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Only a few Israeli Jews who have decided to join the Palestinian popular struggle have faced the challenging question of 'normalisation' of the *status quo* between the 'occupier' and the 'occupied'. Among them, a young woman activist from *Anarchists Against the Wall*, Adar Grayevsky, has underlined her political perspective by analysing the current reality of non-violent resistance in the West Bank and saying that:

"I am against the 'normalisation' politics. What we, as *Anarchists Against the Wall*, are trying to do is jointly act with Palestinians through a Palestinian land struggle. There are many Israeli groups that are active in the Palestinian struggle and it is clear to them that this is not an equal partnership. We are joining in solidarity with Palestinians, but we understand our specific place in that struggle and we do not have final say, the final say is the Palestinian one. The concept of 'dialogue groups' with Palestinians without acting against the occupation has no meaning. The grassroots involvement has developed relations and cooperation, but Palestinians always lead their collective struggle"<sup>214</sup>.

Moreover, she has continued explaining in detail her way of joining in such grassroots activism by questioning the Israeli mainstream left wing:

"I think that the traditional Israeli Left, especially the Zionist Left, has definitively been an elite Ashkenazi movement and this is growing more and more. There are some groups that are trying to change it, but at the end activism is a privilege and the ability to spend time and not having to work twelve hours a day is a privilege. It is a question of class. In our group there are many people who are young, students. Our way of activism is very specific since it has a lot to do with physical confrontation towards army and police, you can get hurt by them during demonstrations"<sup>215</sup>.

Such an issue has continued to be at the core of the whole debate, both among grassroots organisations and at the academic level, pointing up what Manal Tamimi has clearly expressed as follows:

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<sup>213</sup> Interview with Ayed Morrar, Budrus, June 18, 2011

<sup>214</sup> Interview with Adar Grayevsky, Tel Aviv, June 13, 2011.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*

“our problem is not with Jewish people, but with Zionism as an ideology. When we started our demonstrations, Israeli activists started to come here: this was the first time I could see the human side of Israeli Jewish people. I realised that there are also Israeli Jews who believe in peace, like us. I know that an increasing number of them are refusing their governmental policies. And since the last years one of my best friends has become a Jew. This is not the problem. We live all together, none has to try to steal other’s land, we want to live as neighbours, and not as enemies, not as ‘occupied’ and ‘occupiers’. For this reason we are against ‘normalisation’ since it creates normal relationships under the military occupation. First of all we need normal relationships between equal sides, between free people. I believe that it is time to create a successful example for the whole Middle East”<sup>216</sup>.

However, the present reality has drawn an opposite and dramatic picture on the ground. Since 2009 the Israeli government has started to be aware of the political power raised by such non-violent resistance initiatives, and predominantly in Nabi Saleh, which has turned into a model for other popular committees across Palestine. Recent reports have shown how the Israeli army has deployed collective punishments towards the entire population of these villages that have promoted non-violent resistance demonstrations against the annexation Wall<sup>217</sup>. The Israeli political strategy has progressively used diverse kinds of aggression to attack the fundamental rights of the Palestinian people, from home demolitions, to severe restrictions of freedom of movement, to arbitrary arrests, injuries, and killings. The Nabi Saleh struggle has been taken into account even by the most popular Israeli TV channels: they have showed Palestinian demonstrations and the ways through which the situation could become seriously problematic for the Israeli army, which has started to consider them as possible promoters of a third *Intifadah*.

With regard to the other above-mentioned practice of Palestinian resistance, since the first call launched by the Palestinian civil society in 2005, the *BDS* movement has advocated a struggle based on universal rights and international law that also includes the academic and cultural boycott of Israeli institutions. In supporting the initial Palestinian appeal for a *BDS* campaign from within Israel, a growing number of Israeli citizens have sustained and encouraged *BDS* actions, to further their view of a common future founded on real peace and equality among Palestinians, Jews and all

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<sup>216</sup> Interview with Manal Tamimi, Nabi Saleh, June 18, 2011.

<sup>217</sup> See specific documentation provided by both Israeli and Palestinian human rights organisations, such as *B'tselem* and *Addameer*, in relation to the Israeli repression adopted towards villages that have promoted significant struggles against the annexation of their land by the Wall.

inhabitants of the region. Inside this movement, the *Coalition of Women for Peace*<sup>218</sup> has represented a central voice of the struggle; in fact, since 2005, at the end of the international conference of *Women in Black*, they approved the final declaration in which they expressed:

“support for the Palestinian call on the international community, to impose non-violent and effective measures such as divestment and sanctions on Israel, for as long as Israel continues to violate international law, and continues the occupation and the oppression of the Palestinian people” (Final Declaration - *Women in Black* International Conference ‘Women Resist Occupation and War’, 12-16 August 2005).

Later on, in November 2009, at the conclusion of a very contentious internal debate, the General Assembly of the *Coalition of Women for Peace* decided to support the Palestinian call for *BDS* and it has become an active part of the international movement.

#### 2.4. An Ongoing Example of Joint Politics in East Jerusalem

In a complex status of ‘in-between’, the neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem is the most controversial symbol of non-violent resistance in a joint struggle led by both Palestinians and Israelis. In the Palestinian side of the city and close to the 1967 border between East and West Jerusalem, since the late 1990s Palestinian residents have faced up against Israeli Jewish settlers who have started to occupy Palestinian houses and buildings in order to increase their presence and their control all over the territory as much as possible<sup>219</sup>. In the execution of such a plan, any future prospect of sharing Jerusalem has been made unachievable, and, moreover, this strategy has been used towards other communities nearby, such as in Silwan and in the Old City. Consequently, both Israelis and Palestinians, “who view what is happening in Sheikh

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<sup>218</sup> See chapter four in relation to Israeli women’s political background and its internal heterogeneity among peace feminist organisations.

<sup>219</sup> This side of Jerusalem has started to be disputed in 1972 when two Jewish bodies, the *Sephardic Community Committee* and the *Knesset Yisrael Committee*, declared their legal ownership on the land and began legal suits. From that moment, a number of eviction claims have been presented to the Supreme Court, generating a situation of more than twenty Palestinian families evicted between 2008 and 2011, and others will be evicted in the near future.

Jarrah as a horrible injustice”, have founded the *Solidarity Movement* to work by means of non-violent democratic struggle towards the aim of:

“a joint, effective voice of Arabs and Jews against the discriminatory policies of the Israeli occupation. In the long term, its aim is to help to promote peace in Jerusalem and to create a more just society. [...] In Sheikh Jarrah you can see the problems of the entire occupation concentrated in one place and brought to a head. An extremist ideological body is trying to create a situation that will thwart a peace agreement for all Israelis and Palestinians by creating facts on the ground” (*Sheikh Jarrah Solidarity Movement* leaflet, 2010).

On the one hand, the almost daily clashes between Jewish settlers and Palestinian residents have been rather tense due to the partial role of the Israeli police, who have not opposed the violence exercised by ultra-orthodox Jews. On the other hand, the increase in civil disobedience actions led by Israeli Jewish peace activists has meant that a public dissident voice has arisen within Israeli society, by operating not only in opposition to injustices perpetrated in Sheikh Jarrah, but also struggling against the general situation in the West Bank and inside Israel as well.

In the context of Sheikh Jarrah, women’s political role may be divided into two main discourses: the first one is connected with Palestinian women from the neighbourhood who have organised themselves into the *Women’s Forum of Sheikh Jarrah*, and have directly faced the Israeli evictions; the second concerns the position of Israeli women inside the *Solidarity Movement* and their relationships with Palestinian women. As part of the community that has been primarily involved in the effect of the evictions and in settlers’ daily violence, Palestinian women have challenged their own society by stressing their responsibility in resisting the Israeli oppression by means of peaceful popular struggle. On this point, the coordinator of the *Forum*, Amal al-Qassem has stated:

“we have started our work in the *Women’s Forum* in Sheik Jarrah after the eviction of al-Kurd family, the first one among other twenty-seven families that are refugees from 1948 land. We have started to organise ourselves as women because we were doing everything. We faced all the evictions by ourselves”<sup>220</sup>.

Furthermore, in relation to the issue of their human and political closeness to Israeli Jewish women, she has admitted that:

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<sup>220</sup> Interview with Amal al-Qassem, Ramallah, June 16, 2011.

“not all Palestinian people trust them because they come from very different organizations. We are against ‘normalisation’. Nowadays we are not equal. When we are equal in everything we can speak together from the same level. Most of the Israeli activists are expressing their solidarity for the Palestinians, but in which way? What is their role and what is our role? Sometimes I believe that they are doing these demonstrations more for themselves than for us”<sup>221</sup>.

Concerning the Israeli activists of the *Solidarity Free Movement*, one of the leaders Sara Benninga has stressed her belief in the basic principle of working together, Palestinians and Jews, in order to sit around the same table every week and decide about the following week’s demonstrations and non-violent actions. Remembering the initial steps of her involvement, she said:

“I started going every week and then, after half a year, there was a general meeting among Jerusalemite people to think what doing about Sheikh Jarrah because of the evictions. We decided to organise a march from West to East Jerusalem: at the beginning it was very small, then it became very big and significant. During our demonstrations the majority of participants are Israeli Jews, because Palestinians are a bit scared to come out. However, it is a joint work. As Israelis, we want to change the reality and create dialogue with Palestinians from Sheikh Jarrah and from other neighbourhoods around. We work both with Palestinians and inside our society (for instance, mainly tours and school courses in East Jerusalem and also in the Negev). We want to spread our struggle all over the land of Palestine”<sup>222</sup>.

The Israeli side, on the other hand, has become aware of the risk that these actions pose to their government, which has started to arrest more and more peace activists inside the Jewish state itself with the purpose of limiting and discouraging Israeli citizens from backing such politics. For instance, one major attempt of contrasting Israeli peace activists (and in particular, women) took place in the summer 2010 when a few of Israeli Jewish feminist mainstream accused Israeli leftist feminist women for silencing sexual harassments in Sheikh Jarrah, generating an internal sticky discussion within the Israeli feminist movement. In a parallel way, the political investigation on several Israeli peace and feminist organisations<sup>223</sup> conducted by the

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<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>222</sup> Interview with Sara Benninga, Sheikh Jarrah, June 17, 2011.

<sup>223</sup> In addition to Ilana Hammerman and her group, another Israeli peace feminist organisation *New Profile* (see chapter four) has been under investigation. As reported on the *New Profile* website by the activist Adina Aviram: “we, in *New Profile*, try to offer a different way of thinking, engendered by a critical perspective on our lives here. We do this because our conscience tells us so and from a sense of

Israeli police has focused on the objective of intimidating and making analogous joint non-violent actions organised by Israeli Jews together with Palestinians illegal.

In response to such accusations, a number of Israeli feminist and peace-oriented women have put into question their roles as citizens of the Jewish state (the ‘occupier’) and, especially, their awareness in supporting Palestinian women (the ‘occupied’) through joint struggles based on women’s solidarity in opposition to military occupation. Concerning this subject, one of the most eminent feminist peace activists Yvonne Deutsch has written the following reflection:

“when I am in East Jerusalem I am fully aware of being an occupier (albeit a resistant occupier) or a guest. The fact that I oppose the occupation does not take away my membership of the occupying society. [...] I do not believe that our role as members of the occupying society is to ‘free’ Palestinian women from oppression. Our role is rather to support their struggle to free themselves from the occupation. If a trust relationship is developed between Israeli and Palestinian women and if they ask for our solidarity on feminist issues and women’s oppression, of course our role is to be there. But first they have to invite us to join them. Otherwise we risk falling into well-known colonial attitudes that try to ‘free’ the colonized from what we perceive as the ‘darkness’ and ‘backwardness’ they suffer from” (Deutsch, 2010).

## 2.5. *Resisting from Within: Israeli Jewish Women and Civil Disobedience*

The Sheikh Jarrah joint struggle should be considered not only in relation to the context of East Jerusalem, but also as a spreading reaction of Palestinians and Israelis who no longer wish to be part of the pre-constructed paradigms of opposite narratives in conflict and under military occupation. In looking thoughtfully at Israeli society (in terms of the ‘occupier’), some of the participants, mostly women, have decided to break the discriminatory Israeli law by joining in acts of civil disobedience directed against their own government’s policies. The initial stage of one of the most prominent women’s civil disobedience actions was acted out in May 2010, when the writer and activist Ilana Hammerman decided to enable a group of Palestinian women to enter Israel and to enjoy the sea for the first time in their lives. In an article published in the

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responsibility. We refuse to accept the militarist life style that dominates Israeli existence. This militarism makes it possible to delegitimise those who dare to question accepted wisdom and are guided by their conscience - as against society’s dictates and norms. Members of our organisation are being politically persecuted these very days. The aim is to intimidate and silence us” (27<sup>th</sup> May 2009, <URL:<http://www.newprofile.org/english/?p=128>>).

Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* and entitled *If There Is a Heaven*, Hammerman described a special day of fun with three Palestinian young women in Tel Aviv, concluding:

“[...] and then we would have taken two cars and six young women, and maybe men too, and given not only them but also ourselves a feeling of freedom, temporary but still profound and meaningful” (*Ha'aretz*, 7<sup>th</sup> May 2010).

After that event, other women decided to join civil disobedience initiatives and, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2010, twelve Israeli Jewish women<sup>224</sup> publicly announced their choice not to obey an ‘illegal and immoral law’ (referring to their violation of the ‘Law of Entry’ into Israel in order to carry out their acts of disobedience). Following in the footsteps of Hammerman’s previous trips, Israeli women together with Palestinian women from villages in the West Bank crossed the military checkpoints illegally in order to give the opportunity to Palestinian women to experience, though only for a day, the meaning of being free to travel wherever they wanted. These Israeli women wrote the statement *We Do Not Obey* that was reported on *Ha'aretz* as follows:

“we cannot assent to the legality of the ‘Entry into Israel Law’, which allows every Israeli and every Jew to move freely in all regions between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River while depriving Palestinians of this same right. [...] It is not we who are violating the law: the State of Israel has been violating it for decades. It is not we -women with a democratic conscience- who have transgressed: the State of Israel is transgressing, spinning us all into the void” (*Ha'aretz*, 6<sup>th</sup> August 2010).

Nonetheless, the consequential risk related to such illegal trips has been higher for Palestinian women who could face severe punishments if discovered inside the Israeli territory without a permit. This and similar civil disobedience initiatives have produced a contentious debate inside Israel, where an attitude of violent intolerance towards civil and human rights activists has grown. The peak of this aggressive climate was reached when the organisation called *Legal Forum for the Land of Israel* asked the Attorney General to open a criminal investigation into Hammerman’s group due to their violation of Israeli law. In this way, the legal issue has continued to be at the core of such Israeli women’s acts of civil disobedience (as started with Thoreau), and, specifically, the violating of the ‘Entry into Israel Act’, since the spirit of this act does

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<sup>224</sup> At the time of writing, the women’s group named *Lo Metsaytot* (meaning ‘We Do Not Obey’ in Hebrew) has a website only in Hebrew.

not belong within the ethical and political consciousness of women activists. These women have effectively underlined the absolute asymmetry between the right of every Israeli and Jew to move freely and the negation of this fundamental right for the native Palestinians.

This attitude has been well explained by an activist who signed the original statement, Nitza Aminov, and who has made clear that:

“the most significant challenge is for the Israeli society. Our group now is about thirty women. I do not know how we can continue to do it. We are looking for other ideas about actions of disobedience. Through our connections, it has been possible to build strong relationships between the ‘occupier’ and the ‘occupied’. But we are working on disobedience, and not about empowering women and so on. Israeli women do not understand deeply the relation between us, the ‘occupier’, and them, the ‘occupied’; they feel to be obliged to help them, but often they do not know how”<sup>225</sup>.

Concerning her point of view on their civil disobedience actions, she has stated that:

“for me solidarity is also a political act, it is part of my activity. Of course, inside my group there are many different political views, from the ‘one-state solution’ to the ‘two-state solution’, from Zionists to anti-Zionists. For me this group is on acting ‘civil disobedience’, I do not know how it will grow and develop. It means to go against the law, not to accept the law. The law does not permit to Palestinians to enter Israel. We think that it is immoral what is going on, and this is why we will continue to keep the right of the Palestinians, of silent people”<sup>226</sup>.

As women who have theorised and practiced civil disobedience, the group organised one of the most successful joint conferences by Palestinian and Israeli Jewish women on the 12<sup>th</sup> March 2011 in the town of Beit Ommar in the occupied Palestinian territories. At this conference, about two hundred and fifty women from a number of varied backgrounds discussed civil disobedience from different perspectives. By emphasising their objection to military occupation and the use of violence as well as by condemning the complete violation of fundamental human rights, such as the suffering (and in several circumstances the death) of Palestinian women at the checkpoints and the denial of Palestinian freedom of movement, all the participants have agreed with the

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<sup>225</sup> Interview with Nitza Aminov, East Jerusalem, June 14, 2011.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid*.

fact that joint non-violent actions may represent one of the last feasible strategies to be implemented in order to face the Israeli power. Both at the political level and within the emotional-private sphere, Palestinian and Israeli women have shared their experiences, their points of view and their prospects for the inspiration of further similar ways of everyday resistance.

As a result of this, other women and men within Israeli civil society have started to sustain Hammerman and her group publicly, calling for move to increase the hope of change by taking part in instances of civil disobedience. Above all, in June 2011, three hundred higher education lecturers signed a public advertisement in *Ha'aretz* newspaper in support of Hammerman's group. Regarding such women's initiatives, they wrote:

“in these dark hours, we are willing to drive our guests, Palestinian women and children, to hide them and to support their challenge in any other way, whether in deeds or in words. The action of these women shows the right way for any Israeli citizen who truly supports a democracy respectful of human rights. Should Israel's legal system find it appropriate to prosecute and penalize these women we shall be willing to support them, to join them and to be tried alongside them” (*Ha'aretz*, 17<sup>th</sup> June 2011).

## 2.6. *Women's Political Mobilisation: a Way Forward*

In recent times, remarkable political results have been achieved on the ground, with significant examples taking place in Budrus in 2004, and in Bi'lin in 2011<sup>227</sup>. Similar successes may be considered as being the implementation of the discourse that was primarily suggested by Edward W. Said, who critically discussed the necessity of a Palestinian internal change by means of non-violent and popular strategy. As he wrote, referring directly to Palestinians, but more widely to people who live in Palestine/Israel:

“what is needed is a creative method of struggle which mobilizes all the human resources at our disposal to highlight, isolate, and gradually make untenable the main aspects of Israeli occupation” (Said, 2002).

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<sup>227</sup> Concerning the two most well-known symbols of non-violent resistance in the West Bank, the Israeli Supreme Court ordered the moving of the route of the Wall (also known as the 'Defence Barrier') closer to the Green Line. In spite of this, the construction of a new one is not expected to result in the return of much previously-seized territory to the original Palestinian landowners.

As explored in this chapter, these words can be applied to several political actions which have taken place both in the occupied Palestinian territories and in Israel, in which women have affirmed themselves as leading actors within their different historical and socio-political contexts. By empowering themselves and acting in more creative and rather successful ways, they have advanced their own culture of resistance. This has mainly meant transforming and restructuring the previous struggles, firstly those directed against the Israeli military occupation, and then those directed more generally towards the internal as well as external oppressive power-relations.

In doing this, what has emerged throughout my fieldwork (and is mostly reported in extracts of the interviews I conducted) has indicated the necessity of building up a way of acting to foster a more pragmatic solidarity among women. In such an ongoing climate of conflict, Palestinian and Israeli Jewish women's struggles and resistance continue to be vital to those wishing to reject the *status quo*. Moreover, their idea of solidarity is connected with a growing attention towards their own differences, making space for alternative conceptions of understanding as well as practicing non-violence. Even though some internal tensions have remained (especially related to the controversial issue of power asymmetry), the examples I have shown throughout the thesis can prove that women's involvement in such political actions has produced a potential for a growing strength, in resisting and experiencing solidarity through difference.

In the common perception, the majority of such political demonstrations established on civil disobedience and non-violent resistance principles have been perceived as passive strategies. However, on the contrary, they respond to the need for an active role for people who refuse to be part of the predominant system, and who decide consciously to embrace non-violence in order to condemn the Israeli government. In this sense, the rise of women's mobilisation related to civil disobedience and non-violent resistance has suggested a more inclusive way of resisting their own governmental policy (specifically in the case of Israeli women), as well as the military occupation, including all of its multifaceted consequences caused by the Wall and the expansion of illegal settlements, but particularly the effects they have on the daily life of Palestinian women. In such a framework, meaningful interactions between women intellectuals and grassroots activists have emerged, reflecting an influential development into new political directions beyond the crystallised feminist dichotomy of theoretical knowledge and action.

Nevertheless, at the same time, the complexity that has characterised women's activism in everyday challenges within their own societies as well as in cooperation with the other side has implied the necessity of stressing all the contradictions emerging from the current reality. Not only has the paradigm 'occupier' and 'occupied' become something extremely controversial within the various women's feminist struggles, but it has also required a more thorough examination of the power relationships inside the women's movements themselves. Although the experiences described above have involved grassroots Israeli-Palestinian cooperation, Israeli Jewish women as the citizens of an occupying society cannot withdraw from pursuing their own internal criticism in order to achieve real freedom and justice for the oppressed side. In agreement with this political perspective, the feminist activist and academic Daphna Golan has stated that:

"like Ilana Hammerman, I too refuse to obey illegal laws. In a country where spacious prisons were built under the protection of the law, in which people live in fear, it is not only our right but our duty to offer a space of hope. As long as we do not have agreed-upon borders, we are living in an occupying country that discriminates between the rights of different groups based on their ethnicity. In such a country, just like in South Africa under apartheid, it is our right and our duty to challenge the legality of the law" (*Ha'aretz*, 27<sup>th</sup> December 2010).

On the other hand, the Israeli government has continued to legislate laws with the intention of silencing any form of internal opposition and of further restricting freedom of speech among Israeli citizens<sup>228</sup>. Within this context, the defence of the human dignity and freedom of every person, which has been at the centre of the history of women's movements both in Israel and in the occupied Palestinian territories, has appeared as one of the few remaining political views with the potential to start a just process of recognition and reconciliation. At least on a theoretical level, the alternative voices I tried to give space to throughout this final chapter, emerging from Budrus to Jerusalem, as well as from Nabi Saleh to Tel Aviv, could still provide an opportunity to overcome the current impasse.

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<sup>228</sup> The *Nakba*'s law, a law revoking government funding for groups that mark the Palestinian Catastrophe - the *Nakba*, and the *Anti-Boycott* law, enabling the filing of civil lawsuits against those who call for boycotting the state of Israel or any of its institutions and territories, were approved respectively in March and July 2011, with the aim of deterring criticism and protests against current Israeli policy.

## CONCLUSION

Through the course of the research which has culminated in this thesis, I have developed an increasing awareness of the importance of considering Palestinian and Israeli Jewish women's political activism within a theoretical framework based on the feminist critique related to conflict contexts, and specifically to the reality of military occupation as the main ongoing obstacle to peace. I have also grown in certainty that continuing with this analysis may be relevant and necessary for the debate to realise a just, shared future in the land of Palestine under mutual recognition and reconciliation. Although the search for a peaceful way out of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has continued to be considered intractable and its goal to be elusive, what has emerged from the women I interviewed can be regarded as a significant challenge towards the *status quo*.

On the other hand, in a struggle between an 'occupier' and an 'occupied', the Israeli-Palestinian conflict cannot be reduced to the issues of recognition and reconciliation, as founding pillars of a feasible conflict resolution. Throughout my study it has also been important to take account of the structural conditions that have characterised the reality on the ground in Palestine/Israel, without ignoring historical and political roots causes of such a conflict. Whilst attempting to understand the major consequences generated by the persistence of military occupation, my work has mainly focused on Palestinian and Israeli Jewish women's political initiatives directed towards the bridging between conflicting stories by means of parallel and joint projects, with the purpose of deconstructing and redirecting their principal alternative views and perspectives.

In particular, in the development of my research I have discussed the main ways through which women activists have applied their diverse strategies and practices, starting from their national women's movements and joint projects, in order to resist the everyday conflict reality. In this frame, I have identified a conclusive interpretation of the findings from my fieldwork, by evidencing the necessity of looking at the heterogeneous structure of women's movements both in the West Bank and in Israel. This has meant that while on the one hand these women's feminist experiences that I collected may be representative of what has occurred, especially in the last ten years, within the most prominent cases of Palestinian and Israeli women's political activism,

on the other hand it is important to be aware of their internal challenges. I have interpreted these interviews taking into account such a complex contradiction between women's narratives concerning their mobilisation against military occupation and their relationship with their own ethno-national identities, in addition to their internal divisions.

For this reason, despite the existence of substantial contributions from established scholars in relation to the most recognised challenges of women's movements, I have attempted to question and, at the same time, to expand on the existing feminist peace literature. By deconstructing the way through which Palestinian and Israeli Jewish women's political actions have faced the linkage between feminism(s) and ethno-national narrative identities under military occupation, I have analysed the above-mentioned women's initiatives through suggesting another possible narrative, as well as by considering their relative significances contextualised within contemporary political theory. In this way, my research has also considered the most recent examples which are useful in understanding Palestinian and Israeli Jewish women's political mobilisation, in order to balance their fragmented identities and their mutual as well as conflicting interactions.

Starting with the Introduction section, I have attempted to follow an analytical path in which the key paradigm of women's political participation in resistance to the *status quo* might assume coherent meanings within the persistence of military occupation and the widespread construction of exclusivist ethno-national narrative identities. The historical and contemporary cases I have used in my study have demonstrated a similar challenge, which has been worsened by a common denial of recognising the asymmetry of power and privileges between Palestinians and Israeli Jews in women's initiatives as well. By taking into account as many elements of this complex situation as possible, I have interrelated past events with the most recent examples of political alternatives which have tried to encourage new, viable parameters for coming debates on conflict resolution.

Within the plurality of narratives concerning women's political activism in Palestine/Israel, I have sought to record my intellectual journey through a multi-perspective approach, in order to go beyond the standardised paradigms related to women's feminist challenges in the peculiarity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In line with the deep-seated intertwining between everyday realities and the conflicting issues

of Palestinians and Israeli Jews, I have found it necessary to look into the political experiences of those women activists who have contributed unconventional ways of discussing and tackling the nature of this protracted conflict. In this frame, my aim has been to articulate analytical lenses through which it is useful to explore how a considerable number of Palestinian and Israeli Jewish women joining in the political debate have developed original insights concerning their own narrative identities, alongside the striving for a prospect of future reconciliation. Above all, the most difficult obstacle has been represented by the impossibility of reducing several different understandings and experiences of women's activism into a package which fits within the mainstream feminist critique.

This is why I have aimed to partially deconstruct conventional feminist and peace literature itself in order to stress the complexity within Palestinian and Israeli women's movements in relation to their mutual as well as internal interactions. Embracing what has been defined as 'intersectionality', I have stressed the relationships among the multiple dimensions that have characterised diverse forms of social relations and constructions of narrative identities. In such a way, I hope to have provided an analytical contribution by linking what has been deeply discussed by the current feminist scholarship, in particular the feminist peace literature on conflict contexts, and what I have empirically determined during my fieldwork.

In pursuing this research object, I have reported on the most prevalent issues, standpoints and practices of women's politics from diverse contexts, along with the commonalities and contradictions also expressed through their own ethno-national collective narratives. As shown in detail in chapters three and four, Palestinian women activists (both in the West Bank and inside Israel) have experienced everyday struggles under military occupation and unequal laws; while Israeli Jewish women interviewees have pursued their actions against the increasing militarisation of their society, forming their understanding of military occupation by embracing approaches that are, for the most part, defined as feminist. Examining what has emerged as the outcome of my fieldwork, it becomes clear that Palestinian women activists, as women living in a stateless nation, have strongly debated their support or rejection of a feminist perspective within their own national resistance movement, and that the internal disputes and challenges within the Israeli Jewish women's groups, as part of an occupying state, have in many cases been associated with ethnic and class divisions, whilst carrying out action seeking to further support for Palestinian women's resistance.

In addition, within the Israeli women's peace and feminist background, the central question regarding their contradictory visions towards Zionism (considered as the guiding principle of the Jewish state and the basis of its current policies) has continued to remain a major taboo. In my analysis I have specifically underlined the fact that, since the 1970s, middle-class Ashkenazi feminists have assumed hegemonic power in the internal dynamics of peace women's organisations; thus, the Mizrahi and the Palestinian women citizens of Israel who wish to be active in this area have been subordinated by the Ashkenazi elite. Acknowledging the work of those feminist scholars and grassroots activists who have described and demonstrated how the Ashkenazi women have a privileged position within such movements, my contribution has attempted to further explore internal Jewish divisions, and the negative influence they have on joint cooperative actions involving Palestinian women both from inside Israel and from the West Bank.

In the same context, bearing in mind a few of the historic joint initiatives and struggles between Palestinian and Israeli Jewish women since the beginning of the XX century, I have examined in particular one of the most prominent Palestinian-Israeli women's coalitions, the *Jerusalem Link*. Although they are usually seen as projects founded on the concept of 'peace dialogue' initiated in the 1990s with the Oslo process, such initiatives have still been marked by unequal power-relationships and discriminations occurring among their participants, with a recent peak in this problem resulting from *Operation Cast Lead* in 2008/9. In reflecting upon recurrent controversies and clashes within similar women's political commitments, the equality pattern still represents the most problematic boundary in a situation of 'normalised' military occupation. Consequently, the majority of women I interviewed during my fieldwork have admitted the effective demise of joint politics that has missed its initial aims and practices. Whether it has been complex to analyse tangible gains that women have achieved, such joint initiatives have at least shaped consciousness towards their political movements as well as towards their own societies. Indeed, although most of them have not wanted to put a definitive end to such projects, the original idea of cooperation and mutual recognition diminished in value with regard to its potential for carrying forwards a shared future between Palestinians and Israeli Jews.

The complex reality of the Palestinian and Israeli women activists I encountered in the course of my research may be described as being the core of many stories of

struggle, resistance and also of failure. By reporting on major cases experienced by women interviewees, I have striven for a better understanding of both joint and internal dynamics. Since the initial stage I have been aware of the multitude of frames through which I could choose to go deeply into such issues: on the one side, the vast majority of feminist theorists have reflected on the two main dimensions relating to women's socio-political role in nationalist constructions and women's criticism in opposition to the ongoing conflict; on the other, the internal situation within women's feminist movements themselves has required analysis. In questioning the compatibility between feminism(s) and nationalism, it is fundamental to be aware of each specific historical and political context analysed.

Moreover, I sought to pay attention to women's alternative discourses capable of moving beyond those dominant standpoints which have been progressively established on exclusivist boundaries. By following the foremost studies conducted from a critical viewpoint by the major scholars on the issues of women's activism in Palestine/Israel, among which are those from Ronit Lentin, Nahla Abdo, Tamar Mayer, Simona Sharoni, and Sophie Richter-Devroe, my work has aimed to integrate such previous researches, and at the same time, to suggest a further perspective on the exploration of the different discourses that have informed women's activism in the last years in the West Bank and inside the Jewish state. To treat women's mobilisation as a central dimension to be considered in the process of recognition and reconciliation in Palestine/Israel, my analysis has also observed not only that women's political initiatives have to be more visible, but also that this could illuminate both theories and practices directed towards a potential political plan founded on women's experiences of struggle and solidarity.

From this view, my research can be mostly considered as a heuristic illustration, since it has raised additional questions concerning possible ways through which Palestinian and Israeli Jewish women activists could translate their analytical debates into the practices of everyday politics. In looking at their internal national and joint initiatives, my analysis has also considered further case studies within the context of some more universalised examples of women's opposition to conflict realities such as those in Northern Ireland and South Africa. When considering such forms of activism and making comparisons with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it must be borne in mind that several projects and direct actions have not achieved their initial objectives, although the majority of women activists have fought impressively hard to advance

their participation and their role in the face of violence and discriminations perpetrated by the dominant side.

The wide gap between the theoretical plans suggested by women's feminist organisations and what has happened in reality has created a prolonged impasse. This has continued to be a problematic issue not only in relation to women's mobilisation, but also in the way it has been concerned with past and current alternative politics to the dominant mainstream, such as in general inside leftist peace groups and political parties. Furthermore, in the serious paralysis of both civil societies such a discontinuity between theory and reality has been amplified by the effect of the silencing (often by using violent methods) of the influential role of Palestinian and Israeli Jewish peace activists by Israeli governments.

Even though the major examples of women's political activism in Palestine/Israel have been not able to effectively connect their standpoints with their actions, the value of their struggles against the Israeli military occupation and, additionally, in the advancement of alternative paradigms within male-dominated peace activism, is hard to dispute. Within the Israeli left-wing a contentious debate has taken place on this matter, but few have yet begun to realise the necessity of moving towards a renewed agenda, combining their different critical perspectives beyond conventional schemes. Most of the Israeli Jewish women interviewees have challenged, at least at the theoretical level, the current deadlock in order to give another chance in the direction of an effective political strategy. In this sense, the demand for a radical transformation in women's peace activism has begun to spread inside Israeli society, despite the fact that other discriminatory policies have obstructed a wider women's involvement for peace and social justice.

This critique, along with significant initiatives developed in the field, has become a fundamental tool for restructuring political practices as well as for readdressing useful, albeit problematic, prospects towards a future feminist and peace-oriented project. What has been called 'transversal politics', together with the 'politics of difference', may be used to illustrate how a number of feminist approaches have focused on the importance of comprehending encounters among differences both within unfair societies and in grassroots joint movements. My objective in examining such different forms of women's activism has been to reconsider the conceptual links that

may connect them into reciprocal dialectics which may help towards a feasible future peace.

The complexity of the ethno-national narrative identities existing in Palestine/Israel within the context of military occupation has continued to be central in the story of women's activism, as played out through their diverse historical and political backgrounds; as a consequence, their multi-layered viewpoints and the plurality of their experiences have not yet been completely recognised. In my view, this has represented one of the most decisive reasons for the collapse of several women's political projects, and in particular the Palestinian-Israeli joint ones. By contrast, the crossing of identity boundaries and the making of social connections have been problematised in many situations by the women I met during my fieldwork, with this activity seen as necessary in order to cultivate a fair politics of resistance and solidarity between Palestinians and Israeli Jews.

In reflecting on a subsidiary aspect evidenced by my research, namely the illusory nature of the mutual cooperation between Palestinian and Israeli Jewish women, I hope to have shown how the range of women's feminist political engagement is interrelated with contrasting meanings and strategies. Following a brief review of the foremost literature concerning the most contemporary examples of non-violent resistance and civil disobedience, and attempting to relate this to the outcomes of my field research, I have questioned in which way Palestinian and Israeli Jewish women activists have started a shift from a politics focused on the significance of dialogue to a politics aimed at shaping solidarity in an asymmetric and discriminatory reality such as the ongoing Israeli military occupation. In following this path, I have called attention to the existence of a challenging turning point in the current course of women's activism conducted mostly on the grassroots level. This suggests unprecedented discussions and non-violent actions led jointly by Palestinian and Israeli women, conceived as critical voices within the women's feminist movements themselves. In fact, the encouragement of solidarity by women activists who have stressed their criticism around issues of power relationships between the 'occupier' and the 'occupied' (including peace-oriented and feminist contexts) means attempting to develop a real trust and cooperation anchored into the reality on the ground.

In a further prospect, although the debate on the achievability of narratives beyond nationalism has thus far only remained at the academic level, Palestinian and Israeli Jewish women peace activists have attempted to tackle their political

marginalisation within their own communities, readdressing mainstream agendas by a sort of counter-narrative directed towards the dominant ethno-nationalist societal framework. As evidenced in the last section of the research, after the dramatic events that followed the demise of the Oslo Accords, the women's struggle has gradually become once again a force for illuminating their societies. In the wider context of Palestinian-Israeli peace activism, the meaning of grassroots actions and campaigns conducted non-violently has been redefined in different ways, though it has never been included in the official 'peace process'. In carrying out my work, I have needed to underline the way in which Palestinian and Israeli women's political activism has tried at least to open a new discussion space, providing an alternative to the predominant and ineffective 'top-down' strategies aimed towards conflict resolution. In confronting diverse realities on the ground as well as trying to redefine an effective way forward founded on recognition and reconciliation, the relevance of my research represents a basis for future work.

In detail, the deconstructive approach of highlighting internal tensions and the complexities within human interactions experienced by women activists both in the West Bank and in Israel can be further explored. If the majority of women I met during my fieldwork have expressed an awareness of the difficulties in changing their daily situation, they have nevertheless been vigorously engaged in intellectual debates and active mobilisation opposing the 'normalised' military occupation and growing ethno-nationalisms. By taking account of both theoretical arguments and political initiatives in the field, they have struggled to deconstruct and, later on, to reconstruct from different viewpoints the significance of women's activism from below, through extending their refusal to consider the 'Other' only as the enemy.

Observing the wave of socio-political protests that have awoken the entire Middle East since the beginning of 2011, I am prompted to think that perhaps these Palestinian and Israeli Jewish women's stories, which I have tried to shed light on throughout my thesis, may now begin to show the influence of these wider regional developments, and that it is reasonable to expect that they may shift from their idealist vision towards more concrete political responses, moving the participants beyond their present state of disillusionment. If ever there was a precise moment to track and to pursue this alternative road towards a real peace process in Palestine/Israel, it is now, at the time of publication of this thesis. The most significant examples of such political initiatives have a historic opportunity to develop their promising outlooks, building on

what has emerged from women's personal as well as collective experiences during the last decade.

## **APPENDIX**

### **Sample Interview Questions**

I would like to start our meeting asking you about some of the most significant experiences in your socio-political involvement that you can consider as turning points in your life. When and why did you decide to join in the political life in the West Bank/in Israel?

Have you specifically been engaged with women's and feminist movements?

Focusing on the relationship between your narrative identity as woman and/or as feminist activist and the ethno-national collective narrative identity, which one has prevailed in the formation of your own individual identity?

In your everyday life how are you able to manage these two challenging narrative identities?

What does being a woman mean in your society?

How can you define the term 'feminism(s)' in your personal and collective experience?

How do you relate your everyday political commitment with the increase of ethno-nationalism in the land of Palestine/Israel?

What about the internal heterogeneity within women's and feminist movements in the West Bank/in Israel?

With regard to the representation of the 'Other' side, what is your opinion concerning the founding pillars of Israeli-Palestinian joint projects, and in particular women's joint initiatives, such as the *Jerusalem Link*?

Do you believe in the potential benefit of any kind of relationship between women political activists from contrasting sides?

Considering the subject of Israeli-Palestinian joint initiatives, what do you think about the role of international peace-oriented organisations and/or NGOs, in relation to their influence within the reconciliation process between Palestinians and Israeli Jews?

In particular regarding women's joint narratives, what is your opinion looking towards feasible political alternatives suggested by the current women's politics?

The last question is related to the future prospects for the land of Palestine. Considering the *status quo*, what is your personal idea about future challenges? What do you think will be the long-term reality for Palestine/Israel, also reflecting on the ongoing debate about which possibility could be the most viable one between the so-called 'one-state solution' and the historic 'two-state solution'?

## List of Interviewees

### *Within Israeli Women's Activism:*

Gali Agnon

Nitza Aminov

Khulood Badawi

Shirin Batshon

Sara Benninga

Judy Blanc

Rula Deeb

Yvonne Deutsch

Ruti Divon

Nabila Espanioly

Bilha Golan

Esther Goldenberg

Haggith Gor

Adar Grayevsky

Ruth Hiller

Shula Keshet

Molly Malekar

Eilat Maoz

Dorothy Naor

Anat Saragusti

Erella Shadmi

Michal Zak

Edna Zaretsky-Toledano

### *Within Palestinian Women's Activism:*

Wafa Abdel RahDima Aweidah

Maha Abu-Dayyeh Shamas

Huda al-Imam  
Amal al-Qassem  
Naila Ayesh  
Amira Hilal  
Lama Hourani  
Mariam Ikermawi  
Islah Jad  
Rania Khayyat  
Amal Khreishe  
Khitam Saafin  
Rula Salameh  
Manal Tamimi

### **List of Organisations**

Agenda  
Ahoty (My Sister)  
Al-Tafula Center (For the Child)  
Anarchists Against the Wall  
Bat Shalom  
Coalition of Women for Peace  
Combatants for Peace  
Filastiniyat  
General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW)  
International Women's Commission (IWC)  
Isha L'Isha  
Jerusalem Center for Women (JCW)  
Jerusalem Link  
Kayan - Feminist Organization  
Machsom Watch  
Movement of Democratic Women for Israel (TANDI)  
New Profile

Palestinian and Israeli Coalition Against House Demolition  
Palestinian Popular Resistance Movement  
Palestinian Working Woman Society for Development (PWWSL)  
Physicians for Human Rights (PHR)  
Rural Women Development Society (RWDS)  
Sheikh Jarrah Solidarity Movement  
Ta'ayush (Arab Jewish Partnership)  
Women's Affair Center (WAC)  
Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC)  
Women's Forum Sheikh Jarrah  
Women in Black

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