

From Rights To Representation: Challenging Citizenship From The Margins Post 2011

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Keywords

Arab Spring, Israeli Tents Protest, Citizenship, Political Activism, Political Representation

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Cover Page Footnote

I wish to dedicate this study to the activists who shared their experience and thoughts with me, and for allowing me to use their stories in my attempt to shed light on the important political work that they do. Often I find myself astonished by their courage and commitment to social justice. As always, I thank Dana Kaplan for her endless support and valuable intellectual partnership. Thanks also go to the editors and readers for their helpful comments, and to Harriet Gimpel for her careful editing of this article.

FROM RIGHTS TO REPRESENTATION: CHALLENGING CITIZENSHIP FROM THE MARGINS POST 2011

short title: Challenging Citizenship from the Margins Post 2011

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Abstract

This study asks whether we are the same citizens as we were before the civil awakening that spilled over from tyrannical Arab states to core cities of the global economy and beyond. To address this question it offers an historical account of the role of *New Social Movements*, *civil society*, and *deliberative and radical democracy* as the three epistemic frameworks that have shaped the figure of the rights-bearing citizen, and which have conceived the neoliberal citizen as a choice driven individual. Taking the neoliberal shift in Israel of the 1980s as its point of departure, it then places the 2011 Tents' Protest in the broader context of acts of resistance to the entrenchment of neoliberalism. This is followed by a thorough exploration of two post-2011 Israeli activist groups in Jewish and Arab-Palestinian societies respectively, allowing voices and new conceptions of citizenship that had arisen from the margins of the 2011 protest to come to the fore. In the final analysis, this exploration traces how the shift away from the conception of the citizen as a rights-bearing individual challenges neoliberal governmentality. It thus enables us to configure the image of a post-neoliberal citizen, one whose political subjectivity is grounded not in the discourse of rights, but rather in a new discourse of representation.

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Introduction¹

It is almost banal now to say that the uprisings, protests and occupy movements that have engulfed the globe since 2011 have been similar in both content and structure. Idiosyncrasy notwithstanding, it will not sound unlikely if we are reminded that these protests shared frustration in relation to the tyranny of the global markets. In this sense, the different protests coalesced into one event, which was a testimony to the rise of a specific type of citizenship, ushered by neoliberalism. The question which this study probes, then, is whether we are the same citizens we were before that civil awakening that spilled over from tyrannical Arab states to core cities of the global economy and beyond. To address this question theoretically, I trace back the political articulation and social amalgamation of the citizen as a rights-bearing individual which resulted in the “victory of the liberals,” to paraphrase Dean (2009: 18). This victory, I propose, is attributed to the rise of *New Social Movements (NSMs)*, *civil society* and *deliberative and radical democracy*, that performed as both the interpreters of this change and its vehicles since the 1950s. The victory however, ended in a defeat, when neoliberals hijacked the idea of the rights-bearing individual turning her into a figure motivated by a single freedom, i.e., free to make a choice (Brown 2003). Against this backdrop, the moment of 2011 calls for an explanation, but also for a new explanatory approach.

Seeking to give new meaning and significance to this moment, I focus on the Israeli Tents’ Protest as a case in point, placing it in the *longue durée* with two aims in mind. By tracing this event back to earlier acts of resistance under the light of neoliberalism entrenchment, and by extending the analysis to the post-protest entailments, I seek to see the protest beyond its immediate manifestations. I hence reject its depiction as a protest of and for the middle class, and thereby, I refuse the implicit or explicit insinuations that protests that spawned in the social margins were only its side-effects. Rather, seeing the Tents’ Protest as a part of a whole allows me to offer a corrective to common explanations that fail to account for the contribution of marginalized agents to the advancement of citizenship.

¹ Acknowledgments: I dedicate this study to the activists who shared their experiences and thoughts with me, and for allowing me to use their stories in my attempt to shed light on the important political work that they do. I am humbled by their courage and commitment to social justice. As always, I thank Dana Kaplan for her endless support and valuable intellectual partnership. Thanks also go to the editors and anonymous readers for their helpful comments, and to Harriet Gimpel for her careful editing of this article.

This serves my second aim of generalizing on the trajectory of citizenship beyond the Israeli context. Three main reasons make this plausible: first, the Tents' Protest was one of many protests that engulfed the world, and for which proximity and domino-like unfolding suggest that they were not isolated from one another (Castells 2012); second, these events engaged in learning from each other, allowing the migration of ideas and methods between them (e.g., Castells 2012: 141; Cole 2014); and, finally, their resemblance also resulted from them addressing similar issues and grievances (Levy 2014). In this respect, delving deeply into one case may prove beneficial for the purpose of making generalizations. One argument I want to put forward, one which does not presume to exhaust all that can be said about 2011, is that it pointed out to a new trajectory of citizenship, and particularly, to a shift from rights-based citizenship to a quest for new modes of voice and representation.

The empirical chapter is based on an ongoing study of post 2011 Israeli society. It draws mainly on interviews with activists, some which I conducted personally and others conducted in collaboration with my colleagues.² My observations have also been informed by following the activity of some of these players in the social media, primarily on Facebook. To a limited degree, I myself became involved in some of the latter activity not merely as a bystander, but by engaging in debates and conversations.³ Conceptually and theoretically, this paper draws from recent writing on citizenship acts and the enactment of citizenship (Isin and Nelson 2008; Isin 2012), as well as on citizenship "beyond the state" (Stack and Trevor 2007; and in the Israeli context see Levy and Massalha 2012). It pays particular attention to citizen participation writ large (Tully 2008), and focuses on the actors themselves, exploring their vocabulary and listening to the words they weave into their actions (Tully 2008: 136-137; Emmerich 2011; Levy 2014; Cox 2014: 958).

Thereafter this study unfolds in three parts. First I explore the figure of the rights-based citizen through the perspective of the three epistemic frameworks of *NSMs*, *civil society*, and *deliberative and radical democracy* that have shaped it. This will take me to the neoliberal shift and to a discussion of the inception of the 2011 protest in the broader context of acts of resistance to

² This research was supported by the Research Authority of The Open University, Israel. I thank my colleagues Dr. Mohammad Massalha and Dr. Ilana Kaufman for allowing me to use material from our collaborative work. I bear the sole responsibility for the arguments and the interpretation of these materials.

³ Yet, I do not consider myself an activist due to my limited involvement, especially since my main interest is with those who were not, so to speak, "keyboard activists" but rather physically engaged in political action on the streets.

the entrenchment of neoliberalism. It is followed by a more thorough exploration of two post-2011 activists groups, in the Jewish and Palestinian citizens' societies respectively. It brings to the fore the voices that came out of the 2011 protest of those who refused to see it dying. My main argument is that what the 2011 moment showed was a shift in the conception of citizenship that extended from the margins of society to the center. It was a moment when the extant neoliberal practices of governance (Tully 2008) were contested, and the terms of politicization were changing. These new terms were set in the margins, allowing for a new figure of citizen whose main concerns are representation and voice to emerge.

The rise of rights-based citizenship and beyond

In the decades preceding the 2008 economic crisis and the 2011 uprisings, when globalization was permeating all corners of the globe, political and economic leaders were constantly trailed by anti-globalization protesters, later known as the alter-globalization movement (e.g., Bramble 2006). This protest was as nomadic as the G-8 and G-20 summits, and it emulated the idea of global leadership by forming the World Social Forum (WSF) which met for the first time in Brazil in 2001. The latter became significant for later events because it called for bottom-up initiatives and sought to create a repertoire of egalitarian decision making tools (Polletta 2014: 83). Yet, as the protest went global, Arundhati Roy noted that, "The free market does not threaten national sovereignty, it undermines democracy."⁴ Thus, when the anti-dictatorial uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt erupted and spilled over to the Arab world, they served as a reminder that the challenge of globalization needed to be fought at home (Hardt and Negri 2012). It thus brought the struggle back to the field of citizenship, however, this relationship between the citizenry and their governments have since taken a new turn. Let me explain this by elaborating on the relationship between citizenship and struggle for social change.

In the post-1945 era, three moments mark the mutual conceptualizing of modern citizenship and the consolidation of citizen participation: between the 1950s and 1960s, we saw a shift from mostly class-based social movements to *New Social Movements* that sought to extend citizenship rights by means of mass mobilization beyond class and partisanship; since the 1970s, we witnessed the expansion of *civil society* in the face of the shrinking of the political; and from the 1980s we saw the weakening of liberal democracy met by models of *deliberative* and *radical* democracy seeking social solidarity and

⁴ [World Social Forum](#), Porto Alegre, Brazil, January 27, 2003. Retrieved on March 14, 2015.

political participation. *NSMs*, *civil society* and *radical democracy* were not mere descriptive or theoretical concepts. Rather, they extended beyond their analytical power to inform our sociological and political understanding of what is to be done (Cox 2014; Lipschutz 2006: xv). They called upon citizens to act and enact their citizenship, inasmuch as they (re)shaped citizenship and the ethos of citizen participation and our vocabulary on social change.

The end of World War II opened a new era for capitalist democracies when citizenship was considered to be profoundly changing the status of many, while their consolidated civil, political and social rights was reducing the tension between capitalism and equality (Marshall 1998). Indeed, the rise of the welfare state in these societies and economic growth (Streeck 2011), brought about *New Social Movements* that sought to extend citizenship rights to those who were forsaken by previous class based struggles, i.e., women, people of color, gays and lesbians, etc. Progress also induced new demands, namely to critically confront the bad effects of modernization and bureaucratization on both the environment and society. These struggles were mostly led by middle class citizens, who were using their own mix of economic, social and cultural capital in advancing post-material values. They further entrenched the figure of the citizen in their likening, as male, middle class and white. Still, their struggle also resulted in extending the politics of redistribution to other groups (e.g., Purcell 2013; Rose 1996; Streeck 2011; Therborn 2012), thus rendering themselves vehicles for materializing the principles of universality and egalitarianism that underpin the ideal of modern citizenship (Pfister 2012: 244).

The pressure for redistribution eventually spurred a parallel demand for recognition and a new politics of identity (Kymlicka and Norman 1994). In the 1970s, the idea that economic progress is a right “translated into political expectations, which governments felt constrained to honour but were less and less able to, as growth began to slow” (Streeck 2011: 10; cf. Brown 2003; Harvey 2007). Governments responded by rolling back from society and letting the markets come to the fore (Mitchell 1991), allowing *civil society* to appear as an interim terrain, where struggles for redistribution or recognition are neither political nor do they interfere with the freedom of the markets (cf. Dean 2009: 15-6; Cherniavsky 2009: 15). The image of the citizen was accordingly the sum of her functions as a consumer or taxpayer (Hall 2012: 20), devoid of political faculties other than choosing, but with only a little control over the choice she can make (Levy 2014).

These changes were now directing societies on the path of neo-liberalization. This, as Roy suggested above, harmed the democratic aspects of national states, giving rise to concerns amongst thinkers and political

activists alike. While the quest for citizenship rights seemed to be accomplished, the questions of citizen participation and social solidarity were surfacing. *Deliberative democracy* was bound to resuscitate the political left which was the main victim of the shift to neoliberalism (Dean 2009; Mouffe 2000; Benhabib 2004; Glover 2014). Differences in approach notwithstanding, liberal and radical thinkers were equally delineating models for political participation that remained highly intellectualized, and, against their will nonetheless, exclusivist, and, to cite McNay (2014), “weightless” (see also, Dean 2009: 77-8; Glover 2014: 95; Honig 2001). Thus, when class politics were no longer on the agenda of the left, and the middle class was shunning ideology leaving the stage for the right (Dean 2009) – which has done a much better job in mobilizing passions towards neoliberal designs, to paraphrase Mouffe’s (2000: 103) lament on the failure of the democrats—the public sphere was further depoliticized. In the global south, neoliberalization and globalization in some contrast, seemed to fuel the public sphere with renewed political energies.

Globalization made headways into the global south on the back of international corporations and powerful governments, and, all the more significant, into entities such as the IMF and the World Bank. Its entailments included the NGOization of societies and the rise of civil society among others, even under more autocratic regimes (Lipschutz 2006). NGOs were occasionally instrumental in changing the Arab societies (e.g., Cole 2013), rendering civil society a counterbalance to the powers of (authoritarian) states and (neoliberal) markets. Some NGOs also contributed to the popular mobilization of 2011, that was eventually carried out by the politics that transpired in the streets and squares. These, notably, inspired citizens elsewhere who had not yet dared rising against the neoliberal order on their own grounds (e.g., Dean 2009: 22). Then, the discourse of liberal democracy and the figure of the citizen as a rights-bearing individual could not suffice to either describe or explain the newness of the moment.

What instead?

We are still living the legacy of these paradigmatic frameworks of NSMs, civil society, and deliberative and radical models of democracy. All were critical in shaping the contemporary rights discourse and rendering citizenship paramount in forming the relationships between subjects and states, and between citizens themselves (Isin 2009). Indeed, the rights discourse has changed the practices of governance and is the mainstay in contemporary politics (e.g., Brown 2003; Hall 2012). Even for critical philosophers like Raymond Geuss (2001: 150), it has become a matter of fact to claim that,

“rights discourse will continue to flourish.” Under neoliberalism, the evolving rights discourse persists not for its intrinsic value to sustaining individual freedoms, inasmuch as it helps maintain a seemingly orderly, liberal society based on relatively efficient markets (Ibid., 154). Put differently, in neoliberal times, everyone—citizens and non-citizens alike—have become consumers of human rights and customers of a choice agenda (Hall 2012: 20). What eventually drove people to the streets was the growing understanding that things can’t remain as they had been, or to cite the WSF slogan, “another world is possible.” Yet, any attempt to theorize this moment is bound to fail, if only for the simple truth that “those who theorize the Occupy movement ... cannot speak with authorial voice ‘on behalf of’ or ‘for’ the movement” (Harcourt 2013).

What is needed instead is a more nuanced analysis of how the ethos of citizen participation (Tully 2008) and citizenship are articulated and reconstituted in the vicissitudes of everyday life (Isin and Nyers 2014). Thinking of the evolution of citizenship as an agonic game (Tully 2008) is a way of seeing the participants in these relationships—be they the universal citizens as articulated in NSMs, the legal subjects in civil society and consumers in neoliberal markets—as they were re-defining the forms of citizen participation, changing *de facto* the rules of recognition, and allowing for new participants to be recognized as claimants of rights (Tully 2008; Isin 2009; Isin and Nielsen 2008; McNevin 2011). In this historical context, by focusing on how the citizens of 2011 around the globe participate in these agonic games, I aim to further account for the ways these events brought about new forms of participation and new contestations of the (neoliberal) practices of governance (Tully 2008: 154). It is in this context that I now turn to the Israeli Tents’ Protest where the players became engaged in a new agonic game, shifting, as I propose, the ethos of citizen participation from the realm of rights to that of voice and representation.

From neoliberalism to protest

On July 14, 2011 a young, middle class, professional woman from Tel Aviv called upon her Facebook friends to pitch tents on Rothschild Boulevard to protest the rising rent (Gordon 2012; Grinberg 2013; Ram and Filc 2014). This act sparked a summer long protest that drove hundreds of thousands of Israelis to the streets. Yet, if we are to understand the Tents’ Protest as neither isolated nor *sui generis*, and more pertinently, as epitomizing significant elements of the uprisings in the Arab world and the disenchantment of citizens in capitalist democracies, this moment will not suffice. In fact, in order not to underestimate the significance of this event,

which for many is now seen as ephemeral or disappointing, I ask to stretch its boundaries in two ways. One way is by tracing the protest's roots back to the millennial turn, to the rekindling of the *Al Aqsa Intifada* (September 2000), when neoliberal measures started undermining the welfare state. And I also look at its extension beyond 2011, as manifested in the political activism, effervescent ever since in the streets. The second way is expanding my perspective to include not only middle class protesters, but also those who emerged from the margins, before, during, and after the summer protest. This framing, I propose, will facilitate taking better account of the vicissitudes of citizenship before and after 2011.

The neoliberal entrenchment and the origins of the Tents' Protest

At the turn of the millennium, middle class Israeli Jews were reassured that they were enjoying the trickling down of economic growth. Indeed, around the globe the middle class began feeling the burden of neoliberal policies (Harvey 2012: 11; Sassen 2011), and yet the Israeli-Jewish middle class felt protected. Even the long 1998 student strike which, according to Grinberg, was the precursor of 2011, received little attention. Shalev (2012: 167) showed that the decline in earnings of the young, middle class cohort began at some time between these two points, five years prior to their gathering in the streets in protest of skyrocketing prices of housing and goods. This decline spread unevenly, effecting men less than women, but poorer Israelis—Palestinian citizens, ultra-Orthodox Jews, Mizrahim (those from non-hegemonic Jewish communities originated in Arab and Muslim countries)—more than the Ashkenazi middle class. The poorer were also the first to be effected, around the millennial turn and even before (Shalev 2012).

The breakout of the *Al-Aqsa Intifada* in 2000 marked the end of the climax, and the anti-climax of the short decade of the Oslo Process. By this term I refer to what some would see as euphoric years of peace and liberalization (Shafir and Peled 2002), that were abruptly terminated with the assassination in 1995 of Israel's prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin. In October 2000, Israel was on a new track. After declaring the Palestinians not partners for peace negotiations, and severely damaging the status of the Palestinian citizenry in the October Events⁵, the state was ready to renew its alliance

⁵ In October 2000, Palestinian citizens protested in support of the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories following the stalemate of the Oslo peace process. The protest was met by violent suppression, resulting in the killing of 12 Israeli citizens (all but one were Palestinian) and one Palestinian from the Territories. The police officers who were found responsible for the killing were never tried, and events thereafter continue to overshadow the relationship between the Palestinian citizens and the state.

with the Jewish middle class based on a new war and profit pact (Peled 2004; Shalev and Levy 2005; Grinberg 2013). In 2001, Ariel Sharon was elected as prime minister, and appointing Benjamin Netanyahu, an enthusiast neoliberal reformer, as Minister of Finance, they aimed to reform the Israeli economy. When Sharon was re-elected in the 2003 general elections, he made the neoconservative *Shinui* Party, that raked in 15 seats mainly from the established, Ashkenazi middle class, his major coalition partner, and more importantly, he excluded the ultra-Orthodox parties which were still stalling the dismantling of the welfare safety net (Peled 2004). In subsequent years, various segments of society felt the impact of this shift.

The first to be hit were the Palestinian citizens who, first and foremost, suffered a loss of 12 of its people in the October Events. To add insult to injury, major voices in Jewish society sought their punishment by calling to commercially boycott Arab businesses. Being the poorest in Israeli society, Palestinian citizens also suffered from the neoliberal shift as it impacted on the labor market, making many unskilled jobs redundant or vulnerable, and from the subsequent erosion of welfare benefits. Finally, skilled Palestinians who were facing difficulties in capitalizing on their qualifications during normal times, were also lagging behind (Shalev 2012). This will explain the salience of university graduates among the activists of the post-2011 protest, as we shall see below.

Jewish university students were sensing that they were growing more distant from the core of the middle class already towards the end of the millennium. As Grinberg (2013: 496-7) noted, they were part of the B generation, which implied their prospects for integrating into a precarious labor market, and making them feel like second class citizens. This young cohort was involved in several industrial actions and strikes during the decade prior to the 2011 protest, in which the National Students Union was a major player (Ibid.). The 1998 students' strike, according to Grinberg, was also the first to suggest a cross-ethnic alliance in Israeli society, connecting Arabs and Jews, Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Jews, religious and non-religious in one struggle. This call should not be taken for granted, given the ethnicized structure of Israeli society (Levy 2002).

Long before the Tents' Protest, the rolling back of the state was felt at society's margins. In 1990, when Israel was absorbing an influx of immigrants from the former Soviet Union, the rising demand for housing forced many young, poorer Israelis out of their homes. The Tents' Protest at the time was concentrated in the peripheral outskirts, and was addressed by massive state-led construction. Soon after, when the Rabin government (1992-1995) led peace negotiations with both the Palestinians and Jordan, it

was accompanied by an expansive economic policy for the Israeli periphery. Yet, the subsequent peace agreement with Jordan proved to be a deathblow to parts of the Israeli working class, primarily in the textile industry (Lavie 2014: 8-9), sending mostly women home. Enhanced privatization resulted in downsizing state-held industries in the periphery, and the continuous erosion of wages (e.g., Swirski, Konor-Atias and Abu-Khala 2010; Swirski and Konor-Atias 2012).⁶ For a short while, the lower class was protected by a relatively solid welfare policy, attributed not only to the legacy of the Israeli welfare state (Shalev 2007), but also to the political clout of Jewish ultra-Orthodox parties which promoted an expansive child allowance policy (Shalev 2012). In 2003 however, Sharon's government was not relying on the ultra-Orthodox parties, which left it freer to advance an anti-welfare policy and deregulate the financial sector, which resulted in suffering in the margins and in more benefits for the established middle class (Peled 2004). Two encampments epitomized this moment.

Vicki Knafo was a single mother of three whose march from her southern working class town to Jerusalem and her confrontation with Netanyahu made her a symbolic figure of this political re-alliance. Suffering massive cuts to her child allowance (Herbst 2013), and diminishing wages, she pitched a tent in front of the Ministry of Finance that led to a ten-week encampment of single mothers and others who were injured by the erosion of the welfare safety net (Lavie 2014: 5). The encampment drew much public attention, allowing the Israeli public to focus for a short while on the economy, until a Palestinian suicide bomber reverted the media attention to security issues (Lavie 2014: 145-6).

In 2002, Israel Twitto, a social activist, took his three teenage daughters whom he raised alone in a deserted bus which they had made their home, to camp in Tel Aviv's exclusive shopping area, The State Circus (*Kikar Ha-Medina*), re-naming it The Bread Circus (*Kikar Ha-Lekhem*⁷). Similar encampments spawned in the periphery, allowing Twitto an interval of optimism:

⁶ For example, Shalev (2012) unravels the economic conditions that underpinned the 2011 social protest. His analysis shows that young Arab families were not only lagging behind their Jewish counterparts, but that their decline had already begun in the mid-1990s when the peace negotiations were at their peak. According to the Adva Center's report, the decade before the protest (2001-2011) was "more beneficial to employers than to employees. The national income grew by 35%, but while the share of employees rose by 23%, the share of employers rose by 85%" (Swirski and Konor-Atias 2012). For a more comprehensive political-economic account see Ram 2008.

⁷ In Hebrew, *Bread Circus* is a pun, simultaneously read as a *loaf of bread* and a public place of assembly (landmark, plaza, roundabout) named Bread.

“Quiet Revolution” I call it, like [Mahatma] Gandhi, [...] Slowly we shall wake Israeli society up. It’s not easy to get people out into the streets, especially people who are ashamed of their situation. But this revolution will succeed, because the government [...] does not give the citizens a chance to survive. On the contrary, it only creates more difficulties. And the more public awareness and sympathy [the protest] receives [...] the faster it will happen (Sarig 2003).

This political moment yielded no results, first, because the ethno-national divide prevents class-based conflicts from becoming universal, and second, because the middle class did not come aboard as it was still hoping to gain from the economic shift (e.g., Lavie 2014: 147). Not less significantly though, the middle class ignored the inclusive message that came out of these camps: “We are not homeless, we are fighting for the character of Israeli society.” Here too, the ethnicized structure of society prevented the Ashkenazi middle class from joining a call that emerged from the Mizrahi margins. It was not until 2011 that these various calls coincided in one big protest.

J14 or The Tents’ Protest

Two weeks after the first encampment on Rothschild Boulevard, the protest spread like wildfire. Almost on a weekly basis, until early September, tens and hundreds of thousands took to the streets of major cities chanting “the people demand social justice.” Over 2000 tents were pitched in 41 cities across the country, Jewish and Arab, big and small, rich and poor. At one point, the event (Isin 2012: 131; Levy 2014: 32-3), was embraced from all quarters, including the capitalists against whom it protested. This success was also due to a major effort to de-politicize the protest, namely, dissociating the economic situation from the prolonged military subjugation of the Palestinian people—primarily in order not to alienate right leaning constituencies from the protest’s goals. Yet, in the eyes of Jewish and Palestinian citizens in the periphery, the protest was perceived as that of the prosperous and comfortable classes who, to quote from a Mizrahi politician, “sought cheap rent in metropolitan Tel Aviv” (Levy 2015; see also Kaufman and Levy 2014; Shenhav 2013). Eventually the protest dissipated⁸, leaving the public with two commissioned reports that presumably addressed the problem of the high cost of living. Where the government’s appointed committee was requested to offer solutions without imposing new budgetary demands, the Rothschild protest’s self-appointed expert committee sought a

⁸ Like the Knafo encampment, the 2011 protest benefited from a pause in the violent Israel-Palestinian conflict. See Grinberg 2013.

comprehensively new political-economic order. The latter report remained a dead letter, while recommendations by the former were barely implemented.

A little over a year later, and following another violent clash in the Gaza Strip (operation Pillar of Defense), the government reached a deadlock while trying to pass the budget bill. Prime minister Netanyahu called for early elections to be held in January 2013. Netanyahu's main coalition ally was the newly formed *Yesh Atid*, a center-right party that had risen from the ashes of the protest. However, the promise for new politics focusing on socio-economic issues was not fulfilled, and in late 2014 Netanyahu called for another election. Again the anticipated failure to agree upon the budget bill was officially declared as the pretext for this. At this writing, Israel held the elections (March 2015) and Netanyahu's Likud raked in a staggering 30 seats, leaving the two winners of the previous elections—*Yesh Atid* and the national religious party, The Jewish Home—heavily impaired.

Citizenship revisited: From rights to representation

The processes and protests that I described above and which paved the way for the 2011 protest do not fit within the epistemic frameworks which shaped the figure of modern liberal citizenship. Rather, they all rest upon and reaffirm the figure of the liberal citizen, while striving to make a quantum leap. The 2011 event was an opportune moment, when the primacy of the national conflict was giving way to the mundane concerns of the citizens, all citizens, regardless of ethnic and class divisions. Yet, the moment was over when the protest imploded, first, by failing to rise above its own contradictions⁹, and second, because as many times before, security concerns took over (Grinberg 2013). But the protest was neither conclusive nor terminated, and by helping expose the “element of non-consensuality” (Tully 2008: 143) underlying the (neo)liberal discourse of rights, it gave way to new activists and new actions to break through. These activists, who were brought up under the neoliberal governance and through the heydays of the politics of recognition, refused to accept the discrepancy between the liberalization discourse that prevailed since the 1990s, and the reality of non-

⁹ The protest was confronted with several challenges. Its self-declared leadership did not accept the representation of other encampments, thus failing to maintain its democratic face. Eventually, the protest was identified solely with the leadership of the Rothschild camp. Constant conflicts over representation reflected the difficulty to overcome inherent tensions between the center (middle class) and the (ethnic and ethno-national) periphery (lower class). Finally, the efforts to keep the protest a-political stood in contradiction to the political ambitions of some of its leaders, as well as to a shifting emphasis among the core middle class players to the issue of military service of peripheral groups.

egalitarianism. They were thus fighting to be heard and to redefine the terms of their own representation and voice in the public sphere. This is what is to be learned from the following two groups.

The Not Nice

In the Israeli collective memory the expression “not nice” connotes the utterance, “they are not nice” made by Prime Minister Golda Meir in 1971, petrified by the spread of the protest of the Israeli Black Panthers. This was a grassroots group of young Mizrahim from Jerusalem’s slum neighborhoods who rose against the social, economic and cultural oppression of their parents, immigrants from Arab and Muslim countries. While the protest was met on the ground with harsh physical force, it was publicly denounced as uncivilized and as showing ingratitude to the establishment. This utterance, like the one of the Jerusalem mayor who called upon the protesters “to get off the grass,” was received as arrogant and dismissive. This condescending approach was seared in the Mizrahi memory and is present in much of the political discourse to date. Thus, when young activists from the Mizrahi periphery sought to speak up on its own behalf the idea to call it *The Not Nice* touched upon an open nerve and resonated with the history of the Mizrahi political struggle (Chetrit 2009; Levy 2015). Indeed it was turning the insult against its perpetuators, the Ashkenazi hegemonic elite, and to spite them, saying, “If you think we’re not nice, we won’t be nice.” Yet, it can similarly be read as a rhetorical question: “Tell me, who really isn’t nice?”

The idea to assemble an activists group was conceived by activists who were organized in the Peripheries Forum. This forum brought together activists and camps left aside or behind by the main Rothschild protest. Barak Segal came up with the idea of forming a group to act from its own position, not being marginalized or begging for attention or voice. Together with Moshe Cohen, a veteran activist in his hometown, and two activists from southern Tel Aviv, they reached out to Carmen Elmakiyes-Amos, who was becoming a conspicuous activist during the sporadic attempts to resuscitate the protest in 2012, wearing her distinctive black T-shirt with a bold imprint, Panther (in the feminine gender form of the word in Hebrew). The idea was to act in the name of the peripheries, but as Carmen attested, she saw this as another link in the history of Mizrahi struggle, and so they named it *The Not Nice*, now to be printed on their distinctive black T-shirts.

Carmen, who has become a leading figure of *The Not Nice*, was active in 2011 in the Lewinsky encampment in south Tel Aviv. This encampment, only a 15-minute walk from the Tent City on Rothschild Boulevard brought together social and political activists, mainly feminists and mostly Mizrahim,

as well as some activists from the growing asylum-seeker and migrant labor communities in the area, and other marginalized groups, like transgender and queers (Misgav 2013; Monterescu and Shaindinger 2013). Soon it became clear that despite their proximity, the two encampments presented different worlds, that could not be concealed despite their collaboration during most of the demonstration events. Carmen was quick to notice this as she was coming and going between the two camps during the height of the protest. Working as a waitress in a café on Rothschild Boulevard, she found herself frequently discussing it with some of the protest leaders. At nights she frequented the Lewinsky encampment where she saw the other side. In an interview, she explained to me the difference between her experiences:

I didn't find myself [on Rothschild]. I saw it as a guys kind of experience. They came, pitched tents, feeling cool and hype, drinking beers in the evenings, getting drunk and partying. There was nothing, no feeling that they were fighting for their lives. And it's okay, they weren't fighting for their lives, only to bring the rent prices down a little in Tel Aviv. It's not that they had no homes. When it all ended, this group of those who were really homeless was left behind, and they turned into a nuisance.

Sylvie Bitton, a veteran resident and activist in south Tel Aviv and later a *Not Nice* activist, was one of the founders of Lewinsky.¹⁰ She physically experienced the difference between them and Rothschild, when confronting municipal law enforcement accompanied by police who were sent to dismantle the tents daily during their first week. Sylvie: "They were coming at night and kicking us out of the tents, tearing them up and taking us to the police station, leaving us there". After a week of this cat and mouse game, she testifies,

I just stood in tears, *shouting* at them: "Over my dead body, you won't evacuate us, and for each tent that you take, I'll put up ten more," and then all the city inspectors probably gave up, one even shed tears with me, and they took off. At that moment I said to myself—Sylvie you won. (*Italics added.*)

This cry to stand for oneself was echoed in the way another Lewinsky activist explained her stance in real time on the morning of one of these evictions:

¹⁰ My analysis also relies on a documentary that covered the Mizrahi-feminist NGO – *Achoti* (lit. *my sister*) in real time, "The Roar of the South: Stepdaughters of Chuldai" (Dir. Assaf Geteni; [part 1](#); [part 2](#)), and an interview with Carmen Elmakytes-Amos, *Xnet* January 6, 2015 (all accessed 12.2.2015).

If on Rothschild, the students ask for housing, we ask to be students. We grew up here in this country by those basic promises that anyone who wishes to study can do so and live a reasonable life, and it shattered in our face. People here drag their [university] studies for some 12 and 17 years, for they can't pay for it. In this protest it isn't *this voice*, the voice of single mothers, the dependents, those who can't carry the burden as if the state has already forfeited them that we want to be heard. There are transparent people here, who are not seen, not their needs, nor their hope, not their dreams. And this is what we're fighting for, this is [a voice] that we want to bring, while strengthening the struggle on Rothschild (Amalia Sitton, in *The Roar of the South*, part 1; italics added).

Shula Keshet is the head of the Mizrahi feminist NGO *Achoti* that organized the Lewinsky encampment. It was only symbolic that when interviewed for the video documenting the camp she had literally lost her voice. Those women who were leading the camp were enacting their right to the city (Misgav 2013), but for them this was not just a slogan. Unlike the Rothschild campers, the neighborhood was their home. It was not surprising then, that after winning the battle against the municipality, when visiting protesters from Rothschild invited them to move with them, Bitton rejected it unequivocally: "This is my place, I want to protest here. Everything in the south and in the [central bus station neighborhood] concerns me. My interest is not in Rothschild. ... my protest is here and here it will be."

Thus, while the Lewinsky protesters were not asking to split the seemingly unified struggle, and as they were marching and chanting "Lewinsky, Rothschild, the same revolution," they knew that these struggles differed (Misgav 2013). For Carmen, as we saw above, the difference was substantial. Although Rothschild protesters were making reference to Tahrir Square, she felt that it was not really linked to these origins: "There's nothing in common between [this quasi-festival] and a struggle.. If I look at what has happened in Tahrir a moment ago, or anywhere else, there's no connection." In contrast, the multiplicity of voices and struggles in Lewinsky of those who were rising from the margins and have little to lose, were considered more similar to conditions in Egypt or Tunisia.

From the start, the nucleus of *The Not Nice* comprised a handful of activists, all from disadvantaged backgrounds, typically Mizrahim. Once organized, they joined the marches in Tel Aviv as a group, distinctive by their own T-shirts and banners that read simply "*The Not Nice*." To make their voice distinctive they also insisted on starting their march in Tel Aviv's disadvantaged neighborhood, rather than at the bottom of Rothschild

Boulevard. where the main march began as a reminder of the Tents' Protest. Another way this group differed was by refusing to seek police permits for its rallies, claiming their right to demonstrate as *a priori* and unconstrained. One march had made Carmen feel that they had made a difference, and that their effort yielded results, when in a rally that they led from the impoverished Ha-Tikva neighborhood, hundreds and maybe more citizens were marching with them. This is how Carmen described it:

First of all, there were many from the [2011] protest. Many from the Mizrahi struggle, even those who were not in the protests and marches before. Many Mizrahi activists joined. ... [and we felt] not only that people were joining us, but that these are people who hadn't been in the struggle until now, and this was important. Those who didn't take to the street, who didn't go to Rothschild, or anywhere else. And suddenly they [felt] represented. They felt that they can join. That was special.

Marching in different pathways served also as a metaphor for another activist who explained how the place of *The Not Nice* is different. Riki Kohn, a divorced mother of five, a leading activist in this group, says:

The connection between us and the middle class is, you know, it's not that we don't march together, [but] we are actually marching on separate streets, in opposite directions. The discourse is different, you know, they are talking about the cost of living and still fly abroad, and we're talking about homes where there's nothing for the children, where kids go to school and have sandwiches with chocolate spread awaiting them because they have nothing at home.

Indeed, *The Not Nice* were marching on a separate street. The majority of the middle class protesters became (re-)engaged with what they termed as the "burden inequality" (Grinberg 2013), which eventually drove them back to seek recourse in the formal political system in parties that were promising "new politics" (Talshir 2015). *The Not Nice*, in contrast, did not only stay on the streets, as one activist proclaimed, they also remained loyal to their initial goals of voicing the plight of the disadvantaged. They became noticeably active after a new government was formed. When *Yesh Atid's* leader took office as Minister of Finance, *The Not Nice* held a weekly vigil in front of his villa in the affluent neighborhood of Ramat Aviv Gimel, demanding revisions to the state budget that would meet the needs of the lower echelons of society. They also fulfilled the idea of one of its founders and became equal partners in other struggles, as was the case with the struggle to offset the profits of the newly found gas resources to enhance social programs, as well

as the initiators of their own struggles. No longer did they need other protesters to grant them access to decision making or to the media.

Hiraq alshababi

Hiraq alshababi (hereafter *Hiraq*), best translated as Youth on the Move, is a group of young Palestinian activists mostly from the Negev/Naqeb in the south of Israel, home for the majority of the Israeli Bedouin-Palestinian population. In 2011, Palestinian citizens took part in the joint Jewish-Arab encampments in Haifa and Jaffa (Monterescu and Shaindinger 2013), but while only a few set tents on Rothschild, more protested in exclusively Arab localities. Not unexpectedly, most activists were affiliated with the Arab-Jewish Democratic Front for Peace and Equality (DFPE; Kaufman and Levy 2014), while in Jaffa, for instance, the camp was a home for poor citizens with real housing issues, and the activists were mostly local youth identified with the National Democratic Alliance (*Balad*). Still, for the majority of the Arab citizenry, the protest was an internal Jewish matter. Yet, when the protest died out, new protests spawned in the “Arab Street,” interestingly, revealing new faces and new forms of activism. *Hiraq* is one exemplary group amongst several.

Whereas political activism in Israel’s Arab society is mostly confined to the political parties and representative institutions also dominated by the parties, the social protest may be seen as a trigger for new street activism. The new activists were skeptical of the political parties, but also felt that they could not identify with the protest, as Huda, one of the *Hiraq* founders, said retrospectively,

I was waiting to hear someone say that [Israel] needs to get out of the [occupied] territories, or that the protest will be a voice saying all the money goes to the [Jewish] settlers. ... so if someone who thinks sensibly knows that all the money goes to the settlers, and that the settlements need to be evacuated, and then, the Tel Avivians will have more money. I was waiting for someone to speak out. But I didn’t participate in the protest or in any of the demonstrations.

Fadi, another activist, similarly explained his reasons:

I am one of those who decided not to take part in the protest, and couldn’t understand the place of the Palestinians in it, for the very simple reason that half of the [protest] speakers [were making an effort] to de-politicize it. [They] didn’t talk about the Occupation, but the cost of cottage cheese. [They] didn’t talk about all of that racism, and the racist machinery, but the cost of living in Tel Aviv.

These voices notwithstanding, activists of *Shabab al-Yafoiya*, literally, Youth of Jaffa—from what was once a major Palestinian city and now a neighborhood of Tel Aviv—joined the local Arab-Jewish encampment (Monterescu and Shaindlinger 2013: 238-9). The main issue at stake was the lack of public housing, mainly due to gentrification processes generated by the municipality. The *Shabab* also joined marches held jointly by the Jaffa encampment and the one in the Jewish neighborhood of Ha-Tikva. These activists were mostly identified with *Balad*, yet the protest marked their growing independence from the partisan line as well.

Moreover, the protest was a time to reconsider partisan politics for another activist from Jaffa, who was part of a different group. She explains:

The protest was [...] when I disengaged from partisan activism, because then I knew that the DFPE Tel Aviv branch became deeply involved in the protest. And, are you kidding me? You're protesting about housing and don't talk about the land issue [i.e., the confiscation of Palestinian owned lands after 1948 – G.L.]? [Housing] is the problem? [I'm not talking about] the 1967 territories. We're talking about the 530 villages whose lands were confiscated. All this mess, it's a mess, and the settlements are literally a big factory of house-building [referring to the massive building in Jewish settlements – G.L.].

This criticism not only resulted in her leaving the party, but to her calling upon friends from the DFPE and *Balad*, as well as non-partisan Palestinians and Jews, to set up their own tent on Rothschild, naming it Tent 48 (alluding to the now common reference to the Palestinian citizens as the 1948 Palestinians). Their slogan—democracy for all, between the Jordan River and the sea—had, as she attests, driven the DFPE mad, for it undermined and challenged the latter's belief in the two state solution, and constituted a rejection of *Balad's* conception of a state of its citizens.

Withdrawal from partisanship was a recurring theme amongst most activists. Having become politically socialized during the period of their university studies, young Palestinians usually became the ranks and file of the Palestinian political parties, and eventually loyal to them in their adult life. However, in our interviews it appeared that many of the youth (in their 20s and early 30s) no longer see the parties as their only political venue. On the contrary (compare Azzellini and Sitrin 2014), as was evident from the way *Hiraq* activists became involved in several struggles, most prominently

in cross-partisan mobilization against the government's plan to resettle the Bedouins in the Negev/Naqeb (The Praver Plan¹¹).

Hiraq alshababi made its first appearance at the 2013 annual Land Day, commemorating the killing of six Palestinian citizens in a 1976 nationwide protest against the confiscation of lands.¹² Huda explained:

We began organizing [...] in preparation for Land Day, because we didn't want these speeches, [from] the traditional leadership with whom we didn't really agree. Simultaneously, we saw that the struggle against the proposed Praver plan for legislation was not being conducted at the level we thought it should be. Then we said, if the youth don't come, don't participate and don't boycott everything, then, *yalla*, it's the end of the Negev and of the future for us and our children. Then we decided to get organized.

In July 2013, the young activists participated in a cross-partisan rally against the Praver Plan. However, the leadership, in agreement with the police, wanted to cancel the demonstration. The activists decided not to comply and to continue with the march. This led to physical clashes with the police, and ultimately was recognized as a turning point in the way Palestinian protesting had been handled since the October 2000 events. Like *The Not Nice*, they too refused any formal cooperation with the police, perceiving it as an infringement on their right to protest. Similarly, this was their position when they sought to organize the Day of Rage. Nevertheless, in consideration of the sensitivity among Arab citizenry to crossing the boundary of legalism, they applied to the established leaders to request a police permit, which they did. Regardless, organizing this protest had been their initiative.

¹¹ This recent plan is the most elaborate attempt of the Israeli government to settle the land issue in the Negev/Naqeb. Its proclaimed goal is to address the existence of unrecognized Bedouin settlements by their relocation and by determining the issue of land ownership (mostly by declaring it state land). According to its critics, symptomatically this plan was drawn without consultation with the Palestinian themselves, and imposed on them as part of yet another state goal – to encourage Jewish citizens to settle in this area. When in 2013 it appeared as if the plan was going to be adopted and implemented, Palestinian citizens, supported by Jewish activists, sought to stop it by demonstrating against it.

¹² The Land Day on March 30, 1976 marked the first nationwide protest of Palestinian citizens against the massive confiscation of lands since 1948. When the police moved to suppress the protest, it ended with killing six Palestinians. Since then the Palestinians have been commemorating the event in marches that have occasionally become violent. More recently the established Arab leadership has been cooperating with the police in order to keep the events peaceful.

The Day of Rage on November 30, 2013 was to become a significant event for this group in three major ways. First, by taking the leading role from the traditional leadership, the group was undermining the centrality and monopoly of the latter in representing the Arab population. It is of course too soon to assess its impact, but one recent example may attest to its significance. When the Knesset raised the threshold percentage for votes needed to earn Knesset seats to 3.25%—a figure reflecting an interest in blocking the Palestinian parties—pressure from the youth was instrumental in the parties' decision to run on a joint list. Second, the refusal of the activists to play by the rules—by insisting on not requesting a police permit themselves, and then by rejecting the police terms to the protest—was a sign that the effect of the October events no longer hovered over the young protesters. Many activists reiterated the principle of a non-violent struggle, and still, they did not refrain from confrontation with the police force when it exerted force. Our interviewee in Haifa, who was the coordinator on the ground, attested that she could not stop the march when the police were trying to force them off the streets. In the Bedouin town of Hura, where the main demonstration took place, matters became violent too. There are those who say it was provoked by undercover police officers, and at this writing a few protesters are still held in custody for their participation in this event.

Lastly, the Day of Rage showed the specific organizational characteristics of *Hiraq* and groups of its ilk, as well as their own point of view on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Technology and social media played a big part in their organization. As attested by our interviewees, social media connected them with a coaching organization abroad, which specializes in social activism, and it was used to mobilize support in Israel and in the Palestinian territories, and more uniquely, in getting young activists abroad to hold parallel virtual demonstrations. Nonetheless, as our interviewee from Haifa suggested, social media may also have an exclusion effect:

If you write a status and garner 200 likes, so you think that you've reached London. So yes, it satisfies you that the whole world is now talking about that. But ultimately, Facebook is not the whole world ... it delimits your prism at one stage when you think the whole world is here. ... It's only Facebook, it's people on Facebook, it's not everyone, it's not the whole population.

Conclusion

My goals here were both ambitious and modest. Speaking to the former, I suggested that analyzing an Israeli case study may serve as a way of accounting for evolving new trajectories for citizenship post-2011. In this vein, I explored the three main epistemic frameworks that explained and advanced the rise of the rights-bearing citizen. Each of these—*NSMs*, *civil society*, and *deliberative and radical democracy*—was a product of its time, while all shared an image of the citizen as deserving a civilized existence (Benhabib 2004: 172). Yet, each further reshaped the figure of the citizen to conform to the rights discourse, thus rendering society a relatively efficient liberal and capitalist (Guess 2001). The Israeli Tents' Protest, like other protests since 2011, was a reaction to this process that led to the entrenchment of a neoliberal order since the mid-1980s (Ram 2008). It was, then, a product of its own time, a reaction to the polarization of wealth and income distribution and expanding inequality, to the degree of rendering middle class jobs too scarce and precarious (Shalev 2012). Politically, the protests responded to practices of governance that did not only prefer technocracy over democracy, but also, as Wendy Brown (2011) aptly noted, ratified and implemented Margaret Thatcher's notorious depiction of the neoliberal ideal: "There's no such thing as society, only individual men and women, and families." The extension of anti-neoliberal protests from the margins to society's center, as well as the spread of forms of protest beyond national boundaries, thus demonstrated a quest to reinvent society. By seeking to weld *the people* as an active political subject (e.g., Grinberg 2013; Ram and Filk 2013; Azzellini and Sitrin 2014), transcending class and ethnic boundaries, protesters in Israel and across the globe were redefining the ethos of citizenship participation. This new ethos, I propose in final analysis, is grounded in a shift away from the ideal of the rights-bearing citizen.

Jodi Dean, I believe, was correct in claiming that, "When democracy appears as both the condition of politics and the solution to the political condition, neoliberalism can't appear as the violence it is" (Dean 2009: 18). Similarly, when citizenship is seen as both the goal and means of political change, it is timely to ask what citizenship means, and whether its prospects are to encourage social change, or to entrench neoliberal violence. If, then, the shift from *NSMs* through *civil society* to *deliberative and radical democracy* encapsulated a successful effort to expand and extend the terms of being citizens in the liberal sense, the rise of neoliberal citizenship was, to cite Dean again, a "victory in defeat." The political left, she explains, was caught in a deadlock because the rights-bearing citizen has become the epitome of democracy. Once neoliberalism proclaimed this ideal as its own, to put it

bluntly, claiming rights could no longer be a way of seeking social change. At most it entailed integrating as equals in a neoliberal order. For this reason, the claimant of rights has become mostly the political project of non-citizens rather than citizens (e.g., McNevin 2011; Isin 2012).

This takes me to my modest goal of relating to the Tents' Protest as a part of a whole, in the context of earlier and later acts of citizenship beyond the middle class or society's center. Seeing political struggles and ideas as they disseminate from the periphery to the center is not yet common. None the less, as I have shown here, 2011 cannot and should not be isolated from the acts of resistance that preceded it, nor should it be understood solely as a protest led by the middle class or directed by its needs. It is in this broader context, I claim, that the ethos of citizen participation has changed. The political activism of *The Not Nice* and *Hiraq alshababi* attests to this shift from right to representation.

These activists no longer see the right-left continuum which extended over more than two centuries, or the big 'isms', as their frame of reference (cf. Hughes 2011). This continuum that shapes the extant political spectrum and to which politicians adhere, is referred to as a masquerade to the violence of neoliberalism and to the failure of both the right and the left to bring about social change (Dean 2009; Trudell 2012). That said, the activists' reluctance, or, some would say, failure (Gitlin 2012), to articulate an alternative ideology, beyond expressing their own voice, raises questions regarding their political program or future. This, I believe, remains an open question.

This new activism, I further argue, poses a challenge to our conception of democracy, and hence to the future of citizenship beyond constitutional representative democracy (Azzellini & Sitrin 2014). The post-2011 activists were socialized under the neoliberal governmentality, yet their origins in, or social affinity to the societal margins allow them to move easily across the class line. The 2011 protest incited their engagement in agonistic games of free citizens, through which they constituted themselves as not only political subjects (Isin and Nyers 2014: 8). By denying the predominance of the rights discourse as determining access to citizenship, and by redefining democracy as unsilencing the voice of the *unaffiliated*, to borrow Rose's (1996) term for those forsaken by neoliberalism, they pose what Foucault termed as "a permanent provocation" (cited in Tully 2008: 143) to the ethos of citizen participation. In the Israeli context, this already seems to delineate new trajectories for citizenship and democracy that places the voice of the marginalized groups at the center of the political debate.

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