The Discursive Construction of Biometric Surveillance in the Israeli Press

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THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF BIOMETRIC SURVEILLANCE IN THE ISRAELI PRESS
Nationality, citizenship, and democracy

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In 2017, following vigorous public debate, Israel established a centralized biometric database for storing its citizens' bodily information. This step, according to privacy advocates, signifies a critical phase in the development of Israel as a surveillance society. This study examines coverage of Israel's biometric project by three leading Israeli newspapers. Drawing on the intersection of media studies and surveillance studies, it employs discourse analysis to understand how the Israeli press constructs this project in various contexts, asking which narratives are promoted and how they coalesce into a consistent story about Israel's surveillance agenda. The analysis points to two competing sub-discourses – legitimizing and delegitimizing – each of which positions Israel differently, either as a vulnerable victim of external enemies or as an abusive state violating its citizens' rights. Surprisingly, Israeli coverage is more critical than supportive, offering a strong and challenging criticism of Israel's surveillance. I suggest two explanations for the difference between the Israeli case and other accounts, which tend to be supportive, poor, and superficial.

Introduction

In September 2009, the Israeli Parliament approved a law sanctioning the Israeli Biometric Project (IBP), including the issuing of biometric ID cards and passports to all Israeli citizens, and the establishment of a mandatory biometric database for storing their bodily information (fingerprints and face templates). Since approval of the law, social activists, intellectuals, cryptography experts, politicians, and journalists have weighed in on the plan to establish a centralized biometric database, warning of Israel's new surveillance agenda.

The project's official purpose was to prevent identity theft, but social organizations and activist groups, such as *No2Bio*, inquired as to its authentic motivation. More specifically, they pointed to the unnecessary and strategic coupling of the project's two initiatives (issue of biometric documents and establishment of a biometric database), raising concerns about the intention to provide Israel's security services with access to this material. These concerns were supported by an appeal to Israel's High Court of Justice, claiming that "a database storing biometric information on all Israeli citizens is a sensitive and powerful resource that constitutes an unprecedented means of surveillance and control."[1] Nevertheless, in March 2017, after a prolonged pilot study intended to evaluate the project's

feasibility and necessity, as well as several postponements due to administrative and technical challenges, the Minister of the Interior ratified the project.

This study examines coverage of the biometric project by three central Israeli newspapers – *Israel Hayom*, *Haaretz*, and *Ynet*. Based on discourse analysis, it aims to understand how the Israeli press constructs a controversial national project and related surveillance issues in various contexts, asking which narratives are promoted and how they coalesce into a consistent story about state surveillance. The study assumes that the project's representations in the press are a valuable cultural resource that both reflects and orients Israeli imagination about the project and its relationship with different notions, including nationality, citizenship, security, identity, and more.

The importance of this effort lies at the intersection of media studies and surveillance studies, specifically in the Israeli context. Surveillance practices and policies have increased dramatically over the past two decades, to the extent that leading surveillance scholars perceive this growth as one of the most far-reaching social changes of the past 50 years (Rule 2012), and define current surveillance practices as a key organizing principle of late modernity (Lyon, Haggerty, and Ball 2012). Recognizing the role of media representations of surveillance in advancing citizens' critical understanding of such developments (Greenberg and Hier 2009), a considerable yet still limited body of research examining such representations has emerged in the last few years, mostly in English-speaking countries (see Lischka 2015; Wahl-Jorgensen, Bennett, and Taylor 2017).

Israeli society provides an interesting case study in this context: First, it has a long and unique tradition of securitization (Kimmerling 2009), which is closely related to excessive state surveillance (Muller 2010); and second, because Israel is considered an emergent surveillance society in light of the new biometric project (see Marciano 2016). Nevertheless, the coverage of the biometric project or Israel's surveillance more broadly remained largely untouched. Addressing this gap will, therefore, capture a specific moment in the development of Israel as a surveillance society and provide a unique point of comparison to the growing literature about media representations of surveillance in other countries.

Why Media Discourse Matters: A Theoretical Overview

Public debates about controversial issues take place in different forums – the media, parliaments, courts, etc. – but the media arena arguably "overshadows all others," as it incorporates them into unified coverage determined by its own conventions and values (Gamson 2004, 243). The media has long been considered a hegemonic institution through which various stakeholders disseminate, promote, and normalize ideologies and practices (Street 2001). However, it also provides resources for empowerment and resistance, constituting a playing field on which competing social groups struggle for dominance (Kellner 1995). In other words, while media discourses commonly reflect prevailing ideologies, they also allow for the introduction of new and at times competing ideas.

Traditional media theories, such as Agenda-Setting and Framing, illuminate the importance of media content in terms of its potential influence on audiences. Agenda-Setting Theory focuses on the salience of topics in the media and its effect on the public agenda (McCombs and Shaw 1972). It can be summarized in Cohen's observation, according to which the media "may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think *about*" (Cohen 1963, 13). Since the theory's formal introduction by McCombs and Shaw in 1972, many studies

have shown that the salience (frequency and prominence) given to different topics in the media affects the importance people ascribe to them, thus orienting topics of discussion (see McCombs 2005).

Closely related to Agenda-Setting, Framing Theory suggests that the ways journalists cover topics influence how audiences think about and judge these topics (Entman 1993). Through media frames, journalists "select and highlight some features of reality and obscure others in a way that tells a consistent story about problems, their causes, moral implications and remedies" (Entman 1996, 77–78). To put it differently, media frames function as "interpretive packages" by which journalists organize and contextualize stories (Gamson and Modigliani 1989), thus having the capacity to shape public understanding of a particular issue (Entman 1993). Although audiences' capacity to actively interpret media stories according to their experiences is often considered as a weakness of the theory (Neuman, Just, and Crigler 1992; Street 2001), media frames remain a central means of text analysis, based on the assumption that they are able to organize the world for audiences and "activate knowledge, stimulate stocks of cultural mores and values, and create contexts […]"(Cappella and Jamieson 1997, 47).

Agenda-Setting and Framing account for the importance of media discourses not only in terms of their influence on audiences but also because they play an important role in policymaking (Borquez 1993), as they inform both the public and policymakers about social problems and potential solutions (Pan and Kosicki 1993). The capacity of news discourses to influence policy was specifically demonstrated in relation to the coverage of surveillance issues (Greenberg and Hier 2009; Kroener 2013; Kuehn 2018).

While this study neither measures media effects nor employs systematic frame analysis, it is informed by key insights from these theories, assuming that even if extensive coverage of the biometric project might not determine what the readers would think about it, it would certainly highlight "appropriate" topics to debate and promote specific interpretive packages to guide readers' interpretation and judgment.

Media Coverage of Surveillance: Too Little, Too Flat

Media coverage of surveillance has only been accorded (limited) scholarly attention recently, unlike other contexts of surveillance addressed by scholars working within the multidisciplinary field of surveillance studies (Lyon, Haggerty, and Ball 2012). Greenberg and Hier (2009) identified this void a decade ago, suggesting that an examination of surveillance representations might provide important insights into the prevalent views, values, and resources that help people shape a common culture. Since then, the study of media representations of surveillance has increased moderately, following several well-known leaks that were given considerable media attention worldwide (Wahl-Jorgensen and Hunt 2012). These leaks exposed the extent and patterns of questionable surveillance practices in the West that had received minimal public attention until then.

Edward Snowden's revelations are a turning point in the study of media representations of surveillance. Only a few studies examined media discourses on surveillance prior to these revelations (see Barnard-Wills 2011), primarily with regard to particular surveillance practices, such as CCTV (Greenberg and Hier 2009; Kroener 2013). The vast majority of studies have addressed the discourse consequent upon the revelations, mostly in the UK (Lischka 2015; Wahl-Jorgensen, Bennett, and Taylor 2017), but also in other countries such as New Zealand (Kuehn 2018) and Norway (Eide and Lånkan 2016).

Most of these studies have addressed the coverage of different aspects of whistleblowing as a subtopic of surveillance, from the portrayals of Wikileaks (Handley and Ismail 2013) to the framing of key figures such as Julien Assange (Luther and Radovic 2014), Chelsea Manning (Thorsen, Sreedharan, and Allan 2013), and Edward Snowden (Branum and Charteris-Black 2015; Di Salvo and Negro 2016). These studies generally asked what the press tells the readers about surveillance, how, and in which contexts.

The findings of these studies pointed to two competing approaches towards surveillance – supportive and critical – with a slight (Eide and Lånkan 2016) or absolute (Kroener 2013; McCahill 2014) dominance of the supportive coverage that legitimizes surveillance. Moreover, two interrelated patterns were identified: (1) The media address surveillance practices and policies relatively superficially, largely ignoring the social, political, and ethical implications of surveillance; (2) The coverage is characterized by episodic rather than thematic framing. Episodic framing comes with overdramatization and a focus on particular examples and individuals, thus limiting audiences' understanding of the implications of surveillance, as well as their ability to interpret them within relevant contexts (Greenberg and Hier 2009). Thematic framing, by contrast, addresses phenomena and patterns rather than specific cases, thus providing wider contexts for interpretation (Iyengar 1991). Recent studies suggest that not much has changed over the past decade, as the press keeps legitimizing state surveillance using justifications of national security (Wahl-Jorgensen, Bennett, and Taylor 2017), and distances citizens from the surveillance debate by framing it as a political rather than a civic issue (Kuehn 2018).

The current study responds to this growing interest in media representations of surveillance by focusing on coverage of the IBP. It asks which topics are highlighted, how they are contextualized, and how these configurations join forces to legitimize or oppose the project as well as Israel's overall surveillance agenda.

Methodology: Sampling, Coding, and Method

This study applies discourse analysis to three Israeli newspapers: *Israel Hayom*, *Haaretz*, and *Ynet*. The selection of these three sought to balance among their popularity, ideological orientation, target market, and funding structure (see Semetko et al. 1991), to provide a broader perspective of surveillance discourse in the Israeli press. *Israel Hayom* is a free tabloid, currently the most popular newspaper in Israel, with an exposure rate of 36.7% (*The Marker*, July 20, 2017). Founded by one of Prime Minister Netanyahu's fans, it publicly maintains a supportive line towards his policy (Mann and Lev-On 2014). The selection of this newspaper assumes that this stance is relevant to the coverage of a highly controversial law. *Haaretz*, on the other hand, is an elite left-wing broadsheet, known for its critical line towards Netanyahu's government. As of the first half of 2017, its exposure rate was less than 4% (*The Marker*, July 20, 2017). *Ynet* is the most popular news website in Israel. A report regarding the scope of product placement in Israeli news websites defined *Ynet* as "the most commercialized news platform" (*The 7*th *Eye*, January 8, 2015) that "gradually loses its journalistic character" (*The 7ᵗʰ Eye*, January 14, 2013). This study assumes that unlike *Haaretz* and *Israel Hayom*, *Ynet*'s general approach is guided by financial interests more than solid political ideology.

The analysis is based on the newspapers' online editions, primarily because the printed newspapers' circulation is constantly falling, as opposed to that of their digital parallels (Mann and Lev-On 2016). Moreover, the online editions are more comprehensive, as

they usually include both the printed content and additional material, offering a richer discourse on the biometric project.

Corpus

The corpus consists of 272 items – both articles and op-eds – that covered the IBP between 2002 (the first item) and 2015.[2] Three complementary search strategies were used to establish a comprehensive array of texts. First, I typed the keyword *biometric* into each of the newspapers' local search engines to find items that include different declensions, inflections, or conjugations of the word.[3] Second, I typed the same keyword into Google's search engine using a string that allows for retrieval from a specific website.[4] Third, I used the search engine *Digger* to assure exhaustive results.[5] Out of more than 350 items, I selected those that address the biometric project explicitly (as opposed to biometric gadgets or general biometric surveillance in Israel).

Coding

Using Atlas.ti, the analysis started with a close reading of the texts and continued with the coding of different textual units – words, sentences, phrases, and articles. Codes are thematic tags by which the researcher characterizes textual units. Overall, I developed more than 50 codes – some of them deductively prior to the first reading, according to prevalent topics in the literature (e.g. "privacy" or "citizenship"), and most of them inductively during the analysis, according to the articles' content (Fairclough 2003). The development of codes and categories continued until every new textual unit fit an existing code/category (Möllers and Hälterlein 2013). I merged conceptually related codes to form wider categories, that were later reduced to the patterns described in this paper. Such preliminary categorical analysis is a useful strategy for dealing with the "massness" of the mass media (Deacon et al. 2010), as it allows mapping of a given discursive arena and identification of general patterns and trends that inform the rest of the analysis. The coding process ended up with printed sheets consisting of textual units sorted by codes. These units were analyzed contextually vis-à-vis the concept of the code (e.g. units categorized under the code "citizenship" were analyzed in relation to the project's influence on the relationship between the state and its citizens).

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis, commonly used to examine media representations of surveillance (see Barnard-Wills 2011; Kroener 2013; Lischka 2015; Martin and Donovan 2014), is defined as the study of language in use (Gee 2011b), consisting of various techniques for making connections between texts and their meanings in different contexts (Lemke 2012). Unlike similar methods, such as content analysis, discourse analysis is constructionist, interpretive, qualitative, and highly sensitive to context (see Hardy and Phillips 2004), and thus appropriate for analyzing social debates and controversies.

This study combines two approaches to discourse analysis. The first focuses on the ways discourses are organized and how they operate, with particular attention to three discursive components: Variation, function, and construction. This means that when people communicate, they inevitably select one variation out of many alternatives to fulfill a

specific purpose or task and to construct different versions of the social world. The discourse in this approach is not a pathway to a hidden reality lying beyond it, nor a channel leading to people's inner worlds, but rather a functional means that people use to explain, rationalize, and construct ideas and actions (Potter and Wetherell 1987). Accordingly, the researcher should pay close attention to the functional use of different textual units and to the selection of specific versions (over others).

The second approach also emphasizes language's functionality but involves linguistic analysis that addresses the text's grammatical structure, and the meanings produced by different structures in various contexts. This approach suggests two important points. First, language has three main functions – saying, doing, and being – allowing individuals to inform each other, make things (act), and be things (construct identities), respectively. Second, discourse analysis is inherently critical as languages are intrinsically political (Gee 2011a).

Gee (2011a) provides a set of 27 analytical tools, of which I applied 11: Deixis (#1), fill in (#2), making strange (#3), subject (#4), doing and not just saying (#7), vocabulary (#8), why this way and not that way (#9), integration (#10), topics and themes (#11), context is reflexive (#13), and intertextuality (#25). For example, the *Deixis Tool* draws our attention to the use of "deictics." These are "pointing words" whose reference is derived from the context of use and changes accordingly. We should ask which deictics are used to contextualize things and how they are so applied. As deictics commonly refer to categories of person (e.g. I, you, he, she, they), place (e.g. here or there), and time (e.g. now or then), I used this tool to demonstrate how personal pronouns (us/them) and spatial designation (here/there) are used to differentiate between Israelis and "others" while constructing a threat of hostile invasion. Biometrics are subsequently promoted as a preventive solution.

Analysis

The coverage of the biometric project is distributed unevenly among *Haaretz* (41%), *Ynet* (34%), and *Israel Hayom* (25%). As Figure 1 suggests, there are two points of increased coverage: Final approval of the Law in 2009 (31% of the items) and the launch of the pilot study in 2013 (20%). The general approach towards the project, as illustrated in Figure 2, is slightly negative,[6] as 65% of the items in *Haaretz*, 48% in *Israel Hayom* and 43% in *Ynet* are critical. *Ynet's* approach is mostly neutral (55% of the items, as compared with 25–29% in the other two dailies), while *Israel Hayom* is significantly more supportive than the other two (28% of the items, compared with 2–6% in the other two).

The analysis reveals two chief sub-discourses, each of which portrays the State of Israel and its surveillance agenda differently. The first defines Israel externally, based on extrinsic threats to national security, thus legitimizing the project and the country's overall surveillance policy, while the second defines Israel internally, considering its deteriorating relationship with its citizens and pointing to the destructive effects of the new project.

### *The Legitimizing Sub-discourse: Constructing Threats to National Security*

The legitimizing sub-discourse supports the biometric project and the surveillance practices it enables through the construction of threats and dangers to the nation, portraying Israel as a vulnerable victim and "others" as dangerous enemies. Israel Hayom
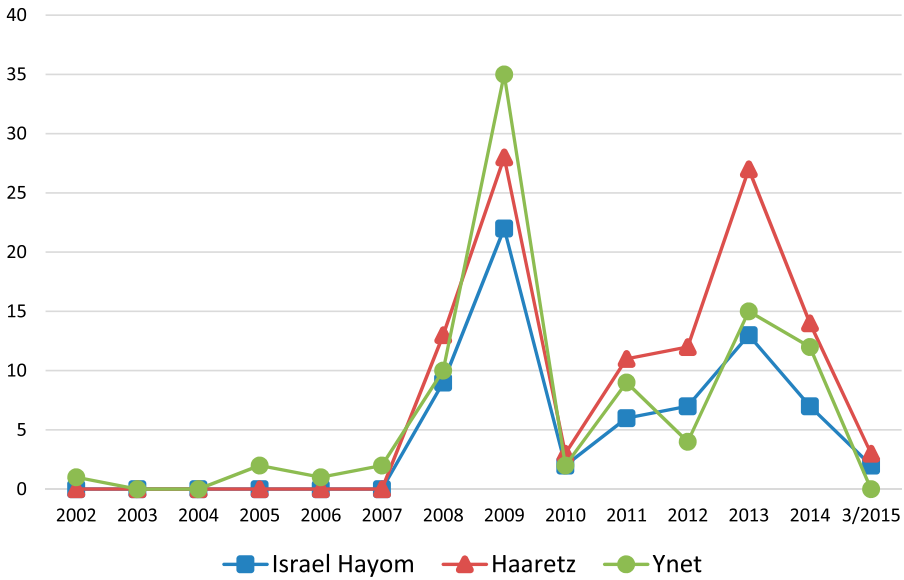
FIGURE 1
Distribution of items by year of publication.

mentioned or discussed the project's contribution to Israel's national security more often (30% of all items) than *Haaretz* and *Ynet* (11–12%).

Forgery of ID cards and passports – one of the official justifications for the project – was covered extensively by all three newspapers. For example: "Over the last few years, Israel has been dealing with a **serious phenomenon**" (I, 1)[7] and with a "**wholesale** forgery of documents […] and identity theft that had become a **national epidemic**" (I, 4). These items refer to a "**culture** of forgery" (Y, 4) that constitutes "a **lodestone** for
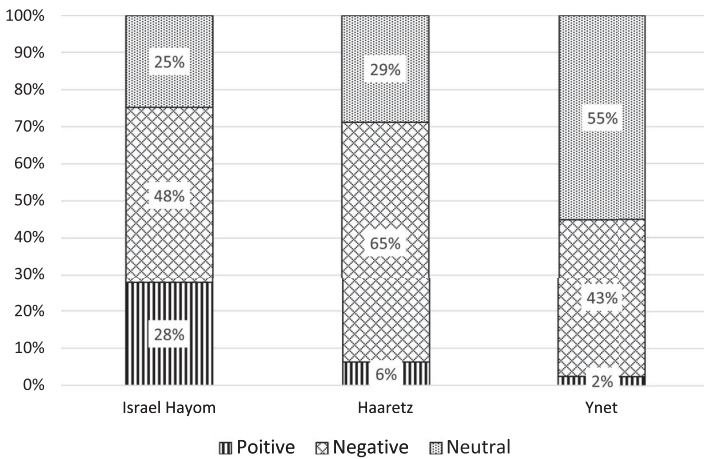
FIGURE 2
General approach towards the project.

unwanted external elements in **great** quantities" (I, 5) and functions as "**fertile ground** for fraud, impersonation, illegal activities, and risking national security" (I, 20).

Previous studies have shown how the mass media construct threats (Altheide 2006; Gale 2004) and pointed to its crucial role in "shaping insecurities in the social imaginary" specifically in relation to surveillance (Monahan 2010, 3). The quotations above suggest that the Israeli media not only magnify forgery using inflated adjectives and metaphors but more importantly – construct forgery as a threat within a national context: As "external elements" are involved, forgery is depicted as a "national epidemic" associated with "risking national security." Accordingly, the responsibility to deal with the threat is ascribed to Israel as a nation state rather than to specific administrative authorities such as the police. More explicit manifestations construct the biometric initiative as "a project with extensive national implications" (Y, 2) aiming at protecting "the national interest underlying this important and vital step" (I, 5).

Document forgery is further magnified by specific references to Iran, suggesting that "there is a danger that thousands of people, including Iranians, wander worldwide with fake Israeli passports" (I, 12) or claiming that "in Thailand, Israeli passports are sold by Iranians" (Y, 8). These references to Iran, among many others, should be understood vis-à-vis the growing hostility between Israel and Iran over the past three decades. During this period, the Iranian regime – and its nuclear program in particular – have become the ultimate symbol of an "existential threat" to Israel (Ram 2009). While the above quotations do not refer to this specific context explicitly, the linkage between document forgery and Iran relies on the Israeli social imaginary regarding "the Iranian threat." It, therefore, functions as a discursive strategy that reinforces the general threat to Israel's security to promote the biometric program, which is repeatedly depicted as an effective means of absolute forgery prevention (H, 4, 10, 13; Y, 2, 20; I, 19, 22 and more).

This constructed threat to the nation is reaffirmed and actualized by illustrating the two sides of the threat: Israel and Israelis as vulnerable victims, and "others" as dangerous enemies. The separation between these two is maintained by a recurrent discursive distinction between "us" and "them," primarily within the context of a hostile invasion of the collective Israeli domain: "In the first few months of its introduction, the system captured dozens […] of wanted terrorists **wandering about our streets**" (I, 5); if there is a technical and simple means capable of preventing hostile elements from **entering Israel** and **wandering around serenely**, we should bless and embrace it" (H, 4); "can anyone assure [us] that thousands of latent terrorists are not living among us waiting for D-day?" (Y, 20); "Israel is completely **permeable**. A terrorist can enter, **live here peacefully** […] the purpose of biometric cards is to know **who is really Israeli**" (Y, 9).

The construction of two clashing parties through personal pronouns (us/them) and spatial designation (here/there) is a prevalent discursive strategy (van Dijk 2006) that was identified as one of five central news media frames (Neuman, Just, and Crigler 1992). Studies examining media representations of surveillance have shown that this strategy was employed to support surveillance practices in various contexts – from the 2005 London Underground bombings (Kroener 2013) to Snowden's revelations (Branum and Charteris-Black 2015). More specifically, Finn and Mccahill (2010) have found that this strategy was used to present surveillance technologies "as tools to reveal that 'they' are among 'us,'" and "masquerading as 'us'" (11). This distinction, therefore, builds a world of "friends" and "strangers" (Bauman 1993), ultimately resulting in "the making of an enemy" (Leudar, Marsland, and Nekvapil 2004, 245).

The quotations above suggest that the threat of hostile invasion applies both to the physical-territorial and the symbolic-cultural domains, as the biometric project is intended not only to prevent dangerous "others" from entering and living within the boundaries of Israel but also to differentiate between terrorists and "real Israelis." The reference to "real Israelis" alludes to Palestinian citizens of Israel, whose loyalty to the nation is often called into question. In this context, the idea of "real Israeli" reflects an ideal imagery of the nation, according to which an Israeli cannot be a terrorist, and vice versa – a terrorist is not part of the nation. The new biometric system, therefore, aims at dealing with two inter-related threats: Physical invasion of the territorial borders, and symbolic invasion that might disrupt the perceived national identity.

This identity is evident all along the coverage. Drawing on national motifs rooted in Jewish history and contemporary Israel, several items include expressions of common destiny and victimization, mostly in *Israel Hayom* (9% of all items) and to a lesser extent in *Ynet* (5%). These expressions deepen the "us" discourse by referring to national symbols and landmarks engraved in the Israeli collective memory, such as "the severe depression during the **1973 Yom Kippur War**" (I, 5), or by alluding to the "Israeli experi-ence." For example: "**Disastrously**, we have known abundance of terror attacks [… and] experienced rocket salvos, learning what to expect in a future battlefield […]. This is why such a database would be extremely important in the national level" (I, 5). Similar items use words and phrases associated with wars and mourning: "the nation is **lamenting**" (I, 3); "our **tormented** county" (I, 5); or "Israel is not New Zealand, and the existential threats from outside – including terror – **are our bread and butter**" (I, 24).

These expressions of victimization correspond with an old Jewish motif – "in every generation, they stand up against us to destroy us" – taken from the Passover Haggadah, a Jewish text narrating the salvation of the Jewish People from slavery in Egypt. This motif has characterized the Zionist discourse from its very outset, both as a component of Israeli identity imagery (Gavriely-Nuri 2007) and as a means by which the Israeli culture has been pursuing its traditional concern with survival (Zerubavel 1985). It is still highly prevalent in the Israeli public discourse in different contexts that together represent a continuous threat to Israel's survival, from Nazi Germany and the Holocaust to contemporary Iran and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.[8]

Use of the common destiny motif to support the biometric project is especially salient in the next op-ed, written by former Parliament Member Aryeh Eldad:

> For 2000 years, the Jewish people was exiled and scattered, with no independent country. We were lucky to become an independent people living on its own land, in its historical homeland. We were lucky to have an ID card with [an image of] the Menorah, which was standing in the Temple in Jerusalem. This is our ID card. That is our pride. If we do not cherish it greatly, if we disrespect our identity, we also devalue 2000 years of yearnings for an independent Jewish state. The new biometric card will truly ensure a match between the card and the person who carries it (Y, 6).

This op-ed addresses two distinct aspects of identity: a fundamental concept of reli-gious, historical, and national identity, and a technical-administrative procedure of bio-metric authentication. The discursive linkage between these two aspects, let alone the reduction of a fundamental and complex identity to a technical procedure of biometric authentication, illuminate the strategic use of the common destiny motif to promote the project.

The Opposing Sub-discourse: Flawed Citizenship and the Threat to Democracy

The opposing sub-discourse rejects the biometric project and the surveillance climate it promotes based on its potential implications for citizenship and democracy. While the legitimizing sub-discourse differentiates between "us" (Israel) and "them" (others), avowing the presence of an external threat, the opposing sub-discourse dismantles the "us" category and suggests a different subdivision between "us" (citizens) and "them" (state authorities), supporting its claim of a deteriorating relationship between the state and its citizens.

In the liberal tradition, citizenship is defined as a set of individual rights and duties (Faulks 2000), reflecting a relationship of trust between states and their citizens. About 17% of the items address citizenship in this context, pointing to a fragile, and even hostile relationship between them.

Different images of power and control are used throughout the coverage to describe Israel's new surveillance policy, with numerous references to the Big Brother metaphor: "Big Brother is arriving in Israel" (H, 11); "Big Brother is already here" (H, 1); "the Big Brother state" (I, 14; H, 14); "a surveillance society in which Big Brother knows everything about us" (Y, 10); "the scary brother will surveil us" (I, 9); "Big Brother will keep an eye open" (I, 1); "Big Brother improves his methods" (I, 2); "Big Brother will see and hear everything, and will know our real-time location" (I, 21); "Big Brother keeps working" (I, 4); "the huge brother" (H, 2); "George Orwell's Big Brother wouldn't imagine using such means" (H, 19), etc.

These references are read within a wider context that questions Israel's democracy, portraying it as "a little less democratic, let alone civilized" (I, 25), "a world-leading country in spying on its citizens" (H, 30), "the first democracy to turn its citizens into guinea pigs (Y, 12), and a country with 'unrestrained power' (I, 20), along with a warning that "information is power, and absolute power is absolutely corrupting" (H, 5). More extreme references describe Israel as part of the "Iron Curtain states of the 50s" (I, 9), as "Mother Russia" (I, 10), and as a "police state" (H, 5; Y, 12) that is gradually becoming a "surveillance society" (H, 29; Y, 10).

Continuing this critical line, some of the items refer to the project as an "undemocratic initiative" (H, 24; Y, 15) that will cause "severe damage" (H, 24), referring to the biometric database specifically as a "means that will shake the foundations of democracy" (Y, 21), "undermine democracy" (H, 24) and introduce a "real danger to democracy" (H, 20). Surveillance practices associated with the new biometric system are further depicted as "invasive" (H, 2), "extremely dangerous" (H, 3), and "hardly legal" (H, 35).

Israeli citizens, on the other hand, are portrayed as naïve, innocent, and lacking all criminal intent. The contradictory descriptions of the malicious state versus the vulnerable citizens pave the way to a thorough discussion of the project's potential implications for citizenship. Many items warn against "invasive data collection on non-criminals" (I, 9), raising concerns that "the biometric database will render citizens translucent" (H, 13), and that the "stored fingerprints […] will turn citizens into suspects" (I, 7), "potential criminals" (H, 3) or "potential felons" (Y, 5). More concrete concerns suggest that "overreliance on the biometric database might result in […] the indictment of innocent citizens for serious felonies" (I, 4).

Several items provide more extreme illustrations that depict these visions not as an inadvertent by-product of the new project, but as an intentional abuse of citizens: "The

authorities might exploit their power to misuse the data, not necessarily to achieve its original purposes" (I, 15), but "to fulfill unintended purposes of the Law" (Y, 23); "the real purpose of the database is not to prevent identity theft, but other motives hidden from the public" (H, 34). Other items relate more explicitly to the erosion of trust between Israel and its citizens: "The real question is moral rather than technical: Do you still trust the state?" (Y, 22); "the government's campaign proves once again: We are not on the same side" (H, 37); "the Interior Ministry tries to give the impression that a biometric database is necessary for smart documentation in order to convince you to give away your biometric data. This is a blatant lie" (H, 35).

The picture emerging so far is that of two clashing entities: A Big Brother state misusing its surveillance capabilities, and innocent citizens subjected to malicious governmentality. This picture casts doubt on the relevance of the traditional notion of citizenship, raising the possibility that the Social Contract no longer applies to current surveillance societies.

The constructed tension between Israel and its citizens is supported by extensive coverage of public resistance to the project (20–25% of all items), magnified through three cumulative strategies. The first includes familiar means of salience, such as front pages, large headlines, and contrasting colors. Typical front-page headlines are: "The opponents: this database is dangerous" (I, 2); "Due to criticism: the biometric database legislation was delayed" (H, 9); "Opponents of the biometric legislation are afraid" (H, 16); "Protesters called to stop fingerprints" (Y, 12), etc. The importance of such expressions of resistance, conveyed through headlines, is that they set a critical context of opposition through which the rest of the article – which might be partly supportive or neutral – is read and interpreted.[9]

The second strategy employs adjectives that convey an impression of inflated opposition: "vast criticism" (I, 7; Y, 5), "extensive criticism (H, 17), 'severe criticism' (I, 7), "stubborn public struggle" (H, 15), "strong opposition" (Y, 17), "stern public criticism" (Y, 14), and more (Y, 4; H, 7). In terms of discourse analysis, this partial wording should be examined vis-à-vis other alternatives that had been left out and could have resulted in more balanced or simply different coverage.

The third strategy is structurally similar to the first. Many articles heralding important milestones in the project's progress open with complex sentences consisting of two clauses. The primary/independent clause usually provides the main point, while the secondary/dependent one adds supplementary information. In English, complex sentences usually begin with the primary clause, setting the general meaning (topic) of the sentence. If the secondary clause comes first, it functions as the sentence's theme, thus providing the point of departure, the framework that orients the reader to the interpretation of the sentence and creates the perspective from which everything else in the sentence is viewed (see the topic/theme discussion in Gee 2011a). Many articles about the biometric project include sentences with reversed clauses, for example: "In spite of the protest: the biometric database goes on" (I, 11); "In spite of public criticism and security flaws, the Interior Ministry will announce the beginning of the pilot program" (H, 30); "While demonstrations continued outside the bureau, the Minister of the Interior inaugurated the […]" (H, 31).

These sentences open with references to different types of resistance – protests, demonstrations, and criticism – and continue with the main information. These reversals contextualize the most important developments in the project – final approval of the Law and the launching of the pilot program – vis-à-vis public resistance. In other words, the resistance becomes the sentences' theme, thus functioning as the context through

which these developments are interpreted and evaluated. While the first and third strategies have similar results, they differ in terms of audience reception. Unlike explicit critical headlines, clause reversals are hard to discern and therefore not likely to encourage defensive reading.

These three strategies – technical salience of resistance, use of inflated adjectives to magnify it, and construction of a general context of opposition – are supported by other micro means, from a systematic presentation of the Law as "controversial" (I, 11; H, 8; Y, 16) to the ascription of the protest to general sources that are easy to identify with, such as "social organizations and civil rights activists" (I, 11), "human rights organizations" (H, 7), "privacy activists" (Y, 17), etc.

Between the legitimizing and the opposing sub-discourses, an intermediate pattern emerges involving recurrent references to Germany. Its intermediate nature is reflected in its drawing on the Jewish-Israeli collective memory (like the legitimizing sub-discourse) to warn of a disastrous misuse of citizens' information (like the opposing sub-discourse). In the first years of the coverage (2008–2009), references to Germany are vague and unexplained. For example: "Even countries like Germany, that use biometric documentation, do not maintain a general database of citizens" (Y, 8); "no democratic country maintains such a database of citizens, including countries that use biometrics, such as Germany" (Y, 14); "in Germany, for example, citizens have biometric ID cards and passports, but a biometric database does not exist" (Y, 31); "such a database does not exist in most western democratic countries [. .], not even in Germany" (I, 21). As Germany's surveillance policy and practices are not unique or exceptional (unlike those of other countries, such as the UK), these references are interpreted according to Germany's centrality in the Jewish-Israeli collective memory.

From 2011 onwards, the context of these references becomes more explicit: "Germany is not establishing such a database because they avoid everything that echoes centralization, considering their history […]. Democracies have known episodes of crisis […]. We are afraid, and therefore wish to keep an eye on the guards" (H, 49); "Germany has decided not to establish a biometric database because of German history […]. We were the first country to ask others not to collect unnecessary data on citizens. […] How can anyone dare do it here?" (H, 50); "German history and misuse of data […] during the Second World War are the reasons for not establishing a biometric database in Germany today. German history is in fact our own" (Y, 78).

The centrality of nationalism throughout the coverage sheds light on the debated relationship among globalization, journalism, and nationality. Media scholars have emphasized the strength of globalization by pointing to its inevitable effects on communication flow (Cottle 2009) and on local news practices and narratives (Reese 2008). Reese, for example, argued that globalization has encouraged news organizations to gradually replace their national perspective with a global outlook. These processes might be particularly relevant to media representations of surveillance, which are often informed by "extra-national" platforms such as WikiLeaks (Handley and Ismail 2013). The findings of the current study suggest that the Israeli press did not adopt a global perspective but rather relied on national motifs and justifications (see also Nossek and Berkowitz 2006). Both the supportive and the critical journalists wore "domestic glasses" (Nossek 2004, 359), resulting in ethnocentric coverage that emphasized Israel's national security, Israeli citizenship, and Israeli-German history.

Concluding Discussion

This paper examined coverage of the IBP by three key newspapers in Israel. The analysis suggests that the coverage is largely ambivalent but tends to be more critical (delegitimizing) than supportive (legitimizing) towards surveillance in Israel. The supportive stance involves the construction of external threats to national security, portraying Israel as a vulnerable victim that should defend itself by employing surveillance technologies. Such argumentation exploits cultural motifs central to Jewish-Israeli history. The critical stance draws a pessimistic picture according to which Israel uses dictatorial methods that violate citizens' rights and endanger its democratic tradition. Here, Israel's role changes from vulnerable victim to hostile aggressor.

These findings bear certain resemblances and certain differences from those found in previous studies. As outlined earlier, previous studies also identified two competing sub-discourses, but in the vast majority of cases, the coverage was supportive, poor, and superficial, with little to no discussion of the social, political, and ethical implications of surveillance. Using Kuehn's words: "Surveillance discourses typically rely upon moral, legal, security, and autonomy frames in support of the state. The media less frequently frames surveillance as a threat to the democratic freedoms it aims to protect" (Kuehn 2018, 5). The Israeli coverage thus differs not only because it is more critical than supportive, but primarily because it raises fundamental questions about the changing nature of Israeli citizenship, and about Israel's democratic future in light of its new surveillance initiative. In other words, while a significant portion of Israeli coverage supports biometric surveillance and promotes securitization, a larger portion offers a strong and challenging criticism that was absent in similar studies.

I want to offer two explanations for this difference, the first referring to Israel's securitization and the second to its journalistic practices. Democracies declare – or are expected to declare – a state of emergency rarely and cautiously, in response to immediate threats and for a limited period of time. States of emergency or threatening events that the public identifies as emergencies are therefore the exception (Honig 2009), and the public responds accordingly. Studies suggest that during emergencies, people tend to embrace surveillance and are more willing to trade privacy for security, particularly when the threat is substantial and immediate, such as 9/11 (see Gould 2002; Lyon 2003). For example, in light of increasing global terrorism, a survey conducted in the UK showed that although 76% of respondents were afraid that too much information is collected about them, shared without their permission (96%), or used against them (68%), a vast majority believed that governments should use surveillance technologies (80%) because they improve national security (90%) (Bakir et al. 2015).

Unlike other democracies, Israel has been in a permanent state of emergency since its establishment in 1948 (Hofnung 1996). Its permanence and prominence in Israel's political culture have cultivated a security-oriented atmosphere that governs many aspects of Israeli public life (Kimmerling 2009). While ad hoc states of emergency declared in other democracies affect citizens and encourage a temporary renunciation of privacy rights, I maintain that the permanent state of emergency in Israel and the prolonged securitization that it legitimizes eventually lead to apathy, cynicism, and contempt. These challenge construction of the privacy-security equation as a zero-sum game requiring people to choose between privacy and security, resulting in criticism towards ubiquitous state surveillance. In a somewhat absurd manner, presuming that the public and media agendas mutually

influence each other (Lang and Lang 2016), critical journalistic discourse towards surveillance might well develop in security-oriented societies.

The second explanation for the difference between Israeli coverage and its parallels elsewhere has to do with the effect of oppositional activism on journalistic practices. In covering surveillance, journalists tend to rely on official sources more than they do regarding other issues, because they presumably enjoy easier access to classified information (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2008), pushing privacy advocates and professional experts to the bottom of the "hierarchy of credibility" (Becker 1967; Kuehn 2018). A recent study based on content analysis and interviews with journalists found that because of their preference for official sources, they normalized surveillance even though they were critical of its nature, extent, and necessity (Wahl-Jorgensen, Bennett, and Cable 2016).

The coverage of the Israeli project was heavily influenced by activist groups such as No2Bio, who constantly challenged the dominance of official sources (e.g. the Biometric Database Management Authority). No2Bio was founded and run by leading experts – senior academics, scientists, lawyers, software engineers, and others – who acted in various public arenas. Over the years, they launched a major campaign against the project, gave numerous interviews to the media, wrote critical reports, appealed to the High Court of Justice, etc. Their expertise allowed journalists to rely on them, sometimes as an exclusive source of information, without violating professional norms.

While the critical line is profound and progressive, it fails to transcend at least one barrier. According to Abu-Laban (2012), to fully comprehend the consequences of surveillance, we need to prioritize a broad framework of human rights over a narrow framework of civil liberties. Conceptualizing surveillance in terms of human rights, she argues, raises a larger set of questions that facilitate a critical evaluation of these surveillance practices. The opposing sub-discourse failed to contextualize the biometric project as a human rights issue. For example, addressing identity and embodiment – two topics covered by *Haaretz* – from a human rights perspective, would raise the possibility that a biometric database enables capturing bodily information on passersby without their consent and knowledge. This feature could even be framed as forced use of one's body, and consequently as a deprivation of people's right to control their own bodies. Such a perspective would strengthen the critical line with a humanistic point of view, currently absent from most media accounts of surveillance, in Israel and elsewhere.

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DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

NOTES

1. Nahon v. Israeli Parliament, 1516/12 Israel High Court of Justice (February 20 2012), p. 2.
2. Discrepancy between the wide range of years and the relatively small sample stems from insignificant coverage during 2002-2007, as illustrated in Figure 1.

3. Typing asterisks before and after a word (e.g. *biometric*) will launch a search for different combinations of the word (e.g. biometrics).

4. For example, to find articles with different inflections of the word "biometric" on *Ynet*, I typed [site:*Ynet*.co.il *biometric*].

5. Digger, powered by *Ifat* – an Israeli commercial company specializing in media analysis – provides access to content published from 2006 on by most Israeli media.

6. This evaluation is based on three components. First, I defined the articles' overall tone as positive if they were exclusively or mostly supportive, negative if they were entirely or primarily critical, or neutral if they were completely or chiefly informative. Second, I defined the articles' headlines as positive, negative or neutral, using the same criteria. Third, I defined the op-eds as positive or negative. The general approach above is based on an average of these three components. For detailed charts, see Appendix 2.

7. To avoid complication, the analyzed articles are listed separately in Appendix 1, included as supplemental material. References to the articles are organized as follows: Parentheses with the first letter of the newspaper (I, H, or Y) and the item's ordinal number. Bold texts are mine.

8. In April 2015, Israeli Minister Naftali Bennett was interviewed by CNN about Iran's Nuclear Program. During this interview, he read this sentence in Hebrew, explaining that "it's Passover now, and just a few days ago all Jews read a sentence – 'in every generation, there's someone who wants to annihilate the Jewish people,' the ancient Egyptians and Greeks and Romans, Nazis, and now it's Iran who explicitly want to eliminate us."

9. The technical salience is highly evident in the quantitative representation of opponents versus advocates. A simple headcount suggests that professional opponents (62) outnumber professional advocates (20), that elected official opponents (76) outnumber elected official advocates (30), and opponents of organizations or institutions (40) outnumber their advocates (6).

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

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