

### Chapter 3

#### Israeli Women and Peacemaking

On a Friday morning in early July, I attended one of the few activities of Bat Shalom that occurred during the summer months of 1999. Eight of Bat Shalom's most active members, ranging in age from forty to seventy, gathered for a political discussion, called a "political coffeehouse," at Sograim, one of West Jerusalem's stylish, new-age coffee houses, located within minutes of the Knesset, the Israeli parliament.<sup>1</sup> Almost all of the women held advanced degrees and had participated in peacemaking movements for over fifteen years. Over espressos and lattes, the women's often heated discussion ranged from lamenting the inclusion of right-wing religious Shas members into Ehud Barak's new government coalition to brainstorming methods of introducing more leftist political sentiment into Israel's new immigrant communities. The women frequently expressed frustration about the effectiveness of their activities in the short and long term. For example, Yehudit, a Bat Shalom staff member who facilitated the discussion, posed the following question, inquiring about the objectives of the *Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions*, an organization supported by Bat Shalom:<sup>2</sup>

Are we rebuilding their [the Palestinian's] demolished homes just to help? Who do we have to reach out to touch? The Palestinians? The government? The [Israeli] public?

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<sup>1</sup> This political coffeehouse is an example of one distinct type of Bat Shalom activity: political education programs designed to educate Israeli women and Bat Shalom members about politics and the peace process.

<sup>2</sup> *The Israel Committee Against House Demolitions* organizes groups of Israeli peace activists, including Bat Shalom members, to rebuild the Palestinian houses destroyed by Israeli bulldozers. House demolitions occur when any house or building is built illegally without an Israeli-issued permit. In addition to a display of solidarity between the Israeli activists and the Palestinian homeowners, these organized rebuilding efforts are one of the few programs that involve both Israeli and Palestinian peace activists together. Jeff Halper, interview, 10 August 1999.

Yehudit's question captured the current debate among members of Bat Shalom. Like the many other peace organizations throughout Israel, Bat Shalom finds itself at a crossroads. The three years of inertia that stalled the international peace process during the Netanyahu administration has undermined the peace camp's credibility with both Israeli constituents and Palestinian peacemakers. Now, as the peace process resumes in the wake of the election of Prime Minister Ehud Barak, Bat Shalom as an organization and its individual members are reassessing how their efforts and resources can be best utilized.

The uncertainty over how to best change government policies regarding the peace process and the treatment of the Palestinians emerged prominently from the coffeehouse discussion. Yet over the course of the discussion a consensus also emerged that Bat Shalom should raise the political consciousness of the Israeli public, "ignorant or blind to the plight of the Palestinians." Nava, an outspoken participant, asked the group rhetorically:

Do you know how many Israelis do not know about the water shortages in the West Bank towns?<sup>3</sup>

This would be the new thrust of Bat Shalom — letting the Israeli public know what the facts were on the ground, the situation of Palestinians, and their rights.

Like their Palestinian partners in The Jerusalem Center for Women (JCW), the women of Bat Shalom are committed peace activists who occupy a particular

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<sup>3</sup> Political coffeehouse, July 2, 1999. This political education program is one of the five kinds of programs sponsored by Bat Shalom. See Section II, p. 69 of this chapter for a list of all five.

niche as a grassroots group within the current Israeli political system. In contrast to the broad definition of peacemaking provided by the Palestinian women whom I interviewed, the Israeli women agreed among themselves on a narrower definition of peacemaking. The Israeli women defined peacemaking as activities, programs, and campaigns designed to exert political pressure on the Knesset, the Prime Minister, and other governmental bodies to change their military and security policies and Israeli international relations policies in general towards more compromising positions. Peacemakers, they said, also try to bring a more sympathetic, humanitarian, and balanced picture of the Arab-Israeli conflict to the Israeli public consciousness.

According to the sixteen Israeli women and men whom I interviewed, peacemaking counter-balances the prevailing traditional Israeli political ethos that has long been preoccupied with military security. Unlike their Palestinian counterparts, whose activities fall under the broad goal of state building, Israeli peacemakers often lobby *against* the dominant, mainstream ethno-national political ethos in their country, rather than in support of it. Stopping settlement building in the West Bank, protecting Palestinian Jerusalemites' residency rights, sharing Jerusalem as two capitals for two states, and stopping the torture of Palestinian prisoners all exemplify the political positions and policies urged by Israeli peacemakers to counter the dominant ethos in their country.

In short, by supporting projects that provide greater rights to Palestinians, Israeli women peacemakers often articulate positions unpopular among the political mainstream. Usually, the direct beneficiaries of their efforts are not Israelis. Bat

Shalom understands that since the Israeli government yields much of the power over the future of the Palestinians and the emerging Palestinian State, pressuring the Israeli government must be their primary focus. Unlike the Palestinian women, the Israeli women articulate not a politics of collective national unity but a politics of opposition. This politics has three characteristics.

First, like the Palestinians, the Israeli women are objects of a distinct historical process. The fifty-two years of Israeli statehood, as well as the Jewish history that culminated in the Zionist project, have deeply affected the role of women within Israeli society. The women that I interviewed said specifically that the gendered assumptions of the dominant national culture often exclude Israeli women. Because the nationalism of Israel is inherently linked to militarism and the question of security — symbolized often in national lore by the image of a young Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) soldier holding a machine gun — women often feel marginalized, on the “fringes” of this masculine national ethos. A feeling of marginalization leads them to question this national ethos more than men, which is undoubtedly one reason for the fact long noticed by researchers and by the Israeli women I interviewed, that far more Israeli women than men have joined peace organizations.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The following works reiterate this point and I draw from them in my explanation of the military’s affect on Israeli women: Naomi Chazan, “Israeli Women and Peace Activism,” in *Calling the Equality Bluff: Women in Israel*, ed. Barbara Swirski and Marilyn P. Safir (Elmsford, New York: Pergamon Press, 1991); Galia Golan, “Militarization and Gender: The Israeli Experience” (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1999, unpublished); Galia Golan and Zahira Kamal, “Bridging the Abyss: A Palestinian-Israeli Women’s Dialogue,” in *A Public Peace Process: Transforming Racial, Ethnic, and Community Conflict Through Sustained Dialogue*, ed. Harold Saunders (Basingstoke : Macmillan, 1999); and Yvonne Deutsch, “Women and the Israeli Occupation” in *Women and the Israeli Occupation*, ed. Tamar Mayer (London: Routledge, 1994).

Second, like their Palestinian colleagues, the Israeli women peacemakers are subjects, choosing particular programs and goals appropriate to their political culture. In this case, the Israeli peacemakers work within the context of a western-style democracy undertaking the challenge of international negotiations and political compromise. Bat Shalom's emphasis on joint work with Palestinians — both dialogue groups and ameliorative social action projects — reflect its members' empathetic consideration for the plight of the Palestinian people. I will call this empathetic moral orientation "other-regarding." The care, empathy, and ability to relate to Palestinian suffering resembles the moral behavior predicted by Carole Gilligan's ethic of care thesis. Yet when questioned about the gendered ethic of care hypothesis, the Israeli women reacted cautiously. Like the Palestinian women, they offered conflicting explanations for how and why women might be better equipped to engage in peace activism than men. The fact that so many Israeli male peacemakers, including two that I interviewed, also revealed "other-regarding" moral orientations and attributes of the ethic of care, challenges assumptions of gender specificity or exclusivity suggested by the ethic.

Finally, the third section of this chapter will explore the discourse of rights implied by the Israeli women peacemaker's "other-regarding" moral orientation. I will argue that both Bat Shalom's situation on the political fringes of the national discourse and Bat Shalom members' experiences as feminists within an often-sexist society have influenced the organization's model of peacemaking, its caring approach to securing rights. Although the women of Bat Shalom support the same theoretical principles and political positions as their Palestinian counterparts

in the Jerusalem Center for Women, the Israeli activists engage in this discourse differently, adopting the other-regarding moral language of duty, sympathy, empathy, concern, and relatedness.

## **I. Objects of the Israeli National Experience**

### **On the “Fringes” of the Political Establishment**

All of the sixteen Israeli interviewees (including the two men) agreed that Israeli women peacemakers are situated on the “fringes” politically in Israel. Their explanations of this political marginalization differed. Many focused on the situation in general of women in Israel. Some cited low numbers of female members of Knesset and the few women involved in local politics as proof of a “glass ceiling of female political participation in the government that [led] to women being mostly involved at the grassroots.”<sup>5</sup> Two women cited the all-male Israeli delegation to Oslo as demonstrating the exclusion of women from the international peace process. The overwhelming majority, however, twelve out of the fourteen women, pointed to some aspect of the military or military occupation as an important factor that has institutionalized sexism and kept women from obtaining much political power in Israel. As in other states engaged in constant

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<sup>5</sup> Ronny Jaeger, interview, 25 July 1999. The phrase “glass ceiling” comes from the U.S. feminist movement. Jaeger, a recent Israeli emigrant, had her roots in that movement. As I will discuss in Part Three of this chapter, many of the Israeli women in the peace movement and Bat Shalom members have had political experience in feminist or peace activism outside of Israel. Unlike any of the Palestinian women I interviewed, four of the fourteen Israeli women, including the director of Bat Shalom, are native English speakers who were born in the US or Canada and immigrated to Israel. This high percentage of English-speaking non-natives in the Israeli women’s peace camp is typical of the Israeli peace camp as a whole. Specifically, many of the immigrant Israelis involved in Bat Shalom were once involved in western feminist movements and anti-war movements. This western (particularly North American) influence on Bat Shalom’s ideas and strategies increase the gap between the organization and its average Israeli member. The many Americans involved in Bat Shalom also puts the Palestinian women of The Jerusalem Link at a

international conflict, military and security policies are of prominent concern in Israel. All of these defense-oriented societal institutions are normally imbued with masculine values, thinking, and language.<sup>6</sup> The national emphasis on militarization has reinforced traditions that have historically associated masculinity with war and femininity with peace. The marginalization of women, created by the centrality of the military to everyday Israeli life, is ironic given that the Israeli army is famous for its early egalitarianism; since the beginning of Israeli statehood, all eighteen-year old women have served in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) for nearly two years.

Thus, while the Palestinian women I interviewed described their national experiences during Israeli occupation and resistance as creating both opportunities for and exclusions from political participation, most of the Israeli women peacemakers I interviewed described *only* the exclusions from politics that have resulted from their militarized society. They also detailed the general sense of political alienation among many women and their sense of exclusion from the main national discourse. This sense of marginalization has encouraged women to participate politically through the alternative venue of grassroots peacemaking.

Service in the IDF is not as egalitarian as it might seem. Many of the Israeli women pointed out that the IDF as an institution strongly reinforces and even generates sexism within Israeli society. Although all eighteen years olds serve in the IDF, women serve less than two years and men serve three. Moreover, the

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linguistic disadvantage within the dialogue groups, at board meetings, and in joint activities, for all of these are generally conducted in English.

<sup>6</sup> Both Jean Bethke Elstain, in *Women and War* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1987) and in *Women, Militarism, and War*, ed. with Sheila Tobias (Savage, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield

tasks given to men and women soldiers reinforce traditional gender stereotypes. Israeli women are often given clerical or administrative jobs or placed in social service or educational fieldwork. The young men serve on the front lines, in the battlefields, in the tank units, and the most elite airforce units.<sup>7</sup> Men earn the war decorations, medals, and the subsequent benefits of these accolades in later life. For example, many officers and decorated war heroes receive tax-deductions, health care incentives, free educational access, and benefit from the old boys network of former generals and military men. In addition to finding employment through their military achievements, the decorated male IDF heroes receive widespread societal respect.

As the mandatory training ground for adult life, the military experience promotes sexism and inequality within Israel. A founding member of Bat Shalom, Nava Eisin described Israeli society as historically and currently “very chauvinistic:”

One of the reasons we wanted an all women’s group was because of the role of the army in every walk of life. We thought of a women’s peace network for women and by women [because] the central role of security in our lives works against women. We see it everywhere. For example, in the work force, most men get trained in the army, get trained, and have military record to show for themselves. If they are good, they can choose a military career. So many of Israel’s Prime Ministers come from the military. Through army, there is a good old boys network. So, we feel that working for peace and thus decreasing the power of the military is actually working to the advantage of women. Also, brutality and violence all result from the military security.<sup>8</sup>

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Publishers, 1990) and Cynthia Enloe, in *Does Khaki Become You?* (London: Pluto Press, 1983) analyze the historical myths that have “gendered” war and peace.

<sup>7</sup> A military reform bill passed in the Knesset in February 2000 now allows women to serve in certain combat units in the IDF.

<sup>8</sup> Nava Eisin, interview, 9 August 1999.

Other Israeli women from Bat Shalom concurred that societal emphasis on militarism has “trickled down” into everyday Israeli life, leading to greater violence, even within the family.<sup>9</sup> For Eisin, the feminist goals of equality within Israel are inextricably linked to the political goals of “peace,” and with peace the hope that the prominent role of the military in Israeli society will be reduced. This theoretical connection between feminism and anti-militarism or peace is encapsulated by Bat Shalom’s self-description as a “feminist peace organization of Israeli women.”<sup>10</sup> By rejecting Israeli militarism and its manifestations — such as the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, or the harsh treatment of the Palestinian prisoners — Bat Shalom aims also to obliterate the more subtle repercussions of militarism within Israeli society, such as sexism and inequality.

All of the Israeli women I interviewed agreed on an essential component of peace activism in Israel, by both mixed gender and all female groups: criticizing or at least reassessing the prevailing security discourse. But because of the sexist and exclusionary nature of the national discourse, they pointed out, women find themselves freer than men to challenge this militarized discourse. On the fringes, they often feel less attached to the discourse, even if they are not necessarily less loyal to its underlying ideologies, such as Zionism or Israeli Nationalism, or their goals.

Since the 1970s, the female peace activists within Israel have argued internally about whether their efforts could be best served within a mixed gender or

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<sup>9</sup> Ronny Jaeger, interview, 20 July 1999.

<sup>10</sup> “Our Home Page,” <<http://www.batshalom.org>>.

all-women's peace group.<sup>11</sup> Five of the Israeli women I interviewed criticized the well-known, mixed gender, broad-based peace organizations such as *Peace Now* for depending on societal approval, failing to diverge from mainstream political centrist positions, and seeking legitimacy in the eyes of the Israeli public through the military origins of their members. *Peace Now* was founded by 350 reserve officers and IDF soldiers in 1978.<sup>12</sup> Military identification lends credibility within Israeli political culture, reflected in the fact that all previous heads of state, including the current Labor, peace-directed Prime Minister Ehud Barak, have distinguished themselves militarily within the IDF or in one of Israel's wars. The Israeli public was more likely to accept Ehud Barak and Yitzhak Rabin's peace initiatives because both Labor leaders had distinguished themselves valiantly in Israeli wars. *Peace Now* seeks legitimacy through the same military guise.<sup>13</sup>

Gila Svirsky, director of Bat Shalom, pointed out that *Peace Now* is also constrained by the political aspirations of its members. Many potential Knesset candidates from Labor, Meretz, and Chadash, all left-wing political parties, begin their political careers as *Peace Now* activists. As a result, their willingness to take daring stands on politically sensitive issues such as sharing Jerusalem, withdrawing from the Golan Heights, or dismantling settlements in the Occupied Territories is

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<sup>11</sup> See Chazan, 152- 161.

<sup>12</sup> "About Peace Now," <<http://www.peace-now.org>>.

<sup>13</sup> Gila Svirsky, interview, 6 July 1999. Simona Sharoni makes this point in "Motherhood and the Politics of Women's Resistance: Israeli Women Organizing for Peace" in *The Politics of Motherhood: Activist Voices from Left to Right*, eds. Alexis Jetter, Annelise Orleck, and Diana Taylor (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1997). Elise Young presents a radical version of this argument in *Keepers of the History: Women and the Israeli Palestinian Conflict* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992). She argues that, thus far, historians have written a military and thus male-focused history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and concludes that the real potential for peaceful compromise must begin by re-writing this history with an eye to the Palestinian and Israeli women's experiences.

more limited than that of the members of Bat Shalom. *Peace Now*'s stated position on the status of Jerusalem reflects its attempts at political acceptability:

Many issues remain to be solved in international negotiations, particularly with the Palestinians; perhaps the most sensitive of these is the issue of Jerusalem. A mutually acceptable solution can and must be found, giving expression to the national and political rights of the 170,000 Palestinians of East Jerusalem. The municipal borders, altered by Israel after the Six-Day War, may be readjusted, and the two states may have their capitals in Jerusalem: the Palestinians in the Arab areas, the Israelis in our areas. Religious sites must be open to all.<sup>14</sup>

The language used by *Peace Now* is open-ended and vague, as befits an organization with political connections. The tentative position that Jerusalem's borders "may be readjusted" and that Israel and Palestine in the future "may have their capitals in Jerusalem" differ from the more definitive, stronger position posited by Bat Shalom:

Jerusalem belongs to all of us – Israelis, Palestinians, and all its residents – Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Jerusalem must be open to all and belong to all that wish to dwell within. Jerusalem can be united only by mutual agreement between the two nations and their two states, Israel and Palestine, with Jerusalem serving as the two capitals of two sovereign states.<sup>15</sup>

While *Peace Now* promises only that religious sites "must" be accessible to all, Bat Shalom presents the more daring political statement that the city itself belongs to "all of us." Bat Shalom's political commitment to securing a Palestinian capital within the Jerusalem city limits also represents a more extreme commitment than

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<sup>14</sup> "Jerusalem-A Shared City," <<http://www.peace-now.org>>. A veteran activist of *Peace Now*, Irene Levy described her organization as more pragmatic than Bat Shalom; "Peace Now is not as ideologically oriented. For example, Bat Shalom will have a campaign to share Jerusalem but we won't because we don't run a campaign if we don't think it will happen.... We want to split Jerusalem too but we won't come out and say it. It would be counter productive." Irene Levy, interview, 5 August 1999.

<sup>15</sup> "Recent Political Statements," <<http://www.batshalom.org>>.

any that have been currently offered by either *Peace Now* or the Labor government's top negotiators on the Jerusalem issue.

The peacemakers of Bat Shalom fill a unique political niche, as the major, all-female political peacemaking group. They are less fettered by political considerations than more mainstream (and mixed gender) groups. Yaala Cohen is an active participant in *Women in Black*, a group of women activists that predates the founding of Bat Shalom. (Many of the women I interviewed are active in both organizations.<sup>16</sup>) She explained that Israeli women on the fringes could be more daring as “we have nothing to lose.”<sup>17</sup> This position contrasts sharply with that of the Palestinian women I interviewed, whose goals vis à vis Israel support those of their government.

### **Challenges of the Political “Fringes”**

Being self-consciously on the “fringes” does not mean that Bat Shalom has no power. Israel's top women politicians affiliate and sit on the Board of Trustees of Bat Shalom. Board members include Deputy Speaker of Knesset, Naomi Chazan (Meretz), Knesset member Yael Dayan (Labor), and former Knesset member Shulamit Aloni (Meretz). These women participate in Bat Shalom and support, at least ostensibly, the Bat Shalom positions that are not endorsed by their own mainstream political parties. However, Meretz and Labor, two of the left wing, pro-peace Israeli governmental parties, do not share Bat Shalom's positions on sharing Jerusalem and dismantling all the West Bank settlements. There is a

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<sup>16</sup> *Women in Black* started in 1988 to protest the Israeli occupation. *Women in Black* members stand vigil with signs and posters in busy Israel intersections throughout the country. Women from other conflict-ridden areas have copied this tactic.

<sup>17</sup> Yaala Cohen, interview, 2 July 1999.

gap between Bat Shalom's stated support for certain more daring political positions and the actual policy measures that their representatives in positions of political power can implement. The fact that the most influential board members of Bat Shalom are limited by the political constraints of their parties undermines the organization's legitimacy with the Palestinians and provokes frequent charges by both Palestinian and Israeli critics that Bat Shalom and other Israeli peace groups "don't deliver."<sup>18</sup>

Although the dissonance between the positions held by Bat Shalom and the policies that can now be feasibly implemented through governmental channels often frustrates members of the organization and their critics, Bat Shalom continues to petition for more radical positions. Bat Shalom often publicly commits to political compromises with the Palestinians and organizes activities, such as marches, demonstrations, and letter-writing campaigns, that would not be undertaken by other peace groups. For example, its 1997 endorsement of sharing Jerusalem — stating that Jerusalem should be shared, as two capitals for two states — was more radical than even Barak's stated position on Jerusalem in 1999. Bat Shalom's endorsement of these more radical statements ironically means that the organization does not accurately represent the average political positions of its 2000 members — women throughout Israel who receive Bat Shalom's weekly email newsletter and participate variably in Bat Shalom activities. Like the Palestinian peacemaking leadership described in Chapter Two, Bat Shalom's organizational leadership

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<sup>18</sup> These exact words were used by two Palestinian peace activists, Hanan Aruri and Soraida Hussein, during my interviews with them.

represents a small subculture that holds different views from those of the average Israeli woman.

While the Palestinian leadership of the Jerusalem Center for Women differs from its constituents in higher education, greater socio-economic means, and more open, less traditional life-styles, the Bat Shalom leadership differs from its constituents in its more radical political positioning. The Bat Shalom leadership, therefore, is often criticized not only for failing to secure its political demands through their conduits in the Knesset, but also for not accurately representing the political positions held by mainstream Israeli women. Although the Israeli public increasingly sympathizes with the plight of the Palestinians, far fewer would protest against Israeli policies or rebuild a West Bank house of a Bedouin after it was destroyed. Rabbi Arik Ascherman, director of the mixed gender peace group *Rabbis for Human Rights* (which joins with Bat Shalom for many of its activities) represented Bat Shalom's more radical political situation with the phrase, "They are left of left."<sup>19</sup>

## **II. Subjects with Regard for the "Other"**

Over half of the Israeli women I interviewed used the words "leap of faith" to describe the stance necessary to engage in peace activism. Feeling and acting upon concern for the plight of the Palestinians requires commitment. As Judith Green put it,

I am proud of the Israeli left, given that the people of the left have nothing to gain. In fact, those members who protest the settler

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<sup>19</sup> Rabbi Arik Ascherman, interview, 21 June 1999.

activists is definitely not a venue to get to the Knesset and can even be perceived as unpatriotic and anti- Jewish.<sup>20</sup>

The “leap of faith” is best viewed through the programs of Bat Shalom. While the JCW focuses on building civil society, understanding peacemaking broadly, Bat Shalom focuses specifically on ameliorating Palestinian conditions, reflecting its “other-regarding” moral orientation. Of course, the difference between Bat Shalom’s other-regarding programs and the JCW’s internally focused ones reflects the difference in the political context of each group. As citizens of an occupying state with open democratic processes, the Israeli women have the opportunity and ability to develop this other-regarding moral regard for the Palestinians, victims of the occupation with no autonomous state.<sup>21</sup>

Bat Shalom’s current programs fall into five general categories: joint programs with the JCW and other Palestinian women’s groups (e.g. dialogue groups); “political education” programs targeted at Bat Shalom’s own Israeli constituents (e.g. political coffeehouses); domestic political activism, directed at Israeli lawmakers and decision-makers (e.g. lobbying in front of the Knesset to free Palestinian political prisoners); international political activism, encouraging foreigners (mostly American Jews) to lobby their governments about Israeli human rights policies; and political action projects, often ameliorative projects designed to support human rights issues among Palestinians (e.g. rebuilding demolished

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<sup>20</sup> Judith Green, interview, 25 July 1999.

<sup>21</sup> As almost every Israeli woman peacemaker that I interviewed pointed out, the other-regarding moral perspective results primarily from the desire by the Israelis to redress the historical wrongs committed by their government. The Israelis have wielded power as the occupiers; the Palestinians have suffered under occupation. A sense of guilt emanated from many of the Israeli interviews as the Israeli women pointed out that it was their duty to help the Palestinians build a state and provide for basic human rights. In Chapter Five, I explore this sense of guilt as it shapes a sense of duty among the Israeli women to engage in peacemaking.

houses). I will focus on the dialogue groups and ameliorative political action projects, because these two kinds of programs best reflect the Bat Shalom emphasis on Palestinian rights.

### **Dialogue Groups**

Palestinian-Israeli dialogue groups form the cornerstone of the joint work between Bat Shalom and the JCW (under the auspices of the Jerusalem Link). Teenagers, university students, and adult women, divided into small groups, meet consistently over a yearlong period in political and personal discussions facilitated by a trained moderator. Bat Shalom's website describes these dialogue groups as "projects that expose participants to one another's realities, providing an opportunity to dissolve stereotypes." Dialogue groups have sprung up prolifically throughout Israel in the past fifteen years. The attempt to bring together Palestinians and Israelis, of all ages, occupational, and socio-economic backgrounds, reflects a political understanding that, in the future, the sustainability of a secure and just peace between the Palestinian and Israeli states will depend on the coexistence and tolerance forged among their peoples.<sup>22</sup>

In contrast to mixed gender dialogue groups, The Jerusalem Link groups were founded on the premise that women would engage differently in the process of sharing, understanding, tolerance, and empathy that dialoguing entails. The Israeli women I interviewed, who, in general, seemed much more optimistic about the success of the dialogue groups than their Palestinian counterparts, provided several reasons why dialogue groups composed of all women would be different

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<sup>22</sup> "Bat Shalom's Ongoing Activities," <<http://www.batshalom.org>>.

from mixed gender ones. First, the shared experience of womanhood within patriarchal societies provides a common starting point for Israeli and Palestinian women. Bat Shalom founding member Galia Golan said that she and the other founders chose women's dialogue groups "because we believed as feminists that we would be able to build on gender identity to narrow the divide between the two sides."<sup>23</sup> Second, women's groups give women the opportunity to express themselves when often they have been left out of decision-making bodies in both Palestinian and Israeli communities. For example, two of the Israeli women whom I interviewed mentioned that they felt more "free to speak up, to say [their] minds" in an all-women's dialogue group than in a mixed gender dialogue group. Third, the first critical task faced within each dialogue group is to overcome the Israeli view of the Palestinian as a terrorist and the Palestinian view of the Israeli as a soldier poised to kill. For women, this preconception of the other is far less salient — an Israeli woman does not necessarily evoke the image of a deadly soldier nor a Palestinian woman the image of a terrorist.<sup>24</sup>

In practice, however, both the Israeli and Palestinian women peacemakers expressed mixed feelings about the success of the all-women's groups in dispelling the stereotypes and suspicions engrained by decades of war and bloodshed.<sup>25</sup> Both

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<sup>23</sup> Galia Golan, interview, 23 August 1999.

<sup>24</sup> See Galia Golan "Militarization and Gender: The Israeli Experience," 10.

<sup>25</sup> See Tamara Pearson d'Estree and Eileen F. Babbitt, "Women and the Art of Peacemaking: Data from Israeli-Palestinian Problem-solving Workshops," *Political Psychology* 19, no. 1 (1998): 185-209. This study analyzed the specific behavior of Israeli and Palestinian women involved in an international problem-solving workshop conducted by Herbert Kelman at the Harvard Center for International Affairs. The authors looked for evidence of change in political activity (through writing, speaking and other avenues) during the workshop or as a result of it. The authors observed both mixed gender workshop and the all-women's workshop and conducted follow-up interviews with the participants seven to ten months after the workshops. They concluded that the all-female workshop did not produce more discussion of specific cooperative actions than did the mixed gender workshop. Nor did the all-female participants place a greater emphasis on

groups of women articulated some lack of parity between Israeli and Palestinian dialogue participants that impeded the dialogue process and the ability to find a common feminist understanding. Many used the words “unequal footing” or “different starting points” to describe this lack of parity. One Israeli activist offered her own experiences within the Jerusalem Link dialogue group:

It is hard to come to these groups as the occupier dealing with the occupied. We [the two groups of women] have had such different experiences nationally and personally over our life times. It sometimes takes two or three sessions to even talk the same language.<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, literally, they are often not speaking the same language. The joint dialogue groups are conducted in English, presumably so that both the Palestinians and Israeli participants can communicate in a neutral language. Many of the Israeli participants, however, are native English speakers or are typically more fluent and comfortable in English than the Palestinians. Thus, many of the Israeli women not only have the linguistic advantage, but they also bring a discourse, world-view, and set of experiences to the dialogue groups that are foreign to those of the Palestinian women.

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responsibilities than on rights. They did find a few more instances of receptivity and empathy in the all-women’s workshop. They observed that the all-women’s group tended to convey personal experiences with the conflict rather than reiterations of historical claims. The most outstanding difference they found was in the participants’ perceptions of the event’s success. Although politically the workshops did not differ in their outcomes, those in the mixed gender workshop saw the event as a failure. The all-women’s workshop participants did not see the event as a failure because they had succeeded in establishing a significant relationship and continued this relationship after the workshop ended. This study may not be generalizable because it looked at a self-selected group who chose to participate in these workshops; the participants and facilitators were also members of the Israeli and Palestinian political elite. Moreover, both workshops were held in Cambridge, Massachusetts as opposed to the dialogue groups that are held in local community centers in Israel and Palestine. Studies of dialogue groups are difficult because the presence of outside observers and guests often changes the dynamic of such groups.

<sup>26</sup> Ronny Jaeger, interview, 20 July 1999.

Both the Israeli and Palestinian women peacemakers that I interviewed pointed out how the motivations and objectives of the Palestinian and Israeli participants of the dialogue groups differed. Bat Shalom director Gila Svirsky explained these differing goals for the dialogue group as envisioned by the two sides:

Israelis participate in dialogue groups so they can sleep better at night. Palestinians participate in dialogue groups so they can prevent us from sleeping at night. It is hard to communicate when the Palestinians really want a venue to say, look you are f-ing us over, and the Israelis are interested in talking about books, art, and culture.<sup>27</sup>

The Israelis, in other words, come to the groups driven by a sense of guilt or moral obligation to confront the victims of their government's policy; the Palestinians came to reinforce or support this sense of guilt with personal anecdotes and experiences. Svirsky also highlighted another disjunction between the goals of the Palestinian and Israeli dialogue group members. While Israelis see the group session as an opportunity to befriend or understand the "other," the Palestinians use the dialogue groups to vent their frustrations and articulate serious political demands.

Although Svirsky's opinion does not capture the experience of all of the Israeli women I interviewed, many Palestinians and Israelis expressed doubt about the dialogue groups as effective means of implementing change. Many Israelis noted that during the Gulf War in 1991, the dialogue groups were virtually suspended, reflecting the tendencies of both Israeli and Palestinian women to

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<sup>27</sup> Gila Svirsky, interview, 5 August 1999. Irene Levy said the same problem occurred among the mixed gender dialogue groups: "A lot of dialogues aren't even such.... They [the

“avoid our differences, even to ignore them, lest confrontation destroy the possibility of cooperation.”<sup>28</sup> The feminist basis for mutual trust is tenuous at best. The ability of all-women’s groups to overcome political difference does not necessarily exceed the ability of mixed gender groups or even of the elite leaders and negotiators of the international peace process.<sup>29</sup>

A sense of guilt, unease, or anger about the injustices suffered by the Palestinians affect the moral perspective of almost all of the Israeli women peacemakers whom I interviewed. Gila Svirsky and other women spoke frequently of their inability to sleep at night after hearing the stories of suffering, poverty, and violence expressed by the Palestinians during the dialogue groups. In Chapter Five, I will take up the prominent role of duty and sympathy in the moral ethics underlying the Israeli women’s activism.

### **Political Action Projects**

Practical political reality also creates different program preferences among the Palestinians and the Israelis in the Jerusalem Link. The Palestinian women choose programs focused on civil society because they see this as an urgent next step in the process of becoming a state. The Israeli women choose petitioning the Israeli government to change unjust policies because they realize this strategy can

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Palestinians] come and say whatever and we just sit and listen.” Irene Levy, interview, 5 August 1999.

<sup>28</sup> Golan, “Militarization and Gender: The Israeli Experience,” 10. Golan contends that women are particularly socialized to avoid these differences and to avoid confrontation in general more than men. This socialized learned behavior leads to different behavior among women and men in dialogue groups, with women avoiding the most difficult political discussions and men engaging in these discussions head-on, 10-12.

<sup>29</sup> Many of the Israeli women peacemakers pointed to the sustained “political crisis” period of Benjamin Netanyahu’s tenure as Prime Minister as undermining the basis for mutual trust required within dialogue groups. The frustrations experienced by elite level peace negotiators during the three year peace process stalemate reverberated on the ground, affecting grassroots activism in general but specifically adding tension to the dialogue group program.

work in their western-style, multi-party democracy. In addition to letter writing, demonstrating, and otherwise pressuring the Israeli government to change its policies, Bat Shalom's political action programs often entail participatory projects. Many of these hands-on political action projects bring Israelis to the West Bank or Gaza to work with Palestinians on their own civil society ventures, thus fostering interaction among the two populations.

Bat Shalom's peacemaking objectives are "other-regarding" in their central concern with Palestinian conditions and rights. During the summer of 1999, Bat Shalom's political action activities focused primarily on Palestinian house demolitions. Seven out of the ten Bat Shalom email newsletters sent out over a three month period from June until September included details about house demolitions, rebuilding efforts, and campaigns to petition the Israeli government to stop this practice. According to Bat Shalom figures, since 1967, Israeli bulldozers have destroyed 6,000 Palestinian houses, leaving homeless 30,000 Palestinians, of whom two-thirds are children.

The Israeli government claims that these houses were built illegally, and justifies its demolition of them. This is hypocritical: In three decades of occupation, Israel has issued virtually no building permits to Palestinians, while construction in the Israeli settlements has gone on and on — in blatant defiance of the fourth Geneva Convention on Human Rights. It is the settlements that are patently illegal, not the Palestinian houses, built only to accommodate their growing families.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> "Action: Demolition of Palestinian Homes," <<http://www.batshalom.org>>. Note that these figures are those of Bat Shalom and the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, as well as other Israeli peace groups. The Israeli government's figures often differ. In March 1999, however, Israeli Civil Administration spokesman Lt. Peter Lerner confirmed that 1,300 illegally built Palestinian homes had been demolished since 1990. Lerner said that Palestinian land seized is expropriated for public use, mostly for new roads to serve both Palestinians and Israelis. The landowners receive compensation upon proof of ownership, he said. See Margot Dudkevitch, "Activists Protest Anti-Arab Practices in West Bank, Jerusalem," *The Jerusalem Post*, 11 March 1999, sec 1a, p. 2.

Bat Shalom activists have joined with the *Israeli Coalition Against House Demolitions* and other Israeli and Palestinian peace groups, traveling on weekends into the West Bank to physically rebuild the demolished houses of the Palestinians. In addition, Bat Shalom has initiated a widespread letter writing campaign, disseminating a form letter over email that can be easily sent to leaders such as President Bill Clinton and Prime Minister Ehud Barak.<sup>31</sup>

The recent emphasis on house demolitions (and the allotment of resources to this at the expense of other major political issues) reflects Bat Shalom's emphasis on other-regarding objectives. On July 9, 1999, for example, Bat Shalom, in conjunction with thirteen other Israeli, Palestinian, and joint Israeli-Palestinian peace groups, planned a weekend-long event to finish rebuilding the demolished home of Salim and Arabia Shawamreh in the village of Anata, a small Palestinian area north of Jerusalem.<sup>32</sup> The Friday and Saturday event drew hundreds of peace activists, who marked the one-year anniversary of the house's demolition by completing the house, holding a dedication ceremony, helping the Shawamreh family move in, and hosting a "Peace Gathering." The event was

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<sup>31</sup> The role of email and the world-wide-web in connecting Bat Shalom's 2000 members and as a potential source and locus of activism is specific to the Israeli side of The Jerusalem Link. The Palestinian women members and activists involved in the Jerusalem Center for Women do not have such widespread network connection. The central role of electronic communication to Bat Shalom means that its active participants spawn internationally and include women from other countries, non-Jews, and Jews. As a result, specifically, Bat Shalom has led a successful letter writing campaign, encouraging foreigners to petition their governments to protest Israeli human rights abuses. The Jerusalem Center for Women, although also funded and supported internationally, cannot rely on email as an effective, centralizing communication mechanism for its organization. Its members must physically travel to local communities, such as rural villages and refugee camps, to plan some of its programs.

<sup>32</sup> See "Action: Demolition of Palestinian Homes," <<http://www.batshalom.org>> for further details about the demolition of the Shawamreh home and those of other Palestinians.

purposefully timed to celebrate the resumption of the international peace process in the wake of Ehud Barak's 1999 election and the renewal of optimism among Israeli and Palestinian peace activists.

Bat Shalom's method of conveying the problem of house demolition reflects its attempt to personalize and identify the Palestinian beneficiaries of its efforts. The organizational website, presenting the background of the house demolition issue, posted an anecdotal story that included the experiences of sixteen-year-old Lena Shawamreh during the 1998 demolition of her house. The touching, first-person narrative documents the experience of the house demolition and the violence that erupted in its wake through the eyes of an Israeli peacemaker who had attended the event.<sup>33</sup> The heart-warming story can be used to change Israeli public opinion, cultivating greater sympathy for the plight of the Palestinians. According to Jeff Halper, the director of the *Israeli Coalition Against House Demolitions*, the issue of house demolitions has taken a strong emotional hold among both male and female Israeli peacemakers, because:

We are in touch with families, we have brought Israelis to feel Palestinian's loss and their fear of losing their houses. We have succeeded in getting Israelis in touch with Palestinians such as the Shawamreh family. There is a sense of urgency, of personal involvement. Before, it [the peace activity] was all so cerebral. Now, when I say, 'they are sending in the bulldozer,' Israelis get really upset.<sup>34</sup>

The women of Bat Shalom recognize that political action projects — such as publicizing the plight of the Shawamreh family, rebuilding their homes, and

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<sup>33</sup> See Appendix D for a complete version of "Lena Doesn't Live Here Anymore" from "Action: Demolition of Palestinian Homes," <<http://www.batshalom.org>>.

<sup>34</sup> Jeff Halper, interview, 10 August 1999.

petitioning the Israeli government to change its house demolition policy — require engendering sympathy among the Israeli public. The women of Bat Shalom said that the demolition of houses should outrage all Israelis, regardless of gender, age, or political affiliation. Israelis rebuilding Palestinian houses and forging bonds with the local Palestinian communities represents Bat Shalom’s ideal model of activism, a full realization of its other-regarding goals. The objectives of Bat Shalom and other Israeli peace groups — ameliorating Palestinian conditions and petitioning for Palestinian rights — contrast with the goals of the official negotiators.

### **Why We Do What We Do: The Israeli Response to the Gender Ethic of Care**

As with the Palestinian peacemakers, I asked the Israeli women to respond to the “ethic of care hypothesis,” suggesting that women, in comparison to men, might display different skills or tendencies in their peace activism. Although I posed the same question to both Palestinian and Israeli peacemakers, their answers reflected their differing conception of peacemaking. As Chapter Two revealed, the Palestinians define peacemaking in broad terms. The Israelis have a narrower definition. For the Israelis, a peacemaker exerts pressure on the Israeli government or public to change its politics towards greater compromise on issues involved in the international peace process, such as sharing Jerusalem. While the Israelis, like the Palestinians, understand the activity of peacemaking through the lens of their own experiences, within the group of Israeli women I interviewed this understanding itself sometimes varied. These different meanings of peacemaking

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both among the Israelis and between the Israelis and the Palestinians complicated my attempt to ask the ethic of care question.

Like the Palestinian women, many of the fourteen Israeli women I interviewed suggested that women act differently from men in some capacity as peacemakers, but then changed their positions over the course of the interview. In contrast with the Palestinian women, however, the tendency among the Israeli women peacemakers was to acknowledge some biological, cultural, social, or adaptive difference between men and women with regard to peacemaking.

At age 87, Etti was the oldest person I interviewed. She registered the strongest support for the ethic of care hypothesis:

From a biological sense, we [women] are the closest to the topic of peace. I haven't done any research on it but I just know that all of the peace movements except Women in Black cannot do this every Friday — in the rain, snow, burning sun for ten years.<sup>35</sup>

Etti's assurance that women's physical and psychological endurance better equipped them to be peacemakers than men derived from her experience standing vigil with *Women in Black*. For the past twelve years, the group has held political signs protesting the occupation, settlement building, and other Israeli government policies at a busy Jerusalem intersection for one hour every Friday, as they did on the 100-degree day in early July in which I joined them.

Etti was the only Israeli or Palestinian woman who mentioned the role of biology. But most of the other Israeli women mentioned specific, typically female attributes that they thought conducive to grassroots peacemaking: patience,

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<sup>35</sup> Etti, interview, 2 July 1999.

flexibility, listening, stamina, long-term perspective, creativity, and endurance.<sup>36</sup>

Five women mentioned that women's patience — their ability to understand and foresee the more long-term processes involved in peacemaking — was particularly conducive to grassroots activity, such as demonstrating, participating in dialogue groups, and rebuilding houses (with the important symbolic sign of hope conveyed by this action). While men might become more impatient with political decisions, these women saw peacemaking as “less of a black and white process, one that included ups and downs.”<sup>37</sup> Jaeger compared this ability to engage in more patient, long-term activity to the act of raising kids:

I think peace is something you have to build and it takes a long time. Peace is attitudinal just as much as sitting down and drawing lines. Women are better at working at something long-term and sticking it out, raising kids and waiting. This difference is not genetic. It is cultural. You get results long-term.<sup>38</sup>

Jaeger said that one instance in which the process of changing public opinion within Israel would contribute to long term peace positions was by amassing public support for withdrawal from Occupied Territory land. Her words evoked Sarah Ruddick's argument that “maternal thinking,” learned and perfected during child raising, can be usefully applied to creative methods of peace activism.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, however, “maternal thinking” in Israel is often associated with a *defense*

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<sup>36</sup> The Israeli women I interviewed, in listing and describing what they believe are “typically female traits,” were aware that many of these traits are learned behavior patterns or responses to social forces. These essentialist gender forces and their impact are related to but not central to my project.

<sup>37</sup> Nava Eisin, interview, 9 August 1999.

<sup>38</sup> Ronny Jaeger, interview, 20 July 1999.

<sup>39</sup> In Chapter Five, I will discuss Sara Ruddick's view, presented in *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace*, that skills learned and practiced in the act of mothering “could make a distinctive contribution to peace politics,” 137.

of the national militarized discourse, because protecting Israeli soldiers (typically one's sons, brothers, father, or husband), Israeli land, and Zionist ideals has long been associated with maternal care.

Former Army Brigadier-General Amira Dotan emphasized that Israeli women were often more “flexible” than men. This flexibility allowed women more readily to change long-held political opinions, such as attitudes towards Palestinians, and to think of less traditional means of making peace, “working with what we have, what’s there.”<sup>40</sup> Nava Eisin concurred, pointing to specific skills that Israeli women are socialized to display:

I should think that women are more trained to listen and accept. Doesn't matter if it's a dialogue group or a classroom. Men are resistant. This is part of the way we are brought up. Women are less convinced that they [already] know everything. They are more willing to listen and share — to examine themselves — willing to take chances to see how the other feels.<sup>41</sup>

In general, although all the Israeli women mentioned some difference in the way that they thought women might engage in peace activism, the specific attributes they mentioned — such as flexibility, patience, long-term foresight, practical application, and resilience — are not the characteristics specifically predicted by the gendered ethic of care hypothesis. As we will see, the original hypothesis focused on the ability of women to relate, to empathize, to understand, and to connect. Only Eisin and two other Israeli women peacemakers cited these predicted attributes.

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<sup>40</sup> Amira Dotan, interview, 9 August 1999.

<sup>41</sup> Nava Eisin, interview, 9 August 1999.

Three Israeli women directly rejected any suggestion that women are either born, raised, socialized, or habituated to engage in peacemaking differently from men. Judith Green, the director of the mixed gender *Beit Sahur Rapprochement Center*, put it this way:

I resist really strongly that concept that women are more sensitive to human rights, those notions that women are mothers. I am really against all that. I think it is really inconsiderate to men, implying that men don't care about their children too.

Green was the most explicit in her critique of essentialist arguments that connect gender to peacemaking based on “specific female traits.”<sup>42</sup>

Other women, even those who offered tentative support for some connection between gender and peacemaking, raised the concern that many politically active Israeli women did not wholeheartedly endorse the Oslo peace process, a total withdrawal from the Occupied Territories, or working with Palestinians. Yaala Cohen, *Women in Black* activist, pointed out that the political leanings of women activists within Israel are not necessarily always pro-peace:

Women might have open minds, but it doesn't always happen. Women are also active in Gush Emunim [a right-wing religious settler movement]. But when women are fanatics, they are real fanatics. I know women fanatics on the left and the right. Women can do things that you don't see immediate results. During the intifada, when everything [in the peace movement] went underground, women had more stamina. In general, you can do this or that because you are a woman and a mother, you do either or — it is a split. There are also Women in Green [the right-wing counter group to Women in Black] who give the same reasons for doing what they do — their children.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Judith Green, interview, 25 July 1999.

<sup>43</sup> Yaala Cohen, interview, 2 July 1999.

Cohen also, however, suggested that women exhibit some attitudinal, stylistic, and behavioral differences from men in the political actions that they undertake. Her point — that women are the “real” fanatics, that they do things with no visible, immediate results and that they have more stamina — have echoes in the words of the other Israeli women peacemakers I interviewed.

A lack of consensus about the connection between gender and peacemaking characterized the Israeli women’s responses to the ethic of care question that I posed. This lack of consensus also appeared in the conflicting opinions often asserted by a woman within her interview. Yet the Israeli women’s responses showed first that they have identified some differences between men and women with regard to peacemaking, but second that they are aware of the attributes that their society has ascribed to them. The Israeli women were familiar with the connections between women and peace that have been proposed and even assumed within Israeli society and the western, democratic societies in which much of this theory has been written. They have been socialized to think that they *should* be conducting peacemaking differently from men. The responses of the Israeli women peacemakers, which, in general, were more supportive of the ethic of care hypothesis than those of the Palestinian women peacemakers whom I interviewed, must be understood in the context of this probable internalization process. Daphna Golan, the former director of Bat Shalom and a Hebrew University Professor of political theory and women’s studies, acknowledged that in Israeli society most people assume that women will be better peacemakers:

We all want to believe that women can make peace better than men. I don’t believe so at all. It is very provocative. Still, I think

that, yes, women do go about peacemaking differently. When I first started getting involved in peace activism, I thought, absolutely yes. Now I am not so sure but I still think that there is a lot about feminism that should be used [in] making peace [emphasis mine].<sup>44</sup>

Golan's comments highlight the difference between "making peace" and "going about" peacemaking. Here she suggests, like other Israeli interviewees, that women's attitudes towards politics and specifically the Palestinian conflict can be distinguished from the activities undertaken by women peacemakers. In their response to the ethic of care question, eleven of the fourteen Israeli women I interviewed focused primarily on the choice of strategies preferred by women. That is, they tended to focus on describing *how* women engage in peacemaking differently from men rather than *why*. They stressed the political marginalization of women within the specific history of Israel and the military occupation. As discussed in the first section of this chapter, many women explained their preference of grassroots activism over higher level involvement as a result of the rampant sexism that excludes women from access to positions of power within the Knesset or ministry posts. Many of the Bat Shalom activists I interviewed had experienced sexism within the mixed gender peace groups, which influenced their preference for all-women's groups. Other women said that a preference for the grassroots as the locus of Israeli women's activism stemmed from the nature of the grassroots activism itself, which is more flexible than participation in national or local political positions:

Women tend to prefer extra-parliamentary organizations [because] they are less hierarchical, less political and more open. Women often feel that they [can] be more effective in extra-parliamentary

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<sup>44</sup> Daphna Golan, interview, 2 August 1999.

movements. These organizations are also more informal. You don't need your elbows to ensure that you won't lose your seat. And it is flexible work, so you can come in and come out.<sup>45</sup>

Many of the women pointed out that it was hard to separate biological or socialized female traits that might encourage women to engage in peace activism at the grassroots from the fact that, because of their political exclusion, women have no choice but to engage in grassroots work. One *Women in Black* and Bat Shalom activist said, "women have a lot of influence on the grassroots, setting the tone on the street rather than in the Knesset."<sup>46</sup> On the whole, however, the Israeli women expressed uncertainty with regard to the causal relationship between gender and their choice of peacemaking strategies. They were not sure whether women set the tone on the street because the street was the only forum for expressing their political views or whether women tended to choose "the street" because of perceived or real female characteristics of stamina, endurance, and powers of persuasion.

## **II. A Discourse of Individual Rights: Bridging Feminism and Peace Activism**

In the first section of this chapter, I argued that Israeli women can engage in peace activism more easily than men can because of their experiences as "objects" of a militaristic state encourages them to reject the militarism of their government. In the second section, I argued that Israeli women, as subjects, choose programs and tactics that reflect their "other-regarding" moral and political orientation.

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<sup>45</sup> Galia Golan, interview, 23 August 1999.

<sup>46</sup> Dafna Kaminer, interview, 7 July 1999.

Thus, they choose dialogue groups in order to understand and communicate with their Palestinian counterparts. They choose political action projects in order to further Palestinian human rights. When I asked, however, about a possible propensity of Israeli women to become peacemakers in contrast to men, the responses lacked strong support for the ethic of care hypothesis. The popularity of equivalent mixed gender peace groups in Israel such as *Peace Now* and the *Israeli Coalition Against House Demolitions* also challenges the generalization that Bat Shalom's choice of activities, other-regarding orientation, or even ability to exert pressure on the Israeli government can be attributed exclusively to the gender of its members.

In this section, in preparation for further treatment of the ethic of care and the Israeli women's other-regarding orientation in Chapter Five, I explore further the implications of the "other-regarding" moral orientation of Bat Shalom. This section assesses how such a moral orientation relates to a discourse of rights, in contrast to the collective, justice-based discourse of rights upheld by the Jerusalem Center for Women (JCW). I argue that while this orientation is not due solely to the gender of the members of Bat Shalom, these members' experiences as feminists have led them to understand rights and justice in a particular other-regarding way. In its concern for Palestinian human rights, as well as its goal of working together with the Palestinians within the Jerusalem Link joint Board of Trustees, Bat Shalom uses a western influenced feminist language of appreciating another's rights. Bat Shalom's particular engagement with rights, I contend, derives from an overlap of feminism and peace activism. Its members' other-regarding

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understanding of rights is based on their own experiences as “the other” within Israeli society. This orientation views rights — specifically Palestinian rights — through a prism of care, relatedness, and sympathy — all specific characteristics of other-regarding morality that have in the west been attributed to a gendered ethic of care. By contrast, as I argued in Chapter Two, the JCW currently employs a rights-based discourse of justice, learned from the nationalist Palestinian experience. This understanding of rights as a means to national justice has been appropriated by the JCW and other Palestinian women’s groups to petition for women’s rights. The conceptual differences between the ways in which Bat Shalom and the JCW understand the nature of Palestinian rights creates a gulf between the two organizations.

Galia Golan, a founding member of both Bat Shalom and *Peace Now*, articulated the feminist origins of Bat Shalom:

I felt perfectly comfortable in the *Peace Now* [a coalition of mixed gender peace groups] but I like women’s groups. Women have a voice. Even little things, like at parlor meetings of Bat Shalom.... If men were there, women wouldn’t open their mouths. [At the Bat Shalom meetings] there were women there who had not spoken out before. Also, some women felt that there was sexism in the mixed groups. In general, I do feel more comfortable with women. I am in favor of women’s groups of all kinds.<sup>47</sup>

Ten out of the fourteen Israeli women I interviewed had been involved in some women’s organization or feminist group before their peace activism involvement or were involved with such an organization when I interviewed them. Molly Malekar, Bat Shalom’s political coordinator, previously directed a women’s rape crisis center in Jerusalem. Ronny Jaeger and Judith Green were both active in the North

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<sup>47</sup> Galia Golan, interview, 23 August 1999.

American feminist movement before immigrating to Israel. The influence of American-style activism, and specifically western feminist activism, is evident even inside the office of Bat Shalom, where on the wall American women's rights posters join pictures of women's rights activists in Israel. Before becoming director of Bat Shalom, Gila Svirsky actively participated in women's groups in both the U.S. and Israel.

Although women's rights in Israel are not explicitly part of Bat Shalom's organizational goals, feminism plays a pervasive role in the group's strategy, ideology, and activities. Svirsky talked about the "overlap between feminism and peace work:"

Feminism is not a dirty word here and people do not get nervous when talking about a 'feminist vision of peace' in front of a group of expressed feminist activists.<sup>48</sup>

The phrase, a "feminist vision of peace," exemplifies Bat Shalom's approach. Members use this phrase consistently in their informational material and website, making it clear that they think they engage differently from the mixed gender groups in pursuit of peace. The phrase explains Bat Shalom's use of strategies learned through feminist activism — such as vigils, marches, demonstrations, and consciousness-raising meetings. Many of these tactics, especially the consciousness-raising mass campaigns such as that conducted by Bat Shalom in regard to the house demolition issue, are reminiscent of western-style feminist organizations. As discussed in Chapter Two, the Palestinian women do not use

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<sup>48</sup> Gila Svirsky, interview, 23 August 1999.

such oppositional tactics, given their more traditional, less democratic political culture and its emphasis on national unity as a precondition for state building.

Finally, Gila Svirsky and other Bat Shalom activists have interpreted the “feminist vision of peace” as a response to the national ethos of militarization and the resultant violence that has permeated Israeli culture. Half of the Israeli women I interviewed discussed the connection between violence against women, domestic abuse or rape, and the violence promoted by the national emphasis on military security. Jaeger, who has recently moved from Toronto to Israel, pointed to a direct causal link between violence against Palestinians and the increasingly rampant domestic abuse within Israeli homes:

When these kids come back [from the army], they are much more open to violence. Everybody is yelling up and down about the violence in society, but why should they be surprised? I don't know how you go to the army for many years and come home and become sweet. There has got to be a deep impact of this current state of war and belligerency, a toll on civil society. You see it everywhere — wives are getting treated badly and so are children.<sup>49</sup>

Many other Bat Shalom members suggested that ending Israel's permanent state of war and “sense of national siege” could possibly stop the “cycle of violence as a form of conflict resolution” embedded in the Israeli mentality.<sup>50</sup> A series of feminist goals to improve the condition of women within Israel are thus integral parts of the feminist vision for peace as imagined and advocated by Bat Shalom

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<sup>49</sup> Ronny Jaeger, interview, 20 July 1999.

<sup>50</sup> Molly Malekar, interview, 28 June 1999.

#### IV. A Separated Link

The past two chapters have created the context for the work of The Jerusalem Link. They have analyzed the two groups of women peacemakers as objects of their national experiences, as subjects choosing strategies that fit their political situations, and as feminists. The greatest similarity between the women peacemakers of the JCW and Bat Shalom is the extent to which they are objects of two distinct national experiences. Although the Palestinian and Israeli collective experiences of the past hundred years deeply differ, both groups of women and their work have been influenced by their national collective's recent history. Both groups have found a niche at the grassroots as a result of particular historical opportunities. For the Palestinians, the *intifada* welcomed women into the ranks of political activism and gave them the experience to galvanize public support at the grassroots, despite the often-traditional cultural norms that greatly impede women's access to political power. The masculine Israeli military discourse and the "trickle-down" sexism it has institutionalized have marginalized Israeli women. Thus, the Israeli women peacemakers, impeded from access to political power both by traditional norms and by the effects on political access of military valor, have found a niche at the grassroots, from which to launch their protest against government policies.

Although both groups of women and their distinct political niches have been shaped by their historical experiences, the differences between the two groups of peacemakers are vast. It is unclear how much mutual understanding can be generated between the two groups of women peacemakers when they define the

term differently. Palestinian women define a peacemaker broadly, as any activist or politician working in support of the broad goals of the Oslo Accords and building the emerging Palestinian State. The Israeli women view a peacemaker as an activist or politician petitioning against her government's policies and trying to make public opinion within Israel more sympathetic towards the Palestinians. The contrast between the Palestinian women's work *in support* of the national collective and the Israeli women's work *in opposition* to their national militarized discourse undermines the Jerusalem Link's goal of creating a feminist vision of peace.

The basic goals of Bat Shalom and the JCW and the way they understand rights also differ. The JCW has focused its efforts internally, on securing women's rights within Palestine. Its leaders use a legally oriented language of rights that derives from the Palestinian nationalist movement. They want to see these rights enshrined in international agreements (for the Palestinian State) or a national charter (for women's rights). Bat Shalom has focused its goals externally, on securing the rights of Palestinian men and women. Its members use a morally oriented language of rights that derives from a tradition familiar to western liberal feminists. They see these rights as guided by moral and political feelings of sympathy for the Palestinians and enshrined in ongoing bonds of coexistence.

Bat Shalom's and the JCW's different definitions of peacemaker, conception of rights, relationship with the national discourse, and current programmatic objectives have led to their divergent visions of peacemaking. The next chapter will address the current clash between Bat Shalom's "peace with care" model of peacemaking and the JCW's "peace with justice" model.

