The Dialogue that Died

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ISRAELI JEWISH AND ISRAELI PALESTINIAN WOMEN IN HARD TIMES

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Abstract ——————————————————————————————————

For fifteen years, in the north of the state of Israel, a women's organization existed in which Israeli Jewish and Israeli Palestinian women activists worked together for peace and justice in a careful and challenging dialogue across difference. "Bat Shalom of the North" was the subject of research by the author in 1996. In this article she reports on her return in 2012 to re-interview former members. Applying the feminist concept of "transversal politics" she analyzes the organization's trajectory, radicalization and eventual closure in the context of a failed peace process and increasing violence in the region. Their perspective on Israel's oppression of its Palestinian minority led the surviving members of Bat Shalom of the North in its final days to envision not a "two-state solution" to the Israel Palestine conflict but a single, inclusive, multicultural and democratic country, in which subject identities are built not on a feeling of belonging to land, language or religion but on shared adhesion to human and democratic rights.

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Israel, Palestinians, women, conflict, occupation, land, identity

There was once a dialogue between women of two communities who might have been thought unlikely to have kind words for each other. The Jewish majority population of Israel and the Palestinian Arab minority are separated by a cruel history, by spatial segregation and by profound inequalities imposed by the state's constitutional structure. The women who maintained this unlikely dialogue were living in the Galilee, the Jezreel Valley and the Wadi Ara. The Jewish women were mainly inhabitants of the agricultural *kibbutzim*

and *moshavim* that stretch across the fertile reaches of this region, while the Palestinians lived in the densely packed villages and towns on the rocky hills – Nazareth, Iksal, Ara, Umm el-Fahm. The dialogue and partnership in which these women worked together for fifteen years was called Bat Shalom of the North, Daughter of Peace, an outlying branch of a more institutional NGO of that name based in Jerusalem.

A RESEARCH PROJECT AND ITS "REVISITING"

In 1996 I carried out a project of action-research in and among the women of Bat Shalom of the North, which afforded me the opportunity to listen to their dialogue. It was one of three case studies I made simultaneously of women's projects sustaining difficult alliances across conflict lines in war-torn countries. The other two organizations were the Women's Support Network, a coalition of women's community associations in Belfast, Northern Ireland and the Medica Women's Therapy Centre in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In the resulting book, *The Space between Us: Negotiating Gender and National Identities in Conflict*, I wrote about the ethno-national wars afflicting these three countries, their bearing on women and the working methods developed within these particular women's organizations to negotiate conflictual national identities (Cockburn 1998). My project was one of action research and subsequently involved a transnational workshop and conference, and an exchange of visits between the organizations (Cockburn and Hunter 1999).

In early 2012, a decade and a half later, I decided to renew contact with the women and their three projects. While the organizations in Northern Ireland and Bosnia-Herzegovina had survived, I found that Bat Shalom no longer existed. However, on travelling to Israel Palestine in March 2012 I was able to locate ten former members.[1] This article reports on that field visit and on an updated reading of materials on gender and ethno-national relations in the context of the unresolved conflict in region. My hope in this "revisiting" was to learn from the women's perception of developments in the sixteen years since the earlier study. How had Bat Shalom progressed after 1996 and why had it folded? I asked them what kind of future relationship between Jews and Palestinians was now imaginable from the perspective that had been evolving in Bat Shalom.[2]

Before enquiring about the present, however, I had to evoke and navigate a common memory of the past. For this "memory work" I used visual resources.[3] My earlier project had generated an archive of photographs from which I now selected images of place, people and activities in the year 1996. I associated these with quotations of their words from that time, on posters, in a video[4] and as a Powerpoint in English, Hebrew and Arabic. The latter I presented to my informants at the start of each interview and the posters were mounted on the walls to promote discussion during our reunion meeting, at which I also showed the video. On each occasion I began my encounters, "This is

how, listening to you, I saw Bat Shalom and Israel in 1996", and asked them, "Is this how you remember it – or differently, otherwise?" Only on the basis of such negotiated recall could I go on to ask "What's happened since then? How is it now?"

1993: THE ORIGINS OF BAT SHALOM

In retrospect, we now agreed, Bat Shalom had been born in a time of cautious optimism in the region. In September 1993, after secret mediated negotiations between representatives of the Labor-led Israeli government and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), a Declaration of Principles was brought into the open and signed by both parties. These "Oslo Accords" committed the PLO to ending its armed struggle, while Israel was to recognize the PLO as representative of the Palestinian people and take the first steps of withdrawal from its occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan Heights. Although the Accords were opposed by the Jewish right, and were mistrusted by some Palestinians as potentially co-optative, in the minds of many positive-minded people on both sides of the divide they did constitute a promise of peace. Advocating a Palestinian state alongside the Israeli Jewish one had become a centrist political position rather than a subversive one (Gorenberg 2011, 9).

In this hopeful moment a meeting had been convened in Brussels between prominent Israeli and Palestinian women peace activists, initiating a process that led to the foundation of Bat Shalom with an office in West Jerusalem. The following year the "Jerusalem Link" had been formed between Bat Shalom on the Israeli side and the Jerusalem Center for Women in Palestinian East Jerusalem. The alliance was based on agreed political goals, chief among them an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories (Coalition of Women for Peace 2012). Almost simultaneously with the birth of Bat Shalom in Jerusalem in 1993, the affiliated group of women that called themselves "Bat Shalom of the North" had come into being.[5]

In the next three years however violent events interrupted the sense of forward movement. A serious setback was the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzak Rabin in November 1995 by a Jewish extremist. His successor, Shimon Peres, pledged to maintain the momentum of the peace process. Soon afterwards however a Hamas leader was assassinated by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), prompting revenge suicide bombings in Israel. In April 1996, Peres launched Operation Grapes of Wrath against Hizbollah, in retaliation for rocket strikes against Israel from Lebanon. Meanwhile the Israeli government continued, to the detriment of the peace process, to support Jewish settlement in the West Bank. The settler population (excluding East Jerusalem) rose from 74,800 to 136,000 between 1992 and 1995 (Philo and Berry 2011, 89).[6]

These were the events to which the women of Bat Shalom were responding when I first visited them in 1996. I learned that the origin of the northern group lay in the moment when some local Palestinian women had come along to join

the predominantly Jewish Women in Black vigils against the Occupation at the Megiddo crossroads. A few of them began to meet as a "forum" whose partici-pants reached out to others through their various Jewish and Palestinian net-works. They opposed the Occupation, of course, issuing press statements, supporting national protests and enacting vigils. However, what characterized them particularly, and differentiated them from Bat Shalom in Jerusalem, was the stress they placed on a local partnership between Israeli Jewish women and Israeli Palestinian women, working together for justice and equity for the Palestinian minority in the Israeli state.

STATE WITH A DEMOCRACY DEFICIT

Israel's Basic Laws, which serve as a constitution, define it as a "Jewish and democratic state." The two adjectives are in practice incompatible. In a state "exclusively dedicated to what it views as Jewish interests, not to the interests of all its citizens," as Ilan Peleg and Dov Waxman put it, non-Jews inevitably suffer structural disadvantage (2011, 133). The country has no Bill of Rights to guarantee equality of all citizens before the law. Zionist institutions such as the Jewish Agency and the Jewish National Fund are invested with responsibilities that in other countries are performed by the state. In sum, "the Arab minority has been especially vulnerable to the Jewish majority's desire to control and marginalize it, a desire born out of the generally hostile relationship between Jews and Arabs inside and outside Israel" (Peleg and Waxman 2011, 139).

Scanning the contemporary data on my revisiting in 2012, I found little change. Economic inequality is still dramatically expressed in Israeli Jews' land wealth and Israeli Palestinians' land poverty, sustained by property law. Although about 20 percent of the Israeli population, Palestinians own only about 3.5 percent of the land.[7] Thus excluded from agriculture, the Palestinians of Israel have necessarily become an urban people, earning their living as shopkeepers and traders, in manufacturing, in the lower reaches of administration and public services and as day laborers on the *kibbutzim*.[8]

Discriminatory state policies and practices exacerbate the socioeconomic gap between Arabs and Jews. The state spends on average 35 percent more on its Jewish citizens than it spends on Palestinian citizens. Arab municipalities receive significantly lower levels of funding for roads, electri-city, sewerage and other infrastructure than Jewish areas. Jewish and Pales-tinian children are educated in separate, parallel systems, and the funding Palestinian schools receive is one-third lower than in Jewish municipalities (Peleg and Waxman 2011, 43–44). Ben White (2012, 83), in his study of Palestinians in Israel, concludes "the truth is that policies which would be considered grotesquely racist applied in other contexts are routine and insti-tutionalized in Israel."

As an organization of women, Bat Shalom found common ground in the disadvantage experienced by women in both communities. Israel passed a Women's Equal Rights Law in 1951 that purports to guarantee the equal treatment of men and women. Yet the established practices of the state fundamentally undermine its implementation. Israel therefore trails behind most other developed nations on gender equality. The World Economic Forum annual report (June 2012) placed Israel down at number sixty-three in the world ranking on equality in matters of political representation, number eighty in matters of education and as low as ninety-one in matters of health (World Economic Forum 2012). The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in its most recent annual evaluation of Israel's performance in observing and implementing CEDAW, observed, notwithstanding the establishment in 2008 of an Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, the continuation of a highly sex-segregated job market, a big wage gap and persistent sexual harassment (United Nations 2011).[9] Though better represented at every level of education than men, women are concentrated in courses leading to stereotypically feminine and undervalued jobs and are predominantly those caring for families (Israel Democracy Institute 2008). Women are also disadvantaged relative to men in representational politics and administration. Though the proportion is slowly growing, women are currently still no more than 19 percent of Knesset members.[10] There is likewise a dearth of women in local government.[11]

Inevitably, ethno-national disadvantage compounds gender disadvantage for a Palestinian woman in Israel. The UN CEDAW Committee cited above expressed particular concern about Israeli Palestinian women's inequality before the law, home demolitions, violence against women, lack of adequate access to education and healthcare, denial of the right of family unification, particular discrimination against Bedouin women and the unequal participation in political and public life in Israel (United Nations 2011). Palestinian women are more heavily dependent on male family members than Jewish women, since only 15.4 percent have full-time employment, compared with 34.9 percent of Ashkenazi women and 29.8 percent of Mizrahim (Abdo 2011, 125).[12] Those Israeli Palestinian women who work are often subject to unlawful labor practices, such as being paid less than the minimum wage and denied adequate vacation and sick leave (Euromed 2010, 10). Palestinian women are, besides, deprived of higher education. While 36.8 percent of Ashkenazi women and 9.2 percent of Mizrahi women have completed a university education, only 3 percent of Palestinian women have done so (Abdo 2011, 125). Palestinian women are even further distanced from political power than Jewish women. Suheir Abu Oksa Daoud observes that they have not acquired even basic political positions in local or national politics in the sixty years since Israel's inception. At the end of the first decade of the new millennium there was one female Knesset member representing Balad. One sole woman had headed a local council (in the 1970s), while a mere seventeen women had become local council members (Daoud 2009, 1). In Arab local

authorities only a tiny 0.5 percent of publicly elected officials were women (Euromed 2010, 21).

Two further factors seriously disadvantage women of both communities. One is Israel's permanently militarized condition. In a society dominated by security concerns, gender equality and women's rights issues are pushed aside as relatively unimportant (Halperin and Yadgar 2010). Second is the interpenetration of religion and the state in Israel. Matters related to personal law are administered by the country's religious courts, Jewish, Islamic, Christian and Druze, according to extremely patriarchal norms and traditions. There is no secular marriage, and therefore no possibility of inter-marriage between communities, and divorce laws are heavily biased against women's interests. However, despite the many impediments they face, a new generation of highly educated Palestinian women is emerging as a feminist movement, documenting and protesting their ethnic and gender positioning.[13] The women of Bat Shalom made a conceptual connection between the ethno-national and gender dimensions of injustice in Israel. As Sonia Zarchi told me recently, "we believed there can be no equality for women in relation to men or equality on any other dimension until there is equality between Arab and Jew. All the equalities come, or fail to come, together." She might well have been invoking the intersectional principle in contemporary feminist theory.

BAT SHALOM OF THE NORTH IN 1996: NEGOTIATING DIFFERENCES

In 1996 when I first met the group, Bat Shalom's principal practice was to organize cultural and educational events, with the aim of carrying their gendered peace politics to an ever wider circle of women. These activities were held alternately in the Jewish *kibbutzim* and the Arab villages and towns. The Palestinian women might for instance mark International Women's Day with a joint discussion in a center such as Nazareth, and each year the Jewish women would host activities during Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles, as celebrated in a secular way by the left-wing Jews of the *kibbutz* movement.

I wrote back then of the challenges the women of Bat Shalom encountered in their "dialogue across differences." The Jewish majority in Israel and the Palestinian minority are markedly separated by culture – language, religion and above all history. The women who met in Bat Shalom, *kibbutzniks* on the one hand and town-dwellers on the other, lived almost entirely segregated lives. "They come from sharply contrasted environments," I wrote, "two bounded ethnic clusters without mixed marriages, mixed parentage or shared lifestyles to soften the distinction between them" (Cockburn 1998, 132). The women told me however, that exploring and dealing with cultural difference had not been the most serious challenge to relationships in Bat Shalom. There had been occasional social encounters between Israeli Jewish women and Israeli Palestinian women before now. What was unique about Bat Shalom was its *political* nature, including in that term gender politics.

Openly addressing political issues exposed internal divergencies between them that challenged the group's unity and functioning. The Jewish women varied in the degree of their Zionism and anti-Zionism, and therefore in the kind of solution to the conflict they felt able to imagine as tolerable. Women were not unanimous in the political parties they favored. Some of the Palestinians, including the Nazareth-based women of Tandi, the Movement of Democratic Women in Israel, were supporters of the long-lived Hadash (Democratic Front for Peace and Equality), a moderate left-wing party originally associated with international communism. Others supported the newer, more nationalist, Balad (National Democratic Assembly), a specifically Israeli Palestinian party. Among the Jews of Bat Shalom a few voted Hadash, but more would have supported Avoda (Labor) and Mapam (subsequently Meretz).

Identifying the shared values that could enable them to deal constructively with the mistrust generated by an embittering past and to achieve dialogue and cooperation in a conflictual present, demanded, beyond good intentions, special qualities and skills in a process that feminist activists and scholars were beginning to call "transversal politics" (Yuval-Davis 1997). It was "a practice of creatively crossing (and re-drawing) the borders that mark significant politicized differences. It means empathy without sameness, shifting without tearing up your roots" (Cockburn and Hunter 1999, 88). Transversal politics is a concept to which I return in the concluding section of this article.

The hard-worked points of political commonality among Jewish and Palestinian members of Bat Shalom were the withdrawal of Israel from the Occupied Territories and the creation of a fully independent and sovereign Palestinian state; peace between Israel and the new Palestine; and the establishment of democratic and just regimes in both states (Cockburn 1998). But how to get there? Who should take the first step? What political parties to trust? An important resource in establishing shared values was simply being *women*. For in both Jewish and Palestinian communities, women's lives were lived in tension between secular modernity and religious traditionalism and, as we have seen above, gender inequality affected them all. Lily Traubmann, of *kibbutz* Megiddo, recalled recently how, for her, the woman-only choice had been fundamental:

> I'm a woman. I want real change, revolutionary change. And that can't happen without change for women. We have to change the whole way we see things, the way we talk, behave, work. I believe in equality, that's why I'm a socialist. But I think, whatever men say, they can't really be feminists – only up to the moment it conflicts with their interests. They can't go the whole way with us, they just can't.

1996 TO 2009: PEACE PROSPECTS RECEDE

The one-and-a-half decades between my first visit to Bat Shalom, reported in *The Space between Us*, and my recent return, saw negotiated agreements

bring peace, of a kind, to both Bosnia-Herzegovina and Northern Ireland (Cockburn 2013). In Israel Palestine, by contrast, violence escalated and peace receded over the far horizon. Shimon Peres and his Labor-led coalition lost the election of 1996 to right-winger Binyamin Netanyahu and the Likud Party, who began to backtrack on the Oslo obligations. "Final status" negotiations between Yasser Arafat and Ehud Barak at Camp David in 1998 failed irretrievably. The fate of "peace" was sealed by the violent Palestinian uprising of October 2000. Prompted by a provocative visit made by Ariel Sharon, leader of the right-wing opposition in the Knesset to the contested holy site of the Temple Mount/Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, this "second *intifada*" was, at a deeper level, an expression of Palestinian frustration with the lack of progress toward statehood. Unlike the first *intifada*, this time violence occurred in Israel as well as across the Green Line. Within weeks, thirteen Israeli Palestinians in Israel had been shot dead by police. The IDF repressed the uprising with massive force. The Palestinians responded with suicide bombings in Israel. In the next ten years over a thousand Israelis would be killed, most of them civilians, and six times as many Palestinians (Gorenberg 2011, 113).

Meanwhile, Jewish settlement in the Occupied Territories continued unabated. Between 1995 and 2000 the number of settlers more than doubled once again (Gorenberg 2011, 108). In 2002 Israel began construction of its notorious "separation wall," designed to protect the settlements, prevent the entry of bombers into Israel, fragment the territory of the West Bank and separate Palestinian centers from each other. In 2006 Israel renewed its war with Hizbollah, launching a hugely destructive attack on Lebanon. The situation in Gaza deteriorated. Israel withdrew its settlers from the Strip but closed the borders to the movement of goods and people. On the Palestinian side, Hamas consolidated its electoral and military control. Rockets were sporadically launched into neighboring areas of Israel. The violence culminated in late 2008 in Operation Cast Lead, a full-scale attack on Gaza by the IDF resulting in more than a thousand Palestinian deaths.

In 2003 there were two moves toward a peace process, neither of which brought results. The USA, with the EU, UN and Russia devised a three-stage "Road Map" pointing toward the establishment of a Palestinian state within two years. It came to nothing. In October that year left-wing Israeli politicians conferred with some Palestinian leaders and produced yet another model for peace, the "Geneva Accords," an unofficial initiative that was emphatically rejected by the Israeli government. In early 2009, three weeks after the end of Operation Cast Lead, elections in Israel brought to power an alliance of right-wing parties dominated by Likud, led by Netanyahu. Likud's most significant partner in this coalition, with fifteen Knesset seats, was Yisrael Beit Einu, "Israel Our Home," led by the extreme rightist Avigdor Lieberman who tabled a stream of racist and repressive propositions of law. The peace movement was eclipsed.[14]

In my 2012 revisiting I learned that Bat Shalom had grown in strength and effectiveness in the years immediately following my initial research among them. As the situation around them deteriorated, their analysis sharpened and radicalized. As the group matured it addressed the embittering issue of land. It is noteworthy that they called themselves "Bat Shalom of the North" without specifying "north of what." Zionists would say without hesitation "the north of Israel." Its Palestinian population however see this terrain very differently.

United Nations Resolution 181, the Partition Plan of 1947, drew a boundary through the region of the former British Mandate that defined two future states: Israel and Palestine. For the Arabs the Plan was already an injustice, giving Jews, just 10 percent of the population, more than half the land. But worse was to come. As the Israeli forces prevailed in the war of 1948 they made territorial gains, resulting in an Israeli state on 78 percent of Mandatory Palestine instead of the 57 percent allowed for by the UN Plan (Philo and Berry 2011). In the final stages of the ethnic cleansing, the expulsion of Palestinians was systematic. The process had long been foreseen. The head of the Jewish Agency Joseph Weitz had written in his diary in 1940, "there is no other way than to transfer the Arabs from here to the neighbouring countries, to transfer all of them; not one village, not one tribe, should be left ... Only after this transfer will the country be able to absorb the millions of our own brethren" (cited in Philo and Berry 2011, 33).

The Nakba, as Palestinians call their catastrophe, ended with an estimated 720,000 Palestinian refugees scattered to the winds, while 150,000 clung on under military rule in the new Israeli state. The name Palestine had disappeared from the map (Philo and Berry 2011, 41).

Much of the northern region where the women of Bat Shalom lived and organized lay outside the 1947 UN-designated boundaries of Israel. It was thus, in effect, occupied land. The women of Bat Shalom, particularly the Palestinians among them, spoke of it as such, in the same way the world speaks today of the Occupied Territories of the West Bank and Gaza, seized as a result of the Six Day War in 1967. The women of Bat Shalom of the North therefore, if pressed to elaborate on "north," were likely to refer to it not as "northern Israel" but as "the north of Israel Palestine."

It was the practice of Bat Shalom to make visits as a group to women's organizations in Jenin and elsewhere across the Green Line. They also visited "unrecognized" Arab villages in the disputed north. On one occasion they took a coach trip to the ruined villages of Ikrit and Biram, seized and destroyed in 1948. Here they talked with some of the original Palestinian villagers, still squatting a church in protest, and to members of a *kibbutz* built on land that had once belonged to these villages. It had been a painful and disturbing day for the group. Such events had given rise to self-questioning. Though their annual "Sukkot tent" had included talks and activities addressing

Palestinian Israeli's experiences, it unmistakably marked a date in the *Jewish* religious calendar that had no significance for the Palestinians. They discussed how to correct this bias. It was the land issue, they saw, that had to be faced. Twenty years earlier, on 30 March 1976, Palestinians in the north of Israel had organized a general strike in protest against the theft of their land and the denial of any "right of return" for Palestinians, whether from inside or outside Israel. Israeli police shot dead six protestors. Land Day, or Yom al'Ard, was subsequently marked, though almost uniquely by Palestinians, with further protests. Now the women of Bat Shalom decided they would *together* commemorate Yom al'Ard, organizing an annual event that would feature women's contributions to the land movement, and the memories of the now elderly women survivors of the Nakba.

In retrospect, agreeing the focus on land and working together on Land Day was a high point in the achievements of Bat Shalom of the North. But its daring carried a cost. The "right of return" to the land, of Jews to the land of Palestine, of Palestinians to the state of Israel, had always been the most painful and divisive issue for the group. A number of the Jewish members still harbored a residual Zionism. Some of these, unable to reconcile it with the group's new emphasis on Palestinian "land politics," now dropped out of the group. Others persisted however. Some new Palestinian members joined, and the commitment and work of Bat Shalom was sustained into the new millennium.

However, differences between Bat Shalom of the North and the Jerusalem office now became increasingly salient. Unlike the northern group, Bat Shalom in Jerusalem and their Palestinian partners the Jerusalem Center for Women were not grassroots organizations. From the beginning they had been characterized by their European Union funding and the somewhat elite membership of their formal governing bodies (Sharoni 2006, 16). As hope faded in the Oslo Accords and violence grew, the Palestinian leadership adopted a policy of "non-normalization" of relations with Israeli Jews, discouraging contact and dialogue across the Green Line. Co-operation between Bat Shalom and the Jerusalem Center for Women in Palestinian East Jerusalem therefore became strained. Janet Powers, in her book on Israeli Jewish and Palestinian women's work for peace, identifies among the challenges unsuccessfully faced by Bat Shalom in Jerusalem "the difficulty of creating alliances in the context of power asymmetry, escalating violence, and societal resistance to peacemaking" (2006, 11).

More significantly, however, the divergence of Bat Shalom Jerusalem and Bat Shalom of the North was due to a difference of political thinking. Although they shared the goal of ending the Occupation, the Jerusalem organization failed, in the view of their northern partners, to couple this with the pursuit of equality, justice and democracy for Palestinian citizens of Israel. Yehudit Zaidenberg, looking back to this time, told me of workshops they had organized with Jerusalem to talk through their difference, "but most of them simply wouldn't give that issue the importance we did." It was in 2006, the year Israel fought its second war with Lebanon, that the northern group

broke away. As the two elements of Bat Shalom parted company, the northerners changed their name from "Bat Shalom" (Daughter of Peace) to "Bat Zafon" (Daughter of the North).

Without funding from Jerusalem, the northern women struggled to keep open their small office and pay their two coordinators. The activist core group dwindled to eight or ten women, and, as the prospect of peace negotiations faded, the activities they organized drew fewer participants from the region. The Jewish women were sensing ever less support for their activities among the *kibbutz* communities in which they lived. Irit Lapidot told me, "I feel we've gone through a tragedy ... Looking at the Jewish members from the *kibbutzim* and the area, we felt isolated in our society. We became weaker." Their Palestinian partners continued to be active, especially the group in Nazareth whose base was Tandi, the Movement of Democratic Women. Samira Khoury, Fathieh Awaisy and Sabiha Qubdsai told me of their dismay at seeing the group breaking apart. "We felt stronger when we were together," "When they left us we felt we must work even harder," "If we came back together we could have more influence and a stronger voice." The Palestinian women continued their regular contact with women across the Green Line. But within Israel only personal friendships with the Jewish women survived. Samira spoke of the "empathy and love" between them. "It's alive, it's still here, part of our lives," she said.

TRANSVERSAL POLITICS

The closure of the Bat Zafon dialogue was clearly also an effect of the adverse political conjuncture. The second Lebanon war of 2006 and the Gaza bombardment of 2008/9 brought a sense of impotence and loss of momentum to the entire peace movement in these years. Gush Shalom, Shalom Ashav, Ta'ayush, the Coalition of Women for Peace – these and other such organizations were, as Lily Traubmann put it, "limping." "Most organizations are falling apart today," she said. "It's connected to lack of vision. Vision equals hope." It is noteworthy however that the reduced group that was Bat Zafon continued to move forward in their thinking, right to the end. Among these few, a more radical feeling about identities was gaining expression. By now they were transcending the notion of being "sides" that were "meeting" in a "mixed" organization. Majd X said, "In most organizations of Jews and Arabs there's this split. We came to realize that Bat Shalom of the North was very unusual. We were working together as a single organization and *didn't think of ourselves as one thing or the other*" (my emphasis).

The reformulation of identity was most clearly expressed by Lily. She said,

> I feel differently today. I don't want to be an Arab or a Jew, but something entirely new. The two identities don't merely limit us. Because they always

express themselves as opposed. They are confrontational. There is a slogan sometimes used in women's demonstrations that goes "We're Arab and Jewish women and we don't accept to be enemies." I don't agree with this statement. It seems to imply that we're enemies first, and then we refuse it. But we are *not* enemies. I would rather problematize the reality of Arab and Jewish identity altogether.

This re-identification, or de-identification, of self and other was in my analysis, a notable triumph of "transversal politics." Interestingly, although it is now widely used, the concept has its origins in Israel Palestine. In the early 1990s Italian feminists were visiting Israel in support of the women's peace movement. Responding to a current emphasis on "transversalism" in the Italian left, they began to visualize the painstaking and highly conscious relationship they were observing there between Jewish and Palestinian women in Women in Black, and indeed their own carefully worked relationship with the Israeli women, as having a quality they termed "*politica trasversale.*" The term became current within Women in Black as the movement was carried to Italy (as *Donne in Nero*) and gradually extended into the worldwide network it is today (Cockburn 2007).[15]

Nira Yuval-Davis was the first to develop the concept of transversal politics in English. Observing the Italian/Israeli encounter, she understood the significance in transversal politics of a practice the Italian women called "rooting and shifting." By this they meant being clear about one's own belonging and sense of self, while at the same time being capable of stepping into the shoes of the other and seeing the world from her point of view (Yuval-Davis 1997, 130). We would later describe the term transversal politics as "answering to a need to conceptualise a democratic practice of a particular kind, a process that can on the one hand look for commonalities without being arrogantly universalist, and on the other affirm difference without being transfixed by it" (Cockburn and Hunter 1999, 18).

Underlying the idea of transversal politics is the concept of "situated knowledge" (Haraway 1988), which stresses the significance of an individual's "situatedness" in relation to power, and posits that from any given positionality the world is liable to be differently perceived and evaluated. There are many truths, such an epistemology suggests, and their reconciliation, or approximation, can only be achieved through dialogue. In that dialogue, the handling of "identity" is critical. A person's subjective sense of self is not necessarily congruent with the identity or identities with which others inscribe her (Hall 1996). Her ideas, beliefs and desires, therefore, may not be "read off" from her apparent "name" – "Jew" or "Palestinian," let's say. Identity is something that calls for questioning, not closure. Thus, transversal politics transcends identity politics. It questions the very notion of identity, setting a clear space between the "name" with which a person is identified, or labeled, by others, and that person's lived sense of self.

IMAGINED FUTURES

The re-articulation of identity that occurred in Bat Zafon may thus be seen as the outcome of fifteen years of practicing transversal politics in Bat Shalom. It began, as I perceive it, during the period in which their shared analysis and relationships matured sufficiently to address the challenging issue of land and land rights. But it had been, as we saw, at the cost of losing some of the membership. Given the strenuous endeavor of negotiating and renegotiating identity and belonging, political alliance building of the kind the Israeli women were involved in depends crucially on finding a shared vision. Yuval-Davis stresses that the boundaries of the dialogue must be "determined by the message rather than its messengers." Solidarity and alliance, however skilled the identity work, has to be based on common values (Yuval-Davis 1997, 88). And interestingly, in the contracting but still cross-communal group of women comprising Bat Zafon, the abandonment of "identity," as evidenced by Majd and Lily in the words I recall above, occurred as, confident of their shared values of justice and equality, they began to respond to the political impasse by envisioning a radically different future.

The surviving members of Bat Zafon came to be among the small number in Israel's peace community who were beginning at this time to think the unthinkable: the exclusive Jewishness of Israel must be relinquished.[16] Jewish settlement in the West Bank had reduced and fragmented the area "available" for a Palestinian state. Such a thing was no longer geographically feasible. Bat Zafon's conviction that true democracy within Israel is a necessary condition of a peace settlement made them ready to imagine the only alternative: a multicultural entity or entities across the whole Israel Palestine region from the Lebanon and Syrian borders in the north to the Egyptian border in the south, and from the Jordan river to the Mediterranean sea, a nation of Jews, Palestinians and others in constitutional equality.

In the early years, the membership of Bat Shalom had understood full well that a Palestinian "right of return" within the frame of a two-state solution must be addressed. But they agreed to differ on what exactly this would entail. Vita X had always spoken clearly of her Zionist feelings, the importance of Israel continuing to be a Jewish state. She insisted again this year, "I want equality for [the Palestinians] but I won't give up my national anthem and flag. That's a price too high for me to pay. I surely don't want to be a bi-national country. My rights for self-determination as a Jewish citizen should be respected too."

Sonia by contrast was one for whom the shared value of "equality" had begun to open her mind to constitutional change, albeit within a state of Israel. She told me, "I will always be Jewish and Israeli, but we want a country that's *equal for all* (my emphasis). So we need to give up a part of our nationality in order to live together. I'm not saying we need to give up our flag. But each of us must make our own peace now, no matter what color the flag. You have to give away a bit of yourself in order for others to live."

Going a step beyond, in order to imagine a singular, multicultural and democratic future state, Majd identified the first step as addressing the issue on which Bat Shalom had focused from the very start – the situation of the Palestinians within Israel. She said, "All the Palestinians, whether in Israel or in the Occupied Territories, should be demanding Israeli identity. To push the Israeli state, to test them. We should force Israel to take responsibility for all these people." Lily Traubmannn had grown impatient with the ding-dong arguments for two states or one. What matters is the character of the state. She said, "The main problem is that Israel is a nationalist and racist state." Crucial for her is that any state or states emerging in the region "should be civil, secular and mixed, creating a new and different collective nationality in which we are all brought to participate. I don't want to live in a country that is a 'side' relative to an 'other'." In this she had recovered the vision, the hope, she had described as lacking in the peace movement in recent years. She spoke of it as "a joyful vision, of something we want because it's the best, in which we can live together and create a future."

The subjective sense of self involves powerful feelings of "belonging." Yuval-Davis has written that certain of its dimensions – and she names belonging by origin, by "race" and place of birth – are particularly intractable (2011, 21). In the case of "feeling Israeli," or "feeling Palestinian," land has special importance. In neither case is it necessarily land as "place of birth," since many Israeli Jews were born far from today's Israel, and many Palestinians, particularly the younger generation, have been born since their land was lost to the state of Israel. But deep in the identity structure of both peoples today is a powerful sense that "this land belongs to us and we belong to the land." Therefore, the women of Bat Zafon were, as they abandoned dichotomous identities, simultaneously abandoning specific land claims. They were imagining a shared region in which they would "belong" among a varied community of people, whose sense of self they hoped would have adapted through mutual knowing and contact in the way their own had done.

Around what, then, would the future mixed inhabitants of the region build their shared identity? Yuval-Davis goes on to suggest that "language, culture and sometimes religion are more open to a voluntary, often assimilatory, identification with particular collectivities." In the case of Israel Palestine however, a terrain on which Arabic competes with Hebrew, and Islam and Christianity with Judaism, these identifications are already fraught with divisiveness and danger. She goes on however to suggest that "Using a common set of values . . . as the signifiers of belonging can be seen as having the most permeable boundaries of all." Those she proposes are "democracy" and "human rights" (Yuval-Davis 2011, 21). These values were at the very core of the project of Bat Zafon, enabling their transversal politics. They are simultaneously Bat Zafon's proposal to several million people around them. "Are you prepared to say," they ask, "instead of 'Judea belongs to me' or 'I belong to Palestine,' simply 'What defines me is my concern for my human and democratic rights, and for yours'?"

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Notes

1 The women with whom I managed to re-establish contact included five Jewish women of the *kibbutzim* of the Jezreel Valley. They were Lily Traubmann from *kibbutz* Megiddo, Sonia Zarchi from *kibbutz* Ginegar, Yehudit Zaidenberg from *kibbutz* Beit Alfa and Irit Lapidot from *kibbutz* Mizra. One of my Jewish intervie-wees preferred anonymity under the pseudonym Vita X. Among the Palestinian Israeli women I was able to re-meet, and in two cases to interview in depth, were Samira Khoury, Fathieh Awaisy and Sabiha Qubdsai in Nazarath (all three actively involved in Tandi, the Movement of Democratic Women), Nahla Shedafni from Iksal, and another former member of Bat Shalom of the North who prefers to be unidentified – and whom I refer to by the pseudonym Majd X. I also draw on correspondence subsequent to my visit with four informed peace activist women who had been close observers of Bat Shalom without having been members of it. They are Gila Svirsky, Rela Mazali, Ruth Hiller and Tamara Traubmann, whose contribution I warmly appreciate. A very special thank you, also, to Hanan Massalha, who helped me as both interpreter and guide during my two weeks in Israel Palestine in March 2012. I would like to express my warmest thanks to these individuals for their welcome, and for affording me their time and wisdom, now as in the past.

2 In this study, as in my previous qualitative research in Bat Shalom, my interviews were formal, in-depth, and thematically organized, but exploratory and open-ended. They were tape-recorded.

3 For a description and discussion of my "memory work" methodology in the revisiting project, see my chapter "Women Living and Re-living Armed Conflict: Exploring a Methodology for Spanning Time and Place," forthcoming in *Gendered Wars, Gendered Memories*, edited by Ayse Gul Altinay and Andrea Peto (Ashgate).

4 This was a half-hour film made by documentarist Dvora Liberman, on her own initiative, using interview and my still photographs. It was fortuitously completed in time for use during my 2012 fieldwork in Israel Palestine.

5 Bat Shalom of the North was comprised of individuals, not organizations. Though the number of activists was relatively small, fluctuating around twenty, it drew many more women to the events it organized.

6 See also Gorenberg (2011) and Grinberg (2010) for an account of this period.

7 In the last sixty years the population density in Arab municipalities, in which 91 percent of Palestinian citizens live has increased by a scarcely believable 1,600 percent. In the Galilee, Bat Zafon's home territory, despite their 70 percent majority of the population, Palestinian municipalities have jurisdiction over just 16 percent of the land (White 2012, 38).

8   OECD figures for 2010 suggest that 50 percent of Palestinians live in poverty. Seen another way, in 2010 they were one-third of all poor people in Israel. Of the thirty communities in Israel with the highest level of unemployment, twenty-seven are Arab. Israeli Palestinians' life expectancy is three years less than that of Israeli Jews and their infant mortality rate twice as high. They are only 8 percent of university students. These data, and those that follow in this section of the text are from Peleg and Waxman (2011, 32–46), citing statistics published by Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development 2010, among other sources. See also White (2012) for data on the status of Palestinians in Israel.

9   In May 2012, in a landmark ruling Israel's High Court judges obliged employers to work toward wage equality, citing figures showing women to earn an average of 66 percent of men's wages in 2010, against an average for OECD countries of 84 percent (Reuters 2012).

10 Knesset website, online at http://www.knesset.gov.il/mk/, accessed October 2012.

11 In 2007, there were only six women mayors out of the 253 who headed Jewish local authorities, and women were only 13.2 percent of all publicly elected local officials. Where positions are by appointment rather than election the disadvantage is less marked: women were 49.8 percent of all judges in 2008 (Euromed 2010, 21).

12 In contemporary Israel, Mizrahim (i.e. Jews of recent Middle Eastern, as opposed to European, provenance) constitute a disadvantaged economic class.

13 In a recent collection of essays, editors Rhoda Kanaaneh and Isis Nusair represent their contributors as part of a "Palestinian feminist movement" (Kanaaneh and Nusair 2010, 11).

14 The Israeli general election of January 2013, while confirming the Likud coalition in power, saw a slight loss of influence on the part of "hawkish" right-wing and religious parties, and the emergence of a new moderate party, Yesh Atid, with a surprising twenty-one seats in the Knesset. The result appears to have raised hopes of a renewal of the peace process.

15 See their website, http://www.womeninblack.org.

16 A conference on 'The Palestinian One-State Solution' was held in Boston, Massachusetts, in March 2009 (Hafez 2009). See also Tilly (2005), Hilal (2007), Morris (2009) and Zreik (2011).

Acknowledgments

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