

**Constructing peace....but what kind of peace?  
Women's activism, strategies and discourse against war  
(Israel-Palestine 1950-2012)**

By *Valerie Pouzol*

**Abstract**

*Israeli and Palestinian women played a vital role in the difficult process of achieving peace and restoring dialogue. Meeting and organizing away from the spotlight, women held discussions with each other and proposed ways to bring about reconciliation, as well as constructing alternatives to violence and war.*

*Women from both sides of the Green Line and within Israel were particularly active during the first Intifada, building a genuine women's peace movement while being engaged in protest activities, lobbying and solidarity actions. These grassroots organizations, which were clearly anti-occupation, took part in non-mixed activities and occasionally subverted and deconstructed national identities. In addition to these innovative and intensive activities in the field, political women and social activists tried to develop women's diplomacy at international meetings. Important joint declarations were endorsed at these pioneering conferences, which helped to prepare the ground for future international peace agreements. The outbreak of the El-Aqsa Intifada, and the disillusionment with the Oslo process, led Israeli women to re-launch their activities in a more radical way, while the peace camp was demobilized. This new shape of activism included a broad spectrum of protest activities, combining the fight against occupation, feminist issues and anti-militarism.*

*The most durable legacy from women's peace activism was the formulation of new political discourses which defined peace in terms of a global concept that clearly links gender oppression and national oppression and creates an alternative discourse strongly opposed to violent and militarist options.*

**- Introduction**

**- Part I - Women for peace (1951-1998)**

**- Part II: The transnational network and the establishment of women's diplomacy**

**- Part III - New women's peace groups, changes in activist strategies and discourse for peace (1998 to present)**

**- Conclusions**

*We should not forget a number of small  
but effective peace organisations which,  
based on their solid moral values,  
provide invaluable services in the fields of documentation,  
medical assistance and contact with people: the women's organisations.  
(Uri Avnery, December 2000).<sup>1</sup>*

## Introduction

Palestinian and Israeli women have worked intermittently since the 1950s and continually since 1987 and the first Intifada towards building a real 'clandestine peace.' Their struggles and contacts have helped to bring reconciliation and develop solidarity between two peoples at war and to maintain a link, albeit a symbolic one, during periods of conflict.<sup>2</sup> Female peace activists have resorted to covert activities to varying degrees in their respective societies. For Palestinian women in the West Bank and Gaza, the struggle for peace was initially undertaken individually, by meeting Israeli women for example, in order to raise awareness of the Palestinian cause<sup>3</sup> and create a political alternative to the conflict. Their commitment to peace and their contact with the Other exposed these women to accusations of normalization, and even collaboration, during the military occupation. For Israeli Palestinian women, contact and dialogue was facilitated not so much as a result of a shared nationality, but rather through shared activist experiences in certain sections of the non-Zionist left and in particular, from the 1970s onwards, in feminist groups. For Israeli women, peace activism took place under radically different conditions from those of Palestinian women: they did not live under occupation but in an independent and democratic state; and they could campaign publicly, sometimes within political parties or as part of a peace movement<sup>4</sup> which, although always a minority, counted quite large bodies of public opinion at different times. However, this rallying together was shattered by the second Intifada. Some Israeli women radicalized their actions at this time, describing their fight as opposition 'to war' rather than as a fight for peace, which they believed had become too hypothetical. This second Intifada 'stunned' the Israeli peace camp, part of which started to argue in favor of a 'divorce' from the Palestinians; despite this, it did not discourage groups of

---

<sup>1</sup> Uri Avnery, "Pourquoi le mouvement pacifiste peine à mobiliser les Israéliens, Proche-Orient, rebâtir la paix" *Manière de voir* n. 54, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Paris, November-December 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Valérie Pouzol, *Clandestines de la paix*, (Paris: Editions Complexe, IHTP-CNRS, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Ralène Rida, *Calcutta, un pays, une prison*, (Paris: Editions Complexe, IHTP-CNRS, 2008).  
<sup>4</sup> Tamar Hermann, *Mon pays, ma prison: une femme de Palestine*, (Paris: éditions du Seuil, 1975).

<sup>5</sup> Tamar Hermann, *The Israeli Peace Movement: A Shattered Dream*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Israeli women, who even radicalized their fight against occupation. Throughout this period of ‘war and peace’, the struggles of both sides retained an asymmetrical character: they took several forms in Israel, but in particular that of protest or even solidarity groups;<sup>5</sup> in Palestine, other than the individual positions taken by certain female politicians,<sup>6</sup> they continued through the work of a single non governmental organization (NGO, the ‘Jerusalem Centre for Women’), which had for a long time supported women’s efforts for peace, under the strict control of the Palestinian Authority.

It is not always easy to reconstruct the history of women’s struggle for peace, since this requires a study of sources that are often widely dispersed between activists’ and private archives, and which must be combined with oral interviews to draw the background to a dispute which is still ongoing. Moreover, women’s peace groups have been, and to a certain extent still are, often transitory, and their composition can change dramatically as a result of events. To a certain extent this last factor gives them their strength, but also makes them transient, hard to identify and difficult to embed in the collective memory. How and in what context did these women from both sides of the Green Line decide to commit themselves to peace and engage in a process of dialogue, meeting and even solidarity? What did these women actually contribute to the long, and at times demoralizing, task of constructing peace? Why did they decide to campaign among women, and did this have an impact on the formulation of peace discourse, on activist identities and their strategies?

### **Part I - Women for peace (1951-1998)**

Post 1948, the few attempts made at reconciliation and dialogue between the Jews and Arabs of British Palestine were still isolated and clandestine, due to the extreme tension between the two communities.<sup>7</sup> The period that followed the creation of the state of Israel and the non-creation of a Palestinian state marked the end of a war in which no peace treaties were signed but only armistices, and in which Palestinian refugees contested the borders that emerged from the war. Any notion of peace and dialogue was thus impossible. Furthermore, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remained in the broader shadow of the Israeli-Arab conflict, which dominated the international and regional scene. The hope for peace or co-existence in the region disappeared among the Israeli political leaders who retreated behind the idea that the survival of the state was not assured, and that the country should mobilize all its strength, and

---

<sup>5</sup> ‘Women in Black’ and ‘Women for Women Political Prisoners’ (WOFPP).

<sup>6</sup> Hanan Ashrawi and Zuhira Kamal are very well-known politicians from the oPt (occupied Palestinian territories).

<sup>7</sup> Mordechai Bar-On, *In Pursuit of Peace: A History of the Israeli Peace Movement*, (Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996).

especially its military forces.<sup>8</sup>

Emerging Israeli and Palestinian nationalism created sizeable ideological barriers that were very difficult to overcome. The majority of attempts at inter-community reconciliation were made in secret, often abroad and in line with an overtly non-Zionist or anti-Zionist political persuasion.<sup>9</sup> It was first of all from inside Israel, in the women's branch of the Israeli Communist Party ('Maki', CP) that in 1951, one thousand Arab and Jewish women joined together around an anti-Zionist ideology and founded 'Tandi' '*Tnu'at Nashim Democratiot*'/'Movement of Democratic Women in Israel'<sup>10</sup>. In the years that followed the creation of the state, the Israeli CP was the most important non-Zionist force. Like the USSR, it did not oppose Israel's right to exist, but questioned the Jewish character of the State. For many years it was the only non-Zionist party in the Knesset, denouncing the treatment of the country's Arab minority. In the women's branch of the CP - which experienced differences of opinion between the Jewish and Arab sections - the latter supported the idea of a bi-national and secular state where Palestinians and Israelis could co-exist.<sup>11</sup> Women activists were quick to debate national questions here as well as issues concerning women and equality, even though debates on this topic were carefully concealed within the CP. 'Tandi' organized periodic demonstrations of solidarity with the Palestinian people; yet it remained very much on the margins of the Israeli public scene. When the Israeli CP split into two factions (Arab and Jewish) in 1965, 'Tandi' remained a bi-national organization, thus providing each side with a platform for exchange and action. Israeli women were also present within the anti-Zionist party 'Matzpen'<sup>12</sup> (the Compass) and in the future parties of the progressive left that were established in the 1970s, such as 'Mapai' (the left wing of the labour movement which favored the creation of a Palestinian State), and also in the 'Moked' party and later 'Sheli'. These last two recognized Zionism as a national liberation movement, but at the same time vigorously defended the Palestinians' right to self-determination; they also called for withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) and for the immediate opening of negotiations with Palestinians including with the PLO. However, although a number of women were clearly involved in most of these political parties, they remained a minority.<sup>13</sup> Although Israeli women showed a certain distrust of political parties, many strongly supported 'Ratz' (Citizens' Rights Movement),

---

<sup>8</sup> On some aspects of militarism during the 1950s in Israel, see the essay by Marcella Simoni in this issue, pp. 73-100.

<sup>9</sup> David Hall-Cathala, *The Peace Movement in Israel*, (Oxford: MacMillan, Saint Anthony's College, 1990).

<sup>10</sup> See [http://www.rosalux.co.il/TANDI\\_eng](http://www.rosalux.co.il/TANDI_eng), accessed 6 June 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Ilan Greilsammer, *Les communistes israéliens*, (Paris: Presses de la fondation nationale des sciences-politiques, 1978). For a discussion of other examples of binationalism see the essays by Giulia Daniele and Marcella Simoni in this issue, pp. 1-21 and pp. 73-100.

<sup>12</sup> See <http://www.matzpen.org>, accessed 6 June 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Gadi Wolfsfeld, *The Politics of Provocation: Participation and Protest in Israel*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997).

founded by Shulamit Aloni and characterized by its strong opposition to the monopoly of religious parties and its marked support for feminism and the rights of Palestinians.

In the 1970s, the actions of Palestinian and Israeli women in favor of dialogue and in support of a negotiated peace settlement were given fresh impetus by two different events: firstly, the national and international affirmation of the feminist movement, and secondly, the emergence of a peace movement in Israel in 1978, to which many Israeli women were committed.

At the beginning of the 1970s, gender equality issues were marginalized in Israel, and the vast majority of Israelis believed that equality had been achieved.<sup>14</sup> However, numerous sensitive issues gradually came to the fore, and the feminist movement reached Israel against the troubled backdrop of the Yom Kippur War. Breaking down the myth of the ‘equality bluff’, feminist figures such as Marcia Freedman,<sup>15</sup> who was later elected to the Knesset (1973-1977), brought to light issues such as domestic violence, the right to abortion and the question of the legal status of women before rabbinical courts, as well as the marginalization of women in the army and the political domain. Information centers and legal councils were established, but the feminist movement was hesitant to become too political and take a position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Among feminists, however, while debating the issue of the oppression of women in their society and thus denouncing the gender roles established by contemporary Zionism, women were individually positioning themselves as committed feminists in solidarity with Palestinian women.<sup>16</sup> In 1977, during the general elections, Marcia Freedman (a past leader of the feminist movement) decided to form a women’s party uniting both Jewish and Arab Israeli women.<sup>17</sup> Although the plan to present a common list of candidates was not successful due to disagreements, it did lead to the creation of a party with an agenda including open support for the right of Palestinians to self-determination and justice. The party denounced the government’s military policy, particularly in relation to budgetary spending, and highlighted the low level of social spending, while at the same time striving to become a bi-national party.

At the beginning of the 1980s, Israeli feminism was institutionalized and focused on Israeli society; however, it provided a breeding ground for future women’s peace groups by beginning to look at links between acts of oppression. For this reason, at the beginning of the decade, Israeli Arab and Jewish women stood side by side in the leading feminist centers, particularly in Haifa.<sup>18</sup> They learned how to debate and then develop their own questions,

---

<sup>14</sup> *Calling the Equality Bluff: Women in Israel*, eds. Barbara Swirski and Marylin Safir, (New York: Pergamon Press, 1991).

<sup>15</sup> Marcia Freedman, *Exile in the Promised Land* (Firebrand: Ithaca Press, 1990).

<sup>16</sup> Pouzol, *Clandestines de la paix*, 98.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 99-100.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Isha l’Isha’ established in 1983, is the oldest grassroots feminist organization in Israel <http://www.isha.org.il/eng/>, accessed 28 June 2013.

thus creating informal areas for exchange and dialogue. While they did not label themselves reconciliation groups, they did contribute to establishing links and greater awareness of the Other and to working together. These groups were subsequently separated along ethnic-national lines at the start of the 1990s, leading to the first Palestinian feminist and *Mizryabi* groups in Israel.<sup>19</sup> In a twist, the future women's peace groups<sup>20</sup> were to provide new recruits to the feminist groups whose numbers had declined slightly at the beginning of the 1990s.

In the faltering history of dialogue and the building of peace between Israeli and Palestinian women, the foundation of the 'Peace Now' movement by a group of reserve army officers in 1978 represents an important event in the history of women's engagement in inter-community dialogue. Following the stalemate in Israeli-Egyptian peace talks, a significant part of Israeli opinion supported the opening of negotiations with Egypt. This group was created at the initiative of 348 reserve officers and soldiers from elite units, ex-servicemen and women of the Yom Kippur War. Its patriotic legitimacy could not be refuted, and the group achieved great success with strong support from the Israeli public.<sup>21</sup> From its foundation, the group excluded women from signing its declaration of intent.<sup>22</sup> Yael Tamir, who would later occupy a string of important positions within the organization, was a member of the protesting officers but was excluded from the group of signatories:

There was a lot of pressure on women as we were not allowed to sign the petition. I did not sign it even though I was an officer and had served two and a half years in the intelligence agency in Sinai. The rule in the group was that women could not sign the letter. They believed that since only men fought, women excluded from combat had no right to sign the letter. In fact, I was the only woman active in the movement at that time. Women were not allowed to represent the movement in public. You could say that at the beginning, Peace Now was a men's movement. It was almost a year before I was officially authorised to speak on behalf of the movement.<sup>23</sup>

Far from being anecdotal, this incident shows a strong trend within the country's peace militancy: men who fought were considered legitimate players in the formulation of political alternatives, and thus good negotiators. As it

---

<sup>19</sup> Pouzol, *Clandestines de la paix*, 100-105.

<sup>20</sup> 'Women in Black' were not labeled feminists but many activists declared that they were feminists after joining in demonstrations.

<sup>21</sup> Bar-On, *In pursuit of Peace*, 93-118. For further analysis on 'Peace Now' see the essay by Jon Simons in this issue, pp. 212-232.

<sup>22</sup> Tzali Reshef, *Peace Now: From the Officer's Letter to Peace Now* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1996), (Hebrew).

<sup>23</sup> Yuli Tamir, ('Shalom Achshav'), interviewed by Danielle Stoper-Perez, May 1990, Personal archives of Danielle-Stoper-Perez.

became more political, 'Peace Now' gradually escaped from the exclusive control of the reserve officers and became a place for activists; however, women continued to find it difficult to establish themselves as leaders within the movement. This struggle to have their voices heard, and more particularly to assume leadership positions, can be seen clearly in accounts by women who were active in groups belonging to the Israeli left, and in the various mixed protest groups who opposed the war at different times. In 1982 during the Lebanon War, one such group, originally called 'Mothers against War', was quickly renamed 'Parents against War',<sup>24</sup> following pressure from men who wanted to join the movement and assume joint responsibilities. There was considerable tension between men and women in the first Israeli groups fighting against the military-only options. Women exercised authority and made the decisions, yet found it difficult to have their leadership recognised. Yvonne Deutsch, a peace activist, recounts her experience within the mixed group 'Shana 21' (The Twenty-First Year), a left-wing anti-occupation group:

One of the surprising things in the mixed left-wing groups is that women did most of the work. The men talked and the women acted. This leads to a sort of dichotomy. A good example is the city of tents, the demonstration organised in the Negev against the Ansar III prison camp to protest against the conditions of detention. This idea was launched by Year 21. The women organised everything. But when the time came, only the men were allowed to speak.<sup>25</sup>

This tension, which is not unique to peace groups in Israel, helps to explain why, at the time of the first Intifada, many women decided to campaign by themselves in single-sex environments.<sup>26</sup> On the eve of the first Intifada, it was primarily Israeli women who, as members of radical left-wing parties or mixed peace groups, began to find their voices. In 1982, during operation Peace for Galilee, and following a series of dramatic events,<sup>27</sup> women gradually began to show their opposition to what they saw as a 'war of choice' (*milbemet brirah*);<sup>28</sup> in which they did not feel the country was forced to take part to defend itself. Israeli Palestinian women were either absent from these protest groups, or a minority; nevertheless, they campaigned in Israeli women's or feminist groups where they learned to engage in joint campaigns. In December 1987, the violence of the Israeli repression in the Palestinian territories propelled women's groups opposed to the military occupation onto

---

<sup>24</sup> Nurith Gillath, "Women against War: Parents Against Silence," in *Calling the Equality Bluff*, eds. Barbara Swirski and Marylin Safir: 142-146.

<sup>25</sup> Yvonne Deutsch ('Women in Black'), interview by Danielle Storper-Perez and Maxine Kaufman Nunn, 1993, Personal archives of Danielle-Stoper-Perez.

<sup>26</sup> Olivier Filieule and Patricia Roux, *Le sexe du militantisme*, (Paris: Presses de la fondation nationale des sciences-politiques, 2009).

<sup>27</sup> In 1975, the mother of a soldier killed in combat created 'Gesher' (Bridge) whose objective was to bring together Jewish and Arab women to establish regional peace.

<sup>28</sup> Literally: war of choice or 'unjust war'.

the public stage.<sup>29</sup> It was at this time that a real women's peace movement emerged, bringing together a protest movement comprising a myriad of broadly transient small groups,<sup>30</sup> and, a few years later, an institutionalized movement with international support and funding ('Jerusalem Link').<sup>31</sup>

These women's groups were similar in that they had no hierarchical organization or spokesperson, and the majority of them brought together Israeli Jewish women, although some Israeli Palestinians had also been present in their ranks since the beginning of the uprising.<sup>32</sup> With the exception of the most institutionalized group ('Bat Shalom'/ 'Daughters of Peace'), an Israeli satellite of 'Jerusalem Link', all operated collectively with decisions being taken together following discussion groups. The overwhelming majority had very few financial resources (private funding) and had no headquarters or offices; meetings were held in activists' homes or in public places (municipal rooms, synagogues). They relied on the energy of the women, some of whom had never been involved in politics before; they produced newsletters, circulated petitions and called for collective mobilization. These groups took different forms: protest groups that made the Israeli people more aware and questioned the acts of politicians, groups promoting solidarity with Palestinians, and dialogue groups. Some - such as 'Shani' ('Israeli Women against the Occupation') - were highly politicized. Based in Jerusalem, this small organization was made up of women from the feminist movement, and in particular from the radical left, who wanted to inform and, more specifically, to open up a debate, by organizing discussions with female Palestinian political representatives. This group of seasoned political activists clearly denounced the consequences of the Israeli occupation on Palestinian civilians and did not hesitate to challenge Israeli feminism when it ignored the issue of the occupation.

Other groups tried to work in a more symbolic way, hoping to mobilize Jewish and Arab women in Israel and Palestinian women in the oPt. As part of this, in 1988, more than five thousand women embroidered pieces of fabric to form a huge Peace Quilt. This was rolled out by some of them in front of the Knesset on 6 June 1988, the twenty-first anniversary of the Six Day War, as a collective

---

<sup>29</sup> It is to be noted that a number of women continued to campaign in certain mixed groups while at the same time being active in women's groups.

<sup>30</sup> The main groups are: 'Women in Black', the 'Peace Quilt' (Mapat ha-Shalom), 'Shani', 'Gesher', 'Tandi', 'Women for Women Political Prisoners' (WOFPP) as well as the 'Israeli Women's Peace Net' ('Reshet') which would become 'Jerusalem Link' and its two satellite groups: 'Bat Shalom' (Israel) and the 'Jerusalem Center for Women' (JCW, West Bank - Palestine). Taking into account the different local satellites of certain groups, it is estimated that around 20 organizations were active at the start of the first Intifada. See <http://www.womeninblack.org/es/history>, <http://www.wofpp.org/english/home.html>, <http://www.j-c-w.org>, all accessed 6 June 2013.

<sup>31</sup> Simona Sharoni, *Gender and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: the Politics of Women's Resistance*, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1995).

<sup>32</sup> Palestinian Israeli citizens were involved in the first 'Women in Black' vigils, but also in older groups such as 'Tandi', 'Neled' and 'Gesher.' They would later also form part of the 'Peace Quilt.'

protest against the occupation. The women of the Peace Quilt sent out a very strong, anti-war political message, supporting reconciliation of the two peoples; the quilt was designed for use as a tablecloth, to cover the future negotiating table.

One particularly representative protest group<sup>33</sup> was ‘Women in Black’ (*Nashim be-Shabor*), established in 1987 out of the desire of certain Israeli women, and later of some Israeli Palestinian women, to use the streets and public places to declare their opposition to the violence of the occupation and the repression of the Palestinian uprising. In addition to its particular dynamism and longevity, this group was unusual in offering women a minimalist slogan that could bring together a broad spectrum of female activists. Since its foundation, it united women from very different backgrounds and ages (Zionist, non-Zionist, religious, secular, Jews and Palestinian Arabs from Israel). Inspired by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, these women, who were often new to collective action, adopted and adapted the Argentinian mothers’ weekly ritual of marching around the Plaza Constitución in Buenos Aires. In contrast to the Argentinians, who tied nappies representing children who had disappeared around their faces, the ‘Women in Black’ decided to protest in silence, wearing mourning clothes instead of symbols of motherhood. This was the only requirement for taking part in the vigil. They opted for dramatic action to increase awareness among the Israeli people, marching holding placards bearing the words ‘Stop the occupation’ in several languages.<sup>34</sup> The circular and silent procession was a performance, an activist happening which was repeated every week; it evoked the display of death, the invasion of phantoms into everyday urban life,<sup>35</sup> and of female prophets embodying a subversive mourning: that of two nations, Israel and Palestine.<sup>36</sup> The subversion was (and still is) heightened by the unusual and disturbing image of women who, far from portraying a reassuring image (the loving wife or mother of a soldier), have hijacked collective mourning which had previously been carefully orchestrated and guided by the state<sup>37</sup>.

Since the first Intifada in June 1988, another group, the ‘Women for Women Political Prisoners’ (WOFPP) chose a different form of action to show direct solidarity with Palestinian women, carrying out important solidarity work with women prisoners. This group was founded in part by lawyers and teachers, with its headquarters in an office in one of the activists’ apartments. It worked to denounce the sexist nature of the Israeli occupation and the particular

---

<sup>33</sup> Wolfsfeld, *The Politics of Provocation*.

<sup>34</sup> Danielle Storper-Perez and Maxime Kaufmann-Nunn, *Israéliens et Palestiniens: les mille et une voix de la paix* (Paris: éditions du Cerf, 1993).

<sup>35</sup> Gila Svirsky, “Women in Black,” in *Jewish Women’s Call for Peace*, eds. R. Falbel, I. Klepfisz and D. Novel (Ithaca, N.Y.: Firebrand Books, 1990).

<sup>36</sup> Sara Helman and Tamar Rapoport, “Women in Black: Challenging Israel’s Gender and Socio-Political Order” *British Journal Of Sociology* 48 (1997): 681-700.

<sup>37</sup> Valérie Pouzol, “L’engagement de l’ombre: homosexualité et militantisme pour la paix dans le mouvement des femmes en noir (Israël 1988-2004),” in *Le choix de l’homosexualité*, ed. Bruno Perrau (Paris, Epel, 2006), 75-87.

violence towards the numerous female political prisoners in the country's prisons. By investigating the mistreatment they have been subjected to in prisons, the WOFPP ensures that these women can have quick access to lawyers who can take on their cases. The WOFPP also visits prisoners who are often separated from their families and facilitates visits from their families by helping them fill out the necessary forms. It supports prisoners both materially and morally by providing them with items often lacking in prisons (linen, clean clothing) and regularly denounces in newsletters their poor diet, lack of hygiene and the conditions in which they are detained.<sup>38</sup> Where possible, they also attend prisoner hearings to check that legal procedures are being respected. The WOFPP makes information a priority and denounces the sexual abuse to which some women have been subjected in prison. During the first Intifada, it also published several newsletters in which it described the mistreatment of women.<sup>39</sup>

Alongside these protest and solidarity groups, several important meetings were organized at the end of 1990 between Israeli women, Palestinian Arab women from Israel and Palestinian women from the oPt. In the Arab village of Kfar Yassif and later in the town of Haifa in northern Israel, the 'Coalition of Women for Peace,' an umbrella organization that united the majority of active groups during the first Intifada, organized two important conferences, bringing together up to four hundred activists for the first time.<sup>40</sup> These meetings, during which the women alternated moments of relaxation and intense political debate, not only tackled the issues of the Israeli occupation, the division of land and the need for two states, but also highlighted the difficulties in Israeli-Palestinian dialogue and the question of asymmetrical relations. The conference at Kfar Yassif positioned the Israeli Jewish women as guests of their Palestinian counterparts, who were able to tackle the question of the oppression suffered by Israeli Palestinian women since 1948.<sup>41</sup> In discussions that were at times rather tense, the women broached issues such as the relationship between occupiers and occupied, issues of racism and discrimination against Israeli Palestinian women, and the difficulty of building trust prior to dialogue.<sup>42</sup> During these debates, the women of 'Shani' argued strongly in favor of entering negotiations with the PLO early, rather than waiting for total trust to be established. The women, most of whom felt marginalized in the field of political negotiation, declared above all that they should be present during negotiations and that they should play an active role

---

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.wofpp.org/english/newsletters.html>, accessed 6 June 2013.

<sup>39</sup> WOFPP Newsletters, June 1988, March 1989, personal archives of Danielle Storper-Perez.

<sup>40</sup> Ayala Emmet, *Our Sister's Promised Land. Women Politics and Israeli-Palestinian Experience*, (Ann Arbor: The University Of Michigan Press, 1996). See <http://www.coalitionofwomen.org>, accessed 6 June 2013.

<sup>41</sup> The latter clearly stated that in the event of the creation of a Palestinian state, they would continue to live in Israel with the hope of obtaining full equality in terms of civil and political rights.

<sup>42</sup> The question of trust was even more difficult in the wake of the First Gulf War in which Palestinians declared their support for Saddam Hussein.

in the division of the territory and the drawing up of future borders.<sup>43</sup>

The first Intifada can therefore be considered a particularly dynamic period in women's peace activism. The Israeli Jewish activists, the majority of whom were Ashkenazi from the middle educated classes, were less politically motivated than their Palestinian partners. For the latter, (the overwhelming majority of whom had a political and feminist past), far from an affirmation of sisterhood, meeting the Other was a pragmatic act to show the oppression suffered by Palestinians both in Israel and the oPt. For Israeli Palestinian women, peace activism was an opportunity to have their voices heard. Until this point, these had been absent from an Israeli peace camp which only saw the conflict from an inter-state perspective rather than an inter-community one. *Mizrahi* women experienced similar ostracism, never being allowed to accede to collective responsibilities in the women's peace movement; these women therefore decided to no longer participate in these organizations.<sup>44</sup>

For Israeli women, peace activism, particularly when it is the first demonstration of a public commitment, is a multifaceted act: sometimes pragmatic in its desire to spare the life of Israeli children sent to the army, but also moral and cathartic, or feminist, this act is always complex.<sup>45</sup> These meetings and dialogue were particularly important for the Israeli participants as they discovered the power of Palestinian women from the territories and, in particular, their feminist convictions. For both sides, these groups represented places where they learnt about activism, places where public opinion was confronted, sometimes violently. Above all, they represented places for empowerment, where some developed a feminist conscience. The national protest groups and ongoing activist activity were not the only forms of peace activism during the first Intifada. These groups were also supported internationally by meetings of women who ratified important documents in the history of Israeli-Palestinian dialogue.

## **Part II: The transnational network and the establishment of women's diplomacy**

Although it is sometimes difficult to measure the impact that these women's actions had in the long and at times demoralizing task of building peace, many of them were particularly active behind the scenes of the peace talks during the 1990s. Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel, and Palestinians from the oPt, as well as from the Diaspora, were pioneers in establishing contacts and opening informal negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian women in the years that preceded the Oslo Accords. In parallel to the creation of protest and solidarity

---

<sup>43</sup> Emmet, *Our Sister's Promised Land*, 91.

<sup>44</sup> Henriette Dahan-Kelev, "The Oppression of Women by Other Women: Relations and Struggle between Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Women in Israel" *Israel Social Science Research* 12 (1997): 31-44.

<sup>45</sup> Pouzol, *Clandestines de la paix*, 195-204.

groups during the first Intifada, the resolute action of the internationally supported female Israeli and Palestinian political activists not only showed that meetings were possible, but that they could accompany the signing of important bilateral texts. In the history of the lengthy construction of Israeli-Palestinian dialogue, meetings abroad played an important role: they offered Israeli women a means of circumventing the restriction on meeting members of the PLO and allowed both parties to talk more freely on neutral ground.<sup>46</sup>

The meetings between Israeli and Palestinian women were organized in the Diaspora, within the liberal Jewish community of Brussels, at the 'Secular Jewish Community Centre' (CCLJ) led by David Susskind since 1959, who strongly supported and promoted tolerance, dialogue and openness.<sup>47</sup> David and Simone Susskind had been inviting Israeli and Palestinian women to their home since 1978 and had built up contacts with women in the region to facilitate meetings. In May 1989, sixty Israeli and Palestinian women met in Brussels for a conference entitled *Give Peace a Chance: Women Speak Out*. Belgium was itself a country that had experienced inter-community tensions, and it was here that the Susskinds created the setting for this meeting. For Simone Susskind, women had an important role to play in constructing peace. This conference was considered a first in the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, since female leaders of the oPt were to meet leading female Israeli representatives, members of the liberal, labor establishment. The two groups selected their delegations themselves, a difficult enough task given the diversity of their respective communities. The Palestinian delegation included women 'on the inside', who were living and bearing political and social responsibilities in the West Bank and Gaza, as well as leaders of the PLO exiled in Tunisia, and women from the Palestinian Diaspora. The Israeli delegation had to include women with political responsibilities and women who were peace activists,<sup>48</sup> as well as considering the ethnic diversity of Israeli society. The PLO was not officially represented as an institutional partner (even though several women were members). Despite numerous difficulties and last minute wavering, the women succeeded in drafting,<sup>49</sup> and subsequently signing, a declaration in which the participants jointly recognized the need for two states to co-exist. The Brussels declaration acknowledged the right to existence of a Palestinian State. But above all, it created a precedent in calling for negotiations with the PLO. This first meeting also resulted in the establishment of a

---

<sup>46</sup> Regarding the issue of a place for activism, see Michel Warshawski, *Sur la frontière*, (Paris: Editions Stock, 2002).

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.cclj.be>, accessed 6 June 2013.

<sup>48</sup> Among them: Shulamit Aloni, Nava Arad, Yael Dayan, Hanna Meron, Naomi Chazan, Hanan Ashrawi, Suad Amiri, Zuhira Kamal, Leila Shahid, Rana Nashashibi.

<sup>49</sup> Hanan Ashrawi and Naomi Chazan were responsible for drafting the final political declaration. Naomi Chazan, professor of political science, is an Israeli politician very much involved in defending women's rights and in constructing peace. She was elected to the Knesset (MK) for the first time in 1992 with 'Meretz' and was re-elected to office three times up to 2003. She has been very involved in different women's peace groups including 'Jerusalem Link'.

‘Network of Israeli and Palestinian Women for Peace,’ to promote the action of women for peace.

In Israel and Palestine, as elsewhere, in Cyprus<sup>50</sup> and in Ireland<sup>51</sup>, women who had played a pioneering role in working towards reconciliation were not invited to take part in the diplomatic delegations charged with negotiating peace. During the Madrid conference in November 1991, the intense media coverage given to Hanan Ashrawi as spokesperson of the Palestinian-Jordanian delegation was unable to conceal the absence of women from the delegation. The spokeswoman experienced some difficulty in gaining acceptance of her isolated position and in the end did not attend the final negotiating table. This lack of representation of women was even more surprising since the women’s movement had just completed an intense period of mobilization in the oPt. In the Israeli camp, a single woman, Sarah Doron,<sup>52</sup> Likud MK, was summoned urgently in response to the media presence of Hanan Ashrawi.

The second peace conference was again held under the auspices of the CCLJ in Brussels, in September 1992, amidst a favorable climate following the Madrid conference and the re-election of the labor government in Israel. Here the women reaffirmed their desire to promote a fairer peace for the region, using their experience in cooperation, and established this principle as the foundation of their joint declarations. Both Palestinian and Israeli women were aware of the exclusion of women activists from the decision-making process. On this occasion they clearly reaffirmed their intent to participate in the international peace process and restated their desire to make a decisive contribution to the construction of peace in the region. Tamar Gujanski, at that time an MK for the ‘Hadash’ party (the revamped Israeli CP),<sup>53</sup> expressed the greatest concerns for a peace brokered by those in power, highlighting the absolute necessity for women from both camps to make their voices heard.

However, on this point their voices fell on deaf ears. The negotiation process which began in September 1993 with the signature of the declaration of principles (DoP) did nothing to change the situation that had prevailed in Madrid from the point of view of the presence of women. Once again, the Palestinian delegation comprised very few women. On the Israeli side, secret negotiations were conducted by military strategists and lawyers who turned the challenge of peace into a set of territorial and security stakes. In this respect, the Israelis remained faithful to a concept that peace should be negotiated by defense and military specialists. The speech delivered by Yitzhak Rabin in 1993

---

<sup>50</sup> Podromos Podromou, “Elles marchent contre le mur de la honte” *Confluences Méditerranée*, 17 (1996): 165-169.

<sup>51</sup> Ronit Lentin, “Women, War and Peace in a Culture of Violence: The Middle East and Northern Ireland,” in *Women and The Politics of Peace, Contributions to a Culture of Women’s Resistance*, ed. Biljana Kasic (Zagreb: Centre for Women’s Studies, 1997): 64-74.

<sup>52</sup> Sarah Doron was a Likud Member of Knesset (1977-1992). In 1991 she was Coalition Chairwoman and member of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee.

<sup>53</sup> <http://hadash.org.il/english/>, accessed 6 June 2013.

during the signature of the DoP is enlightening in this respect. He gave precedence to a vision of peace negotiated by a military strategist who had for a long time assured the defense and security of the state of Israel. The message of women's peace groups and their tendency to deviate from nationalist loyalties can to a large extent explain their marginalization from the final rounds of peace agreements.

Nevertheless, as a result of their political positions, their convictions and courage, female politicians from both sides of the Green Line paved the way for official negotiations. Hanan Ashrawi recalls in her memoirs how, for her, the signing of the peace agreements was merely 'a play repeated for the umpteenth time, in slow motion and more extravagantly, so great was the number of rehearsals.'<sup>54</sup> She stresses the pioneering role of these meetings of women who, although not well known, helped disentangle the Gordian knot of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The women explored sensitive issues, essential questions and proposed monitoring mechanisms. She states that taboos were shattered, such as the prohibition on meetings with members of the PLO and the question of Jerusalem.

It was against a politically favorable backdrop<sup>55</sup> that the 'Jerusalem Link' was officially inaugurated in 1994, with the objective of maintaining dialogue between women from the two communities by developing joint activities thanks to the logistical support of two centers, 'Bat Shalom' (Women for Peace) on the Israeli side and the 'Jerusalem Centre for Women' on the Palestinian side. These two centers worked to raise awareness of the peace building process among women, but also to increase awareness of the role that they could play in consolidating peace within their respective societies. Since this period had aroused many hopes, protest activism fell. 'Women in Black' stopped their protest vigils on 20 October 1993 hoping, for a short time, that they would no longer be necessary. From this date, the two centers - placed under the patronage of female politicians<sup>56</sup> who had by now taken on governmental responsibilities - controlled the majority of women's peace actions. As a result, they were criticized by activists in the field who considered this new form of activism to have become too institutional, not sufficiently anti-establishment and too dominated by Ashkenazi women from the privileged classes. Despite some opposition, the 'Jerusalem Link' adopted several joint declarations covering important points (the two-state solution, Jerusalem as a joint capital, application of the Oslo Accords with recognition of resolutions nos. 242 and 338, denunciation of colonization, rejection of violence and the participation of women in constructing peace).<sup>57</sup>

The two centers had several particularly audacious joint operations to their credit: in the summer of 1997, during a period of heightened tension and while the Israeli policy of colonization continued, they launched a program of joint

---

<sup>54</sup> Hanan Ashrawi, *This side of Peace: a Personal Account*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995).

<sup>55</sup> In 1992 a new Labour-'Meretz' coalition came to power.

<sup>56</sup> Naomi Chazan, Yael Dayan, Hanan Ashrawi, Zuhira Kamal, Leila Shahid, Suad Amriri.

<sup>57</sup> For the 1999 Jerusalem Link Declaration, [www.miftah.org/english/](http://www.miftah.org/english/), accessed 9 June 2013.

discussions on the topic of ‘Jerusalem: two capitals for two States.’ Once again, the meetings and dialogue on this highly sensitive question were facilitated by previously established contacts between activists who already knew each other. In 1997, the Palestinian Authority quickly approved the ‘Jerusalem Centre for Women’ (JCW), hoping that bilateral meetings of women would enable it to circumvent the ban on raising the question of Jerusalem at international peace negotiations. During negotiations between the PLO and the Israeli delegation, the question of the status of Jerusalem was deemed to be so sensitive by the Israelis that it was agreed to postpone discussion of it until after trust between the partners had been re-established. Throughout the run-up to this event, the Palestinian women were given political protection, which was essential in their society since, in times of crisis, contact with the Other could lead to women being accused of normalization or collaboration. For their own protection, they assembled a political committee of about thirty people in charge of providing moral support and approving each of their political platforms and decisions.<sup>58</sup> Throughout this joint work, it was clear that the Palestinian women officially engaged in the center were highly educated women with undisputed national standing in their society. The Palestinian JCW did not focus on Israeli-Palestinian dialogue, but rather on internal work within Palestinian society, promoting the participation of women in public life and the construction of democracy.<sup>59</sup>

However, work within the women’s network was not immune to the increasing tensions mounting towards the end of the 1990s. The Palestinian members of the JCW demanded that the executive committee of ‘Bat Shalom’ should clearly state its position in reference to the new principles of a joint declaration adopted in August 1999. This alluded, among other things, to the defense of the Palestinian refugees’ right of return, in accordance with UN resolution no. 194.<sup>60</sup> With the advent of the second Intifada in November 2000, the decision was taken to discontinue all joint programs of the two centers. As the director of the JCW explained:

We had no choice but to discontinue the work in progress. The political climate paralysed even the idea of collaboration. Our despair and feeling of helplessness increased every day. The work for peace was increasingly questioned and we were openly requested to stop this work. The majority of women publicly distanced themselves from the Centre to save their reputations.<sup>61</sup>

From this date onwards, women from both sides of the Green Line continued their contact, but often met abroad. The international scene, and *a fortiori* the

---

<sup>58</sup> Soumeya Farhat-Nasser, *Le cri des oliviers, une palestinienne en lutte pour la paix*, (Geneva: éditions Labor and Fides, 2004).

<sup>59</sup> Since 1996 the JCW therefore supported the constitution of a parallel women’s parliament.

<sup>60</sup> Farhat-Nasser, *Le cri des oliviers*, 219

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

UN, offered activists from both sides the immunity and protection that they had found increasingly difficult to achieve at home. In 2003, the two groups of the 'Jerusalem Link' joined the 'International Women's Peace Activist Network'<sup>62</sup>, which aimed to forge links and exchange experiences with women from other areas of conflict. By establishing contact between different international partners, this network hoped to promote the defense of civil rights and form pressure groups that would then be able to influence international decision-makers to listen to women's voices.

At the same time, Israeli and Palestinian women demanded before the United Nations and European Union that an 'International Women Commission' (IWC) composed of Israeli and Palestinian women and women from the international community, pressure for more women to be included in peace negotiations and thus make a decisive contribution to the resolution of the region's conflict. This commission would ensure that the specific needs of women affected by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were listened to, as suggested by resolution no. 1325 of the UN Security Council.<sup>63</sup>

### **Part III - New women's peace groups, changes in activist strategies and discourse for peace (1998 to present)**

In addition to protests and solidarity, and their ability to organize and establish a parallel feminist diplomacy, women fighting for peace shaped activist identities, strategies and discourses within their different women's organizations. They were able to shake up the ideas of gender roles constructed by their respective nationalisms, thus radicalizing peace discourse. The non-application of the Oslo Accords and, in particular, the advent of the second Intifada in 2000 changed the playing field, as it prevented Palestinian women in the oPt from participating in joint peace actions without risking their lives. From this date onwards, most women's actions against the war were conducted by Israeli women who intensified their actions against the occupation.

Certain Israeli women activists chose to move away from the national mainstream way of thinking and from its security arguments, in favor of the concept of an all-embracing peace, thus making the issue of oppression central. As they saw things, the national oppression of Palestinians was in part linked to the oppression of women.<sup>64</sup> Thus, certain women activists found it difficult

---

<sup>62</sup> [www.cfd-ch.org/pdf/publikationen/focus\\_fr/newsletter1\\_03\\_frz.pdf](http://www.cfd-ch.org/pdf/publikationen/focus_fr/newsletter1_03_frz.pdf), accessed 13 June 2013.

<sup>63</sup> The UN Security Council resolution no. 1325, adopted unanimously on 31 October 2000, is a legal and formal document that required parties in conflict to pay attention to women's rights and to support their participation in peace negotiations and post-conflict resolution. See [http://www.un.org/events/res\\_1325e.pdf](http://www.un.org/events/res_1325e.pdf), accessed 13 June 2013.

<sup>64</sup> This global approach is based on the feminist theory of intersectionality. Intersectionality (or intersectionalism) is the study of the interaction of multiple systems of oppression or discrimination. This feminist sociological theory was first highlighted by Kimberlé Crenshaw in

to identify with groups who defined peace from a security standpoint<sup>65</sup> (e.g. 'Peace Now') or from a highly politicized point of view (various anti-occupation organizations).<sup>66</sup>

In this respect, the mobilization of activist identities offers a wealth of information: the range of identities varied from one which positioned activists within a legitimate national identity (the mother of a soldier) to one which placed them outside such identity (the woman in black mourning two nations). While some displayed essentialist qualities valuing the central role of the soldier's mother, others supported a more subversive identity, which obscured the nationalist message. This recourse to changing identities, which at times integrate, deconstruct or subvert national identities, allowed women to explore a larger political repertoire, and thus reach Israeli citizens as women rather than national icons.<sup>67</sup> Using a similar approach, at the time of the second Intifada, Palestinian feminists in the West Bank and Gaza denounced the rise of domestic violence against women in their own society and strongly opposed the national roles assigned to them, which identified them primarily as mothers of soldiers and then mothers of martyrs.

Confronted with the deterioration of the political situation both locally (the continued occupation) and regionally (the Israeli army stationed in South Lebanon), Israeli women created new groups and NGOs, juxtaposing their struggles with the older organizations of the first Intifada. During this tense period, 'Mothers Against the War' once again mobilized in Israel against the military presence in South Lebanon and in the oPt.<sup>68</sup>

Another organization, 'Four Mothers'<sup>69</sup> provides a good example of such mobilization. Created in 1998 by the mother of a soldier killed in Lebanon, this group brought together women from different locations in the country who, dressed in white and holding plastic baby dolls, demanded the withdrawal of the army from Lebanon. This group, which did not act under a feminist label or any specific political reference, was very effective in its public protests and its popularity was helped by its use of an identity considered legitimate and having broad consensus inside the country (the mother of a soldier). Meeting

---

1988. See Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color" *Stanford Law Review* (1991): 1241–1299.

<sup>65</sup> Hannah Safran, "From Denial to Equal Representation. Women's Peace Groups and the Creation of New Feminist Activism" *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture* 2/2 (1985): 22-25.

<sup>66</sup> For instance in 'Dai le Kibush' (End the Occupation) or in 'The-Twenty-First Year' anti-occupation organisations during the first Intifada. For details see [www.Israeli-left-archive.org](http://www.Israeli-left-archive.org), accessed 13 June 2013.

<sup>67</sup> Sarah Helman, "From soldiering and motherhood to citizenship: A study of four Israeli Peace Protest Movements" *Social Politics* 6/3 (1999): 292-313.

<sup>68</sup> Several groups of mothers appeared from 1997: the 'Four Mothers,' 'Mothers Against the War,' 'Women for the sanctity of life' (group of Orthodox mothers). A group called 'Mothers against Silence' had already been established in 1982 during the Lebanon War, as mentioned above.

<sup>69</sup> The 'Four Mothers' makes reference to the four matriarchs in the Bible Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel. See <http://capital2.capital.edu/faculty/rbendor/>, accessed 13 June 2013.

with the Israeli people, they were able to have numerous petitions signed. By influencing public opinion in this way, the 'Four Mothers' helped achieve the withdrawal of the Israeli army from South Lebanon in 1999. However, the part they played in this was not acknowledged, as a cultural shift occurred which placed the spotlight on action at a political level. MK Yossi Beilin, a member of the Labour party was officially credited with advocating the unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon between 1998 and 1999. These groups openly chose to position themselves within the national consensus in order to rally Israeli opinion to their cause and thus influence government policy.

These women's groups offered their activists a secure place for their activities, allowing, in some cases, the liberation of voices that until then had never dared to be expressed. Peace was therefore defined as a global characteristic, which not only ensures the security of states but also contributes to an internal calm within both society and families. In constructing their activist identity and in their work on awareness, 'Women in Black', like the WOFPP, made it clear that they see a strong connection between a militarized society and violence against women. They believed that the violence of the combatant is not always directed at the enemy, and that once arms are put down, this violence can be redirected towards the family.<sup>70</sup> They chose to highlight the existence of a war within a war, linking the militarization of society and its consequences in terms of symbolic and real violence against individuals. From 1998, during their silent marches on Fridays, 'Women in Black' used slogans against the occupation together with photographs of female victims of domestic violence in Israel. The WOFPP radicalized their position by revealing in their newsletters the existence of sexually-based repressive practices in the Israeli army.<sup>71</sup>

In their desire to highlight the 'war within the war,' fought against the background of militarization of Israeli society, Orthodox religious women also denounced the excessive sacralization of land at the expense of the sanctity of human life. In their discourse and acts, they formulated a new definition of peace more concerned with preserving life than with conquering territories and protecting monuments associated with Jewish history. In 1997, the 'Women for the Sanctity of Life' violently opposed the rhetoric of religious Zionism which made land and holy Jewish sites central elements of the connection to Judaism. One of the religious women, S., declared:

As a religious woman, the country is important to me and tombs also have meaning for me, but what is more important to me is the life of others. I prefer to cry from a distance on the tombs of my ancestors

---

<sup>70</sup> Simona Sharoni, "Homefront as battlefield. Gender, military occupation and violence against women," in *Women and the Israeli Occupation: The Politics of Changes*, ed. Tamar Mayer, (New York: Routledge, 1994)121-137. For an analysis of workshops and programs that educate against domestic violence in certain sectors of Palestinian society, see the essay by Erin Dyer in this issue, pp.162-184.

<sup>71</sup> Stéphanie Latte Abdallah, "Incarcération des femmes palestiniennes et engagement (1967-2009)" *Le Mouvement social* 2/4 (2010): 9-28.

than to cry on the tombs of my children. This is what I wrote in a letter published in the Israeli newspapers. From now on, we are saying that our lives and those of the Palestinians are more important. Peace is a central value of Judaism. We sent letters to Rabbis stating that we should preserve the lives of Jews and non-Jews, that the sanctity of life is greater than that of the land.<sup>72</sup>

When the second Intifada broke out in 2000, the level of violence and the return of Palestinian terrorist attacks in Israel radicalized a public opinion that was already delicate; as a result, traditional defenders of peace repositioned themselves within the national consensus of security. At that time, many people supported the construction of a security barrier and the principle of *hafradah* (separation) Thus 'Peace Now', which was opposed to the occupation of Palestinian territories, gradually positioned itself to support the construction of the so-called security barrier in 2002. It was in reaction to this crisis that, in November 2000, a 'Coalition of Women for a Just Peace' was established.<sup>73</sup> This organization grouped together nine women's groups and NGOs, including the historical 'Women in Black' and WOFPP.<sup>74</sup> The latter once again called for an immediate end to the occupation, the full involvement of women in peace talks, reduced militarization of Israeli society and social and political justice for Israeli Palestinians. The majority of women involved were linked to the Israeli radical left and campaigned in a network with European and American feminists who provided financial aid and supported their actions by publicizing them abroad. Thus, from this moment, the 'Coalition of Women for Peace' increased their public presence during military confrontations. In July 2006, the 'Coalition' launched a campaign *Women against the War*, and were thus among the first organizations to demonstrate against the war in Lebanon, in particular in Haifa where clashes with counter demonstrators were particularly violent. In November 2006, the 'Coalition' re-launched a communication campaign and sent a petition to the government demanding an immediate end to the siege of Gaza and opposing military intervention between December 2008 and January 2009.<sup>75</sup> In general, the anti-war campaigns had become more radical and, from November 2009, in a decision

---

<sup>72</sup> Interview of the A. with Ayala, 'Women for the Sanctity of Life', Jerusalem, 28 May 1997. For another view on peace oriented movements of Orthodox Jews see the essay by Cristiana Calabrese in this issue, pp. 101-123.

<sup>73</sup> <http://www.coalitionofwomen.org/?lang=en>, the name would later change to 'Coalition of Women for Peace', accessed 14 June 2013.

<sup>74</sup> The 'Coalition of Women for Just Peace' groups together 'Bat Shalom,' 'Women in Black,' 'New Profile,' 'The Fifth Mother,' the Israeli section of the WILPF ('Women's International League for Peace and Freedom'), the 'Democratic Women's Movement' comprised of Jewish and Arab women ('Tandi'), the feminist magazine *Noga*, 'Women for Israeli-Arab co-existence' ('Neled'), 'Machsom Watch.' See <http://www.newprofile.org/english/>, <http://it.wiser.org/group/thefifthmother> , <http://www.wilpfinternational.org/palestine/>, <http://www.machsomwatch.org/en>, all accessed 15 June 2013.

<sup>75</sup> [http://www.coalitionofwomen.org/?page\\_id=176&lang=en](http://www.coalitionofwomen.org/?page_id=176&lang=en), accessed 14 June 2013.

approved by its general assembly, the 'Coalition of Women for Peace' called for support of the 'Palestinian Boycott Divestment and Sanction' (BDS)<sup>76</sup> appeal, thus joining the international resistance movement charged with exerting international pressure on Israel.<sup>77</sup> Since 2007 the 'Coalition' has been working on an investigation entitled *Who profits from the occupation?*, gathering data and then denouncing the profits made by Israeli companies from the occupation of Palestinian territories.<sup>78</sup>

In the majority of groups that are part of the 'Coalition', the label 'peace feminist' is commonly used, and a radical discourse is adopted denouncing oppression in all its forms, whether on a national basis (that of Palestinians), ethnic grounds (Ashkenazi vs. Mizrahi), sexual difference (men vs. women) or on the basis of sexual orientation (heterosexuals vs. homosexuals). It was therefore within groups such as 'Women in Black' that lesbians gradually found their voice to speak out against the violence they had experienced in an Israeli society that, at times of war, tends to reassert a heterosexual norm, with the family at the center of the security system.<sup>79</sup> With the growth of women's peace groups, and the inclusion of a gender dimension in peace activism, groups of Lesbians, Gays, Bi-Sexuals, Transgenders and Queers (LGBTQ) who were pro-peace and against the Israeli occupation appeared on the public scene both in Israel and, more recently, in Palestine.<sup>80</sup> The birth of the group 'Kvisah Schorah' ('Black Laundry' but also Black/Lost Sheep) can be dated to 2001, at the time of the second Intifada. This was a LGBTQ group comprising Jewish and Palestinian Israelis who had marched during the Tel Aviv Gay Pride demonstration carrying placards calling for the withdrawal of the Israeli army from Palestinian territories. Although the majority of Israeli LGBTQ groups position themselves within the national consensus and demand nothing more than to be considered part of the State regardless of its political choices,<sup>81</sup> a

---

<sup>76</sup> In 2005, Palestinian civil society issued a call for a campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions in order to increase economic, political, cultural and academic pressure on Israel to end the occupation and settlements, and for the respect of the rights of Palestinians. This movement is coordinated by the Palestinian BDS National Committee established (BNC) in 2007. See <http://www.bdsmovement.net>, accessed 15 June 2013.

<sup>77</sup> Open Letter to Members of the European Parliament Committee on International Trade, posted by the Coalition Of Women for Peace (10 September 2012), <http://www.bdsmovement.net/2012/cwp-acca-letter-9497>, accessed 14 June 2013.

<sup>78</sup> <http://www.whoprofits.org/reports>, accessed 6 June 2013.

<sup>79</sup> Nitza Berkovith, "Motherhood as a national mission: The construction of womanhood in the legal discourse in Israel" *Women's Studies International Forum*, 20/5 (1997): 605-619.

<sup>80</sup> Lee Walzer, *Between Sodom and Eden. A Gay Journey Through Today's Changing Israel*, (New-York: Columbia University Press, 2000). On gay Palestinian runaways from the West Bank in Tel Aviv and on the help extended to many of them by gay Israeli individuals and NGOs, see the film by Yariv Mozer, *The Invisible Men*, 2012.

<sup>81</sup> This is the case with the 'Agudah' and 'Beit Ha-patuach'/'Open House' (Jerusalem), an Israeli NGO that supports the rights of sexual minorities in Israel while proclaiming their loyalty to the Israeli state. See Erez Lavon, *Language and the Politics of Sexuality. Lesbians and Gays in Israel*, (Palgrave Mac Millan, 2010). See also <http://www.agudah.israel-live.de>, accessed 4 June 2013.

small minority very much on the margins upholds the principle of intersectionality<sup>82</sup> of the campaigns and denounces both the heterosexual and national oppression suffered by Palestinians.

It was also under the feminist label, and with a view to proposing a political alternative to the military choices of Israeli society, that a radical protest group 'Profil Hadash' ('New Profile', NP) was created in 1998.<sup>83</sup> Although NP is a mixed-gender group, it calls itself "a group of men and feminist women." The latter are particularly active and were at the origin of the movement's foundation. In its charter, NP rejects the Israeli government's military-only options for resolving the regional conflict and denounces the social and cultural consequences of such political choices. This protest movement hopes to transform Israeli society by providing it with a new image: that of a peaceful community in which the rights of all are equally respected and defended, and a community in which there is no abusive military occupation of other people's land.<sup>84</sup> In this sense, this movement systematically deconstructs the gender roles drawn up by Israeli nationalism, rejecting in particular the codes of warrior heroism, the notion of the soldier-strategist-peacemaker and the extremely close links between the army and political life. The movement itself proposes action in different domains (in particular the education of young people, and the support of army conscripts who refused to be recruited<sup>85</sup>) in order to help reform Israeli society and, above all, put an end to the violent and discriminatory practices inspired by militarism. This movement allies the molding of a new Israeli society to the construction of peace and is involved in collective actions to bring together Israeli Jews and Palestinians.

It was with a view to denouncing the abuses committed against Palestinians at checkpoints that, in 2001, a group of Israeli women created the NGO 'Machsom Watch,' thus adapting to the changes in the military regime of occupation, and in particular, to the policy of segregation in the oPt.<sup>86</sup> With a type of activism which was both "engaged in the field" and "pragmatic," 'Machsom Watch' (which brings together up to five hundred women across the country) began a relentless campaign of surveillance of checkpoints, their long-term objective being the dismantlement of these. With their presence and observations, they hope to maintain continued pressure on the soldiers, and thus reduce the humiliation and mistreatment suffered by Palestinians. Despite not wanting to intervene, when they began their observations they became real

<sup>82</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins," 1241-1299.

<sup>83</sup> This group is trying to reform statute 21 reserved in the army for unfit soldiers. In Israel, this Profile 21 is very discriminatory against entry into civil life. The group is therefore trying to gain recognition of the conscientious objector status as an official status, thus providing Israeli society with a new category. In reference to this question, see Karine Lamarche, *En attendant la chute du mur. Agir et protester en Israël aujourd'hui* (Paris: Ginkgo éditeur, 2011).

<sup>84</sup> [http://www.newprofile.org/english/about\\_en/charter](http://www.newprofile.org/english/about_en/charter), accessed 5 June 2013.

<sup>85</sup> The status of conscientious objector does not exist in Israel. On the first conscientious objectors in Israel, see the essay by Marcella Simoni in this issue, pp.73-100.

<sup>86</sup> Stéphanie Latte Abdallah, Cédric Parizot, *A l'ombre du mur. Israéliens et Palestiniens. Entre séparation et occupation*, (Arles: Actes Sud/MMSH, 2011).

mediators, using their network of people to contact elected representatives and denounce abuses.<sup>87</sup> These older women belong to the educated upper classes; the majority is Ashkenazi and urbanized, sometimes their families include high ranking members of the Israeli army. They have issued requests for the army to install toilets, provide drinking water and erect shelters over the waiting lines. The form of their action, however, which makes no reference to any political or feminist engagement, runs the risk of helping to make the occupation less abusive by making the checkpoints more humane.

## Conclusions

Israeli and Palestinian women have been pioneers in meetings and in the signing of certain particularly audacious resolutions in the history of Israeli-Palestinian dialogue. The time of the first Intifada was clearly the golden age of these meetings and this exploratory phase, while the period after the failure of the peace accords and the outbreak of the second Intifada led to a decline in bilateral meetings and the joint, ground breaking work of the 'Jerusalem Link'. Nevertheless, although the outbreak of the second Intifada provided a second moment of protest activities dominated by Israelis, it prevented Palestinians in the oPt from any official participation in activities based on co-operation. Although women continued to participate in dialogue, they did so on an individual basis or as part of international peace groups. Similarly, during this period Israeli Palestinians seemed to have lost interest in dialogue and feminist groups, preferring to campaign in areas and with NGOs that were more closely focused on their own society. In the field, Israeli women's groups and NGOs were constantly being renewed and refused to let their guard fall. Through their relentless work, they continued their fight against the occupation and denounced the consequences of the Israeli government's military choices, not only on Palestinian society but on their own society too. Although women's peace groups restricted their references to feminist identity during the first Intifada, this was no longer the case during the second Intifada, during which references to gender-linked oppression multiplied within the activist groups and NGOs.

---

**Valérie Pouzol** is an Assistant Professor of History at Paris 8 University (*Centre de recherches historiques- EA 1571- Pouvoirs, savoirs et sociétés*). She has published on Israeli and Palestinian women's peace activism, with a special focus on gendered identities in

---

<sup>87</sup> Karine Lamarche, "Sous le regard des mères: la surveillance des check-points par des militantes israéliennes" *Confluences Méditerranée, Israël: l'enfermement*, (Paris: éditions l'Harmattan, 2005), 171-179. The whole issue is available also at <http://www.cairn.info/revue-confluences-mediterranee-2005-3.htm>, accessed 14 June 2013.

both nationalisms. Her publications include *Clandestines de la paix. Israéliennes et Palestiniennes contre la guerre, Paris, Complexe, IHTP-CNRS* (2008). More recently, as member of an International Research Program (MOFIP/ [mofip.mmsb.univ-aix.fr](http://mofip.mmsb.univ-aix.fr)) she has also conducted research on Palestinian and Israeli LGBTQ activism – questioning - and underlining the political dimension of this form of activism. Since 2011, she has conducted fieldwork and researches on Jewish orthodox feminism and protest activism against gender segregation in Israeli public space.

**How to quote this article:**

Valerie Pouzol, *Constructing Peace...but What Kind of Peace? Women's Activism, Strategies and Discourse against War (Israel-Palestine 1950-2012)*, in “Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC,” n.5 July 2013  
*url*: [www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=328](http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=328)