

Between the Lines:

Voices of Women
engendering Peace and Democracy



A project initiated
and coordinated by
Arbeitskreis deutscher
Bildungsstätten

AdB
Arbeitskreis deutscher
Bildungsstätten e.V.

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Voices of women engendering peace and democracy

Edited by Margot Brown and Jenny Zobel

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These pages contain the story of three groups of women locked together in historical suffering and committed to emerging from that deadlock. These are women who became convinced that it is worth struggling to emerge from decades of hostility into a more benign reality.

Are women more able to bridge the nationalist and ethnic gaps than men? The reader can be the judge in reading these pages.

We would like to express our profound appreciation to the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth for providing the financial support that made it possible to bring together three groups of women from disparate regions for intense, protracted dialogue, and to do this in as “neutral” a location as possible. We acknowledge the wisdom as well as the generosity of the Ministry in making this project possible.

We would like to thank all participating women for contributing their personal narrative of the Trialogue thus documenting the power of hope despite a separating political reality.

We thank all women ever involved in the project. We thank our editors and facilitators from Great Britain, Margot Brown and Jenny Zobel, for their sensitive empathy, their careful handling of the different styles and texts presented and for their never ending patience. We thank Ruth Hiller and Ute Iding for their efforts of translating the varying contributions.

Arbeitskreis deutscher Bildungsstaetten (AdB),
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Margot Brown

Editorial

E editing this book together with Jenny Zobel (JZ) has been an extraordinary privilege. It has felt like an immersion into one of the most challenging conflicts of our generation. In reading this book, you will find a collection of the writings of some of the women who participated in and contributed to a vision of peace through dialogue which is truly inspirational.

Throughout this collection there is not only a deeper understanding of how the conflict in Palestine and Israel impacts on those who are living through it but also a rare insight into the complex personalities of the women who met irregularly yet built such strong bonds. Bringing together such diverse cultural, linguistic, religious and political experiences has produced writing which is as intense as it is varied.

Some of the pieces you will read reflect on the women themselves while other texts give different interpretations of the same incident. These show what we already know – that we all ‘see’ things differently – but they also remind us that without compassion and understanding these differences can flare into conflict and worse. Certain incidents are recounted by several women, so strong was the impact of the event on the group. These not only show us both the ‘public’ nature of the event but also the silent, private thoughts of the participants.

Most of the women writing here do not do so in their first language and have had their writing translated, trusting to the skill of the translator and then to the editors to mirror accurately what they wished to say. We hope that we have done so. We have deliberately used a ‘light touch’, changing little and cutting less. Our imperative was to let the voice of the women shine through.

One text speaks of the story of the Bat, which for the writer encapsulated the dilemma of difference. I include it here as a reminder of the challenges before us when we allow the differences between us to outweigh what we share in common.

The Party

Once upon a time, the animals decided that they would live in one group and the birds would live in another group. So, one day, the animals decided to have a party. The Zebra was the watchman. All the animals came to the party to have a happy time.

Then the Bat arrived and said, "Let me into the party, for I am an animal."

But the Zebra said, "No! We are animals because we don't have wings; you are a bird because you have wings."

So the bat left without going to the party.

The next day, the birds decided to have a party. The Vulture was the watchman of the bird party. The Bat heard the party from a long way away and decided he would go.

When he arrived at the party he said, "Let me into the party, for I am a bird."

But the Vulture said, "No! We are birds because we don't have teeth; you are an animal because you have teeth."

So the Bat had to leave without going to the party. The poor Bat was not an animal and not a bird, so he could never go to a party.

I say: tell the children of the world, we don't want to be bats. We want to find our place, to be either an animal or a bird so that we can be happy.

By Abraham Marial Kiol, aged 14, Sudanese, Dinka Bor tribe

Time Line

"Women Engendering Peace and Democracy"

- December 1998 First meeting in Würzburg, Bavaria
- June 1999 Meeting in Jerusalem, En Kerem, Taghba
- June 2000 Meeting in Bremen
- July 2000 First publication
"Between the Lines:
German, Israeli and Palestinian Women in Dialogue"
- September 2000 Start of second Intifada
- Between December 2000 – November 2003
Several meetings of German coordinator with
coordinators and groups in Israel and Palestine
- November 2003 German group meets Israeli group in Nazareth and
Palestinian group Members in Bethlehem and Ramallah
- May 2004 German coordinator in Israel and Palestine
for preparation of fourth meeting
- August 2004 – December 2006
German group member working at the International
Meeting Centre in Bethlehem, linking Palestinian partici-
pants, keeping in touch with Israeli group members
- December 2004 Preparatory meeting of German coordinator
in Israel and Palestine
- April / May 2005 Fourth Meeting of German, Palestinian and Israeli women:
"Between the Lines, Between the Times.
Women as Activists against Discrimination,
Racism and Violence"
- February 2007 Preparatory meeting of German coordinator
in Israel and Palestine
- March 2007 Last meeting of the three groups in Berlin
"Between the Lines, Between the Times"
Writing workshop and preparation
of the second publication

Hannelore Chiout

Preface

This publication tries to sum up almost 10 years of an intense and passionate process of finding a common language between women from Israel, Palestine, and Germany.

We came together to learn from and strengthen each other in our common endeavour of protecting women's rights in our societies, strengthening mutual respect for each other, and fostering democratic values.

The original aims of the project were defined as follows:

- To explore 'social spaces' and processes in trans-cultural groups
- To clarify gender and national identities
- To strengthen the ability to create dialogue between cultures and countries
- To foster participation in political processes that are specific to women
- To demanding and establish a network of women from Israel, Palestine and Germany who are working to secure women's and human rights.

This enterprise launched an ongoing and often painful process of search for rapprochement with each other which we didn't expect really with regard to our written agenda. Each point of the agenda was abstract and general at the one hand, ambitious and challenging at the other. The women from three national groups – actually four, since the Israeli-Palestinians play a role for their own – shared a commitment to these aims, which was certainly not a given. The issue of war and peace is a question of survival for the Israeli and Palestinian women.

For German women in the post-war generations, it is an issue that greatly impacts political attitudes and calls for responsible participation.

But it is a long way between an abstract demand for peace and a willingness to recognize each other. It is also a long way from the abstract declaration of fundamental democratic values to democratic action and democratically negotiated processes. The questions of basic rights, human dignity, and equal rights for men and women were thus at the core of the project at any stage.

Within ten years we learned to share our experiences openly, with all the difficulties and risks. We created a dialogue and listened to each other – to the differences and the contradictory narratives, trying to experience and understand each other’s stories and histories. But we also have been separated many times. During the years of the Intifada we were linked only virtually by electronic media, with rare opportunities to meet. We were not standing between the lines, but beyond the borders.

It has been the German part in these difficult years to listen to the Israeli voices on the one hand, to the Palestinian voices on the other; to combine the threads and bring them together whenever it was possible; to play the part of messengers whenever it was needed. Most of the women insisted on a triad when bridges were forbidden.

After ten years our experiences have multiplied. Although we are still in the process of exchange and experimenting, we nevertheless are standing on solid ground now. We had and will have our conflicts and critical moments, but we created that ‘social space’ we demanded in our first agenda. We share a space in which it became possible to live diversity without being separated. We feel encouraged to step up our efforts in our respective regions of the world.

Some of the women left us, others joined. Due to the dramatic changes in the Palestinian Autonomies the turnover in the Palestinian group was essential. At the same time, the core of the “triad” – Palestinians, Israeli and Germans – never gave up, continued to meet and initiated activities – separately and together – to help understand our roles as women and to achieve significant change in creating a more feminine world of justice, peace, and democracy.

Hannelore Chiout

Beyond certainty: expedition into unknown worlds

A German retrospective



Hannelore Chiout

Born in Dresden in 1944. 1975-2007 she managed the International Work of the Arbeitskreis deutscher Bildungsstätten (AdB). She developed long-term partnerships and projects with Eastern Europe, Mongolia, Spain, Israel (since 1981) and Palestine, focusing on the development of democracy. She founded, coordinated and was first chairwoman of the European Educational Network DARE – Democracy and Human Rights Education in Europe. She was the originator of the concept and then, the coordinator, of the German-Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue “Women Engendering Peace and Democracy.”

I am German. I am part of the German group yet I am part of the Palestinian women and part of the Israeli women. I am in between, within and outside.

When did I seriously begin pursuing the idea of starting this dialogue for the first time? Was it at the very moment 25 years ago when the Lebanon war broke out, when I tried to understand what the war motto “Shalom HaGalil / Peace for Galilee” could have to do with me and when some Israeli women included me in THEIR vision of peace in Galilee? Whenever I thought before about peace in Galilee, I had the description of Lion Feuchtwanger in my mind, the blooming spring meadows of the Galil, into which the old Josephus Flavius withdrew to die.¹

My view of Israel was a very German, generation-specific view. I belong to the so-called second generation, the generation following the Perpetrators. All of my conscious political life involved the German past and German guilt. Our fathers had murdered, our mothers remained silent. Our inner commitment was “Never again!” Responsibility meant intervention. Intervention meant having our eyes open to what was the wrong, in order not to close our eyes in the face of the wrong once again. In short, a Jewish human is a victim, a German a (potential) perpetrator.

That day, in the beginning of June 1982, a group of Israeli pedagogic experts came to Berlin. I had prepared

¹ Lion Feuchtwanger: *Josephus-Trilogie*. Frankfurt a.M. 1982: The German-Jewish author wrote a famous novel on the life of Josephus Flavius, the Jewish historian of Roman times who witnessed and described the destruction of the temple.

a concept paper for a programme. It was the first meeting with Israelis in Germany for which I had been responsible. There were two women in this group who broke through my preconceived notions. They requested that I look at Israel more clearly and not see Eretz Israel solely as the miracle of rebirth of the Jewish nation after 2000 years of Diaspora, but also to recognize the price for it. On the same day, the war with Lebanon began with the motto "Peace for Galilee".

These two women were asking me to recognize that there is a Palestinian minority in Israel with restricted rights. And what did I think were the consequences of the war of 1967? I was aware of the conquest but did not think of occupying forces. Occupation in a way meant fair compensation for a war of aggression. I remember a trip to Hebron in 1981 during my first visit to Israel. In those days it was still possible to make

Razia Meron:

It was the first time we heard the story of the refugees and the Palestinian claim to the land. For me it was like dismantling a bomb.

such excursions. Even more than the old city of Jerusalem, to me Hebron was the first, fascinating meeting with the orient: cardamom coffee, tea with nana, blue glass and colourful ceramics, traditional robes and a different pace of life. All the clichés were alive here. No, I didn't see a people under occupying forces; that wasn't within my field of vision.

The shock triggered by another image on this first trip haunted me all the more deeply. On the way to Jericho, coming directly from Massada, the symbol of Jewish resistance against a superior enemy, I saw the huge Palestinian refugee camp of 1948 in the desert landscape. Never again have I been more affected by the shock of this sight than that first time.

It took 16 years of annual German-Israeli programmes before I tried to bring the antagonistic ends of these three elements together. I am a careful though persistent woman. It was 16 years of partnership with Israel with impressive, moving, exciting, professional meetings. It was also 16 years of a friendship for life, rediscovered again and again with the two Israeli women of our first programme. There were other, comparable personal-political developments, enhanced by parallel surges of insight, but the circumstances were so very different: My commitment at the desk versus their action. I wondered what it did to my friend to stand at a traffic junction at 1 o'clock every Friday as a "Woman in Black"² and to expose herself to insults and publicly. I tried to understand what it means to be constantly in the minority. Inconvenient insights are not welcome. The bearer of bad news is hated. What kind of strength does it take not to give up and to continue to insist patiently on your own truth,

2 Right after the beginning of the Lebanon war the Israeli peace movement started to organize actions against war and occupation. An outstanding role had the feminist part of the peace movement. Among them the "Women in Black" gave resistance a face by calling in mind every week the price of occupation.

to love your country and to suffer because it has betrayed its vision of a new, just society? I owed it to my friends to look for a joint way to participate in their struggles, to show my colours, to create room for them.

In those days, I did not have Palestinian friends, not until the beginning of the “Dialogue” in December 1998.

Beginnings

From 1981, during my years of cooperation and exchanges with Israel, the political conflict with the Palestinians gained increasing central significance. I developed a critical view of the changes in Israel and an even more critical view of the circumstances in the occupied territories. But my view was filtered. It was the professional ‘project and programme view’: critical, open, with inner participation, always on the side of my Israeli peace friends, but also always with the feeling of inadequacy, of being at too great a distance in a safe, outside position. Two dates in the 1990s turned my critical standpoint into something more.

In 1992, I made the first attempt to approach the Palestinian side in a serious and direct manner, without any intermediaries. I still needed the framework of a bigger international meeting and at the same time, the limited framework of a women’s meeting, which I haven’t abandoned since then and with good reason.

That year, I arranged a seminar in Berlin with the title “No place – really nowhere?” with women from the so-called transformation societies, from Russia and the Baltic, from the former East and West Germany, from Spain, whose young democracy was decisively co-created by the women in a passionate awakening. It also included female Palestinians and Jews from Israel meeting Palestinians from the ‘territories’. What a neutral word for suppression and occupying forces!

For one of the Palestinian participants, it was the first long, challenging meeting with the ‘Jewish cousins’. At that time she, as a social psychologist, had examined the long-term effects of violence and traumas, during the first Intifada, on young Palestinian people and had touched on a taboo: she also wrote about violence in Palestinian families, which had increased with the Intifada.

For the other participant from the West Bank, the meeting was a familiar situation, because she had represented peace groups with Israeli women who were willing to join her campaign on numerous lecture trips in Europe, particularly in Germany. She described the situation under siege unsparingly. She was the Palestinian voice in Germany, a charismatic “Mother Earth“, who did not have any inhibitions about joint appearances with Israelis.

This intense meeting of women from all parts of Europe and the Middle East showed that women had only limited benefits from the new liberties. Democratic institutions alone are not enough to create democratic cir-

cumstances. Equal rights for women as a constitutional standard are only insufficiently reflected in the social reality. Women have to rely on themselves if they want to emancipate themselves from suppressive and violent conditions.

However, the women at this international conference displayed enormous strength and endurance. These women had a sense of responsibility and righteousness. They had empathy and social imagination. They respected each other. They expected attention and gave attention. The Israeli and Palestinian women risked their safety, their lives in the protection of the majority society, for bridges between and peace among their peoples. They demanded from all of us that we support them in this.

In 1994, at a UNESCO conference, I learned about a unique project which was awarded the alternative Nobel prize. During the first Intifada (1987 – 1991) the Israeli Arna Mer-Khamis had organized lessons for hundreds of children from refugee camps in a private initiative in Jenin, at a time when all education was prohibited under the occupation and the Palestinian schools were closed. I felt I had to get to know this project. During my next visit to Israel I went to Jenin and Gaza. It was the time after Oslo. Peace appeared to be within reach but it still needed to be organized. The Palestinian fighters of minor age should return to school, which they had already out-grown. Education was the key to a new Palestinian society, but a suitable pedagogic concept which was fit for education and peace had to be created.

The young people in this refugee camp in Jenin learned to trust themselves and one another – without violence. They digested their experiences of violence by artistic means, on the stage of the “Theatre of the Stones”. The concept was not aimed at dialogue, but intended to focus on the effects on children’s souls of violence suffered and perpetrated. I see Arna Mer-Khamis before me, an old woman marked by her disease, with an incredibly powerful aura: Strict, official and demanding towards the foreign woman, gentle and loving with the children and young people clinging to her.

What message did I take from these two experiences, from the meeting in Berlin and the visit in Jenin? My knowledge of the conflict cannot remain abstract. Talking is allowed and necessary, but not talking without consequences. I had to take detailed action which included myself. This could only mean that I organize women within the framework of my personal and professional possibilities. Only with women could I imagine reaching limits and going beyond limits. Only with women could I imagine leaving the stage of self-representation, not being stuck in my own state, but making one step forwards without being able to predict the result. With women I hoped to escape the national trap. These ideas contained much German wishful thinking: Female solidarity

is stronger than all patriarchal dominance, than national boundaries, than injuries and trauma. Of course, this could not work – or at least only to a certain extent.

The Trialogue: First Meeting

Politics at high and low levels were favourable for this adventure in the year 1998. The German Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth showed interest in supporting a tri-lateral women's initiative. The official political peace actions in the wake of Oslo had to be proven from the ground up. Dialogue between the enemies was booming. Grassroots initiatives had a chance of becoming visible through their actions. Having emerged from the cooperation of the "Jerusalem Centre for Women" in East Jerusalem and "Bat Shalom" in West Jerusalem, the "Jerusalem Link" had even established itself as an Israeli-Palestinian project with the community-creating power of European money. This "Jerusalem Link" became our first roof.

Edna from Israel gathered around herself a group of Jewish and Palestinian women which reflected the composition of the Israeli society. It included young and older women, all with professional or honorary relations to the women's and peace movement; all in the midst of projects which were supposed to change their society and thus their life. Palestinian feminist activists of the "Jerusalem Centre for Women" came together with young women from Bethlehem and Gaza. On the German side I had asked colleagues who had practical experience of the difficult Jewish-Palestinian situation. They were not only interested in this meeting from a professional point of view, but were demanding democratic conditions with a critical view of their own society.

On Human Rights Day in 1998, fifty years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed, we met for the first time. Without knowing it, we were starting off on a long journey together, and on a voyage of self-discovery. I had ambivalent feelings which caught up with me in the following years again and again. I was so happy that this meeting had come into being at all. It was a gift for me to start this journey with people who shared the agreement to build bridges, and to get to know them in a way which had not been possible for me before. I was able to share their thoughts, feelings, hopes and disappointments.

The process which started in Würzburg in 1998, was in itself an action with ups and downs, with painful moments separating us and happy moments bringing us together.

Our last meeting in March 2007 in Berlin was like a family gathering to me: we live far apart, without any connection in our day-to-day routine, but our unity becomes alive whenever we meet. JZ, our facilita-

tor from England spoke of the trust which we had to create, but Rawia responded energetically: "But trust is there!" Is it really?

I remember a cold day in December of 1998 in a wintry Würzburg deeply covered with snow and lit up with pre-Christmas lights. The German women waited for their Palestinian and Israeli partners in the academy on top of the mountain with the uninviting name of "Leutfresergasse" or "Maneater Street" and were anxious that their guests might not be able to climb the mountain due to the black ice. And then they were all there, having travelled together from Gaza, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Haifa, Tel Aviv, Nazareth, Kibbuz HaOgen. At that time it was still possible for them to travel together, but not without complications. Rima from Gaza had to go through incriminating obstacles before she was able to pass all border checkpoints.

We often revived memories of this first seminar. We wrote about it and reflected our inner transformations. I still remember small scenes:

Ruti, telling of her key political experience in her American homeland: Rosa Parkes, African-American, asserting her right to a place on a "whites only" bus. This act of civil opposition gave her a role model.

The young Palestinian painting a big black hand in the intimacy of the small group, under which she bends down. Doing so, she not only

expressed her fear of the Israeli occupying forces, but also her feelings of being exposed to the numerous constraints and limitations of her own society. Her openness in talking about it was impressive.

Rawia Loucia Shammas:

My dialogue should be primarily regarding the occupation, and not on how to express my feelings of inequality and alienation within the land where I live.

Tinka, who differentiated herself from the 'West Germans' and placed her own East German story beside the all too obvious stories of the old Federal Republic.

Adina, talking about her Zionism in a tentative and also distinct manner, and Gili, who did not want to separate her feminist conception of herself from the Zionist history of her family. Rima, the beautiful young Rima, who for the first time in her life found herself with female Jews in the same room, here in wintry Germany.

I will never forget Rawia and Fidaa in those days, who did not feel accepted as Israeli Palestinians and felt lost, falling between all three stools. "I have a double identity and no identity!" said Rawia, summing up this inner conflict.

At this moment of time our meeting was an experiment, borne up by the hope that one week of intensive living together was the first step towards each other. The written formulation of the target of a 'network' of peace activists from Israel, Palestine and Germany, seemed quite daring. A community of interests beyond the staging of that week was more than doubtful.

“It is not that we are special – it is the dynamic”

Adina 2003

However, very soon it became obvious that the women who had gathered here seriously intended to make a change. There was no definition for the details of this change, but the desire to get over the deep-rooted prejudices and to do it in a different way, seemed to be the decisive motivation to meet with openness, despite all the profound and painful conflicts, and finally allow closeness. The unreserved but not disrespectful openness had dialectic qualities: it caused a familiar closeness, which was not workable yet and caused injuries, which more than once brought this first meeting to the edge of failure. It was perceptible that the political controversies were the expression of personal experience. But the form of the debate differed significantly from the inner logic of the usual conferences with prepared papers, statements, balanced communiqués at the end. There were no winners and no losers.

Or were there? After that week, didn't Fidaa and Rawia find themselves not in the expected, nationally defined sisterhood, but again confronted with the task of inventing a new identity? In this regard they felt close to the Germans. Which identity was required here? The feminist one seemed to be of lesser priority in the face of the dominance of national values. Where did WE belong? At the beginning, the female perspective didn't seem to offer an escape from the dilemma, even in this group.

At this point, I remember our first presenter Cornelia. She suffered the frustrations of our difficult process of communication, but at the same time enabled understanding again with her methodical guidelines. We examined the three central steps – development of democracy, ways leading out of escalation of violence, proposing solutions from the perspective of women – systematically on three levels; in plenary, in small working groups and in groups of two, three, four. Relationships of different kinds developed on every level. On every level, the explosive questions were handled differently. We felt close and several times catapulted ourselves with words into 'enemy territory'. Separate night sessions in national groups followed. And still the isolation was not total. Conversations took place after the verbal attacks, as a result of the long discussions in the intimacy of tiny groups.

After this first week there was an undeniable familiarity, a first trust began to grow, not only in the others, but also in oneself and one's own ability to overcome inner reservations and to contribute to change. In short, we actually had the wish to continue what we had started, to meet again, to illuminate the questions which were moving us from different perspectives, to listen to one another and to learn from one another, to move something, to move oneself.

What happened to this impulse?

On our way

We were making a journey together. I don't know whether nine years ago, we were all aware that we were at the beginning of a process with uncertain outcome. Not all were willing to continue this journey. Some 'exited' after some years. Others joined us. Some joined us for a short distance.

To me this joint journey was a challenge, again and again confronting me with my limits. At no point in time did I feel like a mediator in this triangle. As a coordinator who gave this Dialogue new impulses again and again, it was my intention neither to remain in the past nor in the present in this specific constellation of three and its particular closeness which was obvious for historical and political reasons. My wish was to build a 'common future' house in which every woman has a room of her own.

All of them were familiar with this famous demand of Virginia Woolf, but before they could achieve their own rooms in the same house, from the very beginning every woman needed to find her own voice. Nothing more simple than one voice for everyone in a group of women, we thought. It is true that they came from different cultural worlds, but shared the same basic feminist understanding. It became clear that this basic feminist understanding was a small but not always workable common ground, if we were talking about respect and observance of the individual voices. Abstract agreement was one thing. In reality, however, one voice could cause injuries. One voice could suddenly be cut off; words were not able to build bridges. On the contrary, the trenches often appeared to be impassible. We wanted to understand one another, but discovered that strangeness separated, small and large, in changing constellations: culturally, nationally, politically, generation-specifically. We had to find out when the voice was personal or when it expressed a collective official version.

We only had a chance of making progress together if we left the stage of the big words and actually listened to our 'voices', often going against the national citizenships. But this was already part of the process we had agreed to start.

We had to face the reaction of Palestinian women when a Jewish woman defined herself as Zionist and gave reasons why she holds to her Zionist convictions. Is this a reason why she is not capable of peace? Is she therefore in favour of suppression with violence?

We had to face the reaction of Jewish women when one of the Palestinian wanted to fight for Jerusalem "until the last drop of blood". Does this mean she will also fight against these Jewish women, with violence if necessary?

We, the German women, had difficulties to understand the national passions. We got the feeling that the problems of our country were of secondary importance in the face of the existentially threatening dimensions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. At the very least the German women were forced to examine their national identity, and this two-fold. We had to clarify to what extent we have been influenced by being a member of the nation of ‘perpetrators’. We had to find out what turned a Western German into what she is and what an Eastern German, what separates and what joins them. Are we connected by the same historical mortgage of the guilt of our parents and grandparents?

In order to be able to leave the stage of big words, however, the only way was to allow these exact words their own space. For the Palestinians, in any case, this stage was important. It was of existential meaning to them to place their mission at the centre. The political demands against the occupying forces, for an independent state, for the right of the Palestinian refugees to return, had an almost ritual meaning. First, the fronts needed a clear definition. “To speak and to blame” was what one of the women called this ritual. Israeli peace activists were also citizens of Israel. In these moments they were allocated to the collective of their nation. They were attacked as representatives of the settlement

Vered Shomron-Fabian:

What is it if not reconciliation, historical reconciliation for me? With myself, with different conflicting parts within me, parts that are symbolized by Germany, Berlin, Israel, Palestine, Jews (Muslims, Christians), women (men).

policy and military attacks, for discrimination and humiliation, for a day-to-day routine full of obstacles and limitations.

At these moments, we, as Germans, also felt that we were on the ‘outside’, not being seen but at the

same time being requested to take a stand. It was not really a question of standing up for one side or the other, Palestine on one side, Israel on the other. In this constellation of peace activists from both nations, there weren’t even deep-rooted diverging concepts of the concrete steps necessary to live side by side in peace. But it was *their* conflict. The roles were clear: aggressor and victim. The asymmetry of the relationships did not disappear by supporting political positions. Nor was it revoked by actions: demonstrations, human chains, appeals, the observation and publication of violations of human rights at the checkpoints, visits of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons, calls in Israel to refuse military service.

The Germans did not participate in any of these actions in Israel and in the occupied territories. There was no room between the fronts for third parties in these situations. This regularly caused a feeling of insufficiency and frustration in us Germans. Supporting letters were insufficient instruments, we felt.

Despite all that, a change was perceptible between our meetings. There was not only an atmospheric change. Each of the five meetings was combined with actual causes for new debates. They took place with immense passion, but – gradually – lost their threatening dimension. None of us has forgotten the separating passion of the conflicts in the first seminar in Würzburg. The words “I am dancing with the enemy” made an impression on all of us and came up in every following meeting. However, the labels ‘perpetrator’ and ‘victim’ lost their restricting and destroying force. The term ‘terrorist’ had its place at the first meeting, but not later on.

The separations were not permanent either. They seemed to be necessary safety valves to escape common prejudices and to be able to develop new thoughts and feelings. On a hidden level, our relationship with one another changed with every meeting. The more personal and unmasked we perceived each other; the lesser was the danger of plunging into a debate. We felt vulnerable but became nonetheless confident to overcome the destructive potential of our conflicts.

We were not “special”, as Adina had formulated it in Nazareth in 2003. We were Germans, Palestinians and Israelis who wanted to change their world. We wanted something simple: a world without discrimination, with equal rights and equal chances, without violence and suppression. No less than Utopia, but one with a clear base in reality. Even before the famous UN Resolution 1325 of 2000, we were building bridges and creating and anchoring connections from the bottom up.

Whenever we got bogged down, we took out our three fundamental principles: “Women Engendering Peace and Democracy“. What does democratic change mean in our society? What does it mean to women? Do we stand for one another? Can women’s solidarity stand above cultural, religious, national and class differences? What do we expect from one another concerning personal and political support? Does it really make a decisive difference for our own action if we know from one another where we stand? Can we evade the trap of militarised thoughts, the friend-enemy pattern?

An unfinished business?

If I write ‘we’, then this word alone represents the result of an intended, but not foreseeable common history. The five meetings between 1998 and 2007 were the intersections.

There were three intensive meetings before the Temple Mount Intifada, two more in 2005 and 2007.

We have to come to terms where we are standing now, after nine years, one Intifada and one war older. We are richer with nine children. We passed private dramas. We look back at professional changes and professional careers. Did the political commitment help “to make a

change”? There were serious controversies about the form of the political commitment, particularly among the Israeli women.

With every meeting I saw a growing basic trust in the necessity of the personal and political meaning of this Trialogue. Whenever the future of the project seemed without perspective, the women demanded that we complete our “unfinished business”. This is why we did not separate. We did not give up after the first experiences in Würzburg. Together we faced the trauma of the Holocaust in Lohamei HaGhetaot, the museum of the ghetto fighters, and the Palestinian expulsion history in abandoned Arabic villages, before the Intifada. We picked up this expulsion history in Bremen and for the first time had ‘refugee discussions’. Almost every one of us had her own expulsion history in her family: Palestinians, Israelis and Germans. Unexpectedly, it became a unifying, not separating narrative. The next meeting within the framework of this project was supposed to take place under the heading “refugee stories”.

The Temple Mount Intifada was the end of our plans, but not of our connection. We looked for it even in times when communication between Israeli and Palestinians was officially forbidden. We communicated too rarely, but the connection never broke down. In the Palestinian ‘territories’ the bitterness about the lack of success of many dialogue projects discredited “sweet peace work”, even without the Intifada.

The tightening of the prevailing political conditions including military violence, terror and a visible loss of democratic substance caused a basic decision on the composition of the core groups in our project. It was not possible for our “triangle” to meet in the old constellation after September 2000. The prohibition on communication between Palestinians and Israelis had its effect on our project too. I went to Israel and into the occupied territories several times to ensure communication.

In Germany we considered ourselves well informed, but direct experience showed that our perceptions were completely inadequate. Our Israeli friends became radicalised and simultaneously split themselves up into a politically active group and a group for which conditions were so unbearable that they left the country or retreated into their own private sphere. However, all of them remained in this group.

Our Palestinian friends had drifted apart even more sharply. They were living in Ramallah, in Bethlehem and Gaza. They were not able to leave their homes. Rima, living in Ramallah, has not seen her mother in Gaza for six years. Six years! In 2003 our Palestinian partner insisted on mixing the cards anew under these circumstances and decided to constitute a completely new group. We felt in charge also for the ‘old’ Palestinian members of the trialogue and so the German group organised discussions with them in Ramallah. They definitely wanted to take part in the project in the future and encouraged us to continue. We travelled

from Ramallah to Nazareth with their recommendation and met our Israeli women there. In this meeting we decided against a new composition of members for the project. The negotiations had shown that we had changed in these years and that we as persons in this triangle had a political mission. We had trust in one another despite all setbacks and controversies. We knew well that we would have to start again with a new Palestinian group. We had understood how much time it took to gradually remove mistrust and let trust grow. It is not done with mere talking. We didn't want to go back but forwards, while using our biggest capital, that is, our common history and the trust in one another.

An unfinished business!

From August 2004, Anette, one of the German women worked in the International Centre in Bethlehem for two years. She was our ambassador and became a witness to the living conditions in the occupied Palestine from up close. It was the time when the Wall was being built. It grew in a breathtaking manner. In November 2003 in Jerusalem we stood in front of the concrete panels around the Al-Quds University. In December 2004 I went to Bethlehem and Ramallah to prepare the first meeting of our Trialogue for 5 years. Along with Anette, I arrived in Bethlehem at night and found myself in front of a gigantic gate with military guards, the walls were endlessly high in the dark. In the floodlight they seemed to me like a mousetrap from Hell, at the same time as unreal as a science fiction movie. This was no fiction, however, but stark reality and the demonstration of closure. Palestinians were usually allowed to leave the city only after overcoming many bureaucratic obstacles and then needed a guarantee of being able to return.

On these trips I was able to become familiar with the immediate living conditions of 'our' women. We met at neutral locations and in their families, in religious institutions, in restaurants, at a lecture.

I remember one night in Ramallah, standing on a balcony with my Palestinian friend while the bombs were falling. Her husband was away and it took him hours to return – unharmed. One week before, his eye had been injured in a shooting when he tried to get a wounded young person out of the line of fire.

I remember when, in Rawia's apartment, I met all the Israeli women again for the first time after the outbreak of the Intifada. I remember their helplessness about the military escalation, but also their decisiveness to organize and be part of demonstrations, vigils, public appeals, networking with other groups, combat against military education.

I remember the horror, when 13 people were killed in demonstrations in Nazareth and Um-el-Fahm, for the first time in Israel.

I remember Ruti's impatience; Adina's wise persistence; Edna's courage and mourning, Vered's analytical eyes and her practical action. It was she who did not hesitate to bring Rima to the location of her origin, to Bersheva. However, I also remember how proud our youngest woman, Fidaa, was to present her project "Women against Violence" and Rawia 'her' women's centre Al Fatula. It is a crisis centre, a protective area for women with the political aim of breaking the silence regarding gender-based violence in Palestinian society.

The conflict even reached us at this location. We also discussed incompatible questions of identity here. The Intifada had shifted the priorities. The women's perspective was marginalised while the national perspective dominated every discourse. At that moment the Israeli Palestinians saw themselves thrown back to nationalistic positions. They had to decide to which collective they wanted to belong: the women? The peace

Edna Zaretsky Toledano:

Is it possible that in the future we will be able to offer an alternative vision to our deeply divided societies whose realities include struggles from within and between them, struggles that demand their heavy toll in blood and agony?

women? They were aware of the trap. They decided themselves that the retreat to national positions was the easy way, easier than the attempt to live a multi-dimensional perspective, which included the feminist as well as

the peace position. They called the retreat into nationalism "teenaging in politics", but considered it an unavoidable phase: "You can only escape nationalism once you have the security of national identity!"

We have come a long way together. In 2005 when we continued the Trialogue for the first time and were able to communicate together in three groups, we painted a tree with strong roots and a canopy of close leaves of results, expectations, hopes and plans. In our meeting in March 2007, which was planned to be the termination and stocktaking of the project, we were not really able to imagine the end. This Trialogue will always contain an "unfinished business". The next step will have a different form of organisation, may be, but the links will stay.

We have a common history. Each of us has made great progress in approaching the others. We were not satisfied with the words of complaint and the words of confirmation. We often felt left alone. Nevertheless, a sense of security has been growing between us over these years which surmounts the separation and removes the feeling of lost futility. We see a new generation growing up. It is "pure happiness" to see and feel for myself how the young women in this group have developed their personalities. The women of this trialogue have a free spirit, a clear view and courage, courage to free themselves from conventions and to swim against the tide. We are still united by patience with ourselves and impatience with the world.



Jenny Zobel · Hannelore Chiout · Margot Brown
Adina Aviram · Christiane Reinholz-Asolli · Anette Klasing · Rima Al Ajrami



Jenny Zobel · Rima Al Ajrami
Edna Zaretsky Toledano

Faten Mukarker

An eternal triangle



Faten Mukarker

Born in 1956 in Bethlehem. When I was two months old my parents emigrated with me to Germany. At the age of 20 my parents decided that I should marry in Palestine.

In 1982 I joined a women's movement to fight on two fronts – the occupying troops and the patriarchal society we live in.

In 1996 I had an idea, groups of pilgrims coming to Bethlehem to visit the Church of the Nativity I invited them to my home for an Arabic meal to show them how we lived. From 2000 I started travelling to Germany to give lectures on Palestine there.

I was invited to a peace seminar through a German friend who worked as a peace worker in Bethlehem. Israeli and Palestinian women were to spend a week together in the hope of coming closer to peace. However, as almost everybody in Israel wants 'peace', but everybody has a different concept of it, opinions and ideas about peace with the Palestinians can vary widely. Depending on whom one speaks to, from the government, settlers, Orthodox Jews, right up to peace activists, the solution for peace can be that we live in a prison – which has been created for us by the ten-metre wall – or in an independent and free state.

I had to think about what I was getting involved in, because many Palestinians see meeting Israelis in the sense of a 'normalisation' with the enemy. After thorough consideration, I confirmed the invitation.

The meeting was supposed to take place in Berlin. The mere thought of enjoying the freedom of Germany did me good. But then came the big question, 'How do you get there?' It is very simple for normal people, that is, Israelis. They get into a car, drive to the airport, board the plane and then they fly to wherever they want to go. Since the beginning of the second Intifada in the year 2000, Palestinians were not allowed to use Tel Aviv airport. An Israeli friend gave me some advice. He said, "Why don't you try humanitarian reasons? "That means," he said, "you must be sick. Find a doctor in Germany who will prescribe you an operation and a doctor in Palestine who confirms that it cannot be done here and try your luck."

I got a medical certificate through friends in Germany. I took the paper to the Israeli military-administra-

tion which was responsible for us. It took a long time until it was my turn. I submitted my papers and the soldier told me to return in one week. When the time came, I got up very early to be first in the queue. But many other people had the same idea and I had to wait a long time again. The soldier handed me back my papers with the dry remark that what I had stated was not a humanitarian reason. I am not superstitious, but we have a saying that you should never provoke the worst, and thus I had only stated knee surgery. I asked curiously what would constitute a humanitarian reason, and the soldier replied, "Only something like a heart attack". "But how can you fly with it?" was my question. That

Jameela Alatrash:

It was really quite strange for me to have a good feeling for an Israeli woman, after all the anger I had in that period. How can I have anger and respect for somebody at the same time?

wasn't his business, he replied, and for him the matter was finally settled.

But I didn't want to give up so soon, because the only other possibility I had of getting to Germany was very difficult. The Ben Gurion airport in Tel Aviv, however, was only forty min-

utes away from my house. So I asked and pleaded and in the end I cursed – but without any success. That was too much for the sentry on the roof and he pointed his weapon at me (for us this is an unmistakable gesture) and said in broken Arabic "Jala ruch min hon," which means something like "Off with you." I looked at him, his eyes were cold. How old was he? – He was younger than my sons. "Do you want to shoot?" I shouted up to him, but he looked at me without batting an eyelid and I got scared and went away.

So, my last possibility was to go to another country – to Jordan. To get there I had to go to Jericho and cross the Jordan River over the Allenby Bridge. The same question again, 'How do I get to Jericho?' In the past, we could go from Bethlehem to Jericho via Jerusalem. It took about forty minutes, but for a long time now we are only allowed to go to Jerusalem with a special permit. This means that we have to take a diversion through the Judean desert. The way is not only much longer but also full of checkpoints. Young soldiers are standing there, just eighteen years old, but equipped with weapons and it is a matter of mood, feeling and desire, whether and when they allow us to pass the checkpoints.

In the West Bank there are about 560 such checkpoints, not including the 'flying' checkpoints, which can appear in one place today and somewhere else tomorrow. It is not their task to control the border to Israel but to separate our cities and villages and to make our life even harder.

After many hours I arrived at the border crossing point of Allenby Bridge. Hundreds of people were waiting before me, as it is the only exit from the West Bank. I got number 1084, which means that there were 1083 people before me. The crossing point closes at one p.m., therefore I would not manage to pass across the border until the following day.

I considered the various options still available to me. I could return home to try again the next morning. I could stay in the Intercontinental Hotel, which had been built for tourists in times of peace, but one night would cost one hundred dollars. I could sleep under the trees to get up early the next morning, but it is uncomfortable and the heat in Jericho is much greater than where we live in Bethlehem. The city is located four hundred meters below sea level. There has to be some other way, I thought. I turned around. The man who let the people enter the bus was somehow familiar to me. I approached him. ‘You must help me,’ I asked him. ‘I cannot help you,’ was his answer. ‘If I help you and the others see it, they will lynch me.’ Everybody wants to leave this hell. He could see how sad I was and said, ‘Wait a minute.’ He rummaged about in his trousers pocket and took out some creased pieces of paper with numbers and told me that he got them for humanitarian cases. ‘That will do’, I said and thought that I had finally got my humanitarian reason. He gave me the number 374 and that’s how I got into the first bus.

The trip began, from one bus to the next and then again into another one. The third bus suddenly stopped. There was a red traffic light in front of us. As we were in the border area and there were no houses and people around, nobody was allowed to get out. One hour, two hours. Nobody knew why we had to stand here. A little girl started to cry and

Ruth Hiller:

Our shared encounters and connections have given new depth and meaning to what I do as an individual and as part of a group.

told her mother again and again, ‘I have to pee’. She repeated it so often until the adults started feeling the same urge and at some point it had also reached me. Don’t the peo-

ple holding us here in the blazing sun of Jericho think a bit? Don’t they realise that we are human beings with human needs?

Perhaps this has happened to you in your own country, when you were driving on the motorway or in the city. In the end it becomes some kind of torture. I found myself saying quick prayers and pleading with the bus to continue the trip. Finally, after two and a half hours, the bus drove on and nobody explained why we had been kept waiting.

I arrived in Amman at seven in the evening. I had left my house in Bethlehem at four in the morning, and the distance I had covered was about one hundred kilometres. I drove to the airport. Lufthansa offers night flights from Amman. Amman to Berlin takes four hours.

I was so exhausted after the long day that I fell asleep immediately and thus the time flew by in my sleep. But I had a last thought, ‘would the Israeli women have started their journey if they knew they had to go through all this?’

I woke up when they announced the arrival in Berlin. I asked my neighbour whether anybody had brought anything to eat. ‘Yes’, he said, ‘but you were sleeping so soundly that the stewardess did not want to wake you up.’

The door of the airplane opened, it was early in the morning. I was still standing in the door and wanted to walk down the steps, when a scent reached me. I took a deep breath. It was the scent of freedom. I took one more breath. "It is the scent of human dignity," I thought. I walked down the steps knowing that I had left my homeland – where human life has no value – and was now entering a country in which even animals have rights. I got the feeling that I was not only coming to another continent, to another culture, another climate, but somehow also to another century. For me it was more like leaving a time machine than a regular Lufthansa plane.

I drove through the city, saw people going to work and children with their school satchels going to school. I had to think about the people and children I had left behind, about people whose hope of a better time was shattered on the grey concrete of the wall which was built around us, about children and young people – deprived of their childhood and future – not having any more perspective for their life due to this wall.

I realized the madness which we are living there, a vicious circle of hatred, revenge and reprisal, and worst of all, reprisals for reprisals. But seen from the free and peaceful Germany, our life there is madness. Being in Palestine I considered life there normal, but from here it looked a rather abnormal normality.

German, Israeli and Palestine women; an eternal triangle which started in the past and is still growing in size and influence today. I started to ask myself what things would be like if the Holocaust had not happened. What would it be like if the world community did not feel

Christiane Reinholz-Asolli:

I never before and never since experienced a group in which the personal and the political side of life are truly equally important.

Our group really does live and did live the authentic and productive interaction of the personal and the political level.

guilty towards the Jews? Would my home have then been divided? Would we have had this conflict then, now lasting 60 years? Would the first and second Intifada have occurred? All those who lost their life on both side would still be alive. My cousin would still have his arm, which was torn off

by a grenade. My sons would not have emigrated to America because they did not see any more future in their homeland. They wouldn't have locked us in these ghettos and built a ten – metre high wall.

I could continue this list over many pages. However, there is a wise Arabic proverb saying that we are today's children. Or, in German you might say, make the best out of things.

I was very excited to hear what the Israeli women would say or not say. What are they going to reply if we confront them with the human rights violations we are subjected to by their soldiers every day? Since the year 2000 I had no contact with Israeli women. How could I have? The Israeli government prohibits their citizens from entering the West Bank and we

are locked in by the wall. Thus the only possibility of meeting my female neighbours was to fly to faraway Germany.

It was not difficult to report all that has happened to us in the past years. The pictures of the Intifada were still fresh in our memory. In the beginning, the Israeli women felt bombarded by us with feelings of guilt, but they realized very soon that we would not be able to spend time together if we did not have the chance of pouring our hearts out. I brought drawings my little daughter had painted during nights of bombing. They were sad pictures reflecting all the fears and horror a little kid's heart had suffered. Although we knew that the Israeli women who had come to Berlin did not necessarily approve of the policy of their government, in our eyes they stood for all the harm we had suffered. In all of the conversations which followed, we developed a common consciousness that it could not go on like this. This is the only way we can guarantee both our futures.

With hindsight I can say that we spent some very good days together. The German women were so sensitive and contributed much to our coming closer to each other. The trip to the Berlin Wall was very depressing to me. They had left part of the wall in Bernauer Street. I knew well how

Katrin Wolf:

Walls lock in and lock out. Ask us Germans. We also have something to say about walls and how they grow inwards.

difficult this wall was for the people on both sides, but I could not help but feel that it was only a little wall to me compared to what they had built in Palestine. Suddenly I realized that our wall

is built in the 21st century, in a time where there are almost no more borders in Europe. I could travel to many other countries with my Schengen visa and they told me, because I hadn't tried yet, that I wouldn't even be aware of the border crossing points. In my homeland it has become almost impossible to make a visit to Jerusalem from Bethlehem, only eight kilometres away. So, in the eyes of the Israelis, the only solution for our decades of conflict in which so many people had lost their lives and which caused so much pain to both peoples, was to built a wall around us – in the 21st century – and that we were supposed to live in a ghetto from now on with the knowledge of the other people and governments. I had to think of my daughter when she was young. She liked to play the game hide-and-seek but she was a bit chubby and did not like physical exercise. She simply remained sitting on her chair, closed her eyes and then said to me, "Now you must search for me, you don't see me any more." I always had to laugh then. I called her behaviour children's tactics. However, has a state which calls itself a democracy the right to develop children's tactics? That means, if you do not see us any more, because we are hidden behind a ten – metre high wall, that we are no longer there, do we stop existing? Has the problem then been solved for Israel? In all our following conversations we shared the same idea that it cannot go on like this,

peace is necessary and the only way to guarantee both our futures. With hindsight I want to say that we spent very good days together. The German women were very caring and contributed a lot to our getting closer, in particular on our trips and on the occasion of the party we celebrated with many Arabic and Israeli dances.

Towards the end, we felt like normal women spending their time together. Oh my god, what a pleasant normality! Then came the time for farewells. We wanted to meet again in Israel and Palestine, this is what we promised. On the last day even the sky was crying to demonstrate that it was as sad as we were, because we knew that once we returned, it would be a long time before we saw each other again.

I want to say "Thank you!" to all the German, Israeli and Palestine women who came to Berlin for the dream we were allowed to live together for one week.

Salaam and Shalom!

Adina Aviram

My personal voice in times of political conflict



Adina Aviram

Graduated from the Tel Aviv University in 1987 in Life Sciences in Biochemistry. She heads the Molecular Biology Laboratory at the Rabin Medical Center.

In 2003 she participated in the Conference in Berlin: "Within and Beyond the Limits of Human Nature", presented a paper on 'Controlling the „Other" – Militarization and Bioengineering'.

She is one of the founding members of "New-Profile" (1998) and is active in several movements working towards changing Israeli society from a militarized to a civil society, on human rights and engendering peace and democracy in Israel.

Personal Chronology

First Seminar – Building bridges and trust, through the personal acquaintances, intellectual and emotional involvement.

Second Seminar – Jerusalem and the deportation of the Palestinians in 1948, the abandoned villages, Abu Aarab's story of his expulsion from Tzaforia, Holocaust and the visit to Kibbutz Lochamei Hagetaot.

Before the third seminar I write to my Israeli colleagues my thoughts regarding the right and need to have a national identity.

Third Seminar – Refugees and the Right of Return.

I read Sebastian Haffner's book *The German Story 1914 - 1933* before attending the fourth seminar. The book provides me with insight on how personal identities are drowned within the wider collective and how this leads to and enables sprouting of nationalism, racism and militarism.

Fourth Seminar – Processing my personal identity, finding my personal voice and separation from the collective.

Fifth Seminar – Writing

Fifth Seminar, Berlin, March 2007

I am sitting here and looking around me, we smile at each other, laugh. I arrange the pile of papers; align my pen, put on my glasses and "prepare myself". Slowly the silence begins to creep over and you can hear the pens on the paper and the clicks of the keyboards. In the meanwhile Ruti has handed me a copy of the text that I wrote in July 2000, just before we came to the third sem-

inar in Bremen. The text, set out below, deals with the need for national definition. I read it once again and can still identify with the contents seven years later.

June 26, 2000

Dear Friends,

As always our meetings and interactions are accompanied by reflective thoughts, self criticism, the examination of things that were said and how I reacted to them, and where my statements and yours carry me.

To tell the truth, I keep on turning things over, questioning, and trying to understand.

In looking back, it seems to me that the strongest comment that I made on Saturday evening was my attempt to draw a parallel between responsibility to my children while disapproving their denial of me, even while they are committing immoral acts or actions that I strongly object to on one hand, and my refusal to negate the army, my Jewishness and being an Israeli on the other.

I think that it was very natural for me to present this parallel because of my understanding of what taking responsibility means. If my children sin, I am responsible, as I was not able to educate them and bring them to a path of humanness, morality, justice and compassion.

I believe in my existence here and in my desire to be here and not to live elsewhere, in spite of it all. I believe that it is not an option for me to live here and not be responsible for the immoral actions and injustice I see. If I am here, by choice, then I don't want to negate my Jewishness and being an Israeli. I need national identity and definition. My basic existence is as a human being and maybe I should have stated woman being. I just can't write feminist since these issues are still a bit foggy and unclear to me. Following this, I feel an intense urge to protect the existence of my family and my society in the Israeli context.

I believe in the right to be a pacifist. I believe in the right of young men and women to choose not to be conscripted into the military because of their beliefs in pacifism and their right of conscience.

I do not believe that the only way to bring about change is through a refusal of conscription and annulling national identity. I do believe that there is a need for a professional army based on volunteers. Since I have not succeeded in influencing and making a change by lighting up those dark corners of our lives, I am therefore responsible for this ugly side of our society and the military. If I ever feel that I have reached a state in which I am not only negating the mechanisms of our existence here but that I have also lost the opportunity to bring about change by critical examination, then perhaps I will leave.

Being an Israeli and Jewish is part of who I am. The army is also part of me and as an Israeli civilian I share the responsibility for the way the army acts. Therefore I am responsible for the Israeli Air Force bombing Lebanon and also for the brutality at the checkpoints.

The fact that my children have served in the military does not prevent me from being critical or to voice my objections to military actions to my acquaintances who are officers in the army, to my family and their friends.

The right to a Palestinian national definition and identity was the first principle that was demanded in the 1960's, which we rejected and denied over a period of many years. The demand was unacceptable and turned down by our leaders while they continued to declare how dangerous it was for us as Israelis to acknowledge Palestine's existence as nation. This approach by our institutions and public opinion was unacceptable to me and impossible from my point of view and understanding.

For me, as an adolescent girl and a young woman, my very first identification with the Palestinians was their struggle for national definition. In fact, my intense sense of frustration and enormity of the opposition by Jews to the national definition of the Palestinians is what drew me to their struggle and enlightened me regarding the different aspects of their and our communities here and the conflict.

I will arrive at our next meeting as Adina from Israel (defined as Jewess) together with Fidaa and Rawia, Palestinians from Israel. I come to meet, and learn and to get to know May, Rima, Samira, Sabah, and their other colleagues from Palestine.

Yours, with much admiration, friendship and love,
Adina

September 1998, Israel

Edna called me, I didn't know her then and she had been given my phone number from Rela. She asked me if I would like to join and be part of a group of women who were going to go to Germany and be part of a dialogue. I didn't give her an affirmative answer right away, but told her that I would think about it. I had apprehensions regarding dealing with the German women and the Palestinian women at the same time and was afraid that this might be too difficult for me. In the end I decided to join and thought that getting to know German women my age would be a beneficial experience for me. The interest in the German women was stronger for me than my interest in meeting Palestinian women. I was not lacking in opportunities to meet such women in Israel (I was active in the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions and later on in Ta'ayush, an organization of Palestinian and Jewish cooperation).

When I finally decided and I told my father, I felt frustrated and very angry at him. His response was "Out of all the people and places in the world, do you think that the Germans will help you solve your conflict?" He was angry with me and reprimanded me for my choice in creating bridges through the German women. I was left with the feeling of great embarrassment while standing opposite him because I did not

know how to explain what my motives were in joining the project. At the time I did not know how to explain to him my need to get to know German women. For me it was the deep need to understand life after the Holocaust. I wanted to understand life in post-Holocaust German society, a society that through its silence cooperated with the Nazi regime.

What motivated me to answer Edna and join this journey? It was the desire to confront and acknowledging my fears about myself and others that would be exposed during such a journey. I had a great desire to learn more about myself and who I was. It was the desire to discover to what extent I was capable of learning from others and about others and to

Rima Al Ajrami:

When you start something that you are not sure about, sometimes you end up regretting doing it, especially if you feel it lacked proper planning and thinking.

change and become different. I also felt the need to analyze and understand how the historical narrative illuminates aspects of my personal identity. I wanted to acquire tools that would assist me in breaking

through the confines of 'the Conflict between our Peoples', of hatred, fear and suspicions at that particular time. I was inclined to think that hatred did not exist on my part. I wanted to examine if I was really innocent of all those negative feelings. Is this my reality? Or am I pretending and lying to myself? I thought that this would be an interesting opportunity for me to gain some tools in a structured manner that would allow me to express my politics in a personal fashion.

First of all I wanted to understand what the basis of my belief was. I was curious to learn and understand how the German women dealt with the fact that they were the daughters of a people that brought Holocaust upon my people.

The most significant memory that I have from the project (1998 - 2007) was Rima's statement at the first seminar, "You are my enemy", I had not expected to hear this!

Later on I was disappointed in myself for the fact that I was not capable of taking upon myself the blame and I didn't know how to break down the reference to me being an enemy. Nor did I know how to let go of the automatic reaction of being on the defensive and to respond by hurting. Are there other alternatives?

How can one transform oneself from an enemy to a friend? How can one gain trust and how does one break the barriers of self protection? How does one give up the attack for self defense?

I was full of enthusiasm when travelling to the first seminar. I thought that our work would be on an intellectual level. But actually it was on a very deep emotional level. I thought that we would be arriving as a group and then I realized that in spite of the group framework, the group did not provide me with any protection. I became very confused and felt vulnerable, the feelings that I felt (regarding the frame of the Israeli

group) were very damaging to me. It was easier to build the harmony in a different way. I understood that sisterhood is based on personal similarities, 'chemistry', and especially through sharing the propagation of ideas. I thought that perhaps that this kind of framework could be filled with shared concrete feminist experiences. At the time I did not fully understand what feminism really meant to me. I was keen on revealing its meaning.

December 1998, Würzburg, First Seminar

I remember us, a group of women, all wearing coats and scarves, marching in the dark, through the train station in Frankfurt, searching for the train to Würzburg.

The trains in Germany will always echo in my head and soul especially when it is cold and snowing. We are marching in line; my thoughts wander to a different time and place. They wander to the 1940's, to the trains and freight cars that crossed Europe and took the Jews to their extermination. At the same time in spite of my nightmarish thoughts, I feel protected by the echoing sounds of our shoe heels clicking on the hard station floor. I feel comfortable with the fact that we are following a Palestinian woman, who was in my eyes, in an absurd fashion, our leader here in Germany. We settled in the passenger car and then Rima told me of her life of wandering throughout the Middle East.

I need to confront 'the enemy' within me. The need to cope with this was an enriching experience for me. It is a milestone and it marks the progress that I made.

The moment that Rima said that sentence I could feel how the frustration and despair flooded over me and made me think "What do I need this for?", "Why did I come here?" Why did I put myself in such a position and knowing that I had actually brought this upon myself and this had been my choice to come, brought on waves of anger and indignation. I felt so vulnerable and unprotected and lonely. I immediately heard myself say,

Hannelore Chiout:

Can we evade the trap of militarised thoughts, the 'friend-enemy-pattern'?

without being able to control myself, in the most spontaneous fashion "I know that I am the Occupier and the Enemy there outside this room. But

while we are all here sitting in this room in Germany, I am not willing to be labelled as the Enemy. Didn't every single one of us come to here in order to build trust? At least here then I was able to justify this rationally but later I felt so hurt, vulnerable and victimized. I could not help but throw into the space of the room the statement, "I could have called you a terrorist just the same and even yet I chose not to use that term here." At that time this incident seemed to rekindle the conflict of the first seminar. It was impossible to take back the words. In the months

which followed I continued to analyze the basis of my response. I realized that my response came from weakness, from my inability to stand facing the victimization of the Palestinian women. I was jealous of them that they could come as victims, fighters of justice and equality. I identified with their struggle. It is easier to be a just victim and more difficult to stand straight up in face of the truth that I am part of the evil. It was also interesting to see how this process affected me. In my home, within the walls of my house, in the place where I can be with my family and my friends in Israel, I can distance myself from the national connection.

Edna Zaretsky Toledano:

As Israelis we pay a certain price in our society for our stand and actions against the Occupation and against wars.

I strongly criticize and oppose my people. It is as if outside Israel, within this particular environment, I became sensitive and vulnerable. I feel the uncontrollable urge to rise and protect the homeland as

if I am the homeland. It was difficult to listen to the attacks on the Israelis and the 'Israeliness'. I suddenly rose to my feet and defended my homeland. I looked inside myself and understood how patriotism is created.

Within this process of uncontrollable growth of destructive patriotism, I could understand how another kind of power can be developed instead. It is a power that grows from my personal commitment to these women with names, and personal, shared stories, with friends and husbands and children and parents, and how they become my guard. The personal connection and no longer seeing 'them' as opposed to 'us', allows me the discretion and the ability to combine 'mind' with 'emotion'. When I let my individuality sink into the national connection, my people, my country, I lose my constructive and clear thoughts of established worthiness. When I am a 'representative of my people' I feel as if dark impulses are guiding me and speaking from within my throat.

Nazareth 1999, Second Seminar

Rawia is disappointed because I refuse to abandon the 'Zionist' from my identity. Zionism – In the setting of this conflict, I need to reconsider my identity.

Once, when the memory that I am 'A daughter of new immigrants' was still fresh in my mind, I used to think of myself as a Zionist – Israeli – Mother – Biochemist – Woman. Over the years this hierarchical structure began to change and become dynamic and dependent on circumstances. Zionist /Israeli were abandoned and the experience of motherhood was uppermost. Years afterwards I considered myself firstly and primarily a woman! A woman who is an activist, a mother and a biochemist. The Israeli was no longer there. As for the Zionist, I knew that I still had to think about that. I can not disconnect myself simply and totally from Zionism because I don't want to deny the link that ties me

to the past, to my history and to the place where I live. To totally deny Zionism is as if I completely rejected my existence and that I was born within a void, within “nonexistence”. I don’t want / need / can’t do this. Zionism built my home and family. But it also destroyed and robbed the land of those who lived here before me.

I no longer was the displaced refugee but brought the Na’akba upon the families of my Palestinian friends. I will forever carry this burden. My life was formed to some extent on the backs, land, blood and property of others that Zionism had marked as my enemies. I live in a cognitive dissonance, identifying with the victims of whoever was marked by my peer group as an enemy and I can’t be part of them.

480 Arab villages were destroyed by the Israeli Defense Forces in 1948. Tzaforia (Tzipori of today) was one of them. I heard about the story of Tzaforia, on the second seminar, from Abu Aarab, resident of Nazareth who was 10 years old when banned from Tzaforia. There were 7000 inhabitants living there. They had 2 schools, a mosque and a church. On the 16th day of Ramadan, the village was attacked and 19 people died as a result of the attack. The residents of the village began to flee, very few stayed behind. Many of the refugees began to walk to the north but there were similar circumstances going on in all the villages on the way to Lebanon. The 700 people who stayed behind received identification cards. But after a number of months the army surrounded the village once again, gathered up all the inhabitants and put them into trucks. The inhabitants were told that their village was now under the jurisdiction of the military and was closed to all civilians. They were moved to Nazareth. In 1978 a bulldozer arrived at the village Moslem cemetery, an area that had been preserved, and levelled the land completely.

Nothing that would give credence to the Moslem village, existing for hundreds of years, was left standing. Today there are several requests by

Christiane Reinholz-Asolli:

When I came to Würzburg I was prepared for conflicts on a political level. But I was not prepared to get so involved personally and emotionally.

residents of Nazareth to be allowed to return to live in Tzaforia together with its Jewish inhabitants. But the inhabitants of Tzipori have responded and

said, “You should thank us for allowing you to live in Nazareth and for not taking your home and banishing you.”

Abu Aarab said “This land is beautiful and good and there is enough space for both Arabs and Jews to live on.”

And now just before you finish reading my memories, I would like to share with you the experience of everything coming apart when I return home after each seminar to my family, friends and work and about the difficulties I had to recollect myself and return to my life as I was expected to.

These are complicated feelings of disconnection and disassociation, of not belonging, of anger and frustration. I feel alienated from the place I belong to. This makes me feel even more lonely, cut-off without the will or desire to enjoy, laugh and work. It is very frightening! I need to garner all my willpower each time to recover from the emotional exhaustion and keep in mind the important contribution the project has in my life.

During the past 9 years I have learned to create and establish my shield that allows me to retain my voice. Throughout the events of enemy/terrorist I have experienced the harm that was caused by losing myself and letting 'them' make the decisions. Each time I recall the memory of that conflict; it shakes me and clarifies my personal voice once again. It is my guard.

Anette Klasing

Searching



Anette Klasing

Born in 1955 in Bremen, Germany.

1982 Degree: Social work and Social pedagogic at the University Bremen.

1983 – 1993 Pedagogic secretary in the Youth council of Bremen.

1994 – 2004 Pedagogic staff and consultant for Further Education in the 'LidiceHaus Bremen'.

August 2004 – December

2006 A Civil Peace Servant in the International Centre Bethlehem and Willy Brandt Centre, Jerusalem.

Since January 2007 Pedagogic staff in the 'Lidice-Haus Bremen'

Return from Bethlehem: 2007

Half a year has passed since I returned from Bethlehem to Germany – after two and a half years of living and working 'behind the wall' in the International Centre Bethlehem. I am back home for a couple of months and also back to my 'old' workplace in the Youth Education Centre 'Lidice Haus' in Bremen.

I had been looking forward to my walks in the green areas along the River Weser, without being stopped by checkpoints, soldiers, insurmountable walls or sudden clashes.

I enjoyed being among familiar people again: partner, daughter, family, friends and colleagues. The tensions which had built up inside me slowly dissolved one by one and I also stopped being frightened by the ADAC helicopter after the third time it did its daily circling above our house on its way to the nearby hospital.

Everything fine again? Life goes on? The question I was most frequently asked after my return, in conversations with acquaintances and colleagues, was why I had gone to Bethlehem in particular. 'What is it like being in the centre of the conflict as a German with our past? Why did you live in Bethlehem behind the wall and not in Israel? You can't really be objective, can you?'

Sceptical questions concerning the ambivalent role of a German woman in the Middle-East conflict were also raised by people I talked to in Bethlehem:

"You Germans believe you have a special responsibility in this conflict – but the heavy burden of the Nazi past, with which you are still confronted today, is more

like an obstacle and does not really make you a neutral third party. You simply cannot support all parties.” Such or similar critical statements have caused me to doubt myself and have challenged the claim of ‘all-partiality’ (to be explained later on) in the last few years.

Review: first encounters and contacts in Israel

Twenty years ago I went to Israel for the first time to manage a youth meeting between young people from the Arabic community of Tamra and Bremen.

Until then, I knew precious little about the Palestinian narrative. My confrontation with our German past focused on the Shoah, the Nazi crimes and the search for traces of Jewish history and stories, for example in so-called antifascist city tours or work camps. This had something to do with the ‘knot’ inside me concerning my father’s role during Hitler’s fascism and in the Wehrmacht. He kept his medals and insignia in a small drawer and never really distanced himself from the crimes of the Nazis.

He died a long time ago – I was 19 years old at the time.

I often heard my mother saying: ‘Child, I was far too young at that time to understand all that.’

1985 was the first time I heard about the massacre in ‘Sabra and Shatila’ in the Lebanon: Within the framework of our preparation of the German-Israeli-Arabic youth meeting, Palestinians confronted me with their history, the Nakba in 1948 (Nakba is the Arabic term for ‘catastrophe’). In 1948 approximately 711.000 Palestinians (estimated by the United Nations) were expelled from their land and escaped to Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and Jordan as a result of the Israeli Independence war) as well as with the Palestinians who were killed in 1982 in Sabra and Shatila by Lebanese Falangists – actively supported by Ariel Sharon.

Until then, I hadn’t known this version of the Palestinian history or the Palestinian narrative – and it did not match what I had heard and learnt about the crimes of our parents’ or grandparents’ generation.

In the mid-eighties, I began a kind of ‘time travel’ through Israeli and Palestinian history. I absorbed more and more and wanted to collate it, to understand it.

In the mid-eighties, it was the first time that I heard of the “Mothers against the war in Lebanon”, raising their voices and reminding that war and violence would not provide security for Israel. The gender aspect was very clear: most men and sons were fighting the war and women were demonstrating openly for the withdrawal from the Lebanon and for a non-violent solution to the conflict.

First seminars with the AdB and the LidiceHaus in Israel

In the mid-nineties, I had the chance of experiencing first hand the enormous effort which Israeli and Palestinian women exerted in opposing an increasing militarization and violence, in conversations with women during the seminars in Givat Haviva which the AdB and later also the Lidice Haus organized in Israel. Within the framework of these seminars I also met Nabila Espanioly from Nazareth, with whom I would manage various events and workshops later – until this very day I am impressed by her clarity and positive power.

My cooperation in the women's commission of the AdB, my experiences with Israeli and Palestinian seminar groups, as well as Hannelore Chiout's invitation to Würzburg in 1998, gave me the fantastic opportunity of participating in a tri-national women's project: the connection of personal and (feminist) political history.

Memories of the first women meeting

This seminar – the first one in a series of meetings up to 2007 – demanded enormous strength and effort from all of the participants. For most of the women in the Palestinian group, it was the first time that they had met Jewish-Israeli women as well as German women. I remember very well the snow and the pre-Christmas atmosphere in Würzburg which particularly fascinated our guests. But it was also a seminar, in which accusations were made (e.g. joint singing and celebrating 'among enemies' was condemned...) and many tears were cried: 'Take my handkerchief please; there are still enough Kleenex left!' I felt like a part of an audience, sitting in front of the stage on which two enemies were

Adina Aviram:

During the past 9 years I have learned to create and establish my shield that allows me to retain my own voice.

facing each other, and I also felt the pressure of being obliged to take a stand. It was the Palestinian women, in particular with their dominant leader, who brought forward the political agenda, including all the de-

mands and who wanted a guarantee of a joint platform. Both of our then partner organizations "Bat Shalom" and the "Jerusalem Centre for Women" were part of the joint umbrella organization, the "Jerusalem Link" – whose platform consisted of far-reaching demands such as a sovereign independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. The 'delicate' question of refugees was also part of this platform. I had the feeling that the Palestinian women wanted to make sure that we all backed these demands and that we would also fight for them together within the framework of our network.

They spoke with 'one' voice, the collective voice of the Palestinian people. The term 'enemy' was used again and again and that was the reason why it was not possible to dance with the 'female enemy' in the

evening. The determining factor of this first seminar was the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Potential common ground which we women experienced due to structural gender inequalities or mechanisms of violence in our societies and which could have brought us closer together, were secondary!

I remember that we German women sometimes felt as if we were surplus to requirements and were looking to find an active role. It was only later that some of the participants gave me signs showing me how important it was to them to learn from us German women about our own history, the 'stories about the East and West', as well as the role of the women's organizations. "Don't make yourself invisible; you are no less important", said one of the women.

To me it was a difficult balancing act. As Germans between Jewish women having 'unfinished business' (this is how, for example, V. expressed it) with Germany. The Palestinian women also expected our unbiased support – more or less as 'victims of the victims'.

V. wanted to hear and learn from us German women how we live as daughters or granddaughters of the German perpetrator generation today and which role this past plays in our present life. Again and again the discussions with people from Israel and Palestine made me aware of the fact that I have a German identity. That fact left its mark strongly on me.

In Würzburg I was also very preoccupied with the questions and the search for identity of the two Palestinian women with Israeli passports, for whom there was no place where they could feel quite 'right'. They emphasized their considerations and questions concerning the national working groups to which they might belong with a remark which was both ironic and desperate: "We neither belong to the group of the Palestinian women nor to the Israeli group; we'll go with the German women". It was a meeting in which identity crises and the search for belonging became visible in a painful manner, but in which classical concepts of the enemy developed some initial cracks.

'Power develops from the crisis'- whether this thesis also applies to our process, became clear only later on.

What is 'impartiality'?

The question of impartiality as a German woman in the triangle ran like a red thread through the subsequent meetings. I was aware that 'neutrality' of any sort would not be possible in this 'tricky triangle'; but that was not what I was trying to achieve.

However, in the course of my later commission as peace expert in Bethlehem and Jerusalem, I found a description of the requirements of the 'impartiality of the peace expert' in the working paper of the BMZ (Federal Ministry for Development and Cooperation) and Forum of Civil

Peace Service. What does it mean in concrete terms in this conflict? And what kind of manifestation could it have in our women's network?

From a female – feminist – perspective, we were often able to quickly find a common understanding: no matter how different our social and socio-cultural contexts had been, the structural gender inequalities and the experience of violence brought us closer together. We were not just objects of our social balance of power, but also actors with different options for acting which were meant to be examined and where every one of us had to make her very own decision. The framework for action which was at the disposal of the women in the respective societies varied strongly and particularly the Palestinian women often felt powerless in the day-to-day conflict. In our seminar, however, they had been able to conquer the stage quickly.

As long as the seminar meetings took place in Germany (Würzburg, Bremen, Berlin), I felt closer to the principle of 'impartiality' – because

Shira Ohayon:

For the Jews these words, such as camp, refugees, expulsion, walls, fences, checkpoints, military and others, are dark concepts in the past of European Jewry, while for the Palestinians these words represent painful everyday experiences under the Israeli Occupation.

I was far away from the actual location of the conflicts. I felt a lot more tension during the meetings in Israel or the Palestinian areas and in particular during my two years in Bethlehem: the more the conflicting parties Israel and Palestine 'drifted apart' and the

more the balance of power developed against the Palestinians, the more difficult I found it to follow the formulated principle of 'impartiality'.

To me, 'impartiality' means making a clear stand against injustice, abuse of power and suppression and for a non-violent transformation of the conflict.

Iremember that our Israeli and Palestinian friends made every effort to present both sides of the very difficult day-to-day routine in a "balanced manner" during our meeting in Israel and particularly in Jerusalem. We visited, for example, the memorial for the children of the Warsaw Ghetto (Lohamei Hagetaot) as well as a destroyed Palestinian village and a house occupied by settlers in the old city of Jerusalem. We visited the Palestinian family concerned, who is living directly beside it in the remaining house under depressing conditions. The visits and conversations at both sites made me feel ashamed and left a lump in my stomach.

Is it possible at all to present narratives in a balanced manner when they are personally experienced history at the same time?

During our seminar I was also very touched that it was the first time for one of our participants from Gaza to visit the Dome of the Rock – and to have the chance to make a trip to Beersheba to see the place from

where her family had been driven out. The severity of her reaction to the Dome of the Rock, the shrine, left a mark in my memory. I, who consider myself a secular woman, admire shrines rather from a 'tourist – architectonic' point of view. The knowledge that it is a matter of course to travel to Jerusalem with a German passport and not having to wait for months to get a permit, confronted me once more with the injustices and differences within our group.

The meeting in the Lidice Haus

Our third meeting in Bremen in 2000 – shortly before the outbreak of the so-called Temple Mount Intifada – was again accompanied by a new difficult dimension:

The group got bigger, because new women joined the Israelis and Palestinians. This meant a repetition of proclamatory statements and assurances – and everything seemed to start from the very beginning. The irritability was accompanied by increasing aggression, as the questions as to who were the actual victims was raised again. At the centre of the disputes was Article 194 of the UN Resolution demanding the 'Right of the Palestinian refugees to return'. On one hand, we had reached the core of the conflict and had even managed to develop trust, on the other it was not possible to avoid hurt feelings and tears.

The personal (life) stories, all of which also had a political dimension, turned female enemies into female allies. The discovery that all of the 'three sides' had stories to tell about being refugees was part of that.

Katrin Wolf:

My grandparents had built their house in a region (today part of Poland) from which they had to flee as refugees on 31 January 1945. They lost the right to their house, farm and land, because they were Germans and thus a part of a nation which had assumed the right for itself to deny others the right to everything, even to life itself.

My grandparents never talked to me about it.

Experiences and histories of parents or grandparents came up for discussion in this constellation for the first time.

When V. talked about a house in her vicinity in Herzylia, in which an Arabic family had lived before, it turned out that relatives of M., a Palestinian colleague, had lived in this house until 1948. The long evening, or more accurately the long

night of these 'refugees' stories made the women's network – despite all of the conflicts – reach a new level of quality.

Moreover, I remember the words of S., who as an oriental Jew, often felt very close to the Palestinian women regarding their experiences of discrimination in Israel; the familiar Arabic language supported this even more. Later, she confided in us that the conflicts and discriminations she experienced at her then job had led to the termination of her employment and to a psychological crisis about the meaning of her life.

During this third meeting, it was possible to talk about very personal conflicts, to express grief – without a feeling of revenge. I believe that this would not have been possible in the first seminar.

Later, some of the women said that they already had some kind of foreboding in July 2000 of the imminent violent Intifada closely connected with the equally violent Israeli occupation. However, at the time none of us could ever have imagined the extent of the violence and occupation about to come.

About speechlessness and inability to act

In the subsequent years the fatal misjudgment was often expressed: “it cannot get any worse” – but it got worse. Plans for extending the network and for individual concrete projects, which we began in summer 2000, were stopped by the acts of war with the second Intifada. I felt as if my voice and options for action had been taken from me, I was simply shocked and speechless.

Parallel to the day-to-day violent pictures and news from Israel and the occupied Palestinian areas were the public calls of the Palestinian organizations against the Israeli military operations. The contact between us women became fewer and fewer. What can I possibly say, write, contribute to help?

The resolution of the Palestinian autonomous government to tolerate no longer any official cooperation or contacts with Israeli partner organizations placed many of our Palestinian colleagues in a difficult position. Of course, there were telephone calls and an exchange of emails between some women, but there were no personal contacts or meetings for a long time. We German women had allowed ourselves be caught up in the incredible violent and depressing developments and were also incapable of acting. We no longer acted as a group, only on an individual level at best.

Six months after the outbreak of the Intifada, in April 2001, I flew to Israel and travelled to the Palestinian areas. I will never forget meeting my friend S. in Bethlehem. I had memories of her laughing and wild dancing on the last night in the LidiceHaus in Bremen; but when she met me in Bethlehem at our meeting point, I looked into a completely different face. It was serious and petrified. She told me that an Israeli rocket had hit and destroyed her neighbour's house the night before.

Some days later I met my Israeli colleagues in Tel Aviv who told me about the demonstrations and vigils of the Israeli women. The information about the protests of the women against the Israeli occupation policy was hardly recognized by the Palestinian colleagues. The power of the tanks and weapons made everything else disappear.

In Germany the atmosphere also changed. Sympathy for the Palestinian cause within the framework of the Oslo negotiations, was highly 'in vogue' but when I participated in a demonstration against the brutal Israeli military operations in the Palestinian refugee camps in 2002, there were clear 'reprimands' and insults (especially from some German-Israeli associations). The accusation of anti-Semitism soon appeared. I didn't feel good in the hotchpotch of demonstrating groups in Germany. Then, different streams were exploiting the situation for their own political agenda. I neither wanted to demonstrate together with an Islamist 'Hizbollah Block' of exiled Lebanese – and even less with right-wing extremist 'fellow travellers, who were using the 'anti-Israeli demonstrations' for their own purposes. At the same time the 'anti-nationals' or the 'anti-Germans' were demanding absolute solidarity with Israel.

Although I was in Israel and Palestine in my thoughts almost every day of these two years, 2002 and 2003 – during which the violence on both sides caused so much pain and death – I stayed in contact with only a few women. I was not able to contribute anything constructive, supportive.

I often think of an event in Gaza in 2001, when I visited one of the members of our group. On that day in April I had been instructed by the military authorities – together with a small group of German participants of the seminars – to leave the Gaza strip again by 4 p.m. at the latest. I had actually planned to stay overnight, to spend some time with my colleague. To enter the Gaza strip means undergoing a humiliating procedure. First, you must apply to the military authorities for permits. Often you can tell that military operations are imminent if no permits are being issued. This was why we had a strange feeling considering the order.

Shortly before I drove back to the Erez checkpoint, my colleague's companion said: 'Yes, it is easy for you Europeans to come to Gaza and visit us. After your visit, you quickly leave and can forget everything'.

When I arrived in Jerusalem that evening about 6 pm, I heard about the rocket attack which had begun on Gaza. It was this very Monday, on which the Israeli army bombed the Gaza strip all night long and separated it into three zones. The remark of my colleague's companion was ringing in my ears for a long, a very long time. I cannot forget it. These military operations and considerations are cynical and contemptuous to me.

I haven't seen them since. Last year, I applied to the military authorities for a so-called 'clearance' to enter Gaza. When I wanted to pick it up before my departure to Gaza, it had not been issued, contrary to the information given by the authorities. Shortly afterwards, the German representation office of the embassy in Ramallah instructed Germans to stop travelling to Gaza!

2004 – 2006: my time in Bethlehem and the trips as ‘ambassador’

Today – in 2007 – I often ask myself which experiences triggered my decision in 2004 to go to Bethlehem to live and work there for a longer period. The meetings and conversations with all of the women during the seminars had contributed a great deal to it. In contrast to the situation in Germany, in which the women’s movement and feminist politics had long since passed their peak and decisions concerning feminist policy were reflected in forum meetings and stipulated in equality laws, I considered the Israeli and Palestinian women much more ‘political’ and, in particular, more courageous.

Statements such as: “We can overcome hatred and violence, we women have the abilities and the power to do so” (Edna), have fascinated me again and again. Maybe also because it was a formulation of vision and strength which I didn’t see in myself.

Parallel to this, however, I could also observe that the militancy accompanying the second Intifada and the occupation was continuously driving women from the public stage. On the Israeli side, the demonstrating women were insulted by people of their own society; the Palestinian women hardly heard anything about the protest on the ‘other side’ and

Fidaa Narh–Abu Dba:

In one meeting there was not the need for a group leader because we were a group that gives space to every participant; grown up women who are equal and meeting on a joint journey.

felt that they were left alone. At home in Germany, a journalist wrote in our local Bremen newspaper that “Palestinian mothers send their children to the front to throw stones”. Such reports made me angry, in particular because reports in the German press on mothers

or parents on both sides never included that they shared their mourning of losses in their families. Initiatives such as, for example, the ‘parents circle’ (The Parents Circle is an Israeli-Palestinian Forum of bereaved families and friends) were simply ignored.

In these years of escalating violence, the term ‘ambassador’ and the role of the ‘third side’ received a new meaning. In 2003 we German women moved back and forth in different line-ups between the Israeli and Palestinian side a couple of times to listen, ask questions and also to hand over messages ‘to the other side’. Several times we considered possibilities and ways of defusing the ‘cooperation prohibition’ imposed by the Palestinian Autonomous Authority and to develop common activities despite it. The situation of the colleagues in the Jerusalem Centre for Women (our then Palestinian partner organization) was definitely not easy: cooperation might be branded as collaboration. I also had the impression that the women needed all their strength to ensure day-to-day survival. There was no time for such discussions and risks.

When I met some of the Palestinian women of our group in Ramallah in 2004 – after arriving for my two-year project in Bethlehem – to fathom out the chances of a new joint seminar in Germany, scepticism prevailed at first.

The management in the JCW had changed and official cooperation at that time was out of the question. The women had to organize themselves and did not have an ‘umbrella organization’. All this meant a lot of effort on the part of the women.

While the group on the Israeli side remained constant, the Palestinian group experienced fluctuations. We no longer succeeded in motivating or convincing all of the women that it made sense to resume and continue our cooperation. Furthermore, it was impossible to get our colleague out of Gaza. Our German women’s group was also significantly reduced. Professional and personal changes by some of the women led to them leaving the project.

In contrast to our Israeli and Palestinian colleagues, we German women were largely able to combine our commitment in this special political women’s network with our professional day-to-day routine.

As far as the general commitment to feminist politics in Germany is concerned, I have the feeling that there is an increasing tendency towards ‘withdrawal into private life’ or towards a commitment to more concrete and time-limited projects.

When we finally gathered again in Berlin in April 2005, many things had changed. Some of the Palestinian women had left, new women were integrated. There had been a period of five years between the last joint seminar in Bremen 2000 and this meeting. I felt scepticism and uneasiness. As I had already spent more than six months ‘behind the wall’ in Bethlehem at that time and was confronted with the frustration and anger of the people there day by day, I wasn’t very optimistic and had my doubts about the progress of our network.

Many Palestinians – including women who had left the project – asked: “Why should I make any more commitment to a dialogue project with Israeli women, if it’s getting worse every year and the options for acting have got worse instead of better?” The seminar in Berlin was certainly no light fare because, as expected, there were disappointments and accusations. “Where have you been the whole time, why didn’t you contact us?”

I realized that due to my time in Bethlehem and the experiences I had there, I tended to focus on the suffering of the Palestinians. Initially I had problems accepting that women from the group had said goodbye to the political stage and exercised their right to take a break. But all of the women were showing signs of wear and exhaustion from the constant struggle.

On the other hand, there was a sensation of something else: decisiveness, power and trust, grown over the course of the years. It was possible to utter your own doubts and to speak about personal experiences in the role as 'victim', 'perpetrator' or 'observer'. In my working group, for example, we talked about whether we were aware of our power or power-

Edna Zaretsky Toledano:

The desperation becomes deeper. The chances to reconciliation between the two societies seem now a remote dream.

lessness in conflict situations and whether options for acting remain concealed as long as we exclusively consider ourselves victims. Of course, the classical checkpoint ex-

periences came to mind in this discussion. Every one of us knows the feeling of being reduced to a victim only and not being able to influence anything.

The more we got into the dynamics and patterns of such conflict situation, the more considerations regarding potential pro-action arose.

In our working group we also discussed our own share of possible abuse of power and racism. How do we, as German women, for example, treat immigrant women in our society, how much solidarity do we really show with women doing housework for us at minimum rates or suffering violence in our society?

I discovered parallels with the Israeli women in this discussion. Like Germany, Israel is also a country of immigrants with clear hierarchies, exclusions and marginalization mechanisms.

The increasing gap between poor and rich, between 'winners and losers' of globalization, causing new wars, violence and refugees' fates, particularly in the last years, also influenced our discussions. The wars of the USA in Afghanistan and Iraq after September 2001, the separation of the world in categories of values such as 'Western democracy' and 'Islamic world' also hit the centre of 'the heart' of the triangle Germany-Israel-Palestine.

In Germany we women, for example, find ourselves between the extremes when it comes to the question of the prohibition on wearing the headscarf in public offices – in Bethlehem and other parts of the West Bank, outraged Muslims demonstrated against the 'unbelievers' and 'Western Europeans' in the face of the Mohammad caricatures last year.

The last meeting: what stays, what will be?

As always, we began what was provisionally the last meeting seminar in spring of 2007 in Berlin in national working groups. We German women discussed the current challenges of 'poverty and exclusion' as well as 'Islamophobia' also with reference to the work in terms of social and educational policy in our working group. On the one hand, I still had the pictures before my eyes of the partially very heated demonstrations on the occasion of the Mohammad caricatures last year (also in Bethle-

hem there had been many days of demonstration against the Western European ‘unbelievers’) – on the other hand, after my return from Bethlehem I was shocked about the vehemence of the German debate on the alleged ‘Islamic threat’ in Europe.

When we German women reported on the ‘Guantanamo scandal’ and the ‘Murat Kurnaz case’ (Murat Kurnaz is a young German man of Turkish origin who was detained in Guantanamo for 5 years; he was just ‘suspicious’ and was kept there without any evidence) during the working groups presentations, most of the Palestinian and Israeli women were astonished. In contrast to the daily reporting in the German media, they had heard nothing about it.

This final seminar, in which we dealt intensively with ‘reviewing’ and drawing up a balance sheet of our now 9-year joint history of the women’s network, brought up many events, experiences and also amazing stories once again. I was really impressed by the precision and detail of some of the women’s memories of events and conversations. The most insistent accounts were from our first meeting in 1998. “We then started as a project which developed into a group, a network”, this formulation by one participant describes the long and intensive process very well. Would this process with all its highs and lows as well as the endurance that was required also have been possible in a German-Israeli-Palestinian group with mixed sexes? We also discussed and speculated on this

Shira Ohayon:

On the other hand, they spoke of the internal Patriarchal oppression within their society and of their work as feminists inside the Palestinian communities.

subject. I do not believe that we would have made these steps at this point. In similar politically sensitive constellations, mixed-sex discussions and seminars often do not allow the required ‘depth’ or openness. Also the

experiences with male styles of dominance or the concern about a possible ‘political loss of face’ (speaking of ‘pride and honor’) often determine the course of discussion in mixed groups.

I have no interest in polarizing the ‘gender debate’, but the attitudes experienced in our group and the ability of the women to combine the personal and political and to be able to share both joy and pain, was what made the group grow.

Moreover, it was a clear sign to me that parallel to the dramatic escalation of the Israel-Palestine conflict in the last years and the combined worsening of the day-to-day and living conditions of our colleagues in their societies as well as an overall global intensification due to crises and wars, women are able to achieve strong and powerful personal development and build networks beyond limits and borders at the same time.

The mutual respect which all of the women gave and demanded was an invisible thread running through all our meetings and discussions and made this constructive process possible.

For me, the visions of non-violence, lived democracy and gender justice are more or less still remote, but 'over the years' I learnt from and with the women to ponder on joint visions, to take these and myself seriously and learnt that it is possible to withstand and overcome conflicts.

This also brought my search for an understanding of 'impartiality' a step forward, to a point where it is necessary to articulate my opposition against injustice, abuse of power and suppression and to work towards non-violent transformation of conflict. Sometimes this can be 'inconvenient'.

I wish that I could preserve the respect, the attention and empathy I received and hope that I can profit from Edna's 'wisdom and smartness'. I would like to thank Hannelore in particular at this point, who started this project and this group and never gave up – even in the most difficult situations.

Would this process with all its highs and lows, as well as the endurance that was required, have been possible in a German-Israeli-Palestinian group with mixed sexes?

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2007 in Berlin



Jameela Alatrash
Christiane Reinholz-Asolli



Sabah Ikhymees · Fidaa Narh-Abu Dba · Rima Al Ajram · Razia Meron

Fidaa Narh–Abu Dba

Journey of a woman



Fidaa Narh–Abu Dba

Born in Nazareth, into a family where both parents were political activists. 1983–1988 She lived in Neve Shalom, an Arab Jewish community that strives for coexistence and equality.

As a young woman she was always very politically active. In 1996 she volunteered in the crisis centre in the Association of Women against Violence, (WAVO). Her feminist identity began to formulate through this work. In 1999 she completed her BA in Social Work. Today she heads the Department for Social Change within WAVO as a mentor and facilitator to the staff. She also works with women's groups on empowerment.

When Edna talked to me in 1998 and suggested that I join the project “Women Engendering Peace and Democracy”, in which Palestinian, Israeli and German women’s groups participate, I was thrilled that she chose me. I did not know then the extent to which this experience would impact me, my life and personality.

When I met the Palestinian participating group from the West Bank and Gaza at the airport, I felt homesick and alone, as if we do not belong to the same nation and as if we did not experience the same trauma of being refugees and displaced. As if my name is not Fidaa, which a very common and meaningful name, as if my name is Rahel or Inbal (Israeli names). Later I realized the hard times we live – as Palestinians from the 48 region /Israeli Arabs/ Palestinians who live within the Green Line, or other names given to us, as the names are so many but the situation is the same – is a reality of displacement, weakness and detachment.

The journey to Germany was long and hard. It was my first journey abroad. The first time I travelled by plane. The first time I left my family and friends. I was 20 years old, and my experiences in life were so limited. That year I was a volunteer in the Crisis Centre to help victims of violence at the organization Women Against Violence, and I was still new to organizations and feminist work.

When we reached Frankfurt airport it was late, and I was walking with the Israeli and Palestinian women. I was carrying my bags with no clue as to where we were heading. I was like a soldier who is getting orders that she does not question because, for sure, the leader knows better. Maybe some will think of this an odd metaphor

because we are talking about a feminist based project, but even inside the feminist community there are groups that resemble armies.

When we started the workshop in Würzburg, the loneliness and homesickness got worse. This was for a number of reasons: lack of knowledge of the language came first, being young and inexperienced was another factor. But things got worse when, through the course of our discussion, I was labelled as not belonging to the Palestinian group and people because I do not live under Occupation.

Here a question popped into my head: “Is not what we live a hard reality as Palestinians in the 48 region? Is this not another form of occupation? If staying on one’s land is the charge, I admit that I am guilty as charged, because I belong to a family who decided not to flee during the Catastrophe (Nakba) but stayed on their land and in their house. My family decided to preserve the social and political uniqueness of our Palestinian people in Nazareth. I admit that I do not live under

Occupation as Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza do, but I live another form of occupation on a daily basis in the university and in the street, everywhere

Edna Zaretsky Toledano:

The Nakba is erased from our sight. Who benefits from this blindness towards the suffering of others or in ignoring their basic needs?

and in different forms. Is it right to determine my national identity according to the amount of torture I suffer on a daily basis?

This accusation caused me to burst into tears; it was the honest way to express myself then. I said angrily, ‘Do you know my name and what it means? My family did not name me Fidaa by accident, nor because my family liked the sound of this name. I was born in 1976 one day after Land Day, and after the Tel Al Zaatar battle. I was brought up with these memories and others. I was raised to be aware of the fact that I am a Palestinian living in the state of Israel because it has occupied my land, and not because I chose to move there and live in it.’

From within this dilemma, as with any other hard dilemma we face in our lives, I started to grow up and develop on many different levels: personal, professional, political and social. After I returned to Nazareth I started building my feminist and professional identity in my own unique way through education and work. It is taken for granted that continuing to be in this group contributed a lot to facing the challenges I encountered and pushed me to keep developing. Many people might think that because my work, which focuses on social change and empowering the status of Palestinian Arab woman inside Israel (through raising women’s awareness as part of the Women Against Violence organization), is a form of running away from the political work and the national struggle in which I was not as active. However, since that first meeting with the whole group, I know today that I cannot separate between my personal, social and political realities, and that the struggle to improve women’s

status should surely be considered a social and political struggle for us as a Palestinian community in Israel.

The experience of working and participating in Palestinian, Israeli and German groups was not easy, especially under the political and social circumstances we live as nations and societies in an ongoing struggle for land and natural resources, but it helped me to develop and learn. We were all women from different countries and places, we differed in many ways including age and national identities, but we were alike in other aspects such as our feminist experiences and our desire to change things for the better.

Our work in the project took on personal and professional aspects more than political, maybe because this is what I needed in this group during this time of my life, and maybe because the group's meeting lasted for about ten years! Each meeting was a milestone for me. To contemplate between every two meetings and review what I did during the time passed together; to share it with the group and to learn from their experiences and to plan for the future, were all important learning experiences for me. At every milestone I felt that I am growing up and becoming more mature and stronger. After each meeting finished I would go back to my daily life. The milestones I am talking about are the most important events in my life. I started the journey as a young girl in my twenties. Today I am a woman who is seeking sustainability in my professional and personal lives. I am a mother and an active feminist. The

Hannelore Chiout:

Only with women I could imagine reaching limits and going beyond limits.

break from my personal and professional life I have had every time I joined the group was a key factor in the process of searching for the next stage in my journey.

Sometimes I feel that during the course of these meetings I am reviewing what I accomplished and assessing my life.

I recall that at our fourth meeting in Berlin (2005), the facilitator brought a story about a wood where animals decided to divide celebrations and parties into two groups, a party for animals and another for birds. When the bat wanted to attend the animals' party they told it that it was a bird and not an animal because it had wings; so it went to the birds' party but they did not let him in there either, saying that he was not a bird but an animal since he had teeth. He wanted to find his true place.

The bat's story resembles our situation, that of the Palestinian people who live in the State of Israel. No one recognizes us and our reality is ignored. This can be seen in the way the Oslo Agreement took place. We are not mentioned in any phase of the negotiations by any party. The difference for me now is that I am sure of my identity as a woman and as a Palestinian living in Israel and that maybe makes me stronger, as I can talk to both Israelis and Palestinians and have things in common

with them both. But I will not be part of any of their parties unless these nations choose not to segregate, because we are all equal in this world.

Working in the Palestinian group after the year 2000 was different, perhaps because of the beginning of the Second Intifada when 13 young men of the 48 Region became martyrs, or perhaps because I am more mature and my personality is stronger. What is for sure is that my English is not any better, but I decided this time that I would not let anything stop me from participating in and integrating with the whole group. I felt that I had closed the circle with myself first, and then with the Palestinian group through convincing them that having intellectual, professional and personal diversity does not weaken us as a group or a nation. On the contrary it strengthens us!

My infant baby joined me on my last trip, and I felt so independent when I walked around the airport alone. I am not that weak 'soldier' anymore who does not know where to go in this big world. In this meeting there was no need for a group leader because we had become a group that gives space to every participant, grown women who are equal and meeting on a shared journey.

Today I can see how different I am in the way I live with myself, my family and my friends. Today I am a woman in my thirties and I work continually to develop myself professionally through learning and experiencing as much as possible. I am not afraid to make mistakes anymore.

I know that I won't be a captain, as in the army, but I will be a counsellor who makes space and time for every human being.

Edna Zaretsky Toledano

Weaving the Dream



Edna Zaretsky Toledano

Coordinator of the Israeli group.

Born in Israel in 1941.

Engaged with groups of Jews and Arabs since the sixties.

Since 1982 an member of several groups and coalitions of women for a just peace and against wars and occupation.

As an active feminist, she developed empowerment programmes for women and facilitated groups and staff in shelters for battered women and in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

She served as Chair of Isha L'isha, Feminist Centre of Haifa.

Since 2003 she has been a member of Haifa City Council.

What was the thing that motivated me to start this undertaking, a meeting of a group of Israeli-Palestinian-German women? What was I asking for? Where did this need and the desire to invest so much time and energy in another naïve attempt come from, at a time in my life when I was able to analyze, and did analyze, experiments of this kind and to be more than sceptical about them.

I say what was I asking for, but it was actually 'we' who asked, which multiplied and strengthened the faith, a partnership of women from different parts of the world, sharing a vision and perception of the world and great love.

Prehistory

Actually it started many years beforehand, perhaps when I was just 13 years old and became aware of the libellous trial of Israel Kastner against Greenwald, who had accused Kastner of cooperating with the Nazis. Then much later, when I was a young woman, I was aware of the Eichmann Trial. During these two trials, while referring to the Holocaust, witnesses claimed: "We did not know", "We did not see", "We did not hear", "We did not believe the stories we heard and could not imagine how something like this could happen".

I said to myself, "How could it be that they didn't know?" Could it be that they are just not telling the truth? Or did something block their line of vision? So many people disappeared, millions died and they didn't see anything or hear anything and they didn't do anything? "Don't be so quick to judge" I said to myself, "Thou shall not judge a person until you reach his place,"

the young girl who studied at a religious school reminded herself of the quote from the Mishnah (oral Jewish laws).

“Pay attention”, I said to myself, “Pay attention and mind that you don’t reach that place where you don’t see and don’t hear, where your line of vision is blocked. You must pay attention to it, make sure this terrible thing, the blindness, doesn’t happen to you. Pay attention. You have to pay attention to what is happening. You have to know what is happening. You have to know about these things and not allow them to happen. Otherwise you will be responsible for the outcome. It is not the others. It is you who is responsible.” So I said to myself, that young girl in her teens who was reading the works of existentialist philosophers Martin Buber and Soren Kierkegaard.

How can one know? It took a while until that young teenage girl learned how to ask questions about what she knew; about what she was told at school, or on the radio. It took time until she understood that what she

Gili Tzidkiyahu:

My life, private, professional and political, kept changing all the time as did my priorities and my loyalties. Within all of these pictures, are scattered memories that are illusive but can still be surprising.

knew was a narrative, that reality could be read differently and that there were facts that had been eliminated from the story which was delivered to the general public. It took time until she understood that the concepts that were used to describe

the reality were, in fact, only one way to describe it. She realized that it is possible to describe events in different terms. It was a long process that involved many eye opening moments.

But it was only after the war in 1967, The Six Day War, in which the West Bank and the Gaza Strip were occupied by Israel, when right there before her eyes, events were being rewritten and facts were being manipulated, when words, processes and places were being renamed, it was only then that her eyes were opened. Her eyes became open, but there was no relief. It was like an earthquake. From here on the process of asking questions about history has deepened.

My doubts regarding the prevailing narratives began many years before that. In the meetings I attended together with Arab-Palestinians, citizens of Israel (at the time the majority of these citizens did not define themselves as Palestinians), I learned parts of their painful story. On one Independence Day, my family and I went together with friends, a family that lived in Acre, internal refugees from the village of Ghabsia, to visit their village. It was an encounter with the Nakba, with their disaster, with their expulsion from their land and village, an encounter with a story of displacement and expropriation, with the history of refugees.

In the ceremonies held in schools and the public arena, in our educational texts, Israeli children and adults learn about the Independence War, about the war of the enemies, but not about the Nakba, or about the Palestinian women and men and their suffering. I thought to myself,

“Why don’t we teach the tragedy of the Palestinians? The Nakba is erased from our sight. Who benefits from this blindness towards the suffering of others or in ignoring their basic needs? How can we ignore the plight of the refugees and choose not to know and to shut our eyes and be completely oblivious, when we as a people have experienced being refugees, who have known what it is like to cry out for the compassion of others who ignored our plight. Does not this disregard mean that we are destroying our humanity?”

The massacre at the Arab village of Kfar Kassem in 1956, that happened the day that Israel started the War in Sinai, was a painful breaking point that preceded all this. Men and women came home from work that day, not realizing that there was a curfew. They were taken off the truck that was bringing them home and shot to death, picked off one by one. The fact that Jews could execute people and were responsible for such a massacre shocked me and validated my deepest fears by giving credence to the fact that we too have no immunity from the processes of dehumanization. The trial that followed after the massacre determined that the order to shoot was clearly and undoubtedly unlawful – the kind of ruling that carries a black flag above it. In spite of the fact that the guilty party did not pay a price, this verdict lessened none the less, but did not end, the deep feeling of concern I have felt ever since the trials of Kastner and Eichmann.

The question that was asked in Israel, following those two trials was “How were we led away like sheep to slaughter?” This seemed to me like an unfair and annoying question that fingers and blames the victim. The actual question that pecked away at me was “How could it be that a nation of cultural and spiritual giants, that bestowed upon the world humane literature that made your heart skip a beat, heavenly music and profound philosophy, how could these people turn into the planners and implementers of a mass annihilation and be partners in silence to such inhumane actions? If this happened to them, perhaps there is no immunization against it. If this could happen to them, then it could happen to everyone. It could happen to us.

The education in Israel established and fortified the concept of “We shall never be victims again. We will never be led like sheep to slaughter again. We must be strong”. I asked then, and I still believe that the question that we should be asking ourselves is “How do we prevent turning into murderers, into victimizers?” Our education should deal with that challenge.

There have been so many decisions that I have made in my life, big and little, while these questions and imperatives have been guiding me. I refuse to become the victimizer.

My need to make world reform comes together with the total realization that I may not be able to achieve this goal in my own way. For me the goal does not justify the means, even when there is an ultimate goal that is sublime. The means, the process, is in fact a vital part of the goal. There may be those who will claim that this is naivety, that this is not the way to overcome evil. But is there an alternative option? Can a path of violence or force bring about a better and more humane world?

As the years went by and I became more knowledgeable (I am a trained sociologist), I never stopped being active in that 'naïve' way feeling the intense gap between this path and the sociological analysis that I gave it, referring to its potential and chances to create real social and political change.

I participated and still participate in initiatives promoted by others. But do I have the right to request that other women join me while going down this long path that demands so much energy and time? Under what pretence am I supposed to make my request? The only justification that I can think of is when all those involved are also participants in an entire process of defining the goals and the means of humane organization, means that do not disregard the needs of all involved or ignores their needs and dreams. This kind of involvement will help the participants in building trust in their own potential and in others. It will empower them and nurture their humanity. This will only work and be legitimate when the activities will allow for each participant to be attentive to their own voice, to find their unique voice in a protective space and in the same time to be attentive to the others and to be heard by them, to develop their capability to be polyphonic.

I try to listen to all the different voices and use all my senses to do so. It is an attempt to wear the skin of the other, and to understand the meaning while wearing it. It is a condition for dialogue. I learned to listen when I was younger and read *I and Thou* by Martin Buber and while participating in an actor's workshop that was run by the director Nola Chilton. It had a significant effect on my life.

It is a very long path to take to build a different kind of power in which the energies invested make it worth the while.

I met Hannelore Chiout for the first time in Israel in 1981 during an exchange programme with educators from Israel and Germany. Then in 1982, when Israel invaded Lebanon, I was in Germany for another part of the same exchange programme.

Israel called this war "Operation Peace for the Galilee" and it seemed as if we were part of a chapter from *1984*, by author George Orwell, where "war is peace, peace is war". Not only the name given to the war struck me like lightning, but also the fact that it was possible to knowingly and consciously deceive the citizens regarding present realities.

For almost a year before Israel's invasion, the PLO forces maintained peace all along the shared northern border and the peace agreement with Israel was upheld by them. At the time when Israel declared war there was peace in Galilee. Calling the military operation by that name successfully erased from the memory of so many people what had gone on just the day before installing a false memory instead.

Aside from two women, within the group of Israeli educators that were with me in Germany, no one shared my opinions. During long discussions about the war and about issues regarding the essence of our lives, I developed a close partnership with Hannelore. This partnership emanates from common ideas and from recognizing a shared responsibility to the present. It created sisterhood which has over the years remained an ongoing and developing partnership, friendship and love. Our ideas did not include, in the beginning, thoughts regarding the special potential of women and their capabilities to question prevailing concepts and to create alternative politics. These thoughts developed over the years, first separately by each of us and then in our shared dialogue.

Two weeks after the war broke out, immediately upon my return from Germany, I joined with other women, "Women against the War in Lebanon", and we began to protest daily

Anette Klasing:

For me, the visions of non-violence, lived democracy and gender justice are more or less still remote, but 'over the years' I learnt from and with the women to ponder on joint visions, to take these and myself seriously and learnt that it is possible to withstand and overcome conflicts.

against the war in vigils at various intersections. Here, when passers by yelled out sexist statements to us, we heard calls such as "Fuckers", "Lesbians", "Traitors", "Go cook for your husbands", "Go Fuck Arabs", "Go take care of your children" and so on. Here, at this point, the connection between chauvinism and male chauvinism became quite clear to me. I understood that it is not enough just to demonstrate against the war and it is not enough to run workshops which enable the participants to examine their attitudes towards people from another nation and about the Israeli - Arab conflict in the framework of a Jewish-Arabic encounter. I understood the great necessity for feminist work. My feminist activism began at this point.

A year later, as a volunteer in a shelter for battered women, during a weekly discussion that I held with the women there, while listening to their stories, I became aware of an inner dialogue within myself that signified a radicalization of my feminist awareness.

In my work with students and teachers, in groups that are intended to examine political attitudes of the participants, both in encounter groups of Jews and Arabs and in separate frameworks, the ability that women have to listen and to connect to the stories of others becomes clear time after time, an ability "to get under the skin". Women tend not only

to develop empathy but also an ability to express the need to be of assistance in easing the pain of others, to change the depressing reality and to motivate themselves into action. There are also men who express such sensitivity and commitment, but the majority is women.

As women we find ourselves taking care of all family members, of children and parents. As women we often experience oppression in our right to live a fully humane life, liberated, equal and with the right for self fulfilment. These are possibly the sources of our responsiveness.

While observing the various peace movements it seems that women are the clear majority. Within separate frameworks, we women are building opposition to wars and occupation. There is diligence and consistency. This perhaps stems from our marginality in politics, in decision – making centres, while in spite of that, we want to influence and make a difference. Our marginality is visible not only where decisions are made, but also within wider social spheres where it intensifies our need for solidarity with other women in the world.

Participating in demonstrations of protest against the Occupation, in the marches and while standing at the different intersections, all these became vital factors in my existence and that of my colleagues. The ur-

Faten Mukarker:

I had to think about what I was getting involved in, because many Palestinians see meeting Israelis in the sense of a 'normalisation' with the enemy.

gent need is to refuse, not to put up with the oppression, with the killing and the denial of basic human rights of the Palestinian people and at the same time to refuse to accept the terrible price of bloodshed that the Israeli society pays and the

ongoing process of dehumanization, of pulverizing our humanity, which penetrated to all spheres of our life. It became my focal point. I have a sense of belonging to my community as long as I can voice my refusal.

But expressing this voice of refusal is not enough for the women that demonstrate with me and for myself. These demonstrations are held with a deep commitment and sense of responsibility to society and are meant to create a change. The inability to create this change, the difficulty to get even a fair coverage by the media creates a need to be strengthened and to empower our voice.

Over and over again in the big international conferences that are held by "Women in Black" and by "Engendering the Peace Process" with women who have coordinated and continue to lead and coordinate struggles for human rights and for freedom from oppression, we can hear the different women's voices, the feminist and humane voice. It is a reflection of our own voices. This creates feelings of partnership and it is empowering.

"Engendering the Peace Process" was an initiative taken following the U.N conference in September 1995 in Beijing and the resolution to engender the peace process. Acknowledging the high price that women pay in areas of conflict and their potential as peace makers, the resolution

called on the international community to provide opportunities where women could become active participants in the negotiation processes in areas of conflict.

In our area it included a joint effort of Israeli, Palestinian and prominent women leaders from around the world to empower women to create a dialogue and to promote a joint agenda, to promote peace. I was the Jewish coordinator for this project. We named the project “Women Build a Culture of Peace”.

Women Engendering Democracy and Peace

In 1992 Hannelore organized an international conference of women in Berlin. This was a very exciting meeting and it is here that I meet for the first time the women who would become our Palestinian partners. The strength of their words and their humanity entered our hearts.

Hannelore was not just dreaming about the encounter of Israeli-Palestinian-German group, which we named later “Women Build Democracy and Peace”. She is a very determined woman and she worked hard to make it all come true.

The Israeli Group: Its composition and makeup

I am asked to act under the sponsorship of the Israeli organization “Bat Shalom”, which together with the Palestinian “Jerusalem Women’s Centre” (JCW) constitute the “Jerusalem Link”. The Centre is meant to be our Palestinian partner in “Women Engendering Peace and Democracy”. Eight Israeli women are meant to participate. How shall I choose them? Gila Svirsky, then director of Bat Shalom, tells me that I am free to choose whomever I feel should join the group. She completely trusts my decisions.

The fact that Israel is a deeply divided society, being characterized by deep schisms called for, in my view, a creation of a group of women who are committed to social justice and peace and hence similar to one another, but who will be also different from one another representing the variety of groups, voices and backgrounds in the society. It is significant in my opinion that the women in the group would introduce into the encounter their different concepts, their different interpretations of reality, which were shaped during their different life histories and experiences.

The awareness of the necessity to listen to the different voices stems, in my case, from listening to adolescents with whom I worked from poverty-stricken neighbourhoods and then later on to the women in the shelter for battered women, to women from these same areas and also to my Palestinian colleagues. All of them opened my eyes, deepened my insights and brought on greater understanding. These were significant stepping stones in my life. They enabled me to do a critical analysis of the knowledge which I had acquired in the academy.

At the time when we were making plans for the seminar, the importance of having a representation of the different cultures in any discussion was also understood in the feminist movement in Israel and the application of this understanding became the standard.

I wanted the multiculturalism of the group; Jews and Palestinian citizens of Israel, Ashkenazi and Orientals (Sephardic), religious and secular, Lesbian and heterosexuals, younger and older. So many women in only eight beings.

Shira, for instance, will introduce into our group, as a Sephardic Jewish intellectual, who defines herself as Jewish Arab, a critical analysis of the Israeli society and deep love and connection to the Arabic culture – literature, poetry, music and dance.

I chose, after consulting with my colleagues, women with awareness and commitment in at least one of the following issues: struggles against racism and discrimination against women and / or Palestinians in Israel, and for the creation of conditions for equality, ending the Occupation, struggles against militarism within the society and work towards its civilization. There are women who have just started to be active. Some women are active in more than one organization. I know most of them from our shared activities. They are women who have love for themselves and for others.

The women are active in the “Coalition of Women for Peace” which includes: “Bat Shalom”, “Women in Black”, “Tandi – The Movement of Democratic Women in Israel”, “New Profile”, “The Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow”, and in “The Coalition of Women in Haifa” which includes: “Woman to Woman – The Feminist Centre”, “Kayan – the Palestinian Women’s Feminist Centre” and “The Rape Crisis Centre”.

I see the encounter workshop as an opportunity to develop our ability to listen to the different voices, to understand better the different realities in which women live and act. It is also an opportunity to develop insights regarding the processes that we are going through as individuals and in groups, in our social political reality, and in the workshop in personal processes, in interactions between one another, in inter-subgroups interaction and as a group.

This is an opportunity to reveal the gains and prices in oppression and in being a victim, to discover what part do we take in sustaining and reproducing the depressing reality, to examine what we are accountable for and how we can create a more humane society. This is an opportunity to do it in a supportive environment.

I know, that every examination of attitudes and concepts is demanding, that change at the core of principles and basic values is difficult and painful, and that it takes time to make change. I know the agonies and the soul searching that the participants are going through. I observed this during the many workshops that I facilitated, amongst them work-

shops that were long term processes. Without a supportive environment it is impossible to go through processes that delve into realms of self awareness, and enables growth and empowerment.

Is it possible that in the future we will be able to offer an alternative vision to our deeply divided societies whose realities include struggles

Katrin Wolf:

It is hard work for us not to think in concepts of enemies and national categories, in particular for those of us who have grown up in systems which wanted to teach us the opposite. How fast get we trapped in a train of thought of confrontation instead of trying to identify and pursue joint targets.

from within and between them, struggles that demand their heavy toll in blood and agony? Can we possibly offer a new vision when we ourselves come from within this troubled reality, when our own concepts and world views are etched within us from our roots? Could we do it even given the fact that many of us had

gone a long way questioning their own attitudes and convictions? And could we, when we come back to our societies spread this message?

During the preparation meetings of the first international seminar, which was actually a kind of mini workshop with the three coordinators, Hannelore, 'S' (who asked not to reveal her name) and I, we clarified the expectations, the goals and the methods. We prepared a structure for future meetings and mapped out how we would like to move forward. We decided not to be the facilitators but chose to be both group participants and coordinators. Everything would be decided by consensus. After making these decisions, I shared all considerations with the group. From this point on decisions were decided by the group.

We held introductory meetings within the national groups. Within the Israeli group, after consulting with the Palestinian group, we decide that we should all meet at the Ben Gurion airport, in order to go through all the security procedures together as one group and equally. These procedures are usually humiliating for the Palestinians. This is true for Palestinians who are Israeli citizens as well.

We are successful in this and everyone manages to pass through the security systems without much ado, respectfully and equally. This attitude also repeats itself upon our return. But this does not make me happy. I feel sad and ashamed that we have to protect the Palestinians from our security system. The patronage is degrading

On the train, during the snowy night, on the way from Frankfurt to Würzburg where we would hold our first seminar, we hear Rima's story. Rima is a young woman from a refugee family who now lives in Gaza. She tells us the story of the painful route that she and her family had to go through, crossing lands, in a torturous voyage. Our painful journey has begun. Rima's journey creeps into our hearts.

This also signifies Rima's journey of growth. It is a journey full of courage and determination to criticize the Israeli occupation and the

Israeli society and in the same time to develop an ability to question herself, her own attitudes and her own society.

Journey to the Holy Land

At a two day preparation meeting between Hannelore, 'S' and me, we plan together, in complete cooperation, the entire journey. It includes the Jewish Settlements in the heart of the Old City of Jerusalem, the uprooted Arab villages within the green line and the displaced Palestinian refugees. It includes confronting the Holocaust. It includes also meetings with women's organizations who work to create a different reality in the Occupied Territories and in Israel.

The second seminar, a shared journey to a land of conflict, seems to me the right thing to do. Meeting people in their surroundings exposes us to the complex reality and enables us to better understand the history and to experience each other as human beings. It allows us to be set free from chains to old narratives and ideologies.

We visit Abu Arab in Nazareth. All the windows in the house face Safuri, the village from which he was expelled and never allowed to return. After the visit his dreams and pains penetrate and don't let go.

The modest accommodation that we have planned for this trip seem just right to me. But our attempts to organize another seminar in the region do not come about. The walls of division are higher than they had been before.

At the end of the seminar, following the difficult meeting at the Holocaust Museum, we are exhausted. The last two nights we spend in Tabjha, at the Sea of Galilee, where most of us sleep in tents set up outside alongside the brook and are accompanied by the sound of the water and the buzzing of the mosquitoes. Though it is special and beautiful, it is very tiring. We say our goodbyes around noon. The heat is intense.

Rima would like to see Be'er Sheva, the place where she was born. Vered, who developed a special connection with Rima ever since that first day in Würzburg, takes her to her (Vered's) home and collects two of her children whom she hasn't seen all week long. They drive all the way to Be'er Sheva, which is in the south. There Vered recruits her niece who studies at the university there and together they sightsee in the city. It becomes very late. Vered takes her children and Rima to the border crossing at Erez. Then Vered returns home. I will never understand where Vered found the strength to take that exhausting journey. I will not forget.

With the group of Women from Germany

The first meetings between the three groups, for a good part of the time, address the emotional energy and tremendous effort in the characteristics taken on by the Palestinian-Israeli groups coming together. The women from Germany, every single one of them special and most of them are very active, find it difficult to find their space at these meetings. They become frustrated. Some of them drop out of the project.

We continue on with four German women who accompany us all the way. The connection that is created is more than warm friendship and appreciation. Our shared work along the years, while reflecting on our lives, allows us insights beyond the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

This happens during all of the seminars, and happened, for example during the opening of the fourth seminar in Berlin when we all draw together drawings that represent each national group upon large placards and show the processes that we have gone through since the last time we met. The Palestinian group presents a very hard and gloomy picture, a direct product of the Occupation. Between the pictures the Israeli group and the German group draw there are many similarities.

They show how intensely the position and security of women deteriorates within these two rich societies as a result of the systematic destruction of the welfare state and the pulverization of the social security net. These pictures show the choice of these two strong nations of a Neo-Liberal policy which creates great poverty, unemployment, violation of workers' rights and trafficking of women on the one hand and enormous gains by the higher ten percentile on the other hand. This comparative observation, through the testimonies of the women about the different processes they are going through in their lives and within their close environment, provides some clarity other than that shown in the financial facts that are read, or in the comparative social and political analysis. In these two drawings significant criticism is raised regarding our own societies and their governmental policies. They show objection to the indifference to human lives within controlled and occupied populations and also in regard to the disempowered and disenfranchised populations within these controlling jurisdiction.

During the discussions it becomes evident that there is a need for shared actions between the women in the three groups. Beyond that there is deep appreciation and love for these four women, Hannelore, Christiane, Anette and Katrin. Each one in her way is an example of commitment and social courage.

Looking Back

Today, when looking back on the processes that we went through as a Dialogue group, I have mixed feelings. At the last seminar, the Dialogue group seemed uplifted. There was a sense of sisterhood and an assessment that important processes had occurred within the group and the individuals, that women have been empowered. There was a sense of desire and a need to move forward and continue with this work, in spite of the fact that this seminar was supposed to be our final one. Ruth suggested that we create an NGO. Razia is building a website. These endeavours were received with great enthusiasm. Future processes are being created. So why do I have these mixed feelings? What is holding back the joy?

I will try to reflect on the more difficult moments, the unfinished business. I am one of those who established this triangle and I did it with the explicit knowledge that it would be problematic, and not just because of basic differences of beliefs and attitudes between the groups. There is an essential asymmetry in power relations between us and the Palestinians. This asymmetry was a definite obstacle in having a full and equal partnership.

A partnership should allow us to examine our proceedings together with our partners, especially when members of the group are offended. This examination was limited when it was necessary to examine the actions of the Palestinian partner towards members of the group, including Palestinian women.

In many instances I did not allow myself to act as a full partner. I remembered all the time that out there in the “real world” we, the Israelis, are the ruling party, the Occupiers, and therefore we are not in a position to criticize the Palestinian partner. I kept reminding myself that we, the Israelis, cannot assess properly the condition of the Palestinian women, not the circumstances of their everyday lives, and surely not the pressures and the threats towards them, resulting from the fact that they are meeting and “collaborating” with the enemy. I’m well aware of the fact that the Palestinian leadership opposes activities of normalization with Israelis, including peace organizations, except for acts of protests, as long as the Occupation goes on.

As Israelis we pay a certain price in our society for our stand and actions against the Occupation and against wars. But still this price is minute, and perhaps this very fact makes it easier for us, the fact that we belong to an oppressive society that occupies others.

This behaviour of mine is problematic. It is paternalistic to give up the demands from the others. I keep asking myself if the problem is embedded within the situation or is it my choice to interpret as such.

This policy of not interfering means exposing friends to being hurt and contradicts basic rules of group dynamics.

There are moments that are difficult for some of the Israeli group, moments that have to do with posing questions about one's positions and opinions. For example, in the first seminar, Adina, a woman with high moral values and commitment, active in "New Profile", in the Israeli Committee against House Demolitions and in the Committee for Political Prisoners experienced some very difficult moments when voicing her National-Zionist opinion. She felt isolated and lonely. When talking to her I tried to help her find the way to continue voicing her position and felt that it was legitimate. But I was unsuccessful and unable to help her not feel so isolated. Both of us knew that my position in the matter was very far from hers.

In the seminar in Bremen, when presented with a wider discussion on the problem of the Palestinian refugees and the claim of the 'Right to Return', deep fears rose in Razia and Vered. Razia had a terrible nightmare. She dreamt that a family of refugees moved in and lived with her in her yard. Later, in the dream, or as part of her coping with the panic, the families swapped places. Her family went to live in the yard and the Palestinian family moved into the house.

These are two examples of confrontations that were expected to take place within the seminars. In the end, there was some solution and closure, created by the participants in the processes. This is not the matter that continues to trouble me.

During the first seminar there were many painful instances, not only for those who were directly affected, but for the others as well. One evening, Gili innocently invited everyone who would like to join her after the last discussion session, to come to her room to light Chanukah candles with her. Her invitation was interpreted by 'S', the leader of the Palestinian group, as an attempt of cultural coercion. Gili got a cold shower. It was painful to watch and to see there was no mercy on her for her good intentions.

The reason for this was the same one given in other situations, such as the objection to go to a church nearby to hear a Christmas concert, as well as the objection that the women should be allowed to dance together following a long day full of deep and exhausting discussions. 'S' explained that it is her duty to protect her group from outside influences that may have negative effects when they return to their country.

Another painful experience refers to the Palestinian women who live in Israel, Fidaa and Rawia. They are important integrated members of the Israeli group, with a definite voice and presence in each discussion regarding Israeli society. Their point of view is vital regarding historical narratives, comprehending the current political situation and the differ-

ent hardships and needs, and in every discussion about the future. When the time came to work in single national groups, after much consideration, they asked to be part of the Palestinian group. While the Israeli group saw them as important members of the group, everyone was respectful of their choice to belong to the Palestinian group. But the head of the Palestinian group turned down their request and did not let them join. These two young women were deeply hurt. The younger of the two, the youngest at the seminar, had a terrible time with this. The Israeli group once again offered, with sensitivity and warmth, and invited them to rejoin the group. In the end they decided to work in their own little group.

It is possible to explain the apprehension that the Palestinians were feeling towards 'annexing' other Palestinians from Israel, in the sense that this may frighten and deter Israeli leadership from finding a political solution in dealing with the Palestinians. This means that they must

Rawia Loucia Shammas:

I am definitely Palestinian. I have an Israeli identity card and an Israeli passport but this is because I don't have a choice in the matter.

I refuse to leave the land I was born in because my connection with the land is my existence.

refrain from going further down this path. Even if this was the reason, it is difficult to understand why this was done without sensitivity towards these young women. The memory of Fidaa crying remained in my memory for a long time. It was

painful because they were left without a group, in spite of the fact that they were an integral part of our group. It could not be a comfort nor a solution for them, since it did not reflect the reality outside our seminar, in the Israeli society where they are not regarded Israelis. The double rejection, the exclusion by both societies, the Palestinian and the Israeli, was magnifying the pain.

The support, hugs and love that we showered on these two women did not reduce the pain. Over and over again I asked myself if I had acted responsibly towards Fidaa, this very young woman when I had decided to include her in the group.

At any rate, this event had wider implications. During the third seminar in Bremen, three other women from Israel joined the group. (Enlarging the groups and asking other women to join was done at the request of the funding institution). One of them, Areen, was a very determined and charismatic Palestinian woman. She was resolved in her decision that the Israeli Palestinians must be part of the Palestinian group in its entirety. She succeeded and the Palestinians from Israel became an integral part of the Palestinian group. Unfortunately, Areen could not continue with us after this seminar, because of personal reasons. But Fidaa and Rawia took an active part in the Palestinian group and this intensified the personal reflective processes taking place, and the inclusion and containing of the many different voices, and also the

objection to any kind of exclusion and rejection of any participant, in particular rejection on the grounds of class and background.

This is possibly one of the reasons that some women of the Palestinian group decided to withdraw their participation by the fifth seminar. This fact left the Palestinian group with very few participants. But all of them have gone through impressive processes of empowerment during the seminars and in their personal lives. This is true of all the Palestinian women, those from Israel and those from Palestine.

The fifth seminar carried a tremendous voice of Palestinian women. Sabah has now a clear voice and presence. She teaches Gender Studies in the university now. I watch her she lacks the sadness that was imprinted before. Jameela the energetic young woman who joined in the fourth seminar finds her place and her voice in the group. And Rima, Rima has grown to become a woman of rare moral qualities and as always, so moving.

For me, as for my colleagues, there is much joy about this process of growth. There is also much sorrow because of the departure of women from the Palestinian group, women that were so important to us and are still so significant. Perhaps this is the root of this great sadness that I feel. Perhaps it is truly difficult for me to say good bye to them. We shared so many moments of deep closeness, of sharing thoughts and feelings. The fears of the daughter of Faten, as reflected in her paintings, fears from the shelling of the Israeli army, would always accompany me, as well as the sensitivity in the manner it was described by Faten and her humanistic message.

I want to call them by their names and don't know if they would want to be mentioned upon these pages. I find it difficult to think that they are not part of the Triologue anymore.

The withdrawal of one Palestinian participant from the programme came following the lengthy imprisonment of her partner by Israel. She wrote us a letter and stated that she could not cooperate with us. Her letter was accusing and angry. This is understandable in light of the price that she and her partner were paying. This is the implication of the reality of the Occupation and our inability to stop it.

Within the Palestinian group there were frequent rotations, in some instances decisions were made to include women and then to exclude them. When 'S' stepped down from her position at work (between the third seminar and the fourth she was also replaced as head of the group). Her replacement demanded to deny the continuing participation of all the women and the creation of a new group. There was great objection to this step by the other women in the three groups. In the many discussions that Hannelore held with a good number of the Palestinian women, they expressed the need and desire to continue with the existing group.

In Israel we held a series of meetings that referred not only to the Palestinian women. We discussed if it was appropriate that two of the Israeli women who ceased their political activities should continue on with the group. Should we allow women who are tired from the activities within the significant political groups and who act for their own benefit and for the benefit of the world in different ways, to stay as part of the group?

The meetings were emotional. Everyone attended the gathering at Rawia's home in Haifa and later with three of the German women in Nazareth. The women expressed their commitment, love and concern to all the participants and objection was declared to waiving their participation. Could we give up on Rima, Sabah, May or Raja'a? We could not give up on Vered or on Razia either.

The decision is womanly and humane. A decision based on relating to people in their entirety, and not to their functionality to certain interests or goals. There is a voice for the others. We have a different voice and colour. We belong to another culture, a culture of women, a culture of peace. I am immensely happy and proud.

The last seminar in Berlin we have set aside for writing and we are full of emotions of love and happiness that we can be together again. We try to reconstruct and understand the events of the past and the processes we have gone through and still keep the dream of continuity alive, a continuation that will bring about something of this spirit, of this existence to our world. And we dance. It seems that we are not dealing anymore with the same intensity in clarifying political issues. Could it be? Is it a kind of escapism? I have my doubts.

Sadness is a constant escort. The socio-political and economical reality has deteriorated in our society. Within the Occupied Territories the situation is unbearable and is becoming worse from day to day. Only a few days from today we will be commemorating Forty Years of Occupation. The oppression is becoming more elaborate. Its mechanisms are highly structured. The offence against human lives and against all basic human rights is appalling. There is a fear of a humanitarian catastrophe.

The desperation becomes deeper. The chances to reconciliation between the two societies seem now a remote dream.

And we are in our world, but we are not blind. We are aware of the fact that we try to overcome the evil by personal lobbying in order to help one person or another and for the most part we are not successful. And even when we do succeed, it is uplifting but still leaves us with hard feelings of sorrow and shame. And we, although not all of us, continue to struggle and to demonstrate and to stand at the intersections, refusing to give in. And all this time we are weaving a dream.

Christiane Reinholz-Asolli

Reflections and Thoughts on Ten Years of German-Palestinian-Israeli Dialogue



Christiane Reinholz-Asolli

Born in 1960.
Islamic scientist.
She works as a programme coordinator for IJAB – International Youth Service of Germany in Bonn. There she is responsible for the training of personnel for youth work within the framework of international encounters. Her specialties include expert exchanges with Turkey and the subject of integration / migration.

In December 1998 we met in Würzburg for the first time. That year had been a year of changes for me. I had just moved to Bonn to start my new job as coordinator of international exchange programmes with Israel and the Arabic countries for IJAB – International Youth Service of the Federal Republic of Germany. The name of Hannelore Chiout had been mentioned to me before as one of the experts in international adult education relating to Israel. So I felt quite flattered when Hannelore asked me to join her new German-Israeli-Palestinian women's Dialogue project.

This project seemed to be a great chance to get better acquainted with Israel – which I needed for my new job. So far I had been mainly preoccupied with Arabic countries. I had studied Arabic and Islamic history, had lived in Egypt for a while and had been coordinating adult education programmes in the Arabic world. Also emotionally I felt much closer to the Arab side.

I didn't bother a lot about Israel. Being German it had always been clear and natural to me to learn about the Holocaust, think about how this could happen, explore the role of my family and take on responsibility for all the devastation my country had brought to the Jewish people, to other peoples and nations and to its own population. This responsibility meant for me that I had to stand up for democracy, justice and human rights. I had been in contact with survivors of the Holocaust living in Germany. But it was important for me to differentiate between my responsibility for the crimes of the Nazis and the necessity to learn from it on the one hand and any special relationship between Germany and the actual state of Israel on the other.

At that time I was still struggling to find my own position regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I could not accept the hypocritical way of acting I had experienced very often with German colleagues in dealing with Israeli partners. Criticism of Israeli policies towards the Palestinians was only voiced when speaking with other Germans. Israeli partners just had to hint at the German past in a negotiation to achieve what they wanted. However, I didn't want to find myself in alliance with that part of German society which misused the situation of Palestinians to halt the debate on German fascism and the public remembrance and exploration of the crimes committed.

When I joined the Trialogue project it was important for me first that it was a women's project because it was my experience that women don't remain easily at the superficial level of political slogans. Equally important was that the Israeli women were active against the occupation and the militarization of Israeli society. We would have a basic common position to start from.

When I came to Würzburg I was prepared for conflicts on a political level. But I was not prepared to get involved personally and emotionally so much.

In theory I was fairly well informed about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict but it was completely different to experience every day the traps and seemingly small differences that could incite a severe clash all of a sudden. I was not prepared for the emotional turbulence inside myself. In theory the solution of the conflict was clear but in practice there was a big knot of misunderstandings, naiveté, ignorance, hurt feelings which at times seemed impossible to disentangle. I came to admire the Israeli women deeply. They were fighting against the political mainstream at home. They were subjected to severe criticism, insults and threats because of their work for a just peace. And now they came here and exposed themselves also to the anger and frustration of the Palestinians. I thought they were very brave.

At the same time my 'political heart' was with the Palestinians. There was no real equality for them in this group. Unless the political situation changed in the direction of an independent Palestinian state we were talking in a bubble. After each seminar, the Palestinian women would return to their daily life fighting for permits, being humiliated at check points, not being able to go where they wanted, not being able to feel secure; while we Germans had a choice. We could choose any time to ignore politics and live our happy, little private lives...

Especially during the first seminars there were situations when the anger and frustration of the Palestinians towards 'the Israelis' would break out very emotionally. The Palestinian women would blame the Israeli women for the Israeli occupation policy. The Israelis were identified

with the very state politics they themselves criticized and fought against strongly- which I felt to be really 'unjust'. I shared the disappointment and hurt feelings of the Israeli women when this happened - especially since I could relate to this feeling of being a scapegoat from my private background. My husband, being not German but Albanian from Kosova, confronted me frequently with stories of all kinds of difficulties and injustices he himself or friends and relatives had to face because of their foreign origin. He was sad and full of rage in these situations and suddenly there were only 'you Germans' who did wrong and 'us'" (foreigners, Albanians, Muslims and so on) who had to suffer from this. I, as a person critical of these incidents, didn't seem to exist anymore, which was painful and often led to very emotional discussions.

Experiencing similar situations between Palestinians and Israelis, let me see that there was a pattern and not a personal problem. I understood that all this was not about me / the Israeli women personally and that we, as the only reachable representatives of our societies in these situations, had to take on the role. This was our duty; it was the support we could give and an act of solidarity - just to listen.

So I learned from our meeting for my private life and at the same time my private life helped me to understand better what was going on in the heads of the other women.

From the beginning I felt very close to most of the Palestinian women. Because of this I was even more shocked by the toughness and coldness that all of a sudden could emerge from the Palestinian group. On one hand I was impressed by every single Palestinian woman (even the

Jameela Alatrash:

To tell or not? To share or not? Was it worth sharing? How to do the sharing? Shall I say it as I think or shall I disguise my story not to hurt anyone else?

very young ones) in the open way she would speak about herself, her feminist and political work and her society. In less than a second this could change. The personal relationship I had believed to be there disappeared.

What was left was a cold intellectual rhetorical wall I could not break through. Of course this mainly happened in situations of political conflict with the Israelis; but I felt betrayed too in a way.

I remember myself yelling frantically at one Palestinian woman with whom I had shortly before shared a very personal working session and felt particularly close to. It was the situation where the two young Palestinian women from Israel were denied to be part of the Palestinian group and were totally devastated. I didn't feel I had the right to express my opinion on the issue itself but I was shocked and alienated by how rational, eloquent and polite people could be as cold as stone, without any personal regret. This rejection was formulated by the group - in the face of the two Palestinian Israeli women being completely crushed - by women who considered themselves as feminists.

Nationalism and national identity were important issues throughout all of our meetings. When in Würzburg I heard Vered, a Jewish Israeli, say for the first time that the state of Israel was born in sin (as it was created on the expense of the Palestinians), I was absolutely amazed. I never expected any Israeli could be so critical of his / her own society. And still there seems to remain a very special and meaningful relationship with this country. During our last meeting in March 2007, while reviewing the history of our earlier meetings in a small group, the issue of

Gili Tzidkiyahu:

Within the makeup of our group, I became very 'Nationalistic' and it was difficult to keep on feeling what I was feeling, and I felt that others were too easily giving up.

Zionism suddenly occurred. Rawia, Palestinian-Israeli, said to Adina, a Jewish woman that she wanted her to give up Zionism. From my (obviously naïve) understanding, knowing the political standpoints of these two

women, I didn't expect any problem. For me, Zionism was a kind of outdated nationalist ideology that did not play a role in our group discourse. But a rigorous and serious discussion followed. For Adina, although she recognized the devastating effect Zionism had had for the Arab people of Palestine, considering herself as Zionist was an important part of her identity which she was not ready to give up. For the first time I started really to understand the complexity of this issue and of the historical importance of the state of Israel as a safe homeland for the Jewish people – and the validity of this even for somebody as critical and active to change her own society as Adina.

From the beginning it was clear that the Palestinian women felt a strong and powerful bond to the land of Palestine. It was very difficult for me as a German to hear Rima say that she'd rather die than give up Palestinian land. This connection of human life and land was used by the Nazi ideologies – resulting in so much destruction, suffering and death. I know about the importance of land for people fighting for their national unity and self determination. There again I find a lot of parallels between the situation of the Palestinians and the Albanians of Kosovo. I know it, I understand it rationally but my stomach is physically turning when I hear that people want to give their life for dead soil.

I remember a Palestinian family we visited on our tour of East Jerusalem. They were living in an old Palestinian house. The top floor was now occupied by a Yeshiva (school for Jewish religious education) with windows facing the court yard which was – together with one single room – the family home. The family had put a kind of net over the court yard as the Yeshiva students used to throw all kinds of rubbish down on them. I felt so depressed that people lived in such a dark, humid, filthy place no human being should have to live in. Still they would never leave this place – because they felt obliged not to abandon one centimetre of the sacred soil of Jerusalem (and leave it to Israel).

In these situations I felt very grateful that I grew up as a post-World War II-generation German. My identity is more European or international than German. I don't mind being a German but my nationality is not really important to me. I don't feel obliged to stay in my home country. Neither do I feel any special relationship towards this German soil. I am free to live wherever I want to live.

One important part of my national identity is the fact that Germany today is composed of different people(s) and ethnic groups. I believe that my society can only gain by accommodating other cultures, religions and ways of life – for example the Turkish culture. Most of the Turkish people came to Germany as migrant workers in the Sixties and Seventies. Many stayed on, built families and now second or third generation communities have developed.

In my job I work a lot with youth workers of Turkish origin born and / or raised in Germany. From the beginning of our meetings I found a lot of similarities in the situation of the Palestinians who are Israeli citizens and the people of Turkish origin living in Germany. These similarities were shocking to me because the initial situation of Palestinian Israelis and Turkish migrants differs in a lot of ways. In Germany we have a situation possibly typical of a migration society: The Turkish people migrated to Germany during the past 50 years. Although many are now

Sabah Ikhymees:

I thought "How can we talk about ourselves? How can we hold the burden of convincing Israelis that we are not as they claim we are?"

born in Germany and hold German passports, there is still an awareness of Turkey being their home country or country of origin. But the Arab population of Israel doesn't have a

migrant history. They had lived in Palestine for generations when the state of Israel was founded and don't have another 'home country'

Yet there are many parallels. One topic vital for both societies refers to the question of language. Who speaks which language and when? How accepted is my language? Can I speak my language with everybody or do I have to use one other than my mother tongue in certain surroundings?

Recently there was a big debate in Germany about a school in Berlin with a majority of migrant students where it was decided that everybody in the whole school and at all times (even in breaks) should use only the German language. Also in some youth centres young migrant people are not allowed to talk with each other in their mother tongue. Educators and specialists in Germany are discussing seriously whether learning the language of origin causes deterioration in the command of German of migrant young people...

Years ago in another context I met an Israeli peace activist. She was invited to meet our German group to talk about her work in an Israeli-Palestinian peace organization. To illustrate the sensitivity and awareness needed in such processes, she told us about a recent clash they had had in their team. One day in a meeting, all of a sudden for the Israel-

Edna Zaretsky Toledano:

We are aware of the fact that we try to overcome the evil by personal lobbying in order to help one person or another and for the most part we are not successful.

lis, the Palestinians burst out 'You think we work on an equal basis. But we do not! You don't realize that we work together well because we Palestinians have adapted completely to the Israeli way. For you it is normal

that we all speak Hebrew together – for us it is not! For half of us it would be normal to talk in Arabic...' For all the Israelis in the group, including her, this had come as a big shock. She had not been aware of this imbalance and now she was shocked by her own ignorance.

In Israel there are Arabic nurseries and schools but universities all over Israel only teach in Hebrew. So, for example, Palestinian students of social work learn only Hebrew terminology and methods – although later on they will work inside the Palestinian community. Similarly, in Germany the majority of social workers of Turkish origin are working with Turkish migrant families, using German terminology and concepts. In the German-Turkish exchanges between the social workers I organize, I have seen that the encounter with colleagues from Turkey has been an important experience. The knowledge of Turkish technical terms and way of working is helpful for their own work. It is a good feeling that in Turkey also professionalism exists that is adequate to western European standards. One of the Turkish social workers reported, for example, that from the beginning of his working career he felt uneasy keeping 'professional distance' from his clients as he had learned during his German university education. Only through contact with his colleagues from Turkey did he discover that it is possible to build up a personal relationship with clients without losing their respect and without losing professionalism. This contact helped him to develop his own personal way of working by combining the German and the Turkish approach. For me this is a good example of the way I imagine the living together experience of different ethnic groups. No society can gain through forcing people to deny a part of their identity.

How did we manage to go on in spite of these severe clashes, faced with the deteriorating political situation? One thing is really extraordinary about our group. Never before nor later I have experienced an atmosphere in which the personal and the political side of life are truly equally important. Our group does live and did live the authentic and productive interaction of the personal and the political level. I think this became possible through the feminist approach which is the basis for all

of us. Even in working sessions in which we were talking about our individual personal experiences, the bigger political context was always present and naturally incorporated. From meeting to meeting this awareness of our feminist identity became stronger. The focus of our discussions shifted away gradually from national issues (although these were always there) to our commitment to take over political responsibility in our societies as women.

While writing these lines I read my mail. It is January 2008. Israel has put a complete blockade on Gaza and we hear in the news how people there are struggling to survive. Rima has written. She herself is living in Ramallah but her family is in Gaza. Rima shares with us the happy news of her new born baby niece Sara. And she tells us about the terrible circumstances of Sara's birth in a Gaza hospital without medicine, without electricity, without fuel for generators. Suddenly the news in my TV set come very close. I can see Sara's little face among all the unknown suffering people of Gaza. Rima also writes about her sister who had to go to work in the morning without even washing her face because there is no water.

The women of our group respond soon – each in her own personal way. Shira chooses a strong symbolic act. She went to work this morning also without washing her face to remember Rima's sister from Gaza. And Edna writes a very powerful letter telling about a convoy of Israelis and Palestinians to Gaza carrying supplies and calling for the lifting of the blockade. This mail correspondence for me is an example of the feminist identity in this group.

Looking back, I think that our first facilitator Conny had a big impact on this development (although there was a clash between her and the group later on). She organized the group process very sensitively by making us work first in bigger groups; slowly the groups got smaller and the discussions grew more personal. The discourse between us became

Faten Mukarker:

Towards the end, we felt like normal women spending their time together. Oh my god, what a pleasant normality!

more intimate very slowly and coherently, not allowing us to stay on the superficial level of female sisterhood but reflecting throughout the process on the social and political implications

of our experiences. It would have been easy for us all to let ourselves be carried away by emotions, feelings and harmony. But waking up the next morning, I think the hangover would have been enormous. We would have hated ourselves and the others for this 'sleeping with the enemy' (as Edna, the leader of the Israeli group dramatically called it) and there would have been a speedy end to our Dialogue. As I see it, the dialogue-experienced Palestinian professor who headed the Palestinian group in the beginning, had also a positive role in this. She might have been dif-

difficult for her group; but she prevented the Israeli and Palestinian women from getting too close too quickly. This was good for our group process.

One of the questions that accompanied me through all the seminars in this Triologue and occupies me still is the role of our German group and me as a German. Especially during the first meeting I had a strong feeling of insecurity, of being helpless, not being able to talk. How can I say something in the face of this huge conflict? What can my contribution, our contribution as Germans, be? My experiences seem so small and unimportant in comparison to the difficulties and threats the Palestinians and Israelis were facing every day. I went through an important learning process in the exploration of this issue. I had to learn, and did learn, how to cope with contradictory emotions and constantly changing pictures of reality. I learned to explore myself and the reasons for my urge to take sides. Through the years of our meetings I have learned to live with the ambivalence of the flow of the process and shifting roles without feeling lost and insecure. I'm very sure of the fact that we Germans have a part in the group process. I did not always fill this role. At the time of the outbreak of the second Intifada nearly all of us lost contact with each other. I did not call or mail any of the women from the Middle East to ask how they were. In the first meeting after the Intifada outbreak, telling each other about the developments "in between the times", one of the Palestinian women wrote only one sentence "Where have you been?" I felt and still feel very guilty and ashamed about this.

I feel a natural belonging to the group. At times when the Palestinian-Israeli conflict arises I still feel helpless, even desperate. But it became more and more obvious to me that I don't have to play an active role in this discussion. I don't have to take sides. I can simply be there and try to be supportive by listening. And I know and feel that my presence matters.

Jameela Alatrash

After death



Jameela Alatrash

Born in 1980 at Kuwait. She lived in Kuwait till 1991 and then in Jordan from 1991-1994. She moved to West Bank-Palestine to study at the Evangelical Lutheran School till 1998. She participated at the Play for Peace Group (Palestinian-Israeli-American children). She is proud to wear the Hijab since 2003. Jameela has a B.Sc (2004) in Industrial Engineering from An-Najah National University, Nablus. She has worked as a production engineer and purchases assistant in a marble and stone company. She is now working as a Marketing Manager at an Independent Palestinian Economic Newspaper.

On a shining Spring day in April 2005, two days before my twenty-fifth birthday, I was standing on my family's balcony, waiting for the taxi to take me to Jericho. At 7.00 a.m. the taxi came to pick me up. My journey started the moment my luggage was in the taxi's boot. After travelling through the hill valley of 'wade el nar', we faced the first check point. Fifteen minutes of waiting, then we were allowed to pass the check point. Soon, the second checkpoint was waiting for us. I thought that bad luck was with us on this journey as it was another ten minutes' wait to pass the check point. It took us about three hours to arrive at the Jericho border.

Sabah was my companion on that trip, so she shared with me all the tribulations on the way. She was the one who had invited me to participate in the Trialogue between German, Israeli and Palestinian women in Berlin. We have a mutual friend who introduced us to each other. When she asked me to take part in the meeting, I was hesitant, especially because the second Intifada was not yet finished. Sabah told me about the group and their activities and I became interested to join them. However, I was travelling to my first seminar with a big anger and fear in my heart, because at the last Intifada I had lost one of my best friends. I felt that I should come with a bomb of angry feelings to share it with the others, instead of having to carry that bomb alone... It was so hard for me to think of taking part in such a meeting, side by side with Israeli women, because at that time, I was blaming all the Israelis for killing my best friend.

Ibelieve that violent conflicts are the worst and the violence never ends. Although all my friends and family members encouraged me to go to Berlin to join

the group, I still remember how they convinced me by saying: “Go, you will not lose anything, take it as an advocacy as a Palestinian. It is hard to go to Europe whenever you want, and you may be able to relieve your soul from pain by sharing your feelings with those whom you think are responsible for your suffering.”

I felt that I was betraying my nation and my dead friend, but after struggling with my thoughts, I decided to go to Berlin.

Sabah and I talked about that issue while we were waiting to enter the Israeli border. It was another long wait, then a long checking of our pa-

pers, after which we entered the Jordanian border. Finally, we arrived in the Jordan valley and went to a hotel.

That evening, we met the Palestinian women Raja, May and

Edna Zaretsky Toledano:

I see the encounter workshop as an opportunity to develop our ability to listen to the different voices, to understand better the different realities in which women live and act.

Basima. It was the first time I had met them and we went to the airport together, leaving behind a ticket to be collected by a woman called Rima who hadn't arrived yet but was to follow us as soon as she got to Jordan.

From Palestine we travelled to Jordan and then on to Frankfurt, and finally to Berlin. We arrived in the morning. Anette was there waiting for us. It was my first meeting with her and for everybody also. Anette said: “Jameela, welcome to Berlin!”, and she gave me a warm hug and kisses as if she had known me for a long time. We went to Wannsee by taxi with Anette. As soon as we arrived at the Wannsee Guest House, we went to our rooms to get some sleep and rest from the long journey. I was lucky to get the best room, with a view of the lake, which was gorgeous.

The cold war started inside me that afternoon when I met the whole group at the first session. I faced crucial challenges as I listened to the women talking about general issues and sometimes personal issues.

Although it was my first seminar, the women treated me very kindly and in a really lovely way, especially dear Hannelore. I remember that I got a big warm hug from her at our first meeting, as if she too had known me for a long time.

As soon as I arrived in Berlin, I was very quiet. I did not express myself. I listened all the time, thinking: “How silly these women are! Which peace and democracy are they talking about?”

I still remember the events during my first seminar. It was obvious to everybody that I was a little bit quiet through the seminar meetings. I said almost nothing on the first day. Maybe because I felt that they were dreaming or even that they might be acting. I felt that I was betraying my nation and my memories. I said to myself: “What am I doing here? What a big wrong I have done to myself! I am sitting in the same room with these people! Why? Am I right? Am I wrong?”

On the second day, it was my birthday. I felt ashamed to be away from my family and friends. But that feeling was changed when I came back after the lunch break to find roses, chocolates and cards from all the women in the group. At that time, I felt as if I was at home with my family and friends who cared about me. After they celebrated my 25th birthday with me, Hannelore asked me to participate in the women's discussion. She said, "I notice that you have been a little bit quiet. Would you share with us? We want to hear your voice."

All the women had been asked to participate with a drawing showing the most important things in our lives. I drew something that I will always draw whenever I will be asked to draw the most important things in my life.

I did not intend to touch anybody with my painting but it seems that almost everybody was touched by it. Every painting had a story, so every painter told her story. I found that each woman thought that her life story is the most important reflection and that was my feeling about my story too.

Starting to share or even to talk about the important stages in my life was the most difficult experience I have ever had to face.

To tell or not? To share or not? Was it worth sharing? How to do the sharing? Shall I say it as I think or shall I disguise my story not to hurt anyone else? But as soon as I started, words began to flow very easily and my feelings were shown honestly. I said everything that came in my mind without disguising anything.

I still remember the Israeli women and the way they acted when I told the story of the killing of my friend by the Israeli soldiers while he was demonstrating against Sharon's visit to Masjed Alaqsa, and I remember that I said: I am not telling you this story to beg you to feel sorry for him

Anette Klasing:

Would this process with all its highs and lows, as well as the endurance that was required, have been possible in a German-Israeli-Palestinian group with mixed sexes?

or even for me. I am not here to ask you to stop killing our friends and our brothers. I am here to express myself, to relieve my anger. I can't stop thinking about the death of my friend and the way the soldiers bur-

ned his brain with one cold shot. How they ended his life and our memories. They thought that they ended the life of one person or they might have thought that they had made one voice to shut up. But the fact is that, by killing him, with this one shot, they killed all the members of his family, they killed all his friends. With one shot, they made one voice to shut up and at the same time, they encouraged other voices to speak up. Aaaaaah!

What peace are you talking about? What is democracy for you? Is it killing the Palestinian youth just because they are taking part in a demonstration? Is this the power of democratic weapons?

The strange thing is that after I told them my story, I felt sure that the Israeli women would meet my words with hearts of stone, but it was not so. I was shocked by the kindness of Edna, for instance. She was so kind with me, not with words or hugs, by just with her face, the look on her face was touching my soul. Every line in her face spoke of a lot of things. Her eyes were full of caring and love. She said nothing, while her face and eyes said a lot to me.

It was really quite strange for me to have a good feeling for an Israeli woman, after all the anger I had in that period. How can I have anger and respect for somebody at the same time? This confusion made me think, "Is there any hope to make a change? To trust an Israeli?" After all that had happened to me at that time, I preferred the idea that I should blame the whole society, the political society especially. You made such big fools of us, first at the Oslo agreements, and then in the Intifada! But the idea of blaming was stopped as soon as the story was freed and the women were made aware of it. It happened not because of the telling or because some of them felt guilty, but just because of the sharing and the important feelings brought about by sharing.

Even stranger than the feeling I got at the first meeting was the one I experienced at the second meeting. I got it with Ruth. It came as a shock to me that I could come to respect an Israeli woman again. Ruth is a woman who taught her sons not to kill Palestinians just to obey the law. In fact, I thought it was impossible to have such individuals in the Israeli society. Ruth was crying, and I saw her cry many times. She said, "We don't want to be killers any more. I don't want my sons to be in the army." That's not only because she is afraid they might be killed but also because she does not want them to kill anybody.

Before Ruth left to attend her daughter's wedding back home, I stood next to her, observing every move she made. I kept looking at her and I told myself that Ruth is a dream come true. May God please protect her because we need voices such as hers. I heard later that Razia is teaching her sons the same things that Ruth did.

One of the first seminar activities was visiting Berlin's wall and a Museum in Berlin which shows Hitler's period. Well, the Berlin wall was as high as any normal wall. It is not as tall or as big as our separation wall which divides the Palestinian lands all around the West Bank. The German women were so sad while showing us the Museum or telling us the story about the persons whom were killed for trying to climb the wall. At that moment, it was so obvious for us that all the Palestinian compared the wall with the wall in their homeland. We have named it the Segregation, the Separation or the Apartheid Wall. It keeps the Palestinians away from communication, reducing their economy, keeping their students away from going to schools. It's hard that here we are in the

21st Century and we still do not have the ability to choose where to go or how to go or even what to do, no freedom at the core of the peace land.

Are we as Palestinians supposed to face what the Germans faced during Hitler's or the East German regimes or is Sharon's rule a reflection of these?

Katrin Wolf:

By telling you how I experienced my own history, I have found a new understanding of many things; the expression on your faces, your reactions helped me to develop further.

Arna's Children was a film that the whole group watched at my first seminar. The film tells the story of an Israeli woman who taught Pales-

tinian children after the first Intifada. It shows how Arna tried to help the Palestinians at the Jennen camp for refugees after the Oslo period with all the events leading up to the start of second Intifada, and how one of the children became a young man and blew himself up near Israeli soldiers. Another child was killed by Israeli soldiers during the invasion of the Jennen camp in the second Intifada. I did not stay to watch the end of the film. I decided to leave the room and go and have a shower, because the film was too painful for me. It shows the naked reality of the Palestinian youths. While all the youth of the world enjoy dancing and traveling, the Palestinian youths are busy watching the news on TV, taking part in demonstrations, finding a way to go to school without being killed, longing to be able to sleep through the night without hearing the sound of shooting, and daring only to think of tomorrow, because they are not sure if they will live in the future.

One day, we went to the centre of Berlin with the Israeli women, to have dinner at a Palestinian restaurant. We share the same culture, even the same foods. We ordered hummus and fatosh, also Hallow dishes with ad arach coffee. We all danced to the rhythm of Sabah's songs and music.

It was so exciting. We felt as friends, as a family. It was like rebuilding relationships. We talked about everything, even about our secrets. We shared it all, although we knew that this did not affect the reality and that nothing will be changed by us when we went back home. It made us feel good to think that there might be common things between us, but it is not enough to rebuild trust between our nations. It is hard, not because of us, but because of the external issues that control both sides of the situation. However, the fact was that we are now having a good relationship, after all that time and with all the difficulties we have had to face. This is amazing!

For me the second seminar was really important, maybe because the first seminar was like breaking the ice that covered my mind. At the second seminar, I felt that we were trying to make a change by documenting our experience, through putting together a narrative, and with the help of the web pages which were organized by Christiane and Razia, I felt that we were trying to give others the opportunity to think with us, to try with us, because we believe that we can change. I wish I had been

a part of Trialogue group from the beginning, I wish I had shared with them all the sessions, especially the first sessions, to watch and to be a part of the whole details from the start. But I think that there are still a lot of things to talk about, such as normalization, settlements, right to return, and critical things. "But surely we need money to keep our journey, we need organizations to adopt our group and groups like ours".

It may look like a kind of normalization for some people, especially because the group contains Germans, Israelis, and Palestinians, but it doesn't matter for us as a group, because it means a lot for us. It is a lifestyle and that is obvious from Vered's symbols shown through her paintings, Adina's participation through her feminist movements, Fidaa's work with society, Ruth's sons, Razia with our web page designing, Hannelore planning for our seminars. Every woman in the group within her own sphere of interest is confirming that the Trialogue is a lifestyle.

Sometimes, when I am alone and thinking about the other women in the group, many questions come to my mind. If we manage to achieve this amazing relationship, why is it so hard for our nations to do the same? I hate political issues, I hate feeling too weak to make a change, I hate the reality of being controlled by stupid governments.

If we have the ability to manage this outside Palestine, then for sure we will manage it at home. So all of you leaders, stop pushing us to kill! We can, we surely can. Help us or leave us to manage on our own. Let those who want to come back, come home! Don't force other people to come. People have the right to return or not. There is enough space in the world for those who wish to come back. So please, stop making problems and stop putting stones in the road, because I am sure that we can manage to live with peace and happiness.

Being a part of the Trialogue group has made a big improvement in my life. Everyone in this group is gifted in one way or another. We believe in each other. That is how I felt at the last seminar. This mutual trust encouraged everybody to give as much as possible. Now everyone has a chance. We can talk. As long as there is a dialogue, anything will easily be reached.

Gili Tzidkiyahu

Making Connections



Gili Tzidkiyahu

Born in 1971 and lives in Haifa with her partner. She is a Rabbinical student at the Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem within the Movement of Progressive Judaism. She is a member of the facilitation prayer team in the "Nigun Halev" community in Nahalal. Gili is a declared feminist since the age of 10, and has tried to remain active in feminist circles. Today she primarily takes care of her baby daughter Naomi.

What is the connection between a young woman who travelled with a group of women to Würzburg many years ago and me?

During these days, weeks and months, fresh motherhood fills my life and captures my identity (a justified occupation) and is a period without political context, feminism or nationalism.

It is through this perspective of motherhood, the personal change in my life that I can look at the group, that firstly was comprised of women of many different ages, married and single, experienced mothers and young women and note that slowly, within a few years, all the younger ones joined the camp of motherhood. I am among the last to join.

Much has been said and written in Israel about motherhood as a political force, the ticket women need in order to join the public discourse. But, at least for a certain period of time, motherhood is also a factor that keeps you far from the spotlight and public activities. At least for me the anger and frustration that were the catalyst of active protest weaken when I am face to face with my smiling baby or disappear into the tiredness and oblivion of day and night, diapers (nappies) and baths.

Immediately I think, am I not privileged that, as a mother of a baby, this will distance me from political reality? Don't I have a fairly safe position, or at least a safe enough space in which I can raise my daughter? (At least this is what I tell myself). I have full accessibility to medical treatment if, God forbid, I should ever need it. My baby can meet her grandmother and grandfather, her aunts and uncles and her cousins. Not all my women friends, the mothers, have this basic security. They can't form a bubble that filters out the political contexts even

if they really wanted to. And I feel shame and guilt, why am I not doing anything? Or at least showing some interest, lending a shoulder for support or sending an encouraging message?

I return to Würzburg, to the snow, the holiday atmosphere of just before Christmas, to the pleasant retreat where we stayed and the room that we worked in that was close by. Within it we were able to work with clay, draw and express ourselves in different ways. I remember the dimmed clubroom and the laughter and wine ... and then ... Whoops! We are in

Anette Klasing:

I believe that the mutual respect which all of us women gave and demanded was an invisible thread running through all our meetings and discussions and made this constructive process possible.

conflict. Is it fitting for the Palestinians to associate with Israelis in such a fashion that they are laughing and drinking and taking part in a 'Wine Party'? I naively thought that we were searching for ways to break down barriers, and doing

away with direct separation between nations. But we, the German and Israeli women can permit ourselves to do what is not attainable for the Palestinians. The control of social and cultural matters, within the group and out with it, designates the norms and limitations. The tension between growing close and distancing, between cooperation and objection is preserved. But the cracks are showing up outside the official talking amongst the group, outside the controlling factors and personal relationships which are being created. There is friendship and true moments that are not facilitated by 'proper politics' or group interests.

We are completely spoiled by the walks around this beautiful city, the good food and the pleasant environment. We are able to laugh, cry, get angry, be insulted, grow and also hold back and close ourselves up.

As the years and seminars go by, I remember many wonderful moments and many internal conflicts. I have already mentioned feelings of guilt, but there was also a craving to hear, to understand, that came together with the wish to not hear and not know. And even more than that, there was the personal conflict that I was having about my identity; not to agree to make the reality simpler in order to offer an automatic formula or equation; to try to understand and get in touch with the anger and vulnerability that I was feeling.

Within this everyday social reality that I live, I am a 'Leftist' and not by the definition of an 'enemy of Israel' but the kind that voices criticisms and sees the justice and also the opposite side. Within the makeup of our group, I became very 'Nationalistic' and it was difficult to keep on feeling what I was feeling, and I felt that others were too easily giving up.

The meetings and places are getting mixed up in my head. The statues of the Pigs in Bremen and the hostel on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, houses with straw roofs on the shores of a river in Würzburg, the view and the Bay of Haifa on the promenade, a voyage between worlds, within worlds and too few clear memories.

A few weeks go by and I continue writing. When we met and spoke, my memories were foggy and hazy. How is it that of the many of days and weeks that are spread over the years, I am left with only pictures, isolated instances that seem to be all that is accessible to me right now. After the last meeting, and perhaps after the first meeting, I thought a lot about religion. Religion as a connecting or dividing element... the group of 'Jewish Women' symbolizes the Jewish women who have a certain privilege of women trying to renounce, instead of becoming a world of positive content... The last meeting that I participated in was during the days of Passover, and only I don't eat leavened food. I have to inquire if there is leavening in every single dish that is served. There is a slight feeling of loneliness. Within the 'Group' I am alone.

Edna told me how the incident of the Chanukah candles that happened at the beginning of the process, keeps surfacing in the narratives written

Adina Aviram:

Each time I recall the memory of that conflict; it shakes me and clarifies my personal voice once again.

by the women. I thought, so naively (and perhaps I still think this way) that religion can be a connecting factor, that we the women, have the responsibility and an obligation to

reconstruct religion and to demand that it comes from a position of happiness, of universal merit and creates a meeting place.

I still remember how I packed the Menorah, I can still see myself doing it (or perhaps I am imagining it), remembering my movements as I put it into a small suitcase. An invitation to a holiday.

The Chanukah story

As the time of the first seminar was on the days of Chanukah, I made sure to take with me my chanukiya (made of clay by my younger sister, when she was eight) and Chanukah candles.

The first night of Chanukah was around the third night of the seminar (more or less, I am not sure), and I was thinking what would be the right way to celebrate.

I didn't feel it would be right to celebrate the Jewish holiday in the public space of the group, but I wanted to invite other women to participate...

I decided to do a candle lighting in my room and to let all the women know – so whoever wants can join me, Jewish, Christian, Muslim or atheist.

As a Jewish feminist, the Jewish festivals are always an opportunity to ask questions, to challenge, to find new meanings in old rituals and to reveal (or create) hidden stories. For me Chanukah is an opportunity to explore issues of identity, of struggle, of miracles...

I made an announcement and invited women to join. This started the first big crisis in the group dynamic.

A dominant member of the dialogue attacked me verbally, I don't remember all the details, but I remember her asking me something like "Why do you expect us to come and celebrate your nationalistic festival with you?"...

To be honest – I don't remember who said what, how and when... I remember being surprised, feeling misunderstood, being attacked but also protected.

Somebody said later, and I think that helped me get a perspective – that it was a crisis waiting to happen and that the candles were just a trigger...

And if the story of the Menorah was a breaking point, perhaps the 'Costume Party' was a healing point. Rima and I exchange our outer identities. We are both of the same height, wear glasses, with similar dark hair. In a moment of mischievousness we organize ourselves for the

Jameela Alatrash:

If we manage to achieve this amazing relationship, why is it so hard for our nations to do the same? I hate political issues, I hate feeling too weak to make a change, I hate the reality of being controlled by stupid governments.

farewell party at the seminar in Bremen. Rima removes her head cover, lets down her hair and accepts one of my modest white party blouses that I bought in a market in India a few years before. She dresses me with her head covering and gives me

a long dark shirt, tailored in a traditional fashion. Full of excitement and childish happiness, we go to the party. But something strange happens, I disappear. Rima without a head covering is still Rima, and I, with the head covering and traditional dress am also Rima. The women see Rima twice and are confused.

The photo that was taken that evening has hung above my work desk ever since. First at my place of work in Haifa and later in London. A very dear memory.

Ivaguely remember, during the first seminar, a feeling of disillusionment, a feeling of a breaking up of the 'true' youth movement ideology and the 'good' Zionism and seeing everything in a different light. I remembered that I wondered, "How is it that I, as an involved teenager who is caring and intelligent, never asked questions and never objected. How did I just accept the simple story that was always told? How will I let go of it now?"

Slowly, slowly the picture changes and becomes more complicated. Within the group I had a very safe place to grow in, especially within the Israeli group. Jews and Palestinians, even when I felt different, I felt that I was contained (perhaps I am mature enough to know that everyone feels 'different' and that this is a 'normal' feeling all in all). I felt I had space.

At the last seminar I participated in at the Wannsee House in 2005, I felt like I was 'pretending' a bit. I wasn't active in a feminist organization. Even worse than this, I was working for a Zionist institution. Even if amongst the envoys in the Jewish agency I was still considered 'Left', subversive and outside the consensus, I still made it there. Perhaps my voice had become a little bit silent and I had difficulty committing to the process.

I started the process as a young woman, still connected to certain values and had perceptions that were age appropriate. In love, in pain and in anger, the picture opened up. As time passed I was no longer in the same place where I started. My life, private, professional and political, kept changing all the time as did my priorities and my loyalties. Within all of these pictures, are scattered memories that are illusive but can still be surprising.



Rima Al Ajrami · (Shira Ohayon) · Fidaa Narh-Abu Dba · Vered Shomron-Fabian



Adina Aviram · Rawia Loucia Shammass · Margot Brown

Katrin Wolf

German-Israeli-Palestinian Contacts



Katrin Wolf

Born in 1956 in Berlin-East and brought up in the German Democratic Republic. For several years she worked as a theatre director.

In 1991 she was one of the founding women of the East-West-European Women's Network OWEN. She participated in the project "Dealing with the consequences of the Holocaust", that worked with people from the 'second generation'.

She is a trainer for non-violent conflict transformation and trans-cultural learning and runs projects in Eastern Europe.

Now she the Associate Director of "filia.die frauenstiftung", a women's foundation.

Foreword

In the summer of 2003, we German women travel to Israel rather uneasily, troubled by self-doubt, but in spite of it all, eagerly looking forward to our meeting. Again, the political situation has become entrenched to such an extent that we can only meet the participants of our German-Israeli-Palestinian exchange project separately – we have been working with many of them since 1998. All of the Israeli women come and we can meet two women of the Palestinian group in an office or at home. There is no chance of a joint meeting.

Is there any sense left in sticking with the project? Will not everybody hopelessly shake their head in this situation of violence, new victims every day, and ask us: what do you want here? You cannot do anything. These meetings do not change anything and are thus superfluous...?

Our concerns proved to be unfounded. All of the people we meet describe our meetings as something special in their life, they do not want to be without the renewed hope they experience through our meetings. These meetings are not only special for us German women, we want to, may and must continue. The meetings do not offer solutions, do not suggest anything, are not planned to be political proclamations or collections of signatures. But then what are they?

This article is an attempt to describe some of the effects on me, and to trace the question as to why these meetings are so unique and special. To me, the project is like a stone we have all thrown into the water. Circles are generated, extending, overlapping with other circles,

waves and patterns are being created, like wickerwork. I would like to share with you a small selection of the reflections the project triggered in me and to encourage you to draw your own conclusions, to go on thinking about the effects on your own thoughts and actions...

An invitation and a late thank you

I was asked whether I might be interested in participating in a project in which German, Israeli and Palestinian women would meet to communicate, to encourage, to reflect on their role in their society, to exchange their ideas about peace and their experiences concerning democracy. I jumped at the chance, even though I was aware that these meetings wouldn't be easy. We would have to cope with hurt feelings, attacks and defenses and would have to give them in return. Which traces would this project leave in us? There was a lot of curiosity, a lot of good will, but also a great deal of ignorance.

And I trusted the woman who invited me to participate in the project, an expert in international exchange projects who had grown up in West Germany and whose heart I had apparently conquered during a seminar at the start of the 90s. I – how naive could I have been? – said then that I had the wish to live a happy life. Many years later she repeated these words to me and I could not believe that it was me who had said them and that she could have been so impressed.

To create a world in which we can live happily – without immediately pulling the word happiness (and the claim to it) to pieces, analyzing it and dismissing it as childish – is what brought us together. Hannelore has her utopias and an incredibly stubborn way of not letting anybody talk her out of them, of finding ways to implement them and not losing her belief on the way. She has the gift of making friends for a lifetime and the power to connect them with her visions. With this power, she invented and developed this project and pursued it with such determination that it continuously developed regardless of all the political and financial difficulties. Unfortunately, it is my “nature” to be doubtful. People like her are very important to me, people who build bridges, believe in me and others, extend invitations, recognize the sense of encounters and discussions – also and in particular between East and West and without strong ideological prejudices. I do not want to be convinced, I need the freedom of being allowed to make my own experiences and form my own thoughts. It was possible to experience this kind of freedom in our meetings. And this is a small miracle.

Our first meeting in 1998

During the first seminar I was very busy finding out where I was, forming my own impressions and questioning them at the same time. My English was very poor, it was nearly impossible to make any practical use of my GDR school-English.

Who is who, and what in her background is causing her to act and argue the way she does?

Aha – our two young Palestinian Israelis are crying, because they don't know to which working group they belong. Are they Israeli women with Arabic background or Palestinian women who live in Israel? So what? I don't care. But for them these were existential questions of where they belong, of identity and also of setting their goals in this project and their future life. The Palestinian women from the occupied areas were watching them crying – with some kind of satisfaction? – and did not invite the two young women to join their group. It was a matter of course for the Israeli women 'You belong to us'. This supposed clarity did not make it easier for the women to make their decision; it gave them an even more distinct feeling of inner conflict.

Aha – there is a Jewish woman with oriental roots, who talks about the gaps of justice in Israeli-Jewish society, even about racism within Jewish society. Is one allowed to have these thoughts at all, not to mention to speak them out loud? Until then, being Jew and racist has been mutually exclusive for me. What was my idea of Jews? That they are immune to things people do to other people all over the world? Why should they be? "Auschwitz was not an education centre for anything, and particularly not for humanity and tolerance." This is how Ruth Klüger expresses it in her book *To go on living: The early years*, in a dry, almost laconic manner. Reading the book for the first time, I felt as if I had been caught doing something. Yes, I guess I had assumed something like that – without ever having been able to consciously think it or put a name on it.

Aha – the Palestinian women seemingly need to justify their participation in this meeting – to themselves, their families, their political groups. They are taking the biggest risk by being involved in this Dialogue and draw attention to this over and over again, particularly to the Israelis.

But didn't the Israeli women know this already? They were the ones standing in the street as "Women in Black" every Friday and being spat on and insulted by "their own people", they organized a movement against militarism in the Israeli society. Now, here in our seminar, they let themselves be attacked again and again, without retaliation. Why?

And we, the German women? Have we just been onlookers of a conflict here? What was our contribution? What was the benefit for other

women of learning about the situation in Germany after the collapse of the GDR, about our political debates, our experiences and deficits of democracy? Didn't they prefer to work on their own conflict while we were supposed to act as a buffer?

I was confused and did not have a clear picture. There were things I did not understand and did not dare to ask. Who knew which emotions I would stir up? When would they recognize how stupid I was?

In contrast to me, I found the leaders of the three groups relatively assured and self-confident and admired them for their charisma and decisiveness, particularly in situations charged with strong emotions. One of them would regularly withdraw her 'troops' when the discussion turned 'hot', exodus of the Palestinians from our Trialogue. After a set time, they returned and had reached agreement. Today I would say they were brought to 'the same line'. At the time I accepted without question the

Shira Ohayon:

But for some reason I had a feeling that I would not be able to look the Palestinians who live in the Occupied Territories straight in the eyes as long as they did not have a state of their own.

statement that it was all meant for their own protection, also for the 'time after', at home. What did I know about the discussions they had been exposed to among themselves? I took everything at face value. And I remembered defending nonsensical political decisions

of the GDR leadership in earlier times, whenever there were existential questions from the outside as to whether socialism in general and the GDR in particular made any sense.

The leader of the Israeli group behaved differently. It was very important to her that every single woman got a chance to speak, got the time she required. This woman is so devoted to us all, as if she would marvel at and revel in the diversity and preciousness of all beings on earth again and again, as if every woman was contributing something distinctively precious. This trust helped us occasionally to rise above ourselves.

I certainly idealized the role of the 3 leading women in the beginning. But also from today's point of view, I believe that they created for the starting point, for the compilation of the group, the political-structural background of the meetings, a foundation of trust, mutual esteem and knowledge of the situation and thus a guarantee that the project started and has kept going.

The role of the German women

We want to hear and learn from you Germans; how the generations succeeding the perpetrators deal with the crimes of their parents and grandparents, what they do to be able to live in self-respect. We will be confronted with these questions by our own children."

This very unexpected request by Adina, an Israeli participant, moved me profoundly. Does this mean that we Germans and Jews have now landed together on the perpetrator's side, only at different times?

I use this question as some kind of commission for this article. We German women asked ourselves again and again, which role we should play or wanted to play in this special Dialogue.

- "We don't want you Germans as mediators of our meetings!"
- "We Israeli women want to learn from you how it feels to be the succeeding generation of perpetrators."
- "We Israeli women see you as political allies."
- "We Palestinian women sympathize a great deal with the East German women; their situation reminds us of our own one."
- "We Palestinian women want to publish political statements as a result of our project. We need the German side to do this."

Are these the kind of requirements we want to fulfill? Is this the image we have to correspond to? The question concerning myself in relation to my action within society and also my contribution to our meetings arises in me during this encounter in a very special and unique manner. This uniqueness consists of the amalgamation of our countries due to near and present history, which is interpreted differently by each side, having connotations of different meanings, consequences and also experiences. And I had to set out to find my own role.

Personal stories – Part I

What have our parents done, what have we done ourselves as the so-called second generation after World War II?

How can I explain this to you, Rima, Jameela or Sabah, to Adina, Ruthi or Rawia?

By telling you how I experienced my own history, I have found a new understanding of many things; the expression on your faces, your reactions helped me to develop further.

After the collapse of the GDR, I found myself overnight as an East German woman, a GDR citizen, in a unified German Nation. For months I had been busy participating in demonstrations, round tables and meetings of the "Neues Forum" Berlin-Mitte (citizens' movement "New Forum" Berlin-City). Now, for the first time I heard in public that one should be "proud" to be German. Hmm. This was not what I had been looking for. In the GDR you avoided using the word 'German' at all. A GDR identity was constructed by reference to antifascism, to a socialist conception of man, to solidarity with the brother nations. An identity which also defined itself by reference to an 'enemy', to capitalism, to war

criminals who were allowed to continue in their positions as judges and teachers, to practice medicine in the western part after World War II...

Of course, there were also former Nazis in the eastern part. Many left the country. For more than half of their life, my parents did what they could for socialism as an alternative. There was a fundamental social consensus that the new elite should have communist roots and should develop from the working class as far as possible. This was the reason why I had always an embarrassing 'I' after my name as a student in the class register. I = 'intelligence'. Others had a wonderful A. A = 'Arbeiterklasse' = working class.

It was only after the reunification that I actually understood that the West German economic miracle of the fifties was based on the decision to succeed the Third Reich. To rebuild quickly, to get rich, to show everybody how ambitious we are and how effectively we could work – as if the Germans hadn't already proved this in the most terrible manner. I always hated the stereotype German virtues. To be punctual, to get up early, to be clean, tidy – everything perfect. And what does it look like on the inside?

In the GDR, these very virtues were modified by necessity: to be poor but 'better', to be restricted but safe, well-cared for and sheltered. And we were supposed to be thankful for all the gifts we received from the government, particularly the women.

Reductions – naturally – ideologically influenced on both sides of the border by the victorious powers, each of the two German parts had to prove that its system was the 'right one'.

After the collapse of the GDR in 1989 we East Germans had to justify that we had lived in this part, how we had thought in this part, whether we had worked at all, why we had not moved to the West. Some-

Fidaa Narh-Abu Dba:

My infant baby joined me on my last travels, and I felt so independent when I walked around the airport alone.

how we all had turned into poor souls overnight – no matter whether we were from the citizens' movement or from the party leadership – we were just pitiable. They gave us 100 real

German Marks each and, in general, all the wonderful achievements of the West. Be happy and thankful. Aha, we'd heard that before...

It seemed that it was no longer important that the partition was the result of our mutual history, that is of the megalomania of German world domination and victory, the classification of the world into Aryans and non-Aryans – into unworthy and worthy life, the murder of millions of people. If there were any winners again, were we now, we East Germans, the losers? Of what?

The German reunification – and the retrieval of sovereignty in March 1991 – made it possible that Germany had the chance to play an active part in wars again, which it did without hesitation following the resolu-

tion of a social-democratic/green government with the reason 'no more Holocaust' – in my opinion, an egregious misuse of history. The peace movement was speechless. So, what have we learned as second and third successor generation? Have I answered your question, Adina?

Here, the circle closes with our seminars. Concepts of enemies, nationalism, ideological delusion form the breeding ground for people to let themselves be sent to war, where they trigger violence, injury and death and have to expect it in return.

Along with our Palestinian and Israeli colleagues we have made it the subject of our discussion, and in the beginning it was by no means a matter of course. It is hard work for us not to think in concepts of enemies and national categories, in particular for those of us who have grown up in systems which wanted to teach us the opposite. How fast we get trapped in a train of thought of confrontation instead of trying to identify and pursue joint targets.

Personal stories – Part II

On our tour through Israel in 1999 – during the second meeting of our Palestinian-Israeli-German group – an Arabic guide leads us through Jerusalem. We stand in front of buildings placed on top of one another, the Jewish apartments with the Israeli flag right at the top, constructed directly on top of the roofs of the Arabic houses. How must a human being, a family feel, living downstairs. How someone who positions himself on top it? A life with many symbolic actions, I am here and I have the right to be here, the right, the right, the right – for donkey's years. No matter at whose expense and at what price.

In the thirties, my grandparents had built their house in a region from which they had to flee as refugees on 31 January 1945. Today this region is part of Poland. They lost the right to their house, farm and land, because they were Germans and thus a part of a nation which had assumed the right for itself to deny others the right to everything, even to life itself. Could they learn a lesson from it? Does history teach us to take responsibility?

My mother told me that my grandmother had suffered severely from homesickness. My grandparents never talked to me about it. They had created something in their old homeland, their own house, set up their own food store, had been working day and night. There is a tiny black-and-white picture showing them standing side by side with their working aprons in front of the entry to their former store, an Edeka branch. A little exhausted from all the work, but particularly upright, proud – they managed it by their own efforts. Small entrepreneurs, respected people in the town, maybe even popular.

They had to start from scratch. They worked as a warden of a hostel and as a female cook, first in Thuringia, then in Brandenburg. Have they accepted their share of the guilt Germany saddled itself with? Have they voluntarily taken on responsibility by never talking about being entitled to this country? In the GDR the subject of expulsion of the German people was a taboo subject, it was difficult to make an ideological classification of the refugee families' suffering. Whoever touched on it was suspected of playing down the crimes of the Wehrmacht and the Nazi system.

My grandparents died a long time ago and this is why I cannot ask anybody anymore. My granddad became a member of the SED, the So-

Ruth Hiller:

It has strengthened my identity and given deeper meaning to attributes such as admiration, altruism and accountability.

cialist Unity Party of Germany, very soon after he returned from Russian captivity – emaciated beyond recognition. Did he join due to opportunism or a feeling of responsibility? Perhaps it

was a mixture of both. He was a rather gentle man, who invented games and songs for his grandchildren. Perhaps he simply wanted to get to work again as soon as possible.

It was only in November 1990 that the borders of Poland finally were acknowledged officially by the reunited Germany in the German-Polish Treaty, 45 years after the end of the war. While in the East the end of the war was always considered a 'liberation', particularly by the Soviet brother army, the West of Germany – at least until the famous speech of President Richard von Weizsäcker in 1985 – always considered this event a 'defeat'. For me, this was one of many reasons not to consider West Germany as an alternative worth striving for.

This is how I walk through Jerusalem in 1999. A small insight into the field of thoughts being opened up and illuminated while strolling through a city in a country in which nothing is 'normal', all comparisons are inappropriate and which I, as grandchild and daughter of the successor generation of the war cannot enter impartially. The story of my grandparents enters my mind, because in Germany we cannot think of Israel without considering our own history. Again and again references come up. History? What are we going to do with it in the present so that the future is possible?

When I told my grandparents' story in a working group, the reaction I received was unexpected. The women were amazed that even Germans had been displaced in floods of refugees. A Palestinian woman even suggested organizing a joint event on the various expulsion stories. This reaction taught me to share the feelings of my grandparents.

The meeting and the challenging discussions with Palestinian, Israeli and German women made it possible for us to get in contact with issues which would have remained buried or unquestioned. We say good-

bye to judgments of other people and confront ourselves with our own faces and deeds.

My own role and development

How could I dare to try to take an active part in this project at all? How do I see myself, what is my standing in this world, how do I want to be perceived in this particular group?

Initially, I considered it my task as the only East German participant to assume the role of the East German tragic clown, who always started with the sentence. “For us in East Germany it was different – with children’ institutions, careers for women, private property, social protection, school system, the way we experienced the German-German reunification ...”

I played this role in 3 meetings and sometimes it got on my nerves that it was necessary – at least I believed it was. The Palestinian women were very interested in the question of property and dealing with house, farm and land after the reunification.

After the collapse of the GDR I invested a lot of energy and enthusiasm along with other women in building up an organization to support women and their families in Eastern Europe, to help them organize themselves, to take their life in their own hands again, to develop and concentrate their strengths. In the course of this work I completed my education to become a mediator and trainer.

When our Israeli-Palestinian-German meetings began in 1998, I had just started to manage seminars and processes. I had the chance of gathering a lot of experience in Eastern Europe as to how women in Russia, the Ukraine and Poland have been dealing with crises and changes, how they handled disappointment and success.

And I had made the experience that for the participating women I represented more than my own person. My German origin, in particular, however, my East German origin, enabled me to make clear references to our mutual history. War, post-war, setting up socialist systems: Experiencing the same structures was our connection – from kindergarten to the pioneers and pioneer palaces, the marches and flag roll calls, the socialist conception of man, the concepts of enemies and the build-up of armaments ...

There were other overlaps in our group here. Various Palestinian women were confused by my critical statements concerning the role of the GDR in the Israel-Palestine conflict. The positive role their Communist Party had played was important to them, particularly concerning equal rights for women. “They played a role but they didn’t set the rules”, one Israeli woman summed it up in a conciliatory manner.

It was only in the 3rd seminar that this misunderstanding could be dispelled. The Palestinian side assumed that I wanted to criticize the freedom efforts of the Palestinians by criticizing the GDR policy.

It was also expressed several times that the situation of the East Germans in the time after the collapse of the GDR could be compared with that of the Oriental Jews or of the Palestinians in Israel in terms of access to managerial functions, questions of property and relationships. This had to be contradicted immediately. Comparisons of this kind are seductive but don't help us along.

Later I feel that I have developed myself. Priorities have shifted; I am more independent in my way of thinking and acting. I no longer meet the Palestinian women with the inner attitude, "Oh, you poor victims, how can we dare to comment on your situation"; or the Israeli women "You great, knowing peace campaigners, I can only admire you and as a German have no right at all to get involved in your actions"; to the West German women "When do you start to be interested in what is happening in the East of your own country ..."

These attitudes are non-productive and paralyzing, block any real encounter, are frozen in pictures which only reproduce themselves. For example, I learnt that reproaches merely cause defenses, do not support developments.

Blind spots

Here, I have met the first Israelis in my life" – "I have exchanged very personal experiences with Palestinian women for the first time." How is something like that possible? To live side by side and not have anything to do with one another. A very young Palestinian woman, who has never entered Jerusalem before, points to a stone lying on the edge of the road: This stone contains my blood and the blood of my ancestors. I can die for it. Only now, 8 years later, I am able to tell her my horror about it. Again and again there is an aversion to showing any spontaneous reaction. For me, this sentence smells of 'blood and soil', national fanaticism, nationalism... What kind of feelings must such a young woman have? What education must she have, what stories had she been told? What will the next generation, the generation after the next be blamed for, to burden them with their own unfulfilled goals. How can they find their own goals?

Today the young Palestinian woman says that nationality doesn't mean anything to her. It is important to her to live in peace with her children. She can also ask Jewish Israeli women from our group for support. The general concept of the enemy has dissolved. "I have met Israelis here" she says, "who I had never expected, who were full of understand-

ing, listened and were against the Occupation. And in the beginning I was not happy with it.” The concept of the enemy has been changed by meeting brave women, who actually make it possible to create an atmosphere in which (almost) everything can be said; the ones standing at the checkpoints in order to keep the Israeli soldiers from degrading the Arabic population. The ones being spat at, insulted by their ‘own’, being threatened with injuries and death. Now, who are our ‘own ones’ and who are ‘the other’?

All our discussions have been lived experience of peace. Peace is more than the absence of violence. Here we had the opportunity to confront the conflicts, to articulate their effects on us and to turn the abstract statements into concrete experience.

I was very interested in the arguments between the Israeli and Palestinian women and the kind of reference they would make to us and vice versa. And I was simply curious. Because it was the first time in my life to meet Palestinian women.

The blind spots which we do not want to see, cannot see, when we have been taught concepts of enemies, follow us all our life and also played a role in this project.

Also in our little German group, I first played my Easterner role, sometimes saw surprised faces when I explained something about the situation in the East and sometimes had the feeling they were secretly thinking, “She is exaggerating”.

I see this expression also on a Jewish-Israeli face, when an oriental Jewish woman talks about her discriminations. We experience the Israeli society as deeply split, the Ashkenazim from Europe dominate the Sephardim, the Russian-speaking immigration families from the former Soviet Union push the country even further to the right, have their own

Rima Al Ajrami:

I always go home full of hope, ready to change and to be the way I felt during our meetings. But unfortunately, each time, this usually does not last for more than a week. Then I am back to reality, back to people with whom I feel weak, vulnerable and unimportant.

newspapers, theatres and parties and now form 1/5 of the Israeli society. The Ultra Orthodox block their roads so that nobody can pass through on Sabbath. They do not pay taxes, do not send their children to the army and do not acknowledge the state of Israel. They are waiting

for the Messiah. Arabic people are living in ‘non-acknowledged’ towns without infrastructure and controlled status. We have seen all that with our own eyes, the question strikes me, what will happen if there is no more outside enemy in this country?

The Israeli women allowed the Palestinian women to hurl almost everything at them. I remember one moment when I could not stand it any longer, and raised my objections very excitedly, demanding more respect and recognition for the way in which they were trying to change

the militant macho Israeli society from the inside. I ask myself whether putting up with the reproaches produces a difference in the balance of power again, which confirms the Palestinian women in their role as victim.

Women – Identity – and Policy

Playing with identities, referring to them, although it is actually all about attributing, about influence and the question ‘Who is setting the rules here?’

An example

A young Israeli invites us to light a candle for the Hanukkah celebration. Strong indignation from the leadership of the Palestinian group, religious feelings would be hurt and ignored. I was confused. Why isn't it possible to experience this together? The leader is a Christian – wouldn't she invite us to a common service? I, as a non-baptized Atheist, cannot see how anybody else is ignored by this invitation. I would have enjoyed celebrating it. I would also like to visit a mosque – which I do later in Berlin for a better understanding.

To outgrow the role of the victim, not to feel threatened and to be constantly delineating oneself, being able to allow what is different, being curious of it. Does this constellation allow the growth of openness? There is a picture in my office which I often look at, as if it were proof. It was taken when a Jewish and an Arabic woman in our group exchanged clothes. The Jewish woman wears the hijab, smiles into the camera, hugs her Palestinian colleague, who is wearing her blouse. A game with identities, with possibilities. What would have been if you were born in the place where I was born? How close can we get, to what extent can we try to learn to see things from the other one's point of view.

Another example

“We do not dance with the enemy.” Withdrawal of the Palestinian group from our room filled with music, laughing, dancing. A demonstration of honesty and hurt feelings which are supposed to produce guilty feelings in the other women. “We cannot become friends, there is no friendship between Jews in Israel and Palestinians.” This is as if the Palestinian leaders are proclaiming a political programme.

This gives you a feeling of the GDR, I am well trained in it. Ideology dominates, there are good guys and bad guys, there is a leadership which controls and takes care of the correct flow of things, and there is ONE direction, the obligation to speak with ONE voice. The reason – I have to protect my people. If they come home, they will be in trouble. We do not dance with the enemy.

Does it mean that friendship is dangerous? This is the starting point of a new, feminist strategy. Let no third party tell you anything, have nobody tell you anything about enemies, let us get to know each other, let us listen to one another and respect the experiences of the other ones, let us create subversive friendships.

Here I had the chance of meeting Israeli women who have their own different strategies of dealing critically with the Israeli society.

Concerning the Palestinian women – mostly very young women – our group was able to follow their growing to adulthood and to imagine that they even contributed something towards the process. The charismatic and very influential Palestinian leader left the project when she left the umbrella organization. Afterwards, we were able to witness the emancipation process, which was made possible for these very young women in the group. “In the fourth seminar we cooperated in such a democratic and equal-rights manner as never before.” This is how one of them expresses it today. Disputes developed among the Palestinian women as to who would be ‘in control’ now, tears were falling and the group fell apart. The ones who stayed gained a lot of independence, are daring and have the confidence to think and speak differently than in the beginning.

Whenever I listen to the stories of the young Palestinian women now, I am amazed about the paths they have taken, how self-confidently they pursue or change their professional careers.

For example, Jameela. Her father treated her – after his initial disappointment that she was not a boy – like a boy. She was allowed to play with toys meant for boys and girls. He loved and supported her. Today she is working in a company dealing with stone and is often the only woman at work. Or Sabah, who now has given up her career as an entrepreneur for a position at the University. She is working there with students on gender subjects. Where do we hear such stories of Palestinian women in Germany? We merely see victims, women hidden under scarves, running children, boys throwing stones at Israeli tanks.

Walls

We started our meetings regularly with retreating into ‘national’ groups and created a picture of our societies during the time which had passed between our meetings. We drew images on large paper sheets showing our picture of our countries at that time, showing whirls, people holding their hands, demonstrations, cuts in social services were becoming more prominent subjects, increasingly there were weapons and sites of war – even in our pictures of Germany. Fatal common features. Then, in the last meeting, it was there, on the picture by the Palestinian women. It struck me with shock. There it was again – the wall.

Very moved by the meetings, we are passing a part of the wall in Jerusalem, which is just being erected everywhere. Two young men, seemingly students, and a very old man squeeze themselves through a gap in the wall, Israeli soldiers of the same age, who one minute before had been standing there peacefully, shoot gas at the students. Noise, violence, stench and the look of the Israeli soldiers – very young faces, looking down at the old man, contemptuously, as if he was standing far below them, annoying, not a human being worthy of respect.

What is repeating itself here? Nobody should look at anybody else in such a way after the experiences of the attempted annihilation of entire

Vered Shomron-Fabian:

The external wars are a reflection of what is going on inside.

groups of people (disabled, Sinti and Roma, homosexuals, Jews, Communists...). What have we learnt if not the horror of our own disrespectfulness (“Why, it was war. It was only an order...”), but to respect every human being, regardless of origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender...

This is not how people should be looked at. Never again.

In 2006 I was traveling with another group in Israel, most of them who had grown up in East Germany. We were standing in front of the entrance of the wall surrounding Bethlehem, green olives in our hands, a gift of an Arabic worker, after answering his questions, whether we were Jews, in the negative. Were there any German Jews among us? Didn't we have any olives? The look of the wall, much higher than the wall in Berlin, very close to which we had lived until 1989, caused us to fall silent. The Jewish settlements around it, the enclosed city, an old Arabic man, who was kept from going ahead by two young Israeli soldiers. Are there any words to describe this? The end of the world? Misery, absolute resignation and misconception that walls are able to lock away problems. Walls lock in and lock out. Ask us Germans. We also have something to say about walls and how they grow inwards.

In 2005, all of us visit the Berlin Wall Museum. The photographs of people jumping out of the windows in Bernauer Street are running in a loop again and again. The women of our group watch them full of empathy and cry out loud whenever somebody reaches the bottom and goes on limping with clear signs of injuries. You are watching my entire history and are more moved, have more empathy than me. I was just 5 years old when the wall was built, 33 years old when I was able to walk through the Brandenburg Gate for the first time, in disbelief, anxiously and full of hope for a change. Now I am standing here as contemporary witness and am being asked: How did we live with it? Suddenly, my history is regarded as 'exotic' as I regard day-to-day life in Gaza or how I cannot imagine the constant fear of suicide attacks. How did we live with it, how are we living and how will we be living?

Past and future – what is this thing called luck

There have been three prerequisites which made our story what it was:

1. The persistent procurement of funding by the German project management,
2. The three generations, which came together in our group and
3. The continuity of working with the same women for such a long time. Whenever we were forced by external circumstances to take on new women, it always caused a return to the reproaches of the Palestinian side – which always lay close to the surface – the understanding and endurance by the Israeli peace activists and the helplessness of the German women.

Today one thing seems to be certain to me; the women who contribute to this meeting, with all their fears, their anger and despair, their stories and their silence, their laughter, their tender handling of their babies, their insecurities, their patience and persistence, their courage and will to live, their political attitudes and insights became part of my life and supported me in my life, influenced my thinking. I was lucky to experience this – even though the word does not really seem appropriate when we see the pictures from Palestine and Israel in the news of these days. We nonetheless insist on our ‘pursuit of happiness’.

The idea arose of founding our own organization. I could imagine that our first activity might also be an exhibition to present the circumstances of every single woman, giving a clear picture of the different worlds we are living in, what is connecting us. Developing activities which bring us together again, making us work together on the issues that concern us. This means being full of life and having hope.



Rawia Loucia Shammas

My identity: between optimism and pessimism



Rawia Loucia Shammas

I am a 36 years old Arab Palestinian woman. I live in Haifa.

I define myself as a feminist.

Today I work as women projects' coordinator at „Al-Tafula“, a multipurpose the pedagogical centre for women's empowerment and early childhood care and development. I am mainly involved in a women's empowerment project in the newly recognized villages in the north of Israel.

I volunteer for „Hewar – Dialogue“, an organization of Palestinian parents in Haifa that has established a framework for alternative education.

My name is Rawia Loucia Shammas. I am 36 years old, married to Hanna and mother to two magnificent girls, Sama, aged 6 and Nay, one year old.

I started this journey when I was 27 years old, before I got married, when I was full of life and very much in love and saw the world in happy colours. At the time I thought that I could change the world and that I was able to communicate with everyone. At the time I believed in Feminism as a starting point in changing the world. I was sure that it was my destiny and my mission, being born as a Palestinian in a country called Israel, as a minority, within my homeland, to bring about change. Today I am pessimistic.

At the start of the process I believed in the power of women, that we can bring world peace, free Palestine and attempt living together in this land. We would be able to overcome the burden that the Jewish people forced me and my people to bear. We would change the name and the symbols of the Jewish state and create together a new name with new symbols that are applicable to us all.

I am pessimistic because I think I am unable to change much in my daily life. The resources available to me are hardly enough to provide for my family to survive the wars provoked by the 'little men', who make decisions regarding every little detail of my life. I am stuck here for many reasons; my fate is decided by others.

Today I can't even see the distant horizon. With all my feminism and with all the values that I believe in as a person, I see how far, we as a people, still have to go.

The first difficulty that I recognized at the beginning of our path was how connected I was to my Jewish friends and how unconnected I was to my Palestinian friends who live in the Occupied Territories and Gaza. Today I understand just how much the government of Israel and Zionism succeeded in separating us as if we were two peoples. I think that they, the Palestinian women, saw me as a ‘traitor’ because they have had to live with difficulties under occupation while I live a ‘normal’ life. Therefore my dialogue should be primarily regarding the occupation, and not on how to express my feelings of inequality and alienation within the land where I live. This is basically true. At least I am able to move freely from place to place and I can receive medical treatment whenever I need it.

At first, I did not understand what they meant by normalization and why they opposed it all the time. Now I understand, I ‘accept it’, that I am in Israel and not in Palestine. I understand that the situation won’t change and I must learn how to live inside this bubble. I was so

naïve and too much in love and believed that the world could be fixed.

Vered Shomron-Fabian:

I believe that only after each people resolves its own fears and conflicts will there be a way for the two to slowly build a peaceful relationship – similar to what we have been doing in our seminars.

I could connect with the Jewish women because I had learned the Israeli Feminist discourse and I learned much from this. But I had not learnt how to protect myself and

preserve my identity. In a place that lacks equality, I didn’t learn about feminism from a Palestinian perspective. On the other hand, it bothered me that I was not accepted by the Palestinian side as I recognized them as an inseparable part of my identity.

It bothered me that I could not freely express my opinions or use my experience in mediation. I felt that this was expected of me. I should have been able to do this but I chose not to, because I needed to focus on my issues.

I have my own issues, my own problems, my Palestinian identity, the fact that my life is so distant from the lives of the Palestinians who live in the Occupied Territories and Gaza, so far away from the Israelis that live near me, in my city on my land. I felt very alone.

For my good luck there was another Palestinian woman in the group who lives in Israel. We created our own national group together. Today I am aware that this was an escape from reality and immature.

It was difficult for me to accept the fact that in every dialogue that was held, we as ‘Palestinians’ needed to speak ‘politically correctly’: I didn’t think that I was part of a group with a national agenda. I was preoccupied with the personal aspects. Was I supposed to be there on a national mission? This is an issue that I have not resolved yet.

From my participation in previous seminars, I was aware of my special place, with my own perception and personal growth. But today I realize that those meetings had a deep influence on me. I always worried about the responsibility I take upon myself and this is evident in the difficulties I am feeling in writing this piece.

Many subjects 'sparked my fuses', especially the issue of Zionism. I expected the Israeli women who were with me to be in another frame of mind, different from the 'mainstream' Israeli. I discovered that the subject is open to discussion and I understood that part of the group see themselves as Zionists whereas Zionism in my eyes nullifies my right to exist or where Zionism as an ideology opposes everything that I believe in. It justifies the Jewish right to Palestinian land just because their Jewish ancestors were here 2000 years ago. The world ignores the existence of the Palestinian people in this land because of the Zionism who convinced the world that there are people (Jews) without land and land (Palestine) without people. We are invisible.

But all this denies me my rights just because of the fact that up until 60 years ago, this land was Palestinian. The land was actually stolen from Palestinian ownership.

This strong conflict provokes in me stronger feelings of hopelessness. In addition, there are many 'meltdowns' like the one that occurred during the discussion regarding the Palestinian Right to Return, when I expected some of the other participants (specially the Israelis) to be fully understanding of this basic right. The argument regarding this issue silenced me and closed me down. It made me feel that if these women, who consider themselves part of the radical Left, can't understand, accept and defend this right, then we are in a very unpromising situation.

This seems extremely unjust, especially when one talks about the right of Jews from all over the world to immigrate to Israel (Make Aliyah), when they receive so much support and benefits, more than I do, a citizen of Israel, born in Israel, more than all of those who were expelled and whose homes were destroyed during the Nakba. This scenario continues until this day in Jerusalem, the Galilee, in the Negev, in Ramle and so on.

The western world, Europe, USA and others, perceive Israel as the only democracy amongst all the Arab countries in the Middle East. But Israel still has villages that existed before the country was founded and before the Jews came to 'Israel'. On these lands, many Bedouins lived. The lands were registered in their names ever since the times of the Turkish Empire. Over the years they became less nomadic and even built houses out of stone. In the 1960s, the Bedouins' homes were destroyed and they were expelled from the land. But they continued to live on the free range close to their villages. The Israelis built their settlements and communities in the place where the villages once stood. The Israelis built

their new large modern homes out of stone with beautiful gardens. The Bedouins continue to live today in Quonset huts that heat up unbearably in the summer and are freezing cold in the winter without basic infrastructure, water or electricity. Today it is the Israelis who do not allow them to improve their standard of living.

The Second Intifada and the events of October 2000, when 13 Palestinians, citizens of Israel, were killed, constituted a significant calamity for me and my connections with the Israeli people. There were other events that happened that also led me to feel that as an Israeli citizen I will always be without rights and there is no one who will assist me in my life, not the West, not the Feminists and not another 'democratic regime' in some other place in the world.

When I gave birth and became a mother, I was naturally happy. But I was also very uneasy regarding my daughters' futures and I felt guilty that I had brought them into the same terrible world that I was living in. Today I try to respectfully provide for them. But I know that they will have a more difficult life than mine because racism is so predominant and growing stronger every day. The 'little men' that I have mentioned before, become 'smaller and smaller' and more powerful by instigating wars. But my crisis is that I know that I am even smaller, this is not because of my ideology, but because I am really just a small screw within a larger mechanism and I cannot make many changes.

So how is it that I have been a participant in the seminars these past nine years?

The group itself is very special, there are big differences between us, but we also have very much in common. Everyone in the group gave me support and that was empowering. I grew with them and learned a lot from them about myself. I am very grateful for the opportunity I was given.

The link between three national groups, Palestinians, Israelis and Germans, is a blend between the past, present and future. I am Israeli and Palestinian at the same time. I did not choose to have an Israeli pass-

Christiane Reinholz-Asolli:

In theory, the solution of the conflict was clear. But in practice there was a big knot of misunderstandings, naiveté, ignorance, hurt feelings which at times seemed impossible to disentangle.

port. But it was forced upon me as part of the daily injustices of my existence. The alienation between me and my Palestinian society is great. I am a minority in my feminist self-perception. I am a minority in my way of life. I am also a demographic minority in Israel

as well as being a political minority. I perceived a large complex puzzle that is impossible to put together and I thought that through the personal place, we could really connect. This was the role of the responsible mediators, the German women.

They seemed to me to be like a mirror through which I could see myself from the outside. They were knowledgeable of lessons learned from their history about how to make amends for the future. But they were the ones that made me get in touch with reality once again when one of them, during the final seminar, said to me “But you are an Israeli”. This statement shocked my senses. I had been on this journey for nine years so that I could come full circle and be at peace with my identity, having the same feelings of strangeness and of being foreign and like an outsider. This was how I had felt at our first meeting with the other Palestinian women. Since then I have been in a constant process of proving to myself and to the other members of the group that my Palestinian identity is not debatable or not an open question to ponder upon.

Once, when we were very young, it was forbidden and very frightening, especially for our parents, to say that we were Palestinian. It was forbidden to fly the Palestinian flag in any circumstance or place. Our self definition was that we are Arabs, citizens of the State of Israel, period. All this came from our parents who went through the Nakba (The Disaster in 1948 during the War of the Occupation of the State of Israel). My parents remembered how Palestine had been taken from them when they were children and the fear they had of the Jews who took over their lands. It was the fear of being killed, the expropriation of lands and the expulsions etc.

Our parents were raised on this fear. They went through the war and tried to raise us in such a fashion that we would accept the fact that we are a minority and we should be thankful for the mercy of being spared and were not deported by the Jews who give us rights. We are the generation that did not go through the war, the generation that began to ask the question of “How was Palestine stolen from us?”

We refused to accept the fear and as we matured we began to openly say that we are Palestinians. It wasn't easy to do this but it gave us a distinct allegation to who we are, a distinction our parents did not have.

This does not mean that the Jewish people are more accepting of us or more democratic towards us. The opposite is quite the reality. Today I feel more racism and that there is a growing gap between the two peoples.

I am definitely Palestinian. I have an Israeli identity card and an Israeli passport but this is because I don't have a choice in the matter. I refuse to leave the land I was born in because my connection with the land is my existence. Therefore I have the right and even more because of the terrible injustices that have been done to me. I will continue to demand my rights. Although it won't make a difference, I am obliged to do so for myself and for my family and for all those who live in this land.



Razia Meron

Narrative



Razia Meron

Razia is a long time peace activist and one of the founders of "New Profile", The Movement to Civilize Israeli Society.

She says, "I created the dancing class and several internet sites. I'm a firm believer in seeing the brighter side of life and of people. Tai-Chi is my martial art; the Didgeridoo is my musical instrument."

She is a mother of 3 children, an all time student (nowadays „Family Physics"), a cook, computerized Internet web/screen artist, always on the move to do more.

I didn't want to go to Germany. Edna called me up and invited me to join a dialogue group that she was forming with women activists. It sounded like something that I would love to take part in, but at that point in my life I didn't want to go to Germany. My memories of my only visit to Germany were as an athlete when I was younger. These memories had left me with a bad taste. So I said to Edna, "Thanks – but no thanks."

At that point of my life, I was inattentive, not a listener. I was the 'right' 'left', I knew what was right and what was wrong – in a nut shell – I was a very righteous angry woman. My husband would say about me "You are the most militant peacemaker I ever met..." During that time we were pregnant with our new innovative movement. "New Profile" was about to be born. Life was hard but extremely meaningful.

In May 2000 Edna called again to invite me once more to join the group. This time I already understood that I wanted to join. I had heard the stories from Vered and Ruthie. I wanted to take part in this amazing group that have found a real connection with Palestinians, which have found a common ground, that sparked hope.

I wanted to connect with the amazing German women, leading change, supporting reconciliation and peace, looking and seeing every aspect with love and respect. This is a good opportunity to say thank you to Hannelore, Katrin-Tinka, Christiane and Anette. Oh so attentive, clever, imaginative and generous women! With a plan and a budget!

Nationality issues are becoming petty and narrow minded as I broaden my mind.

Also, Debby, who was in “New Profile” and a good friend, was also invited to join the group. Ha!

During this period my personal life was going badly. There were difficulties. This seemed like this was a good time to go away for a while. That July in 2000 I left behind my 3 young children, Ana aged 12, Dan aged 10, and Lill, 6. I left them with their father, my husband, Eyal. This was a critical time in our marriage. Eyal was in a deep depression. He was apathetic and very unhappy. I was not any comfort for him anymore nor he to me.

In Bremen Debby and I shared a room. Vered and Rima shared the room next door to ours.

Immediately noticed Rima’s sharp mind. Ever since then, when she speaks, I look and listen with admiration to what she has to say and how she analyzes her personal situation and Palestinian issues. I knew from the stories about the previous meetings that she used to say to the Israelis “You are my enemies.” I was impressed by the way she had shifted from being accusing, hateful, and stuck on old beliefs and understandings, into someone who is a listener and open to new suggestions. She is a fresh thinker. I also think that she did understand that we, the Israelis in the group, are not holding the Israel mainstream ideology.

I see Rima as a leader. She is someone who is willing and able to change and grow and be eloquent while reading the map. She is a very religious Muslim and wears a hijab. At the same time, I perceive her as being intelligent and educated, with a broad mind and soul. I can be sure that she will not sell her identity for ‘a cup of rice’. The growing friendship between Vered and Rima made me happy. I adore them both and think highly of their powers. I still fantasise about the creation of a programme that gives woman leaders the education and psychological frame of mind they need to be able to go into politics and also have the advanced tools they need to assist them in their leadership roles and their personal couple relationship and family skills.

Debby, Vered and I used to hang out together after the sessions. We would talk and get some relief from the politics and barriers that we were experiencing at the seminar.

One evening, after a long day of talking, thinking and doing the job that we came to do, all the participants in the seminar sat around the table and tried to give a more personal view regarding the various aspects of life. Each Palestinian started to tell the history of her family, what were their origins in Israel-Palestine and where their land and property had been.

It was the first time we heard the story of the refugees and the Palestinian claim to the land. May spoke about her family and the big house they had when they lived in Sydney Ali. Today this is part of the city of Herzelia. Rima told about her family living in Beer Sheva. The stories went on and on.

We listened and did not interrupt. I think that this evening, in many ways, was the turning point in our relationships. We had the will and ability to listen – to let others say things that usually Israelis do not want to hear. For me it was like dismantling a bomb.

I do not remember what led to what, but what they were saying was in order to reach for real peace. The Palestinians wanted the right to return to their land and property and to the life they had before we, the Israelis, conquered and forced them to leave.

Someone spoke about reading Itzhak Rabin's book. In the book, he wrote for the first time about the plan and execution of the deportation of entire Palestinian villages. This confirmation was a major turning point for them.

We, the Israelis, said nothing. We listened with sealed faces.

I was in shock. It was the first time that the Israeli-Palestinian war seemed insoluble. I was frightened to my bones.

When we finally went back to our rooms it was already very late. But we couldn't fall asleep. Debby and I talked and Vered came in and joined us.

We talked about what the return of the Palestinians, from all over the world – back to Israel – would really and practically mean? Would we be expected to leave our houses to them?

We sat on the beds, developing scenarios of what would happen when all Palestinians returned. We built scenarios in which we, Israelis, could contribute to the Palestinian people. We were willing to pass to them our

pathos, ethos and all the stories of 'fallen' young soldiers – because in Israel soldiers do not die, they fall. These are words of our national anthem.

We thought about offering our help in building their national state and national identity. We could advise

them how to celebrate Independence Day combined with a national military memorial day.

As time passed and the night was turning into pale morning, we were willing to exchange places. At the time I was living in a small home but with a large area of grounds attached the house. I offered up a solution where we could all live in the house in rotation. One family would live in the house; three other families would camp outside on the grounds. We

Rima Al Ajrami:

I always go home full of hope, ready to change and to be the way I felt during our meetings. But unfortunately, each time, this usually does not last for more than a week. Then I am back to reality, back to people with whom I feel weak, vulnerable and unimportant.

would share. We made a list of what we can learn from the Palestinians and what we could teach them.

At several points, our thoughts on this situation found the three of us rolling on the floor, laughing hysterically. Debby, for years after that, suggested that we write a political comedy based on that night.

Later on she moved to Texas U.S.A, taking a writing course. Maybe someday, we will read her own account of that night. My dear friend Debby, I love you and miss you in my life ... you were my teacher and guide to many understandings and insights on my ongoing life journey.

In September 2000, my children and I were driving back from visiting our friends in Metula, which is in the northern part of Israel. It was the first day of the second Intifada. There were traffic jams and the road lights in Wadi Ara were smashed leaving the roads very dark. We eventually got home and understood that the Palestinians living in Israel had joined their brothers in Palestine in this uprising of anger. We learned from the media that the Israeli police were shooting to kill and had actually killed 13 young people here in Israel.

We were shocked and outraged by the killing of Israeli citizen demonstrators. We, some women from “New Profile”, went to meet and visit the families who had lost their sons in those killings by the Israeli police.

We cried with them. We listened to them, looked at the photos and tried

to find ways to give them our condolences. We wanted them to know that they have friends in Israel.

After we left the families we talked in the car. Debby was crying and told us about what is happening

Sabah Ikhmees:

We as women Palestinians go back to the big prison, the unemployment, the poverty and the apartheid wall incarcerating such a large numbers of Palestinians.

at her home. She told us about her older boy getting violent with her, shouting almost slapping her in rage, telling her that he will not listen to her anymore, that she had lost her motherly rule. Her family was not willing to hear about politics from her at home anymore. She was talking about watching television and hearing the news constantly.

There was a need to be updated and to know what is going on, to see the rage and learn about the street demonstrations. This was something that I was familiar with. What Debby cried about was her turning point and mine. The understanding hit me like lightning.

My life was a mess, and as in some stories, I had hit rock bottom. From there I grew to what I am now. I worked hard to change my beliefs; I exercised over and over again – like a dancer or someone working with her body, with my soul and mind. I decided: “until I know how to fix the world to make it better – without anger – I’ll fix myself, I’ll be the change.”

It was my revelation, my disenchantment, my salvation. I'm happy and thankful now, more than I have ever been before. I am learning to change the world through inner change and inner acceptances – to be the change, to smile, to take responsibility on my feelings, to be happy with what is – instead of getting crazy over what isn't.

My children are growing up, becoming responsible and respectful of their feelings. They smile. They would not go to the army to 'serve' unreasonable, hateful tasks. They recognize the connection between military Memorial Day and the next war and understand the correlation between the Israeli education system and the army. What took me 25 years to understand, they already implement without blinking, broadening the alternative road.



Rawia Loucia Shammas · Adina Aviram
Fidaa Narh-Abu Dba · Ruth Hiller



Edna Zaretsky Toledano
Vered Shomron-Fabian



Rima Al Ajrami

Finding Inner Peace:
S/he who does not have a thing,
can not give it to others!



Rima Al Ajrami

Born in Damascus, Syria, in a refugee camp (Yarmouk Camp) and returned to Gaza in 1996.

She has a BA in English Literature, MA in Democracy and Human Rights. She married in Ramallah at the time of the second Intifada.

She has worked in human rights organizations, both for women and children rights and participated in different conferences and activities on women rights.

I do not want my home to be surrounded from all directions, and I do not want my windows to be closed.

I want my home to be visited by all nations' cultures with all possible freedom, but I deny any of them the right to uproot me from my land. My doctrine is not a closed religion. It has a space for all God's creatures even those not significant to others, but it is still opposing prejudices based on color, race or religion.

It all started 9 years ago, when I had my real first confrontation with the 'other'. Being born and raised in Syria with so little information about Israeli and Jews made it very hard for me to understand exactly what was taking place. I was so young, immature, stubborn and totally uninterested to learn about them. I wanted only to be listened to. I felt I had a story to tell and that everybody else should listen. I did not underestimate the others' experiences but I wanted a space of my own; I wanted others to know what I had been through for years. It was then that I stopped and understood that it was time to do something different than only talking. Believe me that was not easy because I am really talkative and very expressive and find it difficult to be quiet!

It's been quite a long time since this process started. I've changed and they've changed but one thing remained and will always be like this: our meeting was the

place where I most expressed myself, got supported and encouraged, was listened to so attentively that it hurts not to feel this all the time.

Whenever I go home, I miss being supported and surrounded by people who love me and care about whatever trivial thing I have to say. I need this more in my life; I need this network of protection. This is a new feeling I have had recently. I did not feel the same during our first

meeting. I felt happy in the group, sometimes strong and opinion-oriented. Then this changed, or I changed. I do not know when this happened exactly but it has to be within the past five years, more specifically after I got married and moved away from my family, friends and all the close people I used to be around on daily basis. This made me feel lonely for the first time of my life. This led me to be longing and waiting for this meeting, with a group so close and warm to a way that you can hardly want to leave.

I passed the hard years already with all of them, even with Palestinians. I can say easily that with them I feel at home no matter where, how and when (politically) we meet. All I care about is that I want to be with them for a while. I always need a break and I will not find another place than with them. They already know me so well that sometimes when they praise me, I can hardly believe that it's me they are talking about!

I always go home full of hope, ready to change and to be on the way I felt during our meetings. But unfortunately, each time, this usually does not last for more than a week. Then I am back to reality, back to people with whom I feel weak, vulnerable and unimportant. This makes me start right away waiting for another chance to meet and to be "re-charged" by all these powerful and loving women.

I can now say confidently that I no longer care that my group members included Israeli women, I have no problem even to announce this and advocate for it if needs arises. I am changed and most importantly I know that I changed and I am proud of my change.

I do not have any feelings of regret. I thought I would but now the thing I would regret is that I might have missed any of our meetings but I did not, so I made it through completely. I experienced this as I should; I had a very long time to reflect upon our group's importance, existence and dynamics.

You can never feel the real importance and beauty of something unless you are deprived of it. This is how I feel about this group and this is why I hate to think that this would be the last time that I hear and see Vered's eyes speaking to my soul in love and care, Ruti's tender and powerful character that enrich all conversations you have with her, Shi-

ra's rebellion and strong spirit that knows what she wants and works so hard for it no matter what, Adina's wise looks and lovely smile that can show you without even using words that she will be there for you if you

Vered Shomron-Fabian:

I have come to think that each society, the Israeli and Palestinian, is still in a state of fear and conflict, even at war, within itself, within most of its citizens.

need, Razia's tears that always mixes with mine whenever I need a shoulder to lean on and an ear to listen to me, Edna's deep feelings and charisma that can hardly be forgotten and that makes you feel you knew her

forever, Fidaa's arms spread always to hold you when you need love and attention, Rawia's words and smiles that wipe away tears and pain, Sabah's calm and confident voice makes you feel everything is OK and hope will always be there, Jamila's young presence that adds a sweet flavour to the group and the way she mingled so quickly and intimately with almost all of us in a childish and loving way, I will not forget: Tinka the naughty woman (child) with whom I laughed and shared all side jokes and fights with smiles and common 'evil' comments, Hannelore the mother I would love to have (though I love my mother) but still I feel some intimacy and so much related to her that I want to spend my lifetime near her, Christiana's sharp and clever remarks and sense of humor at the same time brought about a unique mixture that can hardly be found in any one but her and Anette's light and caring personality who has so much to give and waits for no return.

When I look at the significant personal milestones in my life, for instance my University years in Gaza and my relationship with my family, I can see in what ways my connection with the group has changed, empowered or weakened me.

My protective feeling has decreased. I do not need to defend myself anymore. I am with people who are 'my enemy', who acknowledge this and are trying to reach a common ground with me and other Palestinians.

My father was the one who supported me the most among all other people in my personal and family life. I did not have a good relationship with my mother and it was very hard to get back to her after he left. It was hard to start from scratch as I hardly had anything in common with her. He was ill at the time of my last journey, and what happened is still a very good and sacred memory for me. He was in Jordan and I called my mother to tell her that I needed to go to a meeting with this group. She said it was not the right time to do it, but Father (who was unable to speak) asked her to bring him a napkin and wrote on it "let her go". That was the last thing he actually encouraged me to do and wanted me to be part of. He helped me though all my career and I can hardly find someone to replace him now that he's gone. I will always remember that it was him who encouraged me to start my feminist career.

I married a very considerate and respectful man. One of the main reasons to marry him was, apart from his personality, to get out of Gaza.

I thought that this is what I really wanted to do, fleeing from Gaza and going somewhere I can breathe, but I did not get this. On the contrary I got stuck there for six years with no support.

Another most important milestone for me as when my daughter Tamara was born. I can hardly think of my life without Tamara. She changed me forever and now every decision I will make will include her whether I like it or not. It is for her that I know how to live, work, dream and accomplish anything. It is here where I lost myself into motherhood, in the negative meaning of the word. I got so involved with my child that I could hardly breathe or think of anything for myself.

Then another burden to my freedom and personality was added with the birth of my son Yazan. With all the love I have for him and Tamara, I knew that I had lost my power of decision and my personality forever and that I would not be the same again. If it was not for them I could have taken numerous decisions that I do not dare even to think of aloud now.

During our last meeting in Germany I thought I was sick with the new virus that was spreading in Europe. When I got back I thought about it: What if I was pregnant? I bought a home test and it was posi-

Gili Tzidkiyahu:

Much has been said and written in Israel about motherhood as a political force, the ticket women need in order to join the public discourse.

tive; so I went to the lab, had a blood test which turned out to be positive too. That was too much for me. I started to think about abortion but it was already too late. It was not at all a planned decision. But I am now in my last month and I feel con-

tent about the decision that Yara is coming and that a new change is to be added to my life. My professional achievements ran in parallel to this. I changed my job and I completed my MA, although this milestone did not produce the happiness, the feeling of accomplishment which three years earlier I thought it would bring me, as I saw this at the time as the very essence of my future career.

It all seems in vain when you do not have people to celebrate with. I do not drink, but when I had my MA, I thought I would even be willing to get drunk with friends in order to feel happy and to celebrate!

At the same time, I achieve some political milestones during these ongoing meetings. I grew up and matured. I gained different new perspectives to look at things and experience them for the first time.

I discovered Yoga and practiced it with Vered. I shared a room with an Israeli woman for the first time in my life and to accept this was something beyond normal for me.

In truth, I needed a break from the typical Palestinian ways of thinking and all the trauma. I started being 'Me', the one who has her own feelings and thoughts. They might be wrong and incoherent and politically unacceptable but why don't we have freedom to say what we think, even if it is not correct in political terms? It may sometimes help us to form our identity and consciousness, and then the question arises, who is responsible to define wrong and right and hold us accountable for it?

I don't have much to say about each individual meeting as I feel that altogether they form a pattern, like pieces of fabric intermingled to constitute an important part of my personality, as have tried to express above. To conclude I will say that if it was up to me, I would recommend that our meetings continue indefinitely. We could have a meeting every year or every two years, just to update each other with our latest news and development, and to build on the very solid base that was once started by Hannelore.

I think that the funders who financed this process did not know that they were investing in human beings, not only in quantitative or qualitative outputs and results. I hope they know by now that they have reached their desired physical outputs, but the impact of this project on us participants was much beyond their imagination and much more important than what was planned. An impact, if we were to be decision or policy makers, which could have saved souls and changed the situation forever.



Christiane Reinholz-Asolli
Anette Klasing · Jenny Zobel

Ruth Hiller

A Turn of Phrase



Ruth Hiller

Born in the USA, she came to Israel in her teens.

She lives on Kibbutz Haogen.

She is a longtime peace activist and one of the founders of "New Profile".

Introduction

Whoever reads this narrative and the narratives that my colleagues have written will learn that this project offered an opportunity and provided us with unique insight into the way that deep conflict transformation processes can happen. Our project was the prototype, the one that was created to find a real common standing ground between all sides. Not only did we search deep within ourselves to find the different ways we could learn to live together in better harmony, we also understand each other better. We have studied together the importance of our shared existence, our survival and recognizing that we have options especially in times of war.

It is no longer us and them, it is now just us. I hope that we will find a way to continue this important project. It took us many years to find our bearings. Now that we have it, we should keep the momentum going.

In reflection I can honestly say that this project provided me with a safe space for personal growth without feeling uncomfortable. In turn I was able to be part of a discourse that led to long lasting cooperation and the creation of a sisterhood of true soul mates.

The importance of this network, that may be so typically disregarded by others and not considered as an empowering force, can also be a home away from home. It contains components of shared visions. And even though we do not have one declared joint project, aside from our writing this final chapter, I refuse not to be counted as part of this unique project. It is not the final nail in the coffin.

One last comment before I begin, some of the women who shared this project with me are mentioned by name. This in no way suggests that these women were more significant than those I did not mention. Simply my space is limited.

My Narrative

There are many ways that I would like to ease into this narrative. I really wish I knew how to tell a good joke to slide myself into the narrative, “Three women met in Germany, an Israeli, a Palestinian and a German...”

But instead I will say that being a part of this Trialogue, this joining of women from three countries was one of the most defining moments in my life. I will always consider myself privileged and wiser for having had this opportunity. I belong to this community which we have created. They are my shelter and my light. I am empowered by our insights and strengths and learn from our discrepancies and differences. Today I honestly feel that when I am with them, I am ‘home’. Here I am safe.

We all have deciding moments in our lives, moments when we chose one path over another. Moments when we know there is no going back, no stopping. During or after these moments of significance I sometimes question my own destiny.

Meeting Edna was one of those deciding moments in my life. Agreeing to come to Würzburg was another. But I was only able to recognize much later that I had been very naïve and inexperienced. It was truly an unpretentious lack of experience. But I was willing to learn. I trusted Edna and the path that she put me on. We would walk it together, with the others, those that chose to. I believe that by recognizing this great honour of being chosen to be a member of this Trialogue that there is an even greater commitment on my part that comes from respect and humility. I was humbled for being chosen to take part in this enormous journey of self exploration, national identity and resolution.

There is something to be said about being naïve and not having expectations. When Edna first contacted me with an offer to be part of a group of women from all over Israel that would be working together with women from Palestine and Germany, I was intrigued. I also felt really privileged that I had even been considered to be part of this group. Edna did very well by me, explaining the criteria for being part of the group was to be a ‘young’ (young in the sense of experience) activist committed to working for social change in an NGO.

My first true understanding that I was on a mission and not an adventure came when we met with the group of Palestinian women at the Israeli international airport, Ben Gurion. We had already decided at our first meeting of the Israeli group that in order to provide some protection and avoid the abuse and harassment that non-Jews are subject to, we agreed to go through the security checks in pairs, one Israeli, together with one Palestinian. This was certainly different from anything I had ever experienced before at an airport. I can’t recall if I had been aware of the security procedures beforehand or not. But I remember my apprehension and

my inner voice yelling, “Behave, Act Normal! Behave, don’t look suspicious! Act Normal!” over and over again.

When we met the Palestinian group in the entrance lobby, there was hardly time to talk. We smiled to one another, said hello bashfully and walked through the different security stations together. It was only later that we learned that one Palestinian woman, who came from Gaza, had not received the message to wait for us in the lobby and had gone ahead by herself. She was subjected to the prolonged harassment and abuse of the Israeli security personnel.

At our Israeli meeting before the trip we had agreed amongst ourselves that we would not succumb to the temptations of the Duty Free shops upstairs. We agreed that we would not flaunt our wealth or our freedom and purchasing abilities. This choice fitted very well with how I perceive myself. I like to consider myself a modest woman who enjoys the simple pleasures of life from time to time. For me a shopping spree is walking through a bazaar and spontaneously deciding to buy someone’s handmade craft. (Although I admit that I did buy a few chocolates to take home to my children.)

This consideration, this collective decision, was made because as Israelis we were fully aware of the economical difficulties Palestinians are subject to due to the Israeli Occupation. I had a mistaken belief, a preconceived stereotype that all Palestinians are subject to poverty and hunger, without purchasing capabilities. This apparently was not the case for most of the members of this particular Palestinian delegation as they appeared to be quite well-to-do and with substantial financial means.

While waiting in the departure hall I watched these women with both awe and confusion. It was all very far from my perception of what was the average purchasing capability of Palestinians living in the West Bank. It was the first time I ever had to consider that there was social rank and hierarchy amongst the Palestinians. It was the first time I had ever thought to consider what economic equality meant in Palestine. My few previous encounters had not prepared me for this. All that I had known before was purely driven by desire to promote coexistence and peace.

I had never before had the privilege of spending time in Europe. All my trips abroad had been focused on visits to my family in America. Trips to Europe always seemed distant, and not realistic. But travelling to Europe was always a dream I had.

In Würzburg I felt like I was truly in a ‘Winter Wonderland’. We arrived in the dark of night and woke to a morning with fresh snow. Even today the memories of Würzburg bring back those wonderful invigorating sensations. I can still smell the green pines, the Christmas smells of cloves, ginger and wine at the city’s Christmas Market. I can still see all

the colours that were so vivid against the white pristine snow. I seem to remember reading in fairytales about this untouched and quite virginal snow that falls silently. I remember feeling as if I was in one of those glass bubble fairytale snow scenes, the difference being that when I shook

Vered Shomron-Fabian:

The silence of the outdoors allows the silence within. Silence after a storm. About ten years (or many more?) of storm. Am I truly in peace now?

myself I did so to remember how difficult the situation still is 'over there'. I remember the Christmas decorations in every window, each window like a picture in a book. The landscape was soft and flowing. I could not remem-

ber having encountered landscape like this ever before. There isn't such gentle and soothing landscape in Israel. The terrain there is rougher and tougher with jagged and sharp stones even when there is snow.

The German women received both the foreign delegations with wide open arms. There seemed to be a real sense of starting something new, something different. Hannelore's vision of a new discourse in the Middle East opened up new focus on the themes of Feminism, Peace and Democracy. I felt my world was growing.

I found it difficult at first to share my own personal narrative in Würzburg. I never considered myself a great public speaker. It was the first time I had spoken openly outside my small circle of supportive women acquaintances in Israel about my experiences and my son's decision to refuse to be part of the Israeli military mechanism.

This is a story that I could not share in its entirety with my family in the USA. (My entire family, parents and siblings live in the USA). For the most part their lives are so self involved, like so many Americans. The realities of the world outside the American borders are denied and unrecognized as true issues. And I could never share it with the other members of my community in the kibbutz, not even with my neighbours or with others whom I had once considered my closest friends. My personal choices, my evolving awareness and the belief in my son's right to freedom of conscience turned me into the community eccentric. I had become the traitor and on one occasion had been compared to the likes of the murderous and evil Baruch Goldstein. (On February 25, 1994, between the Jewish holiday Purim and the Muslim holiday Ramadan, Baruch Goldstein, a member of the extremist Kahanist movement and resident of the Kiryat Arba settlement next to the occupied West Bank city of Hebron, entered the Cave of the Patriarchs also known as the Mosque of Abraham. He was dressed in an army uniform and carried an assault rifle. Standing at the only exit of the cave he open fire on Muslim worshippers, assassinating 29 and wounding 125 before he was overwhelmed by survivors and killed. Several dozen Palestinians and many Israelis were killed in the violent aftermath that followed.)

Even today there doesn't seem to be much point in trying to share these experiences with other members of my kibbutz community. From time to time I attempt to acquaint them with this new narrative I am learning but they quickly change the subject. They want no part in this. They do not appreciate my contacts with those 'others'. They don't want to listen or even to know that I have had another defining experience as an individual or even as a woman. They are weary of these strange politics where women come together and discuss matters such as the role of Zionism today, the Palestinian right to return and the deep responsibility that the Germans feel regarding the Middle East.

Once I told someone, a woman who occasionally used to invite me to her home on my kibbutz, to drink coffee in the late afternoons after work that I was going to Europe to meet with our Trialogue group. I tried to explain what we discuss and what we share. All she could say to me was "Don't cause us (the Israelis) any embarrassment." I remember thinking "What does that mean? Why am I an embarrassment?" I was too afraid to ask her. It might mean jeopardizing another friendship. But I knew that what she meant was that if I don't think like them, the mainstream Israelis, then my opinions and perspective on life in the region are an embarrassment to others. In other words, I had been told to keep my different opinions to myself. So now I know I should keep my secrets to myself – but people who keep secrets are very lonely.

The seminar in Würzburg fell between Christmas and Chanukah. This fact raised the matter of celebration, religion and the deeper question of coherence between all the national groups. Could Israelis and Palestinians celebrate with each other when there is Occupation and no formation of a Palestinian country? This became an issue of conflict and discussion. It was painful and offensive, isolating and manipulative. In the end, the discussion did not seem to bridge any deep gaps and bring us to a closer understanding. We were not clear about what was 'allowed'. But the debate itself regarding if we can celebrate together was symbolic. It fine tuned the budding relationships that were beginning to form between the women. And it also forced us, from that point on, to approach our discussions more critically.

As it was, I already was feeling the strong contradictions between my upbringing as a Jew and a Zionist and the reality in understanding that almost every Jewish holiday was in remembrance of victory over another people in war. I longed to find the true connection between my secular Jewish Zionist identity and humanitarianism, but could not. At some previous point, I had already made a mental checklist of holidays that I could never celebrate again because of their strong commemoration and approval of bloodshed. This act of refusal and my choice to not be identified with either victim or the victorious created a deep void in my life and distanced me even further from my community and peers.

Although I had never been traditionally religious, I had identified myself as Jewish. This identity had brought me to Israel and kept me connected with my family abroad. But now I had made a choice to be a non-participant again and this time denounced my Jewish heritage. This decision was especially difficult for my children who could not understand my need to disconnect myself from traditions that I was finding more and more difficult to identify with. Furthermore the attempts to create new family traditions were challenging.

But not just my national identity was being contested. The German women presented a model of women working together while recognizing their birthright of being born into a nation with a horrific past. They displayed solidarity and equilibrium. Now they had brought Israeli and Palestinian women together to talk and try to find shared ways to heal. It is not clear what the role of the German women was to be. I was sure that they could show us what it meant to heal, if only we could choose this path.

Adina and I decide to go for a walk around the neighbourhood where our retreat is located. Anette joins us. It is a beautiful crisp morning and the air is clean and invigorating. Upon our return, coming down the hill, Adina and I argue. We argue about the right to freedom of conscience and I defend my son's choice not to serve in the military. Adina defends her motherhood. Along the quiet path Adina and I shout and direct heated sentences back and forth at one another. It is painful. Both of us are entrenched within our stubborn opinions. Anette, forever the peace keeper, walks between us and tries to steer the conversation to a more logical and less emotional plain. Adina has tears in her eyes.

Only later was I able to understand her pain. But at the time I was oblivious and determined. Now I understand that she has had to deal with issues of her identity as an Israeli Jewish woman, just as I have had to. The difference being I had felt that I had lost my direction long before

Adina Aviram:

Throughout the events of enemy/terrorist, I have experienced the harm that was caused by losing myself and letting 'them' make the decisions of 'right and wrong' for me.

Würzburg and I wasn't sure what path I was on. This was part of my naïve belief that anything new that I could do would always be better than my current personal place. My world and my beliefs had come crashing down

around me and it was difficult to welcome this newfound self awareness. This awareness is agonizing and heartbreaking. I am lost and then found, then lost again, over and over.

Not just the state of the Jewish Zionist woman is in question here. Fidaa and Rawia are forced to face rejection in spite of their innate identity as members of the Palestinian community. All their lives they have believed that they are Palestinians who live in Israel. They are held at arm's length by the Palestinian group. Just close enough to touch but not

close enough to be considered one of them. There is no compassion. This blatant show of rejection is devastating to Fidaa and Rawia.

This is painful for me as well. It is hard to see the two of them in so much distress and not be able to help them. Fidaa is just my daughter's age. I want to hold her and stroke her long hair. But I also want to stand up and put my hands on my hips and give whoever hurt them a piece of my mind. I want to say "Look here, don't be uppity!" But I can't. I hold back. I too am intimidated and I am not sure if this is my struggle or if it is right that I should intervene.

In Würzburg I learned some the secrets that the others had. One of the more significant secrets I learned was when one of the Palestinian women told me about her secret visit to Yad Ve' Shem, the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Jerusalem. She had done this at a time when it was unheard of that a Palestinian would want to learn and understand what happened during World War II let alone recognize the fact that there had been a Holocaust and that 6 million Jews and millions of others had been murdered by the Nazis.

One morning after breakfast, when we were sitting together in the meeting room at the retreat, she called me closer to her with a wave of her hand. I moved to sit next to her and had to lean over very closely to hear her whispered story of how she and her husband secretly went to the Museum so that she could learn and understand. I was sworn to secrecy. No one was to know that she had been to Yad Ve' Shem and had exposed herself to the death and destruction caused by the Nazi regime. Since then this secret has been published in one of her books and I no longer feel that I need to be loyal to my promise and not share it with others. I don't know why she chose me to share her secret with but that touch of sisterhood and sense of equal maturity without mentoring is what I shall remember from that moment. Perhaps she meant to tell me that although we may be perceived as traitors by our countrymen and women; our acts were actually those that we felt would save our peoples and not the opposite.

Over and over again our identity is on trial. Everything we have learned together with everything that we ourselves have rejected is being attacked and taken apart. Gili would like to invite us all to her room to light Chanukah candles. She believes as a Jewess and connects with the religion. As for me religion and holidays only signify an occasion when loved ones gather to spend quality time together. But I am already questioning this practice. Why should family occasions only be connected to symbols and commemoration of wars?

The Palestinian coordinator puts a stop to it all. She gathers us all into the meeting room and explains that there is no way that the Palestinian group can celebrate a holiday with Jewish women, especially not

one that marks the victory of the Jews over another people, the Assyrians. There can be no shared happiness. Again there is rejection. The message is sharp and clear. This time it is Gili who is rejected and pushed away. I will never be able to celebrate Chanukah again without remembering Gili and her bravery when under attack.

But not just Gili is rebuffed. The collective finger was shaken at us all (all the Israelis) and I can identify two parallel reactions within me. The first is that this haven in Würzburg should be a place where we all can feel safe, not persecuted and not enemies. The second made me feel uncomfortable because it reminded me that I am a newcomer to this sphere and perhaps I deserve to be scolded. I feel guilty. I don't understand how in all my attempts to do the 'right thing' I (we) didn't get it once again. Again we, this group of politically aware Israelis failed the Palestinians.

Later it is me again who is taken aside. There would have been no other option but to stop the celebration. "I have to protect my girls", says the

Katrin Wolf:

Developing activities which bring us together again, making us work together on the issues that concern us. This means being full of life and having hope.

Palestinian coordinator, "I am obligated to their families." She explained that we, the Israelis and Palestinians, were growing too close, becoming friends and becoming sisterly. As the mentor of the Palestin-

ian group, she felt that she was obligated to stop that process. "If you are too close there won't be work. There must be conflict if we want to work" she told me later. I realize that there is no growth without conflict but does this mean that we sacrificed Gili so we could continue? I am lost again.

When I return to Israel and my home, after this and each international meeting with this group, for a long period of time I feel that I am still wrapped up in the afterglow of sharing quality time with so many women. The dialogue echoes in my ears and becomes more stimulating as I process and recollect the different moments. My family seriously tries to understand. They patiently listen to my stories and try to follow the flow of my ramblings and sharing of experiences. They are so patient and try so hard to empathize and identify with me.

While the seminar in Würzburg symbolizes a new and important chapter in my life, the following seminars in Israel/Palestine and Bremen are no less significant, but I will comment on them less. It is not that these seminars did not have their impact on me and the development of the project. They absolutely did, but in quite a different fashion than Würzburg. I came to these seminars, wiser and more knowledgeable and was no longer as naïve as I had been just a short while back.

Especially during the seminar that was held in Israel, I am even more aware of the visible and evident signs of a militarized society. I had

learned to identify its characteristics and to critically examine its influence and place deep within the Israeli discourse. I was aware of this normalization, fortified by national symbols and the general public dialogue. At the time I was not sure that others could critically see what I was seeing. Were we looking out the same window? As we walked through the Old City in Jerusalem I was mortified and embarrassed by the strong military presence. In every alley, on every corner, on every road, military presence was visible, threatening and not protecting. As an Israeli I felt threatened by this show of soldiers, guns and power.

At times I felt myself pulling away from the group emotionally. I know that I was distancing myself in attempt to protect myself from onslaughts of criticism. But I could not distance myself from my own self criticism. There were many periods of deep emotional reckoning that I had to overcome at every place that we stopped. Over and over again I was flooded with guilt and shame.

One of the places that we visit is the Holocaust Museum at Kibbutz Lochovei HaGhettaot. I was very curious about this museum because my children have visited it during school field trips that included learning about the Warsaw Ghetto and the Holocaust. I had visited Yad Ve' Shem Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem in the past. But this was the first time I had been here.

I was surprised to learn that this was the first time that many of the Palestinian women had ever had an occasion to learn about the Holocaust. I am not sure how many were aware that there had been such a horrific tragedy in modern history. It is difficult for me to come face to face with the facts and the pictures even though I have been taught about it. So I can only imagine how difficult it must be to grasp for someone

Gili Tzidkiyahu:

Slowly, slowly the picture changes and becomes more complicated.

who was never aware that this could have happened to a people, the Jewish people and instigated by a German leader. It was here that I began to comprehend that it was not

obvious to all the members of our project that there was a true and direct connection due to this shared history and that the events of Nazi Germany made the connection indelible. We were intertwined as nations long before the occurrence of the Holocaust. But the outcome and the consequences of this episode had been stamped on this connection forever.

I have very strong memories from that visit to the museum. One memory was when we met with the Director of the study programmes at the Museum and learning from her how they integrated community work with Holocaust studies and reached out to all the communities in the surrounding area. This was a new and unfamiliar approach to teaching about World War II, the Holocaust and all the implications. Not only is this approach to Holocaust studies encouraged locally, but I also learned that dialogue in these matters were very much encouraged in order to create a greater understanding of moral responsibility. The museum of-

fers different programmes during which it is possible to learn in depth about the implications, collective and individual, cultural and social, and provide a basis for accountability to the collective history of the region before and after 1948.

I was surprised that our assigned guide was a very young Palestinian woman from a village nearby. She was a graduate of the Humanistic and Democratic Studies programme at the museum. I remember that she was very young, maybe only 17, and that I was impressed by her ability to comprehend issues that I was only beginning to come to terms with myself.

Unfortunately, having identified herself as an Arab and not labeling herself as a Palestinian living in Israel, she was subjected to vocal criticism by some of my colleagues. So young and so knowledgeable, yet the right to identify with the Palestinian people was not yet familiar to her.

Although I willingly joined her tour of the museum, hoping to be exposed to new insights, others chose to find their own way, even if this was the first time that they had ever had to confront the issue of the Holocaust and could have done so with her gentle guiding and comprehension.

Today, with a wiser and mature criticism of the past, I know I should have done more and shown more support of her. I feel guilty for not openly questioning the blatant onslaught and interrogation of her cultural and feminist identity. This incident, although not directed to a member of our project, just proved even more that rejection and discrimination knows no boundaries.

Visiting the museum provided me with new insight and new connections. I was beginning to learn that I have a knack for networking. I was discovering that this is a wonderful tool to use in making new connections, new ripples on the water, like when a pebble is thrown in. Circle connecting to circle, halo to halo, hand to hand. Since that occasion there have been several instances where I have referred people and international institutions to the museum and their educational programs.

The next seminar took place in Bremen. I went to Bremen as a fearful woman. My son, steadfast in his belief to the right of freedom of conscience, was being subjected to ongoing harassment by the Israeli

Shira Ohayon:

The fact that Ruth, for example, shares her son's commitment as a Conscientious Objector as an example of the struggle against militarism in Israel, doesn't seem to interest the Palestinians.

military. His future was unclear and we were not sure if he would have to go to prison or not. In the meanwhile, already 3 years into his struggle against the military authorities, we could not find a lawyer willing to represent him should he appeal to the High Court for

his right to refuse serving in the military on the grounds of Conscientious Objection. No one would touch his appeal with a 10 foot pole. I was weary but determined to see this through.

The seminar in Bremen was wonderful and traumatic at the same time. I was so full of apprehension and fear. But I desperately needed to take a break and get away from Israel. The trip to Bremen came at a time when I needed it the most. Away from Israel, I felt like I could breathe again. I could cry every time I looked out the windows and saw the green freshness and the calming surroundings. I spent much of my free time just sitting outside, on the grass, under some shady trees or walking along the path next to the river.

After the seminar in Israel, I was motivated to learn more about the perpetuation of victimization. I had been very curious about this topic for a long time and I wanted to understand it more in depth. Until the next seminar I was determined to examine this topic to the fullest and understand its implications, particularly regarding myself and my life choices as a Jewish woman who chose to live in Israel in what was once considered Utopia.

In Bremen I asked for time to share what I had learned. During some free time I invited the women to join me in an open discussion regarding scapegoats and victimization. It was clear to me that there were instances where I felt that each and every one of us utilized and manipulated our social, national and political standing and may have unwillingly become a victim or had victimized. I have way too many questions and too few answers on the topic. But it was the first time that I had even dared to examine the accountability one has, even as a victim, not just the victimizer.

Sabah Ikhymee:

We were quietly warned against using inflammatory terminology. However there was clearly a dormant volcano in the room – the issues of identity and nationalism.

The research, writing and discussion let me only begin to touch the tip of the iceberg and consider how we are all responsible in our own circle game between Germany, Israel and Palestine. We all contribute. How does a victim become a victimizer and what does that mean when it comes to Israel, when it comes to Palestine or when it comes to Germany? How does the dialogue on victimization fit into our discussions?

Something else was happening in Bremen. I wasn't just anxious because of what was happening in Israel and what was going on with my son. Changes were going on in our groups as well. Leadership was being challenged and the set agenda was being questioned. This time new women from each national group had joined the project. Some of the material that we had covered in the past came back into discussion apparently unresolved and created a need to backtrack and redefine.

Questions regarding the Palestinian right to return were being raised. Some of the women wanted to discuss Feminism as opposed to Nationalism and see if we could all put our feminism on a scale, who is and who isn't and how does not being a feminist, by Western definition, affect creating a nation.

In the past, even though I had experienced disagreement, I had felt that there was a collective decision to approach each topic thoroughly and find grounds for consensus that we could work on together, each woman in her national highlight. But now I sensed betrayal and abandonment. I was experiencing chaos and loss of control.

When discussing the Palestinian right to return, my Israeli colleagues brought up fears and reservations that I had never heard them speak of before. They spoke about their sense of security and that the security of their loved ones could also be threatened. We are torn and undecided about what to expect and therefore could not be completely candid. Even though there was a sense of civility, many walls seemed to go back up and the sense of trust was fading. What sense of helplessness and desperation weighed on our spirits and denied us the ability to stride forward?

For a brief period our leadership was undefined and power struggles began to surface. Our group facilitator was being challenged by members of the Palestinian group who did not identify with her methods of Buber influenced facilitation.

Some of the Israeli women were beginning to pull away. It seemed as if the shared vision of not so long ago was no longer relevant. There were conflicting approaches within Israeli group and cliques were beginning to form. There was no complete ownership of the loss of collective vision. I remain goal oriented and feel betrayed and lied to by those who have left. Some of the participants physically remove themselves. Others continued to participate while openly refusing to be involved, rejecting any future commitment to working together towards social change.

Today I am happy that I can conclude this narrative and say that in the subsequent meetings and seminars over the following years we, the ones who stayed, proved that our conviction was even stronger than before. While many of the women have deserted and abandoned the project, there remains a very strong core group of women from all three countries. The uniqueness of our work is in our perseverance and the fact nothing is taken at face value. Trust has been gained and nurtured. This was a long, time-consuming process and often a frustrating task. But those of us who held on have only benefited from the connection and are now at a point where we can truly forge on.

Sabah Ikhymeess

My Stories



Sabah Ikhymeess

Lecturer of Gender Studies in Al-Quds University. She has a Master's degree in Sustainable Development, Institutional Building, (2006, Al-Quds University).

Her field of interest is 'Empowering women in economical development'. She was a project manager at the "Democracy and Peace Institute" and also involved as a project coordinator at many Palestinian and international organizations such as UNRWA, Jerusalem Centre for Women, and Alumni Association of Bethlehem University.

She conducts training sessions for women in conflict resolution and gender issues.

How I became involved

I was working at the Jerusalem Centre for Women between 1995-1998, as coordinator of three women's projects in the South (Bethlehem-Hebron). It was at this time I was asked to participate in the Dialogue Programme. I needed to think about whether I could manage it with my many family commitments. I recall that my family was amazed when I told them of the project and what it would involve, particularly in travelling to Germany. "What will you do there? How will the meetings happen?" and "Why were you chosen are you are not part of any underlying Palestinian political movement or party?" they asked. However, the idea of working to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict simply by gathering at a round table intrigued them.

My feelings

During the conversations I had with my mother and brothers, I can't deny that an internal dialogue and accompanying feelings plagued me. I felt both curious and ambivalent. It would be my first meeting with Israeli women face to face and at an especially difficult time as it was being held after the first Intifada. Very horrible things had happened – the many killings, the inordinate destruction and the terrible injuries sustained by so many.

To participate or not to participate; that was the question. How were we to meet? ... Who would the other participants be? ... How would we be able to enter into any real dialogue? ... Oh and would they hate us ... and perhaps ... Why do they hate us so much and seem so much

against us? And I was thinking only of Israeli women; they had not warned me about the German women.

Why I decided to participate

The choice of the Palestinian women was coordinated through the Jerusalem Centre where I had been working. The Palestinian group was to be made up of six women of different educational, age and social backgrounds. Moreover the participation process was to be part of a personal development programme involving 'discovery of the other'.

At the time, I often observed my father watching the television news – especially the Israeli channel. On this channel the Palestinians were described as “saboteurs, killers, terrorists and animals that could not be negotiated with”. I thought “How can we talk about ourselves? How can we hold the burden of convincing Israelis that we are not as they claim we are?” Of course we are not saboteurs. The task was to talk politically about our rights and to show ourselves as we are ... real people ... Yes.

Travel on 10 December 1998

Once the programme dates had been set, we needed to begin preparing for the journey. This was a complex task. As you may know, we Palestinians had been prevented from travelling through the Israeli Ben Gurion Airport. However, one of the outcomes of the Oslo accord was to allow the issuing of Palestinian travel documents and identity papers and to allow travel outside the country. Thus it was that we were able to take part in the project.

During the journey from home to the airport, I was struck by the thought of the humiliating inspection process ahead, that is so degrading to the dignity and rights of Palestinians. We reached the airport two

Hannelore Chiout:

Each of the five meetings was combined with actual causes for new debates. They took place with immense passion, but – gradually – the labels 'perpetrator' and 'victim' lost their restricting and destroying force.

hours before departure and were confronted with the instructions for the inspection process. It is important to know how insulted I had felt previously during these inspection procedures. The first thing we were asked, having been noted as Pales-

tinians, was to show our passports and identity papers. I watched the expressions of the security men as they were taking the documents from us and the careful re-examination of each of our faces. To help me manage this situation I imagined my warm simple mother reciting from the holy Koran and some Benedictions.

I was also anticipating meeting the Israeli women on the programme. I knew we were going to meet them at the airport. First we met up with Edna who then introduced us to some of the others. We looked at each

other as this process of becoming acquainted took place. I did not focus well on all the names, however I did notice the name 'Shira' and was attracted to this simple, beautiful and strange word. Shira was later to become my friend.

Security officers then came and asked us to line up for the inspection. What a prospect! Edna however intervened, telling the security men that we were all one group made up of both of Israeli and Palestinian women and invited to Germany by the German Association of Educational Centres AdB. I looked intently at the security official while he was checking our travel documents. Finally an Israeli female soldier started calling out each of the names from our Palestinian group.

- "Where is your bag?" She asked and I indicated it.
- "Bring it over here." She said and I placed my bag on the inspection table. Before opening the bag she asked
- "Did you pack this bag?"
- "Yes." I answered.
- "What's in it?" She asked.
- "Only clothes." I answered.
- "Are you the one who bagged it?"

I had been wondering whether to answer honestly that my sister had helped me but decided against this to avoid any complications. I simply said that it was just me that had done the packing. The inspection and questioning only took fifteen minutes and I thought to myself "We are getting special treatment due to the presence of the Israeli women." It could have been so much worse if we had been alone. Finally we were able to step on board the German airline.

I sat alongside an elderly woman. I wasn't sure of her nationality but I thought she might have been French from her accent. The plane journey was to take about five hours. I was tired and initially sat still in my seat. Then I moved and she looked at me and asked where I came from?

- "From Palestine." I replied with confidence.
- "Where is that?" I was amazed to hear her ask and wondered how I could explain.
- "I am from Bethlehem, the city of Jesus Christ, peace be upon him." I told her.
- "Do you know the city of Bethlehem?"
- "Oh yes Bethlehem, Israel." She said "No, Bethlehem, Palestine" I replied resolutely.

I realized that she knew very little and although I thought it strange, I set about explaining the situation between Palestine and Israel both geographically and politically. However it was clear from her expression that she was simply not interested and did not want to know more. So I left the topic there.

Eventually we landed at Frankfurt Airport, a very large airport indeed. Once outside the plane I looked around me and I felt the very cold

weather. I wrapped a shawl around me. German security men stopped us and asked us kindly for our passports, ignoring the others. We were asked all the same questions we had faced at Ben Gurion Airport. "Where are you from? What have you brought? Why? Where are you going?" This continued for some minutes after which we were actually wished a happy visit to Germany!

At the airport we were welcomed with such a gentle smile by a beautiful lady, who of course was Hannelore. I and some of the others were very tired. Some of the Israeli women tried to sit and talk with us Palestinians, but I did not feel like it. I didn't feel it was appropriate yet. I felt we needed to wait for a proper meeting the following day to find out what they would say first. I was not yet ready. Why should I be?

As we were all waiting at the train station, I felt very uncomfortable what with the biting cold and it being so late at night. The train, when it came, gave no respite either as we were mixed together with no separation between the groups. It seemed to take hours before we arrived at two A.M. in the morning and we couldn't see anything in the gloom and darkness of the snow outside. I was so grateful to be shown to our rooms where I could finally get into a warm comfortable bed. We were so anxious to sleep; we hardly knew how tired we were.

December 1998

In this period, since the death of my father about a month and a half earlier, I still felt sad at his departure and often missed him. After waking up and getting ready for what was coming up in the morning, I went to the dining room where I saw everyone already at table. Each group sat separately, glancing at each other hoping to learn more from a distance. The first to draw my attention amongst the other women was Gili. Her hair, her eyes, her glasses, everything about her seemed typical Jewish Israeli.

Later, all the women entered the conference room. To some extent all went easily and with goodwill. Then I looked at the chairs, which were arranged in a circle and without tables in the middle. I chose mine, as did the others. We were then however directed to where the Palestinians were expected to sit and that made me feel safer. There was an introduction from Hannelore followed by Cornelia who was responsible for facilitating the gathering. We then had a little exercise where we each spoke our name in turn around the group. Eventually the aims of the meeting were presented, and about how the idea had come about to create this women's tripartite dialogue (Palestinian, German and Israeli) to listen to one another, to listen to the differences and the contradictions and to gain understanding through personal stories and from history.

There followed questions and constant dialogue. I was puzzled and found much incomprehensible. Were we here just for this? What was go-

ing to happen? I felt I needed to gain some understanding of what was happening. We were quietly warned against using inflammatory terminology. However there was clearly a dormant volcano in the room – the issues of identity and nationalism. The flames of this volcano must surely have been terms such as ‘the occupier’ and ‘the terrorist’.

However these terms had needed to be raised and addressed. All the confidence-building exercises, understanding and dialogue that Cornelia had been developing, were threatened when she cautiously chose to raise these issues. I did not know what she expected but I was sure at the time that she wanted to do this intentionally.

However once these issues had had attention drawn to them, the effect on the collective consciousness almost eliminated any openness and confidence in just a few seconds.

1999: Ein Karem meeting – Christiane and Gili

We Palestinian women knew each other well as we talked much at the beginning. We also talked with Gili with her particular way of talking. We went together on a tour of the Old City of Jerusalem to look at the brightly lit old streets, and the Dome of the Rock. On our return, we sat down together to review our impressions.

Christiane, one of the German women said “I see Jerusalem as old and dirty. How can the two peoples fight over this area? It is not logical.” Oh God, what a commotion this caused. What horror! Jerusalem of all places! Of course, the facilitators made an effort to calm things down and to refute this and were supported by the rest of the Palestinian women. Jerusalem the proud city and eternal capital of Palestine; how could she say that about the old city of Jerusalem, centre of Arab Islamic history and sanctity of the divine ... She may not have felt anything, but it is so much in our heart and minds.

The squabbling continued. Then Hannelore spoke directly to Christiane telling her that she may not speak disparagingly about things that were sacred to Palestinians and Islam. This would only reduce respect and understanding for their cause and this way of thinking would only exacerbate the bitter political conflict in the long term.

At this point Gili came into the picture with her roots in the religious education and Zionist thought of that period, which reiterated the Zionist idea of the ‘sovereign right’ of the Israelis over the Palestinians. Stated literally it means something like “You Palestinians are not entitled to live here. Look at all the other Arab States and particularly the largest State, Saudi Arabia. Why not go and find a place to live there? We, the nation of Israel are living here. We, the chosen people, have been promised this Land by God.”

The debate, of course, continued around these issues of identity and collective consciousness and was very heated, eventually forcing the

facilitators to close the session to avoid making the situation worse. We, as the Palestinian group, asked for an apology for insulting Jerusalem.

We then met for a special meeting in a separate room to evaluate the situation. How angry we were. I myself felt that the person who had the most impact on our thinking was Christiane. She had worked in Egypt and knew Arabic and about Islamic culture.

We also took a trip to Tiberias, Haifa and Akko. The objective was to learn the history of each group. The group was composed of Palestinian women from Nazareth. We went on to tour destroyed villages in Nazareth and Galilee. They must have been such fascinating places with olive, almond and fig trees in evidence. A Palestinian man talked to us about the names of many of these villages. I heard many things and reflected a lot. When I listened to this man, he reminded me of the stories my father and mother used to tell about our land and our village, which was occupied in 1967. My father would often take us there at odd weekends to tell us about his childhood and where the borders of the village stood. Of course this had been 30 years earlier. We left the place, but did not want history to repeat itself. What of our right to return?

2000 in Germany

In 2000 we returned again to meet in Germany where new members joined us. This time, I felt different in both my thinking and my maturity. Following our second meeting, I had come closer to Shira from the Israeli group, through corresponding via email and also to Anette from the German group. One of the German women even had told me she was pleased to see me still belonging to the group.

Few knew much about me this time. I was talking less and was calmer, especially in the full group. However, during all this, I did not stop debating or inquiring on many issues. I think I wanted to know everyone and felt it even more urgent that we continue. This was because I really wanted some better understanding of the Israeli and German women. I no longer felt bad or the need for hatred as a sort of revenge. I had a strong desire for understanding and to get closer and of course this was their right too.

Shira told me she was surprised to discover how great Palestinian women were. She didn't know that there were Palestinian women educators that dressed so well. This raised another question. Why is there such a negative attitude towards Palestinian women? She told me that they only saw television images of Palestinian women without shoes, for instance, who did not know how to take care of themselves. This was the image of Palestinian society that was projected on the Israelis.

Shira was a wonderful human being and I respected her very much, because in my view she was fair in presenting many of the issues. For instance: how Israeli society treated the Palestinians or the nature of

the internal conflict within Israel between Jews of Eastern and Western origin.

In this meeting, our relations were greatly strengthened and we didn't stop talking about political and personal matters. We even exchanged gifts and bought some jackets perhaps to help remind us of each other and of our work.

2005: An absence of 5 years from Meeting and talking

The second Intifada in 2001 led to army occupation and many terrible incursions. This led to mass killings, destruction of houses and much psychological trauma. In this period I was in constant contact with my friend Anette. She told me that Hannelore had been very keen to find a way of meeting away from Israel or Palestine and that funding was likely to be approved for this.

Anette knew of the contact that Hannelore had been having with Amneh Badran, the new director of Jerusalem Centre for Women. The negotiations were very difficult because many changes happened during these years. Some women, who had been participants in the group work with us at the Centre, had left. Many contacts had changed; connectivity and communication had been disrupted between members of the original Palestinian group.

Hannelore had worked with Anette and me to establish contacts. It was a very arduous process, but in the midst of these proceedings, Amneh Badran agreed to participate in the meeting, provided that all the original members of the Palestinian womens group were replaced with a whole new set. This, Hannelore rejected because it did not fit in with the objectives of the meetings. Much had been accomplished and achieved previously over the long involvement of those in the original group. We had started the project and we wanted to finish it.

This decision had negative as well as positive impacts:

Negative impacts:

1. Reducing the number of Palestinian women participating.
2. The absence of the umbrella institution for the Palestinian women.
3. The inclusion of a new group of Palestinian women.
4. Ignorance of the organizational matters which formed the basis for participating in this meeting.

Positive impacts:

1. The approval for the majority of Palestinian participants to meet again.
2. Our sense of responsibility and commitment towards the goals that we have set.

Why I participated

Even after an absence of so many years, I had never ruled out participating in these meetings again. But I was also concerned about how the meeting would turn out? How would we Palestinian women be able to meet with Israeli women after what had happened in the second Intifada? How would Israeli women see us and how would we think of them? All these feelings of pain, confusion and blame were with me. Perhaps, however I did have a strong desire to speak with them and to try and change their vision. We met after suffering more than before. As usual, our suffering focused on the abhorrent travel procedures, the many barriers and the need to travel through the State of Jordan. It took two days to reach Germany and two days again to return to Palestine!

On the first day of our official meeting

I shook hands but inside each of us were questions. For me it was “What will be the point of meeting? Will there be screaming? Is it useful to scream?” But one thing I was sure about: I really wanted to relate what had happened and what was happening – from the demolition of houses to our house besieged by tanks, the invasion and the curfew. “I will talk about Aisha, my niece, crying at the siege of Yasser Arafat. I will talk to them about the vivid images of tanks and soldiers with their weapons. I will talk about the F-16 bombers who destroyed our houses and killed so many.”

We went round each person with their memories of the previous meetings and their expectations. I said that I did not expect anything. In one of the meetings an Israeli woman suggested how to deal with Israeli soldiers at checkpoints or when they were storming houses. We should be tolerant towards them as they were only following orders and they were young. Of course, these things affect us and I answered “I cannot tolerate an Israeli soldier entering my house, carrying weapons and threatening our children and my sick mother and pointing his weapon at me. How is it possible to tolerate this occupation?”

The meeting ended and I do not really know how it ended. There is always the question at the end of every meeting about whether to participate again. But, in reality, I did not know, I would only participate if I was ready to and at an appropriate time.

We left, all of us with our own stories and memories and ideas, we all returned to the reality of our lives. We as women Palestinians go back to the big prison, the unemployment, the poverty and the apartheid wall incarcerating such a large numbers of Palestinians.

But as a group of women from the three countries, where are we now?

It is perhaps a question too difficult to answer in the present moment.

Shira Ohayon

Berlin 2007: Wannsee Forum



Shira Ohayon

Born in 1970 Dimona to a Mizrahi working class family from Morocco.

She graduated from Tel Aviv University with a BA in the History of the Middle East and Africa and is working on her MA in Education. She developed in two high schools new social educational programmes based on multicultural dialogue.

Later she coordinated programmes on Sephardic Jewish Heritage.

She is one of the founders of the "Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow" and "Achoti" a Mizrahi feminist organization.

She works in Ashdod as the Educational Director of the Andalusia Orchestra.

A week before the last seminar of March 2007 I find myself in a trance, preparing myself for the trip to Berlin. I try "to clear the decks" at my place of work with that Andalusia Orchestra, and not leave any loose ends. I try to complete the work on the written programme for the new concert with Arabic music that I am producing.

Between all of this I am also trying to find something that will inspire me to write the text for the theatrical concert "Sounds of Jerusalem", but the image of Rabbi Judah HaLevy keeps slipping farther and farther away from me, as far as the east is from the west.

I found out about the planned trip to Berlin only when I opened up an email by chance just as I was sitting late at night at my computer and thinking about how nice it would be to take a break and get away. I would love to take some time off from this crazy work pace that I am in. I admit to myself that I am feeling claustrophobic, especially since I haven't travelled outside of Israel for the past two years. I am delighted to find Hannelore's email and she, as coordinator of our project, is inviting us to meet once again with other Israeli, Palestinian and German women in Berlin. And not just to be in Berlin. We are invited to once again spend 10 days in the wonderful mansion by a lake in a well-to-do borough of Berlin, Wannsee.

From reading the many following emails from others on the list, I learn that this could possibly be the last of the meetings of the entire group, as Hannelore plans to retire and the funding is coming to an end. I am sad about this. The meetings have given me a special feeling of belonging forever in spite of the fact that they were few and far between.

These meetings have given me a sense of security and hope all these years. And even with this sad feeling, I am happy for the opportunity that I have had to step away from this suffocating atmosphere and allow myself to take a break. More importantly I have a strong need to meet with all the loving and strong women in the group.

The day before the trip I find myself trying to concentrate on packing my suitcase. But my boy friend just won't let me. For some reason he feels that I may leave him for good and he has to take advantage of every moment that he can to still be with me. It is not as if I have been truly his and he was truly mine. Perhaps he feels intuitively the power of such a multi-feminist and multi-cultural meeting and finds it threatening.

We smoke, drink and make love in between me trying to make some progress with my packing.

My son, Omri, is already at his father's home. The poor child really wanted to accompany me. It seems that he is more attached to me than he lets on. I am concerned the effect my absence will have on his life.

I wonder how he will manage with school and after school classes. With

a heavy heart, I hand over to his father the keys to my car and apartment, two symbols of my independence for which I sweated blood to earn. I convince myself that this act is a small price to pay to ensure that

Rima Al Ajrami:

For me joining this group was the thing that I thought the least about, but ended up as the most important achievement that I'm proud of among all my career achievements.

Omri will have some stability in his life while I am away.

Somehow, at the very last minute, I manage to cram half my house into my suitcase and I urge my boyfriend to be more efficient and take me to the airport as fast as he can. We arrive late. The other women are already there. Edna comes out to me in order to give me my tickets. I am really happy to see her. On the floor with all the duty free products, I meet Rawia with her beautiful baby girl. Her name is Nay. Later I hug Razia, Adina and Fidaa, who is also there with her baby girl Samaa, with big brown eyes and a charming smile. I am sorry to hear that Gili won't be joining us this time. She has a new baby girl as well; too young to travel as she is just over one month old.

Over the past week I have begun to feel the signs of fear of flying. A few days earlier I remembered my last flight to Germany and how my ears were so painfully blocked up and for two days I was almost completely deaf. As we approach the plane, I feel more and more tense. I am afraid that my body will betray me again. I sit down on my seat next to Adina, Fidaa and her baby. We share some information regarding the changes in our lives since we last met, two years ago. I am comforted by Samaa's presence. I appear to be a curiosity to Fidaa's little doll as well as does everything going on around her.

After a relatively easy flight, we land in one of Berlin's small provincial airports. Christiane is waiting there to greet us. I am so happy to see

her; her face, as always, is shining. It seems as if time had just passed over and we could pick up where we left off and the past two years full of events and changes in my life had never happened.

A taxi takes us and all our belongings and strollers to Wannsee Forum. At the entrance we find Vered, Hannelore and Anette. I am excited to meet Vered and pleased with her decision to join us, as she lives in the USA. Without her the seminar could have been a little on the 'pale side', as she always provides colour and happiness at our meetings.

A bit later, during lunch, we meet Ruth and the Palestinian women, Rima, Jameela and Sabah.

I feel a twinge in my heart and I am sad to see that the Palestinian group has become so small. It is such a pity that I won't be able to meet some of the women again because they are no longer able to attend. I have no doubt that the make up of the Palestinian group reflects the real life situation for all the Palestinians, absence of hope and belief in our meetings or contacts with Israelis. The desperation, the hardships of the Occupation on top of all the difficulties created by the Israeli authorities, all these made a mark on our group as well.

During the nine years that we have become this group and held seminars and meetings in an attempt to create a dialogue between us, it seems that from meeting to meeting the Palestinian situation and ours in Israel has just become worse. After a deep sleep in the afternoon in our room, and after we woke from our sense of lightheadedness due the calming and tranquil atmosphere at Wannsee, both Razia and I were surprised to learn that while we were off sleeping, others had started to work. This seminar has a clear and practical purpose whereas seminars in the past did not have the same kind of goals. We are asked to document our meetings together, everyone according to her political inclination and feminist and personal views.

I begin to search deep inside my foggy memory weed out the smaller details. The feelings, the emotions, the voices, the smells and the sights all begin to come back to me.

The pictures have more clarity when interacting with Anette, Vered and especially with Sabah, who has an amazing memory and reminds us of details of our meetings starting with the first time we met and how dramatic it was.

I arrived at the first seminar in Würzburg in 1998 following a conversation I had with Edna Zaretsky Toledano who asked me to join the group. I suppose it was because of my involvement in political activities in Miz-rachi organizations, Kedma School in the HaTikva Quarters in Tel Aviv, and the "Mizrachi Democratic Rainbow". Edna had contacted me because it was her wish to form a very diverse group of Israeli women that would represent different sides in the Israeli Left wing.

At that time I was disappointed in my activity at the Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow. I felt that the movement, in spite of its impressive principled proclamations, was finding ways to avoid serious and deep work on two essential issues, one of them is the Palestinian issue. How could we, the Arab-Jews, call for just claim “This is our land too” when demanding justice in the distribution of lands in the State of Israel, without seriously considering the question of who the land really belonged to before Israel became a state? Furthermore we weren’t making a connection between “Land Day” for example, and the settlements on occupied Palestinian lands and our moral demands.

The second issue had to do with Feminism and the oppression of Mizrahi women by Ashkenazi hegemony and by the male oriented patriarchal Israeli society wherein even Mizrahi men benefit from its privileges.

In short, Edna’s offer to meet and create a dialogue with Palestinian women and other women seemed to beckon just in time. Until this point in life, I had excluded myself from activities in peace movements or left

wing oriented movements simply because until then I perceived them as always being hypocritically Ashkenazi. I couldn’t understand how they could appreciate Arab Palestinians but detest Arab Jews. Yet I felt that it was about time that we, the Mizrahi Jews, directly confront the

Christiane Reinholz-Asolli:

One important part of my national identity is the fact that Germany today is composed of different people(s) and ethnic groups. I believe that my society can only gain by accommodating other cultures, religions and ways of life.

issue of the Palestinians and not avoid it by claiming that the Mizrahi public was still not really mature enough to contain within its discourse a clear position regarding the matter. This was the position I was given by some members of the “Democratic Rainbow”.

I was very curious as the meeting time approached. But I was also very apprehensive. All during my academic years I had developed close relationships with people from Egypt and with Palestinian Israelis and I had experienced wonderful interactions with Bedouins from Egypt and the Sinai. But for some reason I had a feeling that I would not be able to look the Palestinians who live in the Occupied Territories straight in the eyes as long as they did not have a state of their own.

Before the trip to Würzburg, Germany, I attended a meeting in Haifa with the Israeli group within which Edna had also invited a few activists from the organization “New Profile” which I learned about for the first time, Ruthie, Adina and Vered. Also attending were Gili and Rawia from the Feminist Centre Woman to Woman in Haifa and Fidaa from Nazareth. All the women in the group made a strong impression on me. But at the same time I was afraid that I would become the “token Mizrahi” of the group.

At that time I was still happily single and independent. I packed my bags, took time off from my place of work at the Kedma School and arrived at the airport. There I met the Palestinian group for the first time. I learned from Edna that there had been complications in receiving authorization for their exit visas and there was quite a bit of stress up until the last moment. Even as they stood in the airport they were not sure if they had received the proper authorization.

I remember also our solidarity with them by standing beside them as a group during the security checks. For some of them it was the first time they had travelled outside of their country. And according to what Sabah shared with us much later there was much apprehension and a great deal of excitement regarding everything that was unknown.

This was particularly so because of the expected meeting and confrontation with the airport security personnel and of course from the fact that for some of them this was the first time that they had ever been on an airplane.

I also remember the first split that was created in our unity as an 'Israeli group' when the Jewish members went through all the security checks effortlessly, whereas Rawia and Fidaa (Palestinian women who live in Israel) had to open up their suitcases for more thorough inspections and had to wait for many moments while answering ridiculous questions asked by the inspectors. We, the Jewish women, waited for them on the sidelines in silence until their inspection was over.

At 03:00 in the morning we landed in Germany. We were greeted by the freezing cold of 4 degrees below zero. For me it was a chilling welcome as for one, I had never experienced this kind of cold before and secondly I perceive myself as a child of the desert and suffer when it is cold. I immediately recall our first march in the snow in the direction of the train. Aside from the noise of our dragging suitcases and the clear sounds of the steps of the woman who led us with such confidence, all the women were dumbfounded at once. In spite of our coats and scarves, the cold shocked us all.

When we entered the train I thought to myself, "Here I am on a German train." I entered one of the cars with two other women with the hope of getting warm again. Suddenly I heard the voice of a man, scolding us quite aggressively in German. While staring into his face I let the voices in my head to release associations of the Jewish past.

Hannelore, the head of the German group, who had come to meet us at the airport, explained to us that we have entered the booth that belongs to the train staff by mistake and that the conductor is asking us to move to another booth. Thank God. We are saved. I note to myself that everything that I had learned and knew in the past about the Holocaust mean nothing if I don't take into consideration the European cold that freezes my bones. I am not sure that I would have been able to survive in any

concentration camp for even a minute. How did so many survive by living in those frozen woods?

Only after we arrived at the hostel in Würzburg did my body begin to thaw, and at the same time the coldness between us and the Palestinian women began to thaw as well. The German women really helped us with this, Hannelore with her warmhearted smiles, Tinka who came from East Germany with her funny faces and mimicking that made us all laugh, Christiane with her calming and safe voice and Anette with her angel face and kind heart.

The first meeting in our seminar was dramatic and left quite a big impression on me, especially regarding the Palestinian women who were feminists, assertive, intelligent and spoke excellent English. They had high political consciousness and spoke about the hardships of the Occupation. In the one hand they spoke about the humiliation and the daily frustration that was involved in going through the check points. They also spoke about the daily elimination of their human rights and their dependence on the Occupational government. On the other hand, they spoke of the internal Patriarchal oppression within their society and of their work as feminists inside the Palestinian communities. Despite this I felt that they weren't exactly free to speak their mind and I felt the woman who was seen as their leader, was signaling them with her body language and letting them know what was appropriate to share and what wasn't with us the 'Zionist Enemy'.

For instance, this is what happened our first evening in Würzburg. The German women asked us to join them for a drink in a little clubhouse that belonged to the hostel/retreat. I noticed that the Palestinians were consulting one another and decided not to come. They don't drink alcohol anyway. Rawia joins us. She is a Christian and she doesn't have any problems with regards to drinking. Regarding dancing with the enemy, there is nothing to talk about at this point.

I still can't seem to find my place in the seminar and have a feeling of detachment. I feel inarticulate with my English which for some time now has not been 'aired out' abroad. I feel like I am almost like a spy with my Arabic which is good enough making me warning them not to gossip in my presence. Otherwise it is in this stage totally useless to me. I don't feel close enough to speak to them in Arabic, not to mention my Egyptian accent. I also can't find myself with the Israeli group. I don't feel that my Ashkenazi colleagues understand the special place that I feel I am in as a Mizrachi woman, subject to Zionist Ashkenazi hegemony suppression and as an Arab Jewish woman. Some of them don't even understand why it is important to emphasize the matter as 'all of us are Israelis' and as 'we are all one nation'. In addition I learn that Gili is part Mizrachi but it doesn't mean much to her. She emphasizes the Israeli and

Zionist education that she received at home. I sense that Fidaa and Rawia cannot find their place as well. They did come with the Israeli group but they had expected to be welcomed into the arms of the Palestinian group and were very disappointed when this did not happen. It seems that the transition is not as natural and smooth as it seems it would be. I sense tension all around and it is also coming from the Palestinian group.

Very soon, in spite of the good intentions, the different conflicts and differences begin to rise to the surface in our group. It seems as there are cracks forming in our feminist sisterhood. The Palestinians blame the Germans for inclining to favour the Israeli group. The Israelis find it difficult to deal with these accusations that the Palestinians have regarding our national group and being called the 'Enemy'. The Palestinians return 'Fire' and tell us that they have difficulties dealing with the image of them as Terrorists in our society. The fact that Ruth, for example, shares her son's commitment as a Conscientious Objector as an example of the

Jameela Alatrash:

I felt that I was betraying my nation and my dead friend, but after struggling with my thoughts, I decided to go to Berlin.

struggle against militarism in Israel, doesn't seem to interest the Palestinians. We are the enemy and that is that. I don't really have a problem with this. As a citizen of Israel I know that they are right

and I don't deny the fact that I am part of the mechanism of the Occupation and enjoy many privileges in spite of my political convictions and no matter how much I am a peace activist. It is this kind of understanding that I expect to find with my Israeli colleagues. I would like them to understand that they are all part of the Ashkenazi oppression against the Mizrachis and as Ashkenazis they have many privileges over us and because of us.

The tension peaks when Gili, most innocently, invites everyone to her room to light Chanukah candles. The Palestinians, including Fidaa and Rawia, severely condemn her invitation. As far as they were concerned her invitation symbolized Israeli imperviousness and lack of sensitivity of us towards them. How can the Israelis ask us to celebrate a holiday symbolizing victory, they ask? This Jewish holiday is so patriotic at a time when they are still living under Israeli Occupation.

I also seemed to hear voices of protest from some members of the Israeli side who thinks that this is a holiday where children are encouraged to learn about militarism and understand the concept of victimization as persecuted Jews. Gili is hurt by the objections and the interest taken in the affair. I identify with the Palestinians but at the same time I feel badly for Gili who had good intentions and was so naïve. That is also how I felt about Adina as well. It was difficult for them both to overcome the Zionist brainwashing we all had been through.

In the end, someone decided for all of us that the cultural programme would include visiting a church and attending the Christmas Mass ser-

vice or something of that nature. As we walked to the church through the snow in the wood I once again have associations and am reminded of different stories from the Holocaust. The suffering of the victims seems more vivid to me. In the church we find ourselves listening to a choir that sang a very familiar version of one of Handel's works, the oratorio, Judas Maccabeus .Right after that, I look across and see that Vered is smiling at me and we both start humming the melody that is so familiar to us and spontaneously joined in the singing. "Hava Narima Ness Ve'Avuka, Yahad Bo Nashira Shir Chanuka ..." "Let's raise our voices and sing of miracles and the lighting of the lamp. Together lets sing the Chanukah Song ... We are Maccabis and raise our banner. We fought the Greeks and were victorious..." Vered and I are burst out in laughter. What a national salute! They didn't want a Menorah so they got a first grade Jewish victory song instead. Vered fights with her children's teachers for impregnating militaristic concepts using songs such as the one she is humming now happily. Here in the German church, it perhaps sounds much nicer now.

In spite of the difference of opinions and calls for feminism, democracy and peace and in spite of the tears that we wept in between in the meetings, we all celebrate at the end of the seminar party that our wonderful hostesses, the Germans, have organized for us.

I have grown close to May and Sabah. They are both so different. Sabah is so elegant and always dressed in very fine tailored suits. Her speech is refined. May lets you know her opinion. She is assertive even when she says only a few words, as if she were the Prime Minister. Without a doubt she will have a political future. At the same time she knows how to laugh and have a good time. They seem to me both to be like my twin sisters, or at least members of my family.

In July 1999, less than one year since our first meeting, we held a second meeting, with all the national groups, in Israel. We met in East Jerusalem at the Schmidt School for Christian Girls. I am about 7 months pregnant. I am in a completely different position than what I was. I am married now. Vered arrives with her 4 month old baby boy. His name is Yotam. I admire her bravery and the natural simple way that she relates to him. In spite of the fact that we take him from place to place during this seminar, we hardly feel that he is with us. I observe Vered's calmness in the way that she breast feeds him and hope that it will be the same for me. We're joined by Rada and Wissam from Gaza.

What I remember most about this seminar is the travelling from place to place. I was already very heavy and I kept waiting for the moment that we could settle for awhile. But at the same time meeting the women has given me much strength and I don't feel the need to be spoiled.

We are guided through the Old City in East Jerusalem by a Palestinian guide who shows us how the authorities have slowly but surely taken over

the better parts of the city that used to be in Palestinian hands, for example, one of Ariel Sharon's houses in the Old City. He tells us about the Jewish 'Invaders'. I remember a tour that I had taken about one year earlier in Hebron where the act of Jewish settlers' takeover was even more brutal. Our guide shares the Palestinian narrative on Jerusalem. In one

Rawia Loucia Shammas:

The link between three national groups, Palestinians, Israelis and Germans, is a blend between the past, present and future. I am Israeli and Palestinian at the same time.

of the alleys I bump into a sign on one of the homes that the house had been bought by the Mograbi (Moroccan Jews) at the end of the 19th century. In spite of my disdain for the expansion of the Jewish Quarter by the brutal

authorities of the original inhabitants of the place, I was bothered by the fact that the guide completely ignored the existence of the Jewish population that had lived in the city for hundreds of years. But that seems to be the nature of narratives. They don't care about facts ...

From there we went on to a wonderful little retreat in Ein Karem. For the Palestinians this was the place that brought back memories of the Na'akba (The Palestinian Disaster). Sabah told us about her neighbours who painfully told her about the house that they used to own in the village that used to be Ein Karem. Today it is one of Jerusalem's artistic neighborhoods and is very beautiful with many very good and fancy restaurants.

From there we continued on to Tabha in the north. Some of the women in the group still have traumatic memories because of spending the night in tents together with all the mosquitoes, which are very abundant in the Sea of Galilee area. But I actually slept very soundly here because I was one of the privileged few to get a room together with all the young mothers. In the morning I swam, much to my delight, in a green pool and listened to the Palestinian women who were yelling and laughing at the same time. Much later, while reviewing material together with Vered and Sabah, Anette explains to the meaning of the 'yelling and laughing' voices. The pool is full of frogs! From this point, we continue to visit different sites in an attempt to capture more Palestinian and Zionist narratives. I try to arrange my memories according to chronological order but have a difficult time remembering what came first.

We travelled to Nazareth and learned about the difficulties the city and its traders were having. We visited Fidaa's place of work and heard a lecture given to us by Nabila Espanioly on the conditions of Palestinian women in Israel. On one of our trips, we stopped at Nebi Sho'ib and learned about the Druze. Sabah meets a member of the Druze community for the first time in her life outside the context of the Israeli military. She takes an interest in their religion and their Arab identity. She asks him critical questions regarding their military service. For example, she would ask him "Are you aware of the fact that your sons who are serving in the Israeli military are committing war crimes against Palestinian

children?" and expect naively an answer from him, an answer that would satisfy her curiosity on how Arabs could take part in such acts and collaborate with the Zionist enemy. But our host seems to elegantly avoid giving an answer to her questions.

Later, or even perhaps before our trip to Tzipori (Tzeforia), we went to the home of Abu Araab. There we sat with him and heard about the inner refugees, those from inside Israel. Anette reminds us that he spoke in a too loud tone that was difficult for her to listen to. It was as if he tried to shout out the bitter truth regarding the expulsion lest everything be forgotten. Above his head there was a very large vertical window that looked out over the home he had been expelled from.

Many years later the new Israeli laws allows him to fight for his right

Razia Meron:

We sat on the beds, developing scenarios of what would happen when all Palestinians returned. We built scenarios in which we, Israelis, could contribute to the Palestinian people.

to return to his home. But as things already are in Israel, the matter of land, as I had learned regarding our struggles in the Democratic Rainbow, laws are one thing and enforcing them are another. What makes

it decisive in the end are the facts on the ground, abusive tactics by authorities and animal Darwinism. The stronger and faster always win, never the righteous.

Vered reminds us that we could see Abu Araab's lost home from all the windows in his new home. Even from the window in the toilets, as if he is afraid that he might lose a moment of the painful memory of his lost home. I mostly remember his beautiful blue eyes, large and sad. This man was very handsome and projected an air of nobility.

Later I remember our visit to the museum at Kibbutz Lochamei Hagetaot. Even before we entered the museum, I felt the Palestinian's antagonism. They had been prepared for what they were going to see and experience in the museum. Before we enter the exhibit, a young Palestinian guide is waiting for us and she offers to accompany the Palestinian group through the museum using Arabic. They refused her assistance and say that they prefer to walk around the museum without being guided and that they would do with the explanations in English provided on the museum earphones. I could see that the guide was very offended by their attitude. She actually had had good intentions, but in the eyes of the Palestinians she was a collaborator with the enemy and was not sensitive enough to the implications and emotions that could arise when speaking to the Palestinians in Arabic in a tour such as this. I felt sorry for her, and together with Edna, we walked with her during the tour of the museum.

I was very curious to see the affects of the Arabic language on the Holocaust, and it was indeed not easy to hear the explanations in Arabic. For the Jews these words, such as camp, refugees, expulsion, walls, fences, checkpoints, military and others, are dark concepts in the past of European Jewry, while for the Palestinians these words represent painful

everyday experiences under The Israeli Occupation. I understood how the Palestinians felt and their wish to distance themselves from the sights and sounds in the museum seemed logical to me.

As we recall this shared tour when we meet in Berlin, Sabah tearfully tells us how she kept remembering the pictures of the victims from the museum and she kept associating them with the horrors of Sabra and Shatila and the memory of her father having a heart attack that same day. Anette tells us that she was very moved by the documentation of the young children experiences in the Shoah and that for her this was the strongest impression in this place.

As for me the visit to the museum caused my ambivalence towards the Shoah as a Mizrachi woman to surface. On the one hand I identified with the suffering of the victims of the Holocaust, and was truly appalled by the evil manipulations that the human race was capable of reaching. On the other hand the cynical use by the Zionist institutions to silence all suffering or victimization of the others, including our suffering as Miz-rachis and the suffering of Palestinians. I remember that after this trip there were many heated discussions that followed, more so than before. All the tension that was focused on that national triangle, German-Jewish-Palestinian just burst out.

All at once the issue was raised as to who was the victim and who was the victimizer:

Was there a chance for a Trialogue within these national frameworks or were we supposed to rise above our national discourse and find another common language, perhaps a feminist language?

These are the questions we began to ask ourselves.



Rima Al Ajrami · Rawia L. Shammas · Hannelore Chiout · Ruth Hiller · Christiane Reinholz-Asolli



Hannelore Chiout
Vered Shomron-Fabian
Jameela Alatrash
Edna Zaretsky Toledano



Shira Ohayon
Razia Meron
Anette Klasing



Vered Shomron-Fabian

Sitting on a bench in Wannsee, Berlin

(Spring 2007)



Vered Shomron-Fabian

Born in 1959 and raised in Israel to parents of Polish origin, who were Holocaust survivors.

She is an artist by profession, currently living and working in the US.

In addition to high school activism with a new party "Dash", she has been politically active for peace and demilitarization in Israel since 1995. She organized political exhibitions in Jaffa in cooperation with Bat Shalom.

This led her to join women across Israel in the creation of „Women and Mothers for Peace“.

In 1997 she was one of the founders and spokeswomen of "New Profile".

The strongest sensory memory I have from all the seminars is of the sound of the footsteps of the leader of the Palestinian group in the train station in Würzburg on the way to the first seminar, and the footsteps of the Palestinian and Israeli groups following. Steps which were determined and idealistic, like the women themselves. We haven't stopped marching, though the faces have somewhat changed.

What is this group for me? What is my connection to this group, and to each one of the women? "Where am I in this story?" as Dafna Golan asks herself in a book of the same title, about her place in the story of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, mainly in meetings of Palestinian and Israeli women. Dafna, who was the director of Bat Shalom in Jerusalem, and Sumaya Farhat Nasser, the director of the parallel centre Lenissah of East Jerusalem, were two of the women who, in 1996, inspired me to get into political women-activism for peace and demilitarization. Together with the Israeli women activists Rela Mazali – the head and soul of "New Profile", Edna Zaretzki-Toledano of "Women in Black" and many more, Haggith Gur-Ziv, Hanna Safran and the German Hannelore Chiout – they were – and still are – my admired political teachers and feminist role models.

My start was in political art exhibitions followed by group discussions in the artists' gallery "Yadayim" (Hands) in Jaffa, then on Friday demonstrations at road junctions as Women and Mothers for Peace, followed by "New Profile" for the civilization of the society in Israel. I was one of the founders of these three (not-for-profit) organizations.

So, where am I in this tri-national group story?

Physically, since summer 2005 I have been in the United States, in Palo Alto, California – the heart of the Silicon Valley, the centre of world Hi Tech (what am I doing there – that’s a different question, and maybe not so different). When I am asking myself why I came to the seminar this time, the answer I have is that it’s the last seminar and I wanted to “close the circle”. But it doesn’t seem like the whole truth to me. I came because it is important for me; because I learn about myself through each one of the women in the group, each one being a mirror image of a part of me that I know less or more, that I want to see in myself, or not; because I am empowered by meeting these active women, each one a powerful woman in her unique way, with commitment, belief, strong awareness of herself, her society and human kind. This connection is deep, meaningful; a connection that was built during every minute of every meeting; a connection that went through dramas, tears, anger, reconciliation, acceptance, rejection.

The last meeting – a sense that we have come a long way; that we are past the storm. Everything (or most of it) has spilled out – the anger, criticism, the calculations of who is the victim and who is the aggressor, who is and was more miserable. We have dug deep inside this process. We did not give up on any blaming, any guilt feeling. We weren’t polite all the time. We were direct, honest; we said things from the heart, the most difficult ones. And we came out of it. Today it’s easier to talk about ourselves, about our feminine identity, about each other’s personal issues, without constantly clashing on the national level, constantly falling into the trap of the strong and the weak. It’s possible to learn from one another on a more equal basis, as we are all women from very different backgrounds yet with so much in common.

So why did I truly come to this last seminar?

I came to meet Rima, whom I haven’t seen since our last seminar two years ago. I wanted to hear about her work, studies, and kids. I missed her round face, with the rolling laughter and the hijab on her head. This time she is mostly without the hijab, exposing her whole self in front of us women. Her black hair has grown a lot since we first met, when I saw it in the room we shared in the first seminar in Würzburg. In the room we are sharing this seminar I am looking through a book by Jimmy Carter on Palestine – a very thick book written in English that she is probably reading now. I am amazed at her serious studying, in spite of the stressful life and the little support she gets because of a six year separation from her family in Gaza, enforced by my Israeli government. We talk about her going abroad for PhD studies, and I encourage her to look for as many scholarship options as possible, and just go. One reason is to

advance in her field and utilize her intellectual talents. Another is to use her abilities in political activism and leadership in democracy, gender, human rights and demilitarization. But also to have a 'cease fire' from suffocating Ramallah and Palestine, the way I did, from Israel. One thing I learned from my Holocaust-survivor parents is that one shouldn't suffocate in one place, if there is another option. I chose to get out of Israel to breathe another air, to take a break from the conflicts, the tension, and the politics that penetrates our daily life. I wanted to open up the great world to my six kids so that they will know that "I have another country if my land is burning". This is contrary to the popular Israeli song played on the radio and in public ceremonies mainly on Memorial and Independence Days or after wars or terror attacks. The song says in Hebrew "I don't have another country, if my land is burning". For a number of years I kept singing it with the change of words whenever I heard it. I also wish for Rima (and actually for all my Palestinian friends) to live for a while with her family in another country so not to be in her burning land. Our burning land.

In the first seminar Rima was 20. She seemed very young and militant to me then. I believe I invited her to share a room because I wanted to get to know a Palestinian woman better. I thought that the intimacy of the room might help create an intimacy between us two.

In that room I experienced her on the one hand praying, on the other, dressing up and combing her hair in that feminine way that crosses East and West. Women's talk began between us. At first, I think, we both felt the age difference, but with time the gap shrunk, mainly because Rima got married and had two kids. Since I was 39 in Würzburg, and already married for almost twenty years and a mother of four kids, the gap between us was supposedly wide, nevertheless we connected.

Rima's account with Israel was long and drenched with anger. Her clear message, which emerged from the detailed stories she told us about herself and her family history, was that the fact that they were refugees was Israel's fault. I felt she didn't see, nor try to see, the Israeli side at all. I recall a conversation we had in the dining room in Würzburg during the first meal we all had together. When I mentioned the Holocaust (not the most politically correct subject to mention in a first meal

Razia Meron:

I was impressed by the way she had shifted from being accusing, hateful, and stuck on old beliefs and understandings, into someone who is a listener and open to new suggestions.

together) her reaction was to compare it to what Israel is doing to the Palestinians now. I even felt there was an attempt to minimize the magnitude of the issue. Her style of speech in that seminar was mostly

black or white. Looking back, I think that she didn't have information nor any wish to receive information on the story of 'the other side'. She personally and deeply lived the refugee experience and the Palestinian

Nakbah. Even though she said that her childhood in Syria was good, and it seemed that she enjoyed her life in Gaza as well, as I believe her family is loving and loveable, underneath this personal good there was an angry and extremely political account.

Rima didn't hesitate to use expressions that accept war, bloodshed and death to save Palestine.

I felt that from one seminar to the next Rima opened herself up to listen to the other side of the story. I think that her acquaintance with the Israeli women, the personal connections, helped her look at the complexity of the picture, at the grays between the black and white.

The acquaintance with Rima as with all the Palestinian women in the group enabled me to obtain an intimate look into their lives, the life of the community they live in, and into the effects of my society – Israel, mainly the occupation – on the daily and political lives of my Palestinian friends.

I came to this seminar to meet Sabah, to feel her wisdom thorough her quiet voice, to enjoy her feminine beauty, to talk with her and all the women once again. I always try to look at her closely when we meet. I find myself looking with astonishment, mostly at her eastern femininity. And then I think how close we are in our cultures, and if only the two societies would have lived in peace, how much cultural creativity could have come out of it! But the reality is that the two societies still choose war. The two societies apparently still need war. Why? It's hard for me to say. But it's a fact. Lately I try to accept it and live with it the best way I can; not to fight against it, not to try to change it; just accept it as a fact

Fidaa Narh-Abu Dba:

I am not that weak 'soldier' anymore who does not know where to go in this big world.

without anger or sadness. And keep doing the political work I wish to do, whether in my art, with my kids or with wider communities, knowing

that the effect is very small, nevertheless there is a ripple effect. This acceptance of reality seems to help me be more relaxed about life in this unending conflictual political situation, and no less hopeful and optimistic, though mainly about long processes and about smaller results.

Then why do I think both Israel and Palestine choose war? I have come to think that each society is still in a state of fear and conflict, even war, within itself, within most of its citizens. The wars are a reflection of what's going on inside. Similar to what we have been doing in our seminars, I believe that only after each people solves its own fears and conflicts will there be a way for the two to slowly build a peaceful relationship. I truly think that the process we went through is a good model for a meaningful process of understanding oneself and one's community, and at the same time learning about the other, even 'the enemy'.

It took quite a few years of political thinking and activism before I came to this understanding and it's still hard to realize that it's me who is

actually writing it. This intense meeting of one week every other year on average plays a major part in my coping with the political conflict that has accompanied my life since before I was born, and affects myself, my family and the surroundings in which I live, on a daily basis. The conflict is always there. At this point in my life I can choose to stay in it or leave. I chose to take a break of a few years, but against my parents' education that life is more important than any ideal; I can't see myself not returning to this "burning land".

I have to admit to myself that I am a very 'successful product' of the Zionist, idealist education. I am not sure that I am proud of myself for being such. My parents' conclusion from their tragic past is that life is more precious than any ideal. However, they were the ones who bore and raised me in Israel, then Palestine, because this was the only place they could flee to from the 'burning land of Europe' in 1945. I don't think they would have chosen to come to Israel if they had had the choice – I think they would have preferred to go to America, where the ideal is the 'good life', which they cherished so much. And here I am now, fulfilling their American dream, and somewhat sadly realizing that I actually cannot change the words of that song even for myself. I am afraid that the idealist – Zionist education that I nursed growing up in Israel, in a way, overcame my parent's message on life.

Jameela joined the 2005 seminar, thus our acquaintance is shorter. I am impressed by the fact that she is an industrial engineer working in a stone company in Palestine. I picture a very masculine work environment, and she is in the middle – a young Muslim woman with hijabs of different colors, very much aware of fashion, good looking, with a beautiful smile and a rolling laughter. In my view, though probably not practically, she moves stones.

I also see sadness in her, sadness coming from her personal and political experiences. Sometimes I want to hug her, to help her feel better, to help strengthen her happy part that's often hiding. Maybe I see my sadness through Jameela's sadness. I deeply identify with the deaths she has experienced, though luckily mine were 'once removed'. As a daughter of Holocaust survivors, stories of death were part of the walls of my childhood home. I often tried to fight them away and look for the happy and lively parts of life, but that part is still there and I believe always will be. The history of the Jewish people is a part of me, whether I choose it or not; the story of Israel is part of me, whether I accept or agree with it or not. Drawing and painting the symbol of the Star of David in the last 5-6 years, both in Israel and now in the US, made me understand that the issues of my identities – the Israeli, Jewish, Zionist identities, are truly important to me, thus so conflictual within me, now obsessively trying to be resolved through art.

What is my relation to the German women in the group?

Hannelore, the ‘mother’ of our group, a feminist and political role model for me, had a dream; and I feel lucky to be part of its fulfillment. As I see it, she wanted to form a group of German, Israeli and Palestinian women that would meet once a year and talk, understand, decode, create an alternative kind of communication to the regular victim-victimizer language. I believe Hannelore wanted to dig deeply, in a feminist way, into the wounds of the histories (or rather – her-stories) of the Germans and the Jews, Germany and Israel, Germany-Israel-Palestine. She wanted to find out for herself, and invited us all to (re)search this story together, to dive deep into a feminine investigation process. With the aid of professional facilitators, the last two being the great Margot and JZ from England (another side of the historical conflict), we tried to cross into each other’s histories, cultures, religions and feelings. We are all here because of Hannelore’s dream, and her determination to fulfill it. Each seminar was almost like a new project, and I am happy and even proud to have been part of this project since the beginning, including one seminar with a 6 week-old breast-fed baby, Yotam. Looking back, though, I am not so sure I was right in coming then and bringing him along, the way I am not sure about taking part in peace and anti-militaristic activities when he was still in my womb and later as a baby. I believe all of my kids paid, and still pay, a price for my political consciousness and activism. Raising kids in Israel with the message not to become soldiers, the way I do, is extremely radical and unpopular. I hope that the break of a few years I have taken from activism and from Israel (and Palestine) will help heal these wounds and enable me to return to the “homeland” and to activism in a more peaceful way. In the past few years I have been angrier and possibly more militaristic. I was in a frenzy of activism and ‘burned’ myself out, and part of my kids’ souls, as a result.

I always felt personally close to Christiane, and in a way I feel that the two of us, as friends, have missed out on the personal level, being so focused in our meetings with the national / political issues. I was always curious to hear Christiane’s personal stories about herself and her husband, his hardships as an immigrant, and their challenges as a mixed-culture couple. Listening to her stories, I always felt as though I was taking part in the unique path she went through with him over the years, and I was watching how she actually lived the issue of immigration and the meeting points of cultures and religions, not only in her job as a social worker but inside her home, in her own life. I am sure Christiane puts this hands-on experience into use in her work, though she often mentions, like the other German women in the group, that she always remembers her comfortable place as a German in Germany. Don’t I feel the same when I hear about the hardships of the Palestinian women in

the group? And the Palestinian women from Israel? And Shira's stories, as a woman from a Mizrachi origin in Israel? ("Mizrachi" refers to Jews who came from Arab countries).

On the national level, Tinka for me has always represented East Germany, 'the other side', the complexity of the German picture, yet always with humour and mimicry. Until I met her in the first seminar, I was not totally aware of the issue of East and West in Germany. At every seminar I learned more facts and feelings concerning the struggles of the two sides and their unification. During the 2005 seminar in Berlin, we toured the city, saw the Wall and its Museum, and tried to experience this issue from a personal view. It wasn't an easy visit for me. It wasn't easy to simply tour Berlin, the way that, I believe, it is not easy for the majority of Israelis or for any Jewish person. There are places and moments that are seared irrevocably into people's and communities' souls. This final seminar was one of the ways in which I dealt with these scars in my soul. Even wearing a T-shirt that has BERLIN written on it, which I bought on that tour, is a practical continuation of this struggle for reconciliation in my daily life.

Tinka's theatricality always added spice to our meetings, and a lot of humanity to cushion the demanding work that we did for hours and hours mostly in one room. I always remember (and often put into use) Tinka handing out chocolates at the second seminar by the Sea of Galilee, seriously telling us that women's work is so hard, that we need chocolates to help us cope with it.

Anette, in my view, is a kind of Mother Teresa who wishes to help the world's unfortunates, focusing on the Israelis and Palestinians. Her commitment to better the world is tireless, and her determination, pragmatism and seriousness give me, and I believe many others, a sense of confidence that she can truly succeed in this mission. Anette, like all the German women in the group are role models for me as active, feminist, humanist and courageous women, who devote their lives to helping needy

Faten Mukarker:

I started to ask myself what things would be like if the Holocaust had not happened. What would it be like if the world community did not feel guilty towards the Jews?

minorities, mainly women. As such, Anette and the other German women, and actually the women of all the groups, place a mirror in front of that persona of mine, which also wishes to change or at least better the world.

In these last two seminars I tend to question what used to be obvious to me concerning this issue. I also question how representative my German friends are of 'the new Germany', the Germany that is conscious of its past and not afraid to face it, deal with it, and be active in making the change. On the way back from the last seminar in Berlin I read the book *The Last Berliner*, written by an Israeli writer of Berlin origin, Yoram

Kanyuk. He talks about a Germany that still hates Jews, and that there is no 'New Germany' in his view. I am glad to say that I do not share these views. I have never really been in the position of blaming; hatred; self pity. I never wanted to view myself as a victim. I didn't need to receive an apology from my German friends, though I can't say I was not happy to learn of their awareness and political activism. I guess this was one of their keys to my heart. And what was the key to my Palestinian friends' hearts if not my peace and demilitarization activism and the fact that I declare out loud that I am educating my kids not to be soldiers? Therefore not being politically active at this point makes it hard for me not to feel guilty in face of myself and all these active women.

And the Israeli women?

Edna is one of my teachers of politics, of struggle against the tide, of integrity, socialism, feminism, as well as humanism, containing, acceptance. Lately, when I hear about her travelling abroad or telling about her granddaughters, I am happy for her even more than when she talks about her endless political and social activities. I am glad she takes care of herself as well as of others. When we meet I often remind her to straighten her back, which I feel is bending from the weight of world tragedies, Israel and Palestine. Above all Edna takes upon herself the poverty, social injustice and the Occupation.

As a younger Israeli feminist and activist I look up to Edna's overwhelming social and political consciousness and activism. I also admire

the way she combines ideology and life. Yet I feel that in this respect we both still have a way to go, and Edna's back is a reminder for me, and I hope for her too, that there is still work to be done in order to achieve

Edna Zaretsky Toledano:

There have been so many decisions that I have made in my life, big and little, while these questions and imperatives have been guiding me. I refuse to become the victimizer.

harmony in our life. I believe that our personal harmony can well affect the harmony of our community, country and even the world.

I view Adina as the ultimate noble woman who devotes her life to both science and the struggle against the Israeli occupation and militarism. We met through peace demonstrations at the road junctions all over Israel in 1996 (as an after effect of Rabin's murder and the collapse of the Oslo Peace Process), when we were both part of "Women and Mothers for Peace". Once a month we used to meet in a political women's study group, which later became "New Profile". In addition to learning about integrity and commitment to beliefs, I learned from Adina how to cope with children older than mine, how the political thinking of parents influences their relationship. Listening to her experiences, I remind myself that my children are possibly the most important mirrors of myself, and that I

should do well to look to them if I wish to better myself. Since my kids know all of my political agenda by heart it might be better to leave it aside and work on other issues and on our relationship. When time comes, they will do what they decide, having my views very clear in their minds. I don't need to grind it into them for the rest of their lives, causing too many conflicts and disharmony at home.

Ruthy is 100% committed to the struggle for peace and demilitarization in Israel. I view her personal success in this respect in the fact that her three older sons decided not to serve in the army. She was a strong influence on the fact that I did not give up my dream of having six kids, like her, and I have always been attentive to her wonderful motherhood and demilitaristic education of them. I admire the way Ruthy's life and ideals are so well balanced, something I haven't been able to do. After about six years I decided to stop my extremely active political life, mainly as the spokeswoman of "New Profile", as I was not able to combine it with my family life. I am now teaching myself how to maintain the balance, how to cleanse myself, to find the peace within myself and my family, and at the same time have an influence on the wider public level. How does one do that without getting burned? Should we act in the world as Buddhists, who fix themselves in order to fix the world, or as Westerners who believe in an active fixing of the world?

Razia is another friend I acquired 'on the street'. We met in Beit Lid junction (between Netanya and Kfar Yona, not far from our houses) on one of the Fridays in 1996/7. At that time we were demonstrating at many junctions across the country, wearing white and walking in circles like the mothers of May Circle in Argentina.

Razia then established her 'own' junction – on the Vitkin Bridge on the Tel Aviv-Haifa road, where she stood with one or more of her children every Friday, holding, like all of us, a huge sign saying "We Don't Have Children For Unnecessary Wars". Later we decided to erase the word "unnecessary" from our slogan, after long debates about whether wars are sometimes necessary. In such debates in Israel, someone always mentions World War 2, with the question 'Don't you think fighting Germany was a necessary thing to do?', which usually remains unanswered.

Razia was also one of the founders of "New Profile", and we finally held the first Conference of the organization in her yard in October, 1998. The Conference was called "New Profile – Various aspects of conscription and avoiding conscription in Israel." The morning of the conference we moved it to Razia's yard after we were physically kicked out of Ruthy's Kibbutz Haogen where the conference was supposed to be held. A few older people who were Holocaust survivors, demonstrated with signs saying things like 'If we had no army there could be another Holocaust'. The conference made us realize that "New Profile" was not only a title for

a conference but a necessary movement for demilitarization of the Israeli society.

In the third seminar in Bremen, Razia joined the Israeli group, together with Debbie Birenbaum, who was also one of the founders of “New Profile”. I view Razia as presenting an alternative way of political thinking and activism from most of the women in the three groups. After an intense political activism in “New Profile”, Razia found the way of the spirit. It doesn't seem to me that she gave up on her wishes to change the

Razia Meron:

My husband would say about me “You are the most militant peacemaker I ever met...”

world, but she is currently doing it in a different way, at work on the inner peace from which world peace might emerge. She continues to stick to idea-

alism, innocence and a belief in the good. I feel very close to Razia's way now, similarly to being close to the former way. We went through this change at the same time, along with Debbie, sharing books and information on new insights and knowledge. But I feel that Razia is not easy for the group to accept. Every once in a while a remark is thrown at her about dreaming, escaping, floating, living in a bubble. Every time such a remark is made, I feel as though it has been thrown at me as well. I very much identify with her way, and often try to ‘translate’ her words to a more common language, to build a bridge between her and the friends, the friends and myself, my rational self and my spiritual self. Because it's important for me that Razia and her (and my) way will be clear. Her alternative may well be in the spirit of Tai Chi, which she teaches us in the mornings of this last seminar.

I first met Shira in the feminist organization “Woman to Woman” in Haifa, where the Israeli group that Edna organized met for the first time, before the first seminar. Shira was wearing a purple mini skirt, matching purple jacket and stockings. An impressive young woman, a mixture of east and west, sensual, intelligent, intellectual, all in the right amounts. I was impressed then, and I still continue to watch her every morning. She enters the seminar's dining hall or conference room with her shining femininity, based on a few shining pieces of clothing and jewelry, light make up, tight pants and a cleavage. I am amazed at Shira's ability to accept and expose her femininity since I'm sensitive to this issue. My preference, as a teenager, to look through my father's closet rather than my mother's still lingers in my memory, and continues to affect my conduct. I myself accepted my femininity only when I was 27, when I was pregnant for the first time. This subject came up in one of the first workshops in the 2007 seminar, when we split into mixed groups, drew a curvy life line, and marked mile stones along our lives in which we had to cope with the issue of gender. I enjoyed learning about femininity and its development in the lives of my friends in the group, and discovered how much women are similar to one another in so many ways,

even if we are raised in very different cultures. Women's sisterhood is not just a slogan for me. It is one of the most important issues that I passionately care about and deal with on a daily basis. I love to spend time with women, talk to women and hear about their lives, feelings, insights. I believe in women, in their special wisdom and powers. I care about women and try to empower them and be empowered by them.

On the national level, Shira represents the Mizrahi sector in the Israeli group, and is very deeply connected to this identity. I always listen carefully to her narrative, which I know from books and the media but now first hand from a sharp Mizrahi woman such as Shira. When I read the poems she writes, I am amazed at the creative outburst that comes out of her, and how strong and authentic the poems are, combining the physical and sensual with the spiritual and intellectual, Hebrew and Arabic, the poetic and narrative. Just like Shira. Her East-West complexity intrigues me, and I identify with her very much. Like her, I've always felt that part of me is Mizrahi and Arab, even though I am unlike her in that her parents are from Morocco, mine from Poland. This fact used to embarrass me in the past, but lately I've tried to come to terms with it too. One way was to add the name "Fabian" to mine. This was my mother's maiden name which she gave up when she married my father. Since I didn't want to go back to my former family name "Pejsakiewicz" which I didn't like at all as it sounded so Polish, I thought that the idea of continuing the women's dynasty of the family suited me better.

We had more than one workshop concerning our names in the final seminar and others. It was interesting for me to look deeper into my new name addition and to think of it as a recognition of my European roots, and even be happy to have this part added to the so-very Israeli names of Vered (rose) and Shomron (Samaria).

The issue of which group Fidaa and Rawia belong to – the Israeli or the Palestinian – raised questions in almost every seminar, not to mention tensions of various kinds.

My connections with Fidaa changed from a kind of mother-daughter relationship, to women-friends and even daughter-mother at times. Since she was 19 at the beginning and is now 29, I followed her with wonder from one seminar to the next, and now with her 10 months old second girl – Samah – who came along. I feel that she and Nai, Rawia's new baby daughter, are part of the group, looking at us with understanding, though sometimes with forgiveness, from high above. It seems to me that Samah is a result of Fidaa's mature and relaxed motherhood, who finds her way between her personal life, her career and her political work. We discussed together how lucky she was being a social worker – a profession that has a built-in social and political mission, which she likes and can make a living from. In contrast to me, as I told her, who many times along my adult life was sceptical and cynical about my profession – Art – asking

the question, 'What does it do for the world?' I often think art is like the icing on the cake when people have nothing to eat. Lately I am coming to terms with that part of me as well, realizing that Art is what I know best, love the most, and I guess there is also a need for that in our world. In a beautiful motherly manner at the end of our conversation, Fidaa encourages me that the world needs both social workers and artists.

I have been watching her all these years, and similarly to Shira, I am impressed with her acceptance of her femininity and try to study it and take some for myself.

Fidaa, and Rawia have great wisdom and power as women and mothers. I am sure they are both very important to the Palestinians in Israel, especially to the women. I feel lucky to have been a little part in their lives in that meaningful period between their 20s and 30s.

With Rawia I also feel a sense of sisterhood or women's closeness, and the age difference has never really been an issue. There is much humour and laughs between the two of us, softening the rough edges at times. In the last years Rawia and I had a spiritual common denominator, though in the 2007 seminar she seems to question this route also, a fact that makes me re-evaluate it as well. I feel that the two of us have developed in similar ways in the years since we met, moving from the political to the personal, the professional, the family, the spiritual. I don't take these similarities for granted, and I am especially happy with them, remembering the difference in placing in the Israeli society between Rawia and myself. I know that what might come easily for me doesn't necessarily come easily for Rawia.

I have been admirably following Rawia also from one seminar to the next – her personal route, her motherhood, this time joined by her second beautiful baby girl Nai, and her professional development that is also her socio-political success as a women's empowerer.

Iwould have liked to write about all of the women I have met in our seminars but respected the decision to write only on the ones at this final seminar. I learned from each one, and had a special rapport with every one – Palestinian, German or Israeli. I was always sorry to hear about any of them not coming to our next meeting.

I miss May's profound words as well as sharing stories about our kids of similar ages. I miss Gili's special Jewish and feministic points of view. I miss Faten's poetic words, Debbie's surprising insights, Raja's clear opinions, Amne's sharpness, Wisam's sensitivity ...

Across from the Wannsee Lake, one of the first days of Spring 2007 in Berlin. I am sitting on a bench just a few minutes walk from the beautiful Wannsee Villa where the 'Final Solution' was made. Strangely, we never got to visit it in our two seminars here. I walked over there by

myself one morning, and drove with Hannelore and some of the Israeli women on another occasion. But in both cases the house, now a national museum, was closed, and we only looked at it from the outside. It was important for me to visit there, and it was also important for me to be there with both my Palestinian and German friends. Why didn't I speak up and ask for this visit?

Was it because I am past this pain? Or because I insist on skipping over my pains in the face of other people's pains? Is it because I try hard to forget my history as a victim by seeing others as victims? And because I still feel guilty for my Palestinian friends' lives thus cannot share with them my still existing pains? Pains that my German friends' ancestors may have had a part in as victimizers, and I choose to put aside and move on? Pains that my Palestinian friends' relatives may now have a share in but I also choose to put aside because I don't like to be identified as a victim, while I still am?

Iam looking at the kayak rowers in uniform movements on the quiet waters, I am listening to the birds singing, and then I hear a train passing in the distance, but I don't pay attention to the noise that it's making. Or do I?

Have I reached my own peace yet?



Hannelore Chiout

Postscript

Reaffirming the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building [...] urges Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict. The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, On Women, Peace and Security, 2000

The voices of seventeen women from Palestine, Israel and Germany who contributed to this book with their individual perception of the conflict between Jews and Palestinians and their perspective of a future in a democratic society, reflect a simple truth: women are not natural born peace-builders. UN Resolution 1325 does not ask why women have an “important role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building...”

The Trialogue between these women documents that they are not free from militarized thinking. They are not free from hatred. Edna wrote about the “credence to the fact that we too have no immunity from the processes of dehumanization”. We are trained in thinking of ‘we’ and ‘they’. Edward Said, the great Palestinian intellectual, called this process ‘othering’. What was the driving energy then to dare to trust? Wasn’t Jameela reasonable who joined the group in 2005 to ask herself: “How silly these women are! Which peace and democracy are they talking about?” The clear separation of the world into friends and enemies, into victims and perpetrators, into occupiers and terrorists is not only threatening. This distinction is also seducing, promising to be part of the majority, standing on the strong side of victory. Not only one of these women started “with a bomb in her heart” in a similar way to Jameela whose friend had been killed.

So what are the prerequisites for peace? The narratives of these women contain important ingredients of a microcosm of peace-building. In a nutshell they give evidence of the complex and inconsistent process of building a different perspective. So what is needed to overcome the stereotypes of ‘we’ and ‘they’? What is needed to build peace? What did we need?

- First of all realism; eyes wide open, not to be blind on one side (but this may be already a result of the process);
- Courage and perseverance;
- Frustration and tolerance;
- The imagination to be 'in the other's skin'; Change of perspectives;
- Patience!
- To be motivated to start over and over again;
- Continuity of persons and time.

Time is an essential element. Only with time did we have a chance to test our realism, courage, frustration and tolerance. Only with time were we able to develop openness and trust. Reality could be read differently and for us too there was no escape from history and the consequences of history. The ability and willingness to handle conflict situations were outcomes of grown relationships. Otherwise we wouldn't have been able to face the asymmetry in the power relations between us. In good moments we even could take the tension out of them. Christiane's observation was true for each of us, coming from three nations, "I was not prepared for the emotional turbulence inside myself." Clarification was not only necessary among us. Things had to be clarified also within

Ruth Hiller:

While the process may not have always been easy, this project has provided me with insight of how much is attainable when there is a shared vision and an ongoing dialogue.

us, a process which was more than once accompanied by the feeling of isolation and self-censorship. In the first years with each escalation of conflict between us we were afraid to destroy what we had built, especially because we witnessed the speed and dynamics of escalation. Within minutes the whole process could be on trial. Although we were aware of the fact that we followed patterns, not necessarily our personal analysis, judgment or approach, we often could not escape the well-known trap of blaming, accusing, not listening, looking for hidden messages which proved the old scheme of good and bad.

But there was something else, which became stronger with every meeting. We were looking forward to these meetings. They became essential for our way of thinking. Step by step the confidence in our message grew: "Women engendering peace and democracy". Step by step mutual trust grew across the nations. With growing confidence in our process of networking the dynamics of conflict situations lost a good deal of their threatening dimension (although not their serious concern). Trust often seems to be taken for granted in concepts for peace-building processes, but is one of the most difficult approaches which can be achieved. It is always the outcome of a long-term process, not a pre-condition. The bitter Palestinian judgment of 'sweet peace talking' about a number of dialogue projects reflects the fact that meeting and talking don't make a change.

What kind of change did we have in mind? What kind of change did we manage to create? We could not change the political agenda. We could not prevent growing militarization, violence, deterioration of social conditions. We succeeded to create peace – not harmony – from bottom up, an infrastructure for peace which is substantial when political visions shall come into life. Political proclamation is one thing. Living in peace with each other and striving for a society in peace and democracy another.

The participants of the project “Women Engendering Peace and Democracy” discovered the diversity of their lives and perceptions as a source of strength. They started to trust themselves and each other. They shared what Tinka stated “Let no third party tell you anything, have nobody tell you anything about enemies, let us go to know each other, let us listen to one another and respect the experiences of the other ones, let us create subversive friendships.” They learned to “live inside the bubble” (Rawia) and to break the limitations of their bubbles. Did they create a network? They are networking within their societies, each with her capacities and connections. The project itself became more than a network. It became the starting point for a small community of women who refer to each other in order to make sure that the voice of peace is not just words, but a part of life.

It is the “home away from home” (Ruth) for women who “continue to struggle, refusing to give in. And all this time they are weaving a dream” (Edna).

Jenny Zobel

Telling the pain

a view from the outside

Before I came to Berlin to facilitate the writing of the narratives, I was aware of the story of the Holocaust, as well as the long and tragic history of conflicts which have beset the Middle East for years. However, I had never had close contact with people from Germany, Palestine or Israel. So when I met the participants in the group, it was as if the history of these three countries had come alive for me. I was face to face with women of flesh and blood who had inherited these histories and who had decided, rather than be victims to them, to explore them together. Across apparently insurmountable barriers put up by their countries' past and present allegiances: Israel, Palestine, Germany. Whereas their countries had been or still were locked in a fight to the death with the 'enemy', these women had wanted to talk about life.

I was amazed to find out how the women had been meeting over nine years, that they had often been locking horns, experiencing many ups and downs of their relationships, so many setbacks in actually arranging the meetings, as they had been interrupted by two Intifadas.

I was impressed by the mixture of calm strength and passion which emanated from the group. I was fascinated by their passionate dedication to create other ways of thinking about these conflicts, another way of analysing their positions within these conflicts, of finding common ground, of letting go of distrust and despair. I was moved to see how these women had over the years, forged strong bonds of affection and trust with each other, across ethnic, political and social allegiances.

I could see that each of them was exceptional, was full of inner strength, willing to put herself on the line, to go against what her society, family and friends thought of the project. I will never forget those from Palestine, some of them who had travelled for days, going through Israeli checkpoints with a baby, to come to Berlin. I will remember the German women. Their lives had been overshadowed by what had happened to their country in the past and connecting with the Israeli women was a courageous way to re-engage with a terribly painful history. They brought to the meetings their sensitivity, their ability to listen and empathise and their fierce commitment to creating equality and justice in the world. The Israeli women were equally fiercely committed to building peace and democracy, articulate, clear-thinking, unafraid to take direct action themselves in their own country in support of the Palestinian cause and to prevent, as one of them told me 'more of our sons from being killed'.

I was not sure how I would be received by the group and I thought my task of facilitating the writing of the narratives could be daunting. I worried that they might not trust me – a French Caribbean woman, a newcomer who knew nothing about them – to help them write their story. At least, I felt, I did not have any ‘stuff’ going on with any group. I had come to the situation fresh, so to speak.

But from the start, the women made me feel welcome. On the first evening, I offered a presentation centred on my own story which has been shaped by the influence of the simple but strong Caribbean women in my family and our connection with the enduring pain of slavery. I went on to make the link between my telling of this story and the way they would be exploring and setting down on paper their own personal narrative. I sensed that every woman present could relate to my words and felt that from then on, they saw me as an ally.

I learned a lot from facilitating the writing. Obviously, each woman already had her story within her and some of them had already written part of it. My role was just to help bring out the full narratives. I became aware of different levels of distress around this. Some women just sat down and wrote. Others kept putting it off. Others got upset as they started to write. I told myself: “It’s so understandable, because everything is so raw. These women are still living unfinished narratives. Theirs are not stories they can look back at and say: ‘That happened. It’s over now.’ Their stories are unfolding daily and often dramatically”.

The same thoughts come to my mind when I read the many email messages we have been exchanging since. For instance, I had an email from one of the Palestinian women describing in detail what happened to her family who lives in Gaza at the time of the attacks in January 2008 and the way her brother’s wife had had to give birth in a hospital with no water or electricity.

Working with these women has made me realise that we are all responsible for what is happening to them. For instance, I choose to live in a country which has decided to take a violent approach to the problems in the Middle East. Although most people in the UK disagree with such actions, they are still taking place and we share the responsibility.

Israel, Palestine, Germany. In all three cases, their history is one of pain. This is where the problem lies. It is all so painful. The women were willing to work with the pain, which could be triggered by so many things and sometimes unexpectedly.

As for me, thanks to them, I have been able for the first time to make a connection between the three countries, the three histories and the three cultures in a way I never thought of before. I have met some truly unique women. Each one embodies a conflict and each one holds within her the key to the solutions, the miraculous potential for peace.



Biographical notes

Jameela A. Alatrash

Jameela was born at Kuwait on the 28 April, 1980. She has three brothers and one sister. She lived in Kuwait till the end of the Gulf War in 1991 and then in Jordan from 1991-1994. She moved to West Bank-Palestine to study at the Evangelical Lutheran School till 1998. Jameela participated at the Play for Peace Group while at school (Palestinian-Israeli-American children).

While studying for her B.Sc., she worked at a radio station on news shows, and on souvenir stories to practice English and to gain field experience.

She is proud to wear the Hijab which she began during the second Intefada, 2003. Jameela now has a B.Sc. (2004) in Industrial Engineering from An-Najah National University, Nablus, Palestine.

She has worked as a production engineer and purchases assistant at one of the famous marble and stone companies in the Middle East, between Jordan and Palestine. She began her participation with the Trialogue in 2005 and is now working as a Marketing Manager at an Independent Palestinian Economic Newspaper.

Rima Al Ajrami

My name is Rima Abdelaziz Al Ajrami. I have a BA in English Literature, MA in Democracy and Human Rights. My thesis was on 'Children's participation in the armed conflict: Brain washing versus Doctrine oriented'. I was born in Damascus, Syria, in a refugee cap (Yarmouk Camp) and returned to Gaza in 1996 after the signing of the Oslo agreement. I married in Ramallah at the time of the second Intifada, and thus have been refused the right to move freely since then, unless with previous and very complicated procedures. I have worked in human rights organizations, both for women and children rights and par-

ticipated in different conferences and activities on women rights. The most important participation in my career (so far) was joining "Women engendering peace and democracy" group for ten years, through four different meetings. I am now the mother of three children for whom I'm working very hard to create a better future and more secure and 'normal' life that I was deprived of.

Adina Aviram

Dr. Adina Aviram graduated from the Tel Aviv University in 1987 in Life Sciences in Biochemistry.

In 1993 she was a guest scientist at the National Institute of Health in Bethesda (U.S.A) and at the Royal Postgraduate Medical School, Hammersmith Hospital (U.K) in 1995. During 2002 - 2004 she continued her studies at the Cohen Institute for History and Philosophy of Sciences and Ideas, Tel-Aviv University.

She heads the Molecular Biology Laboratory at the Hematological Laboratories at the Rabin Medical Center.

In October 2003 she participated in the Conference on Genetic Technology and Civil Society in Berlin: "Within and Beyond the Limits of Human Nature" and presented a paper on 'Controlling the „Other" – Militarization and Bioengineering'.

She is one of the founding members of New-Profile (1998), the movement to civilize Israeli society and is active in several movements working towards changing Israeli society from a militarized to a civil society, on human rights and engendering peace and democracy in Israel.

In 1998 she joined the international women's group under the sponsorship of AdB, the Association of German Educational Centres.

Hannelore Chiout

Hannelore Chiout was born in Dresden in 1944. She studied German Philology and Political Science and gained a Ph.D. She began work on development aid policy. From 1975 -2007 she established and managed the International Work of the "Arbeitskreis deutscher Bildungsstätten" (AdB) – an umbrella organization of civic and political education for young people and adults. She also developed long-term partnerships and projects with Eastern Europe, Mongolia, Spain, Israel (since 1981) and Palestine, focussing on the development of democracy. She founded, coordinated and was first chairwoman of the European Network "DARE-Democracy and Human Rights Education in Europe".

She was the originator of the concept and then, the coordinator, of the German-Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue Women Engendering Peace and Democracy.

She lives in Berlin, is married and has one adult daughter.

Ruth Hiller

Ruth Hiller is a longtime peace activist and one of the founders of "New Profile", The Movement to Civilize Israeli Society. "New Profile" is a feminist group of men and women working to de-militarize society in Israel, to end Israel's occupation of Palestinian land and to generate a life-preserving, egalitarian, humane society.

In 1998 she joined the international women's group, with other women from Palestine, Germany and Israel, under the auspices of the AdB, to work together to promote Peace, Democracy and Feminism.

Born in the USA, she came to Israel in her teens. She lives on Kibbutz Haogen with her partner Gary. They have 6 children and a grandchild.

Sabah Ikhmayees

I work as a Lecturer of Gender Studies in Al-Quds University. I have a Master's degree in Sustainable Development, Institutional Building, (2006, Al Quds University). My field of

interest is 'Empowering women in economical development'. I presented my thesis "The Role of the Non-Governmental Lending Organizations in Palestinian Economical Development". I was a project manager at the "Democracy and Peace Institute" and also I was involved as a project coordinator at many Palestinian and international organizations such as UNRWA, Jerusalem Centre for Women, and Alumni Association of Bethlehem University. In addition to my current position, I conduct training sessions for women in conflict resolution and gender issues. I participated in the Symposium on „Integrating Gender and Women's Studies into the Curricula". (November, 2007), Title: Impact and Effects of Teaching Gender at Al-Quds University.

Anette Klasing

Anette Klasing, was born in Bremen, Germany in 1955 and has one daughter.

1982: Degree in Social work & Social pedagogic (University Bremen)

1983 – 1993: Pedagogic secretary in the Youth council of Bremen – (Umbrella organization of 22 youth associations in Bremen)

1994 – 2004: Pedagogic staff and consultant for Further Education in the 'LidiceHaus Bremen' (Centre for Social, Civic and Political Education). Main topics: Gender pedagogic and Intercultural education

August 2004 – December 2006: A Civil Peace Servant in the International Centre Bethlehem and Willy Brandt Centre, Jerusalem on behalf of the Forum Civil Peace Service.

January 2007 to present: Pedagogic staff in the 'LidiceHaus Bremen'

Specialist Trainings: 1998 – 2000 'Social work with women & women – counselling';

2001 – 2002 'Intercultural education'

Razia Meron

Razia is a long time peace activist and one of the founders of "New Profile", The Movement to Civilize Israeli Society. She says, "I created the dancing class and several internet sites. I'm a firm believer in seeing the brighter side of life and of people. Tai-Chi is my martial art;

the Didgeridoo is my musical instrument.”

In 1998 she joined the international women's group, with other women from Palestine, Germany and Israel, under the auspices of the AdB Foundation, to work together to promote Peace, Democracy and Feminism.

“I believe that peace in the Middle East is inevitable and that we, Israelis and Arabs, have more in common than we ever let ourselves imagine. People and relationships are my prime interest. ”

Today she channels her care and love for people and nature (in small but firm steps) by raising the understanding that thoughts have energy, that we are the masters of our mind, we can improve ourselves, nature and earth by the way we talk and what we listen to.

Always aware of the gap between what we want and what we have.

She is a mother of 3 children, an all time student (nowadays „Family Physics“), a cook, computerized Internet web / screen artist, always on the move to do more.

Faten Mukarker

I was born on June 6th 1956, in Bethlehem.

When I was two months old my parents emigrated with me to Germany. I was raised in a strictly Arabic culture. That means that my German friends were allowed increasingly more the older they got, while I, the older I got, increasingly less. I took my school-leaving certificate, and then went to the Higher Commercial College. Next I spent one additional year at a school specialising in economics after which I began training as a doctor's receptionist. At the age of 20 my parents decided that I should marry in Palestine. They disguised their plan as a holiday to our homeland. In Palestine my husband saw me the first time in church, and on the very same evening he came to ask for my hand. After two weeks of engagement I was married. I have four children, two sons and two daughters, and one grandchild. During the 32 years I spent living in my home country, there were many changes in the political situation. The Gulf War, the first Intifada, the so-called

peace process and the second Intifada also marked my life. In 1982 I joined a women's movement, because we women had to fight on two fronts – the occupying troops and the patriarchal society we live in. The movement also enabled me to make many contacts with Israeli peace activists. In 1996 I had an idea, groups of pilgrims coming to Bethlehem to visit the Church of the Nativity usually left immediately afterwards but I invited them to my home for an Arabic meal to show them how we lived. After the outbreak of the second Intifada in the year 2000, the pilgrims and tourists stopped visiting Bethlehem and I followed the 'call'- „If the prophet does not come to the mountain, the mountain has to come to the prophet“. I started travelling to Germany to give lectures on Palestine there. It is very important that the people in Germany also hear about our point of view in the conflict, and not only what they hear through the media. Angelika Schrobbsdorf, my best Jewish friend, wrote the foreword to my book, *Life between borders*.

Fidaa Narh–Abu Dbai

She was born in Nazareth, into a family where both parents were political activists. Between the years 1983-1988 Fidaa lived with her family in Neve Shalom, an Arab Jewish community that strives for coexistence and equality. As a young woman she was always very politically active. In 1996 she volunteered in the crisis centre in the Association of Women against Violence, (WAVO) one of the only feminist organizations within the Palestinian population in Israel. Her feminist identity began to formulate through this work.

In 1999 she completed her BA in Social Work. Today she heads the Department for Social Change within WAVO as a mentor and facilitator to the staff. She also works with women's groups on empowerment.

The most significant person in her life is her partner, Sahar. Together they are raising their two daughters.

Shira Ohayon

Shira Ohayon, 38, was born in the development city of Dimona to a Mizrahi (Sephardic) working class family from Morocco.

She graduated with honours from Tel Aviv University with a BA in the History of the Middle East and Africa and is working on her MA in Education. As a student she was a research assistant at the Dayan Institute and worked as a guidance counsellor with young girls at risk at the "Naot Aviv Shelter".

Upon completing her studies she taught in the high schools "Kedma" (multicultural) and the Democratic School "Rogozin". There she developed new social educational programmes based on multicultural dialogue. Later she was employed by the Ministry of Education, coordinating and developing programmes on Sephardic Jewish Heritage. She is one of the founders of the "Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow" and "Achoti" a Mizrahi feminist organization and served on the boards of both.

Today she lives with her son in Ashdod and works as the Educational Director of the Andalusia Orchestra.

Christiane Reinholz-Asolli

born in 1960, Islamic scientist, works as a programme coordinator for IJAB – International Youth Service of the Federal Republic of Germany in Bonn. There she is responsible for the training of personnel for youth work within the framework of international encounters. Her specialties include expert exchanges with Turkey and the subject of integration / migration.

Rawia Loucia Shammass

I am a 36 years old Arab Palestinian woman, married to Hanna and mother to Sama (6) and Nay(1).

I live in Haifa, a mixed city of Arabs and Jews, among the Arab minority which is the native population of the Palestinian land.

I define myself as a feminist, who believes in the power of women to create social and political changes.

Today I work as women projects' coordinator at „Al-Tafula“, a multipurpose the pedagogical centre for women's empowerment and early childhood care and development. I am mainly involved in a women's empowerment project in the newly recognized villages in the north of Israel. Despite the official recognition, these villages still suffer harsh conditions and lack basic infrastructures. Through my work, I feel I am contributing to a humanitarian mission that raises my awareness regarding essential issues many of us still ignore.

Moreover, I volunteer for „Hewar – Dialogue“, an organization of Palestinian parents in Haifa that has established a framework for alternative education. It is worth indicating that the organization is encountering daily obstacles due to the negative and destructive steps the government of Israel and the municipality of Haifa take against it.

Vered Shomron-Fabian

I was born (1959) and raised in Israel to parents of Polish origin, who were Holocaust survivors. I am an artist by profession, currently living and working in the US with my husband and six children, whom I have been raising not to be soldiers.

In addition to high school activism with a new party "Dash", I have been politically active for peace and demilitarization in Israel since Rabin's murder and the collapse of the Oslo peace process in 1995. I organized political exhibitions in my artists' gallery „Yadayim“ in Jaffa, followed by political talks in the gallery, organized together with Bat Shalom. This led me to join women across Israel in the creation of a political movement called „Women and Mothers for Peace“, in which we demonstrated for peace every Friday.

In 1997 I was one of the founders and spokeswomen of "New Profile" – a feminist Israeli organization for the demilitarization of the society in Israel.

Gili Tzidkiyahu

Gili was born in 1971 and lives in Haifa with her partner.

She is a Rabbinical student at the Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem within the Movement of Progressive Judaism. She looks to experience religion as a channel into the heart and a bridge between people. She is a member of the facilitation prayer team in the "Nigun Halev" community in Nahalal.

Gili is a declared feminist since the age of 10, and has tried to remain active in feminist circles. Today she primarily takes care of her baby daughter Naomi.

Katrin Wolf – Tinka

I was born in Berlin-East 1956 and brought up in the GDR (German Democratic Republic). In Berlin I studied theatre production. For several years I worked as a theatre director. Until now I live happily together with the father of our two grown up children.

In 1989 together with other women I founded the East-West-European Women's Network OWEN e.V. and started to get to know the world. I participated in the project "Dealing with the consequences of the Holocaust". In this project a male trainer from Tel Aviv and a female trainer from Berlin worked with people from the 'second generation' of victims and perpetrators. For me this experience was the pre-requisite to taking part in the German-Israeli-Palestinian exchange.

Nowadays I am working as a trainer for non-violent conflict transformation and trans-cultural learning and run projects in Eastern European countries.

And I am on the move again: We are going to live in Hamburg, where I am working as the Associate Director of "filia.die frauenstiftung", a women's foundation to support the feminist movement worldwide.

Edna Zaretsky Toledano

Edna holds an M.A. in Sociology from Haifa University (Dean's List) and a B.A. in Education, Sociology and Anthropology.

She taught and facilitated workshops on is-

sues of multiculturalism, Jewish – Arab relations and gender equality in The University of Haifa and in Bretton Hall College of the University of Leeds-Israel Extension, where she served also as the academic coordinator of the Haifa Branch.

In the Ministry of Education and at Givat Haviva – Jewish Arab Centre for Peace – she trained teachers, school principals and facilitators of encounters between Jews and Arabs on issues of Democracy and Equality in Co-existence.

She began as a youth worker in poor neighbourhoods of Haifa. She developed young leadership programmes and set up a cadre of young Jewish and Arab leaders.

She is a social activist. She engaged with groups of Jews and Arabs from the sixties, served in the early eighties as the Jewish Co-Chairperson of „Partnership“, an NGO promoting conditions for equality and mutual respect between Jews and Arabs.

Since 1982 she has been an active member of several groups and coalitions of women for a just peace and against wars and occupation. She served as the Jewish coordinator in "Engendering the Peace Process", an international Palestinian-Israeli initiative which was created to enhance the influence of women in the peace process.

As an active feminist, she developed empowerment programmes for women and facilitated groups and staff in shelters for battered women and in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. She served as Chair of "Isha L'isha", Feminist Centre of Haifa. Since 2003 she has been a member of Haifa City Council Awards: 1981, The Herbert Armstrong Prize for „Activities advancing understanding between people“; 1979, The Martin Buber Prize with her partners in creating „Hole in the Wall“ a bi-lingual play, Hebrew and Arabic, in Haifa Theatre.

Born in Israel in 1941. She is married to the sculptor Dan Zeretsky, mother of Asaf, a veterinarian, and of Osnat, a music therapist.

This publication tries to sum up almost 10 years of an intense and passionate process of finding a common language between women from Israel, Palestine, and Germany.

We came together to learn from and strengthen each other in our common endeavour of protecting women's rights in our societies, strengthening mutual respect for each other, and fostering democratic values.

Within ten years we learned to share our experiences openly, with all the difficulties and risks. We created a dialogue and listened to each other – to the differences and the contradictory narratives, trying to experience and understand each other's stories and histories.