

Women's Politics of Belonging – Civil and Military Margins in Diasporic, Israeli, and Palestinian Society

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Abstract

In this paper I reflect upon women's politics of belonging in the fractured region of Palestine-Israel, where multiple identities of nation, gender, ethnicity, and religious belief are held together by "imagined communities"¹; I also include in this discussion women in the margins of the Palestinian and Israeli diasporas, who remain in "exile" through circumstances beyond their control, or by choice. I pose the question: is searching for that imaginary collective compatible with feminism? Does it not always result in the normalization of one hegemony at the expense of another? Looking at the gendered nature of state nationalism, I examine masculinist Jewish nationalism as a source of Israeli militarism, the extent of women's participation in the national Zionist project and the growth of Palestinian women's participation in the resistance discourse and struggle.

Finally, the margins at which women are located are examined from the following aspects: civil (discriminatory gynocentric state laws offset against discriminatory Halachic practices; political representation and participation; extra-parliamentary grassroots political activities, including those which deal specifically with the civil/military interface, such as checkpoint monitoring) and military (the increasing number of women involved in the refusenik movement).

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1. Benedict Anderson (1991) *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, Verso; Homi Babha.(1994) *The Location of Culture*, New York, Routledge.

2. Peace as a Global Language IV, held at Kyoto Sangyo University, Japan, November 11-13, 2005.

3. "Identity becomes a "moveable" feast formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surrounds us ... Within us are contradictory identities pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about." Stuart Hall, David Held & Tony McGrew (Eds.) (1992) *Modernity and its Futures*. London: Polity Press: 277.

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Ritsumeikan Annual Review of International Studies, 2005. ISSN 1347-8214. Vol.4, pp. 37-66

Diasporicity and belonging

Reflections on the politics of belonging often gain the most perspective far away from home. Recently, encountering another expatriate (male) Israeli at a peace conference², I was asked “How do you define yourself? As Israeli or British?” It does rather depend on who’s doing the asking, where and when, and the gender, I ventured; identity is a bit of a moveable feast³. Do I define myself according to Hall’s multiple “cultural identities – those aspects of our identities which arise from our ‘belonging’ to distinctive ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious and, above all, national cultures”⁴?

Seeking definition is somewhat of a lifelong pursuit for the unbelonging, the marginalised, and especially for women, who locate themselves easily in both categories. Esther Fuchs⁵ in her meditations on her multiple exiles as a *Yoredet* (literally, one who has “descended”, an “ex-Israeli” who has left Israel) a woman and daughter of Holocaust survivors (a situation not identical, but related, to my own) wonders:

When I define myself as Israeli, what precisely do I refer to? The national label encompasses a sense of place, of language, of community, of cultural memory. Having left the country, have I not forfeited my claim to this definition altogether?

... When a person is stripped of her most basic self-sustaining myths of collective ethos – the myths that make her think she belongs to a broader community of people, even to a national vision – when she loses the sense of home, a certain emptiness, a certain exhaustion sets in. The keen awareness of the suffering of others and the recognition of the justice of their cause create guilt, a heavy burden to carry for anyone, not just a child of Holocaust survivors whose guilt is absorbed from her own guilt-ridden parents. As an Ashkenazi woman, am I not as well an oppressor in a system of restricted resources? Does my feminist theory have practical meaning? Does it include Mizrahi and Palestinian women (Swirski and Safir, 1991; Izraeli et al., 1999)?⁶

For Fuchs, now resident in the United States, there is no community to which she may belong, as a single woman and a secular Jew; the notion that her identity positioning is perceived as the “other” – linked to a “group of Western oppressors

4. Hall, Held & McGrew (Eds.) (op. cit): 274.

5. Esther Fuchs, “Exile, Memory, Subjectivity: A *Yoredet* Reflects on National Identity and Gender,” in Nahla Abdo and Ronit Lentin (Eds.) (2002) *Women and the Politics of Military Confrontation: Palestinian and Israeli Gendered Narratives of Dislocation*, Berghahn Books, New York and Oxford.

6. Op. cit, p. 290.

who have intruded into the Middle East in order to cause nothing but misery for millions” – causes her great distress.

Over the years in Japan, like Fuchs in the United States, I have found myself often deeply missing the Mediterranean intimacy and vitality of Israeli society to which I emigrated in my twenties. But the distance, and the years of teaching about and reflecting on the Arab-Israel conflict, have caused a fundamental sea-change in my perspective on that conflict. Recently a Japanese colleague gave me Sara Roy's essay, "Living with the Holocaust: The Journey of a Child of Holocaust Survivors,"⁷ and aspects of Roy's own journey articulate my own questions in an uncanny fashion. Describing her mother's decision not to emigrate to Israel, as other family surviving members had done in the wake of the Holocaust, she reports that it was founded on "a belief, learned and reinforced by her experiences during the war, that tolerance, compassion and justice cannot be practiced or extended when one lives only among one's own." For Roy's mother, the diasporic experience is a positive, rather than a negative one, as she "wanted to live as a Jew in a pluralist society, where my group remained important to me but where others were important to me too."

This is not mere avoidance of the hardships of living a life in a stressed country, permanently at war, where the mere act of getting on to public transport, shopping for groceries or sitting in a café is fraught with danger. Clearly the daily endurance of curfews, checkpoints, house demolitions and general deprivation is far graver for Palestinians. Nevertheless it raises the question of retaining one's connection to humanity. For Roy, as for me, it also represents a refusal to participate in the occupation of the Palestinians (although my own starting point was somewhat different – as the daughter of a German *kindertransport* refugee, who sought "normalization" through becoming an *olah chadasha* or new immigrant to Israel, yet subsequently became a *yoredet*). In a post-Holocaust world, Roy accuses Jewish memory of faltering, or even failing:

... in one critical respect: It has excluded the reality of Palestinian suffering and Jewish culpability therein. As a people, we have been unable to link the creation of Israel with the displacement of the Palestinians. We have been unwilling to see, let alone remember, that finding our place meant the loss of theirs. Perhaps one reason for the ferocity of the conflict today is that Palestinians are insisting on their voice despite our continued and desperate efforts to subdue it.⁸

7. Published in the *Journal of Palestine Studies* XXXII, No. 1 (Autumn 2002): 5-12.

8. Roy, op cit..

Roy is troubled, as I am, by what it means to “preserve the Jewish character of the state of Israel.” Would this require the preservation there of a Jewish demographic majority and domination at all costs, over the growing and dispossessed Palestinian people? What sort of meaning, she asks, do we as Jews “derive from the debasement and humiliation of Palestinians”?

For Souad Dajani, an American of Palestinian extraction, exile is “multi-layered”. There is always another layer to uncover. It is deeply connected with whether there is a true choice to live “at a geographical distance from a homeland that is simultaneously mine and not mine”.⁹ Responding to an imaginary interlocutor who suggests that she go live in Ramallah or the West Bank, she says that once upon a time that her negative response was, “I don’t want to hate.” On reflection, the answer is far simpler: she cannot go “home” because she is not Jewish; the family home is in Jaffa, where legally (that is, according to current Israeli immigration laws) she cannot settle unless she is a Jewish *olah chadasha*, a new immigrant. She does not wish to go to Ramallah, because she is not from Ramallah; and holding an American passport, she cannot easily settle in another Arab country:

My existence is a patchwork of exile and dislocation. I reside in Boston, my soul floats over Yaffa, and my mind is preoccupied with Palestine. ... Is it that after a certain point, dislocation sets in as a new way of being, a way of life? ... Why should I experience being Palestinian very much as an exile, and exile upon exile as that? Why is it that what set it in motion was more like an earthquake than a dislocation? As though, in the space of a single moment, the ground shifts and heaves, and when we next blink and look around, we are left standing on ground that wasn’t even there just a short moment before. The effect is unnerving, unbelievable, permanent; it scars us for generations. There is no way back.¹⁰

Is questing after an imaginary belonging, searching for that imaginary collective, compatible with feminism? Abdo draws the distinction between national liberation movements and state-institutionalised nationalism.¹¹ It has been said that it does depend on the kind of nationalism and the kind of feminism under discussion; other additional permutations, such as race, come into play. (Here one thinks of bell hooks’ partial dismissal of Friedanesque “one dimensional” feminism as “a case study of narcissism, insensitivity, sentimentality, and self-indulgence... Racism abounds in the writings of white feminists.”¹²) The fictive

9. Soud Dajani, “Yaffawiyya (I am from Jaffa)”, in Abdo and Lentin (op. cit): 75.

10. Dajani, *ibid*.

11 Abdo, in Abdo and Lentin (op. cit): 25.

12. bell hooks (2000) *Feminist Theory – From Margin to Center*. London, Pluto Press: 1-7.

concept of the nation-state, however, dangles the yearning for the ideal, for cultural homogeneity, ever suggestive as a source of negative nationalism and racism, and forever historically mired in patriarchal origins.

The weight of this fictive national enterprise lies at the heart of the Israel-Palestine conflict. For Palestinians, the results are the naturalization of “the hegemony of one collectivity and its access the ideological apparatuses of both state and civil society”, transforming them into minorities who, like women and other marginalised groups, are excluded from important power resources¹³.

From universalist to particular

...as a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman, my country is the whole world.¹⁴

Written in 1938 on the eve of World War II, after a visit to Mussolini's Italy in 1933 and to Hitler's Germany in 1935, Virginia Woolf's antiwar, antinationalist feminist polemic was fired by an anxiety that as a pacifist married to a Jew, she and her husband would not survive neither the possible rise to power of the British Union of Fascists in London, nor a Nazi invasion. (The Woolfs were indeed known to have been on the Gestapo's hit list.) Yet do those universalist and often quoted feminist sentiments chime with women whose nationalism is described as an expression of resistance to colonialism and occupation, and in support of national liberation, or preserving Jewish continuity in a post-Holocaust, post-911 world?

Nationalism—institutionalised nationalism rather than “national liberation”—defines who belongs and who does not belong the national collectivity; yet the urgency of the national liberation project, whether it is state nationalism or liberation, has generally silenced discussion of its gendered aspect. “The nation” (whether nascent or established) is generally described as a hetero-male project, a “brotherhood”¹⁵ based on “masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope”.¹⁶ Only those who “belong” are need apply—and will be granted citizenship rights. How this pertains to women's sense of belonging within and without the Israeli, Jewish and Palestinian diasporas is a subject of

13. Nira Yuval-Davis (1992) *Gender and Nation*, London, Sage Publications: 11.

14. Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (1938); London: Hogarth Press.

15. Anderson, op. cit.: 16.

16. C. Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (1989) Berkeley, CA: University of California Press: 44, cited in Tamar Mayer (2000) (Ed.), *Gender Ironies of Nationalism—Sexing the Nation*, London, Routledge.

controversy, as Ronit Lentin avers:

On 2 November 2000 [when the Al-Aqsa Intifada was in full flight], one ... essentialist call for demonstration stated that “Women make peace, generals do not. ...Listen to the voice of feminine wisdom, because the era of the generals is over!”

... Despite the allure of such essentialism ... in order to understand the positioning of women and men in war and peace, gender must be understood as socially constructed, and that neither the equity position, demanding full equality for women in armed forces, nor the essentialist belief that men equal war while women equal peace, is helpful. The essentialist position may in fact lull women peace activists into ignoring Israeli women being implicated—as mothers, wives, sisters and lovers of soldiers, and as soldiers themselves—in Israeli militarism and in the continuing oppression of the Palestinians.¹⁷

Masculinist Jewish nationalism, the source of Israeli militarism, has an established relationship with parallel movements such as “muscular Christianity”¹⁸. The founder of political Zionism, Theodor Herzl, is said to have appreciated Bismarck’s success at mobilizing German masses around the nationalist banner; he dreamed of a similar future for the Jewish nation.¹⁹ Such vigorous nationalism would “liberate” Jews from the problems and humiliations caused by 2,000 years of exile. Writing about his desires for a “New Jew”, Herzl commented on the sorry state of the latter-day Jewish male, saying “they are Ghetto creatures, quiet, decent, timorous ... Will they understand the call to freedom and manliness?”²⁰ The phrase itself “muscle Jew” originates with Herzl’s contemporary, Max Nordau, who called for just such a transformation in his

17. Ronit Lentin, “If I forget thee...” in Abdo and Lentin (op. cit): 297.

18. “The heyday of muscular Christianity in America lasted roughly from 1880 to 1920. During that time, the YMCA invented basketball and volleyball, the Men and Religion Forward Movement sought to fill Protestant churches with men, and the churches took the lead in the organized camping and public playground movements. These efforts to make muscular Christianity an integral part of the churches lasted throughout World War I. But in the pacifistic 1920s, there emerged widespread discontent with many of the ideals that had flourished during World War I, including muscular Christianity. Protestant leaders such as Harry Emerson Fosdick and Sherwood Eddy blamed muscular Christianity for encouraging militarism. And satirists such as H. L. Mencken and Sinclair Lewis skewered muscular Christianity in their writings.” From “Muscular Christianity”, an introduction by Clifford Putney, retrieved on 20 June 2004 from http://www.infed.org/christianeducation/muscular_christianity.htm

19. Tamar Mayer, “From Hero to Zero in Jewish nationalism” in Tamar Mayer (Ed.) (2000), *Gender Ironies of Nationalism—Sexing the Nation*, London, Routledge: 285.

20. *Diaries*, June 8, 1895.

opening speech at the historic second Zionist Congress in Basel on August 28, 1898. Both Herzl and Nordau called for a return to the “Maccabean tradition”:

Nordau called upon both a great Jewish past and a redeemed future, a convergence that would give the fledgling Zionist movement its present direction and historical rationale. Contrary to contemporary anti-Semitic representations of Jews as scrawny, weak, and inferior (an image also internalized by many Jews through the violent mechanisms of self-hatred), Jews were at one time, Nordau reminded his readership, muscular and heroic, as the mythic story of Bar Kochba attested. Not by chance, “Bar Kochba” and the “Maccabees” also became two of the names adopted by the newly formed Zionist gymnastic associations.²¹

Here is Herzl again, writing in his *Diaries*: “I must train the youth to be soldiers. But only a professional army. ... I educate one and all to be free and strong men ... Education by means of patriotic songs, the Maccabean tradition, religion.”²² For women he did not see an active role:

No women or children shall work in our factories. We want a vigorous race. The state takes care of needy women and children. “Old maids” will be employed in kindergartens ... I will organize these spinsters into a corps of governesses for the poor.²³

However, Herzl and Nordau notwithstanding, the 19th-20th century socialist Zionist youth and settler movements from Eastern and Central Europe trained *both* girls and boys in what they considered to be the dignity of working physically on the land, instilling in them self-sacrifice for rebuilding the homeland. Women were both *chalutzot* (female pioneers leading the charge to re-establish the national Jewish homeland) and *chaverot* (comrades).

Yet although women's contributions were crucial to the success of the Zionist project, they did not come to symbolize its achievements. Despite the Zionist ideal of gender equity, a familiar set of inequities was reproduced. The most cited example is the failed experiment in gender equality through the kibbutz movement—a movement somewhat in inverse proportion to its fascination for sociologists, since it impacts on a mere 2% of the Israeli population.

21. Todd Samuel Presner, “Clear Heads, Solid Stomachs, and Hard Muscles”: Max Nordau and the Aesthetics of Jewish Regeneration” (2003), *Modernism/Modernity*, Vol. 10, No. 15, Johns Hopkins University Press: 269-296.

22. June 7, 1895.

23. June 11, 1895.

Founded in 1910, the socialist Zionist kibbutz movement, with its labour rotations, its childrens' houses and communal kitchens, communal dining halls and communal laundries, famously proclaimed one of its missions as the total emancipation of women from their sexual, social and economic, intellectual shackles. It propounded a doctrine of "identity" equality—the abolition of sex-role differentiation (as long as women were to become like men).

We have given her equal rights; we have emancipated her from the burden of rearing children; we have emancipated her from dependency on the husband, her provider and commander; we have given her a new society; we have broken the shackles that chained her hands.²⁴

The goal was *chinuch meshutaf*— collective socialization. Not only new women but new men were also to be formed. "In the life of the *kvutza* [collective] ... the characteristics of the new man can be formed ... On the basis of spiritual, not blood ties, the family will be reborn – in the form of small, modest work groups,"²⁵ wrote Zvi Shatz, a founder of the kibbutz movement.

Today of course almost all these things have changed, even in the most radical of the four original kibbutz federations, Kibbutz Artzi—due partly to economics and the pragmatic recognition of women as child-bearers of the future generations of the kibbutz, and also women's own avowed preferences as nurturers. Women work largely in the service sector of kibbutz industries, or increasingly, outside the kibbutz, since the economic demise of the kibbutz after the hyper-inflation of the 1980s, with its spiral of kibbutz bankruptcies. Families reside together, may even own their property, and earn their own salaries.²⁶

24. A kibbutz journal from 1950, cited in Melford E. Spiro, *Gender and Culture: Kibbutz Women Revisited* (1979). Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press: 6.

25. *Ibid.*: 17.

26. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, the total population of the Kibbutz Movement in 2000 was 115,300 people, living in 268 kibbutzim (about 1.5% of the Israeli population). The smallest kibbutz has only 25 members and candidates, plus 9 children. The largest kibbutz, Maagan Michael, has a permanent population of 1254, 626 of whom are members. Yagur is a close second, with 1200 souls including 719 members.

The two largest of the kibbutz federations - Takam (60% of the kibbutz population) and Kibbutz Artzi (32%) - have united to form "The Kibbutz Movement". The separate Religious Kibbutz Movement comprises 6%, the remainder belonging to the even more orthodox Poalei Agudat Israel.

Over 15% of the kibbutz adult population work in agriculture and the kibbutzim still provide some 40% of the gross added value of Israel's agricultural output. The remainder work in kibbutz industries—construction, solar panels, textiles, clothing production, manufacture of foodstuffs, medicines and chemicals etc.

Arab women's movement in Palestine also reflected national aims, coming about largely as a result of the Palestinian national movement during the British Mandate period, and largely focusing on ending the British occupation (in contrast to other typical women's movement issues which focus on women's liberation from societal oppression). Its leaders, however, were "upper-class people in the cities" and its activities were largely "charitable and humanitarian in nature" although women participated in demonstrations (such as those in February 1920 and March 1921).²⁷ In the 1929 riots, nine women were among the 120 Arabs killed by the British as they attempted to suppress nationalist uprisings; it was also the year of the first Arab women's conference in Jerusalem, and the creation of the Arab Women's Committee.

After Jordan's 1950 annexation of the West Bank women became more directly involved in clandestine groups such as the Ba'ath Party, the Arab Nationalist Movement and the Jordanian Communist Party; despite being restricted to their own "party cells" and given work of a limited clerical nature, this served as a training ground for future confrontation with post-1967 Israeli occupiers. Likewise in Gaza the Palestinian Communist Party and the Ba'ath party counted women members among their ranks, the latter having a women's section from 1954. However, the majority of service-providing and charitable women's groups operating in the refugee camps and in Gaza, Jerusalem, Hebron and Nablus were not political, likewise the General Union of Palestinian Women, established in 1965 (despite its political origins, having grown out of the 1964 Jerusalem conference which created the PLO). From 1967 on, however, women became actively involved in student unions and resistance struggles, including demonstrations and armed struggle such as plane hijacking; by 1979 Israel had imprisoned 3,000 women prisoners. Nevertheless, women's issues *per se* were neglected and not part of the liberation and resistance discourse.

Women – the Civil Margins

(i) Marriage and Divorce

When reviewing how the margins of women's belonging are defined, it must be

27. Union of Arab Women, *The Golden Jubilee* (1980) Jerusalem: Union of Arab Women. Cited in Islah Jad, "Palestinian Women, 1919-89", in Ilan Pappé (Ed.) *The Israel /Palestine Question* (1999). London and New York: Routledge.

observed that the parameters of the Jewish state are curiously matrilineal, requiring Judaism for the 'final' legitimization of Zionism. The constantly-debated Law of Return, formulated in the early years of the state (1950), amended in 1970 and again latterly modified around "security issues" gives automatic right of immigration to all Jews born of a Jewish mother. (Today, this "right to return" been adopted as a principle too by the Palestinian diaspora.) Yet that is as far as the "gynocentricity" goes: marriage and divorce remain in the control of the Rabbinate, as there is no civil law which takes precedent over the religious domain, although private contracts may be drawn up (but these are not considered as marriage). *Halachic* laws (Jewish religious laws and customs) and their interpretations blatantly discriminate against women in matters of marriage, divorce, alimony, support, guardianship, property, wills and legacies. Women are not allowed to appear as witnesses in rabbinic courts, and can be refused a *get* (divorce) indefinitely by husbands. These "chained women" are condemned to remain the position of *agunot*—chained women—indeinitely. Nevertheless, the Women's Equal Rights Law of 1951 begins "from the beginning of the movement to return to Zion, the Jewish woman was a *loyal companion* to the early immigrants and settlers ... In fulfilling her duty and privilege as a Hebrew mother cherishing the young generation and educating them ... the Hebrew woman and mother continues the great tradition of the Israeli heroine".

The 1970 amendment to the Law of Return—with the reality of mixed marriages of immigrants and their offspring in mind, particularly Soviet Bloc Jews—includes the "child and a grandchild of a Jew, the spouse of a Jew, the spouse of a child of a Jew and the spouse of a grandchild of a Jew, except for a person who has been a Jew and has voluntarily changed his religion". Amendment 4B reflects the Orthodox religious definition of "who is a Jew" ("a person who was born of a Jewish mother or has become converted to Judaism and who is not a member of another religion."). However, for those immigrants wishing to marry in Israel, the burden of proof rests on them and all are required to provide evidence of the above. It is still impossible for a Jew and a non-Jew to marry in a religious or civil ceremony in Israel under this arrangement. Meanwhile the definition according to *halacha* (Jewish religious laws and customs) of "who is a Jew" is left to the Orthodox Rabbinate (a concession Israel's first Prime Minister David Ben Gurion made to Orthodox Jewry). Opposing "theocratic" control and practices is the platform of former Justice Minister Tomy Lapid's secularist party, Shinui

(Change)²⁸.

While Israeli law avoided interfacing with Muslim *shar'ia* law, the above-mentioned Women's Equal Rights Law of 1951—with its injunction against any proceedings in which men could legally discriminate against women—did, however, impact on Muslim polygamic marriage practices; the Criminal Law Ordinance of 1936 was actually amended to make Muslim plurality of wives illegal, despite vigorous protests and legal challenges, on grounds that it was a social practice rather than a religious command. Likewise, paragraph 8 of the Equal Rights Law makes it illegal to compel the dissolution of a marriage against a women's will through the practice of *talak* (thrice declaring “you are hereby divorced”).

Issues related to marriage and divorce laws impact on Arab women's lives in a more fundamental way: one law in particular, the 2003 Family Unification Law, governs the right of couples who marry across the Green Line, forbidding residents of the Occupied Territories who marry Israelis to live in Israel with their spouses, by refusing to grant them residency or citizenship status. (In contrast, Israelis married to foreign nationals who are not residents of the Occupied Territories are still allowed to submit requests for family unification on their behalf.) On 21 July, 2004, the Knesset extended the Family Unification Law for an additional six months, renewing it again in 2005. According to Adalah (the legal centre for Arab Minority Rights in Israel):

On 27 July 2005, the Knesset voted to extend the law until 31 March 2006, with minor amendments which do not diminish the unconstitutionality or discriminatory nature of the Law, and in the case of some amendments, inflict further violations of constitutional rights. In Adalah's view, the Law constitutes one of the most extreme measures in a series of governmental actions aimed at undermining the rights of Palestinian citizens of Israel, as well as Palestinians from the OPTs [Occupied Palestinian Territories]. The Law therefore flagrantly discriminates against Palestinian citizens of Israel, the overwhelming majority of Israeli citizens who marry Palestinians from the OPTs, and against Palestinians from the OPTs on the basis of

28. “Shinui fights against religious coercion and for a secular state with room for all opinions and beliefs. Extortion and exploitation of the public treasury for religious purposes have to end. The ultra-Orthodox establishment is a threat to the orderly administration of a free society and to the individual freedom that characterizes a democratic state. Attempts to turn Israel into a state based on Halacha (Jewish religious law) endanger our future. We seek to separate state and religion, while preserving the country's Zionist character.” “Shinui's Principles” retrieved on 10 September 2005 from Shinui's website, <http://www.shinui.org.il/elections/eng/principles.html#14>

nationality and ethnic belonging, and is disproportionate to the alleged security concerns cited to justify its enactment.²⁹

Family unification between residents of the Occupied Territories and Israeli citizens is permitted only in very limited circumstances. The new amendments include age and gender-related stipulations which prevent applications from all Palestinian men under 35 years of age, and all Palestinian women under 25 years of age. Although individuals under these ages may now apply for a permit to stay in Israel, they may receive only a temporary permit, and do not qualify for work permits or social benefits. A further amendment stipulates that no status will be granted to Palestinians who are related to individuals whom security officials suggest might constitute a threat to the state of Israel. The new law also affects children born in the Occupied Territories to parents resident in East Jerusalem, making it impossible to legalize these children's status in Israel.

(ii) Political representation and participation

There is apparent equality between men and women regarding the right to vote and to be elected in Israel. In Section 5 of the 1950 Knesset's Basic Law³⁰, it is specifically stated:

Every Israel national of or over the age of eighteen years shall have the right to vote in elections to the Knesset unless a court has deprived him of that right by virtue of any Law; the Elections Law shall determine the time at which a person shall be considered to be eighteen years of age for the purpose of the exercise of the right to vote in elections to the Knesset.³¹

Moreover, every Israel national aged 21 or over may be elected to the Knesset "unless a court has deprived him of that right by virtue of any Law", according to Section 6 of the same law. Yet there remains the question of citizenship and who is an Israeli national, which is related to the issue of "who is a Jew", but not exclusively so. Non-Jewish Israeli citizens, specifically Israeli Arabs, do have

29. Retrieved on 8 September 2005 from Adalah: Family Unification at http://www.adalah.org/eng/famunif.php#2002_petition.

30. Israel does not have an agreed constitution, but a series of Basic Laws (passed from 1950 until 2001) function in place of this.

31. Retrieved on 7 July 2004 from the web site of the Israeli Knesset at http://www.knesset.gov.il/laws/special/eng/basic2_eng.htm

identical political rights and are represented in the Knesset. Nevertheless this group is at a disadvantage: the language of the Knesset is mostly Hebrew, and the “marginalization of non-Jews is symbolised in the very fabric of the Knesset building, with its carvings and rich tapestries depicting key moments in Jewish history”.³² Getting elected is in itself a huge challenge due to the social status of Israeli Arabs, and notably, there are no women Arab MKs:

Israeli Arabs have low social status, because in Israel the social status of the citizen is determined not only by education and professional achievements, but by the degree of identification with the central goals of Israel as a Jewish Zionist state.³³

Dr. Azmi Bishara, Arab MK for Balad (the Democratic National Assembly party), reflects on the process of marginalization:

You have here a nation-building process going on the whole time which excludes you in every step since it began, and this includes nationalization of the land, this includes nationalization of the history of this place, this includes nationalization of the religious myth, every single thing that is done in the process of nation-building in this country excludes the indigenous people. A citizenship that grants you privileges over the natives ... over the indigenous people ... this is an unbelievable situation; I think this is very, very unique.”

... On every step and corner, we contradict the Zionist character of the state, because the game, the democratic game is tribal, is inside the tribe, inside the family ... inside a very, very strong identity... and we are excluded from that. Now how did we get in? We got in through citizenship, not through national identity ... the fact that we were citizens of the state of Israel ... we were given the right to participate ... but democracy from the beginning was not meant for us. So from the beginning it was very conditional.

You have to behave as a guest in this democracy, and have to respect that you are given rights ... and if you don't respect it, you are reminded 'Go to Syria, go to Lebanon, go to Egypt – they don't have democracy there – you have democracy here, you have to be grateful for that...' Sometimes I tell them, 'Give me back Palestine, and take your democracy away.'³⁴

Ahmed Tibi, a physician and Arab MK for Hadash-Ta'al (a faction of the

32. Valerie Bryson (1998) “Citizen warriors, workers, mothers in Israel” in Nickie Charles and Helen Hintjens (Eds.), *Gender, Ethnicity and Political Ideologies*, London, Routledge: 130.

33. Palestinian educator, quoted in Barbara Swirski and Marilyn Safir (1993) *Calling the Equality Bluff*. New York and London: Teachers College Press: 9.

34. In an interview for the ITV documentary *Faultlines*, broadcast on British television in 2003.

Communist Democratic Front for Peace and Equality) who was a former political advisor to Yasser Arafat, underlines the contradiction between Israel the democracy, and Israel the Jewish state:

Israel is defined as a Jewish and democratic state; there is a real contradiction between the two values, Israel is not a total democracy, but I can say Israel is an ethnocracy. I am saying yes Israel is a Jewish and democratic state, but my explanation for this is: that Israel is 'democratic towards Jews and Jewish towards Arabs.' It is important to have right of elections as we have here in Israel, but is it enough for defining democracy. Democracy is not only the right of the majority to rule and to dictate, it is mainly the right of the minority to be different but equal. I do not find myself embarrassed by saying that there are dictatorships in the Arab world and lack of real democracy. The first item in our political platform of my party: Arab Movement for Change, is talking about the need for democracy, equality and civil rights in all Arab communities in the Middle East.³⁵

As for those women living within the Green Line, who have been traditionally subordinated within their own "low status" communities, "defence of Palestinian cultural identity has therefore sometimes involved women in defence of their own subordination".³⁶

Furthermore, some 700,000 Palestinian Arabs who fled, left or were expelled from Israel during the 1948-9 War of Independence (or *Nakba*, the catastrophe, as it is known in Arabic) remain disenfranchised, with Palestinian women being a particular target for marginalization. Women living in the West Bank and the Gaza strip were only permitted the right by Israel to vote for the first time in the 1976 municipal elections. Contrary to then-Defence Minister Shimon Peres' expectations, women voted largely for nationalist progressive candidates, rather than more conservative ones³⁷; Peres did not taken into account the growing activism of Palestinian women within student and women's organizations, which was to culminate in the formation of the Women's Work Committee in 1978, and later to the splintering of factions that produced the Union of Palestinian Working Women's Committees (1980), the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees (March 1981) and the Women's Committee for Social Work (June 1982). The infrastructure of these committees was to bear particular fruit in resistance to the first and second *intifadas* (1987-1990, 2000-):

35. *Ha'aretz* "Q and A with with Ta'al MK Ahmed Tibi", retrieved on September 28, 2004 from <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/QA.jhtml?qaNo=110>

36. Bryson (op. cit).

37. Jad (op. cit): 255.

Women of all ages and social classes threw stones, burned tires, transported and prepared stones, built roadblocks, raised Palestinian flags, and prevented Israeli soldiers from arresting people. Political participation by women, which at times involved confrontations with the army, was most intense in refugee camps, villages, and in the poorer neighbourhoods of towns.³⁸

Prior to the *intifadas*, the stated goal of these women's organizations was the national struggle for an end to occupation and the creation of a Palestinian state, although many of the left-leaning unions included women's struggle in their agenda too, but largely in terms of equal employment conditions for women. Neither women's status in society nor the situation of rural women in patriarchal and tribal societies was explicitly dealt with; such issues were considered a sidebar to national goals, with potential for controversy that could undermine and fracture the health and strength of campaigns to end occupation. However, the women's strategic action during *intifadas* proved to be transformative; as Sharoni observes, modes of behaviour that were not deemed socially acceptable prior to the *intifada* became commonplace.³⁹ The long-lasting extent of the transformation is, however, as yet unclear.

In contrast, despite the military struggle for the establishment and survival of the state of Israel, and the perceived ongoing nature of the struggle, women's formal equality within the state has been relatively well legislated-for since the state's inception. Thus it remains a curious phenomenon as to why women have consistently received little more than a symbolic representation in Israeli politics (albeit at least sufficient enough to generate the myth of an open and egalitarian system). This representation reflects two contradictory processes existing side by side in Israeli political culture: recognition of women as a social category and the perception of women's traditional roles—as wives and housewives—as self-evident.

Women in institutionalized political parties face a dilemma as to their political identity on the one hand, and their commitment to feminist positions and activities on the other. Choosing to be party members representing the overall party line, they often find themselves classified as 'women' and relegated to traditional 'feminine' areas and roles. Should they choose to organize on a gender basis, they are marginalized along with the issues with which they concern themselves. Thus 18 women hold seats in the current 16th 120-member Knesset, while three are government ministers—Limor Livnat, Tzipi Livni, Dalia Itzik—but for "softer"

38. Simona Sharoni (1995) *Gender and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*. New York: Syracuse University Press: 70.

39. Sharoni (ibid.)

ministries, respectively Education, Culture and Sport, Immigrant Absorption and Justice, and Environment, and Communications. Four more women are deputy government ministers. Deputy Government ministers include Ruhama Avraham (Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs), Gila Gamliel (Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development), Orit Noked (Deputy Minister of the Vice Premier) and Marina Solodkin (Deputy Minister of Immigrant Absorption).

The breakdown of all women MKs spans the political spectrum from right to left and secular to religious:⁴⁰

- ☛ Colette Avital (Labor-Meimad- Am Ehad)
- ☛ Ruhama Avraham (Likud)
- ☛ Naomi Blumenthal (Likud)
- ☛ Ilana Cohen (Labor-Meimad- Am Ehad)
- ☛ Gila Finkelstein (National Religious Party)
- ☛ Zahava Gal-On (Meretz-Yahad and the Democratic Choice)
- ☛ Gila Gamliel (Likud)
- ☛ Inbal Gavriely (Likud)
- ☛ Erela Golan (Shinui -the Secular Movement)
- ☛ Dalia Itzik (Labor-Meimad- Am Ehad)
- ☛ Limor Livnat (Likud)
- ☛ Eti Livni (Shinui -the Secular Movement)
- ☛ Tzipi Livni (Likud)
- ☛ Lea Nass (Likud)
- ☛ Orit Noked (Labor-Meimad- Am Ehad)
- ☛ Meli Polishook-Bloch (Shinui -the Secular Movement)
- ☛ Marina Solodkin (Likud)
- ☛ Yuli Tamir (Labor-Meimad- Am Ehad)

During the term of 16 governments since the establishment of the State, including that of Prime Minister Sharon, only nine women have served as cabinet ministers: Golda Meir, Shoshana Arbeli-Almozlino, Shulamit Aloni, Sara Doron, Ora Namir, Limor Livnat, Dalia Itzik, Yael (Yuli) Tamir and Zippi Livni (several served in more than one government). Although Golda Meir served as Prime Minister, not even one woman held a ministerial post in her government, despite the fact the her cabinet was one of the largest to date (24 cabinet ministers). Ironically, Ariel Sharon's first government included the largest number of female

40. Retrieved on 1 September 2005 from the Knesset's web site http://www.knesset.gov.il/mk/eng/MKIndex_Current_eng.asp?view=3

cabinet ministers: 11.5%.

(iii) Coming from the margins

Broadly speaking, women's involvement in extra-parliamentary political activity in Israel/Palestine has been aimed at influencing the decision-making process from the grassroots level. The focus of these groups has been organizing demonstrations, rallies, peace marches and other activities aimed at influencing public opinion. In addition, Post-Zionist discourse makes claims for alternative politics and agendas, and alliances with Palestinian women.

In the general history of civil protest in Israel *Shalom Achshav* [Peace Now] is perhaps the most well-known and included the participation of many women. However, it should be pointed out that despite the anger it provoked on the part of the right in Israel, this largest grassroots movement in Israel's history was not necessarily radical, founded as it was in March 1978 during the Israeli-Egyptian peace talks by (male) soldiers: 348 reserve commanders, officers, and combat soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces. It aimed at pressuring the government to consider constructive peace proposals. The soldiers wrote to then Prime Minister Menachem Begin that real security can be achieved only when Israel achieves peace.⁴¹ Another prominent member, the writer Amos Oz, took pains to stress

41. Extracted from the letter to Prime Minister Menachem Begin, retrieved on 2 November 2004 from <http://www.peacenow.org.il/site/en/peace.asp?pi=43&docid=62>:

"Dear Sir,

Citizens that also serve as soldiers and officers in the reserve forces are sending this letter to you. The following words are not written with a light heart. However at this time when new horizons of peace and cooperation are for the first time being proposed to the State of Israel, we feel obliged to call upon you to prevent taking any steps that could cause endless problems to our people and our state.

We are writing this with deep anxiety, as a government that prefers the existence of the State of Israel within the borders of "Greater Israel" to its existence in peace with good neighborliness, will be difficult for us to accept. A government that prefers existence of settlements beyond the Green Line to elimination of this historic conflict with creation of normalization of relationships in our region will evoke questions regarding our path we are taking. A government policy that will cause a continuation of control over million Arabs will hurt the Jewish-democratic character of the state, and will make it difficult for us to identify with the path of the State of Israel.

We are aware of the security needs of the State of Israel and the difficulties facing the path to peace. But we know that true security will only be reached with the arrival of peace. The power of the IDF is in the identification of its soldiers with the path of the State of Israel."

"348 signatures, March, 1978"

that Shalom Achshav was not “pro-Palestinian”:

One can't compare Peace Now with the European peace movement. We are 'peaceniks' but we're no pacifists; most of us involved in Peace Now have at one time or another been on the battlefield—and if the worst were to happen and we found ourselves with our backs to the wall, we might fight again.⁴²

More radical Israeli peace movements were to supersede Shalom Achshav, particularly in response to the Lebanon War in 1982—the war that is considered to be “Israel's Vietnam”—when women's separate peace activism can be clearly discerned.

Many women also linked their political involvement with feminist political strategies, partly prompted by masculine domination of the existing peace movements, and partly prompted by their reaction to what they perceived as the unjustified invasion of Lebanon by the IDF.

In 1982, after the euphemistically-named “Peace for the Galilee Operation” began in Lebanon, some 50 women, and a few men, joined under the name “Parents against Silence,” to petition for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon. The media represented members as mothers, and indeed the group did little to highlight its associations with feminism, disbanding in 1985 when Israeli withdrew from Lebanon.

Another more radical group called “Women against the Invasion of Lebanon” was also formed consisting of feminist activists who demanded the immediate withdrawal of the troops from Lebanon. They offered a more feminist analysis of the ills of militarism. After the Lebanon War ended, this group continued to operate under the name Shani, or “Women against the Occupation.” They protested the conditions under which Palestinian women were held in Israeli prisons, focusing on the West Bank and Gaza, and organizing home encounters between Jewish and Palestinian Arab Israelis, and visits to the Occupied Territories.

Perhaps among the best-known of the women's non-violent strategic action groups is Women In Black.⁴³ Women In Black was inspired by earlier movements of women who demonstrated on the streets, making a public space for women to be heard - particularly Black Sash, in South Africa, and the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, seeking the ‘disappeared’ in the political repression in Argentina. But

42. Amos Oz (1994) *Israel, Palestine and Peace*. London, Vintage: 47.

43. <http://www.womeninblack.org/>

Women In Black also shares a genealogy with groups of women explicitly refusing violence, militarism and war, such as the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (formed in 1918), and the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp in the UK and related groups around the world opposing the deployment of US missiles in the 1980s.

Women In Black owes its critical moment to the outbreak of the Palestinian *intifada* in December 1987, when a women's peace movement was formed to protest military policy in the Occupied Territories. The women gathered every Friday afternoon wearing black at a central square in Jerusalem to mourn the victims of violence and occupation. Later this form of demonstration spread to 40 other locations in Israel: in the north of Israel, where the concentration of Arab communities is greatest, Palestinian women who are Israeli citizens were also active in Women In Black groups. Many local WIB groups made contact with women across the Green Line engaged in support work, such as visiting Palestinians in Israeli prisons:

Women In Black demonstrations spread to Tel Aviv and Haifa, and from there to the kibbutzim, moshavim, and other villages around the country. By July 1990 participants counted some 30 women's vigils involving both Jews and Palestinians from Israel who demonstrated in black against the Occupation every Friday, at the same places and times, often to cries of 'whores!', 'traitors!' 'Arafat's whores!', and similar expressions. As the popularity of Women In Black grew throughout Israel, these protest groups provided a model for women's protest groups in other parts of the world.⁴⁴

The movement has since become a worldwide phenomenon; groups can be found across North America, Central and South America, Europe, Africa and the Asia-Pacific region.⁴⁵

The renewal of the Palestinian *intifada*, in late September 2000, after the Al-Aqsa mosque incident, restimulated Women In Black in Israel. By mid-November women were at six sites (Nazareth, Acre, Haifa, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and the Nachson junction) and this activism continues today in 15 simultaneous vigils, some calling themselves Women In Black and others not.

November 2000 also saw the formation in Israel of the Coalition of Women⁴⁶

44. Sharoni (op. cit): 90.

45. <http://www.womeninblack.net/contact2.html>

46. <http://coalitionofwomen.org/>

for a Just Peace, which brings together all the Women In Black vigils in Israel as well as nine other women's peace organizations. Dressed in black, these women have carried out direct action (such as placing a 'closure' on the Israeli Defence Ministry by blocking traffic to it), in addition to holding mass Women In Black vigils twice a year, with thousands of women participating. The principles approved by the Coalition of Women were cited⁴⁷ as:

- An end to 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 the two states.
- Israel must recognize its share of responsibility for the results of the 1948 war, and find 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.

The Coalition of Women includes

- Machsom Watch <http://www.machsomwatch.org/>
- نساء بالسواد נשים בשחור Women in Black <http://www.womeninblack.org/>
- בנת השלום בת שלום Bat Shalom <http://www.batshalom.org/>
- نوجا، مجلة نسوية נדה Noga, Feminist Journal
- الأم الخامسة האם החמישית The Fifth Mother
- بروفيل جديد פרופיל חדש New Profile <http://www.newprofile.org/>
- וילפ פ.פ.ל.י.וו WILPF Women's International League for Peace and Freedom <http://www.wilpf.int.ch/>
- תנדי י"תנדי TANDI Movement of Democratic Women for Israel
- נילד ד"נל NELED Women for Coexistence

Among the above, perhaps the best-known is Machsom (Checkpoint) Watch. Founded January 2001, Machsom Watch responds to human rights abuses of Palestinians crossing army and border police checkpoints. It is the initiative of three women – Ronnee

47. Gila Swirsky, "Feminist Peace Activism During the al-Aqsa Intifada" in Abdo and Lentin (op. cit): 237.

Jaeger, a long time activist with experience of human rights work in Guatemala and Mexico; Adi Kuntsman, a feminist scholar who emigrated from the former Soviet Union in 1990; and veteran activist Yehudit Keshet, an orthodox Jew. Machsom Watch now counts 400 women members all over the country. Its three stated goals are:

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

Machsom Watch declares that it is exclusively a women-only group, for reasons of non-violence strategic action: "Our 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."⁴⁸

b. Bat Shalom

A further well-known group is Bat Shalom (daughter of peace). In 1989, a meeting in Brussels between prominent Israeli and Palestinian women peace activists 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.

Bat Shalom is an Israeli national feminist grassroots organization of 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," according to its website. It focuses on working on relations between Jewish and Palestinian Arab women living within the Green Line.⁴⁹

c. The Jerusalem Link

The Jerusalem Link is the coordinating body of two independent women's centers:

48. Cited on its website, <http://www.machsomwatch.org/>, and retrieved on 3 September 2004.

49. Cynthia Cockburn (1998) *The Space Between Us: Negotiating Gender and National Identities in Conflict*. London and New York, Zed Books: 130.

Bat Shalom—the Jerusalem Women’s Action Center, located in West Jerusalem, and Mercaz al-Quds la I-Nissah—the Jerusalem Center for Women, located in East Jerusalem. 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 believe a viable solution of the conflict between the two peoples must be based on recognition of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and an independent state alongside the state of Israel, Jerusalem as the capital of both states, and a final settlement of all relevant issues based on international law.

Women’s groups can equally be found on the right. A further movement is that of Women in Green, alternatively known as Women for Israel’s Tomorrow, a rapidly growing right-wing cross-generational women’s movement including homemakers and professionals; some secular and many religious; all bound claim to be together by “a shared love, devotion and concern for Israel”. Spearheaded by the controversial and charismatic Ruth and Nadia Matar, Women in Green has chapters throughout Israel and abroad, including Los Angeles, New York, Chicago and Toronto.

In existence since late 1993, the group, which is a registered non-profit organization, performs weekly street theatre and public demonstrations, writes weekly articles, commissions posters, advertises in newspapers, and lectures to groups:

... in order to educate the electorate on the consequences of certain government policies, such as abandoning the Golan Heights for an illusory promise of peace, and pandering to Arafat, without requiring him to live up to his obligations under the Oslo Accords. We insist that Israel remain a Jewish state. We are actively and intimately connected with the fight to preserve a united Jerusalem. We support and encourage the brave Jewish community in the ancient city of Hebron, and sponsor annual Hanukkah and Purim parties with gifts and professional entertainment for the isolated Jewish children in that community.

Our movement is dedicated to the security and Jewish heritage of historic Israel, and we are outspoken in support of our cause. We are popularly known as the “Women in Green” because of the green hats we wear.⁵⁰

This summer during the Gaza Disengagement, Matar was served with a criminal indictment for “insulting a public official” (Jonathan Bassi) responsible for requiring Jews to leave their homes in the Gaza settlement. Comparing Bassi still more

50. From the group’s website, retrieved on 6 September 2004, http://72.14.203.104/search?q=cache:A_qF77YlJWIJ:www.womeningreen.org/+Women+In+Green&hl=en

unfavourably to officials of the Judenrat (Jewish Council) in Berlin during the Holocaust, she alleged that those officials had acted under Nazi duress, while Bassi had acted voluntarily. She was required to retain counsel to defend her against the charge.

(iv) Military margins

Israel is the sole country with mandatory military conscription for women, and yet the military signifies one of the main sites in Israel in which women's second-class status is implemented.⁵¹ (Conscription has been mandatory for both sexes since 1949.) The military is also the place where many women and men in Israel

... learn how to behave with each other. In past the army was the main arena where men learned to sexually harass and women learned to accept harassment.⁵²

As I have remarked elsewhere⁵³, extreme security issues in Israel dictate an absence of clarity regarding where the military zone ends, and the social (public and private) zones begin, particularly since requirements for national service in the IDF (three years for young men at 18, two for women) and annual reserve service (for the most part, the latter obligation of approximately one month is only for males) blur the lines between civilian and military.

Thus, Israeli civilians can be said to be "partly militarized" and the Israeli military is "partly civilianized". Even women who do not serve are likely to be mothers, sisters, wives, girlfriends and daughters of soldiers. (Indeed, Geula Cohen, a former Knesset member and founder of the right-wing Tehiya political party, reinforced women's national obligation in her celebrated proclamation that a woman is "a wife and a mother in Israel, and therefore it is her nature to be a soldier, the wife of a soldier, a sister of a soldier, a grandmother of a soldier. This is her reserve duty. She is continually in military service."⁵⁴)

In addition, the military is a powerful mechanism for the homogenization of Israeli society, with its many immigrants, through "imposing newly invented

51. Ruth Hiler & Sergei Sandler, "Female Resistance in Israel," retrieved from New Profile's website on 7 September 2005 from <http://www.newprofile.org/showdata.asp?pid=421>

52. Rela Mazali "And what about the girls? What a culture of war genders out of view," retrieved from New Profile's website on 7 September 2005 from <http://www.newprofile.org/showdata.asp?pid=254>

53. Esta Tina Ottman (2004), "Fractured Fences—On Post-Zionism and Diversity" in *Ritsumeikan Annual Review of International Studies* Vol. 3: 196.

54. Hazleton (1977:63) cited by Simona Sharoni (1994) "Homefront as Battlefield: Gender, Military Occupation and Violence Against Women" in Tamar Meyer (Ed.) *Women and the Israeli Occupation: The Politics of Change*. London: Routledge.

identities on existing ideologies, symbols and identity codes".⁵⁵

The military is also a highly patriarchal human resource—serving as the training ground for the (mostly male) elite, especially in the political and business spheres. Male bonds forged in an army unit may last a lifetime. Those outside these margins—ethnic minorities who do not serve, women who do not serve meaningfully, older immigrants, those with disabilities—are all excluded from this culture. It is, as Israeli social anthropologist Eyal Ben Ari remarks, the major *rite de passage* which all (mostly) Jewish Israeli males must undergo, upgrading them from civilian youth to endurance-trained soldiers who pass through the “ultimate test of manhood” to become adult civilians once again.⁵⁶

The growing Courage to Refuse movement⁵⁷ has highlighted the shaping,

55. Nira Yuval-Davis (2003) “Some Thoughts on Post-Zionism and the Construction of the Zionist Project” in Ephraim Nimni (Ed.) *The Challenge of Post-Zionism — Alternatives to Israeli Fundamentalist Politics*, London and New York, Zed Books.

56. Eyal Ben Ari (2005) “Military Service and Male Ideals in Israel: The Case of the Lebanon War (1982) and the Al-Aqsa Intifada (2000-2005)” in *War, Experience and Narrative: The Importance of the Foreign Researcher's Perspective—What Does the Case of Israel Teach Us?* Tokyo: National Museum of Japanese International Research Meeting.

57. *Courage to Refuse* was founded following the publication of The Combatants Letter in 2002, by a group of 50 combat officers and soldiers. The initiators of the letter, Captain David Zonshein and Lieutenant Yaniv Itzkovits, officers in an elite unit, have served for four years in compulsory service, and another eight years as reserve soldiers, including long periods of active combat both in Lebanon and in the occupied territories.

They wrote:

“We, reserve combat officers and soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces, who were raised upon the principles of Zionism, self-sacrifice and giving to the people of Israel and to the State of Israel, who have always served in the front lines, and who were the first to carry out any mission in order to protect the State of Israel and strengthen it.

We, combat officers and soldiers who have served the State of Israel for long weeks every year, in spite of the dear cost to our personal lives, have been on reserve duty in the Occupied Territories, and were issued commands and directives that had nothing to do with the security of our country, and that had the sole purpose of perpetuating our control over the Palestinian people.

We, whose eyes have seen the bloody toll this Occupation exacts from both sides,

We, who sensed how the commands issued to us in the Occupied Territories destroy all the values that we were raised upon,

We, who understand now that the price of Occupation is the loss of IDF's human character and the corruption of the entire Israeli society,

We, who know that the Territories are not a part of Israel, and that all settlements are bound to be evacuated,

We hereby declare that we shall not continue to fight this War of the Settlements.

We shall not continue to fight beyond the 1967 borders in order to dominate, expel, starve and humiliate an entire people.

We hereby declare that we shall continue serving the Israel Defense Force in any mission that serves Israel's defense.

The missions of occupation and oppression do not serve this purpose – and we shall take no part in them.”

masculinized role of the army which imprints itself on Israeli society. Refusenik soldier Private David Chacham-Herson describes how the army “defines” Israeli society⁵⁸

It blurs our differences and consolidates them into a singularity, a sameness. Similarly, it erases our myriad memories and formulates a single recollection. Your entry card into Israeli society comes through the army. Russians and Ethiopians become Israelis through the army.

... The army reflects society. Most of the non-elite units are made of up of Mizrahi Jews ... Meanwhile, the Ashkenasi Jews reap the benefits of maintaining their elite status. ...

Although “refusing for Israel” is primarily celebrated as a male phenomenon, due to the nature of the army itself, New Profile – “a movement for the Civil-isation of Israel”—claims to be a group of feminist women and men” who:

... 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. While taught to believe that the country is faced by threats beyond its control, we now realize that the words “national security” have often masked calculated decisions to choose military action for the achievement of political goals.⁵⁹

Draft resistance of Israeli women constitutes a unique phenomenon in the resistance movement. Israeli law permits women to avoid conscription for reasons of religious lifestyle (such as being ultraorthodox) but unlike male draft resisters, women cannot clearly refuse on accepted grounds of conscientious objection. As the total numbers of draft resisters grows, the numbers of young women requesting exemption from military service on grounds of conscience also continue to rise. Sometimes other strategies are chosen, such as early marriage.

Female draftees are generally given inferior clerical jobs or educational roles

58. 58 Ronit Chacham (2003), *Breaking Ranks—Refusing to Serve in the West Bank and Gaza Strip*. New York, Otherpress: 148-9.

59. New Profile’s charter, retrieved on 12 September 2004 from <http://www.newprofile.org/showdata.asp?id=1&language=en>

within the Israeli military. Male resisters, who have been often perceived as being candidates for front line action, are penalized for opposing military service by imprisonment. Women, however, being perceived as less essential, are released quietly from service by a military committee if they give the “right reasons”. Thus their resistance is not highlighted and is largely unknown. Frequently involved in personal commitment to the refusenik movement, these young women locate themselves yet again in the role of supporters where all attention is directed to imprisoned male resisters. As a result, the significance and effect of their own resistance is constantly marginalized.

One of New Profile’s key cases in recent years was that of conscientious objector Laura Milo, who challenged women’s right to legal conscientious objection through the Supreme Court. The following letter was written by her on the eve of her second term of imprisonment:

I’m going to jail today. If the authorities don’t get wise at the last moment, I’m going to languish in jail for an undefined period, until the army decides that I have “paid my debt to society”.

I’m going to jail today, and therefore will have to stop doing social and educational work, I’ll be going in to a totally depressing environment instead of being an involved person.

Some of my partners in this country have lost their moral compass, and I refuse to come to terms with that. Injustice has been done here, not only to me but also to citizens who have honestly declared what their conscience tells them. Injustice is being done to all those who refuse to shirk responsibility and become mere cogs in a system that destroys us as a society and as individuals. Those who have gone before me are already paying the price for insisting on making their contribution according to their conscience and not against it. This isn’t a case of civil disobedience; rather we are following our consciences. This is my one and only conscience, which tells me what is right and wrong; I don’t have another.

... Doesn’t the state understand that it harms itself with this base behaviour? For the great ideals of a democratic society should be to encourage active and critical citizens. The IDF and the Supreme Court have managed to turn the fact that we are political people into a curse. This shouldn’t be my country’s way.

I’m not a destructive virus, and I won’t allow anyone to turn me into one. I am a young idealistic woman who struggles for her obligation and right to take an active part in shaping a just society - an Israeli society that pursues justices and places people in a central place.

I believe that every person has a sense of justice, which is pure and beautiful, and they only need to be reminded to use it. I believe in people, and not even the IDF and the Supreme Court can take that away from me.⁶⁰

The letter from Laura Milo was printed in *Ha'aretz* on August 23, 2004. According to New Profile, the same day the army sent her to Prison 400 for the second time, for another 14 days. Finally she was exempted from military service on “mental” grounds. Many other such cases are collected on the group's website.

Gender constructs are relatively rigid in Israel. The centrality of the IDF in Israel makes for a hierarchical society where Jewish men have a higher value and easier access to resources than other groups, permitting them a larger share of power. Thus, many sectors of the population are marginalized, such as the Palestinians, the Ethiopians, foreign “guest” workers, gays, the differently-abled, in addition to the female population. This familiar gender-focused bias is also discernable within the resistance movement.

Currently, New Profile's efforts are channeled into changing public opinion about militarized gender roles and the dominant role of the military in Israeli society as well as focusing on how these roles continue into civilian life, emphasizing learning how to generate and maintain an equal civil society.

A further prominent case worth mentioning here is that of Tali Fahima, not a conscientious objector, but nevertheless a highly notable political objector, whose fate hit international media headlines and has mirrored that of the COs. Tali Fahima carried out aid activities with Fatah members (the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades) in the Jenin refugee camp. After Israel's assassination attempt against the organisation's leader, Zachariah Zbeidi (a former peace activist), Fahima publicly declared in the past her willingness to act as his ‘human shield’. She visited the Jenin refugee camp several times and from May 2004 began to establish an enrichment programme (library and computer room) for the children of the camp.⁶¹

Fahima was detained on 8 August 2004 and has since been held in prison allegedly under torture and in isolation. Following two months of interrogation by the General Security Services (GSS) and after approximately three months of administrative detention, charges were filed against her.

Her trial was held from 17-19 July and 18-19 September 2005. The High

60. Retrieved on 12 September 2004 from <http://www.newprofile.org/showdata.asp?pid=610>

61. Retrieved on 12 September 2004 from the Free Tali Fatima website, <http://www.freetalifahima.org/eng.php?lang=en>

Court ruled that she was to be detained until the trial conclusion. At the time of writing, she remains still in prison for the foreseeable future, although a recent judgment pronounced her no longer “an enemy of the state,” which could lead to significantly improved conditions for her.

Writing about Tali Fahima's case, Women's Coalition for Just Peace activist Lin Chalozin Dovrat asks, “Why should we be afraid of Tali Fahima?” and charts her extraordinary background and transformation, from disadvantaged Mizrahi background to conscientization and empowerment:

Tali Fahima, a Mizrahi Israeli woman that grew up in a south immigration town Kiryat Gat (formerly the Palestinian villages of Faluja, Iraq El-Manshiyya) voted for the Likkud party in the last elections in Israel. During the last violent outburst between Israelis and Palestinians, Tali acknowledged that in order to fully understand the conflict and to comprehend the other's side opinions she should better get acquainted with Palestinians. After reading about his positions in the Israeli press, she contacted Zakariya Zbeidi, the commander of the El Aqsa regiments in Jenin, and soon after started a humanitarian project for the children of the refugee camp. Now she is detained for the second time, this time on the false allegations that she was involved in terrorist action. Tali has refused in the past weeks to be recruited by the Shabak, AKA General Security Service, as their informer. The last detention period included a full week of harsh interrogations that ended upon her release by an Israeli court...

There are many reasons to be afraid of Tali Fahima. Truly, there are.

First, if a good girl of Kiryat Gat and a Likud voter thinks that the occupation is a catastrophe, who knows, maybe more people will awake from the coma and find out we are all being screwed? What if tomorrow some more Tali Fahimas will get up and start thinking independently? Women? Mizrahi? Disenfranchised? Should we shoot live ammunition at their legs that will accidentally reach their heads? It is not Palestine here, and above all it's really impractical. ... How will the state be run then?⁶²

62. Published in Hebrew in www.walla.co.il, an Israeli portal, <http://news.walla.co.il/?w=/584286>, and reprinted on the Free Tali Fahima website, <http://www.freetalifahima.org/lin2.php?lang=en>

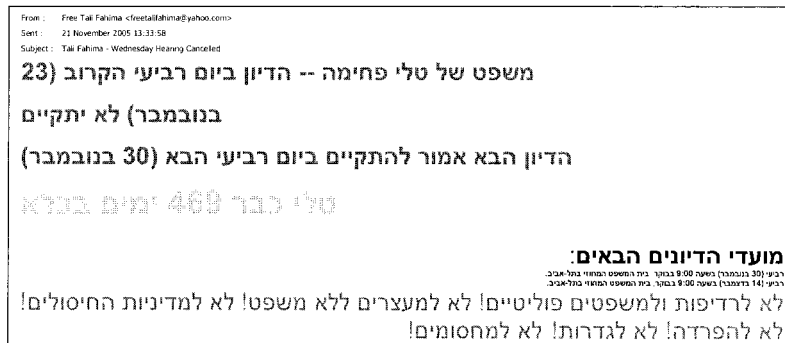


Fig. 1: from the Free Tali Fahima campaign. The Hebrew reads (my translation): The case of Tali Fahima: the hearing on the coming Wednesday (23 November) will not occur. The next hearing is said to be on the following Wednesday (30 November). Tali is already 469 days in gaol. Times of the next hearings: Wed. (30 November) at 9 a.m., District Court, Tel Aviv. Wed. (14 December) at 9 a.m., District Court, Tel Aviv.

No to victimisation and political sentences! No to illegal arrests! No to state liquidations! No to segregation! No to fences! No to checkpoints!

Conclusions

I have explored in this paper the search for definition and belonging (or unbelonging) for Palestinian and Israeli women located in Palestine, Israel and their diasporas, and whether it is indeed appropriate for feminists to express desire for belonging to a national collectivity, even if it points to national liberation rather than institutionalised nationalism. At some point, both the inherent structural violence of nationalism and nation-building, and the violence that may be entailed in national liberation all bear intimate relation to violence against women and minorities through the deep connection of militarism and sexism. Structural violence may be embedded within the civil structures of a state—here specifically the boundaries of marriage and divorce, the Law of Return, the limits of political representation—or made explicit through conscription and military occupation, and blurred at the interface of civil and military, where a society is continually in a state of reserve military service, and where women are always interconnected with male soldiers.

Layered among the traditional coverage of the Israel-Palestinian conflict is the gendered question of history and identity: yet it resurfaces continually, whether one is located within the conflict, or at a reflective remove, within the diaspora. The issues of hegemony and belonging shape both the collective and individual belongings of Israel and Palestinian women. It is only rendering visible of these issues, calling assumptions into question, through identifying the margins, the struggles, the voices and the perspectives, that will cast light on the “50 percent” of the conflict that remains marginalized and unaddressed, and suggest alternative possibilities and envisionings of what peace might look like if it were not confined to the well-worn parameters of current policy-makers. These approaches provide “flesh and bone, human and quotidian dimensions that enable us to catch a glimpse of what human life might be like in a preferred future.”⁶³ As Sharoni concludes,

In addition to creating space for new interpretations of peace and security, Palestinian and Israeli-Jewish women’s struggles for gender equality and for a just resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict challenge the narrow and conventional definition of “women’s issues.” They demonstrate that all issues, including those of local and international politics, are women’s issues, and that women’s issues have always been political.⁶⁴

It is by paying attention to the connections expressed by women activists, such as the connection between the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its gendered aspect, and the pathological relationship between violence, militarism and sexism, that an alternative perspective can be engaged to grapple with a seemingly insoluble issue for which the male military and political establishment has, to date, provided no answer, except that of more militarism (or more violence) in the name of “security” or “liberation”.

Acknowledgements

Parts of this paper were originally given in the form of a shorter presentation for SIETAR Kansai in 2004, and my thanks to Lisa Rogers who remains my inspiration for both.

63. Betty Reardon (1996) *Sexism and the War System*. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse Press: 86.

64. Sharoni (op. cit): 152.