“The Battle Over Our Homes”: Reconstructing/Deconstructing Sovereign Practices Around Israel’s Separation Barrier on the West Bank

ABSTRACT

During the Second Intifada, Israel started to construct a separation barrier, officially aimed at preventing Palestinian terrorists from penetrating into its territory. Previous Palestinian attacks caused the death and injury of many innocent civilians, and raised a sense of indignation toward the incompetence of the Israeli government and security forces. The construction of the barrier, however, raised some objections, based on the argument that the barrier was not built on the Green Line (the 1949 Armistice agreement established between Israel and Jordan) and that it both expropriated extensive Palestinian agricultural lands and de facto annexed many of Israel’s settlements that had been built in the occupied territories. Tracing the various practices, representations, discourses, and arenas in which the clashes between the state and the Anti-Wall movement have occurred, the article’s main argument is that the relative failure of the Anti-Wall activists in their struggle, and the relative success of the state in constructing the Separation Barrier, resulted from the fact that the conflict has become, for both sides, not only a conflict about a barrier and its route, but a struggle over sovereignty and national identity. Under these circumstances, the activists failed in mobilizing the public against “the Wall”, whereas the state succeeded in using various discursive and non-discursive sovereign practices, based on arguments such as “security needs”, and “the battle over our homes”, as a means to accomplish its mission despite the resistance that appeared.

On June 2002, the Israeli government decided to construct a barrier which would separate Israel from the occupied territories in the West Bank. The decision followed massive pressure by the Israeli public that had been
subjected to non-stop suicide bombing attacks by Palestinians during the Second Intifada. Soon, however, it became clear that such a massive and ambitious project embodies various purposes which go beyond the security issue. What were these purposes, and were they realized? A “security fence”, as the Israeli authorities called it or a “wall” according to its opponents, generated controversies and conflicts not only with the Palestinians but within the Israeli society as well. What were these conflicts about, and what influence did they have on reality?

In order to answer these questions, one should trace the events that preceded the construction of the barrier. In 1993–1994, the Israelis and Palestinians signed various agreements which were regarded as a breakthrough in their relations and a crucial step towards a lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In October 2000, however, the Al-Aqsa Intifada flared up. The two sides, which just a few years earlier had shaken hands and started to plan their future together, became involved in a long and brutal war in the course of which the barrier was constructed.

Beside the formal explanation for the barrier—namely, a necessary means to protect Israeli civilians from terrorist attacks—this paper will present it as part of a more ambitious Israeli project that was meant to be realized through war. Not a conventional war, but war of a new kind, whose non-formal purpose was to reconstruct Israel’s sovereignty and national identity in time of turmoil and crisis. By presenting the barrier in this manner, and in describing the way it became a locus of conflicts within Israeli society, we see this article as part of the debate concerning the allocation of power, the character of nation-states, and the status of sovereignty in the so-called late, reflexive modernization, or simply, the era of globalization.¹

STATEHOOD SOVEREIGNTY, NATIONAL IDENTITY, AND NEW WARS

At the end of the twentieth century, many believed that the time of a strong state leaning heavily upon its sovereignty had gone. Certainly, the comprehensive and totalistic meaning of the principle of statehood sovereignty, which is the right to rule and the obligation to obey, was facing a change. The downfall of the Iron Curtain, the unification of Europe, the creation of international financial markets, the privatization of the economy, the appearance of big corporations, the new waves of immigration, the new international laws, the global culture which put the individual and his/her rights at the center, and the growing importance of non-state actors, not to
say the phenomenon of global terrorism, are all examples of the direct and indirect challenges to the old Westphalian notion of statehood sovereignty, which seemed to be eroded by both local and global actors.2

Nevertheless, some scholars argued firmly that sovereignty still organizes and frames political relations within the nation-state as well as between states. Holsti,3 for example, claimed that “The only way sovereignty can be lost today is either by formal conquest and annexation or by voluntary amalgamation of a polity into a larger political unit.” Concurrently, others said that globalization does not reduce state sovereignty, but the other way around; the nation-states are in fact the principal agents of globalization itself.4

Can we reach a decision whose claim is more plausible in describing current reality? The long realist and neorealist tradition in International Relations tended to see sovereignty as a constant, and minimized the concept to relations between states. The more sociological perspective, the so-called social constructivist, which emerged within International Relations in the last decade or two, regards sovereignty as a social construct, “… a product of the actions of powerful agents and the resistance to those actions by others.”5 Such perspective seems to us the preferable method for empirically analyzing sovereignty, as it takes into consideration groups and organizations other than states, which may be involved in the constructing/deconstructing processes of sovereignty. Moreover, unlike neorealism that minimized sovereignty to states’ narrowed interests of accumulating power and increasing security in an anarchic world, social constructivism highlights the importance of values, norms, and ideals, which are embedded within any process of reconstruction/deconstruction sovereignty.6

As a variable which draws up the boundaries between those who belong (the “insiders”) and who do not belong (“the outsiders”) to the political community, sovereignty is inseparable from national identity, as giving both meaning and significance to a political community. Thus, struggles over sovereignty are mostly struggles over national identity and vice versa, struggles which are more crucial and effective in times of uncertainty and change.7

Unlike the neorealist well-known idea, according to which “external” conflicts minimize “internal” strife, and society is highly integrated in the face of the enemy, internal struggles over sovereignty and collective identity are nowadays quite often related to actual or potential wars.8 In some cases, questions around sovereignty and national identity are brought to wars, in others they are part of the war itself, its spirit, course, strategies, and tactics. Those who see the connection between these components characterize the some of the recent wars as “new wars”. 
These new wars are different from the former conventional wars in many respects. They are no longer wars between states headed by standing armies only; they express the transformations that have occurred in the world at large, from politics which is characterized by naked power and narrowed interests to one which embodies other elements, such as culture, norms, emotions, sentiments, and identity. Moreover, the new wars are regarded as wars that can serve as a political means to reconstruct/deconstruct identity and sovereignty.\textsuperscript{9}

The Israeli situation does match fairly well these definitions. For many years, Israel was a nation-in-arms, having a centralized strong state, a mass army, and a highly mobilized society ready for war.\textsuperscript{10} The decline of this model, which started at the beginning of the 1980s, reached its peak in the 1990s. The end of the Cold War, the influence of globalization, the neoliberal economy, and the emergence of a new civil society, after long years of a blurring distinction between state and society, led not only to a relative decline in the Israeli state’s authority and legitimacy, but to the emergence of new cultural perspectives connected with a reflexive modernist orientation. The carriers of this new outlook, new social movements, new associations, and various NGOs, busied themselves with an unprecedented number of existential debates and conflicts around post-material issues, identities, and various life styles, together with attempts to influence the contested boundaries of reality.\textsuperscript{11}

Many of these conflicts touched upon questions of national identity (“What is Israeliness?”) and sovereignty (“Who is entitled to rule over Israel, how, and where?”). These questions became crucial in 1992–3 with the Oslo Agreement, which was signed both by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). For many Israelis the agreement symbolized a promise; for others a threat. Soon, around the accord, internal contradictions sprang up in Israel, gradually organizing around the line of two separate “societies”: one “civil”, the other “militaristic”.\textsuperscript{12} Each society was heterogeneous, a composition of various groups, organizations, and opinions about reality. Nevertheless, the dividing line between the two societies became much clearer during the 1990s: the civil society carried liberal and civic values, emphasized human rights issues, combined with ideas concerning the importance of making peace through compromises and concessions to the Palestinians. Even ideas about the “New Middle East”, which would create a sort of economic integration, could be heard within this society. Conversely, the militaristic society was less homogeneous and combined two sets of values: secular Israelis who stressed the importance
of security measures and believed that only military means would solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and religious circles, who believe in the sacredness of Great, undivided Israel, and the need to use military means in order to hold up that idea.\textsuperscript{13}

These controversies related to questions of sovereignty. As against Israel being a small, secular, civil, and democratic state, that is open to its region and to the entire globe, the militaristic society’s main purpose was to close Israel to outside influence, to preserve most of the territories, to continue with Israel’s wars, which for some of them are holy wars guided by a supreme, sovereign, mighty God, who governs all.\textsuperscript{14}

In the second half of the 1990s, with the “help” of terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians, it seemed that the militaristic and religious society gained much influence within Israel. Neither the appointment of the Labor party leader, Ehud Barak, as Prime Minister, nor the return to talks with the Palestinians in 2000, have changed that situation. The talks failed, a second Intifada erupted, and Barak very soon lost his post to Sharon, the new elected Prime Minister, who promised an iron hand against the Palestinian upheaval.\textsuperscript{15}

As a typical representative of the militaristic society in Israel, Sharon expressed for many years his clear opposition to the idea that the territories could be divided into two states, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could be solved through a policy of compromise and concessions.\textsuperscript{16} As a Prime Minister, Sharon did not waste much time trying to realize his ideas. At first, he objected to the idea of a separation barrier; however, as terrorist attacks continued and public opinion went against him, Sharon gradually changed his mind and construction started. In the following, we will examine the construction of the barrier and the struggles within Israel that arose around it. We will concentrate on the Anti-Wall Movement, a coalition of various small groups which objected to the barrier. In order to grasp the specific framing of the barrier’s objectors, we gathered ethnographical materials and did some fieldwork. It will allow us to show how the construction of the barrier and part of the objections to it were diverted to struggles over reconstruction/deconstruction sovereignty and national identity.

The following manuscript has two parts. While the first describes the barrier as part of the new war methods which reconstructed statehood sovereignty and national identity in times of crisis, the second depicts the practices of direct resistance to the barrier that subsequently appeared within Israel, and the way the nation-state dealt with them.
The Second Intifada was partly the result of the failure of the statesmen—Clinton, Arafat, and Barak—to reach an agreement. Some may claim that it was Arafat who constantly refused to accept the proposals put forward by Barak and Clinton. Without minimizing the role of Arafat in refusing to accept the offers that were made and without ignoring the simple fact that the Palestinians chose the road of violence, the war was used by the Israeli militaristic and religious society as a means to realize their basic assumptions concerning the need to use harsh military methods against the Palestinians (“Let The IDF Win,” was their slogan) which would express Israel’s mastery in the region and avoid any possibility of dividing the land between the two nations.

Such solid definition of sovereignty, which clearly was fueled by the Palestinians’ struggle and attacks on Israeli civilians, was carried not only by the settlers in the occupied Palestinian territories, but by the army and its chiefs of staff, first Shaul Mofaz, then Moshe Ya’alon, and, since May 2001, by Prime Minister Sharon and his government as well.17

As in many other areas of the world, be they the new wars in the former Yugoslavia, in Chechnya, Somalia, or Afghanistan and Iraq, ethno-national groups, paramilitary units, and even fully-fledged armies struggled in an attempt to consolidate identity, to determine new cultural boundaries, and to impose new rules of sovereignty. This relatively new phenomenon of identity politics and sovereignty politics, which stamp the character of the new war, can be contrasted with the politics of ideas which, according to Kaldor,18 was more typical of modern times. While the latter, concerned about innovative projects which entail a promise for all, has an integrative effect and is inclusive in its character, identity politics and sovereignty politics, in contrast, tend to mobilize people around forms of labeling, such as ethnic, racial, or religious. It is exclusive in its character, and tends to create unity (of the in-group) through the construction of unbridgeable differences with the others (the out-group). In the new wars, practices expressing cruelty and uncompromising hatred can serve as “just the thing” to clearly delineate this line of “us” versus “them”.

When the Palestinian violence started, the supreme command of the IDF immediately became one of the main supporters of reconstructing Israel’s sovereignty by using strict punitive measures against the Palestinians. The IDF’s involvement in reconstructing sovereignty was clear not only by its peculiar military operations but even by the public declarations of its
Generals.\textsuperscript{19} For example, in an interview in 2002, the Chief of Staff, Shaul Mofaz, said: “We have defeated militarily the Palestinians, but we have not succeeded in defeating their mind. Their aims have not changed . . . They are interested in driving Israel into the sea.”\textsuperscript{20} Such statements reflected an attempt to dictate a reality on the basis of generalized categories that are typical of national identity and sovereignty politics: the Palestinians wish to drive Israel into the sea; not some of the Palestinians, not their military organs, not \textit{Hamas} (the Palestinian radical Islamic movement) for example, but all of them.\textsuperscript{21}

Through such discursive practices, companied with harsh military means, the Israeli chiefs of command put themselves in one camp only, that of the Israeli militaristic society. Not with those Israelis who considered the Intifada a struggle of Palestinians against a long-lasting occupation, but with those who saw the Intifada as a total war and a terrorist campaign which expressed a kind of “Huntingtonian” clash of civilizations.

Practically, the politics of identity and sovereignty led the Israeli leadership and army into a war not only against the armed Palestinians who were involved in fighting against Israel, but against civilians as well. How does an army fight civilians? The practices of the new war give numerous examples: arbitrary arrests, humiliations, collective punishment, destruction of infrastructures, demolishing houses, untargeted massive shootings, as well as “targeted assassinations”, which killed many innocent people.\textsuperscript{22} Were these methods of war at all effective? Could they wear out a whole society? Could they bring victory in the battlefield? Without entering into another domain, that of military strategies and tactics and their efficiency, noticeably these military practices reconstructed Israel’s sovereignty and served as a means to force a separation between “us” and “them”. In this way, the cultural, ethno-national perspective on reality was translated into military strategy and tactics, and the Separation Barrier was another means that was used for the same purpose.

In order to understand that, one should bear in mind not only that during the 1990s, Israel was exposed to terrorist attacks by Palestinians who objected to the Oslo Agreement or reacted to its non-applicability, but that the attacks created antagonism and strife among the Israelis, which was mainly directed towards the Israeli leadership. During the Second Intifada, as the death toll was heavy, the feeling that the government could not rule due to the terrorist attacks became widespread.\textsuperscript{23} As early as the first months of the Second Intifada, time and again, members of the Knesset, public figures, and journalists complained to the Israeli government for not protecting its civilians from the attacks: “And what should we say today
to our children and civilians in the streets?” asked one of the Members of the Knesset (Israel’s Parliament). “Is it possible that a sovereign state with such a strong army—one that we constantly boast about—cannot provide security for its citizens? And cannot prevent panic among members of the public?”

In face of the on-going terrorist attacks, most Israelis supported Sharon and the IDF’s idea of using strict measures against the Palestinians. In those first years of the Intifada, it seemed that even the differences between the two societies, the civil and the militaristic, disappeared. The “Security Fence”, the government promised, would reduce the terrorist attacks to almost nil.

The separation barrier consists, for the most part, of a network of fences with trenches designed to stop vehicles, five percent of its length is composed of walls, and there are occasional gates and roadblocks. The barrier, almost 800 kilometers in its planned length, was gradually erected. It symbolized a mighty, prodigious, and menacing power of the occupier which was expressed by the barrier itself, the watchtowers, the warning signs, the armed soldiers, and a wall that is eight meters high (twice the height of the Berlin Wall).

Mastery and sovereignty were presented not only through the façade of the barrier but through the process of its edifice as well. Sovereignty practices usurped land and resources, and created separation and hierarchy. “Security needs” was the means through which the process was legitimized. Trying to set new borders through the barrier that would include as many as settlers as possible, the Israeli authorities decided not to build the barrier along the Green Line (the 1967 border)—a step which could create approval even by the Palestinians, but at a certain distance from it along a route that they had designed. The plan also contained “fingers” that are supposed to penetrate deeply into Palestinian territory in places where there are clusters of settlements. In this way, they would not only annex Israeli settlements, but would “cantonize” the Palestinian territories as well, and would prevent a possible Palestinian state. In some places this “slithering snake”, twice as long as the pre-1967 borders, was situated at quite a distance from the Green Line and was adjusted according to the location of the settlements, allowing the settlers the possibility of grabbing more land around the Palestinian villages. One had to be naïve to think that the barrier was a temporary military obstacle—as the authorities claimed—and not an attempt to set permanent political borders unilaterally and by that to reconstruct Israel’s sovereignty.

At first, more than 20% of the occupied territories were to be annexed by the barrier course. Then, following the appeal of inhabitants from both
the Jewish town of Mevasseret Zion and the Palestinian village of Beit Surik, the Israeli Supreme Court decided that not only security but human rights as well, must be taken into consideration by the government. As its verdict became a precedent, the confiscation was reduced to only 9–10% of the territories. Still, the Israeli authorities built the “Jerusalem Wrap”, which has resulted in tens of thousands of Palestinians remaining on the western side of the barrier, dislocated from their nation and territories.

The motive of sovereignty that delineated the “us” versus “them” line was as well concretized through the method of collective punishments that were embedded within the barrier’s route: what can a farmer who has to get to his land through a gate in the barrier do, not knowing that on the same day there is a Jewish holiday and the gate will not be opened? There are children who must go to school in the morning: what will they do if they are late by a few minutes and the gate is already closed? A woman who wants to buy some milk for her child will have to be at the gate exactly at eight o’clock in order to pass through, but will be able to return home at 4:00 pm only, when the gate is reopened. And if an ailing person needs medical attention at night, who will open the gate for him? In such ways, thousands of Palestinians have been enclosed in huge prisons, with every gate, every line of people, every police officer, soldier, or guard, becoming the emblem of Israel’s supremacy and sovereignty.

As though the idea was to mark the distinction between “us” and “them”, the barrier had a substantially different meaning for the Palestinians and for the settlers in the West Bank who remained in the East side of the barrier. For the Palestinians, the barrier, with its gates and roadblocks, was a means of isolation, separation, humiliation, and discrimination. It was not once but many times that Palestinians were stopped in roadblocks and stayed there for hours. Sometimes, it was due to orders from above, in other cases, as a result of an arbitrary decision of 18 or 19 year-old soldiers, who were tired and bored by their task, and could not always forgo the opportunity to exercise their power over people who are sometimes forced to flatter, to bribe, to laugh, to cry, or do anything, provided they will be allowed to pass.

These are the cultural ways in which identity-certainties and practices of sovereignty are asserted in new wars. At the same time, and at the same roadblock, armed settlers have gone across, driving at excessive speeds, waving to the soldiers, without stopping at all. They were still the masters of the land. For them, the barrier and the roadblock was no obstacle, but rather a reconfirmation of their ethno-national superiority and a bridge which connected them with Israel.
Were we in the typical modern era, in which states did more or less as they pleased, unless they had to confront other states, the barrier venture could be accomplished without much interference. In the late, reflexive modernity, however, the project which was built within the Palestinian territory and violated international law was accompanied by resistance. Mostly, the objection within Israel was to the barrier’s route, the legal procedure was the way to deal with that in court, and sovereignty was barely the issue.\textsuperscript{31} One network of groups, however, expressed in its struggle a clear anti-sovereign perspective. It came from the Anti-Wall Movement and their demonstrations, which often escalated into clashes with the Israeli security forces. We are dealing here with small movements that were active all through the Intifada, such as \textit{Taayush},\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Gush Shalom},\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Machsom Watch},\textsuperscript{34} together with newer groups such as \textit{Anarchists Against the Wall},\textsuperscript{35} that collaborated with global protest movements, such as the \textit{International Solidarity Movement}\.\textsuperscript{36} In the following pages we will shed light on this protest campaign and look at its relevance to questions of sovereignty and national identity.

**THE ANTI-WALL MOVEMENT**

As in most social movements, the activists of the Anti-Wall Movement differ in their social characteristics and in the motivations that brought them to the scene. Only in the demonstrations themselves, through collaboration with the Palestinian farmers, and through confrontations with the Israeli security forces, did they develop a common framework. In 2005–2006, most protest activities have taken place every Friday noon near the village of Bil’in. Almost always, the protest activity led to violent clashes. Formally, the Israeli security forces were there to prevent any interference with the work on, or attempts to sabotage, the barrier. Interestingly enough, these clashes happened on Fridays, when there was no work on the barrier and took place at sites where the construction work had not yet started. Indeed, the soldiers and police presence was symbolic: they represented, even by their presence alone, Israel’s sovereignty.

The resistance of the Anti-Wall Movement to the ambitious Israeli project appeared in a peculiar frame. First used by Goffman,\textsuperscript{37} the term “frame” refers to “schemata of interpretation” that enable individuals “to locate, perceive, identify and label” occurrences within their life space and the world at large.\textsuperscript{38} These human interpretations of social situations are actively built up through their involvement in the situations. In this way, collective actions are seen as part of the politics of signification, which
highlight certain aspects of an issue, and not others. Typically, these frames include the identification and definition of a social “problem”, its causes—or the answer to the question “Who should be blamed?”, the desired solution to the “problem”, and the preferable way to achieve it.39

The protesters’ declared objective was embodied by slogans such as: “Stop the Wall.”40 However, their outgrowing frame was more ambitious: to challenge the hegemonic Israeli discourse on sovereignty, which disguised occupation and legitimized the construction of the barrier in terms of “security needs”, and the right of a state to protect its citizens.

The reconstruction practices of sovereignty around the separation barrier were aimed at creating and enhancing the cultural and political lines that divide Israelis and Palestinians. The demonstrators were busy doing quite the opposite. In this regard, we discern the pattern of cooperation that arose between three social categories of demonstrators: Israeli Jews, Palestinians, and international activists. This version of cooperation deconstructed sovereignty by both physical and symbolic means; it put into question the two divisional lines of sovereignty: the national division of “us” versus “them”, and the state division between the “internal” territorial unity, and the “external” “world of states”.

Bearing in mind the cultural meaning of the barrier, the Israeli and Palestinian activists made tremendous efforts to develop close and egalitarian relationships between them. Such efforts can be observed in the minute details of their cooperation: first, unlike many other meetings between Israeli Jews and Palestinians, no exotic and romantic “oriental” hospitality manners were displayed by the host Palestinian villagers in the demonstrations. Second, Israeli and Palestinian activists communicated with each other by speaking both Hebrew and Arabic. One may claim that this detail is trivial; however, it is a remarkable finding, considering the fact that most Israeli Jews do not speak Arabic, and the rest are reluctant to use the language unless they are involved, as soldiers or as soldiers on reserve duty, in a clear indication of occupiers against the occupied.

The blurring of the distinction between Israelis and Palestinians in the Anti-Wall Movement was intentional, but non-instrumental. As one of the activists said: “It is not only political relations, it is also friendship . . . I do not think about the demonstration, but about Aa’id, Majid, and Abdullah. For me it became trivial . . . we are reaching a village and everybody can say hello and everybody speaks [with us].” 41

This method of deconstructed sovereignty exposed a post-national element of unity and egalitarianism standing in direct opposition to Israel’s collective identity of the past. It was seen again and again in the demonstra-
tions, where Israelis, Palestinians, and international activists did everything as one: together they marched dressed in symbolic costumes, together they planted olive trees, symbolically replacing the uprooted ones, and together they wrestled with the soldiers. Quite often, when a Palestinian or an international demonstrator was arrested, the Israeli activist tried to be arrested too, in order to make it hard for the Israeli security forces to carry out severe methods of punishment towards the non-Israeli. “The importance of the demonstrations,” said Jonathan Polak, the non-formal leader of the “Anarchists Against the Wall,” “is in their contribution to the transformation of the occupation to be ungovernable.”

Frequently, these methods of deconstructing sovereignty happened to be efficient. More than once, senior IDF officers have used the Israeli media to convey their frustration at the “operational difficulties” caused by the presence of Israeli citizens in the demonstrations along the barrier route. Indeed, an army of occupation which by itself is a symbol of sovereignty, no less than a carrier of sovereign practices which are executed through military operations creating the distinction between “friends” and “foes”, was looking for means to de-emphasize the impact of the demonstrations. Sometimes, as a means to avoid criticism and publicity, which could magnify the effect of the Anti-Wall Movement’s deconstructed sovereignty, the IDF sent a minimum number of soldiers, who were warned not to use live ammunition. When it did not help, on other occasions, the military headquarters chose the opposite tactics, sending more units, and ordering them to use more measures.

These sovereignty effects sometimes had horrendous results, bringing the death of a few Palestinian demonstrators, mainly in the first period of the resistance. In another event, a young Israeli man, Gil Naamati, was shot by soldiers when he and his “anarchist” friends firmly shook one of the barrier’s gates near the village of Masha. From an ethno-national perspective, this case of a young Israeli Jew who has just finished his three years of military service, received much more publicity in Israel than hundreds of cases of wounded Palestinians. From the numerous videos that presented the scene, it was clear that, while using their guns, the soldiers were not put at any risk. Moreover, the soldiers knew that many of the demonstrators standing in front of them were Israeli Jews. Still they shot. Was it just a mistake, a result of weariness and fatigue? Was it also just coincidental that the officer in charge, the one who ordered the shooting, was a settler? Or could it have been a military sign and a warning to those willing to desecrate Israel’s sovereignty, in this case, by shaking one of the barrier’s locked gates? As if to verify that hypothesis, the Israeli Chief of Staff, “while
considering the facts,” decided afterwards not to raise accusations against the shooters. On the other hand, the police considered accusing Naamati, who was wounded by two gun-shots, for breaking the military rules by his attempt “to destroy” the barrier.46

The activists of the Anti-Wall Movement not only tried to blur the “us” versus “them” division, they also tried to deconstruct another sovereign, modern distinction, that of the so-called “internal affairs”, against the so-called “foreign affairs”. The blurring of that distinction was made by the Anti-Wall Movement’s tendency to involve global activists in their demonstrations. This mode of global/local action, completely inappropriate to the Westphalian code of “a world of states”, became popular in many protest events around the world in the late-modern era. As in many other cases, it served as a practice of deconstruction sovereignty.47

Through the actions of the global activists, the struggle was exported all over the world. The global participants could speak English or French fluently while being interviewed. Returning to their countries, they participated in information campaigns, bringing testimonies from primary sources. In one case, the activists produced an international petition to support the struggle of the people of Bil’in.48 All these actions enabled the Anti-Wall Movement to catch the attention of various audiences around the world which, at least potentially, could put some pressure on the Israeli government.49 No less important was the symbolic meaning of blurring the distinction between the local and the global which emerged from the global activists’ participations in the demonstration. As one of the Palestinian activists said, “Against an army which represents one citizenship, stand people who represent many international citizenships.”50

Deconstructing sovereignty was, furthermore, the way in which the Anti-Wall Movement often used cosmopolitan themes to justify their struggle; they would, for example, present the issue of the barrier in human rights terms. Using this issue, the activists deliberately borrowed a supranational theme taken from the cultural “tool box” of the global peace movements. Again, various symbolic practices clearly expressed it: the global activists in Bil’in often lead with the rhythmic shouts: “Hey, Hey, Soldier, Hey, How Many Kids Did You Kill Today?” This well-known slogan, originally used by the American anti-war activists during the Vietnam War, has been adopted by many peace movements around the world in various cases; at the moment it is being used to oppose the US occupation in Iraq.51 On certain occasions, activists in Bil’in have chosen to carry big pictures of Mahatma Gandhi, Rosa Parks, and Martin Luther King; they have
even used King's famous “I have a dream” slogan of liberation to confer a universal character upon their struggle over the barrier.

Thus, in a manner which was typical of the spirit of reflexive modernization, and almost without any precedent in Israel’s past, the Israeli protesters tended to cooperate both with Palestinians from the Occupied Territories and with international activists. They did all they could so that their protest would be effective. However, when it comes to sovereignty, nation-states can be quite obsessive. Time after time, Israel’s security forces oppressed the demonstrators by shooting rubber bullets, tear gas, cudgels, and by carrying out arrests and trials. Although they may have received better treatment than the Palestinians, many of the Israeli demonstrators were arrested, and their names were put into the police criminal records, something that has future consequences, especially in the job market. As for the global activists, the state made vast efforts to prevent their presence at the scene of the demonstrations. When these efforts failed, they were deported.

Practically, the IDF used various methods to reconstruct Israel’s sovereignty at the scene. In this regard, it was striking to notice how important it was for the soldiers to manifest their control in the demonstration arenas. Despite the fact that demonstrators usually recognized the strength of the security forces and therefore neither tried to destroy the barrier, nor to stop the work, the security forces insisted on playing small “sovereignty games” with them. For example, by defining narrow borders to the demonstration area, usually by placing a barbed wire fence on the ground where the demonstrators were standing and by declaring that the wire fence is the final line and whoever crossed it would be arrested. Such an act sent a sharp message of sovereignty, not by the physical means itself, but mainly by presenting through it the ability of the state to set the rules in the territory.

Beside the violent practices, reconstructed sovereignty was made mainly by cultural means. This included processes of counter-framing, based on distributing the knowledge that the barrier is a legitimate means of a sovereign state aiming at protecting its civilians, “a battle over our home” as the Second Intifada was generally framed in the Israeli discourse. While ignoring the other interests embedded within the barrier, mainly those of the settlers, and by making the route of the barrier a non-issue, the state authorities presented the protestors as eccentrics, oddballs, “leftists”, and traitors. A typical example was the report that appeared in an Israeli newspaper, following one of the anti-barrier demonstrations in Bil’in: “It is time to state the plain fact”—the columnist wrote—“demonstrations against the separation barrier are neo-terrorism . . . everybody who fights the IDF is a traitor. Those whose choice is to embrace the Palestinians comes at a price
of endangering IDF soldiers shall not wear human rights as a feather in one’s cap. One who wishes to fight for [his] opinions, should do it inside his home and not with the enemy.”

This example illustrates why it was difficult for the Anti-Wall Movement, whose framework did not resonate with the Israeli dominant discourse and its pivotal national-security motives, to mobilize the Israeli public against the IDF’s methods of collective punishment. However, this augmented another obstacle; more than once, the Anti-Wall activists, instead of basing their protests on purely humanistic arguments, preferred to be identified with the Palestinian National Movement. In this way, and in complete contradiction to their contention, their resistance was not a post-national, but a purely national, one. To a certain degree, the activists had fallen without noticing into “the trap” of the national discourse, illustrating that even among those who regard themselves as post-nationalists, nationalism still plays a central role as a basis for political claims.

The Israeli activists themselves defined the resistance to “the wall” as a “Palestinian battle”. Indeed, most of the participants in the demonstrations were Palestinians, the locations of the demonstrations were almost exclusively in occupied Palestine, and the modes of action were mostly subjected to decisions made by the local popular leadership of the Palestinian village and the representatives of the Palestinian National Authority. Symbolically, the national aspect of the struggle was conveyed in many ways in the demonstrations: the most observable symbol was the Palestinian national flag, and many slogans were national-religious, calling to “Free Al-Aqsa” or for “More Shaheeds [martyrs].”

Using the Palestinian national discourse by Israeli and international activists may be attributed to a well-known problem for many activists who are active in human rights and peace campaigns all over the world; often they act in a way that de-emphasizes their neutrality, by making others believe that they support one side only. Human rights and peace activists may be very honest in their humanistic aspirations; in the context of a national or ethnic conflict this may be realized in efforts to protect the rights of those who are considered “the underdogs”, people from the inferior group. However, by avoiding dealing also with the plight of people of other groups (typically the stronger group in a social conflict) they create an “aesthetic blight” which makes their cosmopolitan ideology less credible, especially in the eyes of members of the superior group.

Indeed, the identification of Israeli and international activists with Palestinian suffering has resulted in a partial adoption of the Palestinian national discourse. As a result, most Israelis did not see the protesters as
human rights adherents, not even as peace activists, but as firm supporters of Palestinian nationality and the Palestinian struggle against Israel. Generally, the human rights discourse has hardly succeeded in penetrating the Israeli public debate over the separation barrier. Being exposed to terrorist attacks, most Israelis became completely blind to the Palestinian misery.

Any idea about the Palestinians being the victims of human rights abuses was completely neglected through the reconstructed sovereign practices of “us” versus “them”.

For these reasons, the protesters of the Anti-Wall Movement never succeeded in obtaining substantial support within Israel for their activities, and the works on the Separation Barrier, which were carried out at full speed, sometimes with 500 bulldozers working day and night, were almost never slowed down by the demonstrations. It was only with some appeals to the Israeli Supreme Court—the Beit-Surik appeal was the famous one—that some signs of a change appeared. These changes, however, did not undermine Israel’s sovereignty, as they were based on the principle of “proportionality”, which enabled the state to continue using security argumentation as a means of reconstructing sovereignty.

Summing up, Israel’s Separation Barrier was not only a means to protect civilians from terrorist attacks. It signified, as well, an attempt by the state authorities to reconstruct sovereignty in a time of crisis and change. This attempt was made not only through the barrier itself but also through the discriminatory methods that accompanied the barrier’s construction and its route. As presented in this article, substantial resistance to the barrier came from a network of groups and associations, including the Anti-Wall Movement which, in its style of organization and collective action, resembled many late-modern movements; on various issues these de-legitimize authority and deconstruct sovereignty around the world. However, the inability of the Anti-Wall Movement to attract a large audience within Israel and to pose a substantial objection to the barrier project has been explained here through the state authorities and security forces’ ability to reconstruct state sovereignty, while neutralizing the deconstructing practices of sovereignty carried out by their objectors.

In the post-Cold War world, in which ethnic and national conflicts are arising again, it seems that Israel’s style of separation on the West Bank is an indication that, although deconstructing sovereignty is a political force that should not be ignored nowadays, reconstructing sovereignty by state agencies, using various discursive and non-discursive practices based upon the argument of “security needs”, and “the battle over our homes”, is still more effective and influential.
Notes

*Alphabetical order


12. The term militarism is defined here as an institutional tendency to solve political problems (on the national level) with military means. See Ben-Eliezer, The Making of Israeli Militarism, 7–10.


14. Baruch Kimmerling, Politicide: Ariel Sharon’s War against the Palestinians (New York, 2003); Akiva Eldar and Idith Zartal, Lords of the Land (Tel-Aviv, 2004) [Hebrew].


18. Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*.

19. Traditionally, the involvement of any army in politics has been examined through two major channels: either the army as an interest group, trying to realize or to preserve its vested interests and privileges through participation in politics, or the possibility of a military coup, usually in times of turmoil and in weak states where the authorities lack legitimacy, and the political culture is open to the possibility of military coups and military regimes. The cultural involvement of any army in politics, meaning its influence on norms, identities, ways of life, perspectives towards reality in general, and in questions of peace or war in particular, have never been fully and comprehensively examined.


21. For more on this, see Uri Ben-Eliezer, *Old Conflict, New War: Israel’s Identity Politics and Sovereignty in the Al-Aqsa Intifada* (forthcoming).

22. According to B’tselem—the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories—the number of Palestinian deaths in “target assassinations” in the five years of the Second Intifada was 359; approximately one-third of these deaths were passers-by (123)—people who were not the targets of the assassinations. During this period, the total number of Palestinian deaths was 3413, 29% of whom were killed while fighting, and 54% killed while not fighting (for the remaining 17% it is unknown whether they were killed while fighting). See www.btselem.org/English/Statistics/Casualties.asp; the Palestinian Red Crescent reports 4000 Palestinian deaths and 30,000 wounded in the five years of the Second Intifada. See http://www.palestinercs.org/crisistables/table_of_figures.htm

23. According to the IDF, the number of Israeli casualties during the five years of the Second Intifada was 1084 dead, almost 8000 wounded; 70% of the dead and wounded were civilians. See www1.idf.il/SIP_STORAGE/DOVER/files/7/21827.doc


25. The number of Israeli casualties was drastically reduced from 2005 on. However, it is not clear whether it is the result of the barrier’s construction. In 2005–2006, most of the barrier was not yet built, and within the segments that were built, huge breaches remained, mainly within the “fingers”, which annexed large portions of territories and were “waiting” for a U.S. approval. Moreover, there can be many reasons for the decline in Israeli death toll: the death of Arafat and the moderation of his successor, Abu Mazen; the February 2005 meeting between
Sharon and Abu Mazen in Sharm el Sheikh; The decision of the Palestinian armed organizations to agree on a cease-fire (a-tahadia) on March 17, 2005; and effective military measures used by the IDF during the Intifada.

26. There are various estimations about the barrier length. See Amos Harel, “The IDF: 42% is completed, at least one more year to finish the construction,” Ha’aretz, May 27, 2006 [Hebrew].

27. B’tselem & Bimkom (Planners for Planning Rights), Under the Guise of Security, Routing the Separation Barrier (Jerusalem, 2005) [Hebrew].


30. See, for example, Human Rights Watch (HRW), February 2004, “Israel's ‘Separation Barrier’ in the Occupied West Bank: Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Consequences” http://hrw.org/english/docs/2004/02/20/isrlpa7581.htm

Also see: Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCAH), February 2005, “Preliminary Analysis: The Humanitarian Implications of the February 2005 Projected West Bank Barrier route”: www.humanitarianinfo.org/opt/docs/UN/OCHA/BarrierProjections_Feb05_En.pdf#search=%22Preliminary%20Analysis%3A%20The%20Humanitarian%20Implications%20of%20the%20February%202005%20Projected%20West%20Bank%20Barrier%20route%22

31. We are not dealing here with the NGOs who chose to confront the state through appeals to the courts, and thus refrained from deconstructing sovereignty.

32. Taayush (the Arabic word for “life in common”) is a grassroots movement of Arab and Jewish Citizens of Israel. The movement was founded at the end of 2000 “...to break down the walls of racism and segregation by constructing a true Arab-Jewish partnership.” The movement acts mainly to present solidarity with the Palestinian people, to end the occupation in the Palestinian territories, and to achieve full civil equality for all Israeli citizens. www.taayush.org

33. Gush Shalom (“the Peace Bloc” in Hebrew) presents itself as “the hard core of the Israeli peace movement.” Founded in 1993 by Uri Avnery (former journalist, MK, and one of the most prominent activists holding Israeli radical left-wing opinions) the main goal of Gush Shalom is “...to influence Israeli public opinion and [to] lead towards peace and conciliation with the Palestinian people,” especially by establishing a Palestinian state in all the occupied territories including East Jerusalem as its capital. http://gush-shalom.org/english/intro.html

34. Machsom Watch is a movement of women for human rights. Founded in January 2001, this movement focuses on monitoring and reporting abuses of the human rights of Palestinian people by soldiers and policemen at the IDF checkpoints. www.machsomwatch.org

35. Anarchists Against the Wall (AATW) is a group of Israeli activists; it was
founded in late 2002 to support the popular Palestinian resistance to the separation barrier. Activists in the AATW are involved in direct actions such as dismantling parts of the separation barrier; they also form the hard core of Israeli participants in Palestinian demonstrations against the barrier. www.squat.net/antiwall/main.htm

36. The International Solidarity Movement (ISM) is a Palestinian-led movement committed to resisting the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land, using nonviolent, direct action methods and principles. Founded in August 2001, the ISM’s activities aim to encourage and coordinate the participation of international individuals and groups in the Palestinian popular resistance. www.palsolidarity.org


40. See, for example, “Stop The Wall”, the website of “The Grassroots Palestinian Campaign”: www.stopthewall.org

41. Interview with Einat Podjarni by one of the authors, January 31, 2006.

42. Interview with Jonathan Polak by one of the authors, January 29, 2006.

43. See, for example, Meron Rappoport: “Without Shaheeds,” Ha’aretz, June 9, 2005.

44. See, for example, Amos Harel and Arnon Reguler, “Palestinians: The IDF Used Live Ammunition Against the Protestors; The Security Forces: There was a Shooting of Live Ammunition into the Air,” Ha’aretz, February 2, 2004 [Hebrew].

45. See, for example, Eitan Rabin, Itai Asher, Uri Yablonka and Uri Binder, “Why Did They Shoot Me?” Ma’ariv, December 28, 2003 [Hebrew].


49. For details on the worldwide activism against the separation barrier, see “Stop The Wall”, the website of “The Grassroots Palestinian Campaign”: http://stopthewall.org


51. Activists in the Anti-War Movement used to march and shout: “Hey, Hey, LBJ [US President, Lyndon B. Johnson], How Many Kids Did You Kill Today?” Recently, during a demonstration against the US military presence in Iraq, which took place in Blackburn, England, peace activists shouted at visiting U.S. Secretary
of State, Condoleezza Rice: “Hey, Hey, Condi, Hey, How Many Kids Did You Kill Today?”

52. See the reports of Glenn Kessler, “Rice concedes likelihood of thousands of Iraq ‘tactical errors’,” the Washington Post and The Independent, April 1, 2006; Ann Penketh and Ian Herbert, “It’s grim up north, if you’re the US Secretary of State,” The Independent, April 1, 2006.


53. During the years of the Second Intifada, some Israeli activists against the state’s policy in the territories were detained in the airport, and a thorough search was made of their baggage. No reason was given for that, and the activists were later released without charge. From an interview with Jonathan Polak by one of the authors, January 29, 2006).

54. According to the ISM Coordinator in the occupied territories (a telephonic interview with Neta Golan by one of the authors, July 14, 2005. More than one hundred global activists, who took part in or intended to participate in activities against the barrier or the occupation, have been deported from Israel and the occupied territories by the Israeli authorities over the last three or four years. Testimonies of several activists who were interrogated by the Israeli border control, some of whom were even deported, can be found on the ISM’s website: www.palsolidarity.org

55. Benford and Snow, “Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment,” 617.

56. Roi Sharon: “They are Not Anarchists” Ma’ariv, July 17, 2005 [Hebrew].

57. This definition was repeated in almost every interview and conversation we had with activists.

58. “Free Al-Aqsa” is a slogan which refers to the Palestinian name of the Second Intifada, which is “Intifadat Al-Aqsa”. This name means a battle over Al-Aqsa, an extremely sacred Muslim mosque located on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem (this mount is also the most sacred place for Judaism). The Second Intifada erupted immediately after a provocative visit to the mount by Ariel Sharon, at that time head of the Israeli parliamentary opposition, on September 28, 2000. Al-Aqsa, thus, became one of the symbols of the Palestinian struggle.

The Arabic word “Shaheed” (originally a Muslim religious term, literally meaning “witness”) is currently used for glorification of the Palestinian dead in the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts, who are considered as martyrs in a holy war (jihad). In Israeli society, this term is identified with the Palestinian suicide bombers of the Second Intifada, therefore it is important to clarify that this slogan, “More Shaheeds”, was used by Palestinians and not by Israeli activists. However, this clarification does not reduce the importance of the fact that the framework of the demonstrations against the barrier became integrated, to a large extent, with the framework of the Palestinian national struggle for independence.

60. In February 2004, for instance, two thirds of the Jewish citizens of Israel thought that Israel should not include the Palestinian suffering in its considerations in the issue of the route of the barrier. See Efraim Yaar and Tamar Herman: “The Peace Index—February 2004,” *Ha’aretz*, March 9, 2004.