow of events, such as 'order/disorder' and 'stability'; those interpreting internal processes like 'democratization', 'Islamism' and/or 'fundamentalism'; and themes that relate to the effect of the events outside, such as 'regional' or 'geo-political' security or stability. The texts, obviously, do not fall neatly into one category or another, but rather manifest various employments of these themes.

1. Observing the unfolding events
A report on the highly popular news portal *Ynet* describes the protest in Tunisia using the 'order/disorder' framing:

> The public protest against the growing unemployment has got out of control and disturbs the peace in the North African state; the Tunisian president [...] promised last night to act to create new jobs following a series of violent demonstrations that [took] the life of two men. (*Ynet* December 29, 2010)

The text conveys a concern for the situation of disorder, and reassurance from the leader's promises. Interestingly, this tone stems from regarding the demonstrations as disturbing the peace, in a state that, as reported below in the same item, US officials define as a Police State. In other words, the protesters' revolt against the condition of oppression is considered a problem in an otherwise quiet and peaceful Tunisia. A month later, an Israeli media personality, himself of Jewish-Tunisian origin, observed in an op-ed wittily entitled 'We are all Tunisians':

> In a rational world, we would all have been attracted to what is happening in Tunisia from day one of the revolution. Had we employed here a sensible prioritisation, we were talking of nothing else. In reality, we were preoccupied with another nonsensical utterance of [Minister Avigdor] Lieberman [...] and we noticed, in a week delay, to turn our look westward, and a little to the south, to see the most important and fateful thing that has happened in this area in years. (Levy *Israel Today* January 21, 2011)

But this discrepancy between the two voices should not surprise us, especially, as consumers of Western media. In the world, and in the Israeli media, viewing the Arab world in monolithic terms, (e.g., Bayat, 2010: 209 cf.) or disregarding the oppressive character of Arab regimes (unless for purposes of hailing 'Western' or Israeli democracy), is not a novelty (Bresheeth, 2012: 44). This tone also echoes the standpoint of official Israel, that had remained concerned with questions of regional stability, and not with domestic concerns of Arab societies (Ibid. pp. 45, 47). A couple of weeks later, *Ynet* reported again, noticing this time, besides the dire economic situation, the harsh dictatorial character of the regime. (*Ynet* January 12, 2011) Yet, its terminology, despite acknowledging the citizens' critical stance against the regime as a reason for the protest, remained a terminology of 'riots.' (Compare with Bagguley & Hussain 2008)

By and large, commentators were influenced by the perception of stability in the Arab dictatorships. As one pundit put it: "No one assumed that the [Tunisian] president - who ruled with an iron fist for 23 years, headed a secular regime and led an educated state, suppressed Islamic movements, on the one hand, and media criticism on the other - will be ousted hastily at the darkness of the night following such demonstrations." (*Ynet* January 16, 2011) Indeed, when President Ben Ali was re-elected for the fifth time in 2009, the media was reporting on accusations of possible elections fraud, while still emphasizing his role in turning Tunisia into a prominent touristic resort, favourable in Western eyes for suppressing Islamic movements. (Walla News, October 29, 2009)

2. Interpreting internal processes

Another characteristic of most of the commentary on the events in Tunisia, and later in Egypt, had been their focusing on internal processes and their implicit meanings. Thus, whereas the observations related mostly to what was happening in the streets, the interpretations were focused on greater themes such as 'democratization' or 'Islamism.' Mostly, these themes were interpreted superficially or procedurally, in the case of the former, and stereotypically in the case of the latter, thereby reiterating this orientalist, "ideological construction and representation of the Arab world" in which, as Bresheeth (2012: 45) argues, Arabs are commonly deemed as "neither worthy of democracy, nor capable of it." (compare Bayat, 2011) Indeed, only a few commentators were using the terminology of democratization, in spite of the democratizing undercurrents of the events. Thus, Yossi Beilin, once a prominent Israeli politician who headed the liberal Meretz party and a cabinet member and the architect of the Oslo Accords, has remained sceptical regarding the possibility of democratization:

> The revolution in Tunisia is not making good public relations to the US propositions to lead gradual democratization. It will not make authoritarian Arab leaders to propose new election laws, nor giving up part of their authority in favour of elected bodies. These moves are usually perceived as signs of weakness that encourage the masses to increase their demands to oust the exiting regime. [...] Public content based on economic well-being—such as prevails in the Gulf states—is the most significant way to prevent revolutions. (Beilin, *Israel Today* January 19, 2011)

The purpose of democratization was also clear, as Beilin explains:

> In order for that revolution to matter, there must be an alternative regime which will offer a new path for Tunisia. If a liberal secular alternative does not emerge at once, fighting for human rights and citizens' good, the extremist Muslims will win the next elections because they are the only organized force in sight. The police state of Ben Ali would thus be replaced

with a police state headed by a clergy and the Tunisian revolution would be forgotten as we have forgotten the first Arab revolution which took place 26 years ago. (Ibid.)

Not only is there one 'right path' for democracy, according to Beilin, when it comes to the Arab or Islamic world, democracy's main function is as a preventive measure against fundamentalism rather than to serve the well-being of the people. This perspective, which sees democracy not as a good in itself when it comes to the global South, thus complements the discourse of disorder. (Bayat, 2011)

Yet, as Cottle (2011: 654) noticed in the coverage of the Arab Spring by the British press, the "mainstream media can, on some occasions, adopt a more independent and critically informed news stance even when political elites exhibit a relatively united front in terms of their expressed views on the political contention in question." To some degree, this was the case when the Egyptian people followed the path of the Tunisian Jasmin Revolution.

Shortly before Mubarak's regime fell, the editor of the right-leaning *Makor Rishon*, a self-proclaimed Israeli-nationalistic newspaper, wrote:

> For the first time in a hundred, if not hundreds of years, an Arab people, incidentally the largest and the most ancient Arab people, experienced self-realization; an experience of taking its fate in its own hands and of a shift in its history; an experience of the actualization of the sovereignty of the people itself and not of its abstract constitutional elements. This is what a "self-determination" event looks like.

This unique text is interesting in our view, since, like Michaeli's text above, it places the emphasis on the events in Egypt as a sign of danger in a different light. This latter perspective is exemplified in a journalist's blog[3] published on February 1, 2011, entitled: "It's Fun To Walk Like An Egyptian – But How Does An Egyptian Really Walk?" The title itself calls into question the capacity of the Egyptians to determine how, or where, they're heading. Indeed, the post criticizes the international media for not being attentive to internal processes that take place in Egypt or Tunisia. The author highlights the following:

> Sadly, the fact that international media doesn't deal much with "houses" like Egypt or Tunisia, doesn't mean that everything that goes on inside them is ok. Far from it. Many times, these houses hold the worst kind of family violence you can imagine.

This first passage is dominated by the image of family violence. This imagery serves to reinforce what has become a figure of speech for Israelis, who speak of their country as "the only democracy in the Middle East." (Bresheeth, 2012: 45) The exact metaphor was made in 2006 by Israel's then Minister of Defence, Ehud Barak, who alluded to Israel as "a villa in the jungle."

While at first the writer's finger is pointed at the international media, in the second highlighted passage, it seems that even if the media was attentive to this 'family feud,' it would not suffice. Apparently, in the world of *One Thousand and One Nights*, every question is a matter of unveiling a charade:

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[3] The authors accessed the blog on March 3, 2014 at http://www.theothersideblog.com/?p=192. At the time of publication, the url was no longer active.

> The Tunisians and the Egyptians demand change, but can they really become democratic, or will some sort of military or fundamentalist religious regime take over? Look at Lebanon, which hides behind a charade of a government that is actually ruled by the growing terrorist Hezbollah movement.

But the true goal of this post is revealed only in the final piece of highlighted text, where the author returns to speak about Israel and its complex relationship with the international media. The author suggests that the 'real' Arab world is what the international community refuses to see in Gaza, which has nothing to do with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict:

> Tunisia and Egypt gave the world a little peak into what the Arab world is really like. In Gaza, the regime is much more corrupt and murderous than it is in Egypt, but the media prefers to focus on the conflict with Israel and not with the Palestinian regime.

This strategy of moving from the violence—even if potentially democratic—to an assertion that all Arab peoples are essentially corrupt, violent, and un-democratic is not unique to this writer.

Questions regarding democratization and the potential significance of the events as enactments of citizenship were thus curbed by a language that remained embedded in old politics. For example, one reporter, even if astounded by the power of Tunisian citizens to force Ben Ali into exile, continued to analyze the situation in terms of rioting, anarchy, and Islamism. These code words were used, mainly, in reference to the US administrations' efforts to impose or advance democratization in the Arab world. He writes:

> Yet, in the democratization laboratories in the Arab world there are barrels of dynamite in the form of radical Islamic political parties furnished with an infrastructure that would enable them to fill easily the regime void following the street riots, which were lacking leadership, particularly, secular one. (Bismut, *Israel Today*, January 31, 2011)

A senior commentator of *Haaretz* was more critical of this tendency:

> While everyone was looking for the Islamic threat to the Egyptian regime, the frustration and anger of young people who wanted democracy, liberty, and especially to make a living remained off the radar. In addition, the extensive forgeries during the last Parliamentary elections, only two months ago, were the straw that broke the camel's back, even for the millions who have learned to live under a dictatorship. Egypt's ruling party was so determined to defend itself against the Islamist threat, that it could not fathom the anger generated among the masses. And still, no one in Egypt or elsewhere, could have truly believed that the masses will emulate the revolution in Tunisia so fast. (Issacharof, *Haaretz* January 29, 2011)

Given the peaceful relationship with Egypt, several Israeli journalists were reporting from Cairo, bringing the voice of the 'Arab street' to Israeli readers. *Haaretz* reporter dedicated a long article to his impressions from Tharir Square, attempting to frame the protest in its social and historical context, and to pay a tribute to the social media that enabled it. Ending his report, he expressed concerns for the possible ramifications of the fall of the old regime. Mohammad Al-Said is a young Egyptian student and a member of the Facebook group that instigated the revolt:

> Is [Al-Said] not afraid that the Islamists will use liberals like him to overthrow Mubarak, only to lead an Islamic revolution later—much in the way of Khomeini in Iran in 1979? "In free elections each voice would be equal," [Al-Said] said, "and if the [Muslim] Brotherhood does not respect the democratic rules, we will fight them and win them like we do now, and soon we will win the Mubarak regime." (Pepper, *Haaretz*, February 3, 2011)

Yet, the author does not feel satisfied with this answer: "Is he naive? Is the invisible hand of the Islamists directing the events until the time [for their own revolution] is ripe?" To answer his own question, the author draws his article to an end quoting an Egyptian Christian student who confirms his fears:

> "Until last night I was on the other side, among the protesters against Mubarak," he said. "But last night when I stayed after most of the protesters went home, I realized that it is the Brotherhood that really run things out there. They hide it and say that everybody [equally] participates. They're waiting for Mubarak to go and then they will seize power. It's not the democracy I want. I prefer Mubarak to remain as president, he at least protects the Christians." (*Ibid.*)

The "Islamic threat" as well as an emphasis on democratization as merely a procedural rather than a substantial ideological matter, and experiences and ideological aspirations of real citizens were prevalent in most of the reports and commentaries of the unfolding events. These fit well with the concern for regional stability, which was another common way in which the events were framed.

3. Concern for regional stability
Yoav Karni, an Israeli journalist who resides in the US and writes for the Israeli business daily *Globes* was criticizing the Israeli official stance as narcissistic and self-centred. Thus, positing that Israel's official policy too closely reflects the isolationist agenda of Avigdor Lieberman of the extremist right wing party Israel-Beitenu (Israel our home), he suggests that democratization in the Arab world is not necessarily in the interest of Israel:

> Of course, it's not Israel's business to encourage democracy in the Arab world. [...] There is no reason for an Israeli, democratic as one may be, to honour the democratic right of the Arab masses to support the annihilation of the Zionist state. If Egyptian, Jordanian, or Saudi generals would deny this democratic right from their subjects, most of the readers of this article will not feel sorry. Nor the writer. Yet a demand, or even the expectation that the USA adopts such an approach is unrealistic. (Karni, *Globes*, February 2, 2011)

In this observation, Israel's official position is being juxtaposed with that of the international community, which "is content with what seems to be the ousting of a regime that denied its own citizenry their basic rights." (Compare with Bresheeth, 2012) While Karni is not rejecting the Israeli stance, which in his view also adequately represents the Israeli citizenry, he recognizes its unique place within the community. It is, as he says, unrealistic to assume that other states, even Israel's best ally the USA, will act according to Israel's expectations.

Interestingly, another publicist, identified with the right-wing settlers in the Occupied West Bank, had been equally preoccupied with geo-political concerns and their implications for Israel in light of the rise of the Palestinian Hamas movement. Nonetheless, that author readily observed the 'democratic awakening,' in her own words, as an opportunity for 'a lasting peace in a new Middle

East.' (Alon, *Israel Today,* January 25, 2011) This position notwithstanding, the more common perspective regarding the impact of the uprisings on the region and on Israel were consistent with the official Israeli standpoint. Thus, the media echoed the concerns raised by former minister of defence Benyamin Ben Eliezer, a close friend of President Mubarak:

> I am very worried, because I warned against such a reality. […] Our situation is worsening. You don't know who will take over. […] With Mubarak we had a close and warm relationship. He has stabilized the Middle East, fought Hamas and the reactionaries. (*Ynet* January 29, 2011)

It was not surprising that once the revolutionary spirit moved from Tunisia to Egypt, Israeli concern rose. After all, from Israel's standpoint Tunisia is on the periphery of the Arab world, whereas Egypt is not only the most powerful Arab state, it also shares a border with Israel. Moreover, Israel has higher stakes in the situation in Egypt, given the need to maintain the 1979 Peace Treaty, to which there is considerable opposition within the Egyptian polity and society. Indeed, the future of this agreement and the question of the potential political power of the Muslim Brotherhood predominated the various reports and commentary on the events.

Yet, as protests spilled over into Egypt, the media became more interested in the protesters themselves; their lives, actions, demands, and mentalities. In comparison to coverage of the events in Tunisia, the focal point here was "zooming-in" to the experience of citizens. The "man in the street" could now finally speak to the average Israeli citizen as "citizens in the making." This new focus on the Egyptian citizen, and on Tahrir square as their place of "becoming citizens," was nonetheless still complex and multi-modal. The two main media frames that we identified in the case of Tunisia, "disorder" and "high politics," were still utilized by Israeli commentators, only this time offering a "thick description" of the subjects-citizens. Not all of them were sympathetic to the protesters or the protest.

In the following example, which ethnographically chronicles events 'on the ground' as they unfolded, ordinary people serve as the focal point. However, the state of disorder is still associated with the protesters:

> A group of 20 youngsters stood yesterday in front of a foreign journalist who was wandering the streets of Cairo. Armed with clubs and looks of hatred, they approached him. If he was lucky, they only "questioned" him in the street. At worst this meeting ended with fists and kicks. If the journalist was armed with a camera, his day is likely to end at the hospital. (Amargi, *Israel Today*, February 4, 2011)

The style and tone, which continues all along this report by a Catalonian journalist stationed in Israel, who reported from Cairo in Hebrew for the Israeli newspaper, is telling. The reader cannot tell if this is a report of an actual event, as it makes no reference to any particular journalist. Instead, the reader is left to assume that this experience was common to all reporters and foreigners in Cairo, as the main message here is of a situation of disorder and anarchy, in which the "street" determines the level of violence. This tone is typical to reports and analyses of "the crowd science" kind (e.g., Drury & Stott 2011) and to the view of the "Arab Street" in Western media as being either "'irrational' and 'aggressive,' or [...] 'apathetic' and 'dead.'" (Bayat, 2010: 211)

As the events unfolded, and the Egyptian regime grew weaker, the tone in the Israeli media became more complex. An editor of an Arab newspaper published an op-ed in Hebrew with the title "Why does democracy in Egypt scare Israel?" (*Ynet*, February 7, 2011) A researcher at The Israeli Democracy Institute, a liberal leaning think tank pointed to the shades of grey in a transition of power, which would not necessarily result in an Islamic dictatorship. (*Ynet* February 2, 2011) Yet, whereas the former response called upon Israelis to embrace the popular resistance against dictatorship, the latter remained confined to a language of 'foreign relations,' suggesting democratization as the best outcome to ensure regional stability for Israel. When Mubarak was ousted, the reportage from Israel shifted, and the disorder frame was applied to the security forces rather than to the protesters.

**Discussion**

In the Israeli social protest of summer 2011, which spread from *Ha-Bima* Square in the center of Tel Aviv to Rothschild Boulevard, and from there across the country, one notable and surprising scene was the banners that proclaimed in both Hebrew and Arabic that 'Tahrir is Here.' Perhaps even more unexpected were the signs throughout the Tent City that reiterated the notions of 'freedom,' 'equality,' and 'justice' in the two languages. Given the animosity and indeed the tendency in Israeli political culture to distance itself from its Arab neighbours, we seek to decipher the Israeli discourse of citizenship and how it was reflected in the media. In particular, we attempt to account for the ways the Israeli media represented acts of citizenship in the Arab world, and how it amplified dominant conceptions of citizenship in Israeli society. Furthermore, contrary to the common focus in citizenship studies on the orientalist gaze of Arab citizenship, we were interested in the effect of acts of citizenship in Arab societies on Israeli political culture.

Our findings indicate an overall similarity between the media representations of both the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings. Both events were framed as a security threat to the region's stability and to Israel. Such depictions are not different from how Arab politics are commonly represented in the Israeli (and Western) media, lacking nuance or a broad perspective and, above all, failing to see how politics reside in people's everyday life, beyond top-down governmental policies. Paradoxically, although the Arab Spring is a story of 'the people,' (Achcar, 2013) and despite the hegemonic tendency of the Israeli media and public culture to scorn the Arab political culture as authoritarian, by and large, the media missed the new story as it unfolded. Reporters, pundits, and editors in the media mostly failed to grasp that something new was taking place, and the Israeli media at large did not comprehend the emergent culture of citizenship that was born in the East, thus it continued to invoke orientalist media frames.

This, we propose, became evidenced some six months later, when Israelis took their own anguish to the streets. By then, Tahrir Square had already become a model for protests in the US and in Europe, (Brown, 2011; Kerton, 2012) and similar expressions of citizenship were also emerging in Tel Aviv. While, in retrospect, the influence of the Arab uprisings on events in Israel and elsewhere seems clear, it should not be taken for granted. As our investigation into the representations of the Arab acts of citizenship at the beginning of 2011 suggests, it was by and large inconceivable to Israelis to look at the Tunisians and Egyptians participating in these events as activist citizens. This, we propose, is the result of a lacking conception of citizenship in Israeli society.

If we conceive of the media as part of the state's message and effort to achieve national coherence, then we can better grasp the overall dismissal of the new models for acts of citizenship presented by activist citizens in neighboring countries. Explaining Homi Bhabha's concept of "the double time of

the nation," Shapiro (2000) notes that states seek to maintain their national culture by managing temporal—and not just territorial—boundaries. In national-temporal narratives both the past and the future are crucial. In Israel, this has meant erasing traces of Arabness from the past of a considerable part of its citizenry, that of 'Arab-Jews,' while advocating a kind of Jewish continuity masquerading as "Israeli exceptionalism," which the citizenship scholarship in Israel has tried, since the 1990s, to overwrite. The paradigm of multiple citizenship (Shafir & Peled 2002) revealed how the erasing of what Shapiro calls 'Jewish-Arab co-presence" (p. 94) has been inscribed in the socio-political order (Jamal 2007). In particular, depicting the Arab world as dangerous, militant, and essentially 'outside' and 'distinct,' has rendered an exclusivist Israeli conception of citizenship. This deep-seated model of citizenship resonated in the media coverage during the early days of the Arab Spring. Yet, while the political sociological scholarship that emerged on the Israeli protest observed the relation, or at least the connotation, to the Arab Spring, many Israelis, with the exception of a few groups at the margins, have returned to their own sense of exceptionalism, which continues to limit the scope citizenship in Israeli.

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