

## Established and emergent political subjectivities in circular human geographies: transnational Arab activists

Melissa Finn & Bessma Momani

To cite this article: Melissa Finn & Bessma Momani (2017) Established and emergent political subjectivities in circular human geographies: transnational Arab activists, *Citizenship Studies*, 21:1, 22-43, DOI: [10.1080/13621025.2016.1252713](https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2016.1252713)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2016.1252713>



Published online: 12 Dec 2016.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 231



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 2 View citing articles [↗](#)

## Established and emergent political subjectivities in circular human geographies: transnational Arab activists

Melissa Finn<sup>a</sup> and Bessma Momani<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of Political Science, Balsillie School of International Affairs, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Canada; <sup>b</sup>Department of Political Science, Balsillie School of International Affairs, University of Waterloo and Centre for International Global Innovation (CIGI), Waterloo, Canada

### ABSTRACT

In this paper, we argue that Arab transnational citizenship mobilization can be configured through ‘geographies of circularity’ (e.g. bridging multiple locales, encircling the state, transversally stirring political subjectivities, and in the full-circle return of identity). Circularity helps ground and highlight the character and significance of transnational political and social activism, and the transfer of communications, skills, behaviors, organizational forms, tools, and projects (political technologies’) for citizenship. Based on the networks initiated by the Arab revolts, we argue that Arab émigrés, workers, and students – framed here as Arab transnationals – traverse and embody these geographies of circularity and leverage connectivity to mobilize citizenship claims and remit/ bridge/diffuse/export/import important progressive ideas and values locally in the western world and into the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 28 November 2015  
Accepted 24 June 2016

### KEYWORDS

Citizenship mobilization;  
political agency;  
transnationalism; circulation;  
human geographies

### Introduction

This paper draws upon recent turns in contemporary critical citizenship studies to investigate the established and emergent political subjectivities of transnational Arab activists who (re)configure the rules and parameters of citizenship (Isin 2009; Levy 2014). The terms ‘established political subjectivity’ and ‘emergent political subjectivity’ help differentiate political activism, solidarities, and beingness that are historically situated, repeatedly demonstrated, and substantiated through concrete repertoires of action from those that are arising (emerging organically, complaisantly, and/or mechanistically) from highly marginalized, fledgling, alienating, and politically restrictive spaces (Turner 2016). Although citizenship traditionally delineates citizens and non-citizens into strict categories, and this is how states continue to determine the grounds for which service provisions are offered, transnational Arab activism is not reducible to this strict binary. One reason the binary fails is that transnational Arab actors face an array of marginalizing structures depending on class, locale of residence, race, religion, and gender that shape their statuses and approaches to citizenship (Killian, Olmsted, and Doyle 2012).

As a consequence of structural disenfranchisement, transnationally connected Arab actors operate on a political subjectivity spectrum and adopt a range of views on citizenship from exclusive to inclusive to exiled, depending on specificities of affect and their relative privilege or marginalization. We identify four distinct tendencies in these political subjectivities as they relate to contested notions of citizenship. Well-established transnational activism such as decades of financial remittances and overseas voting following election cycles might support an exclusive understanding of citizenship-as-membership bestowed upon people through the goodwill of the state; such action re-inscribes the importance of the nation state and the territorial integrity of its boundaries. Transnational activism can also enable more inclusive understandings of citizenship where political activism that supports mutual aid, *communitas*, and solidarity, the qualities of meaningful civic engagement, are seen as having broad citizenship import (Isin 2008, 2009). In this regard, long-term inter-faith activities or sustained political protests reinforce the importance of seeing citizenship as what people *do* (enactments) rather than what they *have* (an externally endowed condition of being ‘citizen’) that defines their status (Isin 2008; Levy 2014). The re-inscription of both exclusive and inclusive understandings of citizenship keep the coordinates of liberal (rights) and republican (duties) notions of citizenship, citizenship-as-meritocracy, and the referential primacy of the nation state, firmly intact (Turner 2016). Established political subjectivity can also emerge from trenchantly marginalized spaces engendering political commitments in exile or post-national understandings of citizenship; the history of Palestinian Arabs, with their multifarious transnational connections, decades-long protests and labor mobilizations, and insurrectionary politics that rupture citizenship status quos on the basis of a shared claim to humanity, stands a poignant example in this regard (Staeheli and Nagel 2006; Isin 2008; Maira 2008; Chalcraft 2011; Turner 2016).

Emergent political subjectivities also arise, spontaneously or through planning, from the spaces and politics of marginalization, social control, liminality, and alienation. Emergent political subjectivities produce a politics that constantly disturbs the state by enacting isolated or communal negation and refusal of the state as a primary reference point of citizenship (Levinas 1999; Critchely 2007; Turner 2016). Reiterative disturbances of emergent political subjectivities challenge the dualism that people must accept democracy, for example, in being deferent to prominent understandings of liberal citizenship, or revolt, for example, in actively challenging status quos for the sake of challenging status quos. Emergent political subjectivities that deny the primacy of the state for citizenship can be a quiet harmony that intercedes on this noisy dualism; they can be a peaceful (individual) reconciliation with struggle, as such, through leaderless community building that has self-knowledge and collaboration as its major impetuses (Levy 2014). The transnational artwork or ‘calligraffi’ of the French-Tunisian street artist, eL Seed, figures prominently in this regard as a form of activism that unites people by pointing out the common struggles of self and other, eroding fear through knowledge and self-knowledge, inspiring alternative interpretations of marginalized spaces, and reconciling with struggle communities without being fixated on revolt. eL Seed politicizes spaces in beautiful and peaceful ways, and in so doing, radically re-orders what citizenship means. Uniquely, one cannot place his activism as of the East or the West definitively. Here, the foundation of formal and substantive citizenship in the redistribution of rights regimes is creatively and radically de-centered. Non-conformity and escape from the dictates of dominant and even alternative discourses over citizenship, the erasure of citizenship as an objective or claim, not only radically alters

the conditions of struggle, but also opens up new spaces for how political (em)power(ment) can be framed and appreciated (Maira 2008; Ní Mhurchú 2016; Turner 2016). Ní Mhurchú (2016), for example, investigates the political significance of migrant youth music, itself mobilized through the political abeyances and liminality of alienated disenfranchisement, for disruptive, unfamiliar, subtle, and ordinary disruptions of citizenship as a locus for action (citizenship may be the outcome, but it is not the focus of the action). Maira's (2008) investigation of Palestinian hip-hop by transnationally connected actors underscores similar findings. For many youth, citizenship is neither a reference point nor something to take for granted because it is often denied to them in formal (e.g. passport), substantive (e.g. provisions), and/or symbolic (e.g. recognition) ways.

We argue that these four proclivities in transnational Arab political subjectivity are fruitfully explored through circular modalities in human geography. The first circular human geography explored is the power of Arabs with dual citizenship to act as cyberactivists, cultural bridges, or political advocates (from East to West and back). By bridging knowledge, experiences, and events between actors in multiple locales, transnational Arab activists with dual-citizenship expand the public sphere, elevate *communitas* as a value worth pursuing, help deliver mutual aid and solidarity, and transfer political technologies (e.g. organizational forms, affect, skills, or tools) for civic engagement. In the case of politically engaged transnational Arab youth, the outcomes of action are often the networks that are built through their engagement. The second theme of circulation emerges in the character, magnitude, and approach of Arabs protesting in the West in support of Middle East and North African (MENA) oppositional movements. Transnational activists encircle their state of citizenship and/or residence and use democratic means to hold it/them to account. In some cases, even when the action is not designed to specifically encircle the state, youth activists are still able to hold it to account by negating its power over them and their self-understandings. The third theme examines how transversal activist connections and connectivity stir political agitation into latent political activism, and intra-community conflict into collaboration in ways that lead to greater engagement and mobilization. Political subjectivities and self-understandings are transformed from thin (passive) to thick (activated). Fourth, through the full-circle return of Arabs to the MENA region, many Arab activists learn, in their 'doing,' to live beyond and actively subvert age-old stereotypes that inhibit their political development, and in process, expand pan-Arab connections. We argue that transnational Arab émigrés, workers, and students traverse these circular human geographies (e.g. bridging, encircling, transversal stirring, and full-circle return). They leverage connectivity in order to infuse citizenship with progressive ideas and values, both locally in states of residence, and beyond in their so-called 'home countries.' In this paper, we treat Arab émigrés as transnationals, and not as diaspora, whose migratory processes forge and sustain 'simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement' (Schiller, Basch, and Blanc 1995, 48).

We show that transnational political subjectivities are activated through the instantiation and circulation of political technologies (e.g. transnational communications and the international transfer of skills) and the circulation of political activists themselves. To ground our theoretical assertions, we rely upon secondary evidence of when these ideas, skills, organizational systems, or affect are mobilized or exchanged, and denote the importance of these activities for citizenship. We regard the movement of these political technologies as emancipatory.

### *The complexities of transnational Arab political subjectivities*

The transnationals that we highlight in this paper are not just people who have willingly emigrated out of a country in the MENA region, but also those who have also been forcefully removed and exiled for their political views and activism. Referring to the work of Kivisto and Faist (2007) and Faist (2000), Nick Ellison points out that transnational activism is action anchored in two or more nation states by actors who emerge from spaces claimed by state and civil society. He argues that migrant and diasporic groups develop 'solidaristic transnational ties and create transnational spaces of belonging that have implications for national governments, the latter can grant dual citizenship or devise forms of denizenship that bestow specific rights and forms of recognition on particular groups within territorial borders' (Ellison 2013, 51). Suzan Ilcan and Anita Lacey argue that transnational activism is action that operates 'within, across, and beyond the state ... to designate a range of synchronized [and potentially unsynchronized] cross-border activities, campaigns, and movements on the part of networks of activists working counter to various state actors, international actors, or international institutions ... with the aim of bringing about social, economic, and political change across borders' (2013, 1–6). Transnational activism is prompted by people's dissatisfaction with governance (e.g. lack of transparency and accountability in government decision-making), civil, social, and political citizenship rights (e.g. freedoms, welfare, and equality), economic transformation and disenfranchisement (e.g. privatization of essential services and corporate commodification of land), discrimination (e.g. on the basis of gender, sexuality, class, race, or religion), and border control (e.g. impeding immigration or migration, migrants' rights) (Revi 2014). For the purposes of this paper, transnational activists are not necessarily diasporic activists, but rather people acting in one country to address the conditions in another. Although intersectionality is not an explicit focus of this particular investigation, it is important to note that transnational Arab activists are intersectionally diverse, and come from a nexus of different genders, classes, orientations, and identifications.

Until recently, a major umbrella concept for transnational activism was ethnic lobbying. Transnational ethnic lobbying has been analyzed along four main lines: (1) typologies of transnational political actions; (2) channels used by migrants to influence political decisions; (3) initiators of action; and (4) diasporic identities that emigrants maintain vis-à-vis their homeland identities (Bocagni, Lafleur, and Levitt 2015). In this paper, we seek to contribute to the analysis of typologies and channels of transnational activism via investigating territorially embedded (e.g. physical protests on the streets) and disembedded forms of political engagement (e.g. Internet facilitated protest; enacting and embodying post-national disruptions through subversive noise; Ní Mhurchú 2016). Territorially disembedded activism might involve, for example, political engagement and the generation of belonging in non-physical spaces based on a globalized sense of political responsibility, an internationalist claim to human rights, or identification in a shared humanity that presupposes that personal concerns matter (Joppke 2007; Maira 2008; Ellison 2013; Levy 2014).

The literature on social and political remittances emphasizes that progressive ideas and/or actions are exported from the West to the less enlightened MENA region (for an exploration, see Bocagni, Lafleur, and Levitt 2015). We argue, through a framework on circular human geographies, that such presumptions do not hold water. The indigenous expression, especially among Arab youth, for political freedom, dignity, and agency does

not necessarily require Western input in order to materialize. Some of the values and ideas promoted in the continued MENA revolts include indigenous appropriation of Western values; some are the expression of Arab culture(s) themselves, or the latent expressions of a political milieu whose emergence was well overdue. Thus, in the circular movements of transnational activism one finds not only West to East transmission, but also East to West and East to East transmission.

Transnational political subjectivities are tied to contested notions of citizenship. Traditional citizenship studies suggests that political subjectivities emerge from an individual's normative commitment to citizenship that pays deference to the nation state, and from substantive citizenship within the fixed boundaries of the nation state that is bestowed upon a 'citizen' by the state (Isin 2009; Turner 2016). Substantive citizenship (e.g. the right to claim provisions from the state) is instantiated through formal membership in a society (e.g. birth in a territory) and through local practices (e.g. paying taxes). As a concept, citizenship has been and continues to be used to dominate, empower, and exclude certain people. We argue that the tenability of citizenship and the demarcation of citizenship spaces cannot be fixed to sites such as voting or enlisting in a national army, nor can they be fixed to specific scales, such as territory demarcated by an arbitrary border (Isin 2009). Thus, we argue that Arab political subjectivity is not sufficiently locatable within the exclusionary strictures of substantive citizenship arguments. Arab political subjectivity is also more than activists overcoming their exclusion from substantive citizenship by paying deference to, or instantiating liberal forms of rule-adhering 'active citizenship' (Isin 2009; Levy 2014; Turner 2016). Established political activism by Arab activists may pay overdue attention to action that yields provisions from the state, but Arab political subjectivity is not reducible to this motivation. Structural inequalities often prevent transnational Arab actors from making established activities relevant for exclusive or even inclusive understandings of citizenship. The historic struggle to engage both formal and informal political processes in the face of systemic racism and prejudice (Dhamoon and Abu-Laban 2009; Harder and Zhyznomirska 2012; Killian, Olmsted, and Doyle 2012) meant that transnationally connected Arab immigrant communities often had to assimilate and acculturate to western political realities to succeed in politics (Staheli and Nagel 2006; Staheli et al. 2012). As a consequence, structural disenfranchisement, embodied in a prejudice that immigrants from the 'eastern shores of the Mediterranean were "one of the least desirable classes"' of immigrants (Jabbara 1997), often ensured that Arab activism were stymied by structural racism or took parochial forms that deviated from liberal and pluralistic understandings of civic engagement.

The political subjectivities of transnational Arab activists are multi-scalar and pluri-local. People, for example, can be Moroccan nationals and mobilize and challenge citizenship capacities, claims, and spaces in multiple Egyptian sites because they reside in Egypt; Lebanese citizens living in the US can expand mutual aid and *communitas* within the borders of Lebanon. As dual citizens travel between countries they physically attest to the circular geographies that ultimately engender citizenship. Staheli and Nagel (2006) found that home, as such, had a prominent topographic dimension and a significant influence on how transnationally connected Arab-Americans positioned themselves as citizens. For the Arab-Americans interviewed, home was pluri-local and multi-scalar (connected to multiple places at once and referentially focused on change at the individual, societal, and/or state levels) and an anchor for their concerns about inclusion and belonging in American society. Pressures to assimilate reinforced citizenship-as-social-membership, and had the effect of

rupturing Arab-Americans' sense of the past, present, and future insofar as dislocation from and opposition to foreignness, as such, were perceived to be widespread expectations of them. Continuing to pursue transnational connections and pluri-local homes in this climate helped Arab-Americans powerfully acquire a political self-confidence and pragmatism and engender their stake in liberal and republican notions of citizenship. Some of the respondents in Staeheli and Nagel's (2006) study did not ground their sense of citizenship in place because their sense of home was deterritorialized, and as such, they held what the authors describe as 'post-national citizenship' ideas.

Transnationally connected Arabs in the West also experience different magnitudes of structural exclusion depending on where they live. American-Arabs are more likely to be seen as potential citizens and to come from affluent and professional classes, whereas Arabs living in Europe are more likely to be seen as immigrants or 'guest workers' despite decades of residence, and tend to work within the marginalized underclass in menial positions (Nydell 2006). Continued structural disenfranchisement is one reason why Arab youth in the West in particular have not emerged, until recently, as prominent activists in active citizenship modalities and have instead resorted to political engagement that is not explicitly oriented toward civic engagement (Abu El-Haj 2007; Maira 2008). Our argument is that transnational Arab activism is both established and emergent and that citizenship claims, spaces, and knowledge are validated, gain momentum, and establish legitimacy through a multitude of politically significant activities. Transnational activists, moreover, engender, and empower citizenship organically through multiple circular instantiations of human geography (Bocagni, Lafleur, and Levitt 2015; Gidwani and Sivarakrishnan 2003; Turner 2016).

The complex nature of transnational Arab political subjectivity is expressed in the fact that activists fall on a spectrum of deferentiality to the (or a single) nation state as the reference point seen to enable all citizenship knowledge and space. In many cases, moreover, transnational Arab activists actively invest in the project and ideals of liberal and republican citizenship (Jabbara 1997; Killian, Olmsted, and Doyle 2012). They invoke their citizenship rights and are aware of the demands upon them as citizens, often as dual citizens. Their commitment to liberal citizenship inspires action that is constitutive for the public sphere and/or subversive of the status quo while keeping the state as the central reference point for action. Other activists are referentially oriented toward the state because they are nationalistic about home country politics and/or care to directly intervene on the state through embodied and disembodied (e.g. cyber-based) resistance. This type of liberal-oriented Arab activist imports and exports political ideas, skills, organizational systems, and affect (what we call 'political technologies') and politically invests her/himself in transforming local politics and politics in the MENA. Research indicates that an affective sense of loss, dislocation, and alienation that accompanies the feeling of belonging nowhere, or being accepted by no one can make transnational Arab activists less deferential or entirely un-deferential to the nation state. This sentiment is particularly pronounced among transnational Palestinian activists but not reducible to them. Many transnational activists adopt a post-national, deterritorialized model of citizenship that often relies on constructions about being a 'citizen of the world' legally protected by supra-national human rights regimes; in fact, they often operate in a real and/or perceived state of exception, and this is prominently the case for transnationally connected refugees and stateless peoples living in MENA countries (Agamben 1998). In some cases, activists' internationalist action brokers their sadness, and mitigates their perceived powerlessness to change politics in the MENA region. Their political subjectivity

is mobilized through local action that has no citizenship *modus operandi* and yet has concomitant re-territorializing effects on them (Staeheli and Nagel 2006; Maira 2008).

### *Political technologies*

One way that transnational Arab political subjectivities are mobilized is through the movement or transmission of what we call ‘political technologies.’ Here, we briefly outline what we mean by this term. When theorists speak about political technologies, the word ‘technologies’ is often used to denote alienating strategies employed by state actors to discipline and/or compel certain actions or deliver controls upon individual freedoms. Read in this light, strategies of control and oversight (e.g. border control demanding travel confessions or biometric scanning at borders), while designed to increase the efficiency of governing and state security, in fact increase the biopolitical power of elites and their agencies over citizens. The political importance of citizen bodies to the state is what is measured in the term ‘biopolitical power’ vis-à-vis, for example, the political utility of individuals to the state as labor, the practices of police forces and legal systems seeking to integrate individuals into a larger social structure, and to expunge those deemed as dispensable or a threat to the system (Foucault 1988; Salter 2006). Such state practices – logistically supported by political technologies – can be used to demarcate the terms and conditions of formal citizenship. Those who are agreeable to control and discipline emerge as citizens; those who challenge this system may have their citizenship status/rights undermined or revoked.

Many draw upon the work of Michel Foucault for the study of political technologies of the state, and in order to examine when such technologies are enacted, legislated, and institutionalized. Of less interest in this literature is the process by which people enable their own freedom through self-referentiality and self-realization. Researchers seem less interested in the personal and social enactments of agency, and the ways that political technologies can be used to instantiate political subjectivity. Theorists tend to focus on Foucault’s understanding of the technologies of power, and less on the technologies of the self where individuals derive political subjectivity through the transformation of their bodies, conduct, and ways of being (Foucault 1988, 18, 35; Isin 2002). Foucault noted that the confessional structures of the political and social systems that preceded the state system were built not only on individual deference to the master’s permission (disciplining from outside by an other), but also on the individual’s capacities to self-discipline and enact political strategies through self-referentiality (giving oneself permission).

Yet, these systems enabling individual self-knowledge and control are not, *ipso facto*, alienating, disenfranchising, or disempowering. Rather, in them, belonging, mutual aid, and living in common with others for a larger purpose can be facilitated. Foucault charted the ways that political technologies (e.g. mechanisms of state or individual discipline) ensure the domination of the powerful over individual subjects, and the foreclosure of alternative social and political possibilities. We embrace the countersupposition, seeking instead to examine how political technologies wielded by the individual can, in fact, be emancipatory and expand the meanings and capacities of ‘the political’ (Foucault 1988). We highlight how the activism of transnationally connected Arabs is both well-established and emergent, vis-à-vis the deployment of political technologies, in circular turns of human geography.

### *Established and emergent political subjectivities in circular human geographies*

The successes and impasses of numerous Arab revolts over the past few decades are partly explained by the strengths and weakness of circular human geographies. On the one hand, transnational human connectivity and the transfer of political technologies often expanded political spaces that created conditions of possibility for protest. On the other hand, in many cases, due to autocratic repression of fledgling protest networks and the failure of people, including transnational actors, to collectively assemble, connectivity and political technologies, even when they were leveraged, sometimes had a negligible effect on the ground. Transnational Arab activism during the 2011–2012 Arab revolts faced a host of issues such as negotiating old and ‘new networks and circuits of power,’ navigating authoritarian systems of governance and population management that were, at once, both fragile and adaptable, and overcoming systematic forms of privatization and economic liberalization that affected the rich and poor (LeVine 2013, 192; Levy 2014). In the analysis that follows, we focus on circulation in two substantive senses: (1) showing the importance of the circular transmission of political technologies that sustain a complex array of transnational resistance cultures, movements, networks, and identities, that raise the prominence of social media-produced ties, and that undermine the credibility of American (or globalized) systems of control and political manipulation upon the Arab world (LeVine 2013); (2) theorizing, more specifically, how transnational actors engage in circular moves (deploying political technologies) and the impact such moves have on them.

### *Cultural and political bridges*

Established and emergent political subjectivities are enabled and engendered in the bridging action of transnational activists. When activists develop cultural and political bridges, they are in effect unifying people and opening political spaces for the expansion of citizenship capacity building (Valeriani 2011). Transnational Arab actors act as bridges when they broker communication and collaboration between people in two or more countries. Such action does not necessarily invoke an exclusive and/or liberal conception of citizenship-as-membership where people rely on the state to protect and deliver them. Instead, sustained and spontaneous transnational bridging actions are forms of established and emergent political subjectivities that support inclusive citizenship. These bridging actions, moreover, become citizenship space, as such. Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti argue that Syrian activists living abroad were ‘cultural brokers’ who developed ‘bridges between local activists and distant publics, and between media “new” and “old,” to build support for the uprising in the homeland’ (Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti 2013, 2188). Specifically, Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti saw these brokers filling key tasks such as ‘(a) linking the voices of protesters inside the country to the outside world, (b) managing messages to bridge the gap between social media and mainstream media, and (c) collaborating with professional journalists and translating messages to fit the contexts and understandings of foreign publics’ (2188). The voices of digital transnationals are amplified further when local media is censored or government controlled (Brinkerhoff 2009; Kalathil 2002). When marginalized by physical exile and/or censorship, transnational actors evince a commitment to citizenship in multiple locales through their refusal to partake in, or their decision to overtly challenge the system that excludes them. The activism, that makes knowledge known that would otherwise not be

known, is citizenship supportive behavior because it intellectually and logistically sustains a more contoured and multi-faceted public sphere.

A multi-faceted public sphere is possible when transnational activists are able to bridge and broker the globalized media landscape. As Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti (2013) point out, the globalized media landscape fosters transnational activist voices but protest movements are politically successful insofar they are able to 'bridge' new media like social media, citizen journalism, and other bottom-up news sources with more mainstream media platforms that dominate Western media discourse.

Attempts by Arab transnational activists to counter prejudice support mutual aid and solidarity; as a result, such activities breathe life into and legitimize inclusive notions of citizenship-as-action. Arab transnationals played an important role as interlocutors between the West and the Arab world. This bridging occurred in a context of widespread Western disbelief that Arab capacities could be productively and non-violently mobilized. As Cottle (2011a) points out, Western media reinvented Orientalist interpretations of the Arab world in their surprise reactions about the 2011–2012 protestors' 'secular, non-violent and democratic nature' (2). The protestors confounded the widespread expectation that radical Islamists had co-opted the grassroots challenge of state power (Cottle 2011a). Transnationals helped Western media transcend Orientalist views of Arab protestors. Hence, we see the media coverage of the Arab revolts used in 'building and mobilizing support, coordinating and defining the protests within different Arab societies and *transnationalizing* them across the MENA and the wider world' (Cottle 2011b). Egyptian-Canadian Ahmed Khalif invoked an inclusive conception of liberal citizenship, mobilized through democratically-oriented action untethered to the strict territorial boundaries of the nation state when he said: "There is not East and West there is no "they hate us because of our freedom" all this is gone, now we know that "they" love freedom just like we do.' When asked where he hopes this goes, he replied 'Freedom! Democracy, always Democracy!' (Kinch 2011).

Here, enacting emergent political subjectivity in an alienated context that paints the so-called East and West as incompatible, Khalif demarcated *communitas*, and in putting spotlight on a widespread prejudice, concomitantly engendered a nascent public sphere. In this public sphere, Khalif challenges the notion that solidarity must have a geographical fixedness, and he advances the presumably counterintuitive supposition that Westerners can identify in Arab aspirations, an authentic struggle for freedom and a set of shared political dreams (Atkinson 1990). Indeed, articulations of (global) community are practices of constitutive citizenship that help create a public sphere supported by a populist impulse. This is significant because the public sphere lacks political neutrality and may, with a shifting wind, produce negative interpretations of living in common. Although admittedly a small, ordinary, constitutive act, such articulations form nicks in the political structures and dynamics that reduce, reify, or keep limited how (Arab) political subjectivity is conceived, enacted, and constituted (Castells 2008; Springer 2014).

When such articulations are sustained repeatedly over the long term, they become expressions of established political subjectivity, and concrete reference points and models that can be adopted by others (Bayat 2013). Translating the Arab revolts to Western audiences became an important objective of Arab transnationals. Outside the White House, protestor Mohammed Abdeljaber told reporters, 'I can't contain my excitement to see young men and women going to the streets claiming those basic rights that you and I enjoy here in the United States' (NBC Washington 2011). In London, UK, Tarik Saeed organized an Arab

arts and culture festival during the revolts and reflected on the large turnout, saying: ‘We were celebrating [the] freedom our brothers and sisters are fighting for and trying to show London what we Arabs are, to break that ice, that we love freedom’ (Durno 2011). Here, reiterative statements of this nature point to established political subjectivities within the transnational Arab community; through them, ordinary and constitutive, or public sphere supporting, citizenship capacities and spaces shape-shift into more insurrectionary forms citizenship. Messages of *communitas* on the streets of London disrupt existing coordinates of contemporary orderings and representations of Arabs; they negate, refuse, and rupture disempowering narratives and in the process produce emergent forms of solidarity and coalition. The citizenship status quo is not only under watch through these emergent political subjectivities, but is actively subverted by bridging action that invokes radically refreshing conceptualizations of the political. Citing Immanuel Levinas, Turner sums up these processes well when he writes that, in the radical questioning of what belonging means, ‘the political is also the possibility of difference that can never be subsumed within a totalizing social formation’ (Levinas 1999; Glenn 2011; Turner 2016).

Arab transnationals express established and emergent political subjectivities in the active bridging of new media (social media and citizen journalism in the Arab world) and old media (traditional western print and broadcast media). Ghannam (2011), for example, found that the media reportage on the Tunisian revolution was first posted on Facebook by local Tunisians, then Tunisian transnationals translated and posted it on Nawaat, a website and blog curated by Tunisian transnationals. It was then Tweeted and picked up by mainstream Western media (Ghannam 2011). Emergent political subjectivities that supports constitutive and public sphere enhancing citizenship spaces is evinced in the words of US-based Nasser Weddady, one of the most influential and widely cited Arab bloggers at the beginning of the revolutions. At the time, he essentially argued that necessity became the mother of constitutive citizenship:

We have power because the news cycle needs stories. We interpret the events and context in a way the media understands ... It's connecting dots and playing chess. Three-dimensional chess ... So my job now is to explain why ‘this’ is a news story. My biggest struggle was to get activists to stop speaking in rhetoric. If you can't put a thought in 140 characters or less, an editor or a journalist is not going to listen to you. (Leigh 2012)

In the early days of the Syrian uprising, transnational Syrians used social networks on the ground to dispel regime propaganda and report on the demonstrations (Trombetta 2012). German-Syrian Karim Layla published and distributed a weekly magazine called *al-Hurriyat* (Freedoms) to fill the gap in getting Syrian activists' messages of protests in a verified online form. Financed mainly by Syrian transnationals, the magazine collated social media and activist reporting and distributed it to stakeholders that supported the Syrian revolutionaries online via Facebook and Twitter (Trombetta 2012). As activist Karim Layla noted: ‘To arrive where Internet does not ... We need to re-discover the traditional means of information and rely on social ties’ (Trombetta 2012, 10). In these efforts, we see the impulse to create a public sphere, sustain dialog between activists, to reclaim a right over space, as such, to de-privatize public space, and instantiate constitutive citizenship (Levy 2014).

Syrian transnationals effectively utilized social ties to get their message of revolution out to the world. In particular, Syrian activists who lived in an authoritarian regime where ‘the walls had ears and eyes’ relied on family ties at home and abroad in order to get messages out of the country without risking their own security. For example, as one Syrian living in

Turkey noted: ‘Outside Syria, we feel two things: one is that we have the responsibility to show to the world what is going on in Syria, and publish it. The other feeling is that we’ve left our friends alone there’ (Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti 2013, 2191). These transnational Syrian activists engender emergent political subjectivities that highlight the horror and concern produced by dislocation and marginality.

The Arab revolts energized Arab transnationals to help mediate Western frames about the Arab world with views of the Arab protests as ones that favored democracy and freedom. By acting as conduits for the transfer of political technologies such as affective connections, tools for negotiating communicative structures, and social bias interrupting demonstrations, transnational Arab activists broke open political spaces that were otherwise closed off, and in so doing, legitimated citizenship at the crossroads of relative privilege and exile.

### *Democratic encirclement*

In short- and long-term circulation of political technologies, transnational activists are empowered to overcome the frustration of the slow improvements in their home countries, and to hold local and MENA governments to account. Democratic encirclement of the state is a circular human geography enabling, and enabled by established and emergent political subjectivities. The political engagement of transnationals with countries of origin is not new, and transnational actors have long called upon their country’s governments to intervene to improve conditions in the MENA region. Waldinger (2015) explains one of the conditions of possibility for democratic encirclement: a government or political context that supports free expression. Put differently, in an environment that allows for free expression, established and emergent political subjectivities are cultivated through democratic encirclement. Waldinger (2015) writes that many transnationals detach politically from their homeland because there are often few rewards to participate in homeland politics. Their political frustration partly explains their desire to emigrate in the first place. This can be reversed, he argues, if the political structure (as in the United States), favors ethnic lobbying, or when political dissent is high – as witnessed, for example, in the large-scale protests of asylum seekers or refugees – and transnationals feel safe to voice political opposition.

Lobbying efforts that subvert the complacency of the government of residence and the recalcitrance of their home country governments are forms of insurrectionary citizenship. The effectiveness and impact of these lobbying efforts are further enhanced by encirclement. The academic literature has well documented the various ways that transnational political activists encircle governments. Newland (2010) identifies a number of political tools and activities, including lobbying governments of countries of origin, filing international lawsuits, fundraising for development or disaster relief, voting in countries of origin, protesting home countries’ government policies (e.g. through art, consciousness-raising activities, and demonstrations), and using Western media to shape public and government opinion on countries of origin. Transnationals can use their social capital in Western countries to pressure local or resident governments to change their policies toward countries of origin. Here, Newland pinpoints, in a concrete way, the political technologies of democratic encirclement, and underscores systems of demonstration that use legal means, fundraising, and art to refuse, interrupt, and/or dialog on dominant social orders.

To be sure, among the most visible forms of transnational activism of Arabs living in the West has been protesting in favor of the political change in the Arab countries, advocating for revolution online, and at times being directly involved in supporting Arab rebels in

the overthrow of Arab governments. For example, a recent study found that nearly 85% of Canadian Arab youth respondents had in some way contributed to the revolutionary push, for example, thorough signing online protests or petitions, posting videos or images online, Tweeting, blogging, and participating in opposition movements against Arab governments (Momani 2015). During the 2011–2012 revolts, Dutch-Moroccans demonstrated in front of the Moroccan embassy and pushed the Dutch Government to help post-revolutionary Arab states. Similarly, Arab transnationals protested in front of Western political capitals in support of Arab revolutionaries. While protesting at the White House, Ahmed Ilhniish, a Libyan in the United States, said for instance,

I have been waiting this day since the day I was born ... I was in Benghazi in March when the French planes first came. I'm going to get back in Tripoli tomorrow or in a few days as soon as they get him (President Muammer Gaddafi). (Al Jazeera 2011)

Arab transnationals devoted considerable time demanding that Western governments do more to help fellow Arabs. Canada's Egyptian community, in particular, was active in pushing for the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak. Through online mediums, thousands protested in Toronto, Montreal, and Ottawa. Mohamed Tobar, a new immigrant to Canada from Egypt, attended one of the demonstrations in Toronto, and noted the irony that he was 'already practising his democratic right to assemble, a right he says he didn't have in his home country Egypt' (Hotakie 2011). In the United States, Egyptian-Americans also turned out to protest against Mubarak in front of the UN. Among the signs held by protestors, 'Egyptian blood is our blood' stood out as a rallying call (Electronic Intifada 2011). Similar protests in Canada focused on the overthrow of Libya's dictator. Demonstrators attended events in Toronto, Montreal, Edmonton, Calgary, Regina, and Winnipeg and hoisted flags of Libya and Egypt; flag-waving enables established and emergent political subjectivities and is a form of democratic encirclement. In addition to protesting against Gaddafi, the protestors called on the Canadian Government to do more to support Libyan rebels. As Libyan-Canadian Amal Abuzgaya said, 'We feel that Canada is being a follower and not taking action in terms of humanitarian aid ... We still feel there's more that [the Canadian government] can do' (Levitz 2011). Here, Abuzgaya's democratic encirclement punches open the public sphere, and creates a potentially powerful reason for solidarity, emergent coalitions, citizenship capacity-building that have the state as a key reference point. During the Arab uprisings, a pan-Arab consciousness emerged from symbolic and constitutive forms of citizenship in which protestors enthusiastically explored regional solidarity and waved flags denoting their allegiance to multiple nations. The protests to overthrow Mubarak in Toronto had numerous country flags – Egypt, Tunisia, Lebanon, Algeria, and even Iran were seen throughout the protests. According to one Iranian-Canadian, Banafsheh Beizaei (from Toronto, and who attended the rally):

I find what is happening in Tunisia, Egypt and everywhere else in the region very exciting and I've found it's had a huge impact on the mindset of Iranian and Arab youth that I know here. My classmates, people who've never even expressed any interest in politics, are coming ... A solidarity rally like this is very important- this is more than in just one country. It's hope for the whole region. It has an impact even here in Canada (Kinch 2011).

Beizaei points out how established political subjectivities of transnationally connected activists engender emergent political subjectivities in latent activists. From this influence, pan-Arabism develops. This has been the case historically and in contemporary times. Across the continent, there were similar scenes of pan-Arab unity that solidified the Arab

transnational community's political clout in the West. Regarding a San Francisco rally against Hosni Mubarak, blogger Asad Abu Khalil observed that

the protest and march in San Francisco was quite impressive. Hundreds of Arabs and Americans gathered to denounce Husni Mubarak and US support for the Egyptian dictatorship. You saw Arabs from different backgrounds cheering the people of Tunisia and Egypt. (Abu Khalil 2011)

Through these actions, protestors enacted themselves as political beings (and engendered political agency in others) in an evolving and difficult political environment undergirded by negative stereotypes about Arabs.

### *Transversal political development and the stirring of latent political subjectivities*

Established and emergent political subjectivities, that differ in their relative deference to or focus on the nation state as a reference point for their action, emerge from transversal connectedness and connections that stir political agitation into collaboration. In this case, transversal connections transmutate or thicken political subjectivities from thin (passive) to thick (activated) in ways that open up new and creative citizenship spaces and political potentialities. As a caveat to this argument, we are aware that the opposite is also true: that the transmutation or thickening of political subjectivities from transversal connections and political agitation can produce fragmented social networks. On the basis of the limited space of this paper and in seeing epistemological and political importance in privileging and reaffirming solidarity when it works, we have decided to focus here on productive political development rather than its opposite; an opposite we seek not to reify or essentialize. We are attentive to the reality that fragmented networks and contested politics can themselves be productive of radical democratic and agonistically pluralistic foundations that guide and navigate passion, contestation, and conflict toward democratic designs and outcomes (Mouffe 2000; Levy 2014). Here, we leave the question of whether fragmentation is debilitating for effective political agency in abeyance because it is beyond the scope of this paper.

Cyberactivism is a method or political technology that enables self-knowledge as well as ownership of the knowledge generation process; both are relevant to citizenship. Metwally, Perk, and Shackleford's study on Moroccan transnationals in the Netherlands points out that up to 30% of Dutch-Moroccan youth were intimately involved in cyberactivism during the Arab revolts in Morocco. Harb (2011) observed a similar pattern in regards to the Libyan revolution, in which Western journalists were notably absent in the early days. A website called *17 February*, in English and Arabic, was created by Libyan transnationals to help spread the message of their revolution (Harb 2011). As Libyan-British student, Omar Amer, noted 'I can call Benghazi or Tripoli and obtain accurate information from the people on the ground, then report it straight onto Twitter' (Harb 2011).

Egyptians living abroad were also instigators of political activism and collaboration, especially when Mubarak turned off the Internet. According to an interview by Elizabeth Iskander (2011), one Egyptian transnational watched:

al-Jazeera via satellite television with his computer on his lap and both mobile and landline telephones beside him. Throughout the 18 days of protest, particularly while Internet access inside Egypt was shut down, he posted updates on his Facebook profile from al-Jazeera and called landline numbers in Egypt to pass news from the Internet and satellite television on to family and friends. In turn, he gleaned eyewitness accounts from inside Egypt from these calls and then relayed them to his network among the Egyptian diaspora via Facebook and Twitter and to a wider audience via English-language media websites and blogs. (1227)

In addition, Harb (2011) found that Arab transnationals exchanged computer software to help Egyptians and activists circumvent government blockades. Egyptian transnationals created Facebook pages like *Akher Khabar's* and *Rased's* in order to post information from family and friends collected through telephone conversations, and thus played a cyberactivist role at a critical juncture of heightened Western interest in the Arab revolts, when information was most valued and often most inaccessible. To a lesser but still notable extent, Arab transnationals went to their countries of origin to participate in protests or to assist in relief efforts.

Love for the homeland also inspires transnational activists to transform how citizenship is seen and invoked, and challenges how state actors framed the terms of their citizenship. Wael Ghonim – an Egyptian working in the United Arab Emirates who started the ‘We are all Khaled’ Facebook campaign in order to expose police brutality in Egypt – returned to Egypt so that he could participate in the street demonstrations. Below, Ghonim talks about his life as a transnational and reflects on the moment when, in prison, a police officer had called him a traitor:

We [activists] love Egypt! If I was a traitor I would have stayed by the swimming pool in my house in the UAE, have fun, and enjoy my life, get paid, every once in a while my salary increases. There's no problems. Should I say what others are saying? Let it [Egypt] burn! Is it our country? It's theirs! That's what I'd say if I was a traitor. We're not traitors! Thank God, one of the things I'm proud of is that I went home knowing that I convinced these people that we're not traitors. I know what I'm saying and I know they are now convinced that the only motive we had [as protestors] was our love for our country. (Ghonim 2011)

Ghonim reveals a complex dynamic in transnational Arab political subjectivity. For Ghonim, affect inspired transversal connections and latent or emergent political subjectivity that had the nation state as a reference point and constitutive citizenship building as an outcome.

The circular flight or return of transnationals to their home country to fight for political rights are significant for symbolic, constitutive, and insurrectionary citizenship that expands transmission of critical political technologies in the local context. Nadia Bouras, a Moroccan in the Netherlands, went to Morocco to participate in Arab protests. According to Bouras, ‘[s]ome of my colleagues joined as well. There was singing, chanting of slogans. Youngsters, but also old people, men and women. This was peaceful protesting; these people are democrats’ (Metwally, Perk, and Shackelford 2011). The political technologies employed by Bouras's participation in the Moroccan protests include skill transfer, organizational knowledge, and challenging the Western Orientalist images of protestors in order to develop more accurate frames. Her participation in the protest movements demonstrates how collective mobilization helped to instigate the regional revolts.

Transnational activists who travelled to the Arab region were rare, but were nevertheless important symbolically and politically. Whether online or in person, Arab transnational activism had unifying effects that often underscored collaboration over confrontation. At the onset of the Arab revolts, Moncef Marzouki, most famously, returned to Tunisia after having lived for over a decade in France and became the country's interim President. Similarly, Libyan Prime Minister, Abdurrahim el-Keib, had, in his previous life, been an engineering professor who lived in the United States for over 20 years before returning to Libya. Moreover, according to one report, the high number of Libyan transnationals who supported the revolution can be explained by their own personal connection to those who left the country when Gaddafi came into power during the 1969 coup (International Business

Times 2011). To a lesser extent, some Libyan transnationals had returned to Libya in order to become rebels and help overthrow the Gaddafi government (International Business Times 2011). Syrian transnationals have perhaps been the most active in assisting revolutionary movements in their homeland. Nineteen-year-old Syrian-British student, Ibrahim Abd (pseudonym), for example, travelled to Syria multiple times to assist revolutionary media activists in writing and reporting in English. Affect and solidarity were mobilizing forces, in his case, for the development of emergent political subjectivity. According to Abd, 'I had lost so many friends that I felt I needed to help as much as possible' (Khaleeli 2013).

The circulations of activists between the Arab and Western worlds, as well as the stirring of inter-community conflict into collaboration, solidarity, and mutual aid, instantiate political subjectivity. Tunisians in Germany reported that the Arab revolts in their native country had the effect of increasing their ties to other Tunisians within Germany (Ragab, McGregor, and Siegal 2013). In particular, respondents argued that prior to the Tunisian revolutions, they held suspicions toward other Tunisians in Germany. Such negative impressions were acutely felt in intra-community battles among Tunisian organizations within Germany. The Tunisian revolution, however, brought common purpose to these German organizations and dampened the once competitive environment for attention and support: Tunisian organizations in Germany increased networking within their circles and increased collaboration with German public institutions trying to foster closer ties to Tunisia (Ragab, McGregor, and Siegal 2013).

### *Full-circle reclamation of political subjectivities*

The Arab revolutions had an unintended effect on Arab transnationals: awakening their self-identity as Arabs in ways that either subverted politically alienating systems of exclusion based on the institutionalization of inherited or acquired formal citizenship, or shifted the focus to inclusive citizenship understandings. Metwally et al. studied Moroccans living in the Netherlands and found that the uprisings prompted a political awakening among young Arabs abroad to be more active in Moroccan politics, and to raise awareness about Moroccan struggles for democracy within the Netherlands. For example, Aboutaleb Jannat, a 23-year-old man born in the Netherlands, stated that the Arab revolts made him a 'critical citizen' that could see the connectors between his life in the Netherlands and life in Morocco (Metwally, Perk, and Shackelford 2011).

Established and emergent political subjectivities are also engendered in identity reclamation. Ragab, McGregor, and Siegal (2013) found that the Arab uprisings strengthened Tunisian-Germans' sense of community and self-identity as Tunisians. In particular, younger Tunisians living in Germany felt a 'new consciousness,' a 'stronger sense of belonging,' and more 'connectedness' to other Tunisians after the Arab revolts. This strengthened identity also resulted in the creation of new civil society organizations tasked with promoting ties to Tunisia as well as fostering stronger intra-community relations. Interview and survey respondents noted that prior to the Arab revolts, Tunisian government officials tried to tie transnational activism to cultural programs. However, in the wake of the Arab revolts, Tunisian transnationals wanted to get more involved in the political and economic developments in Tunisia, thus leading to the creation of new German organizations with more political overtures (Ragab, McGregor, and Siegal 2013). By returning full-circle – politically investing in their home countries while instituting organizations in residence countries committed to the political emancipation of Arab societies – transnational activists enact

a public space in two societies and, as a result, produce forms of constitutive and by extension insurrectionary citizenship.

Such full-circle return helps spread and mobilize core political technologies, including organizational structures committed to *communitas*, and helps build and solidify networks of political stakeholders inside two or more countries. Indeed, there was a rise of civil society organizations developed in the West by Arab transnationals in order to aid and assist in political, economic, and social development in the Arab region. For example, *Tunicom*, a German organization, was founded after the Tunisian revolution in order to assist in connecting Tunisian ‘professionals and managers, experts, entrepreneurs and academics in Germany in order to build a modern, developed and democratic Tunisia’ (Ragab, McGregor, and Siegal 2013, 20). Likewise, *TuniConsult* is an online database of Tunisian professionals living in Germany who offer free advice to Tunisian businesses and their entrepreneurs (Ragab, McGregor, and Siegal 2013).

The Arab uprisings awakened within Arab transnationals a profound desire for their citizenship rights and to break open citizenship spaces vis-à-vis their country of origin. An Egyptian transnational, Tarek El-Manadily, told *Ahram* newspaper online that many Egyptians like himself likely had avoided the Egyptian embassy for decades. Yet, when the revolution transpired, they were re-engaged with their country of origin, wanting to register for the right to vote (El-Gundy 2011). According to Egyptian activist and blogger, Raafat Roheim, Egyptians living abroad were further motivated to call for their right to vote after being insulted by the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF):

The campaign to vote in elections back home began to be more vocal when we read in May of 2011 in the Egyptian press that some military source claimed that Egyptians abroad will not be allowed to vote because they can sell their votes, and they do not care who will represent them back home. That statement made us all angry and we began to comment and speak about it on social-networking site Twitter, using the account @EgyAbroad to coordinate our efforts in different countries. (El-Gundy 2011)

The Twitter handle @EgyAbroad was created to fight for the rights of Egyptians abroad to vote in Egyptian elections. After the SCAF agreed to allow Egyptian transnationals the right to vote, @EgyAbroad advised them on how to register, introduced candidates and districts, and informed followers on how to navigate the complicated voting process.<sup>1</sup> Sameh Fawzy (2012) conducted a study of Egyptian expats in the United Kingdom and found that their greatest frustration was the lack of ‘good governance’ in Egypt. Many Egyptians celebrated the 25 January revolution but were apprehensive about Egypt’s ability to adopt rule of law, fight corruption, and promote transparency and social tolerance (IOM 2012). Getting politically engaged in Egyptian politics after the revolution was emblematic of the renewed sense of Egyptian identity during and after the 2011–2012 Arab revolts, and of a desire to leverage their formal citizenship for the further expansion of citizenship spaces in Egypt.

Political subjectivities of transnational Arab activists are also enabled through the pursuit of the benefits of exclusive citizenship structures to expand political power. Pressure from Arab transnationals also pushed a number of Arab countries, undergoing political transition, to provide their transnationals with the right to vote abroad. Tunisia went the furthest by expanding its overseas voting for all expats (Brand 2014), which was aided by the fact that Tunisia’s opposition and the exiled Ennahada party had strong support among Tunisians living in Europe. The Ennahada party developed strong networks in France and successfully urged Tunisian transnationals to fill vacancies in the electoral commission

offices and to serve as electoral monitors in polling booths abroad. Most notably, perhaps, is the fact that Ennahada had monitors in all 450 electoral polling stations outside of Tunisia (Brand 2014). In personal interviews with Mehdi Jomaa, who was recruited to lead an interim government after Ennahada's London-based leader, Rachid Ghanoushi resigned, the former prime minister noted that he also used his contacts with French-Tunisians to fill cabinet posts in his government.

Transnationals played a key role in spreading the norm of having a right to vote in newly democratizing Arab states. After the success of Tunisian transnationals, Brand (2014) contends that there was a domino effect of Arab transnationals pressuring their homeland governments to allow them to participate in overseas voting. Egyptian transnationals tried to mirror the successes of their Tunisian transnational counterparts by pressuring the Egyptian Government to extend the right to vote to them. Indeed, the gains of Tunisians and Egyptians shaped subsequent debates among Moroccans and Libyans who also pressured their governments for the right to participate in an overseas vote (Brand 2014).

Why did the transnational Arab political subjectivity awaken? Much of it had to do with the increased self-confidence among transnational Arab activists and their dogged refusal of untenable stereotypes. This self-confidence and the concomitant emergent political subjectivities engendered were made possible because of the circulation of the political technologies of skill-sets, affect, and organizational forms, and through the development of transversal connectedness and connections. As Yasmin Alibhai-Brown aptly noted: 'Longstanding stereotypes of Arabs as stupidly rich, misogynist, violent, ignorant and philistine have, for now, been packed away' (Durno 2011). Similarly, according to Londoner Ahmad Ali: 'For so long it was hard to be an Arab, the world was against us. Now we are showing people the way and those of us with these roots have special sense, we are so proud' (Durno 2011).

## Conclusion

In this paper, we conceptualized a feedback relationship between the circulation of political technologies and the circular action of transnational activists, and the established and emergent political subjectivities that they engender (and vice versa). What we have found is that protest, collaboration, facilitation, and awareness-building within the territorial spaces of the nation state and in the interstices of territorial disembedded spaces (e.g. the cyberworld) of information flow, constitute political subjectivities of transnational activists and open up critical spaces to reconceive, reclaim, and/or repudiate the power of citizenship's hold over people. Through circular human geographies, we find Arab transnationals acting as revolutionary bridges, citizens, and remitters of political ideas, skills, organizational mandates, and tools. These elements are deployed for positive and progressive political change.

We have examined these patterns in the ways that Arab transnationals bridge East and West, both in terms of assisting in logistical cyberactivism and in acting as cultural bridges between Arab protestors. We also see these dynamics, including both claims to exclusive forms of citizenship and refusals of the nation state as a reference point for citizenship, unfolding through Arabs' established and emergent protest, and encirclement of the local/resident and MENA governments. In two transversal shifts, Arab transnationals stirred latent political engagement into activism and engaged in acts that renewed a pan-Arab awakening of identity among activists, while also enabling a full-circle return to long-neglected

identities and self-confidence. We analyzed how these dynamics of circulation affect the mobilization of political technologies, the articulation of values of *communitas*, mutual aid, and solidarity, and in the process, supported symbolic, constitutive, ordinary, insurrectionary forms of citizenship. From this study, it is clear that the concept of circular human geographies supports critical citizenship studies by exploring aspects of political agency that challenge republican notions of service to community and/or a liberal notions demanding of rights, and the widespread beholdenness to prevailing citizenship regimes, the territorial supremacy of the state, and the citizenship frames and exclusions promoted by national governments. There is an emancipative quality to the circulation of political technologies and the circulation of political actors from East to West and back.

Despite the varied nature of their relative disenfranchisement from regimes of citizenship, transnational Arab activists centrally seek to expand inclusive forms of citizenship through the use and movement of political technologies, and through activists' collaborative and disruptive actions (Turner 2016). Solidarity and dogged effort move such actors. Through their activism, transnational Arabs raise the profile of their practices and activities for the expansion of civic spaces, as such, in ways that heighten the impact of their citizenship self-understandings, most poignantly expressed and felt when they are denied formal citizenship recognition and/or provisions. Other actors, especially youth, reject the very parameters upon which inclusions and exclusions in citizenship spaces are conceived, framed, and legitimated; for some activists, the inclusion/exclusion logic is relevant to them only insofar as it creates a politics of opportunity or spotlights a politics of neglect. Sometimes, transnational actors seek neither to enter sites of formal citizenship management nor to focus on their exclusions from citizenship regimes; rather, their focus is on developing self-knowledge in ways that we, like other theorists of this field, argue have citizenship import (Maira 2008; Johns 2014; Ní Mhurchú 2016). Arab activists are, therefore, a prominent demographic where well-established and emergent political subjectivities engender political struggle intentionally to make claims upon the state and/or to challenge the hierarchical ordering of social life and historio-social stories. As immigration patterns from the Arab world continue to increase, in particular to the West, we expect that the involvement of Arab transnationals in MENA politics will only increase in response. Transnational Arab activism will continue to support rebel, opposition, and/or reform movements in many critical ways, given the deep challenges that continue to burden the evolving politics in the MENA region in our current era of expanded globalized pressures.

## Note

1. The Twitter handle appears to have gone dormant after the June 30 coup d'état in Egypt.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Funding

This work was supported by the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada [Grant No. 611-2015-0292].

## References

- Abu El-Haj, T. R. 2007. "‘I Was Born Here, but My Home, it’s Not Here’: Educating for Democratic Citizenship in an Era of Transnational Migration and Global Conflict." *Harvard Educational Review* 77 (3): 285–316.
- Abu Khalil, As’ad. 2011. "Protest in San Francisco." *The Angry Arab News Service*, January 29. Accessed 15 September 2015. <http://angryarab.blogspot.ca/2011/01/protest-in-san-francisco.html>
- Agamben, G. 1998. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Al-Jazeera. 2011. "Libyan Diaspora Celebrates the Fall of Tripoli." August 22. Accessed 18 September 2015. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2011/08/201182282315305270.html>
- Andén-Papadopoulos, Kari, and Mervi Pantti. 2013. "The Media Work of Syrian Diaspora Activists: Brokering between the Protest and Mainstream Media." *International Journal of Communication* 7 (22): 2185–2206.
- Atkinson, D. 1990. *The State, the City and Meaning: Towards a New Theory of the South African State*. Durban, South Africa: Centre for Social and Development Studies, University of Natal.
- Bayat, Asef. 2013. *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press.
- Boccagni, Paolo, Jean-Michel Lafleur, and Peggy Levitt. 2015. "Transnational Politics as Cultural Circulation: Toward a Conceptual Understanding of Migrant Political Participation on the Move." *Mobility* 11 (3): 444–463.
- Brand, Laurie A. 2014. "Arab Uprisings and the Changing Frontiers of Transnational Citizenship: Voting from Abroad in Political Transitions." *Political Geography* 41: 54–63.
- Brinkerhoff, J. 2009. *Digital Diasporas: Identity and Transnational Engagement*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Castells, M. 2008. "The New Public Sphere: Global Civil Society, Communication Networks, and Global Governance." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616 (1): 78–93.
- Chalcraft, J. 2011. "Migration and Popular Protest in the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf in the 1950s and 1960s." *International Labor and Working-Class History* 79 (1): 28–47.
- Cottle, Simon. 2011a. "Cell Phones, Camels and the Global Call for Democracy." *Opendemocracy Net*. Accessed 14 September 2015. [http://www.researchgate.net/profile/Simon\\_Cottle/publication/268520337\\_Cell\\_Phones\\_Camels\\_and\\_the\\_Global\\_Call\\_for\\_Democracy/links/54cf747b0cf24601c093784d.pdf](http://www.researchgate.net/profile/Simon_Cottle/publication/268520337_Cell_Phones_Camels_and_the_Global_Call_for_Democracy/links/54cf747b0cf24601c093784d.pdf)
- Cottle, Simon. 2011b. "Reporting the Arab Uprisings: Notes for Research." *Journalism Theory, Practice and Criticism* 12 (5): 647–659.
- Critchely, Simon. 2007. *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*. London: Verso.
- Dhmoon, R., and Y. Abu-Laban. 2009. "Dangerous (Internal) Foreigners and Nation-Building: The Case of Canada." *International Political Science Review* 30 (2): 163–183.
- Durno, Morgan. 2011. "Cultural Revolution: How Artists Have Been Inspired by the Arab Revolts." *The Independent*, July 15. Accessed 18 September 2015. <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/features/cultural-revolution-how-artists-have-been-inspired-by-the-arab-spring-2314807.html>
- El-Gundy, Zeinab. 2011. "In Historic Ruling, Egyptian Court Confirms Voting Rights of Millions of Expats." *Jadaliyya*, November 17. Accessed 15 September 2015. <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/3137/in-historic-ruling-egyptian-court-confirms-voting>
- Electronic Intifada Staff. 2011. "Global Mobilization in Support of Egyptian Uprising." *The Electronic Intifada*, January 31. Accessed 16 September 2015. <https://electronicintifada.net/content/global-mobilization-support-egyptian-uprising/9206>
- Ellison, Nick. 2013. "Citizenship, Space and Time: Engagement, Identity and Belonging in a Connected World." *Thesis Eleven* 118 (1): 48–63.
- Faist, T. 2000. "Transnationalization in International Migration: Implications for the Study of Citizenship and Culture." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 23 (2): 189–222.

- Fawzy, Sameh. 2012. "Egyptian Migrants in the UK: A Reading after the 25th of January Revolution." *A Study on the Dynamics of Arab Expatriate Communities: Promoting Positive Contributions to Socioeconomic Development and Political Transitions in Their Homelands*. IOM Publishing, June 24. Accessed 15 September 2015. <https://www.iom.int/files/live/sites/iom/files/Country/docs/IOM-Flash-Report-11.pdf>
- Foucault, Michel. 1988. "Technologies of the Individual" and "The Political Technologies of the Individual." In *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, edited by L. H. Martin, H. Gutman, and P. H. Hutton. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Ghannam, J. 2011. *Social Media in the Arab World: Leading up to the Uprisings of 2011*. Washington, DC: Center for International Media Assistance.
- Ghonim, Wael. 2011. "Interview with Dream TV." February 7. Accessed 13 September 2015. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yW59LZsjE\\_g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yW59LZsjE_g)
- Gidwani, Vinay, and K. Sivaramkrishnan. 2003. "Circular Migration and the Spaces of Cultural Assertion." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 93 (1): 186–213.
- Glenn, Evelyn Nakano. 2011. "Constructing Citizenship: Exclusion, Subordination, and Resistance." *American Sociological Review* 76 (1): 1–24.
- Harb, Zahera. 2011. "Arab Revolutions and the Social Media Effect." *Media/Culture Journal* 14 (2). <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/viewArticle/364Two>
- Harder, L., and L. Zhyznomirska. 2012. "Claims of Belonging: Recent Tales of Trouble in Canadian Citizenship." *Ethnicities* 12 (3): 293–316.
- Hotakie, Alima. 2011. "Egyptian–Canadian Wants to See Change in His Homeland." *The Toronto Observer*, January 29. Accessed 9 September 2015. <http://torontoobserver.ca/2011/01/29/egyptian-canadian-wants-to-see-change-in-his-homeland/>
- Ilcan, Suzan, and Anita Lacey. 2013. "Networks of Social Justice: Transnational Activism and Social Change." *Studies in Social Justice* 7 (1): 1–6.
- International Business Times Staff. 2011. "Gaddafi and the Libyan Diaspora: On the Quest for a New Identity?" *International Business times*, November 2. Accessed 18 September 2015. <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/gaddafi-libya-diaspora-quest-new-identity-242153>
- IOM (International Organization for Migration). 2012. "A Study on the Dynamics of Arab Expatriate Communities: Promoting Positive Contributions to Socioeconomic Development and Political Transitions in Their Homelands" *IOM Publishing*, June 24. Accessed 15 September 2015. <https://www.iom.int/files/live/sites/iom/files/Country/docs/IOM-Flash-Report-11.pdf>
- Inin, Engin F. 2002. *Being Political: Genealogies of Citizenship*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Inin, Engin F. 2008. "Theorizing Acts of Citizenship." In *Acts of Citizenship*, edited by Greg Nielson, 15–43. London: Zed Books.
- Inin, Engin F. 2009. "Citizenship in Flux: The Figure of the Activist Citizen." *Subjectivity* 29: 367–388.
- Iskander, Elizabeth. 2011. "The Arab Revolts| Connecting the National and the Virtual: Can Social Media Have a Role in Institution-Building after Egypt's January 25 Uprising?" *International Journal of Communication* 5: 1225–1237.
- Jabbara, N. W. 1997. "Politics and Acceptance: The Lebanese in Canada's Maritime Provinces." *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 29 (1): 99.
- Johns, A. 2014. "Muslim Young People Online: 'Acts of Citizenship' in Socially Networked Spaces." *Social Inclusion* 2 (2): 71–82.
- Joppke, C. 2007. "Transformation of Citizenship: Status, Rights, Identity." *Citizenship Studies* 11 (1): 37–48.
- Kalathil, S. 2002. "Community and Communalism at the Information Age." *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 9 (1): 347–354.
- Khaleeli, Homa. 2013. "Britain's Syrian Community: How War is Dividing Families." *The Guardian*, June 17. Accessed 15 September 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/17/britains-syrian-community-war-dividing-families>
- Killian, C., J. Olmsted, and A. Doyle. 2012. "Motivated Migrants: (Re) Framing Arab Women's Experiences." In *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 35, No. 6, 432–446. Pergamon.

- Kinch, Megan. 2011. "600 in Support of Egyptian and Tunisian People at Dundas Square in Toronto." *Toronto Media Co-op*, January 30. Accessed 20 September 2015. <http://toronto.mediacoop.ca/story/600-support-egyptian-and-tunisian-people-fill-dundas-square-toronto/5943>
- Kivisto, P., and T. Faist. 2007. *Citizenship: Discourse, Theory and Transnational Prospects*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Leigh, K. 2012. "Behind the Arab Revolts, an Activist Quietly Pulling Strings from Boston." *The Atlantic*, January 25.
- LeVine, Mark. 2013. "Theorizing Revolutionary Practice: Agendas for Research on the Arab Uprisings." *Mena Critique* 22 (3): 191–212.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. 1999. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.
- Levitz, Stephanie. 2011. "Canada Suspends Diplomatic Presence in Libya, Evacuates Officials." *The Globe and Mail*, February 26. Accessed 16 September 2015. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/canada-suspends-diplomatic-presence-in-libya-evacuates-officials/article568395/>
- Levy, Gal. 2014. "Contested Citizenship of the Arab Spring and Beyond." In *The Routledge Handbook of Global Citizenship Studies*, edited by Engin F. Isin and Peter Nyers, 23–37. New York: Routledge.
- Maira, S. 2008. "'We Ain't Missing': Palestinian Hip Hop – A Transnational Youth Movement." *CR: The New Centennial Review* 8 (2): 161–192.
- Metwally, Amre, Diederik Perk, and Kelly Shackelford. 2011. "From Tahrirplein to Museumplein: Dutch-Moroccans and the Arab revolts." *Humanity in Action*, August 20. Accessed 18 September, 2015. <http://www.humanityinaction.org/knowledgebase/376-from-tahrirplein-to-museumplein-dutch-moroccans-and-the-arab-spring>
- Momani, Bessma. 2015. *Arab Dawn: Arab Youth and the Demographic Dividend They Will Bring*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Mouffe, Chantal. 2000. *The Democratic Paradox*. London: Verso.
- NBC Washington Staff. 2011. "Egyptian–Americans Take to D.C. Streets." *NBC Washington*, January 31. Accessed 15 September 2015. <http://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/Egyptian-Americans-Take-to-DC-Streets-114857819.html>
- Newland, K. 2010. *Voice after Exit: Diaspora Advocacy*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute. [www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/diasporas-advocacy.pdf](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/diasporas-advocacy.pdf)
- Ní Mhurchú, A. 2016. "Unfamiliar Acts of Citizenship: Enacting Citizenship in Vernacular Music and Language from the Space of Marginalised Intergenerational Migration." *Citizenship Studies* 20 (2): 156–172.
- Nydel, M. K. 2006. *Understanding Arabs: A Guide for Modern times*. 4th ed. Boston, MA: Intercultural Press.
- Ragab, Nora, Elaine McGregor, and Melissa Siegal. 2013. "Diaspora Engagement in Development: An Analysis of the Engagement of the Tunisian Diaspora in Germany and the Potentials for Cooperation." *Deutsche Gesellschaft*, July 1. Accessed 18 September, 2015. <http://www.giz.de/expertise/downloads/giz2013-en-Tunisian-Diaspora-Engagement-in-Germany.pdf>
- Revi, Ben. 2014. "T.H. Marshall and His Critics: Reappraising 'Social Citizenship' in the Twenty-first Century." *Citizenship Studies* 18 (3–4): 452–464.
- Salter, Mark B. 2006. "The Global Visa Regime and the Political Technologies of the International Self: Borders, Bodies, Biopolitics." *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 31 (2): 167–189.
- Schiller, Nina Glick, Linda Basch, and Cristina Szanton Blanc. 1995. "From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration." *Anthropological Quarterly* 48–63.
- Springer, Simon. 2014. "Why a Radical Geography Must Be Anarchist." *Dialogues in Human Geography* 4 (3): 249–270.
- Staheli, Lynn A., and Caroline R. Nagel. 2006. "Topographies of Home and Citizenship: Arab American Activists." *Environment and Planning* 38 (9): 1599–1614.
- Staheli, Lynn A., Patricia Ehrkamp, Helga Leitner, and Caroline R. Nagel. 2012. "Dreaming the Ordinary: Daily Life and the Complex Geographies of Citizenship." *Progress in Human Geography* 36 (5): 628–644.
- Trombetta, Lorenzo. 2012. "Altering Courses in Unknown Waters: Interaction between Traditional and New Media during the First Months of the Syrian Uprising." *Global Media Journal* 2 (1): 1–13.

- Turner, J. 2016. "(En)gendering the Political: Citizenship from Marginal Spaces." *Citizenship Studies* 20 (2): 141–155.
- Valeriani, Augusto. 2011. "Bridges of the Revolution: Linking People, Sharing Information, and Remixing Practices." *Sociologica* 3: 1–27.
- Waldinger, Roger. 2015. *The Cross-border Connection: Immigrants, Emigrants, and Their Homelands*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.