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WOMEN'S ACTIVISM FOR A JUST PEACE IN PALESTINE AND ISRAEL:

Notes on a Visit

PART 1: INTRODUCTION - THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

I visited Israel twice for a total of two weeks in November 2005 and March 2006. During these visits I had the good fortune to be able to interview twenty-two women (including one on the phone), and in the UK had further interviews with two Israeli women activists, making twenty-four interviews in all. I give the names of the women involved, and a little detail about them, at the end of this paper. I would like to thank them very much indeed for sparing time in their busy lives for some lengthy conversations.

The purpose of my visits to Israel was to understand better the current activism of some women against the Israeli Occupation of Palestinian lands and against lack of democracy and equality in Israeli state and society. The women in question represent three identity groups. Some are Israeli Jews, some are Palestinian citizens of Israel and some are Palestinians living in the Occupied West Bank. The existence of these three 'social actors', is the product of a long history. I won't attempt here to detail that history, which is readily available from alternative political perspectives.¹ The following facts are the basic minimum necessary to understanding the movements described in this paper.

1.1 Historical background

The Israeli state came into being in 1948. From the late 19th century a Zionist movement among Jewish communities in many countries had encouraged Jews to migrate to the land containing the holy places of the Jewish religion. The movement had erroneously represented Palestine as a territory more or less empty of people. In reality it contained a substantial population, mainly of Arabs, both Christian and Muslim. From the end of the first world war the area

¹ For an account of the Palestinian struggle since 1969 see Said, Edward W. (1995) *The Politics of Dispossession* (London: Vintage Books). For brief anti-Zionist accounts of Israeli history see Davis, Uri (1987) *Israel: An Apartheid State* (London: Zed Books) and Abdo, Nahla and Yuval-Davis, Nira (1995) 'Palestine, Israel and the Zionist Settler Project' in Daiva Stasiulis and Nira Yuval-Davis, *Unsettling Settler Societies* (London: Sage Publications). For a study sympathetic to Zionist aspirations see Wistrich, Robert and David Ohana (eds) (1995) *The Shaping of Israeli Identity: Myth, Memory and Trauma* (London: Frank Cass).

was governed by Britain under mandate. By the end of the second, the genocidal acts of Nazi Germany, added to the Jews' centuries-long subjection to persecution in the diaspora, had increased international support for the project of Jewish state in Palestine.

United Nations General Assembly Resolution 181 of 29 November 1947 partitioned Palestine for two potential states. The Jewish state was to be created on 57% of Mandatory Palestine, an Arab state on the remaining 43%. Despite many decades of Jewish inward migration the total Jewish population at this time was no more than half a million. Even inside the territory designated by the UN for Israel, the Jewish population was slightly smaller than the Arab (Davis 1987:22). Yet in the fighting that accompanied the establishment of the Zionist state, the Israelis seized 24% more than their UN-designated land. Of an estimated Palestinian population of just under a million, 750,000 were ejected from these de-facto Israeli borders, many to live in nearby refugee camps in Lebanon and Jordan, while approximately 150,000 remained under military rule within Israel - many of them displaced from their homes and lands. The year 1948 is celebrated by Israeli Jews as the moment of 'independence'. By Palestinians everywhere it's mourned as the moment of their catastrophe, the 'Nakhba'.

In the next two decades there was sporadic fighting between Israel and neighbouring Arab states. A Palestinian Liberation Organization was founded in 1964, that did not recognize the Israeli state and engaged in exchange of armed attacks with Israeli forces. In 1967 Israel seized the territories of the West Bank of the Jordan river, Gaza, Sinai and the Syrian Golan Heights. Although Sinai was later returned to Egypt under a peace deal, the other three territories are still occupied by Israel and in this way a considerable Palestinian population has come under Israeli rule.

In 1987, twenty years after the Occupation, a relatively non-violent resistance movement, the intifada, began in the Territories. Successive 'peace' initiatives were prompted by Western governments. In particular, the Oslo Accords of 1993 achieved mutual recognition of Israel and the PLO, and provided for creation in the West Bank and Gaza of the long-promised Palestinian state. The Israeli government, however, failed to implement the Accords, meanwhile fostering Jewish settlement in the Territories and further restricting Palestinian movement by closures.

1.2 Recent political events

The second intifada

In 2000, further peace negotiations took place in the USA at Camp David, but did not succeed. That October, Ariel Sharon, then Israeli leader of the opposition, staged a highly publicized visit to the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. It was particularly provocative to Palestinian opinion as appearing to claim this Muslim holy place for Jews. Angry protests by Palestinians ensued, not only in the Occupied Territories but also, unusually, in Israel.

Bloody repression by forces of the Israeli state followed. In Israel, thirteen Palestinians were killed by police. The period of Palestinian uprising that has continued since is known as 'the second intifada'.

Since the Al-Aqsa moment, there has been no official peace process between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Palestinians have suffered continuous land confiscations, road closures, house demolitions, settlement and road building, arbitrary arrests, selective assassinations, curfews and collective punishment. In retaliation, in addition to the armed resistance inside the occupied territories, there was an increase in attacks by Hamas and Islamic Jihad suicide bombers on civilian targets inside Israel.

An Amnesty International report summarizes the effects, four and a half years on from the start of the second intifada.

From the first days the Israeli army abandoned policing and law enforcement tactics and adopted military measures generally used in armed conflict, routinely using excessive and disproportionate force against civilians, including frequent air-strikes and tank shelling in densely populated Palestinian residential areas, large-scale destruction of Palestinian homes, land and infrastructure, and the imposition of military blockades and prolonged curfews which kept the Palestinian population imprisoned within their homes...

More than 3,200 Palestinians, including more than 600 children and more than 150 women have been killed by Israeli forces, and more than 1,000 Israelis, including more than 100 children and some 300 women were killed by Palestinian armed groups. Most of the victims were unarmed civilians who were not taking part in any armed confrontations. Thousands more have been injured...²

The report cited above emphasizes the serious impact of the Occupation on many aspects of Palestinian women's lives.

Palestinian women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have lived for most of their lives under Israeli occupation and have been facing a triple challenge to establish their rights: as Palestinians living under Israeli military occupation which controls every aspect of their lives, as women living in a society governed by patriarchal customs, and as unequal members of society subject to discriminatory laws. Living under decades of Israeli occupation has dramatically curtailed development opportunities for the Palestinian population in general and has increased violence and discrimination against Palestinian women in particular.

² Amnesty International, 'Israel and the Occupied Territories: conflict, occupation and patriarchy. Women carry the burden' accessed at web.amnesty.org/library/index/engmde150162005 on 25 June 2005.

Construction of the Wall

In 2002 the Israeli government had began construction of a continuous 26 ft-high concrete wall inside the West Bank, eventually to be 420 miles long. The government term this partition the 'Defence Fence', while opponents it call it the 'Separation Wall' or 'Apartheid Wall'. Its proclaimed intention is to prevent potential suicide bombers from entering Israel. Its construction has been accompanied by the building of new roads (banned to Palestinians) and the increased use of military checkpoints inside the West Bank.

Critics of this project point out that the aim of the Separation Wall is not security (which it cannot achieve). It is designed, on the contrary, to surround, connect and protect Jewish settlements, to carve out land for future settlements, and enfeeble any future Palestinian state. Since the route of the Wall is not on the Green Line but in many cases well within it, its construction appears to be a bid to redraw Israel's borders so as to permanently incorporate parts of the West Bank in defiance of UN Resolution 242. The map of the intended wall shows it circling round East Jerusalem, cutting off its Palestinian population from the West Bank. It will virtually sever the north and south of the West Bank at its narrowest point (McGreal 2005).³

The building of the Wall is having an extremely disruptive and impoverishing effect on Palestinian life, further restricting movement and separating many villages from their land and olive trees. Its construction has incensed much international opinion and been condemned by the International Criminal Court and the UN General Assembly. Palestinian communities have been engaging in non-violent direct action against the Wall, supported by Israeli and international activists. The village of Bil'in has been the site of particularly sustained and well-publicized opposition during 2005, with protestors locking themselves to the structures and the IDF using stun grenades, tear gas and rubber bullets against them, and making many arrests.

Further initiatives towards peace

In 2003 the UN, the EU, the USA and Russia (the so-called 'Quartet') sponsored an initiative of George W. Bush termed the 'road map', involving planned steps towards a resolution of the conflict by the end of 2005, under which Israel would dismantle its settlements and eventually withdraw to the pre-1967 borders in exchange for evidence that the Palestinian Authority was seriously tackling terrorism. The promised end-point was a two-state solution, with 'fair and realistic' resolution of the refugee issue and a negotiated sharing of Jerusalem.

In December 2003 extra-governmental talks seeking solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict took place in Geneva. Although attended by some high-level political figures on each side, the proposals of the resulting Geneva Initiative were unofficial and not binding on the two governments. In fact the

³ McGreal, Chris (2005) 'Israel redraws the roadmap, building quietly and quickly', *The Guardian*, Tuesday, October 18, p.17.

government of Israel rejected them outright and on the Palestinian side, acceptance was only slightly warmer. Some foreign funders subsequently enabled educational and promotional activity on the proposals. The main organizations carrying this forward today are *Heskem* (Geneva Initiative-Israel) and a Palestinian counterpart, Palestine Peace Coalition -- Geneva Initiative (PPC/GI).⁴

'Disengagement'

The long-time Palestinian leader Yaser Arafat died in November 2004, and the prime minister, Mahmoud Abbas, otherwise known as 'Abu Mazen', succeeded him as president of the Palestine National Authority. Then, in the summer of 2005, prime minister Ariel Sharon abruptly took an initiative to 'disengage' Israel from the Gaza Strip, withdrawing all the Jewish settlers residing there. It was a startling move that resulted in highly emotional scenes, widely shown on television, in which reluctant soldiers carried away weeping settlers, who portrayed themselves as the victims of Israeli defeatism. The borders between Gaza and Israel and Egypt were subsequently sealed. One motivation for the disengagement from Gaza may have been to improve the economic situation: investors had ceased investing in Israel, tourism had fallen off, jobs had been lost.

Internationally, Sharon was accorded considerable credit for his 'disengagement', supposing it a move towards 'peace'. Even many left-wingers and peace activists in Israel gave him the benefit of their doubts. But it soon became apparent that Jewish settlement was still being expedited in the West Bank. So - more sceptical opinion on the Israeli left sees Sharon's unilateral move (it was not even presented to, let alone discussed with, the Palestinian Authority) as part of a plan to proceed independently to 'bury' the Palestinians, making Gaza a prison, while splitting up the population of the West Bank in a series of disconnected 'bantustans'. He is reported as having told his right-wing supporters, 'My plan is difficult for the Palestinians, a fatal blow. There's no Palestinian state in a unilateral move' (Avi Shlaim 2005).⁵

In late October, just as I arrived to interview women in Palestine and Israel, a Palestinian suicide bomber caused deaths in the Israeli town of Hadera, in retaliation for an IDF assassination in Jenin. The IDF responded with targeted assassinations in air attacks on Gaza and the West Bank. Feeling more and more like South Africans under *apartheid*, Palestinians are now calling for an international campaign of sanctions against Israel of the kind called for by the African National Congress to overthrow the white supremacist regime. On 9 July 2005, 171 Palestinian civil society organizations issued a call for 'boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel until it complies with international law and universal principles of human rights'.⁶

⁴ www.heskem.org.il

⁵ Shlaim, Avi (2005) 'Sharon's iron wall', *New Statesman*, 31 October. P.30.

⁶ www.badil.org, accessed 1.12.05.

The government of the USA, which deems the security of Israel vital to its interests in the Middle East, supplies an estimated 3 billion dollars a year in aid, most of it military. While successive administrations have called for Israel to fulfil its obligations to Palestinians, they have never threatened withdrawal of this economic and military support. In fact, when George W. Bush recently spoke of the 'facts on the ground' created by Israel in the West Bank he appeared to endorse the settlement policy and renege on UNSC 242 (Fisk 2005).⁷

Changed party political landscape

Soon after my return from Palestine and Israel, in early November 2005, there were two developments on the party political scene. Amir Peretz was elected leader of Avodah, the Labour Party. His relatively progressive manifesto includes early negotiations with the Palestinians and an economic policy of spending public money on deprived communities within Israel rather than on the settlements. His arrival gives Palestinians and the Israeli anti-Occupation activists a glimmer of hope of a viable left alternative to Likud.

On November 21, Sharon announced his resignation from Likud and his formation of a new party, the Kadima ('Forward') Party. As its leader he was distancing himself from those in Likud who disapprove of his 'disengagement' from Gaza, while clearly hoping to bring many others with him. He was making a bid for the votes of the centre and even of some leftwingers in elections announced for March 2006.⁸ But his statements showed his own rightwing agenda to be intact. He rejected what he had come to call the 'false' concept of 'land for peace' as promised at Camp David, substituting the idea of 'security for independence' (Macintyre 2005).⁹

Demographic change

Meanwhile the population of Israel has grown increasingly mixed, and less politically, economically and socially united. Of a total of almost 7 million Israelis, about 20% are Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel. Another 20% are recent Russian immigrants. There is a substantial number of Jews from Ethiopia. The remaining majority of the Jewish population are split between Ashkenazi (mainly Western) and Mizrahi (mainly Middle Eastern and / or Arab) Jews. As well as cultural variations between these demographic groups, including greater and lesser orthodoxy in religion, there are marked economic differences. The gulf between rich and poor has grown. The government's

⁷ Fisk, Robert (2005) 'Twisting Gulf arms', *New Statesman*, 31 October. P.33

⁸ Subsequent to my research, Sharon was taken seriously ill and Ehud Olmert took over leadership of Kadima. In March 2006 Kadima came well out of a national election and was expected to form a coalition government with Avoda (Labour). Likud performed badly.

⁹ Macintyre, Donald (2005) 'Fears for peace plan as Sharon rejects territorial concessions', *The Independent*, 23 November. P.27

enthusiasm for 'privatization' of the economy, favoured by the international monetary institutions, is costing some sectors dearly.

1.3 Women's responses to recent developments

Palestinian women living under Occupation

First, I wanted to get a sense of how Palestinian women living in East Jerusalem and the West Bank see Sharon's new tactics, and particularly the disengagement from Gaza. Amal Khrieshe Barghouti answered at greatest length. From the briefer remarks of others, I do not believe they would have disagreed with her. Indeed, neither in Palestine nor Israel did I encounter anyone who for one moment believed Sharon's 'disengagement' signalled good intentions with regard to ending the Occupation and enabling a viable Palestinian state. Amal said

Look, for 57 years until today the focus has been on the *management* of the conflict, not on solving it. Every proposal for a peace agreement has failed. And now what Sharon's doing, this 'disengagement', it's an illusion, a tactic designed to maintain the Occupation while suggesting it's ending.

Besides, she added, the cost to the Israelis of occupying Gaza was quite high because of the extent of the resistance there. She saw this move as Israel dumping a problem, while making it harder for Palestinians to convince internationals to keep up their resistance to the Occupation. For instance, a lot of people internationally who had originally expressed enthusiastic support for sanctions had now pulled back. She went on to stress that

disengagement wasn't negotiated. It wasn't part of the 'road map'. It was a unilateral move on Sharon's part. There are no negotiations now - only empty talks between the Israeli government and Abu Mazen about 'security'. They're offering absolutely nothing for the improvement of daily life now, or for the future of Palestinian society. It's worse than *apartheid*, what we have here. The West Bank is being reduced to a cluster of ghettos, little 'Suwetos'.

As a result of all this, Amal said, the legitimacy of 'two states for two peoples' was increasingly being questioned. More and more Palestinians now were discussing a single-state solution, because they had experienced the failure of so many attempts at compromise.

Natasha Khalidi said the redoubling of settlement and the house demolition programme in East Jerusalem since the withdrawal from Gaza reminded her of a similar increase after the Oslo accords. And there was international silence about these Israeli abuses! In fact, Israel had received additional funding from the United States since the withdrawal from Gaza, by way of 'reward'.

The Israelis promised to remove checkpoints, to make the task of Mahmoud Abbas in controlling the militant factions easier. They want him to disarm the factions and police the Palestinians. But nothing was done. That's why he postponed the elections. Whatever he does, everything will stay the same on the part of the Israelis. Disengagement from Gaza! It's like a ship that's dropped ballast so as to travel faster. And it's just been imposed on us. There was no negotiating about it. It was just 'accept or we crush you'.

Raja Rantisi, Nadia Naser-Najjab and Amal all mentioned their support for the call of Palestinian civil society organizations for an international campaign of 'sanctions, disinvestment and boycott' against Israel. They would like it to be thorough and widespread, and involve not just individuals and NGOs abroad, but national governments and the United Nations.

Views of Israeli women on the current situation

The Israeli women I spoke with on the whole agreed with the frustrated and depressed feelings of the Palestinian women reported above. For instance, when I spoke to Lily Traubmann in November 2005 she saw Sharon's disengagement from the Gaza Strip not as a step towards ending the Occupation but as part of a plan to dispose of the 'problem' of Palestinians. With its Jewish settlers removed, Gaza could now be sealed off, fired upon at will, and controlled from without. There was no gain in this action for Palestinian inhabitants of Gaza, except the freeing-up of a little land. She believed Sharon's disengagement move, like the construction of the Separation Wall, appealed to many ordinary Israelis by appearing to give them just what they most wanted: a definitive separation of Israelis from Palestinians so that the latter could no longer be seen nor heard. Their hope was, however, illusory. It's not actually possible to separate the two peoples. She pointed out that the Hadera bomber had come from Jenin, a town that is theoretically sealed off from Israel.

So in November Lily was feeling Sharon's disengagement strategy had successfully demonstrated to Israelis that the trauma of removal was so great, it would now be unthinkable to remove settlers from the West Bank. It had had the effect of deceiving some of the opposition to the Occupation in Israel, dividing it, and leaving it with no strategy. Even the two-state solution had come to look impossible. But by March 2006 she was a little more optimistic about the long-term effects of the Gaza disengagement. It has made a solution to the conflict involving giving up land a little more thinkable to Israeli Jews today. The colonizers have a little less legitimacy. Any political party that talks of continuing to hold the Occupied territories for ever, she said, is seen as extremely rightwing.

Likewise Molly Malekar, although she is deeply enraged and depressed by the strategy of settlement round Jerusalem and the continued building of the Wall, is not quite so negative about the disengagement. She says

Despite the fact we know disengagement was a trade-off, I do think it paves the way for change. For years the settlements were a 'sacred cow', we were told you couldn't disturb them, it would bring us to civil war. But now it's happened, it's been an anticlimax, and we go on.

Molly keeps tabs on the rightwing press to 'read the signs' and detects 'little cracks in the system, and they're growing wider'. She gave an example. *Yediot Achronot* (Latest News) is the most popular paper in Israel, read by 50% of the population. These days, almost every weekend supplement carries an article about what's happening in the Occupied Territories – including the experience of Palestinians. A recent headline was 'How much does the Occupation cost and who pays?' Papers like this publish what they know their readers want to read – so they are a good indicator of changing opinion. Since disengagement, people have become more pragmatic and realistic, she feels.

However, along the spectrum of optimism and pessimism, I heard some sharply contrasted views. On the one hand, Gila Svirsky said, 'There's been a dramatic move leftwards...There's far more support now for a two-state solution, for ending the settlements...There's a major consensus on a Palestinian state in the making...The dynamic is positive'. On the other, Debby Lerman said

In the past few years, Israel under Sharon has broken all the boundaries and shown complete disregard for international law and accepted behaviour. The few restraints that still remained after 38 years of Occupation are gone. There's a big swing to the right in Israeli public opinion.

PART 2: THE WOMEN'S PEACE MOVEMENT IN ISRAEL

The second intifada has greatly changed the nature of the anti-Occupation movement in Israel. The groups that were formerly important - Shalom Achshav (Peace Now) and Gush Shalom (the Peace Bloc)¹⁰ – have shrunk and are less evident, while relatively new organizations have come to the fore. Although few in numbers these are lively and engage in non-violent direct action.

One is Ta'ayush (Life in Common), formed in 2000. It is a grassroots movement of Arabs and Jews working to break down the walls of racism and segregation, and to end the Occupation, by constructing a genuine Arab-Jewish partnership. Another is Anarchists against the Wall (Anarchistim neged Hagader), an anti-authoritarian group of around one hundred people. Anarchistim are relatively young, in the dual sense of being of more recent origin and attracting younger members. They are the main organizers of regular Saturday demonstrations against the Separation Wall.

A weakness of Israeli anti-Occupation activism in the past has been that it is male-dominated and masculine in style – indeed at worst positively militaristic. This masculinism unfortunately persists today in Ta'ayush and Anarchistim. Tali Lerner, an active member of New Profile who also attends demonstrations against the Wall, says that Anarchistim has probably equal numbers of men and women among the membership. But, she says, 'The ones who persist tend to be men.'

The negligence of gender issues in the mainstream movement has been one reason for the evolution since 1987 of a lively Israeli women's peace movement. Women's organizations set up at different times between 1987 and 1990 included Women in Black (WiB), the Women's Organisations for Women Political Prisoners (WOFPP), the Israeli Women against the Occupation (SHANI), the Women and Peace Coalition and the Israeli Women's Peace Net (RESHET). Several of these organizations and coalitions went on to do valuable work during the 1990s, although there was a slow-down after the Oslo accords were signed in 1993, when peace seem to be on the way.

2.1 The Coalition of Women for Peace

Today there are nine women's organizations that direct their energies mainly towards ending the Occupation, and they come together in the Coalition of

¹⁰ Shalom Achshav is the largest extra-parliamentary movement in Israel, the country's oldest (and most conservative) peace movement and the only one to have a broad public base (www.peace-now.org.il). It was founded in 1978 when the Israeli-Egyptian peace talks appeared to be collapsing, by a group of reserve officers and soldiers from the IDF. They monitor, and oppose, Jewish settlement in the Occupied Territories. Gush Shalom (the Peace Bloc) was formed in 1993, with the primary aim of influencing Israeli public opinion and leading it towards peace and conciliation with the Palestinian people (www.gush-shalom.org).

Women for Peace, which may be seen as a successor to the Women and Peace Coalition of the eighties. While in Israel I interviewed Gila Svirsky, one of a group of women who founded the Coalition in November 2000 a few weeks after the outbreak of the second intifada. She is now its full-time financial and international coordinator.¹¹ I also interviewed Hedva Isachar, who is on its communications committee and a member of the management team that coordinates 'Reality Tours' (see p.13 below).

The organization

The Coalition's web site¹² describes it as 'bringing together independent women and nine women's peace organizations, some newly formed and others promoting co-existence since the founding of the state of Israel...We are a mix of Jewish and Palestinian women (all citizens of Israel) and we take action to amplify the voices of women calling for peace and justice for all inhabitants of the region'. They go on to say that the Coalition 'seeks to mobilize women in support of human rights and a just peace between Israel and its Arab neighbours, as we work to strengthen democracy within Israel'.

Any women's organization that agrees with its principles may be a member of this alliance.¹³ Their scope is wide enough that taken as a whole the membership spans opinion from Zionist to non-Zionist and anti-Zionist. The nine organizations that, alongside some individual members, currently constitute the Coalition are:

1. Bat Shalom
2. The Fifth Mother
3. Machsom-Watch
4. NELED
5. New Profile
6. Noga- A Feminist Journal
7. TANDI – the Movement of Democratic Women for Israel
8. WILPF (the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom – Israeli chapter)
9. Women in Black.

¹¹ Subsequently Gila Svirsky has expressed the intention of withdrawing from this post and a replacement is being sought.

¹² www.coalitionofwomen.org

¹³ These are the principles to which the Coalition subscribes:

- an end to the Occupation;
- the full involvement of women in negotiations for peace;
- establishment of the State of Palestine side-by-side with the State of Israel based on the 1967 borders;
- recognition of Jerusalem as the shared capital of two states;
- Israel must recognise its share of responsibility for the results of the 1948 war, and cooperate in finding a just solution for the Palestinian refugees;
- opposition to the militarism that permeates Israeli society;
- equality, inclusion and justice for Palestinian citizens of Israel;
- equal rights for women and all residents of Israel;
- social and economic Justice for Israel's citizens, and integration in the region.

These organizations send representatives to a monthly meeting which may be attended by any individual who so wishes. This meeting is the main decision-making body, and the decision-making process is consensual.

The Coalition has friendly relations with some feminist organizations whose concern is 'the condition of women' more than 'end the Occupation' – though of course any progressive group is pretty much bound to include the political and military situation among its issues. The Coalition works closely with feminist centre Isha l'Isha (Woman to Woman) in Haifa, which does work around UNSC Resolution 1325 (inclusion of women in peace processes). Noga is a feminist journal that has chosen to be in the Coalition. ASWAT, a group of Palestinian lesbians, has chosen not to be.

Activities

Support for member organizations

Under Gila's financial leadership the Coalition has raised considerable funding for its member groups – \$220,000 in the most recent year. This represents relatively large grants for certain of the member organizations, and smaller grants for specific projects in the case of others. In addition they've helped them with capacity building; run a project to improve member organizations' access to the media; produced a video describing the work of the member groups; and come to their support when under attack (e.g. when New Profile was slandered on a TV show).

Advocacy and campaigning

But in addition the Coalition engages in various kinds of activity on its own account. Under the heading 'advocacy and campaigning', each annual report runs to several pages of activity. They use public education, posters, billboards, street theatre, petitions and articles in the media. Twice a year they organize mass rallies. To list just a few characteristic instances of this kind of activism in recent years:

- Approx. a thousand Israeli and Palestinian women marched through the streets under the banner 'We Refuse to be Enemies';
- Several hundred women dressed in black lay down in a public plaza of Tel Aviv under the banner 'The Occupation is Killing Us All';
- with Palestinian women, the Coalition organized an International Human Rights March of Women - the visitors travelled for three weeks through Israel and Palestine calling for a just peace;
- a 'walking exhibition' in Tel Aviv, showing photos of destroyed homes in Gaza;

- the delivery of hygienic supplies, infant food and school supplies at different moments to towns in the Occupied territories;
- a campaign to demand that Israel permit UNRWA to resume food deliveries to Gaza, stopped in reprisal for a bombing;
- campaigning against the Wall.

The Coalition is planning a new, pro-active campaign for 2006 on the theme of 'Reframing Security'. They will rewrite the concept of 'security', the criterion by which Israelis continually judge their reality, helping show that security can't result from maintaining the Occupation. They will raise awareness of other meanings of security: economic security for the poor, security of women from violence in the home and on the street, and environmental security for a sustainable future. This Reframing Security campaign is inspired and informed by the ongoing anti-militarist work of New Profile, which has long questioned the meaning of the term 'security' as it is used by Israeli leaders and in mainstream Israeli discourse.

Outreach

In recent years the Coalition have found that rallies and campaigns draw fewer and fewer participants. During 2004 and 5 therefore they shifted the emphasis of their strategy. 'Outreach,' Gila told me, 'is now our biggest thing'. They are trying to reach five target groups: Russian-speaking women; teenagers; young women; Israeli women and men of centrist opinion; and disadvantaged Mizrahi women.

On the theme of 'feminist Russian-speakers for human rights and social justice', the Coalition has been organizing two-day 'forums' in which the women come together, have an overnight stay, and discuss radical feminist ideas and all kinds of discrimination – including against women at work, lesbians, Palestinians in Israeli society. Some have been held in mixed communities such as Nazareth, where Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs, both Christian and Muslim, live in proximity. This itself is quite a challenging experience for Russian-speaking women.

Recently the Coalition have started a 'third generation group' in which young women are 'creating their own vision'. They have organized 'young women's groups' in Tel Aviv and Haifa, and mobilized young women for out-reach to the younger-still 'teenage' group. In a project with New Profile, young women in their twenties organized a one-week camp taking a group of one hundred Israeli school children to experience the wilderness. On this trip they also met Palestinians for the first time.

The Coalition's main means of out-reach to 'middle-of-the-road' Israeli opinion is its programme of 'Reality Tours'. For the last year and a half, around ten groups a month, each of twenty or more people, have been taken on an advertised coach trip to see 'parts of the conflict they have never seen before', the separation Wall, military checkpoints, refugee camps and Palestinian

homes. The 'tourists' meet local people and have a talk addressed to them both before and after the trip. Three thousand five hundred Israelis have now been on these tours, Gila told me, and their hope is for a further three thousand during 2006.

Internationalism

The Coalition, more than any of its member groups, maintains international connectedness for the Israeli women's peace movement. They have constructed and now manage an active website in three languages. They also run an e-mail list of 4000 addresses worldwide, which reaches tens of thousands more. The Coalition is involved in the Social Forum movement. Gila travels abroad on speaking trips and many Coalition women speak at conferences in different countries.

Of the member groups, Women in Black is the most international. Gila is a long-time member of the Women in Black Jerusalem vigil – and in some ways it's now the Coalition that 'do' internationalism 'as' Women in Black. For instance, when the biennial Women in Black international conference was held in Jerusalem in August 2005, the Coalition staff were actively involved. More than 700 women from all over the world came to the event. In addition, live internet coverage was arranged, enabling 2000 more people than could actually visit Israel to attend the event 'in real time'.

2.2 The Coalition's more active member groups

2.2.1. *Women in Black*

Most of the Israeli Jewish women I interviewed had at one time or another stood on Women in Black vigils. Amira Gelblum for instance said 'We are *all* Women in Black. I feel it as part of my identity even if I don't go on vigils as often as I used to.'

Origins and development

The Women in Black vigils started more or less simultaneously in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa, based on relations between women in the left. Judy Blanc told me how in Jerusalem on the first night of the 1987 intifada some of them on the left had come together to discuss how to dramatize the Occupation. Let's do a 'black' vigil, they thought. They had in mind something like the Argentinian Madres of the Plaza Mayo or the South African white women's Black Sash movement. At the first vigil at the Cinemateque in Jerusalem they were seven – two of whom were men. 'The next week,' said Judy, 'it was all women, in the middle of town rather than on 'safe ground' near the Cinemateque, and we were physically attacked by the right. So we moved to a visible but more easily protected location'.

Gila had been working as head of a charitable foundation. Like other liberal Zionists of that time, she said,

we used to call the Occupation the ‘enlightened occupation’. We saw it as bringing civilization! So we were very shocked by the intifada. We suddenly saw ‘these Palestinians are killing our sons’. And that was what brought some women to the vigil. But in the core group there were some more political women— Judy Blanc, for instance, Yvonne Deutsch, Hagar Roublev and others.

Gila and her partner joined the early vigils, carrying their own placards saying merely ‘End the violence’. Only gradually did she come to see that ‘violence’ must mean the specific violence of the Occupation. Gila would go on to become a key actor in Women in Black and has written a book about the movement, as yet unpublished.

The number of WiB vigils snowballed and in the summer of 1990, just before the Gulf War, there were vigils in 31 sites in Israel. The vigilliers would meet every week on a Friday, usually for an hour from 1 pm till 2 pm, usually wearing black, at some prominent place such as a major crossroads. The Israeli vigils were never completely silent, in the way many Women in Black vigils in other countries eventually became. But the signs and placards they carried were their main means of communication. The most common was the raised black hand bearing the words ‘End the Occupation’.

Women in Black in Israel never developed into an organization, although there are occasional meetings. Each vigil is autonomous, and there have been no WiB leaders, co-ordinators or spokeswomen – although there have been charismatic personalities, among them the late Hagar Roublev. The vigils have often attracted an aggressive response from rightwing passers-by, who often call them ‘whores’ and ‘traitors’. But through their persistence and the simplicity of their message they have become a respected feature of the Israeli opposition. Besides, participating in vigils has changed many women. Gila said

Women in Black had the effect of educating women and politicizing unpolitical women. Lots of us involved with it shifted one step to the left at that time. Thank heaven our vigils weren’t silent! We were able to talk to each other and learn from each other.

In remission – the nineties.

The Gulf War in 1991 was a setback to WiB. Arafat’s public support for Saddam Hussein and his vehement opposition to the US invasion, caused many Israeli peace activists to fall silent. Then, in 1994, once the Oslo accords were signed there seemed less need for demonstrating against the Occupation. The only vigils that survived between 1993 and 2000 were those of Tel Aviv, Kibbutz Nachshon and (on and off) Jerusalem.

In October 2000, at the time of the second intifada, some vigils started up again. Today there are seven regular vigil sites (Carmiel, Gan Shmuel, Haifa, Jerusalem, Megiddo, Nachshon and Tel Aviv). The groups vary in their politics

and style. Judy Blanc explained that the movement as a whole does not define itself as feminist and has no particular stand vis-à-vis Zionism.

Men often stand alongside the women on Women in Black vigils. Yvonne Deutsch says, 'In the first intifada we did not want men to participate with us...when men attended we used to witness aggression between the men from the right and the men from the left who joined us. But today we are so few that nobody says anything against men's participation'. Judy Blanc adds, 'This is certainly in part because we are few and need the support. But I think the feminist understanding that feminism doesn't mean 'women only' has influenced the feminists among the women, while the other women who stand do not consider 'women only' to be a principle.' But it has been agreed and understood, Gila affirms, that women are the decision-makers in Women in Black.

The internationalizing of the movement

Gradually, as you can read on the WiB international website¹⁴, Women in Black spread from Israel to become a worldwide phenomenon. Italian women came to Israel to support the women's actions and took the formula home with them, creating *Donne in Nero* groups in many Italian cities. These in turn, as Yugoslavia collapsed into war in the early 1990s, carried the idea to Belgrade where a group, which would eventually match the Israeli group in influence, translated the name as *Zene u Crnom*.¹⁵ From there WiB spread worldwide so that today there are Women in Black style activities in 32 countries.

In contrast to the rapid growth of the international movement, Israeli WiB has become, with the passing of time, with changes in the conflict and in activism against the Occupation, less dynamic than in the early days. Not only has the number of vigils shrunk to seven, the numbers attending have also declined, so that whereas Jerusalem once had 100 to 120 women standing, there are now only 12 to 15. WiB is no longer breaking new ground – as Yvonne Deutsch put it, 'It's somehow frozen, and has not taken on itself a more comprehensive political role'. Hedva Isachar felt it was the second intifada that had put paid to WiB's relevance.

At the beginning that black hand saying 'Stop the Occupation' was new and powerful. Even the fact of women coming out on a Friday instead of staying home to cook the Saturday soup! But today even the right know the Occupation is destroying us. The question isn't whether to get out but *how* to get out. So Women in Black is shrunken and causeless.

Most of the women who would like to be more outspoken against the Israeli state's militarism and injustices against Palestinians are active in other groups and networks too.

¹⁴ www.womeninblack.org

¹⁵ See my profiles of Italian and Serbian Women in Black on my website www.cynthiacockburn.org

On the other hand, WiB holds a particular place in the spectrum of women's activism in Israel. Its dignity and singlemindedness have always appealed to women who don't feel able to do more than turn out once a week to join with other women, in a women's space, and pronounce 'Occupation corrupts'. As Sharon Dolev, a non-vigiller, put it, 'There's something noble about Women in Black's Sisyphean persistence'. But Gila's reflections on WiB, from inside, show how that very persistence hides a shift in motivation. She says

I'm just going to the vigil on Fridays now as if it's a job. It doesn't any longer have the intense emotions that it had, or the danger that used to be involved – the fear you might have a grenade thrown at you. Now I stand because it sends a message to women internationally about Israel and Palestine and gives them permission to do the same.

On the other hand she wouldn't want to see WiB striving to become more than the vigils, to embark on more analytical work or campaigning.

It's the one organization with true moral stature, everyone on the Left sees and respects it, and its high reputation depends precisely on simplicity and repetitiveness.

2.2.2 *Machsom-Watch (Checkpoint Watch)*

I learned about Machsom-Watch mainly from talking to Yehudit Keshet, one of its founders. Yehudit used to be a management consultant for non-profit organizations; she is also a writer, and her book about Machsom-Watch will be published early in 2006.¹⁶ She had been a member of the Bat Shalom political committee. The other two founding members of Machsom-Watch were Adi Kuntsman (a feminist and lesbian scholar from the former Soviet Union) and Ronnee Jaeger (long-time activist in human rights in Guatemala and Mexico). All three lived in Jerusalem.

Yehudit says

I thought, what's needed is testimony of abuses at the checkpoints. I thought: we will record and report. But who would we report to? We initiated meetings with the army – more than anything as a means of protest. They listened politely, but did nothing. They weren't open to change. And anyway, it's a fine line between co-operation and collaboration.

One morning the three of them, still uncertain what would unfold, just went out together to a checkpoint near Jerusalem. At first they scarcely knew what they were doing. 'We were fumbling. In Israel the Army is God – how can you confront it!' But they stood there, they watched and they took notes. They

¹⁶ Keshet, Yehudit Kirstein (2006) *Checkpoint Watch: Testimonies from Occupied Palestine*. London and New York: Zed Books.

went a second time, and others began to join them – at first it was mainly women from Women in Black groups.

Monitoring and recording

Gradually the purpose of Machsom-Watch clarified. It would be:

- to monitor the behaviour of soldiers and police at the checkpoints;
- to ensure that the human and civil rights of Palestinians attempting to enter Israel are protected;
- to record and report the results of their observations to the widest possible audience, from the decision-making level to that of the general public.

Mainly they went to checkpoints on the Green Line between Israel and the Occupied Territories. Eventually they began going to areas inside the Occupied territories to which they were legally permitted to go. This became important as the IDF increasingly used mobile checkpoints. The women quickly learned that checkpoints are not really about security for the Israeli population. The checks are usually cursory. They are rather a kind of harassment, intended to make movement difficult for Palestinians.

As the number of women in Machsom-Watch grew, there were four shifts a day at many checkpoints, each group of women taking notes, never failing to write a report - 'it was tremendous documentary evidence'. Where they found abuses they reported on them, to the state and to the media. So they quickly gained credibility and respect. Amira Gelblum told me, 'It's been an amazing development. They don't use any violence. They're just quiet witnesses. It's become an institution that the army has had to take account of'.

Composition and organization

In two and half years the number of women involved grew from three to 500. Although some are young women, the watchers are more typically mature, often retired, women – women who have the time but are also robust enough to undertake this relentless and emotionally exhausting task. All are Israeli, and the great majority are Ashkenazi Jews. (The reason for the absence of other ethnic groups will become clearer in Part 3 of this profile.) I asked Yehudit, why women?

We didn't start Machsom-Watch with a feminist agenda. It was not a feminist initiative, but a political move. We voted on whether to include men and decided against it. In Israel it's just not possible to have non-violent movement which involves men, because almost all men have served in the army. Even the few came along as guests to our observations -- we found they were either aggressive to the soldiers or chummy with them. And besides, when men are involved in mixed groups they are so often at the forefront, the ones articulating the ideology, speaking to the media.

Machsom-Watch have an egalitarian and informal approach to process and structure. Their management group is simply called 'Org'. Anyone can volunteer to be part of this group, which is the decision-making forum. They are registered as a not-for-profit company, but have no hierarchy, no paid staff and no office holders. Each area has a coordinator to organize the rota of teams that go to the checkpoints, and two women are responsible for communication. But anyone may be interviewed by the media and feel she can speak freely. Women who can't go to the checkpoints do the work of editing, translating and distributing the reports. E-mail is their basic organizing tool.

Achievements and motivations

I asked Yehudit what she thought Machsom-Watch might have achieved in its five years of operation. She feels that, though they have changed nothing with regard to the checkpoints, in the sense that none have been dismantled and the number has even grown with the construction of the Wall, nonetheless they have demonstrated that citizens can challenge the IDF. In their web page they write

A quiet but assertive presence at checkpoints is a direct challenge to the dominant militaristic discourse that prevails in Israeli society. It demands accountability on the part of the security forces towards the civilian estate, something hitherto almost unheard of.

The Israeli Civil Administration in the Territories have now set up a 'hotline' at checkpoints for occasions when they have to deal with emergencies -- for example of health. This could have been prompted by the presence of the watchers. Secondly, Machsom-Watch does regularly manifest solidarity with Palestinians and that itself is important, although as Yehudit put it, 'We have to recognize it's problematic -- it's never egalitarian and necessarily patronizing'. Finally, perhaps, Machsom-Watch provides a model of bearing witness and giving testimony that may be useful to other groups inside and outside Israel.

The range of political opinion in Machsom-Watch is great, some women seeing themselves as having a neutral observer role while others are more hostile to the military. The three founders were more radical than the majority of the current membership. A particular newspaper article had the effect of bringing in a great many 'mainstream' women from Meretz and the Labour Party, who prefer for instance that Machsom-Watch not be visible in demonstrations against the Wall, or even be involved in the Coalition of Women for Peace. Many women have mainly humanitarian motivations, others want to demonstrate to Palestinians that there's a likeable side to Israeli Zionists. Some women feel conflict, as mothers who sympathise with the young soldiers. They want to say 'I have a son like you -- show your humanity!' Consequently, they have to take care not to allow dialogue with the soldiers to blur into fraternization -- 'handing out cookies'.

This aspect of Machsom-Watch makes some women a little critical of the operation. Thus Debby Lerman said 'They're big and busy. They produce good reports. But it could be this is all about making the checkpoints seem nicer, more humane!' And Sharon Dolev said, 'It's good they're there, and non-violent. But I sometimes wonder isn't this just making the Occupation seem a bit better?' The other side of the coin however is that a lot of women of very moderate political views get to see the reality of the checkpoints and bring back these images to their communities. They say 'don't you know what's going on?' The experience is radicalizing. 'Women don't come out the same as they went in'.

Some women of Machsom-Watch who want to do more political work have formed another organization called Yesh Din (There is a Law) which records testimonies from Palestinians about abuses they have experienced at the hands of the Jewish settler communities, sometimes taking cases to the Israeli courts.

2.2.3 New Profile: Movement for the Civil-ization of Israeli Society

I received first-hand accounts of New Profile mainly from interviews with Rela Mazali, one of its founders, and Tali Lerner, a younger woman who has recently become involved in developing New Profile's youth activities. Rela is a freelance writer and describes herself as having been active in various groups since the early 1980s, 'radicalizing over time' – first gaining awareness of Israeli oppression of Palestinians and, through that and subsequently, coming to a feminist critique of Israeli society.

In the violence after Netanyahu provocatively opened a tunnel under the Temple Mount, many people were killed on both sides. In Herzlia, where Rela lives, some women started standing in protest at an intersection. Although their action was similar to a Women in Black vigil, the women didn't wear black. Rela said, 'They wanted to distance themselves from what they saw as something too radical, perhaps too lesbian. They called themselves 'Women and Mothers for Peace'. It was quite large for a while. Sort of spontaneous'. Some of the women she got involved with in this way expressed the need to 'embed their activism in more knowledge, to combine practice with theory'. So Rela, who had been writing on militarism in Israel, offered to facilitate a study group.

After a couple of years they decided they should move from words to action, working on aspects of military enlistment and avoidance of service in the IDF. They took the name New Profile. A study day on this theme attracted 150 people from all across the country. Rela says, 'There seemed to be a real need. There was already a *de facto* movement of undeclared draft-resisters that we could make more visible'. Rela drafted a founding 'charter', subsequently hammered out in many discussions within the group. This can now be seen on their website.¹⁷

¹⁷ www.newprofile.org

New Profile's aims

Their objective would be, they decided, 'to de-militarize society in Israel, to end Israel's occupation of land conquered in 1967, with its consequent injustices, and to generate a life-preserving, egalitarian, humane society'.¹⁸ Specifically, they would support and counsel those refusing military service. In the charter they stated

We, a group of feminist women and men, are convinced that we need not live in a soldiers' state. Today, Israel is capable of a determined peace politics. It need not be a militarized society. We are convinced that we ourselves, our children, our partners, need not go on being endlessly mobilized, need not go on living as warriors. We understand that the state of war in Israel is maintained by decisions made by our politicians – not by external forces to which we are passively subject... we refuse to go on raising our children to see enlistment as a supreme and overriding value. We want a fundamentally changed education system, for a truly democratic civic education, teaching the practice of peace and conflict resolution, rather than training children to enlist and accept warfare.

Composition: women and men

New Profile began as a women's organization – its feminist approach attributable to Rela among others. The women in question were, and are, all Israeli, mainly Ashkenazi Jews, not on the whole from underprivileged backgrounds – for instance having a car assists full participation, and speaking English also helps. The relative absence from New Profile of Mizrahi Jews and Palestinian citizens of Israel is due not only to the 'normal' alienating processes through which these groups tend to be under-represented in left organizations (as discussed further below), but also to their specific differences with regard to military service. The state excludes Palestinians from the draft. Conversely, Mizrahim, being relatively economically disadvantaged, tend to hesitate before possibly risking their chances of employment and upward economic and social mobility by refusing military service.

Though started by women, New Profile doesn't describe itself as a women's organization but rather as 'a feminist organization of women, men and youth'. The mixed membership follows from the fact that the organization offers its services to both male and female refusers of military service. Some but not all of the men are gay.¹⁹ Today in a typical management meeting there would be

¹⁸ New Profile, Annual Report 2004, p.2.

¹⁹ A note on lesbian and gay politics: I was told that the lesbian and gay movement in Israel is rather small. There are numbers of lesbians and gays active in the anti-Occupation movement, but not organized around that identity. Many on the contrary focus their energies on organizing to gain full rights in the military. A small group, Black Laundry, was active for a while but is apparently now little more than

perhaps three to five men out of 20 to 25 total participants. But Rela stressed that the presence of men does not usually present a problem. Knowing that New Profile calls itself 'a feminist organization', men only stay with it if they themselves identify as feminist. Also, 'the men are coming into an already established framework in which women are confident at expressing themselves and are supportive to each other'.

Organizational structure and process

New Profile don't have an office. The activists work from their individual homes, using their own computers and other resources. The organization has an excellent website and runs two list-servs, one an activist list through which the work of the organization is carried on, the other an extended mailing list of around 1000 interested readers. There is no formal membership structure – anyone can be on the mailing list, and that itself constitutes membership.

There are no directors or office holders. The monthly meetings are the main decision-making forum. They usually draw between 25 and 35 activists, and take place in someone's conveniently situated home, the venue rotating. Facilitation too is rotated, and usually involves two members working together. Decisions are by consensus, voting avoided wherever possible. Dissenting voices are carefully listened to.

While New Profile are not very well funded, they have received small grants from the Religious Society of Friends (the Quakers) in the UK and USA, the Movimiento de Objeción de Consciencia in Spain, and the Heinrich Boll foundation in Germany, among other sources. But this funding is not used to pay a fulltime coordinator. Rela devotes around 35-40% of her time to New Profile unpaid. Rather the funding is used to reward different members for short periods of work on particular projects, opportunities they attempt to rotate.

The practical work of New Profile is carried on by 'teams'. These include for instance a legal aid team, a counselling network, a group running a telephone hotline, an on-line forum, an education team, a fundraising team, and, interestingly, a 'critical reflection' team that continually evaluates the organization and its work.

Rela explained that 'we really *work* at non-hierarchy. We try to arrange it that all of us can represent the organization, learning as we go'. She sees this as a feminist method, 'trying to create structures that generate and maintain equality and open up spaces for people to grow and take responsibility'. When invitations come to speak abroad, these learning opportunities are spread out among the active members.

an e-list. Its young men and women aimed to be active on the Palestinian issue and out as a lesbian and gay community within the anti-Occupation movement. It was not easy.

There's a lovely informal practice whereby each person travelling knows she can use others' speeches, can get hers translated, and can find friends who will listen to her practising and give her feedback. People often need persuading. But it's empowering!

Gendered thinking about militarism

Rela pinned down for me very clearly the particular place where New Profile stands within the Israeli left and women's movements. First, they are explicit about what they *don't* attempt to do. They're not a 'bridge-building' organization seeking links with Palestinians in the Territories. They're not calling for a particular solution to the Palestinian problem. 'We don't categorize ourselves as Zionist, non-Zionist, anti-Zionist. We have ignored those positionings and the issues that go with them – one state, two states etc.' Nor does New Profile oppose merely the Occupation. 'The Occupation is horrible. But Israel would be militarized even without the Occupation. *Militarization* is the paradigm we address.'

One thing I noticed about New Profile is that gendered thinking permeates its work, more than is the case with other member organizations of the Coalition. Interestingly, the thinking involved in the conscious inclusion of men within a feminist culture may be both cause and effect of this.

In Hebrew you can't speak at all without using gender (Rela said). Verbs in the singular and plural are conjugated in gendered forms. In our publications, we choose to use the feminine. Some of our men use the feminine plural for their own speech and people find that highly irregular.

New Profile don't address male violence as such – there are other feminist organizations such as Isha l'Isha that do this. Their focus is on militarism and militarization. But in this they differ from the mainstream left in being concerned with 'structures of militarization and their relation to gender and certain kinds of masculinity'.

Diverging from mainstream draft refusal

Consequently, 'New Profile are seen in the refusal movement as the troublemakers around gender', Rela says. The two most radical mainstream organizations supporting refusal are Yesh Gvul (There is a Limit) and Courage to Refuse. New Profile differ from them.

Yesh Gvul's message is about 'do you or don't you serve in the military for this purpose or that'. Yesh Gvul men refuse to serve in the Occupied Territories but most of them still remain in the army. They believe that they can change the military system as participants; indeed, that their participation is a condition for changing it. New Profile addresses the underlying structural issue: it's about the militarization of Israeli society and what that does to life in Israel (Rela).

Thus New Profile does not favour the term 'refusenik' which Yesh Gvul use to distinguish and valorize those men who 'state their limits' but remain 'good soldiers'.²⁰

Basically, Yesh Gvul and Courage to Refuse have a purist idea of a specific kind of refuser, already a soldier, the right kind of soldier, and a *man*. New Profile work additionally with young boys and girls, eighteen-year old school leavers, the shministim, intending to refuse the draft. The teenagers have all kinds of reasons for attempting this – they may be ideologically pacifist, or feel mentally unfit for service, or just dislike uniformed institutional life, or just be scared. Yesh Gvul considers such people shirkers, whereas New Profile say, 'If these young people want to be draft-resisters, any reason is good enough for us. They can do it on the military's terms or on their own.'

Work with young draft-resisters

Tali Lerner told me about her work with the shministim. Although she's only in her early twenties, she already has a long experience of educational work with young people. She's currently enrolled in a programme of radical educators - but has been a 'youth guide' since the age of fourteen. She explained that youth activity is traditional in Israel. 'Most political parties have their own youth groups and 50% of young people join one or another. The majority – including the Scouting Movement - would be Zionist.' She was active for five years in the Social Democratic Party youth group, and in this progressive context was able to do 'value-laden' anti-militarist and feminist youth work. Now she's begun to do this kind of work for New Profile.

Most Israelis, males and females, are drafted into the military at the age of eighteen. Compulsory service is three years for men, and two years for women. Following compulsory service, Israeli men become part of the IDF reserve forces, and are usually required to serve several weeks every year as reservists, until their forties. There is no legal provision for conscientious objection for men, and a recent court ruling has severely limited the existing provision for conscientious objection for women. To be exempted from the draft on grounds of conscience, a young woman must state her refusal in writing, stating her grounds, and then go before a committee and make her case. While some young people get exemption on this or other grounds, others spend a term in military prison. The process of refusal is extremely unpleasant, demeaning, and highly challenging to a young person's sense of self. In addition to having to face up to highly authoritarian and judgmental military and judicial personnel, he or she faces often faces severe criticism from family and friends.

²⁰ See for instance Kidron, Peretz (ed.) (2004): *Refusenik! Israel's Soldiers of Conscience*. London and New York: Zed Books.

New Profile is not permitted to go into schools but has sometimes leafletted students outside the school gates. It also advertises its work widely and has become well known. Tali organizes New Profile meetings to which teenagers can bring their questions, 'questions about feeling different and so on'. They get help in developing their awareness and a critical faculty. The young people are organized into groups – that may be as many as 200. There are currently two such groups, and the aim is to start five more in 2006.

Those who decide to refuse military service are supported by other, more experienced, young people associated with New Profile. They get help writing the letter they must address to the Prime Minister, and in preparing the case they will make when interrogated by the military draft committee. Tali says, 'They test you to see whether you are a true total pacifist, in which case your refusal may be accepted, or whether you are just a 'political' refuser.' A proportion of these appeals for exemption are accepted. In many cases a claim of physical or mental 'unfitness' is taken at face value.

The reason a considerable proportion of the shministim are exempted from service is, Rela explained, not a sign of compassion on the part of the military committees. Rather, 'the military are complicit, because they don't in fact need so many soldiers. And also they seem to know they need the safety valve provided by the movement or by such exemptions in general.' But this is not to diminish the social significance of numbers of very ordinary youthful people refusing military service in a country where there is huge pressure to conform. Rela says of these young draft-resisters

They aren't necessarily on the left. It's an important process of ordinary young people not buying into the hegemonic narrative – the narrative that says there's no choice, everybody goes to the military, and if you don't, Israel will be in existential peril.

The feminist case against military service

Until recently it was quite easy for a girl, in particular, to be exempted from military service on grounds of 'pacifism'. It is entirely different, and indeed until now has been unthinkable, to refuse on grounds of 'feminism'. But New Profile is currently supporting a young woman, Idan Halili, who has made her case for exemption from military service 'for reasons of conscience based on a feminist ideology'. New Profile's support for this young woman, and their pride in her, marks their distance from the philosophy of Yesh Gvul. Here are some extracts from her impressive letter to the authorities seeking exemption, which in many ways encapsulates New Profile's feminist antimilitarism. Idan writes

Army service would force me to participate in an organization whose principles clash with the feminist values in which I believe, and which are reflected in a commitment to human dignity, equality, consideration

for the specific needs of various groups and individuals within the population, and a rejection of oppression...

I had been educated to regard the army as a beneficent type of organization, and I believed that the best and most obvious way to be of use to society and my country was through serving in the army. I intended to enlist and so I started the selection process to get drafted for military intelligence, with strong motivation. I thought that women's participation in the army – and in any other institutions – just like men, was the feminist solution and would bring equality...(translated from Hebrew to English by New Profile activist Mirjam Hadar).

She then traces the way her ideas changed as she deferred her military service to do a year's community work. Half-way through that year she decided that her best way of contributing to society would be in the form of 'feminist work within the army'. So she passed up on the 'military intelligence' function for which she'd already been selected and chose a more social kind of assignment. But by the year's end, after 'a long process of doubt and consciousness building' she came to understand finally 'that the army, in essence, does not square with feminist principles'.

[It] is a patriarchal organization: patriarchy consists of a hierarchic social structure which is underwritten by 'masculine' values such as control, a power orientation, and the repression of emotion. The army is hierarchical, and this, by definition, does not allow for equality. Indeed, the army's demand for uniformity and conformity, makes it impossible for individuals to express various different identities and needs. Such a type of organization usually undermines the weaker groups within as well as outside it...

I resist being a part of the army not only on theoretical grounds. Once I understood that there is a tight connection between all the forms of women's oppression in society, I also saw that the only way for me to live as a feminist would be to watch out, wherever I would be, for the social factors that make the abuse of women possible, to oppose these and to work for their replacement with alternative values. Army service would impose a way of life on me that is deeply contrary to my values and moral beliefs. I would have to consistently deny and suppress my most fundamental persuasions. I cannot live in such flagrant denial of my conscience and I cannot serve an organization that tramples the values on which my whole moral outlook is built.²¹

Gender relations are also an issue among the shministim themselves. The way the Israeli state deals with young men and young women differs - the young men being much more likely to go to prison. Some of the boys tend to 'play into this macho stuff', as Tali told me. One young woman, Shani Werner, wrote a letter on the New Profile website expressing her exasperation as a female among the shministim. At first she had felt herself to be on an equal

²¹ www.newprofile.org accessed 12 December 2005.

basis with the boys. But as they approached their prison term, she felt herself being reduced to a 'cheerleader' for these 'heroes'. Some parents however were aggrieved when this feminist 'take' on gender in the movement was made public. 'With our boys in prison, this is no time for women's issues', they said.

New Profile's ideological work

Another feature that distinguishes New Profile from other anti-Occupation women's organizations is the extent to which it conceptualizes its activity and grounds it in theory, expressing these ideas regularly in lectures, study days and workshops – many of which are accompanied by their portable exhibition 'Study War No More'. Thus, they write

New Profile members see militarization as a process that revolves around 'othering'. It turns on maintaining the image of a fearful enemy thought to 'understand only force' and on projecting the image of defenceless, passive 'women-and-children' whose need for protection justifies state violence. The enemy, on the one hand, and 'women-and-children', on the other, are militarism's 'others' -- each serving to sanction the practice of war and the continued supremacy of a masculine elite of fighters.²²

The passage above reflects the influence on New Profile of the US academic activist and writer Cynthia Enloe, whose several books have been important for many of us in making the links between feminism and antimilitarism.²³ The paper continues

In Israel today, the imagery of Hebrew mass-media and culture exerts continuous, concentrated pressure towards the normalization of military service and implicitly of war. It directs and seduces boys and men to become or be soldiers, to look and act in ways associated with soldierhood... [to be] the young, inevitably good-looking, sexy, masculine fighter... Jewish Israeli girls and women are seduced by a very different role model -- that of the admiring, supportive soldier's girlfriend, wife or mother, who lovingly serves the male soldier, conceding him special status and privilege.

2.2.4 TANDI, the Movement of Democratic Women for Israel (Tnuat Nashim Democratit in Israel)

I interviewed Samira Khoury who has been involved in TANDI from its origins and is still today its leading spirit. In 1948, when the Nakhba occurred, Samira was a young school teacher. Even as a child and a student she had been politically aware of the threat to Palestinians from the Jewish Zionist project. In May 1948 as the Israeli army advanced and massacres were taking place,

²² New Profile, Request for General Support 2005-6, October 16, 2005.

²³ For instance, Enloe, Cynthia (2000) *Maneuvers*, University of California Press.

she returned to her home town, Nazareth, where the population was soon doubled due to the influx of refugees. Together with other young women she organized the collection of food and medicine for refugees. They went on to form a society, the Nahda Society (it means 'Awakenings'), to do consciousness-raising on women's rights and run literacy classes for women.

In late 1948 these Palestinian women made contact with a group of Jewish women, the Progressive Democratic Organisation of Jewish Women, who had the same aims as themselves - opposing militarism, occupation and expulsions. They joined in a single organization, and affiliated to the Women's International Democratic Federation, which was associated with the socialist countries. By successive congresses and mergers, they eventually grew to have many branches.

At every stage of development, Samira emphasizes, they were Palestinian and Jewish women together. This was an important principle for them, without which they believed they could not succeed in their work for peace and the implementation of the UN resolutions, for the defence of women's and children's rights, and opposition to discrimination and apartheid.

In 1973, in a document signed by 5000 women, they named themselves the Movement of Democratic Women in Israel, TANDI (Tnuat Nashim Democratiot in Israel). TANDI has always been formally independent of political parties, though many of the women involved come from a venerable Communist tradition in the region, today mainly reflected in the political party Hadash.

At first some feminist organizations concerned specifically with 'women's issues' questioned why, as women, TANDI were working on the issue of peace. Samira says, 'We believed it was both our right and our responsibility as women to do so.' In 1985 TANDI was a founder member of an alliance of women and women's groups for peace, that would later become well-known as RESHET, The Network, from which many other initiatives developed.

Today, TANDI continues to be active. It does not have formal membership, seeing itself more as a movement than an organization. Having started with nearly equal numbers of Palestinians and Jews, today a majority of the women involved are Palestinian with a Jewish minority of around 10% - which they are actively working to increase. TANDI hold a four-yearly congress and an annual general meeting, at which a central board and president are elected. The board meets bi-monthly and elects a secretary and an executive committee which meets every two weeks. TANDI have no source of funding, except for occasional small grants to pay the costs of specific projects. All work is done voluntarily. They have a small office, but lack equipment.

TANDI's activities today include the following. First and foremost: empowering women. In the years 2004 and 2005 they ran 9 courses annually, each attended by 20 women. These courses offer an education in democracy and gender issues. They encourage the participants to recognize their right to a life outside the home, to education and employment. They show them

possibilities for being involved in political life and decision-making. The success of these courses was visible, Samira says, in the leadership role taken by these young women in the big March 8 International Women's Day demonstration this year.

A second important activity is solidarity with Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories. TANDI women participate in activities and demonstrations in the West Bank, and also arrange for the sale in Israel of Palestinian products, such as olive oil. They organize groups for mutual understanding. The construction of the Separation Wall and the increasing number of checkpoints make crossing in either direction exceedingly difficult but, Samira said, 'We find ways across the mountains'. Many Jewish members of TANDI are in Machsom Watch, and many Palestinian members are active also in Bat Shalom.

Thirdly, TANDI organizes outreach to women in the 'unrecognized' villages inside Israel, explaining their rights and supporting their demand that the Israeli state provide them with the services such as roads, water and electricity to which all villages are entitled.

A fourth activity is the movement's work against domestic violence. They were the first organization to have a telephone 'hotline' for Arab women experiencing violence. They have set up shelters for women, two houses for 'girls in distress' and a 'house of passage' - a half-way house for women on leaving the shelters. They help women survivors of violence to find employment. They have opened many kindergartens and crèches. Finally TANDI have projects for children with disabilities and learning difficulties.

Every International Women's Day, from 1949 to the present day, TANDI have sent a memorandum to the Knesset calling on them to institute an annual day's holiday with pay on this date, March 8. They also call for equality for women in work, marriage and divorce, and for the separation of religious and civil law. They have done research which was submitted to the United Nations.

2.2.5 Bat Shalom (Daughter of Peace)

In 1989, a meeting was convened in Brussels between prominent Israeli and Palestinian women peace activists, supported by European women. The meeting initiated an on-going dialogue that in 1994 resulted in the establishment of the Jerusalem Link comprising two women's organizations—Bat Shalom on the Israeli side, and the Jerusalem Center for Women on the Palestinian side. The two organizations share a set of political principles, which serve as the foundation for a cooperative model of co-existence between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. So runs the first paragraph of the home page of Bat Shalom's website.²⁴ They go on to describe themselves as

²⁴ www.batshalom.org

an Israeli feminist grassroots organization, comprising Jewish and Palestinian Israeli women working together for a 'genuine peace grounded in a just resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict, respect for human rights, and an equal voice for Jewish and Arab women within Israeli society'.

Structure, composition and politics

Bat Shalom is rather formally structured. The organization has its principal office in Jerusalem and a second in Afula, in northern Israel. It has several paid staff. In Jerusalem are Molly Malekar, director; Lily Traubmann, political coordinator; Maya Frankforter, office manager. Bat Shalom also have a part-time fundraiser, Jessica Nevo. Northern Bat Shalom are staffed by two part-time programme coordinators, Yehudit Zaidenberg and (recently resigned and soon to be replaced) Nizreen Mazzawi. Bat Shalom's governing body, a 25-strong board, includes a number of former Knesset members and other women of public standing. The majority are Ashkenazi Jews; Palestinian Israeli membership of the board is approx. 20%; and there is currently one Mizrahi Jewish woman. The director is also a Mizrahi woman.

Bat Shalom isn't dominated by any particular political party, but is necessarily, given its aims, 'of the left'. However, together, the board and staff span rather a wide range of political opinion, from Zionist to non-Zionist and anti-Zionist. (Each of those terms of course has many different and contested meanings.) Though in the context of the Jerusalem Link (see below) certain political principles have been worked out in a long and painstaking process, there are still unresolved differences of view within the Bat Shalom board on issues such as, for instance, how to interpret 'the right of return' of Palestinian refugees to Israel, and the current lively question of whether to welcome international 'sanctions, divestment and boycott' (see p.79 below).

There is also quite a range of opinion in Bat Shalom on another dimension: women, gender and feminism. Although in their website they term themselves a feminist organization, and some of the board and staff certainly identify as such, I heard conflicting views as to whether this is really an accurate description of Bat Shalom as a whole. Aida Shibli told me, 'We are currently discussing whether we're feminist or not. Are we a *feminist* organization, or are some of us feminist women in a *women's* organization? This is undetermined as yet.' But Debby Lerman said, 'In my opinion, the discussion we are carrying on in Bat Shalom is "what kind of feminism unites us" and not "whether we are feminist or not"'.²⁵

Bat Shalom has two parts – the all-Israel organization based in Jerusalem and a regional organization specific to northern Israel, that differs from it in important ways. So, Lily Traubmann says, 'In a way, there are really two Bat Shaloms, not one. Yet each is necessary to the other'. I deal with them separately below.

²⁵ Subsequently the Bat Shalom board took a decision affirming that BS is 'a feminist organization'.

Bat Shalom in Jerusalem

Part of the energies of Bat Shalom in Jerusalem are invested in co-operation with the Jerusalem Center for Women in the context of the Jerusalem Link. I describe this activity separately in Part 3 of this paper, (see page 44 below). The Jerusalem office is the main the site of Bat Shalom's international relations and political publishing. Board meetings circulate between Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Afula. But Bat Shalom Jerusalem branch also have some practical projects in the city and its environs.

You can't live in Jerusalem currently without being aware of the shocking developments as Ariel Sharon contrives his 'facts on the ground' -- the house demolitions, the building of the Wall and the construction of Jewish settlements to disrupt connection between the Palestinian population in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Jewish women living and working in West Jerusalem seldom come in contact with Palestinians. The Bat Shalom office is in Jewish West Jerusalem. Palestinians mainly live in East Jerusalem, a segment of the city that fell outside the Israeli state in 1948 but was annexed in 1967. It is adjacent to West Jerusalem but sometimes seems a continent away.

In Jerusalem the Occupation is felt very strongly and continuously. It is always a fundamental fact of life here – impossible to forget for a moment. Bat Shalom's practical projects in Jerusalem therefore centre on opposing the settlements and the Wall and keeping alive the notion that the city will one day be fully shared, and become side-by-side capitals for Israel and the eventual state of Palestine.

They have built links to Palestinian communities in the neighbouring villages of Bidou and Aram, joining local women on demonstrations against the Wall. Khulood Badawi, a Bat Shalom board member living in Jerusalem, and a Palestinian citizen of Israel, told me

The villages are being separated by the Wall from both East Jerusalem and the West Bank. They're being isolated. We bring Israeli women to see the reality of the Occupation machine and to act against it. We, the Israeli women and Palestinian women from Bidou and Aram had hoped that, by our partnership, the Wall could be stopped somehow. Of course we failed. And now the Wall's in place between us. [All the same] this work has been good, concrete, a kind of resistance.

In co-operation with Ta'ayush, Bat Shalom recently carried out a practical project of restoration in Silwan, a Palestinian district in the old part of East Jerusalem, where the municipality has a programme of house demolitions. Khulood explained that, whereas in Bidou or Aram the Israeli policy is one of cutting off existing Palestinian villages, in Silwan the Israeli government is using another strategy – judaization – 'cleansing' the area of Palestinians by land-use planning policy.

They've declared a green area, a kind of park, and issued hundreds of demolition orders. They don't offer re-housing. The municipality will not even give building permits to Palestinians in East Jerusalem. Either they must build illegally or go to the West Bank. This is *transfer* by land use planning. They don't actually take you forcibly, but induce a kind of self-transfer.

Khulood believes the only strategy for Bat Shalom in Silwan is to use their privilege as an Israeli organization to break the Jewish consensus on Jerusalem-for-Jews and to make internationals aware of what is going on. 'Yes, Bat Shalom are privileged and my aim in being part of it is to bring their voice to bear.'

Manal Massalha, also a Palestinian citizen of Israel, told me about two projects she had initiated when working for Bat Shalom. The first was a tour for Israeli women to the village of Lifta, near Jerusalem, where they had heard a Palestinian woman refugee, originally born in that village and twice up-rooted, tell what had happened there in 1948. The second was a meeting on 'space, control and memory', showing how (as Silwan starkly illustrates) these three things are connected. Planning is a political instrument and the indigenous Palestinian memory is being erased by Zionist policy.

Molly told me how increasingly difficult cross-Line work is becoming. She said

I've worked with Palestinians for twelve years. For the first time now I'm afraid of crossing the Wall. But I do it. For me it's an act of protest, saying 'no' to attempts to wall us off. As women and as feminists we know what it is to be kept behind closed walls.

Northern Bat Shalom

If in Jerusalem it's impossible to forget the Occupation, in the north of Israel, where Palestinian towns and villages are located within the wide agricultural landscapes of the kibbutzim and moshavim, what you can't forget is the basic inequality of Palestinians and Jews inside Israel. Northern BS was formed in 1993 by Jewish and Palestinian women living in 'Megiddo, Nazareth and The Valleys'. This is with areas known as the Triangle and Lower Galilee, the part of northern Israel with the largest population of Palestinians. As mentioned above, they have an office in the Jewish town of Afula, and two part-time paid programme coordinators. One of them, Yehudit Zaidenberg, is a Jewish woman from a nearby kibbutz; the other, until recently, was Nizreen Mazzawi, a Palestinian from Nazareth. Lily Traubmann, Bat Shalom's political coordinator, lives in Megiddo kibbutz and is active in BS North as well as in Jerusalem. I had also visited them in September 2002 and draw here, in addition to my recent interviews, on conversations I had then.²⁶

²⁶ I have written about this northern group of Bat Shalom in an in-depth study published in 1998. See Cockburn, Cynthia (1998) *The Space Between Us: Negotiating Gender and National Identities in Conflict*. London and New York: Zed Books.

An evolving project – 1993-2000

For the first five or six years of their life, the main activity of Northern Bat Shalom was 'dialogue workshops' bringing together Palestinian Israeli women of the Arab towns and villages and Jewish women of the kibbutzim and moshavim of the Wadi Ara, Lower Galilee and The Valleys. Yehudit Zaidenberg explains, 'It was a process of 'getting to know each other'. We believed that, with knowledge and acquaintance, the huge fear each felt of the other would lessen and relationships would form. And that did happen'.

Once confidence was gained, social and cultural activity no longer seemed enough. They felt ready to deal with political issues. The aim became, Yehudit Zaidenberg explained, 'to effect change in the political thinking among the people around us - ultimately effect change in political reality'. While the main 'political reality' for Bat Shalom in Jerusalem is the Occupation, for northern Israel it is, in addition to the Occupation, racism, inequality and women's lack of rights within the Israeli state.

The events of October 2000 were a turning point for Bat Shalom as for many leftists in Israel. Local Palestinians were very aroused. This time the intifada was in Israel. Whereas many on the left felt disappointed by the new radicalism of the Palestinians, Yehudit and other Jewish women in Bat Shalom felt a deep solidarity with it. She says, 'To me what happened wasn't a surprise. We'd known that Palestinians couldn't endure such inequality and injustice for ever. What astonished me was that my friends in the kibbutz felt so betrayed'. At that moment she felt alienated from them.

After October 2000, there was both a drawing apart and a radicalization within the membership of Northern Bat Shalom. It could no longer be taken for granted that Jews and Palestinian members were completely in accord. The numbers of actively engaged women fell off. So did the number coming to participate in Bat Shalom events. The choice of themes for discussion began to take more risks with conventional Jewish opinion, which in this region of kibbutzim and moshavim is conservative Zionism.

When I was there in the autumn of 2002, for instance, the theme of the sukkah was 'racism'. It responded to the current climate in the country, the ugly anti-Arab sentiment expressed in graffiti, threatening demands for 'transfer' of Palestinian citizens out of the state. And it was not only the Palestinian participants at the sukkah who called Israel a racist state and society. Edna Zaretsky explained the function of racism for the state. 'To do what's done in the Occupied Territories,' she said, 'you have to have racism in Israel. The other must be inferiorized, stigmatised, if we are to live with ourselves and our actions'.

Racism was a bold and controversial theme to raise in the context, and it shook many of the more Zionist members - including Vera Jordan, a former board member and still today a committed activist in northern Bat Shalom. She told me she feared that if she was alienated, other Jews in the locality

would be too. 'Introducing racism is provocative. Humanist Jews can't accept that nationalism is racism. For them racism is 'what the Nazis did'. They can't see themselves as that bad. And they are not. They won't be able to identify.'

So, 'little by little we became more anti-zionist', Yehudit said. Because of this, some Jewish women withdrew. On the other hand, some Palestinian women withdrew because in the new political conditions after October 2000 they no longer felt like working with Jewish women. For both Palestinian and Jewish women the price paid in their communities for working with each other became greater. The result of these shifts in membership is that numbers of Palestinians and Jews in Northern Bat Shalom is today about equal.

Bat Shalom's activities changed too. Instead of cultural co-existence work, such as celebrating the major festivals of Xmas, Hanukah and Ramadan together, they began to hold a series of 'political cafes' on women's issues in relation to, for instance, globalization and economic trends. At election time they brought speakers from different parties so that women could question them. They held showings of films touching on Palestinian and women's issues, bringing the directors to discuss with the audience. They organized bus tours to 'unrecognized' and 'vanished' Palestinian villages.

Present direction and focus

I learned about more recent developments from Mariam Yusuf Abu Husein, a Palestinian citizen of Israel, who lives in the Arab town of Umm el-Fahm in the Wadi Ara and is an active member of Northern Bat Shalom. Since 1996, a major event in the calendar of northern Bat Shalom has been Sukkot, a Jewish festival, when they set up a sukkah, or tent, and invite women and men for a programme of talks and discussions, and a demonstration. Although the date is associated with the Jewish calendar, the event has been organized by Bat Shalom as a whole, Palestinian and Jewish women together.

Mariam first encountered Bat Shalom five years ago when she saw the sukkah at Megiddo crossroads and went in, curious to find out what was going on in the tent. She was attracted to the organization by two things – that it was feminist women, who saw Arabs as a partner for common struggle; and that it was opposing the Occupation and active on 'all the burning issues'. She took part in its activities for a while, including demonstrations against the Jenin massacre and visits to the refugee camps, distributing food and clothes. Two years later she had become a very active member.

Although she liked the principles of Bat Shalom, Mariam felt she could contribute new ideas and directions. She wondered for instance why the group's main annual event was on a Jewish festival, supposedly because mothers would be on holiday at that time. But which mothers? She pointed out that this Jewish Feast of Tabernacles is not a holiday for Palestinian women. She suggested Bat Shalom might think of a day that could be more generally relevant. They decided to commemorate Land Day, Yom Al Ard. This commemorates 30 March 1976 when the Israeli state, in its programme of

'judaization' of the Galilee, expropriated land from the villages of Arraba, Sakhnin and Deir Hanna. Although there had been expropriations in other areas of Israel, this was the first time the villagers had risen up in concerted opposition. Six people, including one woman, were killed in the resulting police violence.

Yom Al Art had always been commemorated by Palestinian citizens of Israel. The Israeli Jewish left had recognised the day too, but had seen themselves as supporting Palestinians in the commemoration. Now Mariam and the other Palestinian women of Bat Shalom suggested to the Jewish women that this day should be seen as 'not just our problem but yours too' - Land Day had been experienced by both communities, as oppressor and oppressed. They needed to remember those events together. She said, 'It was very important to me and other Palestinians in the organization that all Bat Shalom women should take on Yom al Art as their *own* issue'. Lily says, 'This was a very radical step – to recognize that Yom al Art is an *Israeli* concern, not just a Palestinian one. That we all have to take responsibility for it'.

It was also radical in another way – Bat Shalom represented the theft of the land as a *women's* issue. Yom al Art activities had always been led by men, with women following behind in the demonstrations, but never part of the leadership. Mariam said

Bat Shalom presents itself as a feminist organization. Failing to understand this is the very opposite of feminist. Women have a special relation to the land. Women work the land, they plant the seeds, they carry the water from the wells. The well, or spring, is a feminine symbol, it is protective, containing, and gives people water to live. Palestinian women used to meet each other at the well or spring. It was a rare thing, a legitimate public space for women. When Palestinian communities were displaced from their land and forced to be town dwellers, women suffered in a particular way. Yom al Art marks a significant loss for women.

Some of the Jewish women immediately understood these points, others were slower to see them. The first year, the Palestinian women proposed to hold the event in the Palestinian town of Umm el-Fahm. Some Jewish members protested that Jewish women would not attend if it were in a Palestinian town - they suggested holding it in a kibbutz. But the proposers stood their ground. 2006 will be the fourth year Bat Shalom has commemorated Land Day, in Umm el-Fahm, Nazareth or another Palestinian location. They were the first women's organization to do this. They mount a two-day event, at which the older Palestinian women recount the events of the Nakhba and Land Day from their perspective, visits are made to local villages, and there are invited speakers. Up to a hundred women attend these occasions, including many Jews. The younger Palestinian women that attend are also, many of them, hearing this history for the first time. In addition, each Land Day event has a theme. For instance, in 2005 there was a presentation on 'planning and domination', which dealt with the way land-use planning is used by the state to accentuate the domination of Palestinian communities, isolating them from

each other and impeding development. They focused on how this affects women.

Gathering testimonies of the Nakhba and Yom al Art

Northern Bat Shalom work as much as possible in both Hebrew and Arabic language. They have produced a fine book, *Testimonies: Palestinian Women in the Nakhba*, based on interviews. They are also collecting the testimonies of older Jewish women, and are seeking funding to do more of this kind of work. They see the gathering and recording of women's memories and reflections as 'a feminist way of working - listening to women'.

A current project, a 'pilot' for which they have received preliminary funding, involves young people of 16-17 years in nearby Palestinian and Jewish communities. A group of ten in each place will be trained in interview method so they can interview older women relatives about 'what they did in 1948'. Lily emphasises that this isn't about women as victims, but about how they actively struggled and resisted the brutal processes to which the Israeli state has subjected the Palestinian population. 'We want to bring to view an alternative kind of heroism – a heroism that's not militaristic.'

The two groups of young people will work first separately and then together, publishing the testimonies in the form of a magazine or review, and developing a piece of theatre to present in various venues. Five hundred portfolios will be printed for distribution to libraries and schools, containing the testimonies and photographs, together with a book by the well-known writer Ilan Pappé.

Contact across the Line

Although their main focus has been the issue of democracy and citizenship inside Israel, Northern Bat Shalom also look towards neighbouring Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. The town of Jenin is only fifteen minutes drive from Afula. At night you can see its sparkling lights clearly from the Megiddo crossroads. Jenin women had sometimes crossed the Green Line to attend Bat Shalom events. Several visits had been made to women's associations in Jenin, facilitated by Samira Khoury and other Palestinian members of Bat Shalom who are also members of TANDI. Such visits by Jews to the Occupied Territories are of course highly contentious in the Jewish community in this region, among whom it is considered at best foolishness, at worst treason.

One negative consequence of the intensification of Israeli repression in the West Bank since the start of the second intifada was the loss of this connection with women across the Green Line. After the destruction of Jenin by the IDF in 2003 they were only able to meet twice more before communication between them was definitively cut by removal of the checkpoint and closure of the road between the two towns with massive, electrically-controlled gates.

It is not just the physical closure however that now impedes connection between women of the West Bank and the adjacent area of northern Israel. With the changing political circumstances, *cultural and social* contact is not acceptable to the Palestinian women of the Occupied Territories, neither does it any longer seem adequate or appropriate to the Israeli women of Northern Bat Shalom. (In this there is a parallel with the partnership of Palestinian and Jewish women within Northern Bat Shalom.) Only a well-articulated, shared *political* project would be relevant, and the cessation of contact imposed by the closure means this is no longer (for the moment) practically feasible. It is deeply frustrating to Mariam, for instance, who illustrated the effect of rupture: for her, contact is now reduced to sending small donations of clothes and money with an old Palestinian who comes across the Green Line selling things.

However, even if contact across the Green Line has been severed, Northern Bat Shalom see their activity against racism and for equality and democracy within the Israeli state as intrinsically connected with opposition to the Occupation and partnership with Palestinians of the Occupied Territories. It is all, as Yehudit put it, one struggle 'to achieve peace and to bring justice'. Samira Khoury, for instance, drew parallels between the oppression of Palestinians in Israel and in the Occupied Territories. She said

I see it as one and the same problem. Palestinian people in Israel have family members in the Occupied Territories. After the Nakhba we who remained suffered under military control, we couldn't move without permits, some activists were under restraint. And still today Israel is not a democracy – either in law or in practice.

She cited the discrimination in employment, the many injustices concerning land. (I shall discuss this further in Part 4 below.) A recent citizenship law that, in the case of a marriage between a Palestinian Israeli and a Palestinian from the West Bank prevents the couple living together in Israel, clearly affects Palestinians both sides of the Green Line. She went on

Another connection between us is that Palestinians in Israel, like those living in the Territories, are vulnerable to extreme measures. For instance, the threat of 'transfer'. Two years ago in a meeting some Knesset members, academics and personalities spoke quite openly of measures to achieve the removal of Palestinians out of Israel. They mentioned confiscation of their lands, not giving education or jobs, offering money to emigrate, and even physical removal.

With the loss of contact across the Green Line, the activities of Bat Shalom down in Jerusalem have become even more valued by the women of Northern Bat Shalom. They can (as we saw above) maintain the links with West Bank women and have the active projects opposing the Wall and house demolitions to which in the north they can no longer aspire.

Partnership between Palestinians and Jews in Northern Bat Shalom

Mariam Abu Husein would like to see yet more Palestinian women active in Bat Shalom. She says the commemoration of Land Day has brought Palestinian women along in greater numbers, but only for Land Day activity itself. Although some Palestinian Israeli women don't favour co-operation with Jews in present circumstances, there are others, like herself, who do. It isn't, she says, that people don't care. It's important for Palestinian women to engage, because whatever the political beliefs of a Jewish woman she cannot speak for a Palestinian woman. She said, 'If you were to ask me why I'm in Bat Shalom, it's because Lily, Yehudit and the other Jewish women are *like* me, but they are *not* me. They don't live in my skin. They can't do it without me'. Lily, who overheard this, said 'I agree utterly!'

Mariam had commented on the rather slight presence of Palestinian women in Jerusalem Bat Shalom, where there is no Palestinian working in the office and rather few on the Board. I asked her whether she feels there is genuine equality today in Northern Bat Shalom. She hesitated. 'Not yet. Not exactly. In some things, yes. In others not.' There is, however, more equality in the north, she feels, than in Jerusalem. For instance, when she asks 'Why are there not two directors, one a Jew and one a Palestinian, in Jerusalem Bat Shalom?', the answer given is often 'Well, there's the Jerusalem Center for Women in East Jerusalem'. But, as Mariam believes, that is a separate organization, and it is in *East* Jerusalem. Bat Shalom should have its own internal partnership and balance.

In relating to her Jewish partners she has certain conditions.²⁷

I want Jews first to acknowledge all this land they live on was Palestinian – after that we can talk. I would have preferred they'd never come. Now - they're here, and we live with that. But I want the wrong confessed. Only then can we talk about a solution.

And Bat Shalom do have a quality that Mariam values greatly: they can and do talk about anything. No issues, not even the 'right of return', are too sensitive to tackle. 'It's not that we expect necessarily to resolve all our differences, but at least we can talk about them'. In few situations between Jews and Palestinians is the talk so honest.

I asked her whether other Palestinian women – indeed whether she herself - would be vulnerable to criticism in their local community for working in partnership with Jews in Bat Shalom. She says no – certainly in her case, because she and her husband are both respected in the community. But she does sometimes feel the burden of somehow being 'a representative' of

²⁷ Khulood Badawi said something very similar. Her basic terms and conditions for co-operation with Jewish women include, first, not to be treated as a minority, an 'Arab' or 'Palestinian', but to be dealt with 'as Khulood, a person'. Secondly, there must be well-agreed, common political ground. Third, she says, 'I require that those I work with recognize and acknowledge my historical background, the Nakba. If we are to talk with Jews about conflict and peace, they must first acknowledge their own part in that history and the privilege that results from it'.

Palestinian Israelis. 'That's sometimes heavy!' she says, 'But I brought it on myself. I came in, I couldn't leave – now I face the challenge!'

Beyond the context of Bat Shalom, I discuss further this question of relations between Israel Jewish women and women who are Palestinian citizens of Israel in Part 4 below.

PART 3: PROBLEMS OF RELATIONSHIP ACROSS THE GREEN LINE

3.1 Problems in relationship across the Green Line: perspectives of Palestinian women in the Occupied Territories

'Pros and cons' of dialogue with Israeli activists

It will be clear from Part 1 above that circumstances make it difficult to build and maintain bridges of connection between women on the two sides of the Green Line. There are two initiatives (of which I know – there may be others) in which Palestinian women living in the Occupied Territories have an on-going dialogue with Israeli women activists opposing the Occupation. The first is the Jerusalem Link, which structures a connection between the Jerusalem Center for Women and Bat Shalom. Secondly, there is the project of an International Women's Commission, in which the leading actors are currently Maha Shamas, on the Palestinian side, and former Israeli Knesset member Naomi Chazan. The two initiatives are different in nature. Below I describe the Link – and discuss the IWC later, under the section on 'international relations' on page 76 below.

This section, 3.1, is based primarily on interviews with six Palestinian women. They are, in alphabetical order, Amal Khrieshe Barghouti, Maha Abu-Dayyeh Shamas, Nadia Naser-Najjab, Natasha Khalidi, Raja Rantisi and Rana Nashashibi. Three of them (Amal, Maha and Natasha) are involved in the Jerusalem Link, while three (Nadia, Raja and Rana) had chosen, for the moment, not to be involved in any Palestinian-Israeli dialogue. This was useful in enabling me to hear the thinking that leads to such choices.

Raja Rantisi for instance told me

In the years after 'Oslo' there was lots of connection to Israel. There was plenty of funding for it. There was optimism then. But since 2000 and the second intifada things have cooled down. Lots of Palestinian organizations withdrew from contact then. The [Palestinian National Authority's] Women's Affairs Committee were very much against co-operation.

There are still organizations with dialogue and even co-operation on the agenda, she explained. The problem was the difficulty in implementing anything. One reason was the practical limitations on movement. Cars, people, they couldn't cross without a permit. Legally speaking, Israeli Jews could be arrested for coming to Ramallah or other Area A parts of the territories (those technically under Palestinian control as a result of the Oslo process). Many Jews, she said, were afraid to come. It was therefore difficult to have meetings, except abroad, for example in Turkey.

A more significant impediment, however, in present political circumstances, was Palestinian feelings. She went on

Lots of Palestinians think the Israeli peace activists haven't done enough during the second intifada. There are various views on the reasons for the weakness of the movement. The struggle has become defined around specific issues, among which are: the rights of the refugees; borders; the legitimacy of suicide bombers; and the status of Jerusalem. Because the Israeli peace movement isn't a unitary voice, a lot of disputes come up between *them* on these things. For most Israelis now they are fundamentally threatening issues. It puts the peace movement, who would otherwise be open to talking about them, in a difficult position internally - they're seen as traitors.

So none of these three women are currently involved in the Link or any other project of 'dialogue', though they have been in the past and may still occasionally meet Israelis in their professional lives. It was not that they are deterred by Palestinian disapproval of dialogue. There is no problem of 'loss of credibility'. Raja said 'It's always worth it. I like it that our voice is heard by Israelis. It's just that it won't ever meet our expectations'. Nadia Najjab added

The problem is, meeting with Israelis as Palestinians, we have one hope: to influence them, to try and change the negative perception of Palestinians that exists in Israel - and it exists even within the peace movement itself. It's us who are desperate to change the *status quo*. For that reason, action-based activities appeal to me as well as political dialogue. For the Israelis there's time for a long process, for us there's not.

The undesirability of 'normalization'

Nadia recently wrote her PhD thesis on the programme of 'people-to-people' activities that received international funding after the Oslo accords in the mid-nineties.²⁸ The idea was that Palestinians and Israelis engaged in similar professional fields would meet and build a relationship through their shared interests – as teachers, say, or architects. The findings of her research had left her critical of the concept. The contact activity was donor-driven, and it was limited to an elite circle. Because of the physical difficulty of arranging meetings, there was little geographical spread. The programme aimed to avoid discussion of the conflict and, in a sense, to by-pass it by 'normalizing' relations between people of the two sides. But so long as the Occupation continues, normalization is, she feels, inappropriate and in practice impossible.

You can't share experience, let's say on education, without starting with the disastrous effects of the Occupation on schooling. That's the dominating factor for our schools. Then there was the architects' group. The Israelis would want to talk about building and development

²⁸ Naser-Najjab, Nadia (2004) 'Palestinian-Israeli people-to-people contact experience, 1993-2004: an evaluation'. PhD thesis. Exeter, UK: University of Exeter.

plans, ignoring the realities of the power relations between Israel and Palestine.

Consequently, those organizing people-to-people activities had had 'to beg Palestinians to take part in these meetings', persuading them that they might thereby influence Israeli opinion. Rana for instance had not taken part because she doubted the encounters could achieve such a thing.

We refused because we didn't believe dialogue would be of use if there was no action on the ground. Even if you become the best of friends, the situation itself has not changed. It was a bottom/up model and should have been a top/down one. And it wrongly assumed that as Palestinian life gets better, in the long run they will lose interest in national rights.

Nadia concluded from her research that theories of 'contact' are always more sensitive to the higher-status party. Most Palestinians already knew Israelis were human beings, she said, they had contact with them as workers in Israel. But conversely Israelis didn't know Palestinians. (The oppressed always know the oppressor better than the oppressor knows the oppressed – they need to.)

We discussed similar experiences in Northern Ireland, and concluded that such people-to-people reconciliation projects are founded on the erroneous notion that the conflict arises from personal sentiments of prejudice and hate and can be cured by 'getting to know each other better'. They ignore the real origins of conflict in the state and militarism, politics and power relations. If this was the realistic assessment even in the optimistic 1990s, it was not surprising that, since 2000, there was even more caution among Palestinians.

Asymmetry: occupier and occupied

In the course of the conversations I had with Raja, Rana and Nadia I saw clearly how the sharp asymmetry between Israeli experience and Palestinian experience undermines relationships between individuals and groups. The positionality of oppressor and oppressed, those with a state and 'rights' and those deprived of both, are fundamentally different. Israeli activists too often want Palestinians to step into their shoes and understand their difficulties within Israeli society. Nadia said

They want you to appreciate that they are 'different' from Israeli society. So they kind of say, 'Don't tell us any more about the crimes of the Occupation—we already know about them.' If you talk about your agony they get on edge.

'Israelis', she said, 'want dialogue with us so they can sleep well at night. If Palestinians want dialogue, it's so that Israelis can't sleep well at night'. And Raja added, 'And we're winning. They *don't* sleep at night!'

Yet too few Israelis, they feel, are willing to step into Palestinian shoes and understand what they need to hear – an admission of shame for the 1948, for 1967, for present aggression. Nadia said

A few do. But there are others who have always got `exclusions' in their heads. They'll say 'No to the Occupation', but 'Don't talk to us about the right of return!' They pick and choose the agenda.

One effect produced by the asymmetry is that the Israelis have a 'peace movement', while for Palestinians such a concept doesn't make sense. Rana said, 'What does it mean to be a peace activist in Palestine? We can only resist oppression. Justice necessarily comes first. Peace is a second step'. And Nadia added

In Palestine most of our work is organized in political parties. Some Palestinians fall into the trap of speaking of `our peace activists' working with Israeli peace activists. I don't use that term. *Every* Palestinian struggle against the Occupation is motivated by the desire for peace.

The issue of violence

This raises the difficult question of whether violent strategies are sometimes necessary to achieve justice, or, it may be, to ensure survival. On this there are very mixed feelings in Palestine, these women told me. Rana said, 'We were using stones in the first Intifada. It was the IDF that provoked the violence. Palestinians were pushed into a position of responding violently'. Now as a consequence of the violence used against them it's hard for Palestinians to pronounce (even to feel) that suicide bombing of civilian Israelis is wrong. 'You hear Palestinians say "they've made me lose my humanity. I'm against killing. But now I'm so fed up that I understand it, or even condone it".' The Israeli media don't show the world this Palestinian ambivalence. Instead it dwells on the mothers who are 'happy' that their sons died as martyrs for jihad.

In principle the majority of Palestinians are for non-violence, Rana believed. There are, for instance, many meetings at which the legitimacy of suicide bombing is questioned. Many Palestinians today observe that violence is achieving no more than non-violence had ever achieved. But, Nadia said, 'The mood here, because of the aggression and the need for cohesion, is that privately you say 'I'm against violence' but publicly you don't'. Natasha Khalidi for her part said that she personally believes the national interest doesn't lie in violent struggle. Certainly she would condemn suicide bombings of civilians. But she doesn't feel like outright condemnation of armed resistance against the IDF inside the Occupied Territories. 'I've seen F16 bombers' missiles land near my house,' she said. 'It's our right.'

The Jerusalem Center for Women

The Jerusalem Center for Women (JCW, or *Marcaz al-Quds la I-Nissah*) has an office in East Jerusalem, with seven full-time staff members and a part-time accountant. It is governed by a board of trustees, comprised in the main of women who are well situated in Palestinian society. The various members serve on the board as individuals rather than representatives. Nonetheless an attempt is made to draw women from the spectrum of those various political parties that endorsed the Oslo accords and are thus involved in the Palestinian administration in alliance with the majority party, Fatah.²⁹

The JCW holds annual general assemblies of the membership, involving around eighty women, activists from all parties, human rights and women's organizations, as well as independents. The members are nominated by board members. The first was held in 1994. Natasha Khalidi, the present director of the JCW, explained to me that (as already observed above) it's not all Palestinian women who consider it productive to be involved in dialogue with Israelis.

You would only have a special category of women who would want to be in the JCW. All Palestinian women want peace, but not many continue to believe that negotiation, dialogue, even just speaking to the Israeli public, is worth the effort. So you need women who see it as a valid strategy alongside the intifada and alongside official negotiations - when these happen.

Since the start the centre's main activity has been among Palestinian women in Jerusalem, in projects of empowerment, consciousness-raising and the encouragement of political participation. For instance they have run: capacity-building for young women; educational programmes for housewives on human rights and democracy; legal advice and counselling for families whose houses have been demolished by the Israeli authorities; support for women political prisoners in Israel; a conflict resolution training project for university students and young activists; and have offered support to women running for elections, while also campaigning for quotas in local elections.

The Jerusalem Link

My particular interest in the JCW however was for its engagement with Israeli women. As has already been mentioned, in 1989, a meeting was convened in Brussels between prominent Israeli and Palestinian women peace activists. The meeting initiated an on-going dialogue that in 1994 resulted in the establishment of the Jerusalem Link, which is composed of the women's NGO

²⁹ In an election subsequent to my drafting of this paper, Fatah lost its position of leading party to Hamas. Fatah is the Liberation Movement of Palestine. The other parties participating in the administration are the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Palestine Democratic Union (FIDA), and the Palestinian People's Party. Outside the ruling alliance are the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and Hamas (the Islamic Resistance Movement). Hamas formerly refused to participate in elections, leaving only smaller parties and independents competing against Fatah. In 2005 however had Hamas participated in municipal elections, with considerable success. (From www.en.wikipedia.org 28.11.05)

Bat Shalom on the Israeli side, and the Jerusalem Center for Women on the Palestinian side.³⁰

Each organization is autonomous and takes its own national constituency as its primary responsibility—but together they promote a joint vision of a just peace, democracy, human rights, and women's leadership. Mandated to advocate for peace and justice between Israel and Palestine, they have agreed a set of political principles, which they say 'serve as the foundation for a cooperative model of co-existence between our respective peoples'. The principles include recognition of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and an independent state alongside the state of Israel within the pre-1967 borders, Jerusalem as the capital of both states, and a final settlement of all relevant issues based on international law. They also state that 'a just solution to the Palestinian refugee question is an essential requirement for a stable and durable peace. This solution must honour the right of return of the Palestinian refugees in accordance with UN resolution 194'.

However, even for Palestinian women who form part of the Jerusalem Link it remains a continually open question whether and when the contact with Israeli women is beneficial and advisable. the Link has fallen into inactivity for several periods in its 10-year life. The events of 2000 caused a rupture. Looking back to that time Natasha, director of the JCW, said she had felt

Yani, we're kidding ourselves. What has this relationship brought us? We're back to convincing the world and Israel that the Occupation is unjust. Just that after 38 years! We've got nowhere. The brutality of the IDF in October 2000, the helicopters bombing, assassinations, attacks on peaceful demonstrations -- it was very shocking to us.

For a while they had ceased contact with Bat Shalom. But a couple of years later women were beginning to feel 'let's have another attempt'. So they reopened the contact. However Palestinian reasons for talking are seldom the same as Israeli reasons. Amal said 'It's a method of survival for us, for me. For the Israelis it's more an ethical issue, an expression of political commitment'. She explained further, that there are many strongly articulated arguments in Palestine today for a one-state solution. However the two-state solution remains one of the JCW's formal principles, and Amal herself firmly believes it is the only practical solution. Dialogue is necessary, she says, to help Israeli women like those of Bat Shalom, who are a minority in their society, to market this solution in Israel. At the present moment too, they try to motivate the Israeli women to work within their community to expose 'the big lie on disengagement'.

Nonetheless the JCW women are careful in defining the terms of their contact. Natasha said

³⁰ This information on the Jerusalem Link has been obtained from the website www.batshalom.org (accessed 28.11.05).

We are dealing with concrete issues: assassinations, demolitions. We are saying, in effect, there is another side to this lunacy. We can find solidarity and coalition. But just to end the Occupation and bring about a new reality. Not co-existence, as things are.

Amal Krieshe confirmed this. She said, 'What we have with Bat Shalom in the Link is emphatically not co-operation or coexistence'. While Palestinian society support dialogue with Israel they are against anything that could be considered 'normalization' of the situation, she continued. They shun people-to-people projects today. So JCW tread a careful line. She said

We have the Jerusalem Link principles to reassure Palestinians, and our own guarantees that we are only in dialogue, not in negotiation. Civil society women's organizations in the Arab world have certain standards. The Palestinian community have confidence in me. We are part of the generation that was in the street in the intifada in 1987 -- in fact we still are in the street.

In their periods of contact, Bat Shalom and the JCW have tackled some tough issues. At one point they were close to an agreement to strengthen their position on the 'right of return' of Palestinian refugees to their homes in what is now Israel. A political committee of six women, three from each organization, worked hard to find agreement on this, and also on the question of democracy for non-Jews in the Israeli state. But, Natasha told me, two years into the intifada, with the isolation of Arafat, with collective punishment going on and the silence of the international community, they had been set back. At such times the more conservative element in Bat Shalom and in the Israeli peace movement as a whole are able to 'lower the ceiling', she said, and offer fewer concessions.

All the same the two organizations have developed an interesting methodology over recent years. They've engaged in what they call a 'public political correspondence' - an exchange of letters published in Palestinian and Israeli newspapers simultaneously. The letters are carefully discussed on individual sides, and then together, before publication. Through this kind of work they are gradually updating and strengthening the founding principles, and plan to republish them soon.

...

Women's issues

To recapitulate, the six Palestinian women of the Occupied Territories I spoke with revealed a range of views on the current value of dialogue. I also heard among them a range of opinion on whether it is appropriate for Palestinian women, in the present conjuncture, to discuss with Israeli women the oppression or women or their disadvantage in society.

Those involved with the JCW and the Link are there because they feel it's important to give women a voice. Natasha said, 'We're sending messages to

the two peoples. That we're women, with a number of principles, discussing critical issues and demands with each other. We have an opinion'.

When I asked her 'do you see the JCW as feminist?' She answered

Some think it is, and say so. But others feel that if you use the term 'feminism' or even 'women's rights' you will get accused of importing Western ideas. So women are careful. Backward forces in society could use it against us and get us into a corner, a place where we shouldn't be.

But she went on to suggest that women can find common ground in the life experiences they share.

As women we see things differently. There's something women understand more and are able to contribute to mainstream discussions. We understand the repercussions of the Occupation on everyday life, on families, on the future. We understand racism, oppression and the abuse of power. Because of our experiences of oppression in our societies, we can affiliate with each other across cultures. But be careful! The relationship hasn't been easy. Being women hasn't enabled us to bypass obstacles. On both sides we were brought up in conventional societies.

However, while women's experiences could be a motivation for dialogue, it was not necessarily the case that they would be a subject of direct discussion between Israeli and Palestinian women in the Link. Amal said

We both face our different extremists. Zionist extremists in Israel are in control in the Sharon coalition. In Palestine the extremists have the support of a majority of people too. It adversely affects women's rights. And we are not merely talking conservative – we're talking extreme values on the family that are becoming very dangerous. Because I don't want extremist groups to dominate Palestinian life, that's why I have this dialogue with Israeli women.

But she went on to explain

Although it would be relevant from a social point of view, we can't talk about 'family law' with the Israeli women - with Bat Shalom for instance. I could talk to an Italian or another woman about it, but it's forbidden for me to be a bridge between Jewish and Arab women on such an issue.

Rana Nashashibi had been one of those who went in 1989 to Brussels to the meeting that began the process that would eventually lead to the Jerusalem Link – but she did not stay with this project. In the main it had been women politicians who had been involved on both sides. She felt individuals had gone there for different reasons – including political calculation. But not many on the Palestinian side, she believed, had gone to Brussels believing that women

as women could bring change. 'We didn't believe women had something particular to bring to the peace issue.'

NGOs but not a women's movement

Raja Rantisi mapped out for me some of the more significant women's organizations in Palestine today. She first mentioned three NGOs that share an office building in East Jerusalem: the Jerusalem Centre for Women, the Women's Studies Centre and the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling. In Ramallah there is a coalition of independent organizations under the Women's Technical Affairs Committee, associated with the Ministry of Women's Affairs of the Palestine National Authority. Several of the political parties have their own women's sections or associated NGOs. For example Fatah has the Women's Society for Social Work; the Democratic Front has its Society of Women's Work; and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine has the Palestinian Women's Society.

But, Raja said, although these organizations are all concerned with women's rights, you couldn't exactly say, since the second intifada, that there's a women's *movement* in Palestine. Women were sometimes painfully divided among themselves.

Rana Nashashibi talked about her dissatisfaction with international feminist movements and their appeal to 'worldwide sisterhood'. Although she recognised the importance of women's movements in India, Latin America and other regions, she felt that Western feminism was problematic. Of course it had raised issues of undoubted importance to women - for example equal pay for equal work, and the perception that 'the personal is political' (especially vital in areas where the patriarchal family is still the norm). But she said, the problem comes when moving from concepts to action.

What issues get priority? Whom should we target? At what level? This is complicated. I do believe that in principle all oppression should be seen as being at the same level -- there should be no 'hierarchy of oppression'. But in the case of Palestine, can you really talk about domestic violence before you talk about the Occupation? The more urgent thing, the thing that creates the conditions for violence, is the Occupation. This is a major divergence between us. Western feminists can condemn rape, but when it comes to Occupation there's a certain ambivalence. In my view, if you condemn rape you *have* to condemn the Occupation, which is itself a rape. Rape and Occupation both attempt to debilitate, to annihilate our identity, to reduce us to submission.³¹

Rana felt that Western feminists had not recognised that Palestinian women 'start from a different place' and their priorities should be respected. 'We didn't

³¹ See Nashashibi, Rana (2003) 'Violence against women: the analogy of Occupation and rape. The case of the Palestinian people'. Palestinian Counseling Center, accessible at www.pcc-jer.org/Articles, where she argues that feminist writings fail to make the necessary connection between Israeli colonization, gender and violence.

get that tolerance from the West.' And there was bias. For instance, the older generation of European women, those who had memories of the Second World War, fascism and the Holocaust, tended to identify with Israeli Jewish women. They were less sensitive to Palestinian women's national aspirations. Rana, Raja and Nadia all had uncomfortable stories to tell of their encounters with Western and Israeli feminists -- times they'd been hectored, put down or patronised.

Non-comparable situations

Rana, Raja and Nadia did not come to feminism, they said, through academic life as did many Western and Israeli feminists. They are from the left, and though not now active in political parties, are still informed by ideas they bring with them from student days in the Communist Party of Palestine, now called the People's Party. So when talking to Israeli women, as Nadia put it, 'what I want to discuss with them is *political*. I want to know what's their position on the Occupation and how they plan to work with us against *that*.' Whether the dialogue is to be about politics or women's issues, it's the same. 'I ask are they willing to apologise for what Israel's done and what it's doing now. If they are, then we can we talk.'

They wondered how Israeli or foreign feminists could say in all seriousness, 'Tell me, how do you suffer as *women* under the Occupation?' Of course, they explained, they may very well have a critique of Palestinian men and talk to *each other* about how their society is male dominated. But in present circumstances that critique has to remain within their own community. When writing for or talking to Israelis or foreigners about the oppression of women, Palestinian women necessarily stress first and foremost the oppression all Palestinians experience at the hands of Israel as an exacerbating factor. Thus, the Amnesty paper cited above gives detailed testimonies of abuse from many Palestinian women, and cites Maha Abu-Dayyeh Shamas of the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling, who says women are not only victim to the political violence of the Occupation but, additionally, *due to the pressures on Palestinian society*, victims of heightened violence within the home. She draws a clear analogy between the psychological experience a woman living in an abusive relationship and that of a nation living under siege.
32

The situation of Israeli women and that of Palestinian women is simply not comparable. Nadia said, speaking from a social psychologist's perspective, that as the lower-status group, Palestinians feel Israeli women are patronizing when they say 'let's discuss women's issues'. After all, Israeli women have a state and Palestinian women don't. An Israeli woman suffering violence has institutions to which she can turn for help. Palestinian women don't.

Not surprisingly, then, women's initiatives are prompted by Israelis first and foremost, seldom by Palestinians. Israeli women such as those of Bat Shalom will readily separate off from men and see things as women. Palestinian

³² As above, citing www.wclac.org/paper/lsocialpsychological%20impact.doc.

women, in a political context, tend to be unwilling to hold meetings separately from men unless they have to – as when for instance women from traditional communities are not allowed to mix with men in public.

Basically, Raja, Rana and Nadia gave me to understand that talking feminism with Israeli women is inevitably superficial because in all important matters they have more in common with Palestinian men than with Israeli women. When there's an Israeli attack, they can no longer think only as women. 'We drop all separate issues and unite around the external threat. You can only discuss feminism in a relaxed society, not in a war.'

Nadia said

I can't be so feminist when I see the checkpoints. I see Israeli soldiers treating men and women alike. I see it from a national perspective. We're suffering here, men and women both. How can I say those Israeli women soldiers at the checkpoint are my sisters?

3.2 Problems in relationship across the Green Line: Jewish perspectives from Israel³³

Ever since the foundation of the Israeli state, Israeli Jewish and Palestinian populations have lived very separate lives, to the extent that many Jewish people pass their lives without ever getting to know 'an Arab' as a person. At most they may be aware of one (usually a man) as a nameless manual worker. This point was driven home to me when Gila Svirsky, who as we've seen plays a significant role today in women's peace activism, told me that although she'd lived in Israel from 19 years of age she didn't meet a Palestinian socially until she was 43.

This encounter happened at the home of Haim and Judy Blanc – a Jewish couple living in Jerusalem. Chaim was a specialist in Arabic studies and a fluent Arabic speaker, and, quite exceptionally, they had many cultural connections with Palestinians, including close personal friendships with families and individuals. Their home was a rare place in Israel where Jews and Palestinians met socially and politically. It was, Judy says, for some Shalom Achshav leaders, their first informal political contact with Palestinians. She remembers how, at the time of the first intifada (1987) she and others had started a women's group, Shani, that had been one of the first to bring together women across the Green Line. But enduring and relaxed friendships between Jews and Palestinians remained, and still remain, rare. Yehudit Keshet said

³³ This Section is based mainly on interviews with Molly Malekar and Lily Traubmann who are involved fulltime with Bat Shalom, and therefore key actors in the Jerusalem Link, but also draws on interviews with other Israeli women activists, several of whom have or have had connections with Bat Shalom – serving at various times as board members or members of its political committee.

You have to make an effort to meet Palestinians. It's always somehow artificial. You say to yourself, 'I will go and meet Palestinians'. And when you do it's always a careful dance around each other's feelings, each taking care not to tread on the other's toes.

Friendship is continually undermined by the basic inequality. Relative to Palestinians, Jews are always privileged. 'A relationship between one of the occupying and one of the occupied people can never be a healthy or neutral one,' Yehudit said. Visiting Israelis, for Palestinians, meant seeing villages and houses they had once lived in and been expelled from. It meant visiting occupier's homes. You would scarcely expose yourself to such pain unless something useful were going to come of it.

The renewal of intifada

After the events of 2000 - the Israeli provocation at Al-Aqsa, the renewed uprising and the repressive Israeli response - many Palestinians were deeply disillusioned by the inadequate response of the Israeli left. And those Israeli Jews who had been maintaining some kind of contact, perhaps no more than 'coexistence groups', desisted abruptly. Molly Malekar said, 'It's only the ones who were never naive who stayed with the contact after 2000, the ones who couldn't be disillusioned'. They included Molly herself because, as she said, 'For me there was nowhere else to go, politically I had no other home'.

Although after a few years things gradually improved, it's only the most committed of Jews who seek contact with Palestinians today. There's an animosity in Israeli society towards Arabs, and especially towards Palestinians, that often amounts to hatred. Yehudit said, 'Racism is endemic in Israel, often disguised as ethnocentrism'. Even in Shalom Achshav (Peace Now), Judy says, many have not overcome a profound feeling that Palestinians are... 'the enemy'. She hesitated, searching for a less extreme word. 'Other', perhaps. Deeply different, anyway. Yvonne later told me how profoundly Israeli Jews fear and loathe Hamas and Islamic Jihad, 'altogether overlooking our own role in causing them to rise'. So, said Yehudit Keshet, 'We need a radical change in Israeli thinking. There are solutions. But for them to become possible we need first to see Palestinians as human beings'.

Unsurprisingly then, there's great suspicion and mistrust of such Jews as do choose to go to the Occupied Territories and have dealings with Palestinians. I heard conflicting views on the impediments to Jews crossing into the West Bank. Some stress that they can be prosecuted, for instance for entering Jenin, Ramallah and other parts designated 'Area A'. Others point to the fact that more determined Jewish activists do routinely cross, and suffer few, or only mild, consequences from the authorities. However, the very idea of visiting even those areas of the territories still technically under Israeli control, gives rise to anxiety for many Jews. Will I be safe? Will I be held at the checkpoint? Will I be in time to collect my child from school? Will I be back for work tomorrow? As a result Palestinians see more foreigners, many involved with the International Solidarity Movement, than Israeli Jews.

Limited contact

Among women's peace/anti-occupation organizations, some don't particularly seek dialogue with Palestinians. For instance, it's the Israeli government to whom Women in Black in their vigils address their call to end the Occupation. New Profile, as we've seen, has taken on the task of demilitarizing Israeli society. The Coalition have their 'reality tours', exposing Israelis and foreign visitors to the truth about the separation Wall. In this connection they have what Gila Svirsky described as 'ad hoc contact' with certain villages where local Palestinians speak with the tourist groups, tell them how the Wall affects their lives and take them to their homes. But, she added, 'We see the connection with Palestinians as being Bat Shalom's thing, so we hold back. In the Coalition we try not to step on each others' turf'.

Machsom-Watch in their observation of the checkpoints support Palestinians they feel are being mistreated, but they don't make it their job to build and sustain relationships. As we saw above, Yesh Din has more working contact.

Demonstrations against the Wall bring Israeli activists of Gush Shalom, Ta'ayush, Anarchists against the Wall and Rabbis for Human Rights into touch with local Palestinians – Bil'in is a case in point. And during the olive-picking season these groups organize Israelis to go and help Palestinian villages with the harvest. But it's a tiny proportion of the Israeli population, even of the left, who would consider such a thing, and the contacts are seldom sustained at a personal level.

Difficulty for women

Tali Lerner, referring to the actions against the Wall, told me it's particularly hard for women to meet on these occasions. The Palestinian resistance is a very masculine affair, she said, 'strictly male and strictly chauvinist - you get some harassment from these men'. She was noticing Anarchists against the Wall itself becoming a more chauvinist group, its men all too willing to play into the Palestinians preference for dealing with male leaders. She said

It takes a huge amount of effort just to reach women in the Occupied Territories, and we young ones don't have that kind of time. It's partly that they can't come to Israel, so we must go there and that's problematic for us – we don't have cars. I go to the Occupied Territories may be once a week throughout the year, but not more than twice in all this time have I had a conversation with a Palestinian woman. In fact the men ask us specifically not to contact their women, because they fear that we'll influence them.

Women from Anarchists against the Wall had tried to make contact with a women's group in Bil'in. 'Some of us when we went recently, didn't go to the demonstration itself, but stayed back to make contact with the women we could see in the houses. But the problem is we don't speak Arabic!'

Bat Shalom and the Jerusalem Link

Bat Shalom therefore is rather unique as a specifically women's organization, addressing political issues and 'specialising' in working across the Green Line.

As we saw above, the relationship between Bat Shalom and the Jerusalem Center for Women has been an on-off affair, acutely responsive to changes in the political context. Debby Lerman, who's on the board of Bat Shalom, said

When we look at what we've achieved, I agree with some of our Palestinian colleagues that we've failed, and all we've done together has achieved absolutely nothing. We might have achieved more if each side had worked separately in its own community. Right now on both sides of Jerusalem Link there are two streams, one saying 'let's cooperate on a limited agenda at least', the other advocating to continue the contact between the two organizations while simultaneously each group directs its main effort to its own public.

Another board member, Amira Gelblum, said

Bat Shalom's one of the few organizations that's maintained a degree of contact with Palestinians. At least, if we go abroad as the Link, we do go in pairs, one Jew and one Palestinian. That's good. But the Link is like a rope that is wearing thin, just holding together by a few threads.

Khulood Badawi was more positive about the Link. She prefaced her remarks however by clarifying that there is a basic inequality between West Jerusalem / Jewish / Bat Shalom and East Jerusalem / Palestinian / Jerusalem Center for Women. The inequality exists, besides, as we have seen, inside Bat Shalom itself. The organization in Jerusalem is predominantly Jewish, with no Palestinian staff and only around 20% of the board being Palestinian. She feels however that Bat Shalom does create a valuable space in which women of different backgrounds and different political views can meet and work together. 'It's a challenge for each of us. We have difficult political exchanges, and it's improving all the time. It's not ideal, but it's going somewhere and you can influence the direction.' And, despite the difficulties, the Jerusalem Link is worthwhile in present circumstances, just for sustaining contact between the two organizations and working to establish common political ground, as in the exchange of public letters.

We do address the hard questions: Jerusalem, settlements, the '67 borders and – most difficult of all, the 'right of return'. We don't just choose the things on which there's easy agreement. There has been a huge process of gradual gains in agreement.

Molly Malekar too was hopeful.

It's true you can't count on it, that it'll be sustained. But there are certain women on both sides who have political trust in each other, trust that they aren't in it for their careers but are genuine about

dialogue. Most women know that we have a lot to lose if we split apart, not just as Israelis and Palestinians, but as feminist women.

One factor in the relationship has been personnel – who at any given time was respectively director of Bat Shalom and the JCW. Molly succeeded Terry Greenblatt as director of BS, who in turn succeeded Gila Svirsky, who took over from Daphna Golan. At the JCW Natasha has followed on from Amneh Badran and Sumaya Farhat-Naser. Molly and Natasha are now in the process of filling the relationship with more content.

Despite the uncertainties in their relationship, in the last few years the two centres have, as Khulood said, tackled some serious and divisive issues together. Perhaps the most challenging is recognition by the Israeli state of their responsibility for the Nakhba, the need for reparation and even the ‘right of return’ of Palestinians to Israel. Lily Traubmann told me

This is an important demand on the Palestinian side, and the JCW must put it to us clearly if they are to maintain credibility with their own people. There’s no public discussion of this at all in Israel, except for scare-mongering. It’s as though the problem will disappear. But it’s absolutely necessary to raise the issue. It opens up questions that go beyond the return to pre-1967 borders. It’s implicitly about a return to the borders originally laid down by the United Nations in 1948.

On the Israeli side there are very few people indeed, even on the left, who are willing to take this issue on and make it part of their own demands on the state. In the women’s peace movement in Israel, including Bat Shalom, there are Zionist, non-Zionist and anti-Zionist women, and they have very divergent views on it. As Molly said, ‘It touches a very sensitive nerve in Israeli Jews. It asks them: do you have a right to be here at all? There is a moral split in the population and in each of us individually on this.’

Another question that’s sometimes left tactfully unaddressed is the legitimacy of violence. Are the Israeli partners in the Link explicitly pacifist? Do Bat Shalom women explicitly support refusal to serve in the IDF? Do the Palestinian partners explicitly condemn suicide bombing of civilian Israelis? The subject of violence was carefully approached in one of the public ‘exchanges of letters’ between Bat Shalom and the JCW. Bat Shalom did acknowledge in its letter that the Occupation itself is violence. But the outcome was inconclusive. As I understand it, the two ‘sides’, in renegotiating the principles of the Link, have not made explicit demands of each other to state a position on some of these things.

Acknowledging mixed motivations

So (as I understood) to talk to each other at all, Palestinian and Israeli women activists have to recognise the complexity of each other’s situation and the fact that there’s more than one view, and probably more than one motivation, on each side. For example, Israelis have to understand the degree of clarity with which Palestinians are obliged to define the character of their work with

Bat Shalom: this is dialogue - not co-operation, not coexistence and certainly not negotiation. 'We Israelis are sometimes not attuned to the fine distinctions that Palestinians see,' said Debby.

Israeli women have to deal with their suspicion that women of the other organization are only interested in contact with 'elite' women who have some purchase on the Israeli political system. 'Women who can make a difference, who are close to power -- that is who they want to be working with'. At the same time they have to acknowledge there is some truth in Palestinian suspicions that Israeli women want the contact to make themselves feel better, to assuage their feelings of guilt and to show that some Israelis 'aren't that bad'. As Molly put it, Palestinians might well complain 'You occupy us and then want our sympathy for your bleeding hearts!'

Molly went on to stress the importance of Israeli women being very clear in their own minds and to Palestinian women that they have their own political interest in contact. This is not just a patronizing kind of 'support' or 'solidarity'. 'I wouldn't dare to say to Palestinians that I'm doing what I do in *solidarity* with them. In any case is not true. I'm part of the conflict, and I have my political interests in the contact with them'.

There's a particular danger that Israeli women suppose that just 'being women' is enough to validate dialogue. The fact is, Molly said, 'Even if we agree on women's issues, feminism won't necessarily bring us to the same side of the table, because the national issue will remain to be resolved between us.' Besides, there are substantial differences in the price women pay on the two sides for breaking with gender norms. A woman in an occupied or colonized country may well be feminist, yet she won't be able to show herself as such to women of the oppressor side, or even to afford those beliefs, until national rights have been achieved.

So Israeli women are continually dealing with mixed feelings. 'Must we always subordinate our own needs to those of Palestinian women, because of our guilt as the oppressors? Must we always be falling over backwards to accommodate them?' Molly answers that question by reinvoking the asymmetry of the two situations. 'I take care to leave the initiative in *their* hands. I will take the risk of entering Ramallah. But they should be the ones to say whether or not they risk being seen with me there.'

PART 4: PROBLEMS OF RELATIONSHIP WITHIN THE ISRAELI STATE

The conflictual relations in this region that most often gain international attention are those explored in Part 3 above, i.e. between Israeli Jews and the Palestinians of the Occupied Territories. But, as will by now be apparent, there are other dimensions of social tension.³⁴ Of special interest to me was the relationship between Jewish Israeli women and Palestinian Israeli women, touched on already, in Part 2, in the case of Northern Bat Shalom. I learned more about this from interviews with two Palestinian citizens of Israel, Khulood Badawi and Aida Shibli, who live and work in Jerusalem and are both members of the Bat Shalom board; with Manal Massalha, who formerly worked in Bat Shalom in Jerusalem and now lives in London; and with Amira Gelblum, a Jewish feminist living in Tel Aviv.

Injustice, inequality and failures of democracy

Palestinians citizens of Israel are in theory just that - citizens. But necessarily, in a state that's formally and officially Jewish, in practice they lack the status of full citizens. The most serious aspect of the massive discrimination against them concerns real estate. Having been, in many cases, dispossessed of their land in 1948, they are not permitted to buy land or property outside designated areas. Most, having lost their land, have been obliged to adopt an urban way of life. Once independent farmers, they have severely restricted economic opportunities and many are now hired labour for Jews.

The land laws result in a high degree of physical concentration - Arab hamlets have become villages, villages have become towns, all densely packed. There is spatial segregation in the cities too. Territorial segregation in West Jerusalem is so marked that, as Lily Traubmann said, 'You even feel there 'aren't any Palestinians here'. There are, but we don't see them'.

Socially and economically Palestinians experience marginalization and discrimination. For one thing, although Arabic is one of the two official languages of the Israeli state, its use is not promoted. Jewish children don't emerge from school with more than a few words. Television programmes

³⁴ I have chosen not to deal in this paper with the complex relationship between different groups of Jews in Israel. A footnote, however, on the Ashkenazi/Mizrahi relationship may be in order however. Mizrahi Jews, who are of Arab or Middle Eastern background, in contrast to the frequently European or American background of Ashkenazis, are, as a social group, economically disadvantaged and relegated to a lower position in Israel's class hierarchy. As a group they tend to conservatism in regard to Zionism and the Occupation. They do not easily find common ground with Palestinians in a shared Arab identity. Mizrahi women are often deterred from joining anti-Occupation groups such as Bat Shalom, New Profile, Women in Black or Machsom-Watch whose Jewish membership is overwhelmingly Ashkenazi, by the discomfort of being in a minority and sometimes by Ashkenazi insensitivity to Mizrahi realities or feelings.

In 2002 I'd found it instructive to listen to Yali Hashash-Daniel speaking for a Mizrahi women's labour organization. (I paraphrase here from my notes of her speech.) She argued that Israeli Palestinians should see that Mizrahi Israeli women are obliged to fight a class struggle against the state to secure their standard of living and can't always afford to put the Palestinian struggle first. The Occupation, she said, serves the purpose of internal control too (as indeed it does). Class and other kinds of discrimination ride on the back of the Occupation. The left should not allow the Occupation to deflect workers from the pursuit of social justice.

barely recognise the presence of an Arabic culture in the country. Aida told me of her surprise and delight when one day a message had flashed onto the screen saying 'Have a good day' in Arabic. It turned out to be no more than an advertisement by an NGO working for equal rights in Israel. 'But just the fact of seeing Arabic on the screen -- that was amazing. It never happens. Usually there's no mention of us, nothing about us. Zero.'

In the few institutions where Palestinians and Jews do mix, including the anti-Occupation movement, Palestinians experience all the marginalization and discrimination that are familiar to women in male-dominated organizations. You have the qualifications, but are overlooked. You do the work and somebody else gets the credit. Even in left and feminist organizations, Manal said, you have to be alert to the way power works.

Even Bat Shalom reproduces the power relations of Israeli society in microcosm. For example, you have to ask, who decides the agenda? Who takes what for granted? I take for granted that when talking about peace we'll also be talking about justice. For Zionists, that isn't necessarily in their mind. It's an Ashkenazi Jewish hegemony. For things to be equal you have to *specifically* include me, the collectivity I belong to, my different experience. For instance, the fact that I'm treated as a foreigner in an Israeli airport - you aren't. It makes you wonder what citizenship means. Zionism is inherently a racist ideology. It's relatively easy for Bat Shalom to challenge the Occupation, much less easy to challenge the Zionist nature of the state.

As a result of the incomplete citizenship of Palestinians in Israel, Khulood Badawi said (you will remember her as a resident of West Jerusalem and member of the Bat Shalom board), 'We're always seeking rights and laws that guarantee equality, challenging the state on its duty toward us. They always turn the question round and remind us of our duties to the state, challenging us on our loyalty'. An issue that is often raised is military service. Palestinian men in Israel are neither obliged nor permitted to serve (and, of course, few would wish to do so). But Khulood said, 'Double standards are applied. Both Palestinian Israelis and some Jewish religious groups don't do military service. In our case this is used to delegitimize us as citizens. It is not used that way against the religious groups.'

Racism

Israel, which defines itself as a 'Jewish state', is structurally racist. Many examples have been given above. Another is that the education of children is segregated and stereotyped. There is however also a great deal of deeply imbued personal racism on the part of Jews against the Palestinian of Israel that is a significant impediment to constructive political work between them. Khulood said

There's great ignorance about us among the Jewish majority. They think of us as 'Arabs' only, and believe they know everything there is to know about *them*. They don't recognize us in the way they recognize

other Arabs - as 'Egyptians' or 'Jordanians', for instance. We're just 'Arabs' with no roots, as if we were created along with the Israeli state. The only kind of relations Israeli Jews have with 'Arabs' is as their boss. It's embedded in Jewish consciousness that dirty work is for Arabs. So the relation isn't based on acknowledgment of equality, even at the human level – it's always from above looking down.

Palestinians are considered by many Jews to be *less than* human. Yehudit Keshet told me that the women of Machsom-Watch are often told by soldiers at the checkpoints, depriving Palestinians of water, food and toilets, 'Don't worry about them, they don't feel it the way you or I do'. They are also considered *inhuman*... Sharon Dolev said, 'A lot of Jews consider racism to be realism. They'll say 'We know one thing about Arabs: they're people who don't value life'.' Aida works as head nurse of a hospital emergency room. This skill and status doesn't protect her from a patient who feels free to shout at her and insult her, 'You Arab!'

Mariam Abu Husein put it this way.

Arabs and Jews are Semites, so they are not supposed to hate each other. But due to the crisis there is a fertile environment for hatred between the two peoples. However I think that most Jews hate *Arabs*, while most Arabs hate *what Jews do*. I work with Jews in the hope that things will be different for my son than for my father. My father, whatever his abilities, felt put down by Jews, and hated them. I want my son to look at those people my father hated, and see them not from below but from the height that his abilities deserve.

While anti-Arab racism has always been endemic in Israel, it's been more widely and crudely expressed since the second intifada. Most Israeli Jews had considered the Palestinian population no more than an unwanted 'leftover' from 1948. Suddenly TV screens were showing Israeli Palestinians in angry street demonstrations. 'When we saw them no longer silent, no longer accepting their subordination – this was a serious shock for Jews!' Hedva Isachar told me. 'This was an internal intifada! All trust disappeared.' They began to be suspected of being a 'fifth column' working for the Palestinian national cause.

Aida Shibli told me that, as a result of the structural and individual racism they experience in Israel, the struggle of Palestinian Israelis against the state has to be different from that of Jewish activists.

We have to do it differently than an Israeli Jew would do it. We have to do it as civilians calling for equal rights. We have to work on people's opinion, by showing Jews our real identity. We have to counteract government and official propaganda that represents us as 'the other', 'the enemy'. I don't mean we should argue on grounds of 'after all, we're all Semites'. That's not what I'm saying. It's that your 'other' is living right here inside you and there's no way we can be separated.

An existential gap

Khulood told me a personal story that illustrates 'the huge gap between us here in the Israeli state', how great the difference of positioning and experience between Palestinian and Jewish people in Israel from an early age. She described a particularly formative moment for her, when the nature of the relationship really sank in. When she was a school child she took part in one of the 'people to people' contacts that were current after the Oslo accords. Children of her high school were taken to a Jewish school to meet local Jewish children.

'The first shock was seeing the school - so grand and well-equipped compared with ours, it might have been a university! The next shock was to find we had no common needs in the encounter. Their need was to test the stereotype, check out if we were human beings. The kind of question they asked us was 'do you have sex before marriage?' We didn't even know there was such a thing! For our part, our need was to talk about our nationality, our identity, the Nakhba, the Occupation. Then again, of course they didn't know Arabic, and our Hebrew was not so good as theirs, so our capacities in the meeting were totally unequal. It was an experience that did me personal and lasting damage. I realized later that I had been *used* by the Ministry of Education - we were part of a programme.'

The story is important, Khulood added, because it's indicative of a wider reality.

The linked oppressions of Palestinian women in Israel

It will by now be evident that Aida has a holistic political analysis. I think many of the feminist anti-Occupation activists I spoke with in Israel implicitly share it, but she expressed it most clearly. It's a perception, not only that the struggle of Palestinians inside and outside Israel is one and the same struggle, but, further, that the oppression of women, the oppression of Palestinians and the effects of imperialism are intimately connected. She says

If you de-legitimate one section of the population, the 20% that's Palestinians, then you can easily de-legitimate the 50% that's women. When you say anybody is 'other' you legitimate every othering process and exclusion. We have to insist that it's the same mechanism working against women, against Palestinians and in the violence of war worldwide. We must work against all three simultaneously.

Modelling genuine partnership

From Amira Gelblum I learned about a women's school, the Community of Learning Women, that seems to exemplify this 'practising of what we preach'. It may go further than any other project in Israel to face up to the difficulties of creating respectful relations in an environment of violent discrimination.

The school (Kehilat Nashim Lomedet) is not in the state education system but an NGO registered as 'a learning women's community' – the intention being not only individual empowerment but also aiming to build women's communities. It was founded in 2001, an unlikely moment, when Jewish-Palestinian relations were extremely problematic.

Amira was involved from the start, and is a board member. She said, 'We're a school without walls. We go to women in the community, we create a group, find a place and offer courses'. The communities they aim to work in are the very poorest, where women are immersed in day-to-day survival. This means they're working mainly with Mizrahi and Palestinian-Israeli women. They don't usually attempt to mix these groups but rather respond to the specific needs of each. They formerly ran courses in prisons.

A course usually involves half-day sessions of two to three hours, held once a week for 10 or 12 weeks. There are usually around six courses running at any one time, each with an enrolment of 10 or 12 women. There are two basic courses, one on empowerment, the other offering computer skills. Often a woman will take the first and stay on for the second.

Of the 'empowerment' course, Amira says,

It's really basic feminism. We draw on existing material, especially our own literatures, rewriting it in forms that respond to the women's needs, which may be different from group to group. The classes are in workshop style, and women bring their own material too.

As to computer skills,

Women are often intimidated by their own children when it comes to computers. They feel it as an immense achievement to learn how to use one. Pretty soon they start writing to each other by e-mail. We use woman-friendly texts and get feminist ideas across in this course too through the material we use.

But, in the Israeli context, the innovatory quality of the Community of Learning Women is not so much in the feminist content of its 'adult education' as in the structure and working of the organization itself. Because their target group is the weakest in society, the board and teachers of the school are strictly 50% Palestinians and 50% Jews -- and among the Jews 50% are Mizrahim. Instead of the usual practice on the left, whereby the few Palestinian and Mizrahi people working with Ashkenazi Jews come *to them*, in the Community Women's School the Ashkenazis in the project are leaving their own terrain and going *to* those 'other' districts and villages. Amira has been politically active for 30 years, always as a Jew in contact with Palestinians, but, she says

this is the first time in all those years I feel a real equality between Jews and Palestinians in an organization. Always before there was some degree of patronage, defensiveness, caution, things you daren't say. There'd be good intentions and a genuine aim to work together, but it was always artificial. It made the Jews feel good maybe, but not much could come of it. Here, women from the usually-marginalised groups are strong enough, with their equal numbers, to criticize us - and to disagree among themselves too.

The experience of the school returns us to the observation that it's not only Palestinians who tend to get excluded from even left, feminist and anti-militarist movements, but also Jewish minorities such as Russian immigrants and, especially, the very large Mizrahi population.

In other countries too I've often heard women of the dominant ethnic group express sadness at the monocultural nature of their group. One problem, I think, is that the apparent urgency of the problem anti-war activists face, the imminent threat of violence, the prospect of many deaths, gives rise to kinds urgent action that by their nature don't tend to careful, inclusive, democratic and positively antiracist processes. It's a far cry from the painstaking, relation-building activism of a community-based adult education NGO like the Community of Learning Women. In this sense maybe there's a perennial tension between the two main tasks of our movement – that of being anti-war (opposing state and military policies) and that of being pro-peace (building bridges to and partnerships with 'others').

PART 5: FOUR FURTHER ISSUES

In the course of my interviews with women in Israel and Palestine I asked five further questions, each of which unpacks into a series of others:

- Why do you choose to organize *as women* against militarism and Occupation?
- What views exist among you on *nationalism*?
- What are the difficulties of effectively *challenging the Israeli state* and influencing Israeli public opinion?
- What (if any) are the uses of *internationalism*?

5.1 “Why do you choose to organize *as women* against militarism and Occupation?”

Gila, from her standpoint within the Coalition, said, ‘This has been a core issue for a lot of us. But it's so big we often can't see it'. I'm finding it's quite common that women organize ‘as women’ without being too analytical about the reasons. It can be quite a pragmatic choice. Yehudit Keshet, you'll remember, described how Machsom-Watch became women-only from observing that Israeli men relate differently to soldiers than women DO. That some WiB vigils at the time of the first intifada preferred to be women-only, Yvonne Deutsch said, was because ‘when men attended we used to witness aggression between the men from the right and the men from the left who participated in the vigil’.

Some like to work with women because (not always but at best) women can generate an effective and convivial *way of doing things*. Judy said, ‘There are a few common across-the-board features that mean in a group of women there's an educated ability, based on social experience, to welcome a democratic process’. Aida defined such a process as one ‘where feelings are taken into account in everything we do. Where there's transparency and honesty. Where there is no separation of head and heart.’

For Yvonne the reason for organizing as women was, first, because *being marginal* in society gives women a useful outsider perspective and also a certain freedom that can be used to create something different. That ‘something’ would be more authentic, more ‘connected to our inner being’, and stem from our distinct life experiences throughout history’ because ‘women give up a lot of things in order to be part of mainstream society’. But she added that this is a privileged perspective – in societies where women are more heavily oppressed such freedom doesn't exist.

When I asked Amal Khrieshe, her reasons for organizing as women, she answered

It's everything. For one thing it's women who are suffering the most negative consequences of the Occupation in both societies. Women bear the brunt. And women have no ego and *no interest invested in*

conflict. Because of their weaker status in both societies, women are more conscious of social injustices and the inequitable distribution of resources. They see that military expenditure is at the cost of social services, schools and health.

In the anti-Occupation movement, in particular, women were saying they organize as women because of *deficiencies in the mainstream movement*. The women respond just as men do to Shalom Achshav's calls for mass demonstrations, but they aren't treated as equals and seldom get invited to speak on the platform. Tali told me that in mixed actions against the Wall

women quickly find the violence too much. The men are telling heroic stories on the bus home of how this happened and that happened. You go there to be tough, it comes to be a sport. The violence of the state draws us in and we get to think violently. It's mainly women who see this and discuss it and criticise it. Women are more prone to talk about their feelings, about what the shouting, the tear gas and so on made them *feel*.

Gila believes that working separately has enabled women to lead the development of a *different kind of message*, to make connections between military violence and the environment; to link peace with justice, and include in that concept economic justice for the poor of Israel.

But I was reminded that not all 'women's' political activism is progressive. The Israeli Women's Network, for instance, the biggest parliamentary lobby, has taken court cases to get women the right to combat duty in the IDF. And then again, to be feminist need not mean organizing as women-only. We've seen the example of New Profile. And Aida told me that she would like Bat Shalom to be a mixed (though feminist) organization.

Yvonne, who calls herself a leftist feminist, is one of the generation that began their political life back in the 70s and 80s. They started as leftists and only later, as a women's movement grew around them, became feminists. But not all feminist activists today had that grounding in the left – so a gap exists today between the left and feminism.

A similar gap exists between organized feminism and organized women's opposition to the Occupation. The most feminist organizations are those - such as Isha l'Isha in Haifa, Kol Ha-Isha in Jerusalem, and the Mizrahi group Ahoti - whose focus is women's perspective on women in society, not women's perspective on politics and war. For Yvonne it's a big question how to span that gap.

Women's groups like Kol Ha-Isha have existed a long while, but we almost exclusively focus on women's issues, not political issues around the conflict. At the same time the peace movement women have a political analysis of the Occupation and militarism but don't necessarily know how to connect them to gender and the social rights of women,

don't make the connections between oppressions part of an inherent and communicative political analysis and action.

On the other hand, *Noga*, the feminist magazine, has chosen to be a member of the Coalition. With its spread of articles and features, it does make these connections and, as a written medium, usefully puts words to them.

Violence -- the idea that male violence against women represents a continuum reaching from home and street to the battlefield - could notionally connect feminist women's organizations to feminist anti-militarist organizations. But, Yvonne says

Women here aren't talking that language. The users of *Kol Ha-Isha* won't do *Women in Black*. Rarely, *Women in Black* would protest male violence. But they would do it only on the International Day against Violence against Women, not as part of a declared political analysis and ongoing action.

Nonetheless, there's some common work in hand between the Coalition and *Isha l'Isha*. The latter are working for the promotion of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 which stresses the role of women in peace building and peacekeeping, and the Coalition plan to involve them on the forthcoming campaign to redefine 'security'.

Analysis of the connection between militarism and patriarchy finds a home more comfortably in *New Profile* than anywhere else in Israel. Below I paraphrase how Rela told me they see it – in what amounts to a feminist social theory of militarization.

The feminism we're bringing to analyse militarization, she said, is critical of *an array* of othering—not just the othering of women in relation to men. Militarization's based in and maintained through this kind of process, reproducing constantly a self together with an enemy to fear and to fight.

Israeli society is a deeply divided and stratified society by class, race and gender. There are also sub-stratifications, for instance able-bodied and disabled, and of age. Militarization holds all these in place. There's an illusion in Israel that the IDF is a people's army, that all get a fair chance in it, that it's an equaliser for everyone who serves in it, a ladder of advancement that's open to all. But sociological research, she says, shows this conception to be wrong. The military functions in the way schools do, to channel people into their class and to affirm their class (and ethnic, and gender) belonging.

So militarization is a mechanism for maintaining the patriarchal structure - women-and-children as a hyphenated entity to protect, and the male military elite as protectors (and adversaries). Conversely,

patriarchy is a motor of militarization, which needs to keep women in their place (secondary, needy, subordinate), and to 'imagine' them as incapable of doing without men's protection and without organized violence. What's imagined and constructed as masculinity in a militarized culture is a set of traits—competitiveness, lack of emotion (on some things!) and being a fighter - while women-and-children are constituted as the other half of the binary. Militarism is a culture that invests labour in keeping that gender binary in place as natural.

I think, individually, a lot of women in the other organizations we've looked at above, believe pretty much in such connections, but not equally explicitly. They do believe women are more capable, as Sharon Dolev put it, of 'acting outside the framework of honour-and-pride that so motivates men'. But there's an understandable reticence about elaborating on a conceptual feminist anti-militarism in our banal activist world (we feel this in England too). Gila says, of Women in Black, 'It nourishes our standing there. We just don't address it'. Yvonne, asking herself why she's not more public with these ideas as an activist in Kol Ha-Isha, put it very well. 'I have them inside me, but I couldn't easily represent them to women in Kol Ha-Isha who don't agree with me. Working there with women from disenfranchised communities, I'd feel as if I was giving a lecture, somehow crude, declamatory, rhetorical.'

5.2 "What views exist among you on *nationalism*?"

The meaning of the words nation, nationality and nationalism varies greatly according to who speaks them, to whom, when and where. Just comparing a dictionary definition to our own present-day understanding shows how thoroughly contested the concepts are bound to be. For instance, relevant definitions from the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary include:

Nation: *A distinct race or people distinguished by common descent, language or history, usually organized as a separate political state and occupying a definite territory.* But we know a nation may sometimes unite not so much around a common past but around a common destiny³⁵; the collective differences between people are not clearly bounded; and there's a large and necessary element of 'imagining' in nation and national belonging.³⁶

Nationality: *1) national quality or character, 2) national feeling, 3 the fact of belonging to a particular nation, 4) separate existence as a nation; national independence or consolidation.* These phrases too beg a lot of questions eg. Can belonging to a nation ever be a 'fact'? Is national character 'fact' or is it 'feeling'? Is it feasible to 'separate' people in order to achieve a 'nation' etc.

Nationalism: *1) devotion to one's country; a policy of national independence.* This of course begs the question of what is a 'country' and can nationalism sometimes (as in Cataluna for instance) stop short of an aspiration to national statehood?

³⁵ Yuval Davis, Nira (1997) *Gender and Nation*. Cambridge: Polity

³⁶ Anderson, Benedict (1983) *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso.

I was interested to learn what women anti-Occupation activists in Palestine and Israel are thinking about nation and nationalism because in Women in Black, in other countries, I've encountered conflicting views. Some women (remembering all too recent 'ethnic cleansings' in the name of nation) feel that WiB is, must be, cannot avoid being, *by definition* 'anti-nationalist'. Others feel differently – especially those who aren't of the dominant group in an already existing nation state. Even those who are in such a dominant group may sympathize with those who are oppressed by one. They say, 'Hang on! Wait a bit... Maybe a national feeling, a national identity, organization around a national ideal, is legitimate and needn't imply a wish for violence. I can't be part of a Women in Black that declares itself anti-nationalist.'

In the territory spanned by Israel and its Occupied Territories there are two collective identity groups asserting national rights and claiming some or all of the land. The result is distress, oppression and violence. But how, as feminists, do we evaluate the two nationalisms in this situation? There's conceptual, linguistic and political confusion. Zionism isn't recognized by all Zionists as being a nationalism. Some expressions of Palestinian nationalism don't claim a separate state 'for Palestinians' etc.etc.

So, women in this territory who are defined by 'the other' (however they define themselves) as 'being' Israeli Jew or Palestinian and who choose to work for a just peace with women of that other collectivity, have to address the question of nation, nationality and nationalism even if only implicitly. Can they help the rest of us in the women's antiwar movement to understand better how to deal with the issue?

Manal Massalha, Nadia Najjab and Aida Shibli gave me the following views from a Palestinian standpoint on national and gender identities.

Manal (from within Israel) told me she feels it's important to distinguish 'being' a Jew or Palestinian from political ideology. So she is always at pains to describe the conflict not as one between Jews and Palestinians but between *Zionists* and Palestinians. The basic value for her is mutual recognition of equal rights regardless of religion, race or class.

We have this little bit of land, Jews and Palestinians, and we have to work out how to live on it. I'm not a nationalist. I will struggle to achieve equality as a Palestinian, not because I'm nationalist, but because I'm anti-racist and am being discriminated against on grounds of my nationality.

Nadia (from a West Bank perspective) sees national need, national feeling, as at a certain historical moment precluding action around women's needs, feminist feeling. She said (you'll remember) 'I can't be so feminist when I see the checkpoints. I see it from a national perspective. We're suffering here, men and women both... Our critique of men has had to remain within our community.' Before talking as a feminist with Israeli feminists she requires from them a clear recognition that the Israeli state and Zionist movement deny Palestinian national identity and rights.

For Aida too (living in Israel), there are these same two 'levels' to take account of. 'There's the level of Palestinians, and the level of women.' But additionally, as a Palestinian living in Israel, there are another two levels besides.

As a Palestinian I have two identities—I'm a Palestinian first and second I'm an Israeli. On dark days I won't define myself as an Israeli. But on days when I feel confidence and am positive I will say I *am* an Israeli and I like being one. On good days I will call this 'my government' and on bad days I won't. It's schizophrenia really! I feel that schizophrenia every moment of my life! ... OK. So I challenge my government in order that Palestinian Israelis can be seen as equal, as not as the second-class citizen I'm made to feel everywhere I go.

For her a single non-national state is the only possible answer and democracy becomes the key issue.

I would give up my Palestinian fantasy, my fantasy of a greater Palestine. In exchange I would ask Jews to give up their fantasy of a greater Zionist state. One state with equal rights. And that's asking no favours!

Among the Jewish women I spoke with, Hedva Isachar was one of those who agreed with Aida on the one-state solution – though she sees it as impossible in present circumstances. 'Two states for two peoples is contradictory, because it's nationalist. How can you be socialist and think as a nationalist?'

Sharon Dolev recognized that any shift by the left and among Palestinians towards a one-state solution would be very threatening to the Israeli authorities and the Israeli right. She said,

If the Palestinians were to say tomorrow, OK, let us join you with full democratic rights in the State of Israel and we'll give up our claim to a separate state, that would end the Occupation without another shot fired. They would be given their separate state immediately, the state they were no longer asking for!

The implication here is that Israeli nationalists *need* Palestinian nationalism. (The very same thing occurred in the former Yugoslavia, where the Serb nationalist movement needed Bosnian nationalism to validate their own resurgence.)

We've seen that, on the Jewish 'side', the women's anti-Occupation movement described in the above pages has participation from women of a range of opinion from Zionist, through non-Zionist to anti-Zionist. Several women told me how valuable this is, even anti-Zionists recognising that the Zionist feminist and anti-Occupation activists are the ones who can best reach and influence mainstream Jewish opinion.

Not all Zionists recognise Zionism as being nationalism, although the women I spoke with did. Judy Blanc for instance, who describes herself as never having been a Zionist but rather 'like all old reds, first and foremost an internationalist', ruminated on the unsatisfactory theoretical position of all left political parties in Israel on the national question.

Deep down it's nationalism. The non-Zionist and anti-Zionist left don't know how to deal with Zionism. It's the permanent problem we don't have an answer for. I think we have to deal with it. Maybe this applies to nationalism in other regions too.... The problem of nationalism lies in the legitimate need for a national identity. We support the Palestinian cause. But there's a certain contradiction in that. Can we be opposed to Zionism and in favour of Palestinian national rights? It's not a contradiction we often face up to. And there's no ideology to tell us where to draw the lines. Maybe it's 'one nationalism may not oppress another'. But dialectically, it's always a crisis for us.

Other Jewish women do recognise Zionism to be nationalism, and define that nationalism as legitimate. Recently in London, I spoke with Vera Jordan, who is active in Bat Shalom. She formulated it this way

My nationalism's about self-determination. I have to have my country, a Jewish state, which I was denied for so long. I want my own flag, my own anthem. A 'single state' solution would eventually make me a minority in Israel. I want Palestinians to have equal rights in Israel but not to be a majority. I wouldn't feel it as my country, where I can shape its policies. Palestinians should have their own state where they would be a majority and determine for themselves what they want. Recognition of the Nakhba is legitimate, but it shouldn't mean we can't any longer celebrate our Israeli Independence Day. The memories for us are too fresh – memories of the Holocaust and of the pogroms against Jews that occurred in Palestine before the creation of the state of Israel. Half a century isn't enough.

Vera, negotiating her own Zionism with honesty and care, and others like her, are valuable in the anti-Occupation movement. They are the ones who stay with it at the greatest cost, but who can best help the movement touch the majority in Israeli society. But, as and when the movement shifts to more radical future scenarios, the inner conflict becomes very painful. Unlike Vera, a lot of Zionist women have left Bat Shalom in recent years. So Vera stresses the need to be in touch with more conservative Jewish opinion. 'I want us to be relevant. If we simply adopt a pro-Palestinian agenda, we won't be relevant. If there is nothing in our aims for Jews, we will achieve nothing.' For instance, I asked, showing that 'the Occupation is bad for us too'? Yes, she said, absolutely. 'I'm not doing what I do out of a self-righteous concern for Palestinians but because it is in my interests too.'

Gila, a founder of the Coalition and often its spokesperson, also defines herself as Zionist. And she recognises it's often said to equate with

nationalism, even imperialism. But she doesn't herself interpret it that way. As a Women in Black activist, she wouldn't want the movement to define itself as anti-nationalist.

Nationalism is often taken to extremes. But nationalism as an identity is different. I wouldn't call myself a nationalist, but often I say I'm proud of being Israeli and a Jew. The Zionism I grew up with meant the liberation of the Jewish people. A human state was the original vision. But it was at the expense of Palestinians. I'm sorry about that and I'm grateful to those Palestinian to agree now to a compromise on territory.

The question of course that Zionists and non-Zionists alike struggle with is 'if not a nationalist Jewish state, what kind of state?' What does democracy mean and is it compatible with Zionism, with nationalism, indeed with any 'national state' – including a Palestinian one? Gila says, 'Israel has to give equal rights to all its citizens. And it has to welcome all immigrants on the same terms'. And women debate tirelessly how to interpret and whether to honour 'rights of return' to Israel - of any Jew, of any Palestinian.

5.3 What are the difficulties of effectively challenging the Israeli state and influencing Israeli public opinion?

5.3.1 Non-violent direct action

In the course of some conversations while I was in Israel I reflected that in the international media we don't hear of mass non-violent direct actions involving arrest and incarceration of large numbers of Israeli activists in connection with the Occupation. What is the situation in that respect, I asked?

I was answered in several different ways. First, some women told me there really never has been much of a tradition of mass law-breaking in Israel. Besides, many of the individuals making up the larger peace movement, in Shalom Achshav for instance, while they disagree with the state's policies, are not alienated individuals – they are mostly well-integrated within Israeli society. They prefer protests that stay well within the law.

Then again, in the women's peace movement there's a certain endemic caution: 'We have kids, we are older, we can't afford it!' Many women feel culturally more attuned to the kind of public statement exemplified by Women In Black vigils. With regard to the political tasks of, first, developing co-operation with Palestinians in the Territories and, second, challenging the edifices of the military state in Israel, we've seen how difficult even Bat Shalom have found the former. As to the latter, if some Women In Black vigilliers or Machsom-Watch checkpoint observers want to see more action they tend to do it alongside men in the mixed groups such as Ta'ayush and the Anarchistim.

For some women this was sufficient explanation, but others had complicated feelings on the issue. Amira and Debby for instance said in almost identical words, 'The thing is, we have the luxury of choosing, and sometimes we choose not to act. Palestinians don't have the same choice.' Sharon Dolev does sometimes go on the Friday demonstrations against the Wall. But she felt doubtful of their effectiveness, and even a bit suspicious of the motivations of the demonstrators who 'are seen, and see themselves, as heroes'. She doubts her own authenticity too. 'Going on actions makes me feel good. The adrenalin flows when you're facing the IDF soldiers. But I recognize a sort of self-righteousness in it.'

Women also spoke about the social price you pay in Israeli Jewish society for defying the norms. Hedva stressed 'There are huge social sanctions here. We're a small community, and lots of us are working in state employment or depend on state connections. If you step out of line they can ruin you forever. You'd have to leave Israel'. Rela confirmed this. 'It's the culture. Imprisonment isn't an option here. It's how the family would see it, the social sanctions against it.' Yehudit Keshet took a different view, she said, 'As Jews in Israel we have privilege. There have been very few cases where people have lost their jobs or been ostracized by their communities for their political views. Most of us live in our own little leftwing bubble'.

The current demonstrations against the Wall, particularly (as mentioned above) in support of Palestinian resistance in the village of Bil'in, illustrate characteristic state responses to non-violent direct action. The demonstrations, co-ordinated between Israelis and West Bank Palestinians, are constant and determined. The Israeli demonstrators are getting skilled at blocking bulldozers and chaining themselves to the wall in ever more imaginative ways to make it difficult for the soldiers to remove them. The IDF are angry and frustrated and don't hesitate to use tear gas, stun grenades and rubber bullets against demonstrators. Sharon, who recently got a rubber bullet in the ribs, says 'There's more violence here than anything I've seen anywhere else'.

But, while Palestinian members of the Bil'in village committee are subjected to arbitrary arrests – and possibly to torture under investigation - those arrested on the Israeli side are fewer, and most are released on bail. Few cases come to court and fewer still result in gaol sentences. At most activists get a couple of days in prison. This is characteristic of Israel, where the government knows better than to make political martyrs. 'So even if you go all the way you only get a slapped wrist,' as Debby put it. The exception is the treatment of conscientious objectors, as discussed in Part 2 above. But, Rela says, 'Even for COs, imprisonment is usually for short terms, albeit repeated. And the military prisons are not too intimidating, some are not even like prisons. So this is not martyrdom.'

When cases do come to court it's difficult to make political mileage out of them. Rela said, 'We are just construed as weirdos – sometimes as traitors but mainly just weird'. Tali said

To make a speech in court is pointless here – nobody's listening. Such incidents just don't cause discussion here. Actually, they cause more violence because when you come out you get beaten up by ordinary people. People are violent against you just for who you are. That's why there's so little non-violent direct action in Israel.

Of course the Israeli state keeps a careful eye on activists. But what it considers more dangerous than highly visible demonstrations is any hint of sustained political contact between Israelis and Palestinians in the Territories, which is less open to view. Probably to the state the most worrying aspect of the current demonstrations against the Wall are the good connections between the Israeli demonstrators and local West Bank Palestinians generated by the outrage of the Wall and indiscriminate police brutality against those who object to it. Yehudit Keshet reminded me that in the 1970s and 80s a number of activists were arrested, charged and imprisoned for several years for contacts with radical Palestinian groups such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Until the early 1990s contact with PLO was proscribed by law and punishable by up to three years in prison. Even today these same people are subject to more harassment and surveillance than today's demonstrators.

The case of Tali Fahima was often cited during my visit. She's a young Mizrahi Jewish woman who befriended a leader in the Palestinian resistance group, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade. She was not at the time a leftist, not political, not active in the peace movement. She visited him in Jenin, and while there she saw the full extent of that town's destruction by the IDF. On return to Israel she gave an interview about what she'd witnessed, to counter misinformation in the media, and set about collecting money for a children's association in the Jenin refugee camp. After an Israeli assassination attempt against the Brigade's leader, Zachariah Zbeidi, Tali publicly declared her willingness to act as his 'human shield'.

She was detained in August 2004 on her way back to Jenin, and since then has been held for 18 months in prison awaiting charge and trial. According to the website of her support group, interrogation over many days has included blindfolds, painful restraint and sexual harassment. The interrogators (so they told her) were attempting to 'make Tali into a good Jewish girl'.³⁷ Yehudit Keshet observed to me that there is a degree of misogyny in Tali's case. The authorities clearly saw her as a young girl, who may or may not have had a romantic attachment to a Palestinian, vulnerable because without political backing. She could be punished for her temerity as an object lesson to others.

5.3.2 *Opinion forming*

Because of the difficulties recounted above in effectively challenging the Israeli state, some women feel that the best, or perhaps the only, route to this end is to influence the Israeli voter. But how? Sharon Dolev for instance,

³⁷ www.freetalifahima.org accessed 20.12.05

chooses political campaigning in preference to demonstrating. 'When I do this kind of work I feel less righteous and less special but I think it's what works'. Her passion is a small new publication she edits called Watchdog (Kalbey Hashmira) in which both Jewish and Palestinian writers are published, in Hebrew and Arabic editions.³⁸ Manal Massalha, from an Israeli Palestinian perspective, feels demonstrations are important but they need to be backed up by alternative activities. 'It's not easy to have an effect on Israeli politics. But that doesn't mean we should be silent. People are misled by the mainstream media and indoctrination, for instance in the school curriculum and in the army. We have to give people alternative information'. That's why she values, for instance, Reality Tours and the kind of political discussions they have in Bat Shalom.

The trouble is, as Hedva Isachar described it, even in left media the voices of women anti-Occupation activists are marginalized. Besides, they have difficulty even finding a counter-militaristic language to speak. In Hebrew there's no word for 'struggle' except 'fight'. The word 'commitment' is the word used for 'enlisting' in the military.

On a more optimistic note, it seems that some of the thinking and language put into circulation by New Profile may be beginning to rub off on the mainstream media. In a recent issue of Jewish Peace News³⁹ an editorial notes that there is 'a growing critical discourse on Israeli militarization in mainstream Israeli media. A recent item on the increased pre-military training in high schools... featured the caption 'Militarization' in bold print...' Rela Mazali comments that this word was until now completely absent from mainstream Israeli discourse – despite this being one of the most militarized countries on earth in which 50% of the surface area is military land.

On a less optimistic note, Debby Lerman says

We may have brought some issues onto the agenda of the average Israeli's Friday night dinner table. Yes - refusal of military service for instance. But now the settlers are doing it even better! [NB:some of whom now refuse to be soldiers in protest at the IDF's part in forcibly removing the settlements from Gaza.] Any successes we've had have been marginal.

The difficulty is that today the overwhelming issue in Israeli popular opinion is 'our insecurity'. The media mostly plays into it. It's difficult to offer a convincing alternative paradigm. Yvonne Deutsch said, 'Security is the magic word. As Jews we have these unhealed existential fears. The politicians play on them.' Hedva added, 'The memory of the Shoa, even among Mizrahim, most of whom didn't directly experience it, runs very deep. There's paranoia. It feeds the security agenda, the fear of the Arab threat. And now there are Iran's nuclear weapons!' Even if they are aware of Palestinian suffering, the majority

³⁸ See www.shadowgov.org

³⁹ Jewish Peace News commentary by 'RM' in www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org, accessed 24 October 2005.

of Jewish Israelis tend to feel (Yvonne says) ‘I’m sorry – but what can we do?’ And recently, Ariel Sharon’s disengagement from Gaza, which to some seems to take risks with security, leaves people thinking the ball is now, after all, in the Palestinian court. ‘Why don’t the Palestinians say thank you?’

5.4 “What (if any) are the uses of internationalism?”

In this aspect of our conversations we touched on two issues. Firstly, *women’s internationalism* – particularly Women in Black’s development into an international network, and the initiative for an International Women’s Commission. Second, *international solidarity in relation to the Palestinian cause and the Israeli opposition to the Occupation*, the most current instance being the call for sanctions, disinvestment and boycott.

5.4.1 *Women’s internationalism*

Women in Black

The development of Women in Black from an Israeli to an international movement had taken many WiB women here by surprise. But most women I spoke with welcomed the internationalization of Women In Black and were mostly happy that their conference had been held in Jerusalem. Gila feels only international connection can keep the Occupation in the forefront of opinion among women in other countries and enable occasional concerted action – as when in two successive years the Coalition had inspired synchronised round-the-world petitions to embassies and governments on Israeli/Palestinian issues. Nonetheless it’s important, she feels, ‘not to let internationalism lead us by the nose’ and deflect attention from the main task of influencing the Israeli government and public opinion.

Some women feel Women in Black internationally is less alert to Zionist sensitivities than Women in Black in Israel. While some feel the greater radicalism of WiBI can give a useful ‘push’ to the Israeli movement, others fear it could be counter-productive. Amira for instance said it might alienate the local Israeli population from the local activists and impede the building of a wider movement.

Some women specially valued the input to the conference from and about other war zones. They would have liked more time devoted to this in the programme. Gila and some others said they felt it could usefully broaden the perspectives and agendas of Israeli women in black vigils. Gila had been disappointed at how little reciprocity there had been by Women in Black in Israel for the international support they’d received. When she’d tried to bring international issues to the vigils - for example the appeal for the release of the Italian journalist Giulia Sgregna kidnapped in Iraq, the vigillers had shown little interest or enthusiasm for the cause.

In her talk to the conference, Rela pressed Israeli peace activists to take on board the agenda of the international women activists – the ‘war on terror’ and the invasion of Iraq. She used the opportunity to make the point that resisting the Occupation of Palestine means also addressing the USA and its actions in the region. The situation of Iraq and that of the West Bank and Gaza aren’t identical, but there are strong analogies. ‘It is a single power-based authority – the United States – that grants and protects the international impunity of both the occupiers of Iraq and the occupiers of Palestine. Resisting one of them requires and involves resisting the other.’⁴⁰

One issue arose at the international conference that proved divisive. The WiB movement internationally (and the women’s anti-Occupation movement in Israel) has many lesbian activists, and normally WiB annual conferences reflect this by having sessions on sexuality in the programme. To be politically active as a lesbian woman or gay man in Palestine however is socially very costly.⁴¹ Some of the Palestinian partners organizing the 2005 conference said they would be unable to attend if the proposed lesbian workshop were to be included in the programme. The Israeli Coalition organizers were divided on whether to comply by dropping the workshop. After much heart-searching they did so, understanding the Palestinian women’s position and not wishing to forfeit their partnership. The international participants mostly came to the conference in Jerusalem with two aims - to support Palestinian and Israeli activism against the Occupation and to discuss issues relating to their own activism in other countries. Unsurprisingly, some of them agreed with the decision that had been made, others were disappointed by it.

Yvonne Deutsch felt the conference, while it had not challenged the local Women in Black movement in the way she had hoped, had been important for expressing international WiB solidarity with Palestinian women. The fact of the visitors being directly exposed to the realities of Palestinian society would perhaps attract more international support. Palestinian women associated with Bat Shalom in the Jerusalem link were unequivocally glad of the international scope of Women in Black. Amal said that it was very important for her as a Palestinian. She recognised what a tiny minority of Israelis their activist partners the other side of the line represent. Women in Black internationally could support them and help them to get their political message across to other Israelis and the Israeli government. When they visit the region they get to see the reality of the Wall and the settlements and take the information home with them. Amal added that the presence of the international women had enabled them to talk about gender and women’s issues with the Israelis present, but without the bilateral contact that could be taken for inappropriate ‘normalization’.

Of the Women in Black International conference, Natasha said

⁴⁰ From www.newprofile.org accessed 18.12.05.

⁴¹ Though there is a Palestinian lesbian organization, ASWAT (Voices). See their website www.aswatgroup.org where their self-introduction reads ‘a courageous and dynamic group of women who have decided to organize to challenge the status quo and to improve their lives and hopefully secure these rights for the coming generations’.

Women in Black. These are our allies. Without that international presence at the conference we would never have had agreement on support for sanctions and a clause on the 'right of return'.

Manal, too, felt there had been benefits from holding the WiB conference in Jerusalem. She especially valued that the visitors had had the opportunity to personally witness the effects of the Occupation, such as the Wall, checkpoints, racism etc. It was also very important to show international visitors that Palestinians and anti-Zionist Jews can work together.

The International Women's Commission

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 has been taken very seriously by women in Israel. Isha l'Isha has picked up the 'basket of tools' made available by the UN – a glossary of terms, guidance on how to organize groups to carry the Resolution forward, and on how to mobilize parliament to legislate for it – and has translated the document itself into local languages.

The most substantial move however has been the establishment of an International Women's Commission which would be capable of implementing the Resolution in the context of Israeli/Palestinian peace negotiations. It aims to bring a civil society perspective to negotiations, together with a gender perspective, and the actual inclusion of women at the table.

Natasha Khalidi of the JCW told me, 'The Commission was born here in the Jerusalem Link. Its agreed principles are basically those of the Link – though in less detail, because ours were still being worked out at that stage.' The founding duo were Maha Abu-Dayyeh Shamas, on the Palestinian side, and Terry Greenblatt, at that time director of Bat Shalom, on the Israeli side. Today Maha's Israeli partner is Knesset member Naomi Chazan.

Together in May 2002 Terry and Maha addressed the UN Security Council in New York, and in August that year they addressed an appeal to the Quartet. They shared with them their ideas

on how we might contribute to the elevation of the discourse on the Middle East to a different level away from the military escalation and the insane violence..by enabling the insights, perspectives and concerns of Palestinian and Israeli civil society, and especially women, to inform the political dialogue and negotiations that will have to be re-launched at the political level to achieve a just and durable peace...⁴²

Later, Maha Shamas described to me the structure that has evolved. There will be 60 commissioners, 20 Israelis, 20 Palestinians and 20 international women. The latter will come from both the global north and global South, and

⁴² Letter of August 19, 2002, to the representatives of 'The Quartet', the EU, the UN, Russia and the USA. *Equality Now* Press Release 22.08.02

their role will be to pressure their own governments. The commissioners will be 'prominent politicians and feminists'.

This year, in August, there was a meeting in Istanbul of ten Palestinian and ten Israeli women under the auspices of UNIFEM to carry the IWC project forward. In Israel, using an amendment to the Israeli Equal Rights for Women the Law passed by the Knesset in June, the preparatory group have actually succeeded in establishing the International Women's Commission as a legal Israeli entity. The Commission has also been recognised in Palestinian law and by a presidential directive.

Maha told me at the beginning of November 2005, 'We have a charter now. It's still under wraps, but will be published soon with an official launch.' She emphasises that 'We don't just envision the management of the conflict - we are seeking a sustainable solution. And we're not looking for a parallel peace process - our aim is actually to access negotiations.' The IWC negotiations bypass the current Palestinian inhibition against co-operation with the Israelis by having an official mandate.

I heard some scepticism about the IWC from some Israeli Jewish women – it's an 'elite project'; its principles have been watered down during negotiation; the existence of the IWC in no way ensures the acceptance of women as negotiators; and in any case there are no peace negotiations in sight. But, on this last point, Maha says

True - there are no negotiations current. But we're looking to the future. We're fostering the possibility in what we ourselves do now. We try to influence the processes through the joint statements we issue.

Other instances of women's internationalism

Beyond Women in Black and the International Women's Commission, there are two other aspects of women's internationalism felt in Israel and Palestine. First, *funding by foreign donors*. This was undeniably useful but sometimes came at a price. Molly Malekar of Bat Shalom mentioned the conditions imposed by some donors. In the 1990s it had been common to require people-to-people contact, whether or not this was productive. Today donors often require a commitment by the Palestinian projects they fund to 'working for democracy'. Some NGOs felt this to be an inappropriate demand so long as the Occupation has them all in crisis. Donors are often only interested in funding practical projects that can be evaluated, rather than the political campaigns, so badly needed, whose results are unmeasurable. They will support human rights work while not wanting to support the political work that challenges the source of human rights violations. Besides, Molly said

Donors do have good hearts and good intentions. They want to support civil society's work for peace – but sometimes they seem to expect civil society to bring salvation. They leave us to struggle against the Israeli

government's atrocities and don't confront their own governments and their complicity with the Israeli government.

A second aspect of women's internationalism is *solidarity visits*. Women of WiBI and other women from overseas often come to work in or alongside the International Solidarity Movement in the West Bank. An example is the International Women's Peace Service, founded by Angie Zelter from the UK, which maintains a house for overseas women activists in a Palestinian village. Other women from various countries, but most particularly Italy, have now for many years made a practice of coming to Israel to support women's anti-Occupation groups.⁴³ On the whole this was welcomed, though some women did mention to me that it could be counterproductive. Very few of the visiting women spoke either Hebrew or Arabic, sometimes they were insufficiently well-informed and at worst could be intrusive and patronizing.

Prospects of a global movement

Because my own preoccupation is with the potential for a movement - conscious, connected and global - of women opposing militarism and war, I asked women whether they too aspired to this. Most of course do, and see women as having a real capacity for international networking. Some Israeli women, like Gila Svirsky, are already central to such an emergent movement. But again several cautions were expressed. Amira Gelblum for instance said, 'International networking is lovely. To go abroad and feel part of the big consensus'. But, she warned, 'There's too much of it. Too much of our resources are spent travelling to conferences. That's not the work we have to do.' And Hedva Isachar said

Yes, if we link local agendas in universal action it could be very valuable. Globalization's here already – only for *our* purposes it isn't here yet. We need to be much more skilled at using its benefits, e-mail, the Web. We need the practical tools that could enable us to work with each other. Most women aren't even on-line yet! Besides, the language barrier interrupts us. Too much of what we talk about is wishful thinking.

5.4.2 *International solidarity*

The Western left and anti-war movement frequently focuses on the Middle East and supports efforts toward justice for Palestinians and peace for Israelis. I found women generally felt this to be valuable, if not vital. But there were mixed feelings about it.

Palestinian women on the whole evaluated it positively. It's clearly vital to the Palestinian cause that it's kept in the forefront of world opinion. If the USA

⁴³ See my Research Profile No.15 on Women in Black groups in Italy – accessible at www.cynthiacockburn.org.

made ending the Occupation a condition of its aid to Israel, it would end tomorrow. Amal felt Israel had been skilled at using the international arena to push forward the Zionist agenda. Palestinians and the Israeli opposition needed to use internationalism equally intelligently. Progressive opinion from outside, reaching the Israeli public, could help them see through their indoctrination by the state. Raja Rantisi felt internationalism worked best when it was person to person, involving known and trusted contacts.

Jewish women too felt it was useful to have people raising issues abroad that echoed back to Israeli society. 'We need the visibility they give us,' Rela said. 'It gives us credibility in Israel.' And Molly said, 'I'd be frightened if at a given moment there were no international interest. It would give a free hand to the Israeli government... But I need them to be working on their own governments back home too!' The main problem was, and several women mentioned it: Israelis interpret opposition to Zionism in the outside world as anti-semitism. 'And sometimes of course it is,' Sharon said. 'There really is anti-semitism in the world.'

The call for sanctions, disinvestment and boycott

A specific case currently is the call, already mentioned above, by organizations of Palestinian civil society for an international campaign of sanctions, disinvestment and boycott. A forerunner of this was a campaign organized by Western academics for a boycott of Israeli universities. In the opinion of many on the Israeli left this had been inept and counterproductive, since many academics are actually in the left, or sympathetic to it. The call for boycott would have received more approbation had it been limited to Bar-Ilan University, in a Jewish settlement in the West Bank.

As we've already seen, the present boycott call is supported by those Palestinian women in the Occupied Territories I spoke with, even if they doubt it will be effective. Among Palestinian citizens of Israel I found mixed views. Samira Khoury does not support the boycott. She believes its effects will be felt most severely by children, by the disadvantaged, and by Palestinians, of whom she says 'We're boycotted as it is'. Khulood Badawi by contrast said that a sanctions campaign against the Occupied Territories, and against military products and agreements, would be valuable. She's disappointed that some Bat Shalom board members are not supportive of sanctions. 'What I say is, if you're be brave, be brave to the end'.

Among Israeli Jewish women too I found mixed feelings. There were worries on the left that it might further alienate ordinary Israelis by damaging the economy and causing unemployment and poverty. On the whole though, the left would probably be happy with such a campaign as long as it was the Palestinians, not themselves, promoting it.

Lily Traubmann feels, 'Israel is very preoccupied with the impression it gives internationally. Boycott is a non-violent method, and it's something that hasn't

yet been done. It's worth a try'. More emphatically, Rela Mazali feels there's a real need for such a campaign, 'we need middle class Israelis to feel they are paying too high a price for the Occupation, and start to change'. In her address to the WiB international conference she said 'I'm asking the international community: Please, boycott me. Boycott my country. Sanction it till it stops committing these crimes. And sanction as well those outside it who are profiting.'⁴⁴ Yehudit Keshet agreed that 'it's useful for Israelis to hear people saying 'You aren't part of a civilized community of nations'. But Judy Blanc feared that the boycott demand came, at bottom, out of a wish to punish Israelis, not to change their minds. It was a mistake. If the demand were, as it seemed to be, 'stop being a Zionist state', i.e. a state that doesn't privilege Jews, it was plainly unrealistic. 'Personally,' she said, 'I think it's very important to build an international campaign that includes all three tactics but it has to be aimed at the occupation in all its manifestations and not simply at Israel'.

In the Coalition of Women for Peace views are equally divided. There is as yet no consensus on how to react. Gila, for one, feels sanctions, if applied at all, should be selective. They should be limited to a boycott of goods produced in the settlements, and of companies like Caterpillar whose bulldozers are used to demolish Palestinian homes.

What is entirely new in the present call of Palestinian civil society for international sanctions, disinvestment and boycott is a clause that calls for Israel to recognize the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality. This has surprised and delighted Palestinian women. Amal Khrieshe said, 'It's the first time we ever saw such a thing, that we've seen the problem raised in a Palestinian statement. Till now it's only been the Occupation that's been addressed.' It has however disturbed some Jewish women. Judy, for instance, feels the Palestinian NGOs were mistaken in including the rights of Israeli Palestinians in this way. She explained

The fight for democracy in Israel is an international issue. I don't think the campaign should address all the things that are wrong with Israel. Sanctions are a tactic, a tool for the international community which, after all, doesn't have too many tools for acting effectively. Moral statements are part of a campaign - but one has to be careful not to derail the campaign.

Taking on global antimilitarist concerns

We saw that a question arises among women as to whether international support for justice for Palestinians and for the Israeli movement working toward that end is, can be or should be reciprocated - by Israeli activist women taking on the causes motivating the women's anti-war activism in other countries. The same question arises concerning the Israeli left / peace activism more generally. Till now rather little attention has been paid to joining

⁴⁴ From www.newprofile.org accessed 18.12.05

in the worldwide opposition to the 'war on terror' and the invasion of Iraq. And the issue of Israel's possession of nuclear weapons is, women told me, still a taboo subject. In these ways there is a certain asymmetry in the relationship between the Israeli movement and the international movement.

An appropriate finale on internationalism could come from Aida Shibli who, when I asked her, 'Does internationalizing your problem help or hinder you?' replied in words that stunned me by their clarity.

We don't have to internationalize it. It is international. We're one of the fires started by imperialism. Their colonizing here — you can see it's another phase of imperialism. We're facing the globalization of war — it's no longer my issue alone. The bombing in London is my issue. There's no difference between the Wall here and the wall that the European Union are trying to build around themselves. (You mean, with Turkey on the outside? I asked) Yes. The wars in Bosnia, Colombia and so on, we're a continuation of them. White nations are taking what they don't need and have no right to, as if everything belonged to them. They're polluting the world with their industries. None of this is a coincidence. Why don't people see this? Why don't we understand the connection between exploitation in Africa, bombs in London, the Occupation of Palestine?

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I sent this text in draft to all those I interviewed for comment and correction. Once we had arrived at a version of the paper with which they felt comfortable, they agreed that it should be put on my website for women in other countries to read and discuss.

Aida Shibli, a board member of Bat Shalom and a member of its political committee, is a nurse and medical research coordinator at Hadassah Ein Karem hospital in Jerusalem. She is active in the Inter-religious Encounter Association, the Peacemakers Community and other groups.

Amal Khrieshe Barghouti is a psychological counselor, and director of the Palestine Women Workers Society for Development in Ramallah, which is associated with the Mubadara political movement. She is also a board member of the Jerusalem Center for Women.

Amira Gelblum is a historian teaching at the Department for Political Sciences at the Open University. She was one of the editors of *Noga* magazine. She is a joint founder of the adult-education Social Economics College and the Community of Learning Women, and is on the board of both organizations as well as that of Bat Shalom.

Debby Lerman is a member and board member of Bat Shalom. She is also a founding member of the IWC (International Women's Commission) and an activist and member of the management committee of Kav L'Oved (The Worker's Line) and is employed in an information technology business enterprise.

Gila Svirsky was born in the USA and migrated to Israel in 1966, age 19. She was director of the 'New Israel Fund' in the 1980s, became a feminist and lesbian; joined Women in Black in 1988; became director of Bat Shalom; and in November 2000 co-founded the Coalition of Women for Peace.

Hedva Isachar was a journalist in the Israeli public service radio, 'Kol Israel'. She writes for feminist and left publications and websites, and is active in a workers' rights NGO and the Coalition of Women for Peace. She is the author of *Sisters in Peace: Feminist Voices of the Left*, Resling Press, 2003.

Judy Blanc was born in 1928 in the USA where, after World War II, she joined the Communist Party, especially valuing its work for racial and women's equality. In Israel she has been active in Shani, Women for Peace, Reshet – and now in Bat Shalom, of which she is a board member.

Khulood Badawi is a Palestinian woman citizen of Israel, born in Nazareth. She was the first woman to be elected chair of the Arab Student Union of Israel. Active in most of the anti-occupation movements, she is currently employed in the Association for Civil Rights (Occupied Territories Department) where she is doing field research on the Separation Wall. She is a member of the board of Bat Shalom.

Lily Traubmann migrated to Israel after the military coup in Chile in 1973 and has since lived in kibbutz Megiddo, working for the kibbutz movement, Kibbutz Ha Artzi as sex equality officer and in the political department. Long active in Women in Black, she is a founder member of Bat Shalom and now its political coordinator.

Maha Abu-Dayyeh Shamas is director of the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling in East Jerusalem, head of the board of trustees of the Jerusalem Legal Aid Center, a board member of the Jerusalem Center for Women and a prime mover in the International Women's Commission.

Manal Massalha is currently studying for a masters degree in human rights at the London School of Economics, having obtained a first and second degree in sociology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She is a former staff member of Bat Shalom in Jerusalem.

Mariam Yusuf Abu Hussein is a Palestinian woman who finished her first degree in sociology and is a qualified nurse, caring for the health of children in a secondary school in the town of Umm el Fahm. She is also a group facilitator working in the community with mothers of talented children with leadership potential. She is currently part of a five-woman team establishing a Women's Community Centre for women of the Wadi Ara area.

Molly Malekar was born in India and came to Israel in 1971. She is one of the founders of Women Engendering the Peace, a political-educational project, and of the International Women's Commission. She has been a staff member of Bat Shalom since 1995 and is currently director.

Nadia Naser-Najjab, PhD, studied social psychology at the University of Exeter. Her recent research is an evaluation of people-to-people groups following the Oslo accords. She is Associate Professor of Education and Psychology at Bir Zeit University.

Natasha Khalidi lives in East Jerusalem and is director of the Jerusalem Center for Women in East Jerusalem.

Raja Rantisi qualified in international law, is an Associate Professor of English in the Department of Languages and Translation at Birzeit University, and a member of the advisory board of the International Women's Peace Service in Palestine.

Rana Nashashibi is director of the Palestinian Counseling Centre in occupied East Jerusalem, a community-based counseling and consultancy organization advocating for positive mental health through provision of quality care and capacity-building.

Rela Mazali is a writer and independent researcher; a contributing editor of *Jewish Peace News*; former staff member of Physicians for Human Rights; and New Profile founder and activist. She is initiator and assistant director of the documentary *Testimonies* (1993), and author of *Maps of Women's Goings and Stayings* (Stanford University Press, 2003).

Samira Houry was born in 1929, in Nazareth where she has lived most of her life. She trained as a teacher, taught in schools and adult education, 'to change women's lives'. Much of her energy has been devoted to political activism, and she was for many years president of the Movement of Democratic Women for Israel (TANDI), of which she is now an executive committee member.

Sharon Dolev headed Young Meretz from 1999 to 2001. She was formerly a fulltime staff member of the Geneva Accords Campaign (Heskem – otherwise known as the Headquarters for a Full-Status Agreement) and currently campaigns for Hadash.

Tali Lerner is the youngest woman I interviewed, aged 22, and active in New Profile. She already has many years experience of youth organization and is currently responsible for developing New Profile's youth programme.

Yehudit Keshet was born in Wales, settled permanently in Israel in 1974 and worked for the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial and Israeli Institute of Talmudic Publications among other organizations. She founded the Tradition Center, a cooperative multi-cultural puppet theater and is co-founder of Machsom-Watch.

Yehudit Zaidenberg was born and has lived for most of her life in a kibbutz. Her occupation has been educational work, both with children and adults. Since 1999 she has been engaged in fulltime political work as one of two programme coordinators in northern Bat Shalom.

Yvonne Deutsch is a social worker who started her anti-Occupation activism in the early 1980s in the Committee of Solidarity with Bir Zeit University. With the first intifada she became an organizer of Women in Black and Women and Peace. In 1994 she became the founding director of The Women's Centre in Jerusalem (Kol Ha-Isha) and currently coordinates one of its projects.

APPENDIX

In addition to Women in Black, New Profile, Machsom-Watch, TANDI and Bat Shalom, the following four are also member organizations of the Coalition of Women for Peace: ⁴⁵

The Fifth Mother

The Fifth Mother was founded in March 2002 by women from the Four Mothers movement, which had been instrumental in ending the Israeli occupation of Lebanon, and other women who share the view that 'War Is Not My Language'. They believe that every conflict has a solution and that conflicts must be solved with words, not bullets. They tried to bring to public discourse insights from language and conflict resolution in the unique voice of women and provide an alternative to the militant language that now defines the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Noga – a Feminist Journal

Israel's most prominent feminist magazine, *Noga* was started in 1980 by a group of women from differing professional backgrounds. The magazine, 'by women, about women, for women', is the centre of an activist organization that organizes symposiums, conferences and workshops on issues pertaining to women and women's status. They raise awareness of feminist theories and feminist political analysis and encourage female artists, writers and photographers. But they say of themselves that they combine 'a striving for equality with an aspiration for peace', and their articles often deal with issues of politics and militarization.

NELED (Women for Coexistence)

This group was founded in 1989 'to bring together Palestinian and Jewish citizens of Israel'. They hold regular monthly meetings, with an average attendance of 20 to 30 women, and some men as well, at which usually an invited lecturer will talk about social and political issues. NELED initiate solidarity visits to the Occupied Territories, collecting donations and gifts for humanitarian institutions in the West Bank city of Tul-Karem with whom they are networked.

WILPF (Women's International League for Peace and Freedom -- Israel chapter)

WILPF is an international NGO with national sections in 37 countries, covering all continents. Its international secretariat is based in Geneva and it has an office at the United Nations in New York. The local chapter in Israel

⁴⁵ The material in this appendix is drawn mainly from the self-descriptions of the organizations on the website of the Coalition of Women for Peace, www.coalitionofwomen.org, accessed October 2005.

pursues the work of the organization as a whole -- that is, 'bringing together women of different political beliefs and philosophers who are united in a determination to study, make known and help abolish the causes and the legitimization of war'. They strive, beyond non-violence, for the establishment of economic and social systems that will bring justice for regardless of sex, race and religion.

Some other feminist women's organizations in Israel mentioned in the above text.

Ahoti (My Sister)

Ahoti is an organization of Mizrahi feminist activities, devoted to representing women who are living in the peripheries, helping and aiding women who are deprived of their labor rights and whose voices cannot be heard. They are dedicated to closing the economic, social and cultural gaps and creating alternatives for women in economic distress, through projects, workshops and conferences that empower women, and inform them of their rights. (Information taken from www.achoti.org.il on 18 December 2005.)

Isha l'Isha (Women for Women)

Isha l'Isha a feminist centre in Haifa, A 'feminist glasshouse' which shields, protects and fights for equal rights for women and is home to women from all walks of life, regardless of race, creed, nationality, age and sexual orientation. They have a project 'fighting against the trafficking of women' and have been active in promoting the adoption of UN Security Resolution 1325 on the inclusion of women in peace negotiations. (Information taken from www.haifawomenscoalition.org.il on 18 December 2005.)

Kol Ha-Isha (The Women's Voice)

A progressive feminist grassroots organization run by an ethnically diverse staff and board of directors, Kol Ha-Isha is a multicultural women's centre in Jerusalem founded in 1994 as a space in which to continue and strengthen the legacy of feminism and women's activism in Jerusalem. They provide a forum for women from different communities to learn from each other, advocate for common issues and promote a multicultural model of social change. (Information taken from www.kolhaisha.israel.net on 18 December 2005).

This document is one of a series of local and regional profiles that can be seen on the website www.cynthiacockburn.org. They are interim products of a two-year research project *Women Opposing War: Organization and Strategy in the International Movement of Women against Violence and Militarism*, being carried out by the author from her base in the Department of Sociology,

City University, London, during 2004/5, with the support of several charitable trusts. The profile is not intended for publication in its present form. I would be grateful if you would not quote it in published work without first seeking my agreement.

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