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The National Body in Israel and Syria: Comparing Processes of Unity and Fragmentation

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ABSTRACT *Responding to this journal's call to establish new strategies of analysis that account for the circulation and contestation of power and agency, this article focuses attention on the socio-political mechanisms that link states and societies in Israel and Syria. We argue that the tensions between the powerful concept of a harmonious national body and the material realities of Israeli and Syrian societies reveal the extent to which the 'national' population arises not only through processes of social unification, but also—and perhaps most effectively—through active processes of fragmentation. Drawing together empirical research conducted in Damascus during 2009–2010 and in Tel Aviv and West Jerusalem during 2010–2011, this article situates seemingly disparate contexts within a shared methodological and theoretical frame. In doing so, we highlight not only how continuities and contradictions link states with societies, but also how shared historical and structural formations importantly connect the Israeli and Syrian contexts.*

KEY WORDS: *Body politic; ethnography; everyday state; Israel; Syria*

In *Middle East Critique's* special issue 'The Arab Uprisings of 2011' published in 2013, Mark Levine challenges scholars of the Middle East to rethink prevailing approaches to the study of state-society relations in the wake of regional uprisings. As Levine wrote then: 'New strategies of analysis, strongly empirically grounded and theoretically open yet precise, are necessary to capture the circulation and contestation of power and agency.'[1] This article responds to Levine's call for a new research agenda in the contemporary Middle East, demonstrating how empirically grounded research produces theoretical analyses sensitive to changing relations of power. Rather than focusing solely on the 'post-uprising' period, however, we apply Levine's methodological and political challenge to the region prior to and during transformation, focusing on Israel and Syria, respectively. Our research draws attention to how dynamism, contestation and negotiation have consistently characterized the relationship between state and society in these contexts, yielding shared structural formations and

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[1] M. Levine (2013) Theorizing Revolutionary Practice: Agendas for Research on the Arab Uprisings, *Middle East Critique*, 22(3), p. 194.

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laying the ground for political mobilization. Drawing together empirical research conducted in Damascus during 2009–2010 and in Tel Aviv and West Jerusalem during 2010–2011, this article situates these seemingly disparate contexts within a shared methodological and theoretical frame. In doing so, we highlight the continuities and contradictions that link Israeli and Syrian states and societies through shared historical and structural formations.

Arguing for a Comparative Approach: Notes on Methodological Choice

Our decision to compare Israel and Syria stems not from a belief that these states share a single or even similar model of governance or orientation toward their subjects in terms of everyday political life; rather, our comparison is based on empirical research that highlights how these states strive to create and secure a bounded 'national' body, which stands as a yardstick of modern statehood. As our discussion highlights, while the two states may differ significantly in their policies, both are engaged in active processes of social inclusion and exclusion mobilized by these issues. Our analysis reveals not that Israelis and Syrians experience *the same* social and political dynamics or realities, but that as both states aim at a common benchmark of modernity—the national body—comparable processes and practices shape and emerge from a distinctly social base.

Our argument is that compliance with outward norms of modern statehood, such as a bounded territory, a national population and a national government, which is required to participate in international politics, creates, in Israel and in Syria, comparable pressures on the organization of their internal statehood and body politic. We argue that in both states these pressures result in instances of sharp, social fragmentation, which simultaneously result in, and perhaps are necessary for, sharp instances or performances of national unity. By drawing this comparison between two states, which frequently are considered as stark opposites, we wish to draw attention to the fact that states, which belong to highly opposed political 'camps,' and which support highly different political strategies, in fact may be shaped by highly similar normative and systematic global demands.

Our methodological approach is shaped by the concept of 'everyday' politics, both in the sense of de Certeau's original formulation (as everyday 'life') and in the way that Middle East scholars such as Timothy Mitchell and Salwa Ismail have developed this concept.[2] Here, mundane routines are shaped by, and in turn shape, social, economic and political structures imposed by market and government. This insight questions the independent existence of entities such as society, state and economy. As this article demonstrates, we agree that boundaries between such assumed social entities are extremely vague and porous. However, we argue that they are not indistinguishable. For example, while Mitchell has demonstrated that the state is an effect of power and thus not easily distinguishable from society at large, we would argue that the materially and normatively extremely entrenched existence of the state as a privileged political actor has turned it into an independent sphere and space of action, which nevertheless remains subject to constant social dynamics.[3]

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[2] M. De Certeau (1987) *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press); T. Mitchell (1991) The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics, *The American Political Science Review*, 85(1), pp. 77–96; and S. Ismail (2006) *Political Life in Cairo's New Quarters* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press).

[3] T. Mitchell (1991); and idem. (2002) *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press).

At this point, we would like to reflect upon some of the tensions inherent to conducting an 'empirically grounded and theoretically open yet precise'[4] comparative analysis in the post-uprisings period. Levine's call for new research strategies foregrounds new sites of contestation and transformation that trouble the state-society boundary in Middle Eastern contexts. While Levine rightly questions the extent to which this frame can account for the range of positions that individuals might take up relative to the state—inside, outside or somewhere in between—he does not discuss the likewise fraught or ambiguous location in which scholars pursuing the new agenda may find themselves. As scholars of Syria and Israel-Palestine, conducting our comparative analysis of empirically grounded research has yielded nuanced and sensitive theory that makes important connections within and across contexts. Yet drawing these states and societies together also generates political and methodological tensions: How can we say *enough* empirically about these separately contentious contexts, and our respective relationships to them, while still managing to theorize *anything* about the significant socio-political dynamics they reveal together? Since 2011, escalating war and the rise of Da'esh (the Islamic State) have dominated discussions of Syria, rendering an analysis of the relationship between social cohesion, macro-political power and humanitarian intervention seemingly irrelevant. In the Israeli context, the brief moment of optimism felt by protestors who rode the 2011 wave of 'social justice' has given way to further, horrific episodes of political violence visited on Palestinian territories and populations, along with deepening political stasis. As scholars writing jointly toward the new agenda in our respective contexts and also the broader regional frame, we risk not only appearing politically apathetic through a comparative focus on 'past' events, but also dissatisfying on the one hand those looking for more empirical detail and on the other hand those looking for greater theoretical precision. We feel, however, that these risks are outweighed by the benefits of presenting for discussion a rare comparison of the Israeli and Syrian contexts; such a discussion illuminates how disparate micro-political dynamics may be understood via common macro-political structures.

This article argues that Syria's and Israel's stark and sometimes brutal political practices aim to achieve a mutual goal, which is to create at least the appearance of a national population that stands in apparent agreement with the government: a national body politic. The body politic is a ubiquitous metaphor, taken to describe idealized or 'real existing' elements of the modern nation state. The metaphor's origins lie in classic political theory, and its contemporary use is documented by today's frequent use of body, medical or nature metaphors to describe political phenomena: terrorist 'cells' may 'plague' the 'family' of nations, and the 'head' of state or the 'heartland' of Europe are terms in frequent use, both in everyday politics and academic analysis.[5] This continued use of the body politic, as a metaphor for the state-society complex does not imply that it has been an unchanged, trans-historical figure of speech, transporting the same meaning throughout the ages. In pre-Enlightenment political theory, the body politics' different 'limbs' referred to different social groups fulfilling different tasks, for example the 'feat' equaled 'the peasants', while

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[4] M. Levine, Theorizing Revolutionary Practice, p. 194.

[5] K. Schlosser (2007) The Bio-Politics of Bodies Politic: Nature and Intertextuality in Classic US Geopolitical Discourse, *GeoJournal*, 69(3), pp. 199–210; C. Rasmussen and M. Brown (2005) The Body Politic as Spatial Metaphor, *Citizenship Studies*, 9(5), pp. 469–484; D. Campbell (1992) *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press); M. B. Salter (2002) *Barbarians and Civilization in International Relations* (London: Pluto Press); M. Foucault, M. Bertani & A. Fontana (2013) *'Society Must Be Defended': Lectures at the Collège De France, 1975–76* (London: Allen Lane).

the ‘head’ referred to the ‘king’. This theory described a pre-capitalist, and pre-nationalist society, in which the cohesion of state and society did not depend on membership in an imagined, national community.

The development of the systematic exclusion of strangers and indeed racism as a basis of modern, European statehood has changed the way the body politic concept is used.[6] Today, it frequently is employed as shorthand to describe the tightly unified trinity of a state’s population, its government and its territory, through which the state legitimately exists. The extension of bodily metaphors of illness or the parasitical invasion of foreigners demonstrates how exclusion of apparent non-nationals remains fundamental to the legitimacy of modern nation states, as do increasingly draconian border controls, to keep said non-nationals out. David Campbell sums up succinctly the reasons for the endurance of the body politic metaphor, when he argues that:

> The continued efficacy of ‘the body politic’ as a trope for social order stems from two factors: (1) there is a well-established history of representing the social as a body that precedes the rise of the state in Europe; and (2) it is a figuration which authorizes and empowers the representation of danger to the social body in terms associated with the representation of danger to the physiological body.[7]

Scholarship that engages with recent revolutions and uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa reaffirms the continuing relevance of the body politic metaphor for understanding the dynamics animating society-state relations. The case of Alia al-Mahdy, an Egyptian feminist blogger who attracted nationwide attention and split the political opposition in Egypt, made evident the continued merging of female bodies with questions of nationhood, national identity and morality at a time of political transformation. As Sara Mourad argues, public opinions around images of al-Mahdy’s naked figure—posted online in an act of protest—revealed the wider political discourses central to both Egyptian and Arab body politics.[8] The centrality of the physiological form to the national body is further evident in the enormous role played by images of violated male bodies, for example in the case of the Tunisian vegetable vendor Mohamed Bouazizi, whose self-immolation was a turning-point in the Tunisian protest movement, or the powerful response in Syria to the display of the tortured body of 13-year-old Hamza Ali Al-Khateeb. Here reactions to a physical body—a gendered, raced, classed and often sexualized human form—shed light on the mechanics of dissent and cohesion among broader political bodies at state and regional levels. Importantly, these physical and metaphorical bodies, and their meanings, remain historically located and in part socially constructed. Like the bodies of al-Mahdy, Bouazizi and al-Khateeb, collective forms must be understood as inherently political and contingent, emerging through social relations and their interface with authority.

Our study confirms some of the claims put forth within prevailing theories of the body politic, but it also demonstrates their limits when applied to Middle Eastern contexts. While Israeli politics indeed work around extreme modes of ‘othering’ a large portion of the population, Syrian politics demonstrated very different, fluid processes to cohere the nation, centered on demonstrating allegiance to the president instead of an imagined, ethno-linguistic nationhood. In both contexts, the creation of a national body politic is shown to require constant negotiation and violence by states and governments in order to keep contradictory social behavior in check, as well as self-regulation by social actors. We argue that in Israel and Syria processes of unification and fragmentation from above and below create the appearance of a national body, which, along with international hegemonic norms, justifies the domination of the state.

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[6] Foucault, Bertani & Fontana, ‘*Society Must Be Defended*.’

[7] D. Campbell, *Writing Security*, p. 75.

[8] S. Mourad (2014) The Naked Body of Alia: Gender, Citizenship, and the Egyptian Body Politic, *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 38(1), p. 64.

This article's comparative appraisal of state-society relations in Israel and Syria thus uses the body politic concept in two ways: Firstly, in the sense of a global 'yardstick,' against which states are measured and to which they must conform in order to continue as independent and internationally accepted institutions. Secondly, as a lens through which to understand how far peripheral states and societies are shaped by this 'yard-stick', and what particular state-society interactions emerge in the struggle to emulate the metropolitan body politic model. We argue that both the Israeli and Syrian states are very clearly embroiled in this struggle, and that certain apparently strange or contradictory state-society relations in both states can be explained by it.

Comparing Syria and Israel

Clearly, there are extremely important political differences between the Israeli and Syrian states, both in their domestic and international situation. Despite a number of attempts at negotiation, Israel and Syria have remained in a state of war since 1967, when Israel occupied a corner of Syria's southeastern territory, the Golan Heights. Travel between the countries, which have no diplomatic communication, is prohibited. In Syria, which on paper is a modern nation state built on French public law, a single family has captured the state and manages to manipulate state institutions to ensure its continued rule.[9] Only personal relations to the powerful (and money, which can create such relations) can protect systematically against state violence, which may otherwise intrude into a person's life at any stage in an unpredictable fashion.[10] The Syrian state is officially secular and exercises no official discrimination or segregation on the basis of religion; certain individual characteristics, such as religion or regional origin may affect one's relationship with the state, but not determine it. As close observations of the way non-Syrians are treated during everyday interactions with the state reveal, these broad rules apply to *any* person residing on Syrian territory, and are not altered significantly according to a person's domestic or foreign citizenship. Citizenship is a nearly meaningless concept in Syria's the day-to-day political relations between the population and state, as the government flexibly doles out individual rights *vis-à-vis* the state, depending on political orientation.[11] In this way, Syria's domestic politics match the analysis of Thomas Hansen and Finn Stepputat, who have referred to the '"weakness" of everyday stateness' in post-colonial states, which is 'often countered by attempts to make state power highly visible.'[12] Importantly, the horrifically violent war in Syria—conducted mainly through a mix of indiscriminate aerial bombardment and besieging of civilian neighborhoods by the government, mass incarceration of government opponents, street-to-street combat between different armed factions and political oppression from both government

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[9] A. George (2003) *Neither Bread Nor Freedom* (London: Zed Books).

[10] B. Haddad (2012) *Business Networks in Syria: The Political Economy of Authoritarian Resilience* (Stanford: Stanford University Press).

[11] S. Ismail (2013) Urban Subalterns in the Arab Revolutions: Cairo and Damascus in Comparative Perspective, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 55(4), 4, pp. 865–894; and George, *Neither Bread Nor Freedom*.

[12] T. Blom Hansen & F. Stepputat (2005) *Sovereign Bodies: Citizens, Migrants and States in the Postcolonial World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), p. 15.

and religious fanatics—has not fundamentally changed the governance tactics of the Syrian government, but rather has accelerated previously existing dynamics. The fact that Syrian 'citizens' do not receive systematic protection from their state has become clearer than ever, and while the family-run government has lost dominance of some parts of the state (most notably territory and infrastructure), it still controls its essential elements.[13]

Israel, in contrast, exists as a modern settler colonial state, which emerged through purportedly anti-colonial struggle as Jewish residents of Palestine sought to wrest the control of territory from under the British mandate. While defining itself as decidedly post-colonial through its establishment at the twilight of British rule in Palestine and in terms of governance or structure, the Israeli state may be regarded as a 'post-colonial colony,' because Jewish citizens of the nascent state declared themselves 'independent' of British colonial rule while maintaining colonial privileges.[14] As Ella Shohat suggests, here subscription to the label 'post-colonial' hides the more accurately *neo-colonial* activities of the state, erasing contemporary power relations by claiming that the colonial period has ended.[15] Yet even while its colonial project outwardly might be masked, the religious definition of the Israeli state means that policies and practices continue to determine belonging and exclusion in distinctly ethno-national terms.[16] In the wake of anti-Semitic attacks in Paris and Copenhagen during January and February 2015, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu made clear the criteria for inclusion by stating: 'Of course, Jews deserve protection in every country but we say to Jews, to our brothers and sisters: Israel is your home. We are preparing and calling for the absorption of mass immigration from Europe.'[17] These active, state-driven mechanisms of nation building create and maintain a tiered system of citizenship, along with a body of shadow subjects living in the occupied Palestinian territories.[18] Though not included within *de jure* Israeli state borders, those Palestinians living in occupied, annexed or blockaded regions of Palestine/Israel remain within the *de facto* boundaries of Israeli state sovereignty without recourse to civil, political or social citizenship rights.[19] Through ethnicity, race, religion and location, here citizenship indeed possesses content and regulates a person's relationship to the government—in seeming contrast to the Syrian state, the Israeli state exhibits few outward signs of 'weakness.'

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[13] As public perception of the Syrian conflict becomes increasingly dominated by religious and sectarian analyses, it is important to remember that any Alawite Syrians opposed to the government face as ruthless a crackdown as any other opposition figure. While the conflict has raised general suspicions and risks to foreign citizens, who could be journalists, spies or other forms of enemy, critical citizens are at an even greater risk of attack or arrest.

[14] J. Massad (2006) The 'Post-Colonial' Colony: Time, Space, and Bodies in Palestine/Israel, in: J. Massad (ed.) *The Persistence of the Palestinian Question: Essays on Zionism and the Palestinians* (New York & Abingdon: Routledge), p. 13.

[15] E. Shohat (1992) Notes on the 'Post-Colonial', *Social Text*, nos. 31/32, Third World and Post-Colonial Issues, pp. 105–107.

[16] As numerous scholars of Israel-Palestine have argued, while the Israeli state officially defines its nation through religion and ethnicity, in practice it must be understood as a 'racial state'; see S. Lowrance (2004) Deconstructing Democracy: The Arab-Jewish Divide in the Jewish State, *Middle East Critique*, 13(2), pp. 175–194; R. Lentin (ed.) (2008) *Thinking Palestine* (London & New York: Zed Books); and I. Pappé (2006) *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: Oneworld). Through the lens of race, critical scholars shed light on the logics through which the Israeli state and society continues to subordinate Palestinians legally, juridically, economically, politically and socially. While the authors support these claims, 'ethno-national' is used here in order to draw attention to the language through which the Israeli state justifies marginalization, discrimination and social stratification on international stages. Doing so highlights the language of prevailing political and public discourses internal to Israel, and is not intended to neutralise or elide the racialized politics of the state.

[17] A. Chrisafis & N. Kohmami (2015) Copenhagen Attacks Raise Fears of Anti-Semitism around Europe, *The Guardian*, February 16, 2015.

[18] G. Shafir & Y. Peled (2002) *Being Israeli: The Dynamics of Multiple Citizenship* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press); O. Yiftachel (2006) *Ethnocracy: Land and Identity Politics in Israel/Palestine* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press).

Due to these significant differences, Israel and Syria often are considered as polar opposites, archenemies and/or exceptional in different ways within Middle East studies, making a comparison between the states appear unusual or provocative. As outlined above, Israel and Syria are outwardly dissimilar in their relationships to colonialism, their terms and guarantees of citizenship, and their relative degrees of strength or weakness. These states additionally diverge in their relations to Western powers, as geostrategic interests have led to different sources of support; notably, Syria does not enjoy the political and economic support extended to Israel by the United States.[20] However, we wish to challenge the exceptionalism frequently attributed to both countries and to show that in fact they may be more similar structurally than often is thought, and further, they have similarities to other states in the region, which were founded after the collapse or withdrawal of the Ottoman, French and British empires. We argue that despite Syria and Israel's significantly different positions toward 'Western' power, they become comparable when considering how their respective societies struggle continuously to conform to hegemonic norms of statehood. Through comparative analysis, the Israeli and Syrian cases cohere around a politics in which a bounded state-society emerges through active and stark processes of social and political fragmentation, which in turn also create stark formations of unity.[21]

Comparing Israeli and Syrian Constructions of the Body Politic

Syria

The arrival of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis to Syria, in the aftermath of the 2003 US-led invasion of the country, highlighted that the particular manner in which the Syrian government mobilized the concept of the Syrian nation, was not based on the systematic exclusion of non-nationals. As the Iraqi refugee crisis became the focus of intense activity of the international, humanitarian community and Western donor states, the tensions between Syria's domestic body politic and the international expectations of what this body politic should look like, became starkly apparent.[22]

The Syrian state possesses all the institutions of a parliamentary republic, including a constitution guaranteeing equal citizenship rights to all persons of Syrian nationality. Yet a number of formal and informal changes to the structure of the state since the 1960s mean that most of its institutions are defunct, in the sense that they have little power over the way the

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[19] Shafir & Peled, *Being Israeli*; Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy*; Nahla Abdo (2011) *Women in Israel: Race, Gender and Citizenship* (London & New York: Zed Books).

[20] This is not to argue that Israel is a 'truer' nation-state than Syria due to its favor with the United States. While foreign support necessarily impacts structures and experiences of statehood, this article focuses on the everyday micro-politics through which national bodies are fragmented and cohered.

[21] We borrow this turn of phrase from Lisa Wedeen's work on state legitimacy and domination in Syria; see L. Wedeen (1999) *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press). While Wedeen's work focuses on individual political performance, we adopt this term to explain a key mechanism of social cohesion, which underwrites the body politic in post-colonial Middle Eastern states.

[22] S. Ismail (2011) Authoritarian Government, Neo-Liberalism and Everyday Civilities in Egypt, *Third World Quarterly*, 32(5), pp. 845–862.

state operates in the everyday life of people. Formal changes include the 1964 constitutional anchoring of the Ba'ath Party as the 'leading party in society and the state,' which weakened the notion of free electoral competition (this elevation of the Ba'ath formally was abandoned in 2011, as a belated reaction to the unfolding popular protests). Informal changes include the enormous expansion of internal intelligence and security agencies, and their use of state instruments to suppress violently any form of opposition against the Al-Assad rule, which, for example, ensured the repeated re-election of the president and loyalist parliamentarians in apparently free elections. The imposition of emergency law between 1963 and 2011 can be regarded as the culmination of a strategy to manipulate existing state instruments toward the purpose of protecting presidential power. Emergency law afforded the state wide-ranging powers, undermining the constitution, and officially was justified by Syria's continued state of war with Israel. In practice, it provided a veneer of legitimacy to the oppression of opposition against the government. Stripping state institutions of their intended meaning and steering them toward becoming vacuous shells serving presidential power gradually entrenched in Syria a politics of 'as if,' in which the outward shape of a cohesive, national body politic was constructed through lip-service and fantasy, while the actually lived body politic, as it was experienced during daily life, did not cohere around national unity, but primarily around (pretend and actual) loyalty to Al-Assad.[23] By the beginning of the new millennium Syrian pan-Arabism largely had reduced, as other tenets of Ba'athism, to a shell-ideology, yet nevertheless remained a reference point in Syrian foreign and domestic policy.[24]

Compared to the intensive bureaucratic routines requested from migrants in North Atlantic countries, the 'laissez faire' attitude of the Syrian government toward Iraqi migration appeared surprising. What international organizations referred to as Syria's 'tolerance' or 'open-door policy' toward Iraqis, in everyday life translated into a very weak presence of exclusion or control mechanisms aimed at excluding Iraqis from the Syrian 'national' population.[25] While Iraqis were required to obtain residency permits, usually awarded on an annual basis, such permits could be obtained according to a wide range of justifications, such as having a child attending school in Syria, or being in need of medical treatment. Only two of 80 Iraqis about whom I collected information were not able to muster a legitimate reason to obtain a permit. Iraqi children were allowed to register in Syria's free public schools according to the same procedure as Syrian children and, apart from a degree of social discrimination, did not face any particular barriers due to their differing nationality.[26] Iraqi students were able to complete high school and receive the Syrian baccalaureate; one of my Iraqi acquaintances was among her schools' top finalists.[27] Similarly, Syria's free public health system was initially fully open to Iraqis; with the growth of a humanitarian sector, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)-funded clinics that were operated by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent were set up to care specifically for Iraqi patients.

Importantly, the official restrictions that *did* apply to Iraqis, such as an official employment ban, and a restriction on setting up businesses, were not enforced systematically. This easily could be observed by the presence of thriving Iraqi businesses operating in several Damascene suburbs, which had taken on a distinctly Iraqi character since the arrival of thousands of Iraqi migrants.[28] Here, the Iraqi dialect dominated in the streets, and shops sold Iraqi foodstuffs, such as Samun, the thickly crusted Iraqi bread. These shops were called 'Baghdad,' 'Falluja', and 'Mosul.' Iraqis from Baghdad recognized newly developed outlets of major restaurant chains, which generally were operated exclusively by Iraqi staff. A new boutique hotel in old Damascus, located in a beautifully restored old house, had reportedly been opened by an Iraqi investor and just outside Damascus, on the road toward Jordan, an Iraqi private university had been opened, where Iraqi professors taught a mainly Iraqi student body. The latter examples confirmed that even the ban on Iraqi employment in the public sector and in medical and legal professions was not upheld fully.[29] According to the brother of my Syrian landlady, who had employed Iraqis in his orthopedic shoe workshop, the government was 'closing both eyes' on the issue, as it knew that 'Iraqis had to make a living somehow.'[30] The extremely weak boundaries that Syrian government institutions drew around the Iraqi migrant community helped a rapid and relatively seamless integration of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis into Syrian society. The systematic marking and excluding of foreigners via bureaucratic or violent techniques clearly was not an important tool in the Syrian government's strategy of cohering a domestic body politic, nor was it practiced on a social level. Although the Iraqi community tended to cluster in certain neighborhoods, interactions with Syrians were frequent and presented no significant conflict.

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[23] Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination*; Ismail, Urban Subalterns; George, *Neither Bread Nor Freedom*.

[24] V. Perthes (1991) Syria's Bourgeoisie and the Ba`th, *Middle East Report*, 21(3, 170), pp. 31–37.

[25] S. Hoffmann (2011) The Humanitarian Regime of Sovereignty: INGOs and Iraqi Migration to Syria, *Refuge*, 28(1), 59–70.

[26] Iraqi pupils arriving in the middle of the year, or in upper grades faced problems due to the differing curricula and subjects taught in Syrian schools.

[27] However, Iraqis were required to pay fees to attend Syrian public universities, which were free to Syrians.

Still, Iraqis in Syria frequently expressed the worry that they were not able to find jobs according to their qualifications, and that there was no long-term future for them in Syria. '*Ma ku mustammara*'—there is no stability—was an often repeated phrase, with which Iraqis summed up what they regarded as a dead-end existence in Syria, where they had been waiting for years on future plans, which mostly involved the hope of migrating further abroad. One research participant, an Iraqi woman in her late teens, reported about her search for work and how she had learned about a basic juice-making factory, where Kurdish girls squeezed pomegranates with bare hands while sitting next to large, burning-hot cauldrons, earning around $5 per day. Through this encounter the Iraqi woman had learned that Kurds in Syria were in a 'bad situation,' as they were not given nationality and opportunities. The job in the juice factory presented such bad conditions that my Iraqi friend decided against it.[31] Another research participant, an Iraqi man in his early 20s, was actively searching for work in a number of fashionable restaurants in the old city, where some of his Iraqi friends were employed. The wage he expected to earn, around $160 per month to begin, would be the same as Syrian employees.[32]

Crucially, Iraqi concerns about the lack of opportunities and potential risks of remaining in Syria were not significantly different from the concerns voiced by many of my Syrian acquaintances. Precarious working conditions and a fear of a sudden regional crisis were among the key reasons why so many young Syrians, even those with relatively good career prospects, were keen to seek a life abroad during this time. For example, two female friends, who both held well-paid positions in Syria's private sector, were working on long-term

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[28] A. Ali & K. Dorai (2010) Under the Radar, but Not Invisible: Iraqi Activity in Syria's Informal Economic Sector (Damascus: UNHCR).

[29] Ali & Dorai, Under the Radar.

[30] Syrian man, conversation with co-author Hoffmann in Damascus, October 2009.

[31] Co-author Hoffmann, Field notes, November 5, 2009.

[32] Co-author Hoffmann, Field notes, January 23, 2010(a).

plans to leave the country, due to—prescient—concerns about the possibility of sudden crisis, and the lack of opportunities provided by Syria's stagnant economy.[33] Syria's social and political conditions of uncertainty, in which the state did not offer systematic protection to any resident (be they Syrian passport holders, or not) did not create deep structures of affective, national belonging extending beyond the immediately personal.[34] As a person's success in and attachment to Syrian society depended crucially on positive, or at least neutral relationships to the government-state complex, the common marker on which integration depended was at least outwardly expressed allegiance or acquiescence to the Al-Assad government. A discussion of the complex manner in which existing power structures were reproduced in Syria is beyond the scope and focus of this article.[35] Of importance for our argument is the recognition that a politics of 'as if' plays (and continues to play) a crucial role: Government and population behave 'as if' national unity and popular representation form the basis of the government's power, while at the same time most are aware that this is not the case. In this way, the president and performances of loyalty to him, emerge(d) as crucial boundaries and constructions of Syria's body politic, rather than an imagined unity of ethno-linguistic compatriots.[36]

A further example of how this system affected Iraqi migrants is the case of an Iraqi research participant, a feminist activist who regularly worked as a fixer for foreign journalists. After helping a foreign journalist with his research, Syrian intelligence officers called her in for an unpleasant interrogation. She discovered that an elaborate file on her life and activities existed and suspected that her Syrian neighbors had quietly observed and reported on her. Even more seriously, when she attempted to travel abroad in the following weeks, she discovered at the airport that she was subject to a travel ban.[37] Travel bans were a control measure that intelligence agencies frequently deployed against Syrian oppositionists. In addition to intimidating and oppressing activists, such bans served to isolate critics from international audiences and stopped the development of opposition groups abroad. Yet applying such a ban to an Iraqi migrant, while nevertheless renewing her residency permit and allowing her to continue working in Syria, was surprising from the hegemonic perspective of national statehood. Instead of deporting her, which would have been justified from the perspective that foreigners and nationals enjoy differing rights of belonging to the national territory, Syrian security officers used the same tools against an Iraqi transgressor, as they did against her Syrian equivalent. Even with regard to punishment of critical behavior, Iraqis were not singled out from the Syrian 'nation.' While Iraqis' lives thus were shaped significantly by their recent experiences of flight, violence and rupture of their social ties, their day-to-day interactions with the state in Syria were surprisingly similar to those of Syrians, and created similar conditions to those experienced by Syrian nationals. As long as Iraqis maintained the essential 'red lines' of acquiescence and loyalty to Assad's rule, did not criticize the government in any way or create any social disturbance, their existence quietly merged into the group of people residing on Syrian territory, 'national', or not.

International humanitarian organizations working on the Iraqi refugee issue frequently expressed gratitude and amazement at the Syrian government's perceived generosity towards

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[33] Co-author Hoffmann, Field notes, January 14, 2010(a).

[34] L. Wedeen (2013) Ideology and Humor in Dark Times, *Critical Inquiry*, 39(4), pp. 841–873.

[35] For a nuanced discussion about everyday-performances of loyalty in Syria see especially Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination*. [Full citation at n. 25.]

[36] Ismail, Authoritarian Government.

[37] Iraqi woman, interview with co-author Hoffmann in Damascus, November 3, 2009.

Iraqis.[38] To them, such openness to foreign migration appeared as a surprising aberration from 'normal' nation-state behavior, in which the exclusion of refugees (and other migrants) forms an essential basis of statehood and works to produce the national body politic. What this international perspective onto Syria failed to realize, is that exclusive citizenship and the construction of exclusion/belonging according to an imagined, ethno-linguistic national community, was not an essential element of how the Syrian government mobilized the domestic state to shape the Syrian population into a body politic that maximized the government's power. Internationally, Syrian state representatives conformed to the nation-state ideal; inside Syria, communal belonging/exclusion worked on a regional, sub-national level and via loyalty/disloyalty to the president, who was portrayed as the essence and origin of the nation.[39]

In international interactions, Syrian state officials mimicked the humanitarian rhetoric of vulnerability, generosity and nationalism to describe the Iraqi refugee situation. A 2007 special issue of *Forced Migration* included an article by Syria's deputy foreign minister, discussing the arrival of Iraqis to his country in classic, humanitarian terms:

> *The human health needs of the Iraqi arrivals are mounting, in particular among women, children and the elderly.* The Syrian government is endeavoring, with what resources it has, to meet their needs. … Iraqi refugees constitute a numerically enormous mass of humanity in comparison to the number of the inhabitants of the region … Syria's economy and infrastructure are buckling under the great weight of the burden.[40]

Similarly, a speech by the Syrian government at a UN conference on the Iraqi issue in April 2007, included a passage stating that the 'Syrian government and people moved to offer a safe haven for the Iraqi brothers and sisters.… It is noteworthy that regulations in Syria do not require an entry visa for Arabs'.[41] The speech is a good example of how the functioning of the above-mentioned politics of 'as if' worked in day-to-day Syrian politics, here on the international stage. Although the material reality of social relations in Syria meant that Iraqis were integrating in a way that quickly made them indistinguishable from the rest of the population, the speech communicates 'as if' a national unity between Syrians and their government existed and formed a boundary between them and Iraqi migrants, who are portrayed as alien to the Syrian body politic. While in the domestic sphere, the contradiction between the rhetorical upholding of this politics of 'as if' and everyday politics were easily discernible, on the international stage, this performance of the hegemonic ideals of statehood passed more easily, especially as they were couched in the standard UN-language of refugee rights, and the limits of these rights.

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[38] IRC Commission on Iraqi Refugees (2010) A Tough Road Home: Uprooted Iraqis in Jordan, Syria and Iraq (New York: IRC); UNHCR Syria (2009) UNHCR Syria Update Autumn 2009, in *UNHCR Syria Updates* (Damascus: UNHCR Syria).

[39] K. Khaddour & K. Mazur (2014) The Struggle for Syria's Regions, *Middle East Report*, no. 269.

[40] F. al-Miqdad (2007) Iraqi Refugees in Syria, *Forced Migration Review*, Iraq Special Issue (June), pp. 19–20.

[41] Syrian Arab Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2007) Paper presented by the Government of Syrian Arab Republic to the *International Conference on Addressing the Humanitarian Needs of the Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons inside Iraq and in the Neighbouring Countries*, Geneva.

Israel

The production and maintenance of state-society relations in Israel may be observed clearly through a case within a case: The 2011 social protests against the cost of living. Here a protest movement emerged in seeming opposition to state policies and practices, ostensibly threatening national unity and infringing upon the state's sovereignty, seen as its unique ability to 'make rules, identify citizens and subjects, and command compliance.'[42] However, through the lens of the everyday state these actions can be seen to *sustain* state power through the reconstruction of the prevailing body politic, as the protests' divisive internal dynamics mirrored the state's exclusive external order.

As previously outlined, the Israeli state is characterized by tiered or hierarchical citizenship, which coheres the nation around categories of subjects who are positioned according to markers of ethnicity, religion and race. Possessing no formal constitution—instead governed by a series of Basic Laws—the Israeli state officially defines itself as 'Jewish and democratic,' pointing to a contradictory system in which rights and protections are extended unevenly, though broadly guaranteed to all citizens. Like Syria, Israel has operated under conditions of Emergency Law, which has been renewed on an annual basis since the state's founding in 1948;[43] these 'defense' regulations importantly permit the ongoing confiscation of land and allow for policies and practices such as administrative detention that are aimed at deterring terrorism and illegal immigration. In addition to the state's overt definition as Jewish—an ethic, religious and racial category—the 68-year state of emergency effectively suspends the very tenets of democracy,[44] allowing Israel to claim an inclusive political practice or structure of governance while at the same time employing extreme, and often violent, methods of exclusion. Interestingly, through the widespread acceptance of Israel as both Jewish and democratic, its image remains largely consistent on both international and domestic stages, if with different strategic emphasis. While Israeli politicians might highlight the state's democratic qualities in international forums in a performance of modern statehood, these same state actors continually reaffirm its Jewish character through their policies and practices at home.

Against this politico-legal backdrop, Israel's summer of protests began in July 2011 as a mode of popular opposition to the rising cost of housing in Tel Aviv, with primarily young middle-class Jewish residents—often Ashkenazi[45]—moving into tents set up on Rothschild Boulevard, a site symbolic of the city's history and wealth.[46] Borrowing from the #J25 Twitter hash tag identified with the Egyptian uprising from January of the same year, activists branded Israel's housing protests as the 'J14 movement' [#J14].[47] Beneath the rallying cry '*Ha'am doresh tsedek chevrati!*' [The people demand social justice], Israeli citizens poured onto streets in increasingly high numbers, totaling 450,000 participants in the final

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[42] B. Chalfin (2008) Sovereigns and Citizens in Close Encounter: Airport Anthropology and Customs Regimes in Neoliberal Ghana, *American Ethnologist*, 35(4), p. 519.

[43] Lentin, *Thinking Palestine*, pp. 3, 7.

[44] Lowrance, Deconstructing Democracy.

[45] The term 'Ashkenazi' refers to Jews of European descent.

[46] H. Sherwood (2011) Tel Aviv Tent City Erected in Protest against High House Prices, *The Guardian*, July 17, 2011; B. Mann (2001) Tel Aviv's Rothschild: When a Boulevard Becomes a Monument, *Jewish Social Studies*, New Series, 7(2, Winter), pp. 1–38.

[47] N. Belkind (2013) Israel's J14 Social Protest Movement and Its Imaginings of 'Home': On Music, Politics and Social Justice, *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, 6, Special Issue: Geographies of Identity: (Per)Forming Space in Palestine and Israel, pp. 329–353.

demonstrations.[48] As the protests quickly spread from Tel Aviv to cities and towns throughout Israel,[49] leaders and participants remained focused on two primary modes of action bolstered by social networks and growing mainstream media attention: Tent encampments and regular demonstrations, which unfolded in common public spaces.

Central to the processes and practices shaping the protest body was ‘politics,’ in the particular meaning and charge that this concept takes on within broader Israeli society. From the outset, the 2011 protests were framed by a deliberate splitting of social and economic issues from those deemed political. As read in the context of Israel-Palestine, ‘politics’ relates directly to matters of conflict, violence and security that produce the Left-to-Right political spectrum. When pressed on the protestors’ intentional distancing, one participant at the Tel Aviv encampment related:

> This isn’t about who loves Palestinians and who hates Palestinians. Yes, this *is* political. It is political. But it isn’t political in the way that we’re used to talking about politics in Israel. The biggest criticism we face is the accusation that we are all ‘Leftists’. Yes, we’re Leftists, but this is the *social* and *economic* Left, not the political Left.

> We’re very careful not to be Right or Left, but we *are* social and economic Left. In the end, however, it will have to become political because that’s where change happens.[50]

Like the majority of my research participants, this speaker—a young Ashkenazi man—articulates how, as a concept within Israeli society, politics remains tightly associated with an individual stance taken toward Palestine and Palestinians.[51] During interviews and participant observation conducted throughout 2010–11, self-defined ‘Leftist’ Jewish Israelis repeatedly subscribed to this shared understanding, coupling the meaning of politics with conflict and pairing its practice with governance. Yet in explicitly disavowing ‘politics as usual’ (read: ‘politics-as-Palestine’) during the summer of 2011, protestors distinguished between meaning and practice in ways that suited the aims and interests of the protest movement. As the speaker above demonstrates, labels of ‘Left’ and ‘Right’ ostensibly were detached from politics and reaffixed to economic and social realms, and an act of exclusion paradoxically generated the appearance of an inclusive movement.

While this deliberate move generally increased the protests’ appeal, it also maintained the boundaries of the protest body around the accepted shape of the body politic. Unlike the 2013–14 Gezi Park protests in Istanbul— also catalyzed by ‘civic issues’ and targeting specific state policies—politics were defined, deployed and denied within the Israeli social protests in a manner that served to divide at the same time as unite, protect at the same time as include, while keeping ajar the door to the forum for change. While the Gezi Park protests brought together a wide spectrum of opponents to Prime Minister Recep Erdogan’s regime, including those communities ordinarily excluded from the national body such as Kurds and

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[48] O. Rosenberg, I. Lior & G. Cohen (2011) Some 450,000 Israelis March at Massive ‘March of Millions’ Rallies across Country, *Ha’aretz*, September 3, 2011; H. Sherwood (2011) Israeli Protests: 430,000 Take to the Streets to Demand Social Justice, *The Guardian*, September 4, 2011.

[49] D. Sheen (2011) Could Israel’s Middle-Class Spearhead a National Revolution?, *Ha’aretz*, July 22, 2011.

[50] Co-author Natanel, Field notes, August 1, 2011; emphasis in original exchange.

[51] See also Y. Mendel (2013) Diary: Israel’s Election, *London Review of Books*, 35(4), pp. 38–39.

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queers,[52] in Israel politics—absent and present—aligned the newly formed collective with the dominant construction of national identity, foremost defined by the state as 'Jewish.'

Yet as the protests consolidated seeming opposition throughout the summer months, the protest body remained a site of negotiation and contestation, undergoing constant challenge and re-construction. While the protests were framed as led by and chiefly representative of young middle-class Ashkenazim, mirroring the power and privilege of Israel's tiered citizenship system, multiple meanings were ascribed to the housing protestors' demands for 'social justice.' In its very inclusivity the banner of social justice revealed itself to be an increasingly empty signifier,[53] one capable of encompassing the interests of radical Leftists in Tel Aviv along with the rhetoric and aims of extreme-nationalist settler organizations from the West Bank. Against the desires of the protestors, this negotiation and re-imagination of '*ha'am*' [the people] took on explicitly political tones, contextually tied to conflict, violence and security—along with the hardline Zionist organization *Im Tirtzu*, West Bank settler groups including the Hilltop Youth, *Israel Sheli*, and the *Yesha* Council became involved in the protests inside Israel. Members of '*ha'am*' by virtue of citizenship and ethno-national belonging, Jewish Israeli settlers insisted upon inclusion despite living illegally beyond the territorial borders of the state.[54] Though ultimately expelled by inhabitants of Tel Aviv's Rothschild Boulevard, Jewish settler factions continued to participate in the protests as encampments and demonstrations spread to the illegal settlements, with actions in Ariel—a large settlement in the West Bank—receiving 'official endorsement' from the protests' central leadership.[55]

Also part of 'the people' by virtue of second-class citizenship, a small number of Palestinian citizens of Israel took up residence at Tel Aviv's Rothschild Boulevard tent encampment in 'Tent 1948.' Adorned with signs written in Arabic, Hebrew and English, Tent 1948's Palestinian and Jewish inhabitants displayed large plywood placards detailing narratives of expulsion and dispossession, challenging the meaning and scope of social justice. According to Palestinian activist Abir Kopty, 'Tent 1948's main message is that social justice should be for all. It brings together Jewish and Palestinian citizens who believe in shared sovereignty in the state of all its citizens.'[56] While tent encampments and protests eventually spread to Nazareth, Jaffa, Haifa and other locales home to large Palestinian communities,[57] ambivalence around the construction of '*ha'am*' prevailed. As Palestinian columnist Sayed Kashua wrote in *Ha'aretz*:

> 'The people want social justice.' What exactly is the definition of 'the people'? Will I feel comfortable shouting those words out along with the other protesters? I know it was borrowed from Tahrir Square, where they shouted, 'The people want to topple the regime.' But in Egypt the word referred to the Egyptian people. Meaning everyone who lives in Egypt. And here? Does the term 'the people' really include all of Israel's citizens?[58]

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[52] See A. Alessandrini, N. Üstündağ & E. Yildiz (eds) (2014) 'Resistance Everywhere': The Gezi Protests and Dissident Visions of Turkey, *JADMAG* Issue 1.4, Tadween Publishing.

[53] See E. Laclau (1996) *Emancipation(s)* (London: Verso Books), pp. 36–37.

[54] C. Levinson (2011) Dozens of Hilltop Youth set up Camp in Israel's biggest Tent City, *Ha'aretz*, August 3, 2011.

[55] M. Blumenthal & J. Dana (2011) The Exclusive Revolution: Reflections on the Tent Protests, *Mondoweiss: The War of Ideas in the Middle East*, August 29, 2011.

[56] A. Kopty (2011) Tent 1948, *Mondoweiss: The War of Ideas in the Middle East*, August 6, 2011.

[57] Belkind, Israel's J14 Social Protest Movement; C. Misgav (2013) 'Shedding Light on Israel's Backyard': The Tent Protest and the Urban Periphery *Theory and Criticism*, 41(Summer), pp. 97–120 [in Hebrew].

[58] S. Kashua (2011) Middle-class Heroes with a Shameful Secret, *Ha'aretz*, August 5, 2011.

Rooted in his experiences as a Palestinian citizen of Jewish Israeli ‘democracy’—wherein provision of and access to rights remains *de facto* dependent upon ethnic or racial identity[59]—Kashua’s words underline how the protest body mirrored the (hegemonic/ideal) national body and failed to overcome state-driven terms of exclusion. This is not to claim that Tent 1948 and similar initiatives by radical political actors failed to destabilize the construction of the protests, nor is it to downplay the extent to which these actors disrupted the reconstitution of the body politic along lines of politics-as-usual. However, while Tent 1948 challenged the shape of the protest body, on a broad level the 2011 protests persisted in following the familiar form of the national body as determined by narratives of conflict and relations of domination.

As the summer progressed, this adherence of the protests to hegemonic, state-led frames became increasingly evident. The extent to which the protests actively reproduced the hegemonic national body appeared not only in public media accounts that overwhelmingly conveyed the voices and concerns of dominant social actors—here young, urban middle-class Ashkenazim—but also on the micro-political levels where interpersonal exchanges and individual decisions take place. I observed these dynamics during an exchange between three friends in early August, as they discussed becoming involved in the social protests. Brought together through childhood friendship and professional networks, these Jewish Israeli men shared a common professional field, age (mid-30s) and opposition to Israel’s occupation of the Palestinian territories. Interestingly, all expressed hesitancy to join the social protests, as they took seriously the meaning and effect of their participation in an avowedly apolitical—yet political—protest. Together they speculated about why the protests claimed an apolitical frame, highlighting a shared belief that the political cannot be easily decoupled from the personal. ‘It isn’t about politics I think, because to talk about politics brings in things like shame and family’, Zohar stated decidedly. David added, ‘Politics brings up other things too, like responsibility—people don’t want to take responsibility. A socio-economic struggle is something that people can feel *good* about’. Gil offered a final thought: ‘The participants and leaders might be keeping separate from the Old Left because they [the Old Left] are seen as part of the elite—the *Ashkenazi* elite.’[60]

Shaped by, yet not limited to, the discourses and material realities that fuse the political in Israel-Palestine with security, violence and conflict, the meanings ascribed to politics by these men straddle the boundary between private and public spheres, drawing together subject and state. Importantly, this intimate connection provides reasons to *avoid* particular modes of political action—an impetus for disengagement. The deeply personal and affective aspect of politics in Israel-Palestine then infuses the body politic with a shared emotion,[61] which produces national belonging and reaffirms the meaning and space of politics. Subtly confirming the association of politics with shame, family, responsibility and privilege, as conveyed by three friends in Baka, West Jerusalem, the body of the social protests took shape in part through offering a sense of relief or escape. By displacing or deferring politics, the social protests provided formerly disillusioned or quiescent citizen-subjects with an opportunity to resist and to take action, voicing their opposition to the state while at the same time failing to challenge prevailing state-led political narratives and practices.

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[59] Shafir & Peled, *Being Israeli*; Lowrance, Deconstructing Democracy; Abdo, *Women in Israel*; M. Semyonov & N. Lewin-Epstein (2004) Introduction: Past Insights and Future Directions: Studies of Stratification in Israel, in: M. Semyonov & N. Lewin-Epstein (eds) *Stratification in Israel: Class, Ethnicity, and Gender* (New Brunswick & London: Transaction Publishers), pp. 1–13.

[60] Co-author Natanel, Field notes, August 1, 2011; emphasis in original exchange.

[61] See also L. Berlant (1998) Poor Eliza, *American Literature*, 70(3), pp. 635–668.

Thus, rather than undermining the state, the 2011 protests effectively reified Israeli state power through reproducing the body politic in its hegemonic shape and sense. While in outward appearance the protest body confronted the state at its very social base, in effect these acts served as a pressure valve that facilitated the expression of dissent while reconstructing the prevailing body politic along exclusive ethno-national lines. Because the protests failed to challenge the state's enforced shape and content of the body politic, they ultimately left intact the key underlying political condition of economic and social life in Israel. Then the consolidation and reconstruction of the Israeli body politic within and through the social protests illuminates how the state's power to shape this body is produced, maintained and justified at the level of everyday life. While the summer's social protests were cast as a conflict between a constitutive populace and its constituted sovereign, the former ultimately shored up the latter through processes of unification and fragmentation that consolidated and confirmed as dominant the Jewish national body.

In failing to challenge the prevailing body politic, the 2011 summer of social protests reveals a mode of resistance that is 'world making' rather than 'world changing.'[62] As protesters and their supporters aimed to achieve 'justice' in social and economic terms, rather than contesting broader power relations and their base in settler colonialism, these actions demonstrate how the politics of 'as if' might simultaneously enable and encumber novel modes of resistance. Israel's social protests effectively mobilized and galvanized a formerly disillusioned public through promising a particular vision of the future, one where a specific set of material conditions might allow participants to better experience everyday life 'as if' free from violent conflict. At the same time, by ignoring or avoiding the relations that produce and maintain occupation, domination and colonization—operating 'as if' separate from politics—the protests failed to challenge the very conditions that constrain economic and social life in Israel. As such, these actions make starkly visible how reproduction of the body politic not only underscores the state's position as the central political authority, but also enables the construction of new social worlds that permit investment in particular kinds of transformation.

Conclusion

Significant academic attention has been paid to how recent political unrest in the Middle East catalyzed processes of social differentiation and consolidation, as national societies took shape through collective demands for transformation. Across the Middle East and North Africa social communities, as national 'bodies,' took aim at the state and political leadership to mobilize civil resistance on massive scales. This article has taken a temporal and analytical step back to consider how bodies and populations in the region emerge as 'national' not only through resistance, but also in concert with authority. Rather than positing an either/or situation—where national bodies emerge *either* through opposition *or* in tandem with the state—the concept of the national body politic allows us to consider how processes of negotiation and contestation unfold simultaneously, producing the 'national' population through unification and fragmentation.

Since 2010 and 2011, Syria and Israel have experienced violent social and political unrest, and in both countries protests failed to wrest control from dominant elites or fundamentally change state-society relations. Apart from shedding light on recent similarities in the two countries' political situation, our comparison aims to demonstrate that Syria and Israel share historical and structural aspects, and that both states are engaged in an ongoing struggle to produce a national body politic that will fulfill internationally required norms, according to which legitimate statehood is measured. This struggle takes on different expressions, but results in two, key shared formations: Firstly, that state-enforced exclusion from the national body is carried out via unexpected practices and secondly, that both states' domestic sovereignty is discrepant with their international performance of statehood.

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[62] L. Berlant (2008) *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham & London: Duke University Press), pp. 269–270.

The relative newness of national statehood in the Middle East, varying forms and degrees of sectarianism, and recent histories and trajectories of colonialism entail a particular kind of imperative underwriting claims to modernity and legitimacy. Our comparison of Syria and Israel reveals the contours and depths of the contradictory processes and practices shaping national bodies in the Middle East. While this comparison details the production of national bodies specific to these two Middle Eastern states, the dynamics revealed through this article can be extended beyond the borders of Syria and Israel to shed light on common processes and ideals—as states in the region strive to consolidate their national bodies, they meet with the expectations of an international community, which measures peripheral statehood according to the characteristics of modern, national rule, to which a national body politic belongs.

While this article has focused on the similarities between Syrian and Israeli states in the formation and function of national body politics therein, these states importantly differ in the extent to which they are understood to meet the hegemonic international standard. As outlined above, Syria and Israel exhibit varying colonial histories and trajectories, citizenship regimes and degrees of strength or weakness; these Middle Eastern states further diverge in their levels of acceptance by the international community and, relatedly, their 'success' in embracing the project of modernity. We have argued that Syria and Israel may be compared on the basis of how shared processes of social fragmentation and unification cohere the national body, strengthening claims to modern statehood. However, as a concept the 'body politic' admittedly plays out differently at the international level, both in terms of how these states are received and how 'unity' is created on this broader scale—put simply, Israel enjoys far greater inclusion and acceptance than Syria, which inevitably influences its body politic.[63] Exploring the extent to which international recognition impacts, and perhaps attenuates, processes of national unification is fruitful terrain for future research. As our comparison of Syria and Israel suggests further avenues of investigation, it makes visible the multiple levels on which formations of unity play out, situating everyday politics as central to the production of national bodies and hegemonic norms of statehood. As Levine indeed suggests, here the circulation and contestation of power and agency becomes a marker through which the relationship between state and society might be read more precisely.

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