

Transnational Social Movements, Civil Society, and a Secret State: The Idea of a Nuclear-free World through Israel's Vanunu Affair

URI BEN-ELIEZER* & ADRIANA KEMP**

*Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Haifa, Haifa, Israel, **Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel

ABSTRACT *Studies on transnational social movements in world risk society tend to emphasize their centrality and effectiveness as the result of two major transformations: the decline of the nation-state as a primary locus of power and sovereignty, and the rise of assertive civil societies' subpolitics. Drawing on the 'Vanunu affair' (the Israeli technician who was sentenced to eighteen years in prison for making public Israel's nuclear secrets), and the reactions it elicited at the local and global levels, the article analyzes the obstacles that may prevent the effective influence of anti-nuclear transnational social movements, and their difficulties in contributing to global framing. These obstacles are related mainly to the cultural politics of a 'secret state' that constructs national sovereignty, and mobilizes the local civil society, by means of nuclear secrecy and opacity.*

KEY WORDS: Transnational social movements, civil society, cultural politics, nuclear policy, secret states, world risk society

For more than fifteen years, every Saturday in the early afternoon, between a dozen and two dozen people – mostly British citizens – held a vigil outside the Israeli embassy in London. They stood there always, carrying placards and selling books, pamphlets, and posters for the freeing of Mordechai Vanunu and for a nuclear-free Middle East. In 1988 Vanunu, an Israeli technician who worked at a nuclear plant near the Israeli town of Dimona, was sentenced to eighteen years in prison for making public Israel's nuclear secrets. Until Vanunu's release from prison in April 2004, the protestors at the embassy did not miss a single Saturday, come rain or shine, and were very proud of it. Who are these people? What drives them? How is the fate of an individual who was convicted for breaching Israel's nuclear secrets bound up with their fate? What do developments somewhere in the Middle East have to do with them?

Anecdotal though they may seem, such scenes provide sociological insight on transnational social movements (TSMs) and their modes of collective action. One of the typical topics that TSMs deal with is the danger of nuclear weapons and energy.

Correspondence Address: Uri Ben-Eliezer, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Haifa, Mount Carmel, 31905 Haifa, Israel. Email: uriben@soc.haifa.ac.il

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From a theoretical point of view, anti-nuclear activity by TSMs offers a clear illustration of the modes in which ideal, non-material interests and normative processes are articulated in order to influence world politics, to mobilize transnational collective action, and to present a different frame alignment from that of the nation-states. Are the TSMs' protests at all effective? What are the conditions that make possible their failure or success? We attempt to answer these questions through an empirically grounded analysis of the process whereby global normative innovation and political change may become domestically effective or ineffective vis-à-vis nation-states and local civil societies. Drawing on a constructivist analysis of Israel's nuclear policy of opacity and secrecy and the reactions that the 'Vanunu affair' elicited at the local and global levels, the article analyzes the obstacles that prevent the effective influence of anti-nuclear TSMs, and their difficulties in contributing to global framing of a nuclear-free world.

The Global/National/Local: A Constructivist Perspective

Research literature on the growing influence of the TSMs in global politics tends to attribute this phenomenon to the weakening of the nation-state's power and to new patterns of politics waged by TSMs in the global era. One of the most influential models in this regard is the spiral model developed by Risse *et al.* (1999) on human rights issues. This model is a systematic attempt to analyze the modes in which transnational advocacy networks become locally effective through diffusion of norms. Policy change happens, they say, when local movements and organizations turn to TSMs in an effort to exert cumulative effective influence on a reluctant state, thereby creating a transboundary window of opportunity for social change (1999, p. 235). The theoretical importance of the spiral model lies not only in the simple fact that it works empirically in various places (e.g. Callaghy *et al.*, 2001) while it does not work in others. Its analytical strength lies rather in the shift of focus to the transformative power of norms and socializing processes in world politics achieved through interconnectedness between global and local networks of activism (e.g. Barker & Soyeze, 1998). Although persuasive, the spiral model of normative-oriented policy change remains elusive as to the specific conditions that make change possible or inhibit it. The main questions one may ask are (1) whether the articulation between global and local mobilization is sufficient for influencing nation-states and (2) what practices, actors and institutions contribute to or prevent the formation of global/local articulations and to what extent they unsettle the primacy of the nation-state in local and inter-state politics.

Indeed, much of the TSMs' activities and modes of collective action still seem to be captured by the spell of nation-states' institutional and organizational power. As explained by Beck *et al.* in their theory of reflexive modernization, the emergence of transnational social movements and the greater emphasis on interconnectedness have rendered the container model of society-cum-nation-state increasingly problematic, yet it does not mean that modernity and its key institutions have vanished (2003, p. 2). Thus, while the reflexivity of the new modernity is leading to disenchantment with many of the truths of the first modernity and to the collapse of its taken-for-granted premises, the new era is still anchored to a great degree in the institutional configurations and discourses of the modernist past.¹ As a result, they conclude, the potential to alter the course of modernization through globalizing and transnational processes is not certain and, in fact, can only be made clear through empirical investigation. Much of the writing

on globalization and transnationalism has privileged outcomes that are self-evidently global, highlighting success stories that unsettle the national and destabilize existing meanings and systems (Sassen, 2006). By doing so, this literature tends to overlook the fragmented, partial and uncertain character of transnational articulations as they engage with national framings and institutions.

In general, research on TSMs follows a similar line of analysis. While acknowledging the effects of globalization on the nation-state and its organizing principles – of which TSMs are both an expression and a catalyst (e.g. Holton, 1998; Held & McGrew, 2000) – it still seems to us that the study of TSMs tends to magnify their strength and role in the shaping of policies at the global and regional level. This general tendency is often achieved at the expense of a more fine-tuned analysis of the areas which TSMs are likely to influence, their amount of influence, and the way in which it is achieved. As noted by Tarrow (1998), the compelling argument of a global civil society, which encroaches on the power of the nation-states to control the individual and to limit their freedom, drawing on the mobilization of global–local networks and their ability to diffuse new norms and generate new identities, awaits further theoretical specification and empirical in-depth research.

The Israeli case offers a particularly fruitful case study for decoding the significance of transnational mobilization and tracing the institutional domains in which TSMs are likely to confront the workings of resilient national institutions and framings.

In many aspects, Israeli society has undergone a late modern, reflexive twist. This has been characterized, among others, by the opening of the borders to the influx of capital, goods, ideas and labor; increasing income growth along the polarization of social and economic gaps, the outburst of legitimacy crises that challenge entrenched hegemonic configurations and increased civil society mobilization in various fields. To a great extent these developments have undermined the certainties of the former, modern era and the predominance of the container model of society (Shafir & Peled, 2000; Filc & Ram, 2004). Israel has not remained impermeable to the influence of an emerging global society either, as it has become a locus for the activities of numerous TSMs. During the 1990s, Israel witnessed the creation of an impressive array of new associations, social movements, and global networks that deal with ‘new’ issues such as minorities, immigrants, women, gay and lesbians, and human rights; secularism versus religious life; peace activities; and ecological concerns, to name a few.² The mobilization of civil society at both the local and transnational levels has elicited new definitions of risk, following Beck’s (1999) terminology, around pollution, radiation, viral diseases, immigration and certainly terror, pushing them to the front of public and policy discourse. Surprisingly, however, the fear of nuclearization has been conspicuously absent from the discourse on risk society and has not elicited societal mobilization.

Thus while the nature and scope of social changes seem to indicate that Israel is entering the second stage of reflexive modernization, as alluded to by Beck *et al.* (2003), they also exemplify the fragmentary and ambivalent character through which the transformation of modernization and its key institutions is being accomplished. The Vanunu affair, which evolved from the transnational mobilization against Israel’s nuclear policy and secrecy, offers ample evidence for the argument that global forces do not have the same influence and impact on each and every state (Mann, 1997). More importantly for our argument, it shows the differentiated significance of TSMs’ activities as they manage to problematize certain aspects of the political and the societal as defined by modernity, while they fail

to do so regarding other aspects. Israel's nuclear policy of secrecy and opacity is a case in point.

Israeli scholars have explained Israel's nuclear secrecy through two main perspectives: neo-realism and elitism. According to the neo-realist perspective in international relations, secrecy and opacity are strategies designed to enable states to protect themselves in an anarchic world and to develop the bomb without external interference (Cohen & Frankel, 1991; Aronson, 1992; Evron, 1994). While the neo-realist perspective deals with nuclear secrecy within the realm of inter-state politics, the elitist approach shifts the spotlight to intra-state politics. According to the elitist approach, the strategy of nuclear secrecy and opacity aims at neutralizing a possible public debate, which could reduce the power and interests of the political and the expert elites (Kimmerling, 2003). Both explanations are plausible as they tackle different aspects of nuclear politics and point at the different levels in which it operates and performs.

Notwithstanding a different emphasis of analysis, both neo-realists and elitists share a common assumption in explaining Israeli nuclear politics that takes the container model of the state as a point of departure. However, the Vanunu affair introduced new kinds of politics and mobilization that did not originate or stop at state boundaries: transnational social movements and networks. Neither of the above-mentioned approaches offer analytical tools for explaining transnational mobilization against the nuclear and for specifying the conditions that make possible its success or failure in bringing about policy and normative change. Moreover, in explaining the resilience of nuclear secrecy and opacity, both approaches diminish the central aspect brought into relief by the Vanunu affair. That is, even when nuclear secrets were disclosed and opacity was publicly challenged – first by Vanunu himself and then by the TSMs' activities – the Israeli state's policy of secrecy and opacity remained intact and went unchallenged by local civil society. In this regard, Cohen has rightly observed that the policy of secrecy and opacity in Israel depended over the years not only on top-down censorship but also on tacit agreement by citizens to look the other way and acquiesce (1992, p. 219).

This oxymoronic situation of keeping open secrets intimate, out in the open and yet a part of the state–society shared closet, calls for a constructivist approach sensitive to the power of norms, and identities in explaining political processes. Constructivism considers how ideational structures shape the state's rationale and the very way actors define themselves (Wendt, 1999). Unlike neo-realist and neo-liberal approaches to international relations, which regard all states as power-driven units that function in a rational way to maximize their utilities in material terms, constructivism holds that state interests and rationales are not isolated from culture but rather shaped by and enacted within a common web of ideas, cultural understandings, values and norms (Finnemore, 1996).

Security interests concerning the nuclear are not exempted from the cultural and social construction processes that shape their meaning. Following this approach, Katzenstein (1996) argues that security interests are not necessarily determined by rational politics and relationships between states in a system that is anarchic by its nature; they are rather the result of the social construction processes in which actors and institutions engage while defining collectively held norms, national identity and discourses.³

Drawing on a constructivist approach, this article posits that Israel's policy of nuclear secrecy and opacity should be understood as part of the socio-cultural process that constructs the Israeli state as a *secret state*. A *secrete state* is not one which maintains secrecy around national security issues – indeed, it is difficult to find any state in which

security concerns are not veiled by the cloth of secrecy. A secret state is rather one that constantly constructs and manifests its devotion to the idea of secrecy and opacity regarding security issues, mobilizing society around this common web of meanings.⁴ Through this process of social construction, secrecy and opacity become part of a frame alignment, which defines the identity of the state and its citizenry as together.⁵ Secrecy and opacity are, in other words, less a strategic issue than a symbolic one, a constitutive part of the discourse on national identity and national sovereignty that ties state and society together in a web of *cultural intimacy*. According to anthropologist Michael Herzfeld (1997), cultural intimacy is the complex of cultural understandings and normative codes that the nation-state and its citizens keep together, binding them as partners of a shared national and sovereign community.

From this point of view, nuclear opacity and secrecy are not only an inter-state strategy as understood by neo-realism, or conversely a top-down strategy of censorship as argued by elitist explanations, but rather an inextricable part of the discourse on national sovereignty: that is, a discourse on domestic legitimacy that emphasizes the normative and value-laden link between the authority and the defined political community.⁶

Decoding the cultural and normative web of meanings that construct nuclear secrecy as part of the cultural intimacy linking state and society is critical for understanding the obstacles faced by TSMs in creating local/global articulations, in mobilizing local civil society and producing alternative framing to that of the national state around the nuclear. Moreover, the state–society collusion around nuclear secrecy shapes, in turn, the channels of mobilization and the strategies of collective action open to TSMs in their attempt at achieving social and political impact. Based on the Israeli case, we argue that the conditions that prevent the effective influence of anti-nuclear TSMs and the articulation of an anti-nuclear frame alignment that challenges national framings are related to two main factors: first, the state’s ability to create a societal collusion around nuclear secrecy. Thus, we argue, in the Israeli context nuclear opacity and secrecy are an inextricable part of a nationally constructed discourse on identity and sovereignty that links state and society. The second factor is the tendency displayed by TSMs to redirect their activities to the state and inter-state level when confronting a reluctant local civil society, and to channel their cultural influence to the global level while forsaking attempts to engage the local and the national level.

We analyze empirical data collected from a variety of sources: Internet sites, the local and global press, pamphlets, newsletters and reports, personal correspondence, and in-depth interviews with local and transnational activists. Drawing on this wide array of data sources, we advocate investigation of the empirical complex relations between TSMs, the nation-state and the local civil society through a case study method. According to Feagin *et al.* (1991, pp. 6–7), the advantages of in-depth case studies are that they allow for the grounding of concepts in natural settings studied at close hand and provide information from a number of sources and over a period of time, thus permitting a more holistic study of complex social networks and social actions.

This paper is divided into three sections. The first section delves into the modes in which nuclear secrecy and opacity served as a means of constructing national sovereignty and identity around the Vanunu affair. The second describes the way in which anti-nuclear TSMs framed nuclear risk through the Vanunu case. The third section analyzes the normative dynamics stimulated by the encounters between the secret nuclear state, local

civil society, and the TSMs, and their impact on the ability to advance the idea of a nuclear-free world.

Reconstructing National Sovereignty and Identity

In the fall of 1986 Mordechai Vanunu, a former junior technician at the Dimona nuclear reactor, and at the time a student at a southern Israeli university, provided information and dozens of photographs of the bomb factory to the London *Sunday Times*. Despite attempts to undermine the report, including disinformation fed to London papers by its Mossad espionage agency (Hounam, 1999, pp. 113–126), Israel was unable to prevent the publication of a detailed feature article (*Sunday Times*, 5 October 1986), which immediately became a journalistic coup.

To some degree, the step that was taken by Vanunu strengthened the state's national sovereignty and identity. The policy of secrecy and opacity developed concurrently with the building of its nuclear reactor, adjacent to the southern town of Dimona in the heart of the Negev desert. The reactor, which was built in 1958, developed the ultimate weapon in the greatest secrecy, on the basis of a military and political alliance with other countries, notably France. In time, when complete secrecy could no longer be kept, as the USA, on 21 December 1960, publically denounced Israel for building a nuclear reactor, a strategy of opacity substituted the secrecy surrounding the project and Israel's policy became one of neither confirming nor denying that it possessed nuclear weapons.⁷

The report in the *Sunday Times*, following the information that was transferred by Vanunu, embarrassed Israel, particularly as the report could also be published afterwards in Israel – as indeed happened. Its detailed publication in all of Israel's newspapers, however, did not terminate the state politics of secrecy and opacity around the nuclear issue.

Soon, the state's authorities started with ritual demonstrations of sovereign control through the Vanunu case.⁸ This was strikingly attested by the manner of Vanunu's arrest and subsequent trial. Vanunu was lured from London to Rome with the help of a Mossad 'temptress' who went by the name of Cindy, and then he was abducted and brought secretly to Israel.⁹ Israel could have requested his extradition, but doing so could have undercut the image of an omnipotent state that does not allow its malefactors to hide behind international law and the new, global discourse of peace and human rights.

Vanunu was thus brought to Israel, tried, convicted of treason, and sentenced in 1988 to eighteen years in prison.¹⁰ The trial was conducted in camera, which was also intended to reinforce secrecy. The twelve years' solitary confinement in prison was probably directed to exhibit the act of concealment. Even photographs of the prisoner could not be published, as his physical image might have undermined his deliberate demonization by the state, one aspect of which was to keep Vanunu out of sight. In any event, these measures were not imposed out of fear that Vanunu would reveal Israel's nuclear secrets, those secrets having already been published around the world.

In this connection, we should also note that the prison authorities forced Vanunu to wear an iron mask when he was brought to court, painted over the windows of the police van that transported him, and constantly sounded the horns of the police vehicles to drown out any possible attempt by the prisoner to convey messages to reporters.¹¹ Thus, secrets did not remain quiet but became a *noisy silence*, while opacity turned into an 'active' opacity serving the social construction of the nuclear as a taboo.

In fact, the rituals of secrecy and opacity proved to be a domestic method of re-nationalizing the nuclear issue. Through it, the secret state constituted the nation as a closed community of (Jewish) Israelis who are in the know but are silent. 'I wanted to confirm what everyone knows', Vanunu explained in his trial.¹² And rightly so. As an ethno-national community in which security is the centerpiece, many aspects of nuclearization in Israel are an open secret: 'everyone' knows about them, but remaining in silence becomes a national mission, a means of identifying with the community and part of its national identity. The preservation of the open secrets as secrets, and the impression that individuals who abide by this secrecy are responsible citizens, defined in a very clear and profound way the *cultural intimacy* between the Israeli Jews and their nation-state. Cultural intimacy, as the anthropologist Michael Herzfeld (1997) terms it, is the complex of the cultural understandings and the normative codes that the nation-state and its citizens keep together. Interestingly, in all post-colonial nuclearized states – India, Pakistan, and Israel – nuclear development was bound up with questions of national sovereignty and identity. 'These are not nuclear tests, they are national tests', officials in India insisted, as they do now in Iran (Abraham, 1998; Nizamani, 2000).

Societal mobilization and participation in the construction of nuclear secrecy in Israel was clearly evinced by the press coverage of the Vanunu affair. The Israeli press played a central role in framing Vanunu as one who 'crossed all lines', as one reporter wrote.¹³ All the newspapers, without exception, clung to the line of secrecy and opacity, rejected the possibility that Vanunu was ideologically motivated, and sanctioned his description as a traitor and a spy, who was motivated by sheer greed.¹⁴

Practically, the press depoliticized the affair by reducing Vanunu's act to his personality and pursuing the character of a traitor.¹⁵ The press harped, for example, on Vanunu's conversion to Christianity and mentioned that he had hung a crucifix in his cell.¹⁶ One article focused on Vanunu's work as a nude model during his student days; another interviewed one of his high-school teachers who commented: 'He was quiet, but sly.'¹⁷ A reporter took an example of Vanunu's handwriting to a psychologist and a graphologist (without Vanunu's consent, of course) for character analysis. The psychologist said that 'mentally, he is functioning at the adolescent level' and that he was experiencing an identity crisis that was driving him to extreme behavior; the graphologist found that he suffered mood swings.¹⁸ The press also dealt with Vanunu's intimate relations with his partner, as reflected in his personal diary, which a reporter obtained underhandedly. One journalist blamed Vanunu for delivering information about fabricating a nuclear bomb to Hamas' leadership in prison.¹⁹ Nor was Vanunu's family spared. A well-known columnist, wrote in his daily: 'The Vanunu family will become synonymous with treason and espionage and damaging Israel's reputation.'²⁰ Not content to demonize Vanunu, the press played up the sensational elements of the affair centering on 'Cindy the blond temptress' and describing Vanunu's abduction as having supposedly taken place on the high seas.²¹

These and other articles turned Vanunu into an outcast so as to delineate the boundaries between *us* and *them*, ensuring that even though the Vanunu affair made the headlines, and secrets were already leaked, nuclear policy continued to be a non-issue in the sense that no serious public debate concerning its benefits versus its dangers was held. The cultural politics of constructing secrets – even overt secrets – to empower national sovereignty and identity was summed up succinctly by Shimon Peres, who as Prime Minister gave the order for Vanunu's abduction to Israel. Expressing his objection to the publication of the

partial trial transcript, Peres said: 'The public knows that there are things they don't want to know.'²²

Thus, the window of opportunity that Vanunu might have opened did not lead to a meaningful public discussion about the necessity of nuclear weapon in Israel. Nothing more illustrates this than the surveys conducted by Arian (1999). When asked, over the years, what was the main issue that the government should deal with, the nuclear issue was not raised at all by the Israeli public (Arian, 1999, p. 75). This compared with 10 percent in surveys taken in the USA on the same question (Schuman *et al.*, 1986).

Was this, then, the conclusion of the Vanunu affair? In the reflexive world risk society it was only the beginning. In fact, the secret state's flaunting of its supposedly invulnerable sovereignty and identity lubricates the engines of anti-nuclear TSMs and drives them to act.

Anti-nuclear Global Politics

Some time after Vanunu's abduction by Israeli agents became known, TSMs became active on the issue. Their involvement was compatible with Risse *et al.*'s (1999) spiral model, which holds that a local organization that finds its course of action blocked calls on global organizations to take action on new subjects. In this connection, we direct the reader's attention to the Israeli Committee for Mordechai Vanunu and for a Middle East Free of Atomic, Biological and Chemical Weapons, which was established by a few Israelis at the beginning of the 1990s. Given the hostile public sphere around Vanunu and the revelation of Israel's nuclear secrets, the committee appealed to global organizations, based on a simple reason cited by one of the local activists: 'We know for a long, long time that international solidarity helps in local struggles. Lately, we encounter again and again the fact that many of our struggles are global.'²³

The appeal had its effect. During the 1990s, networks of committees were formed in Australia, Britain, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, India, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Russia, Switzerland, Taiwan, and the USA.²⁴ The idea was to create a transnational discourse coalition, and a kind of global public sphere. For that purpose, the network was backed by peace movements, human rights organizations, and environmental groups, nuclear weapons being only one of many issues with which they were involved.²⁵

Resistance to the bomb has existed since Hiroshima, and the struggle against nuclear weapons has known some periods of vigorous action, especially at the beginning of the 1970s (Wittner, 1997). Anti-nuclear activities around Vanunu, however, were different, in many aspects. Invoking a range of political strategies combined with cultural symbolism typical of new social movements' tactics, the TSMs not only made many people around the world aware of Vanunu's arrest and his ongoing isolation but also disseminated the universal meaning of the risk against which Vanunu protested.

The networks' main operational strategy was to organize a joint worldwide campaign in support of Vanunu. It included, for example, the 22,000-name petition handed in at the Israeli embassy in London on 27 March 1995, the anniversary of Vanunu's sentencing to eighteen years in prison.²⁶

Anyone looking for signs of the possible emergence of a global civil society will certainly find them in the form of this globally coordinated campaign. In the information society, diverse organizations scattered around the world cooperate and are mutually

updated within seconds by means of the Internet and email, overstepping cultural and political boundaries. When the Israeli Committee for Vanunu demonstrated – for example, on the anniversary of Vanunu’s incarceration, demonstrations were held the same day in Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, London, Oslo, Toronto, Ottawa, Sidney, Vancouver, Wellington, Winnipeg, Hiroshima, and more.²⁷ Illustrating the global character of the struggle, from time to time, when Israel’s representatives visited world capitals, demonstrators holding posters calling for Vanunu’s release were waiting for them.²⁸

Among the most active groups were the American, the Norwegian and the British committees. Most committees made their messages known via the Internet, newsletters, petitions, public meetings, conferences, petitions, and vigils; and they held marches and monthly sit-ins. Participants in these events read out letters from Vanunu and disseminated books about nuclear disarmament and peace, as well as pamphlets, tapes, T-shirts, and stickers.²⁹ From a practical point of view the committees’ main effort was to put forward an alternative frame to that of the Israeli state, describing Vanunu as a prisoner of conscience and international worker for peace who had been willing to sacrifice his freedom for that cause. One success recorded by the American committee was a petition to President Clinton signed by thirty-six members of the Upper House declaring that Vanunu had suffered enough as a prisoner of conscience, and asking for his release on humanitarian grounds.³⁰ Another political weapon used at the cultural level was the recruitment of celebrities. The British branch, which was the most active of the committees, specialized in this technique. Theater figures and literary personalities, film actors and Nobel laureates signed petitions for Vanunu’s release. Some of the best known of these figures became highly involved in the cause, including the playwright Harold Pinter and the actresses Julie Christie and, in particular, Susannah York.³¹ The British committee also tried successfully to persuade MPs to raise questions in the Commons about Vanunu.³²

TSMs use sometimes exceptional methods to concretize the alternative frame to that of the state. One such method was executed by the Eloffs, a Christian couple from St. Paul, Minnesota, who in 1997 adopted Vanunu as their son. Both in their late sixties, the Eloff couple were civil rights activists and had children of their own. They used to travel around the world in an effort to elicit support for their adopted son. Invoking the court judgment that approved the adoption, the couple sought to have Vanunu brought to the USA. The adoption was intended to breach the isolation that the Israeli state forced on Vanunu, to challenge the state’s monopoly of his fate, and to show that the prisoner was not alone.³³

Letters were sent to the prisoner, as a political means to symbolically create the feeling that he was not alone, and numerous Internet sites were created to keep Vanunu and the cause he stood for in the public eye. For that reason, the Federation of American Scientists (FAS), whose members include fifty-five Nobel laureates, published satellite photographs of Israel on the aptly named Public Eye section of its website. The site registered no fewer than 1.2 million hits, of which 46,000 were from Israel, during the week in which Israel’s nuclear security secrets were posted.³⁴ Leaving no doubt that the Web is also an arena of political contestation in the world risk society, Steven Aftergood, the project initiator of the civilian spy satellite, noted: ‘The time has come for Israel to get used to the new rules of the game. Everything is open to observation.’³⁵

In an era which puts the individual at the center and challenges expert knowledge, it was easy for the global network to turn Vanunu into a hero of the global age: ‘What are the

qualifying factors that make a hero?’ asked Summer Lambert from the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, adding: ‘Vanunu did what a respectable citizen . . . should do. He is a man who stands before us all as an example of political and global responsibility.’³⁶ The anti-nuclear TSMs acclaimed Vanunu as a whistleblower, the world’s first nuclear hostage, and a hero of global democracy.³⁷ Evidently, such a perspective was at polar odds with the framing of him by the Israeli state and press.

The TSMs disseminated the slogan ‘I am your spy’ to underscore the universal character of Vanunu’s act. They held demonstrations wearing Vanunu masks to protest Israel’s years-long refusal to allow the prisoner’s photograph to be taken, and they referred to him as ‘the man in the iron mask’ in symbolic protest against the way he was gagged. The network also made the image of Vanunu’s palm – on which he had scrawled the circumstances of his abduction and then held it up for the cameras on the way to a court hearing – a symbol in the struggle for freedom of speech. By means of their symbolic activity, the movements were trying to appeal to people’s moral sense and elicit in them feelings of injustice, wrongdoing, anger, and compassion. This form of moral crusade and emphasis on emotions typifies the activity of new social movements in what Beck (1999, pp. 37–40) calls global subpolitics. During his term of imprisonment Vanunu was honored by several international organizations, received the Right Livelihood Award, known as the alternative Nobel Peace Prize, and was named more than once as a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize. Only past laureates can submit names of candidates, and the very fact of submission confers honor and recognition.³⁸

The anti-nuclear network of collective action in the Vanunu affair raises the question as to whether it had an influence on the global, the national, and the local levels. Moreover, has this transnational activity added up to the possibility of a global–local interconnectedness that could advance the ideal of a global civil society in the future?

When the Global Meets the Local

The high point of the encounter between the TSMs and the Israeli reality was supposed to be a semi-academic international conference held in October 1996, in Tel Aviv, Israel’s metropolis. The gathering was given the title ‘The International Conference on Democracy, Human Rights and Mordechai Vanunu’. The organizers managed to recruit some well-known personalities, including the physicist Professor Joseph Rotblat, co-recipient of the 1995 Nobel Peace Prize, and Daniel Ellsberg, himself a culture hero of the peace movements. The conference was meant to highlight the nuclear risk. It attracted very little attention in Israel: the press barely covered it, the public failed to attend, and Vanunu’s image was not altered. Nevertheless, the sponsors were heartened by the fact that the conference had been held at all, and continued to try to reach the Israeli public by other means as well.³⁹

In a week of international protest in September 1997 volunteers from a dozen countries gathered in Tel Aviv to mark the eleventh anniversary of Vanunu’s abduction and arrest. Their hopes were high. Sam Day, head of the American committee, wrote: ‘The conference succeeded beyond our expectations, so we are returning again to Israel and taking the campaign into the streets.’⁴⁰ With great expectations, then, the activists took up positions on street corners in Israel’s big cities, set up booths, and tried to organize a protest campaign. The members of the Israeli committee were also optimistic, believing that they were about to reach Israeli society; as one of them put it: ‘The criticism of the harsh

treatment of Mordechai Vanunu at prison and his long sentence became more publicly acceptable. We could never dream [of] such change in public opinion and media treatment.⁴¹

The optimism, however, proved to be wishful thinking. The activists were frequently taunted by the public and told to go back where they came from. Overall, the public, which was socialized politically by the nuclear secret state, reacted as if the activists were creatures from another world, *weirdoes* trying to protect a traitor and totally unable to understand Israel's security needs.⁴²

Within a few days it became clear that the TSMs' attempts to establish a frame alignment of risk, within which large numbers of Israelis would adopt their position, had yielded no tangible results. Studies of new social movements have shown clearly that the ability to create a frame alignment is of crucial importance in achieving political influence. This was clearly evinced, for example, in the wake of the Chernobyl disaster when, according to Kriesi (1995), the official state interpretation in France that Chernobyl did not constitute a problem for their country became the dominant one, whereas in other European countries such as Sweden, Denmark and Germany the anti-nuclear local and global movements were able to give a different meaning to the same event. In Israel, however, neither the public nor the political parties thought that the Vanunu affair had anything to do with them. The prisoner was perhaps right when he wrote to Sam Day: 'You and others in Washington had more concern on this case than the politicians in Israel.'⁴³

The Israeli peace movements, unlike other peace movements worldwide (Marullo & Lofland, 1996; Matush, 2000), address the nuclear subject as if it were unrelated to questions of peace and war. Environmental groups, too, shunned the nuclear question in general and the Vanunu affair in particular. Greenpeace International was established in reaction to nuclear testing, but the Israeli Greenpeace activists ignored the subject. 'Conditions are not yet ripe for dealing with the nuclear issue in Israel', one of the activists said when asked to explain their silence.⁴⁴ Whereas the Israeli Committee to Free Mordechai Vanunu was unable to rid itself of the public stigma of being 'too political', Greenpeace was not 'political enough' to deal with the nuclear issue.

The protest week of 1997 marked the end of the TSMs' concerted efforts to reach the Israeli public and to engage the local civil society in the Vanunu affair. From that time on, the number of international activists who demonstrated near Dimona was usually higher than that of the Israelis who protested with them. Discouraged by the failed attempt at promoting anti-nuclear ideas within the Israeli public, and unveiling the cultural politics of opacity, the TSMs changed their tactics. They gradually focused on more moderate and well-established activities typical of pressure groups, attempting mainly to influence Israeli decision makers. They addressed Israeli ministers, the President and the Prime Minister, urging them to at least to improve Vanunu's conditions of imprisonment.⁴⁵ In the following years, such meetings, the many attempts to meet the Israeli President or Prime Minister, and to talk about Vanunu's conditions of imprisonment came to nothing.⁴⁶

The only exception was in 1998, when the Norwegian government asked Israel to remove Vanunu from the isolation block in which he had been languishing for such a lengthy period. The Norwegian Prime Minister made the request to his Israeli counterpart, Benjamin Netanyahu, when he visited Oslo. Netanyahu tried to rebuff it with the typical Westphalian argument that this was an internal Israeli affair. His hosts, though, were

insistent. They reminded him that Norway had sold Israel heavy water in the past, which Israel had then used for other than peaceful purposes, in breach of its commitment. Moreover, they said, the conditions of Vanunu's incarceration violated international conventions. A day later, 12 March 1998, Vanunu was released from solitary confinement after more than twelve years.⁴⁷ Apparently, his release was the result of this pressure by the Norwegian activists, and hence, to a certain degree, of indirect pressure by the global movement.⁴⁸ It was an initiative that perhaps did most to advance the universal meaning of the anti-nuclear struggle. But did it change Israel's nuclear policy, or did it undermine the dominant Israeli frame concerning secrecy and opacity?

Many anti-nuclear movements have scored successes in the anti-nuclear struggle by means of pressure on national leaders. In a comparative study on nuclear protest in Europe, Rochon and Meyer (1997) and Flam (1994) show that in some cases the European movements posed concrete challenges to the decision makers in their countries by making relevant information public and generating political debates. The Israeli case, however, was different, as nuclear secrecy and opacity were part of the state's constituting its national sovereignty and identity, and the global activists were judged through this perspective.

The new direction taken by the TSMs' activities – addressing the state leadership directly – is typical of TSMs' difficulties in winning a local civil society. It may transform them into a sort of global status group with its own frame, identity, and way of life. This is perhaps the result of what Macdonald (1994) and Hopgood (2000) call globalization based mainly on the liberal-pluralist approach of defense of civil rights only. In the Vanunu case, it was strikingly evident when the global activists visited Israel. They usually tended to pay brief visits to the country, to attend one small event or demonstration, visit the prison gate, and call out the prisoner's name close by the wall. 'Did he hear us?' they wondered on their way back to the airport the same day.⁴⁹

The British committee organized public auctions under the aegis of the Vanunu Trust, which also took place in a kind of borderless world, amid a global culture of celebrities, cocktails, classical music in the background, the men in fashionable suits and the women in evening gowns. What expresses the global status group more than the following?:

Those of you who have attended Vanunu Benefits will know of the pleasure – touched by sadness – that they afford. The benefits have always sold out ... on a damp night, last October, we gathered at Leighton House. To the music of the fountain we sipped wine as we gazed at an oriental splendor of architecture and ceramics ... We heard sublime music from the Velvet First Choir and from cello, flute, drums and harp ... There was provoking humor from Arnold Brown and Mike Rosen, politically evocative speeches from Paul Foon and Tony Benn, together with moving readings by the luminous Susannah York and Julie Christie. Where else do you find such variety, such quality at such modest prices – and at the same time, help such a brave and deserving man?⁵⁰

From his prison cell, Vanunu wrote: 'Another year has passed, and now ... with all these activities in the U.S. and Europe, I am still here ... maybe ... whatever you do will not help. That is what they [the Israeli authorities] are trying to prove during all these years.'⁵¹ These were moments of despair for the prisoner. They indicated, furthermore,

the limitations of TSMs' cultural politics when dealing with a nuclear secret state in the world risk society.

Conclusions

Despite the ongoing debate on globalization – its meaning, its very existence and its consequences – there is wide agreement that we live in an era of increasing interconnectedness that reframes the meaning of state and national boundaries. However, the detailed process-tracing by which global cultural innovation may become domestically effective or ineffective vis-à-vis nation-states and local civil societies, and the detailed indication of the fields in which such influence may materialize, still await further elaboration.

Through the in-depth analysis of the Vanunu affair and Israel's nuclear policy of opacity and secrecy we probed into the obstacles faced by TSMs in creating local/global articulations, in mobilizing local civil society and producing alternative framing to that of the national state around the nuclear. The Israeli case illustrated two main obstacles crucial for preventing the formation of transboundary mobilization: the first related to the state's ability to create societal collusion around nuclear secrecy. Thus, we argue, nuclear opacity and secrecy in the Israeli context are not only an inter-state strategy or top-down censorship exercised by state institutions but also an inextricable part of a nationally constructed discourse on identity and sovereignty that links state and society in a web of cultural intimacy and complicity. The second and interrelated obstacle lies in the mobilization channels and the strategies of collective action employed by TSMs themselves. In this regard, we pointed out the tendency displayed by TSMs to redirect their activities to the state and inter-state level when confronting a reluctant local civil society, and to perform as a global status group that exerts its cultural influence at the global level while forsaking attempts to engage the local and the national levels.

Vanunu's experience as a free man, since he left prison on 21 April 2004, is perhaps another example of the secret state's ability to use effective methods against its opponents. Vanunu was released under restrictive conditions that do not allow him to leave the country or to talk to the press. Not a year went by before he found himself in prison again awaiting yet another trial on charges of violating the terms of his release.⁵² Again, the TSMs mobilized to help him. The reader, however, should not be surprised by the possibility that in the long saga – its end not in sight – TSMs would continue to face difficulties in bracketing the global and the local together, as long as nuclear secrecy and opacity continue to serve as a national symbol, and part of Israel's sovereignty and identity.⁵³

Notes

1. According to Beck *et al.*, 'reflexive' does not mean the 'increase of mastery and consciousness, but a heightened awareness that mastery is impossible' (2003, p. 3).
2. Numerous works present the various changes that Israel has undergone in recent years. See Kimmerling (2001); Shafir and Peled (2000, 2002); Ram (2000, 2004); Al-Haj and Ben-Eliezer (2003); Ben-Eliezer (2003); Filc and Ram (2004); Kemp and Rajzman (2004).
3. On constructivist theory presenting an alternative to both neo-realist and neo-liberal theories in international relations studies, see Hopf (1998).

4. We use the term 'secret state' in a different way from that used by Thompson (1979) and Thurlow (1994), who use the same concept for describing states under the influence of security services.
5. On the term frame alignment, see Snow and Benford (1992).
6. On the concept of 'national sovereignty' as opposed to 'state sovereignty', see Barkin and Cronin (1994). According to them, much of the theoretical discourse on sovereignty fails to distinguish between two types of discourses that have existed throughout history. On the one hand, 'state' sovereignty that justifies equality and reciprocity between states; and on the other, 'national' sovereignty which performs as a principle of domestic legitimacy, emphasizing the normative and value-laden link between the authority and the defined political community.
7. On the numerous devices Israel used in order to create opaque strategy, see Cohen and Frankel (1991); Hersh (1991); Cohen (1998, pp. 195–218, 277–292).
8. On rituals of demonstration of sovereign control in general, see Biersteker and Weber (1996); through land disputes, see Kemp and Ben-Eliezer (2000).
9. See Hounam (1999, pp. 83–95); see also 'Cindy seduced Vanunu: let's go off for a cruise', *Yediot Aharonot* [daily], 16 November 1986.
10. Michal Polity, 'Guilty of treason and espionage', *Yediot Aharonot*, 25 March 1988.
11. As a means of resisting Israel's policy of secrecy and opacity, Vanunu communicated his kidnap to reporters by writing on his hand on his way to his trial.
12. Ron Kampeas, Associated Press, *National News*, 25 November 1999, Available at <http://detnews.com/1999/nation/9911/25/11250048.htm>
13. Dolev Aharon, 'Vanunu, the man who has crossed all lines', *Maariv*, 7 November 1986.
14. An accusation that was denied by Hounam, the journalist who revealed Vanunu's secrets (Hounam, 1999, esp. pp. 71–82).
15. On nuclearism, see Lifton and Falk (1982); on 'nuclear normality', see Hook (1985); Lifton and Markusen (1990). The term 'Nukespeak' is a pun on Orwell's 'newspeak'.
16. *Yediot Aharonot*, 29 December 1994.
17. *Yediot Aharonot*, 3 November 1986.
18. 'A graphologist: Vanunu is shy, insecure and tends to moodiness', *Yediot Aharonot*, 17 November 1986.
19. Which turned out to be a complete lie. See Zvi Harel, 'Vanunu against *Yediot Aharonot*', *Haaretz*, 24 May 2004.
20. Dan Margalit, 'A noble price for treason', *Maariv*, 17 February 2004.
21. *Yediot Aharonot*, 16 November 1986.
22. <http://www.nonviolence.org/vanunu/archive2/yaeditorial.html>
23. Ilan Shalif, 'The globalization of our struggle', 21 July 1997, Available at <http://www.tao.ca/ainfos/A-Infos97/3/0142.html>. Also, an interview with Reina Mosse, an activist who is a member of the Israeli committee that supports Vanunu.
24. The addresses of all these committees and campaigns are listed at <http://www.vanunu.freesev.co.uk/page4.html>
25. Among these was Amnesty International; see <http://www.amnesty.org/news/1996/51506490> or the Committee on the Middle East (COME), Available at <http://www.MiddleEast.org/COME.HTM>
26. <http://www.vanunu.freesev.co.uk/chronol.html>
27. <http://www.baltimorechronicle.com/vanunu.html>
28. See, for example, the Norwegian Free Vanunu Committee, an appeal to Foreign Minister David Levi on his visit to Oslo, 26 November 1996.
29. A letter from Sam Day to the authors, 9 October 1999, and another letter on 1 June 2000. See also *Newsletter of the US Campaign to Free Mordechai Vanunu*, Fall 1999, Winter 2000, Spring 2000, etc., as well as correspondence of one of the authors with Heffermehl. See also <http://www.aseistakieItalyjialiitt.fi/vanunu/vanueng1.htm>; Fredrik S. Heffermehl, 'Disarmament – human rights: Mordechai Vanunu – 11 years of torture', *IPS News Reports*, Available at <http://www.oneworld.org/ips2/oct.vanunu.html>
30. <http://www.nonviolence.org/vanunu/archive/s9936members.html>. See also the President's response at <http://www.nonviolence.org/vanunu/s99signers.html>
31. Interview with Marie Stone, committee member of the UK Campaign to Free Mordechai Vanunu, held in Jaffa in 2001.
32. See http://www.coventry.org.uk/news.neewswire/oddy-mep/9803_13b.htm
33. Interview of one of the authors with Nicholas and Mary Eoloff, members of Pax Christi, USA, and the US Committee to Free Mordechai Vanunu. See also Neri Livneh, 'Our son Mordechai', English translation from *Haaretz*, 24 December 1999, Available at <http://www.nonviolenceorg.vaunu.archive2.sonmordechai.html>,

- as well as Chris Tomlinson, 'U.S. couple adopts Israeli traitor', 29 October 1997, *Seattle Times*, Available at http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/extra/browse/htmI97/adop_103997.htm
34. <http://fas.org/nuke/hew/Israel/>; also wysiwyg://38/http://www.fas.org
 35. Ronen Bergman, 'No more secrets', *Haaretz*, 8 June 2000. Also available at <http://www.nonviolence.org/vanunu/june8.html>
 36. Summer Lambert, 'Mordechai Vanunu', Available at http://www.napf.org/hero.mordechai_vanunu.html
 37. E.g. <http://www.vanunu.freereserve.co.uk>, 23 March 2005.
 38. <http://www.peacemagazine.org/9701/vanunu.htm>. In 2001, for example, Nobel Peace Laureate Mairead Corrigan Maguire put forward Vanunu's candidacy. See <http://www.nonviolence.org/vanunu/sp01nobel.html>
 39. *Voices for Vanunu* (1997); *Vanunu and the Bomb* (1998).
 40. Alliance for Survival, Peace Conversion Times, Available at <http://www.concentric.net/~Nonukes/vanunu.htm>. See also http://salam.org/activism/vanunu_protests.html
 41. Ilan Shalif, Available at <http://www.tao.ca/ainfos/A-Infos97/3/0142.html>
 42. Interviews held in 2001 with Felice Cohen-Joppa, associate coordinator of the US Campaign to Free Mordechai Vanunu and editor of the *Nuclear Resister Newsletter*; and with Marie Stone, committee member of the UK Campaign to Free Mordechai Vanunu.
 43. A letter from Mordechai Vanunu to Sam Day, sent on 9 March 1999, arrived on 24 July 1999. See <http://www.nonviolence.org.vanunu/archive/letter.html>
 44. Interview with the spokesman of Israeli Greenpeace, January 1999.
 45. An example of an international delegation's meeting with Israeli Minister of Justice Daviv Liabi, Available at http://www.nando.net/newsroom/ntn/world/040696/world14_3356.htm
 46. See, for example, reports by Jeremy Corbyn, MP, on his recent attempt to visit Mordechai Vanunu, Available at <http://www.llb.labournet.org.uk/1998/june/1nt6/html>. See also <http://news6.tdo.bbc.co.uk/low/english/world/middleeast/newsid80000/80479/.stm>
 47. Batsheva Tsur, 'Vanunu allowed out of solitary', *Jerusalem Post*, Internet edition, 13 March 1998, Available at <http://www.jpost.com/com.archive.13.Mar.1998/News.Article-3.html>. See also <http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/go.asp?MFAHoa4to>
 48. Reported by Heffermehl in a letter to one of the authors, 5 November 2000. See also http://news6.thdo.bbc.co.uk/low/english/world/middle_east/ne..65149.st; and <http://www/jpost.com/com/archive/13.mar.1998/News/article3.html>
 49. For example, <http://www.peacemagazine.org/9701/vanunu.htm>
 50. See <http://www.vanunu.freereserve.co.uk.page8.html> or another example at <http://www.nonviolence.org.vanunu.sp01artists.htm>
 51. A letter from Ashkelon prison written by Vanunu in October 1999 to the British committee and received there in late February 2000. See <http://www.nonviolence.org/vanunu/sum00vanletter.html>
 52. 'Vanunu faces new jail term', *The Guardian*, 18 March 2005; Charge sheet, Jerusalem, 17 March 2005, Available at www.vanunu.freereserve.co.uk/htdocs.chargesheet.htm
 53. After this manuscript had been submitted, actress and activist Susannah York took part in an international Shakespeare festival which was held in Tel Aviv on 6 June 2007. Dedicating one Shakespeare Sonata to Vanunu, the Israeli audience, unsurprisingly, was outraged, and some even left the hall. See *Ynet*, 6 June 2007.

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Adriana Kemp is an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Tel Aviv University and a fellow at the Van Leer Institute of Jerusalem. Her main research areas are the sociology of labor migration, citizenship, and civil society. She is the author of *Foreigners and Workers: The Political Economy of Labor Migration in Israel* (with Rebeca Rajzman) (HaKibbutz Hameuchad Press and Van Leer Institute of Jerusalem, 2008) and the co-editor of *Israelis in Conflict: Hegemonies, Identities, Challenges* (Brighton: Sussex University Press, 2004) and *Citizenship Gaps in Israel* (HaKibbutz Hameuchad, 2008). Among her recent articles are: ‘Managing migration, reprioritizing national citizenship: undocumented labor migrants’ children and policy reforms in Israel’, *Theoretical Inquiries in Law*, 8(2) (2007), pp. 663–691; ‘Between state and civil society: the formation of a refugee regime in Israel’, *Law, Society and Culture* (2008); ‘Fertile and strangers: the gendered biopolitics of Israeli labor migration programs’ (forthcoming), in: Y. Shenhav & Y. Yonna (Eds) *Race, Racialization and Racism*; ‘Tel Aviv is not foreign to you: urban incorporation policy on labor migrants in Israel’, *International Migration Review*, 38 (2004), pp. 26–51; and ‘International migration, domestic work and care work: undocumented Latina migrants in Israel’, *Gender and Society*, 17(5) (2003), pp. 727–749.

Uri Ben-Eliezer is a political sociologist and a senior lecturer in the Department of Sociology, Haifa University. Among his publications are: *The Making of Israeli Militarism* (Indiana University Press, 1998); *In the Name of Security* (with Majid Al-Hag) (Haifa University Press, 2003); and a forthcoming book on *Israel in the Second Intifada*. He has also published numerous articles in various academic journals on the topics of peace and war, Israeli militarism, army, society and politics, Israeli democracy, civil society, and Ethiopian Jews.

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