

Gender relations and national security in Israel

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IT IS WIDELY assumed that war is a man's world. Male soldiers fight enemy soldiers on the battlefield to protect their homelands and their families from existential threat. The woman's role during war, on the other hand, is to remain steadfast on the home front, support her man, keep the home fires burning, and wait anxiously for his safe return. On the basis of this scenario, the motivation for the 'citizen warrior' to take up arms is ultimately to shield the honour and integrity of his 'beautiful soul' against the perils of a dangerous and anarchic world (Elshtain, 1987). Whether or not this account of warfare is accurate, it is the quintessence of the conventional rendition of national security, namely, protection of the boundaries of a nation state (homeland) from external military threat. The accompanying script of home front (safety) versus battlefield (warfare) as respectively feminized and masculinized is a powerful interface of discourses and practices that designate particular roles to men and women in conflict zones.¹

However, upon consideration of gender as a major analytical category, the real landscape of war and national security is often revealed as less exclusively male (Enloe, 1989), as women participate beyond the home front, and practices of warfare are not necessarily confined to the battlefield as typically defined. Women occupy many diverse positions in relation to international conflict, not only as supporters of men, but also as combatants, guerrilla warriors, terrorists, and so on. As well, divisions between home front and battlefield are not necessarily exclusive when the social context of warfare is considered. In short, a consideration of gender renders ambiguous many of the common assumptions held about male–female domains in war, as well as the nature and effectiveness of protection systems (i.e. security). This has significant implications for redefining security from the perspective of feminist debates and concepts.

The Middle East is a valuable laboratory for investigation of the dynamic between gender and security. Because of the protracted conditions of warfare in many Middle Eastern states, gender roles are structured to a great extent by the

exigencies of the national security agenda throughout that region, and hence the predominance there of the military in political decision making. States in the Middle East are characterized by unsettled boundaries, civil/ethnic disputes, guerrilla warfare, proliferation of weapons, militarism and a general context of insecurity. These political circumstances spill over into the private sphere in the form of militarized social relations and gendered insecurity. The vulnerability of women often results from the dependence of regime self-preservation on a centralized form of patriarchal authority, a disproportionate military defence budget and uniformed male decision making in times of crisis.² For the general population, this situation of chronic emergency can be experienced as a mechanism for order and social control. The militarized and masculinized form of leadership in the Middle East tends to impinge upon the rights of minorities and other collectives, the identities of which are based on class, ethnicity, religion and gender, groups whose main interests may not coincide, and may even conflict, with those of the state. Women tend to be positioned in such sub-state groups and, as such, comprise a major category from which to understand the exclusive nature of security in the Middle East.

In this chapter, Israel is the immediate context for exploring gender roles ascribed by national security, and the cleavages that result from a society in constant state of war. Israel is the epitome of a war society in which all aspects of life are conditioned, to some extent, by the security policy predicament. The predominance of warfare in Israel developed in tandem with the process of state building. Israel's origins as a pioneering community led to the dual objectives of assimilating a diverse immigrant population and of transforming the Jewish national character from a persecuted minority in the diaspora into a sovereign and independent majority in Palestine. The army was given a special role in the transformation of both the Israeli citizen and Israeli society (Almog, 1993), and the process of state development. Over the years, the protracted Arab–Israeli conflict has effectively positioned the state and its security apparatus as the overarching power structure that impinges upon all other aspects of life in Israel, whether in the political, economic, cultural or social spheres.

Until recently, the primary role of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) was not subject to public scrutiny or criticism. However, changes to the strategic environment in the 1980s and 1990s opened space for civil society and dissenting groups to question their roles in national security and to promote new understandings of the relationship between national and personal security in Israel. This process of reflection on the military in Israeli society has developed further in the context of the Middle East peace process (MEPP). Peace negotiations have altered the context in which the theory and practice of security in the region are understood. Although internal conflict is raging in the Israeli–Palestinian context, inter-state war in the Middle East is no longer regarded as a legitimate political mechanism, and this has resulted in new constraints on and

opportunities for social groups struggling for change, whether through violent or non-violent means. Women have played a significant part in ongoing political transformations. Women have occupied a large role in protest movements, and they have also contributed significantly to ongoing discussions about national security, which hold crucial implications for conflict zones in the post-Cold War era.

This chapter has two main lines of inquiry. First, it seeks to explore the gendered aspects of national security in Israel and to consider the ways in which women are domesticated within their protection systems. This line of inquiry considers how current gender boundaries have developed historically and in relation to the political process in Israel. Second, within the context of these gender boundaries and symbols, the chapter turns to the politics of women's resistance in order to explore women's alternative understandings of security. Israeli women have organized around two main responses to the gendered structures of war, responses that correspond to the mainstreaming versus independence debate in feminist theory (Jacoby, 2000).

On the one hand, Israeli women have waged an arduous struggle for equal access to the 'right to fight'. In Israel, women undergo compulsory conscription but have not, until recently, entered the last bastion of male exclusivity in the state – combat. A consequence of the predominance of the military in Israeli society is that, women's right to fight is equivalent to women's equal access to all the leading structures of authority in Israel. Since the 1973 War and the quandaries that resulted from the lack of womanpower on the home front, the goal of women's career advancement in the military, and later women in combat, became an issue on the political agenda. The struggle for women's right to fight involves working towards equality within existing structures and rules, and participating in the mainstream political process alongside men.

On the other hand, women have articulated a feminist agenda within the context of the women's peace movement in Israel. Women's peace activism represents an oppositional constituency with roots dating back, in large part, to the 1982 Lebanon War and the 1987 Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.³ Although not a pacifist movement, women in the peace camp have expressed critical and dissenting views *vis-à-vis* the State and its military policy. In its actions and ideologies, the Israeli women's peace movement has articulated understandings of security that, in relation to feminist identity and social justice, lie outside the mainstream agenda, and an affinity with their Palestinian women counterparts. This strategy combines a campaign against war with a struggle for women's equality. Significantly, women's peace activism in Israel has taken place largely outside the predominant structures of the Israeli political system.

While both strategies – mainstreaming and independence – promote women's voices in the national security agenda, they hold different implications

for female liberation in Israel – broadly defined – as well as for the nature of a negotiated settlement to the Arab–Israeli conflict. The main question is the extent to which either strategy for women’s activism helps or hinders a redefinition of security in support of the dual goals of gender equality and peace in Israel.

Finally, the chapter considers the significance to gender relations in Israel of the changes currently taking place in the military–industrial complex as a result of the evolution of the strategic environment and the new circumstances set in motion by the Middle East peace process. In the contemporary Middle East, a complex of relations, both formal and informal, has been forged to support normalization and peaceful coexistence. While not always successful in political terms,⁴ these relations influence the opportunities and constraints for women’s struggles and the perception of women’s roles in society.

Israeli women and national security

For the purposes of this discussion, and notwithstanding the wealth of debates within feminism,⁵ the definition of gender used here is that of a ‘constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes’ (Scott, 1988: 42), and as a primary way of signifying relationships of power. Gender is understood, therefore, as a social rather than a biological category underpinning the male–female distinction as well as the separation of male and female bodies in all the major structures of society. In this sense, gender is both a discourse and a practice. As a discourse, gender produces and reproduces what Cynthia Enloe (1989) refers to as a ‘bundle of expectations’ about socially valuable and culturally acceptable norms related to ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’. As a practice, gender is a concrete representation of the power dynamics between actual men and women in terms of their access to economic, political and military authority.

A growing body of seminal works has begun the process of critical reflection on the relationship between gender and national security in Israel (Emmett, 1996; Kandiyoti, 1996; *Palestine–Israel Journal*, 1995; Sharoni, 1995; Mayer, 1994; Azmon and Izraeli, 1993; Bernstein, 1992; Swirsky and Safir, 1991). A major theme of this literature is the fundamental contradiction in Israeli society between the myth of gender equality and the reality of women’s marginalization. The gender equality myth in Israel draws from such significant cultural signifiers as women’s compulsory conscription, Golda Meir (the first and only woman prime minister of Israel), communal childcare in the *kibbutz* (co-operative settlement), images of the pre-state pioneering women and of women’s fighting roles between 1947 and 1949. A result of these indicators of gender equality in the historical development of Israeli society is the

often-encountered assumption that the problem of feminism in Israel either has never existed or has already been resolved.

By way of contrast, Israeli feminist scholarship has begun to challenge the gender equality myth through revisionist history and gender analysis by exploring ways in which the Israeli political system has simultaneously mobilized and marginalized women. This 'mobilization–marginalization' phenomenon in Israel has been linked to the primary role of the military in Israeli society and the underlying prioritization of military over civilian interests. The predominance of the Israeli military is upheld by the widespread belief that, as a result of the protracted conflict, the existence of the State of Israel has yet to be guaranteed. This notion of an 'existential threat' has given elite military men, including those in the upper echelons of the military hierarchy and those generals who have made the horizontal move into politics, the responsibility for making key decisions for the State on such crucial matters as war and national security. As part of this perspective on national security, Israel has invested a disproportionate amount of spending in the military sector,⁶ thus creating a large military–industrial complex at the expense of other areas such as health, education and social services. The predominance of military–industrial over civilian interests has developed simultaneously in Israel, therefore, with the predominance of men over women, who occupy a secondary role in military affairs and a disproportionately large role in the private sphere.

Israeli women have always had a difficult relationship with the Israeli military–industrial complex. Historical accounts relate that the early Jewish immigrants to Palestine from Eastern Europe and Russia in the early 1900s were motivated by the common goal of building a new egalitarian society that would be collectively organized and committed to social transformation. However, the early egalitarian objective of the Jewish community in Palestine did not extend to equality between men and women. The harsh physical conditions and security issues led to social norms being eventually surpassed by the glorification of physical labour, militarism and masculinized traits. Productivity targets and the prioritizing of physical labour intensified the segregation of men and women. Women's work became associated with a lack of productivity and power and was thus rendered less valuable than men's work, in particular the physically demanding tasks associated with agricultural labour (Bernstein, 1992). Although women did work alongside men in the fields, their inclusion in the nation eventually became synonymous with motherhood and child-bearing, and other traditional feminine functions such as childrearing and various unremunerated social services.

A similar gendered dynamic of inclusion and exclusion took place in the pre-state military sphere. During the initial stages of warfare, women struggled to be equally included in military operations. However, the issue of gender

equality was continually sidelined as tensions escalated between Jews and the local Arab population opposed to the Zionist settlement project. Women were excluded from the first Jewish pre-state defence organization, *Hashomer*, an authoritarian para-military group that espoused power and male superiority (Rein, 1980: 35). However, as a result of the deterioration of security in the early 1920s *Hashomer* was replaced by a new and secret defence organization, *Haganah* (literally defence), that recruited all able-bodied men *and* women to struggle against the Arab population as well as against British restrictions on Jewish immigration. Nevertheless, although *Haganah* women were trained with men in techniques of discipline and weaponry, women's service was segregated into such feminized areas as communications, first aid and medical assistance (Bloom, 1991: 129). The early articulation of gender relations in Israel was characterized, therefore, by the domestication of women *within* the key structures of Israeli society, despite the ideology of equal inclusion in labour and defence that underpinned the pre-state period.

Following the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the persistent security situation continued to impinge upon gender relations. However, the period of statehood established an additional factor in the social construction of biological difference between the sexes in Israel. The lack of separation between religion and statehood in the State of Israel further complicated the role of women in the national security agenda. Israel was initially established as a political solution to the persecution of Jews in Eastern Europe. Although a large portion of Israeli citizens currently identifies itself as secular, Israel has remained a Jewish state with laws that favour Jewish over non-Jewish citizens.⁷ An unwritten accommodation between religion and statehood known as the 'status quo' gave the Orthodox rabbinical authority a monopoly over personal status law.⁸ The disproportionate political power of the Orthodox as opposed to other streams of Judaism, such as Conservative, Reform or Reconstructionist, pertains to a broad range of areas, such as marriage and divorce, child custody, inheritance and burial. This reliance on Orthodox Judaism for monitoring the contours of the Jewish nation has problematized women's struggles for equality since, according to Orthodox interpretations of scripture and custom, women occupy traditional roles as mothers and bearers of children. In fact, according to Orthodox interpretations, a Jew is defined as having been born to a Jewish mother, thus establishing a maternal lineage for reproduction of the Jewish nation. However, Orthodox women do not play an important part in public prayer and political life, the key staples of authority in religious communities.

In a zone of conflict such as Israel, religion serves two major purposes. On the one hand, religion is a source of solace and community in times of crisis. On the other hand, religion can be manipulated as an ideological tool to serve political ends. Since the 1967 War⁹ and the acquisition by Israel of key

holy sites in the West Bank and east Jerusalem, policy debate about national security has become integrated with fundamental belief systems. Since 1967, both the Labour and Likud Governments have sought to populate the occupied and/or annexed land. Since 1967, strategic reasons for control over disputed territory have increasingly mixed with religious and messianic arguments in support of the biblical Land of Israel (Sprinzak, 1991; Lustick, 1988).

This increasingly politicized role of religion in Israeli politics has served to radicalize political platforms, and has allowed the Jewish settlement imperative to impinge upon the most intimate relations in Israeli society – those of the family. The Israeli–Palestinian conflict has seen the family become a primary tool in the demographic struggle between Jews and Palestinians in disputed territory. At its core, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is fought over the settlement of territory and the designation of borders. Families are needed to populate conquered territory. As a result, strategic arguments have permeated the personal arena of sexuality, fertility and reproduction. The notion of strategic superiority maintains that soldiers must defend borders, while the Bible gives the cardinal commandment ‘Be fruitful and multiply’ (Genesis 1:28). The synthesis of religious and strategic arguments over land renders national security synonymous with the need to reproduce, settle and populate territory, and this has had a direct impact on women’s reproductive freedom in Israel in both Orthodox and non-Orthodox circles.

In both instances, the idea of the ‘nationalist family’ is a normative structure that embodies strategic value. The gendered significance of this politicized understanding of the family lies in its impingement upon women’s obligation to the nation. The nationalist family perpetuates domesticated notions of women’s role as reproducers of culture and social continuity, and members of the national collectivity (Yuval-Davis and Anthias, 1989). This female image has had very concrete effects on women’s struggles for independence in Israel. For example, controversy over population control in the 1970s became connected with the campaign to legalize abortion in Israel. The State’s pronatalist policy rendered any form of decreased fertility (such as abortion) as inimical to the political exigency of Jewish reproduction in Israel. In other words, abortion was regarded as a threat to Israeli national security. The State clashed on numerous occasions with the women’s movement over a woman’s right to decide about her own reproduction. The coincidence of women with national reproduction is reinforced in Israel by the association of womanhood with territorial integrity and notions of the Jewish nation as a ‘family writ large’ (Katz, 1996). The male domination of military and labour relations, the patriarchal religious establishment and the patriarchal family, all represent key gender structures in Israel that combine to define a problematic relationship between women and national security in Israel (Jacoby, 1999).

**The politics of women's resistance in Israel – peace or
the right to fight?**

In response to these gender boundaries in Israel, the politics of women's resistance has taken two major forms. The first is defined by the struggle for the right to fight, while the Israeli women's peace movement represents the second. This section explores these strategies for women's resistance in terms of their contribution to women's liberation – broadly defined – and their association with security and a peaceful resolution of the Arab–Israeli conflict.

Israeli women and the right to fight

Israeli Jewish women¹⁰ have undergone compulsory conscription into the IDF since the establishment of the State of Israel on 15 May 1948, followed by the passing of the Defence Service Law on 8 September 1949. The compulsory military service of women, during times of peace and war, is a distinguishing feature of the Israeli context in so far as that most other instances of international conflict do not involve women serving as soldiers. This participation of women in the national security agenda creates an array of challenges and opportunities that are unique to feminist struggles in Israel.

Women's right to fight is a complex dimension of international feminist theory. Female soldiering contradicts the two major assumptions of conventional feminist scholarship on gender roles in war. On the one hand, conventional feminism posits a coincidence between women and pacifism (Ruddick, 1989; Gilligan, 1982). This female pacifist role is, in many respects, diametrically opposed to men's supposed predisposition to aggression. The literature on women and war assumes that women's aversion to violence derives from the feminine qualities of motherhood, care giving, morality, emotion, connection, holism, and value for the sanctity of all life (Reardon, 1993). It is assumed that these qualities are universal and exhibited by all women, in all places and at all times. However, the Israeli context renders problematic these basic categories of feminist theory.

In Israel, women's organizations, such as the Israeli Women's Network (IWN) and the Parliamentary Committee on the Status of Women, have contradicted the assumptions of Western feminists by waging a strong battle for women's right to fight. Although women have always served in the IDF, controversy has lingered over women's entry into combat positions. Arguments in favour of women in combat imply that women's liberation and their attainment of full civic rights depend on equal representation with men in all domains and leadership positions where policy is made.

However, women's marginalization in the Israeli military and obstacles to their career advancement have been a serious concern for the Israeli feminist movement. Galia Golan, a veteran Israeli feminist, academic and peace activist,

has argued that 'the military stands as the quintessence of a patriarchal institution reinforcing the stereotypical role of woman as subordinate, subservient and superfluous' (1997: 115). One of the major issues in women's service derives from job segregation. Statistics show that the majority of women conscripts serve in clerical and service positions under the authority of a male of higher rank. In 1994, the largest category of women in the IDF was clerical, representing 33 per cent.¹¹

The most significant factor in women's marginal role in the military has been their exclusion from combat.¹² In Israel, combat duty is considered the most prestigious area of military service on account of the national security situation. Elite combat units such as *Sayeret Golani* (footsoldiers), *Sayeret Tsanhanim* (paratroopers), and *Sayeret Matkal* (special forces) are seen as protecting the State from existential threat. For that reason, these units are recognized as the most honourable soldiers, since they risk their lives for the good of the State. Soldiers who remain on the home front are derogatorily referred to as *jobnikim*, soldiers who preserve a low rank and entertain no risk. Combat is not only considered a prestigious arena *within* the military: it serves as an all-encompassing rite of passage into other areas of Israeli society. For example, many high-ranking soldiers translate their decorated military careers into material and political benefits in the governmental, commercial and industrial sectors upon retirement to civilian life. Women's lack of combat experience has effectively denied them such benefits and opportunities.

The campaign for women's career advancement in the military in Israel began in the aftermath of the 1973 War. During the war, while the male-dominated labour force was resituated at the front lines, problems resulted from women's lack of training in areas of manufacturing, agriculture and public transit. After 1973, the armed forces were restructured in a way that broadened the number of professions open to women. For example, in 1978 women became eligible to instruct on combat courses such as tank and artillery. In the 1990s, major gains were achieved by women struggling for the right to fight. In 1995, a woman whose objective was to become a military pilot petitioned the Israeli Supreme Court of Justice which forced the Air Force to create accommodations for women in pilot training courses. In fact, in 1999 the first woman completed the Israel Air Force's pilot's course and was assigned to an F-16 squadron, while other women have since entered basic flight training. Women were recruited to border-guard units in 1996, and since 1998 women have been integrated into anti-aircraft defence units, which train personnel in the operation of Hawk and Patriot missiles, and *Ramit* radar systems.¹³ Women have also served as flight navigators, as spotters on the northern border, and have trained in the navy's ship commander's course.¹⁴ The gradual opening of all positions in the military to women has dismantled one of the last bastions of male privilege in the national security agenda – at least formally.

However, issues for Israeli women in combat continue to arise. First, formal rights to career advancement in the military do not necessarily translate into concrete gains. A serious complicating factor is that women in the military structure continue to face informal barriers to advancement. First, women's right to fight in war does not account for some of the most pervasive forms of structural and direct physical violence in society by men *against* women, i.e., domestic violence and sexual assault/rape. Indeed, the military is not exempt from this type of gendered violence, and some would argue that militarized masculinity in the IDF contributes to an environment in which violence against women is tacitly condoned. For example, a serious concern for female soldiers has been sexual harassment. In mixed-gender units, a substantial number of court cases have involved women charging senior officers with rape and/or sexual misconduct.¹⁵

One strategy for responding to male–female tensions in the military has been to train women separately from men. This strategy has been undertaken in the Israeli military with underlying gendered connotations. Israeli female soldiers belong to the Women's Corps, or *Chen*, which refers literally to charm and grace. Simona Sharoni has pointed out that this is not a 'linguistic coincidence', but rather reflects the fact that women in the Israeli military are encouraged to emphasize their femininity and neat appearance, and are actually provided cosmetic guidance as part of their basic training (1995: 46). While the separation of men and women in the military may avert problems of inappropriate physical contact, it inadvertently replicates traditional female roles as women are segregated into such traditional fields as caring for male soldiers and providing 'moral support' (Yuval-Davis, 1997: 101). As a whole, the Women's Corps in the Israeli military is seen as secondary to the more serious business of the male combat soldiers. While many women have moved over into elite and mixed-gender units, it is clear that women's individual career advancement does not necessarily eradicate the formal and informal gendered structures that characterize the construction of sexual difference in the Israeli military and in society at large. In this sense, the experience of women in combat offers limited insight towards a feminist transformative agenda, not to mention the negative implications for the Middle East peace process of increased numbers of women willing to go to war.

A major difficulty is that women's entrance into male-dominated domains, such as military combat, reproduces the standard for citizenship in Israel that relies on the male citizen warrior as a role model. Feminist critics argue that this standard is inappropriate, and even unattainable, for a functioning society that would ideally value the reproduction and moral education of children, the harmonious functioning of families, and the growth of society. Rebecca Grant has suggested that 'bellicose women' are an 'ambiguous model for reform' (1992: 93) because women soldiers are trained to reproduce the masculine

norms and modes of behaviour of militaristic systems that restrict and repress many other women, and also women's traditional domains. Women's assumption of the masculine role does not, in itself, challenge patriarchal norms. Indeed, women in combat do not necessarily promote men's increased role in reproduction and care giving. In fact, critics suggest that the advancement of so-called 'token women' may even undermine a transformative agenda for the vast majority of women who are marginalized within the war system and its underlying norms of militarism and violence. In short, critics of the right to fight point out that women in combat reproduce the association of citizenship with the bearing of arms and thus do not contribute to the transformation of society in a way that values women, reproduction and peace.

One of the main conclusions to be drawn from the campaign for women's right to fight in Israel is that while it may be a positive step for the advancement of individual women or groups of women, it does not address the overall gendered aspects of a society at war in terms of the association of security with certain norms and modes of behaviour associated with 'masculinity' and the devaluation of 'femininity'. Although women in combat are notable for their struggle for gender equality, they may do so at the expense of replicating the dominant renditions of national security established by men and the state system. For that reason, the contribution of women in combat to a redefinition of security is rather limited in terms of taking into consideration women's traditional roles and interests, and attempting to transform the war system into a more peaceful society. This limitation may be partially attributable to the constraints on women working for change within the system. The next section explores women's struggles for peace outside of the formal political process and determines their contribution to redefining security.

The Israeli women's peace movement

A second major political strategy pursued by women in Israel has taken the form of the Israeli women's peace movement. Since the late 1980s, Israeli women have articulated an agenda for liberation that coincides with a distinctly feminist anti-war sentiment. The Israeli women's peace movement has not been identified as 'pacifist' along the lines of women's movements in the West. The message of female peace activists has been clearly defined as opposition to violence with support for the right to defence – when necessary. Indeed, many female peace activists were conscripted and have male family members who serve either in the army or do reserve duty. This close connection between women peace activists and the military is a key distinguishing feature of the Israeli context that blurs the lines between peace activism and the right to fight. There exists a considerable overlap between those individual women involved in the IWN and the Parliamentary Committee on the Status of Women (the right

to fight) and women involved in the peace movement. However, there is also a key ideological difference between the two strategies insofar as the former condones women's participation in war, while the latter supports a peaceful rather than a military settlement to the Arab–Israeli conflict. Many Israeli women struggle simultaneously on both fronts.

The Israeli women's peace movement is comprised of a number of organizations, whose roots can be traced back to women's opposition to the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon.¹⁶ The Lebanon War and the aftermath of protest was the first time Israeli women occupied a dissenting role in the national security debate and made public statements against Israeli foreign policy. Massive anti-war demonstrations took place throughout the country, as both men and women vehemently protested Israel's tacit involvement in the massacres by Christian militia in the *Sabra* and *Shatilla* Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. Women came to form the majority of the rank and file of one of the most visible mixed-gender protest movements, Peace Now. However, women were underrepresented in Peace Now's positions of authority and did not represent the movement publicly.¹⁷ This underrepresentation of women in the Israeli peace movement was mirrored a decade later when women had to struggle for representation in the official peace process that started at the international conference in Madrid in 1991. Women were most active at the grassroots level, in neighbourhood committees, public demonstrations, and mass movements, admonishing both Israeli and Palestinian leaders to make progress on the peace issue. However, from 1991 onwards, the diplomatic level appropriated the momentum established by popular struggle where the initiatives for peace originated, and women disappeared from public view.

Because of their marginalization in both the mainstream peace movement and the official peace process, women formed their own separate organizations and the Israeli women's peace movement was born. One of the initial women's peace organizations was Women Against the Invasion of Lebanon (renamed Women Against the Occupation, *Shani*, in January 1988), a markedly feminist anti-war group established to protest the Lebanon War. Women against the Invasion of Lebanon was represented negatively in the Israeli media because of their combination of feminism with support for Palestinian women's struggles. For both Israeli and Palestinian women, however, their affiliation was a celebration of sisterhood beyond the national divide. The Israeli public nonetheless perceived it as a serious act of disloyalty, particularly during times of crisis.¹⁸

After the Lebanon War, the Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation, *intifada*, in 1987 was the second major catalyst for the organization of feminist peace activities. Israeli women were particularly moved by the nature of the *intifada* itself. The uprising was not a typical war, but rather a popular insurrection comprising Palestinian men, women and children. Scenes of Israeli soldiers

beating women and children were televised worldwide, bringing stark images of the violence, brutality and oppression created by the State of Israel into the homes of Israeli families. The media, along with condemnation expressed by the international community, had enormous influence over many Israeli feminists, whose personal struggles against gender oppression in Israeli society were rekindled by the *intifada*. For example, many of the women who organized politically during the *intifada* had worked in rape crisis centres and shelters for battered women, and had participated in struggles for the right to abortion in Israel in the 1970s (Rein, 1980). Their experience of struggle against patriarchy informed their struggles against Israeli political oppression of the Palestinians. This combination of feminism with support for Palestinian national self-determination was expressed pervasively through the political ideologies and activism of the Israeli women's peace movement.

Along with over 180 Israeli and Israeli–Palestinian mixed and women-only peace organizations¹⁹ *Shani* organized against Israeli military policy during the *intifada*. However, its unique approach was to establish Israeli–Palestinian dialogue and co-operative activities in support of peace at the social, political and personal levels. While organizations such as Peace Now made public pronouncements against the *intifada*, *Shani* embarked on solidarity visits to hospitals, nursery schools and individual homes in the occupied territories, and staged protest demonstrations for the release of Palestinian political prisoners or against school closures in the West Bank ('Women and Peace' a 1989 pamphlet).

The emphasis of women's peace activities on the social dimension of war contrasts with the State's diplomatic focus. During the *intifada*, Palestinian women were invited to parlour meetings in the homes of Israeli women to discuss their experiences and try to dismantle long-standing psychological barriers created by military occupation and war.²⁰ Israeli women travelled to the Israeli occupied territories to visit Palestinian women's committees and production co-operatives. Through these personal contacts, strong friendships were formed. This combination of the personal and the political is a long-standing objective of women's movements around the world. The extra cross-cultural dimension of these organizational activities in the Israeli–Palestinian context helped to create dialogue at the social level and meaningful exchange about the perspectives on peace and security of the different women involved in the conflict.

The most significant contributions of the Israeli women's peace movement have been in the independent organizational structure for women's cross-cultural activism, and in the articulation of an alternative perspective on peace and security. Since the *intifada*, Israeli women peace activists have emphasized the need to establish security based not primarily on military power and statehood, but on justice, reconciliation and coexistence between Israeli and

Palestinian people. All members of mixed-gender peace groups campaigned for an end to the violence, but Israeli women peace activists linked this claim primarily to their support for the cause of Palestinian national self-determination. This focus on the rights of the other destabilized the affinity between security and the State of Israel, and established a point of solidarity between women whose primary focus of identification was not the nation state. The Israeli women's peace movement has always suggested that peace does not result from agreements between leaders, but from establishing good relations between people and providing the fruits of peace that render those agreements solid and long-lasting to begin with. According to this new definition, security is detached from the state and positioned in relation to the protection of individuals and their communities. In other words, the term *security* is rendered meaningful in relation to the needs and interests of people, rather than the protection of national boundaries.

To further the human element of security, the Israeli women's peace movement has employed the symbol of motherhood. In such conservative societies as Israel, and even more so in the Palestinian areas, motherhood has offered women a legitimate platform from which to protest in the public arena. It has also provided a common foundation to bolster the partnership and the shared experience of Israeli and Palestinian women. In a zone of conflict, motherhood is often politicized as a symbol of bereavement. When grieving for children takes the form of opposition to a state's authority to declare war, the public generally embraces the mothers. Opposition to war expressed by feminists, on the other hand, has elicited more highly controversial and negative connotations. During war, the struggle for equality between men and women is perceived as divisive to society, particularly when that struggle is made in conjunction with 'enemy women', so to speak. This was apparent in the negative responses to such groups as Women in Black.²¹ For example, while perceived as making overtures to the 'enemy' because of their partnerships with Palestinian women, the Israeli Women in Black met with a harsh and often extreme public reaction. During silent vigils, male bystanders called the women 'whores of Arafat' and 'traitors', and shouted for them to 'go home and clean the house'. Others threatened, spat, and assaulted the women physically. This deeply gendered response to Women in Black vigils represents a deep-seated hostility in Israel toward a feminist anti-war sentiment. This was not the typical reaction to mothering groups²² whose cause was perceived as beneficial to the Israeli family. Women in Black and other feminist components of the Israeli women's peace movement have generally been chastised for collaborating with groups and individuals perceived by Israeli society as 'the enemy'. This type of cross-cultural activism is rejected, particularly during times of crisis when many Israelis feel the need to 'close ranks' and prioritize internal unity over relations outside the nation.

Nevertheless, the politicization of motherhood in Israel has served as an important means by which to blur the lines between nation and enemy. Feminist anti-war activists worked to replace a parochial or nationalist motherhood discourse with a universalist discourse of motherhood emphasizing commonality between Jewish and Arab people. Their symbol of universal motherhood involved a transition from caring for their own children to caring for the children of others or even all children, for that matter (Orleck, 1997). Feminist organizations have, often reluctantly, employed the symbol of motherhood for campaigning purposes. The Jerusalem Link, an organization of Israeli and Palestinian women,²³ expressed one of the most notable examples of this type of platform in an advertisement entitled 'Every Person Has a Mother' published in October–November, 1996. The ad featured a common list of Jews and Arabs murdered during the conflict, followed by the statement 'We don't want to see our sons, our spouses, or our brothers – IDF soldiers – fighting in a useless war in the territories.' The point of unity resulting from Jewish and Arab casualties was the tragedy of bereavement experienced among mothers (and fathers) in both communities and their joint renunciation of war as a political tool.

On the basis of the use of such concepts as universalism, bereavement, motherhood and justice, the Israeli women's peace movement has established an alternative discourse on the meaning and nature of peace and security among Israelis and Palestinians. Women's articulation of peace entails the building of a 'new society' from the ground up rather than from the top down. This transformation of society would involve a transition from the militarist culture that prioritizes security to a society that values education, social services and civil society. For these women, the challenge of peaceful coexistence is both to overcome the deep psychological barriers resulting in stereotypes and prejudices between Israelis and Palestinians, and to eradicate the symbols of violence that continue to be produced and reproduced in cultural forms such as the media, arts, and education.

For the Israeli women's peace movement, a broader definition of peace begs a reconsideration of the meaning of Israeli national security. The official definition of Israeli security in foreign policy and popular discourses is territorial and oriented toward military solutions. By way of contrast, Israeli and Palestinian women have forged a different understanding of security that emphasizes connection with and legitimization of 'the other' as a means to acquire protection for the self. In this sense, protection derives neither from separation nor boundaries, but from connecting with and understanding the other's motivation, and struggling for the rights of the other. A member of the Israeli women's peace group *Bat Shalom* (the Israeli part of the Jerusalem Link) describes this sentiment by suggesting that security is not a question of keeping people out, but of bringing them in. 'Security does not come from walls, fences or guns, but from removing the initial desire to harm or climb that wall

in the first place.²⁴ Her perspective on the security quandary in Israel crystallizes the notion that power is a problem rather than a solution to the personal insecurity Israelis experience. National security does not consider the reasons why Palestinians protest, and even fuels Palestinian discontent, thus intensifying the underlying motivations for Palestinian violence against Israelis in the first place. This redefinition of security holds profound implications for resolving the Arab–Israeli conflict in ways that promote justice, coexistence and social transformation.

This chapter has explored some of the alternative perspectives on security articulated by women peace activists. It was suggested that, in Israel, a feminist anti-war sentiment has greater implications for redefining security than a liberal campaign for women's right to fight. While women in combat may contribute to the feminist goal of gender equity, feminism must be combined with peace in order to promote a society in which women can be equal with men and also live without the fear of violence. This means that gender equity cannot serve the interests of women in isolation from a transformative agenda. Such an agenda would link feminism with peace and a diplomatic, rather than military, solution to the Arab–Israeli conflict, since the two are interconnected. In so doing, it would seek to improve the overall context within which women struggle for their rights and opportunities.

Post-peace process strategic environment

Since the 1990s, significant changes have taken place in the Middle East military–industrial arena because of the evolution of the strategic environment. These changes have crucial implications for gender relations in Israel. New circumstances have been set in motion by the Middle East peace process and its breakdown (primarily the second *intifada* since September 2000). The most important social consequence of the negotiating process was that it fostered higher expectations in Israel that violence would disappear and security would prevail. However, Mark Heller (2000) claims the opposite. Although the possibility of inter-state war remains greatly reduced in the peace process era, counter-insurgency and counter-guerrilla warfare has risen as a top security concern in Israel. These violent measures are not contained within the battlefield as traditionally defined, and threaten civilian targets, including women and children, in all areas of Israel, both public and private. As a result of the impasse in Israeli–Palestinian peace negotiations, along with the election of right-wing governments in Israel in 1996 and 2001 and the apparent delegitimization of the Palestinian Authority, security has returned to the Israeli policy agenda as a national priority. Civil society groups, including the Israeli women's peace movement, have yet again been sidelined as the State of Israel has come to rely more heavily on military solutions to the conflict. This strategy has been witness

to ongoing retaliatory attacks by F-16 fighter planes and helicopter gun-ships against Palestinian targets in response to suicide bombers since the spring of 2001.

On the other hand, despite the escalation of violence, the Israeli military has been influenced by changes in a society that expresses serious 'war fatigue' and strives to participate in the era of globalization. In the 1990s, the IDF has moved away from its traditional self-image as a 'people's army' by adopting the policy of selective service (Cohen, Eisenstadt and Bacevich, 1998: 57–58). A more professional army would be characterized by greater technological capabilities that could respond to the increased threat of ballistic missiles and the proliferation of other weapons of mass destruction in the region. This change in Israeli military policy has also resulted from a reduction both in popular support for the high levels of defence spending in Israel and in the decreased willingness of the average Israeli to serve and sacrifice his/her life so long as the private sector and development in high technology offer greater opportunities than the military for economic status and social mobility. These changes in societal outlook in Israel have accompanied a rise in standards of living, and in individualistic and consumerist attitudes that conflict with both the essence and nature of military service.

These changes in Israeli society have greatly affected the contours of women's struggles in Israel. On one hand, the reorganization of the IDF towards the image of a professional army has problematized women's right to fight by reducing the time of women's service from twenty-four to twenty-one months, thus further dissuading women from pursuing a military career. Furthermore, the prospect of cutting expenditures has focused on those soldiers who are considered 'expendable', and women have become increasingly associated with this category on account of their lack of high-level military training. The Israeli Women's Network has argued that the decreased service time for women is part of a broader trend to 'diminish the status of women in the IDF' (*Women in Israel*, 1996: 77). This process is a grave concern for those women soldiers for whom career advancement in the IDF depends on the opportunity to serve alongside men on equal terms. On the other hand, women are entering combat positions at the same time as the military is becoming a less important institution in Israeli society as a whole. This begs the question: should women reorient their energies toward inclusion in areas that hold greater promise in the future such as high technology and the private sector? Along with the growing trend toward privatization in Israel, these professions have surpassed the military as lucrative and growing sectors of the Israeli economy in which young students and urban professionals seek employment. This economic trend couples with the growing criticism of military policy and the state's authority to declare war expressed by protest movements and ordinary citizens since the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Despite the absence of a comprehensive peace settlement and despite

increasing personal insecurity in Israel (because of terrorist attacks) decreased respect for and investment in the military may characterize security policy in the years to come. As a result, combat duty, for both women and men, may not be the most conducive avenue for attaining social mobility in Israeli society. This development stands in sharp contrast to the early years of state building and inter-state war when the military stood as the ultimate institution in Israeli society representing the sacrifice and fraternity that defined citizenship in the State of Israel.

Concluding remarks

In a zone of conflict, involvement in society tends to be characterized by the precedence of equality of duties over the equality of rights. The primary duty is to bear part of the defence burdens of the community. In order to produce and reproduce the national security agenda, societies in conflict make demands of the citizen that otherwise peaceful societies would not. As the Israeli context demonstrates, women have been particularly torn between their individual rights and their collective duties. On the one hand, war has served as the catalyst for the political mobilization of Israeli women as they have entered the political sphere in order to struggle for equality of inclusion in the national security agenda. This has involved an arduous campaign for women's right to fight and women's entry into combat positions in the IDF. The result of these efforts has been an increase in the number of women who strive to be equally responsible for the security of the State of Israel. On the other hand, simultaneously with women's right to fight, there has developed a feminist peace sentiment in Israel that eschews the militaristic undercurrents of Israeli society and seeks social transformation on the basis of women's support for peace and social justice. The feminist rejection of peace relates in an ambiguous way to the feminist acceptance of women in combat. While both are definitions of 'feminism' in Israel, their objectives can often contradict one another.

Therefore, war has mobilized women in the public sphere both 'for' and 'against' military combat. However, war also marginalizes women by transferring the burdens of conflict to the traditional family and by reinforcing the domesticated roles of women as wives and mothers. In this sense, the equality of duties has tended to constrain the opportunities available for women to participate at all levels and in all sectors of Israeli society. As a result of the militarized and masculinized characteristics of war, which have a tendency to spill over into the private sphere, women have forged a connection in their political activism between the dual goals of feminism and peace. The right to fight and the right to peace are two distinctly separate objectives for Israeli women that coexist uneasily in their political struggles. While the former does not help to

redefine security, the latter is problematic at a time when peace negotiations are at an impasse and Israeli society is struggling against serious security concerns. The appropriate path for Israeli women's struggles will remain ambiguous and problematic for so long as the security situation persists and changes continue to occur in Israeli society and its economy. However, it is clear that, with respect to women in Israel, future peace negotiations must necessarily include gender issues in order to fully address the rights, freedoms and securities of all members of that society, both male and female. The relationship between gender and security in Israel will depend to a large extent on the evolution of the strategic environment and the capacity of feminist groups, regardless of their goals, to fully participate in forging women's roles in the theory and practice of Israeli national security.

NOTES

- 1 For a more comprehensive discussion of 'zones of conflict' – or what they refer to as 'zones of turmoil' – see Singer and Wildavsky, 1993.
- 2 Not all leaders in the Middle East are in the military although many have a background in the armed forces.
- 3 For more on the Israeli occupation and Palestinian *intifada*, see Lockman and Benin, 1989.
- 4 Indeed, at the time of writing, the second *intifada*, as it has come to be known, since September 2000 has caused a breakdown in peace negotiations and an escalation of violence in the region.
- 5 For a comprehensive overview of different feminist perspectives see Tong, 1989.
- 6 Israel spends approximately US\$8.7 billion on the military, 9.4 per cent of its GDP. For more information see the CIA Factbook at www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook
- 7 For example, the 1952 Law of Return provides that any Jew throughout the world can emigrate to Israel and obtain Israeli citizenship automatically.
- 8 The 'status quo' was established to placate the demands of the religious sector, and has been kept indefinitely because of the disproportionate influence of religious political parties in all subsequent coalition governments.
- 9 For more on the 1967 War, see Khouri, 1976; Smith, 1988; Parker, 1992.
- 10 Arab women citizens of Israel as well as Jewish women who are married, pregnant or claim a religious way of life are exempt from military service.
- 11 According to the Israel Women's Network, female soldiers in 1994 were categorized thus: 12.6 per cent were officers, 10 per cent worked in technical professions, 9 per cent in instruction and training, 7 per cent in intelligence, 7 per cent in communications, and 1 per cent in the military police.
- 12 Until recently, women served only in combat support positions.
- 13 See *Ha'aretz*, Friday, 9 April 1999.
- 14 See *The Jerusalem Post*, Monday, 19 April 1999.
- 15 For example, the debate over the promotion of Brigadier General Nir Galili to major general was taken to the Israeli High Court of Justice after he was accused of raping a female soldier. See *Ha'aretz*, Friday, 26 March 1999. Other less publicized cases of rape and sexual harassment in the military have raised serious questions about women's position in the military.

- 16 In response to the bombardment of Israeli cities in the north by Palestinian militants in southern Lebanon, the IDF staged a siege of west Beirut. This mission deviated from the national consensus and the agreed-upon 40-kilometre security zone thus causing outrage in the Israeli public directed against the government.
- 17 Chazan, quoted in 'The Israeli Woman – Myth and Reality: An Interview with Naomi Chazan', *New Outlook: Middle East Monthly*, June–July 1989.
- 18 The Palestinian reaction to the Israeli–Palestinian women's partnership was equally hostile during times of crisis. In fact, the Islamic resistance movement threatened female members of the Palestinian side of the Jerusalem Link and reinforced the negative atmosphere for joint work with Israelis.
- 19 Women's peace groups in Israel included Women for Women Political Prisoners, The Peace Quilt (an Israeli–Palestinian project exhibited at the Knesset on 5 June 1988), *Reshet* (the Israel Women's Peace Net), Women in Black, and the Jerusalem Link (an umbrella organization for two Israeli women's centres, an Israeli centre in west Jerusalem and a Palestinian centre in east Jerusalem).
- 20 'Parlor Talks for Peace', *Jerusalem Post*, March 1990.
- 21 Women in Black is a loose network of women dedicated to peace and social justice, and opposed to war and violence. The women-only silent and non-violent vigils were established as a formula for action in Israel in 1988 with the objectives of protesting Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and promoting a peaceful settlement of the conflict. See www.chorley2.demon.co.uk/wib.htm
- 22 For example, Parents Against Silence (dubbed Mothers Against Silence) during the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Parents Against Moral Erosion in response to the 1987 Palestinian uprising, and Four Mothers since 1997 for Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon. These groups, of disproportionately female composition, express the *feminine* rather than the feminist discourse for peace, emphasizing the private sphere and mothers' concern for their children – in these cases, concern for sons serving in IDF combat units.
- 23 The Link is a co-ordinating body of two independent women's centres, the Israeli *Bat Shalom* (Daughters of Peace), in west Jerusalem, and the Palestinian *Marcaz al-Quds la FNissah* (Jerusalem Centre for Women), in east Jerusalem.
- 24 Personal interview with Susan Techner, Jerusalem, 11 December 1997.

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