

WOMEN, PEACE-BUILDING AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN PALESTINE

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ABSTRACT

Palestinian women became involved in peace-building initiatives in 1987 and were ready to establish channels of communication with Israeli individuals and groups. After the Oslo Accords were signed in 1993, Palestinian women activists worked in partnership with Israeli women to institutionalize women's peace-building work. At the civil society level, two institutions were established: one Palestinian (the Jerusalem Center for Women) and the other Israeli (Bat Shalom). Together, through dialogue, they built political initiatives under the umbrella of the Jerusalem Link, where staff and members of the two institutions could meet with the aim of developing a women's joint vision for (just) peace as well as organizing activities to promote this vision. A weakening Palestinian civil society post-Oslo and failure to achieve a fully agreed-upon joint vision for peace diminished the effectiveness of the Jerusalem Link, some of whose functions were eventually taken over by the International Women's Forum in 2008.

Keywords: Palestinian women, Peace-building, JCW, Zionist, Racism, Development

The involvement of Palestinian women in peace-building initiatives can be traced back to the first Intifada in late 1987, when women's activism was steered either by individual beliefs or factional agendas. These activists were ready to publicly open channels of communication with Israeli individuals and groups affiliated with the mainstream Zionist parties, the Zionist Left and the Left (non-Zionists or anti-Zionists). Soon after the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, Palestinian women activists who belonged to the Fateh movement, the Fida party, and the Palestinian communist party, along with independent activists, worked in partnership with Israeli women to institutionalize women's peace-building work. At the level of civil society, two institutions were established: one Palestinian — the Jerusalem Center for Women (JCW) and the other Israeli — Bat Shalom (BS), which was one of a kind. Together, through dialogue, they

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built political initiatives under the umbrella of the Jerusalem Link (JL), where members of the boards of directors and staff of the two institutions were able to meet with the aim of developing a women's joint vision for (just) peace as well as organizing activities to promote this vision of peace.

By the late 1990s, while the peace process at the formal level was struggling, the Jerusalem Link too was in crisis, and Palestinian euphoria that peace was possible was gradually fading. Palestinian women activists found themselves involved in negotiations with Israeli activists similar to those taking place at the formal level, but, with limited tools, were unable to reach out either to the public or the decision-making level. They struggled to propose a better peace deal and to influence the process of peace-building, but eventually realized that they had neither a peace partner nor a Palestinian political system that was developed to the extent where women and their feminist points of view² could be part and parcel of its decision-making process. The Israeli partner has not been ready to commit to a human rights-based approach to solving the conflict, where International Law is *the* term of reference, and the Palestinian political development has been obstructed by centralization, limited gender sensitivity, and concentration on democratic procedures rather than democratic values. All of this has hindered serious participation by Palestinian women in the peace-building debate and decision-making process.

The contribution of this research is derived from unfolding Palestinian women's understanding and assessment of their experience of peace-building in the context of the Jerusalem Link as a joint Palestinian-Israeli venture. Also, it illustrates this experience in relation to Palestinian political development and the role that Palestinian civil society managed to develop for itself. Thus, the framework of this empirical study is state-civil society relations in the absence of a sovereign state. It adopts a qualitative methodology and uses a discourse analysis approach, in which the main document of the Jerusalem Link, which included its principles or vision for peace, is analyzed. The study employs various primary and secondary sources, and has also used interviews as a research tool, having conducted semi-structured interviews with (former) activists.

This research is also built on the premise that political systems have the upper hand in setting the rules of the game for civil society and its components, especially when institutionalized democracy is not yet entrenched since the political system determines the constraints or the

² In this regard, there has not been a single united feminist vision or point of view. Women belonging to different political factions or parties brought different political agendas to the table. Individual beliefs included, for Mariam Irbash (former director of the Jerusalem Center for Women, Ramallah 2007-2014), "deep recognition of injustices"; while for Gila Svirsky of Bat Shalom, feminist politics meant: "sharing and being flexible that there is a compromise that both sides can live with." Interviewed in Jerusalem February 2005.

volume of available space according to which civil society components can function (Badran 2010: 53). The study provides a fresh perspective on the politics and intended role of the JCW as a component of Palestinian civil society and as a contributor to public space, that is, where different powers and interests compete to shape the societal moral order and influence the political system of the state.

The research covers the period between 1993 when the Oslo Accords were signed, and the second Intifada, which had faded away by the year 2004.³ This was the period during which the fate of the Occupied Territories and other contested issues were introduced into unprecedented debates at the level of both the Palestinian and the Israeli political establishments and both publics. It also witnessed euphoria for an approaching peace after leaders had shaken hands and signed agreements, and later, when people-to-people and second-track diplomacy programs flourished. Furthermore it saw the creation of a so-called ‘peace industry’, especially after the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, and was also the period of trust-building (to varying degrees) and trust-destruction (almost totally during the Second Intifada). It was the period during which meetings and joint programs became legitimate and public, and the period when different formal agreements encouraged bi-national encounters with the aim, as declared, of each getting to know the other, to find common ground, to build joint ventures and a culture of peace, to overcome stereotypical images, and to pave the way for a historical territorial compromise⁴ and reconciliation. At least this is what was written in formal agreements, donors’ guidelines, and both separate and joint project proposals. It was the period during which it was supposed that final talks would finish (1999) with a final settlement. But until the present, no agreement has yet been reached over the end-result of the conflict.

As part of illustrating the peace discourse pertaining to this research, the author initially offers a brief explanation of a conceptual issue used in this paper — that is, the study uses the term ‘peace-building’ rather than ‘peace-making’. Although some scholars and practitioners use the terms interchangeably, this research accepts that there is a distinction between them. In the field of peace studies and conflict resolution, the term ‘peace-making’ is usually used in association with formal processes at the leadership level to broker a deal between conflicting parties. With

³ It should be noted that between 2008 and 2014, the work of Jerusalem Link as a joint venture for peace was frozen. This was due to Bat Shalom’s position on the Israeli war on Gaza in 2008, which the JCW rejected, regarding it as equating the occupying state’s aggression with the occupied people’s resistance (interview with Mariam Irbash). During that period, the JCW worked in areas related to legal and psychological aid, with its primary focus on women in Jerusalem. However, since 2014, low profile work has been conducted under the umbrella of the JL, and importantly, the JCW has also appointed a new board of trustees.

⁴ In this context, a historical compromise is one where adversaries agree to settle their prolonged conflict by accepting the idea of division of Palestine and ‘land for peace’ equation.

this type of process, power politics usually dictates — and produces — a win-lose result, whereas the term ‘peace-building’ is associated with a process that aims to build peace at different levels: grassroots, middle-rank leadership and high leadership.

For instance, in his model of peace-building, Lederach stressed the need to address the complexity of ‘multiple actors, pursuing a multiplicity of actions and initiatives, at numerous levels of social relationships in an interdependent setting at the same time’ (Lederach 2005: 33). As applied by Knox and Quirk (2000: 24-28), Lederach’s model also stresses that peace-building processes pass through three stages: transition, transformation, and reconciliation.⁵ In such processes, one paradigm of power relations will be given up for an alternative paradigm, one that addresses the needs of both parties as well as the history of the conflict, and can thus move towards structural change. In other words, it can be said that the process of power politics represents a settlement process of peace-making, while one that addresses the felt needs and interests of all conflicting parties represents a resolution (Azar and Burton 1986: 92-97), or a peace-building process.

As such, in the context of researching the Jerusalem Center for Women of the Jerusalem Link, as a unit of analysis, the term peace-building is rather more accurate. However, it should be made clear that its use should not be understood simply to imply that the mind-set of power politics has been abandoned or is absent.

As part of analyzing the political peace discourse of the Jerusalem Center for Women of the Jerusalem Link, a number of values or concepts are examined. These concepts include equality, justice, racism, truth and peace, and will provide thoughts about the political orientations and characteristics of the discourse under discussion. It will be possible to detect the extent to which the discourse of the Jerusalem Center for Women of the Jerusalem Link is primarily pragmatic, principled, selective, and/or practical, or presents a combination of these qualities.

These five concepts are at the heart of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict and the debates of the Jerusalem Link. Each of the two sides — the Bat Shalom which is derived from the dominant society, and the Jerusalem Center for Women which is derived from the oppressed society — referred differently to these concepts. Each side across the divide provided meanings that fitted with its own perspective(s) as to the perceived legitimacy of its own cause and how future settlement/s might be envisioned. For example, the issue of legitimacy, being open to a plurality of interpretations, contributed to how truth continued to be a highly-contested issue.

⁵ While the Lederach peace-building model was applied by Knox and Quirk they concluded that the case of the Israeli peace-building process had been far behind that of South Africa, arguing that it had not even reached the transition phase (2000: 210-115). As to the South African case, in their view the reconciliation process had not been successful.

The conflicting sides across the divide (have) had different views as to what equality and justice mean, and the word peace (has) had different meanings even within each side, although the latter to a lesser degree. While the women of the JCW stressed the need to view equality and justice, as egalitarian thinking would demand, the women of Bat Shalom either neglected these concepts or argued that since they were of differing types they could be looked at from different angles. The idea of the impossibility of attaining absolute equality and justice was very much argued over, and was also connected to the need for compromise. Both sides also claimed to have the moral high ground for their rights/claims. The women of the JCW highlighted the need to include morality in defining these concepts, whereas the Bat Shalom women believed that a morally acceptable compromise to both could be found through negotiations. The role of morality in defining these concepts was also contested.⁶

The concepts of equality, justice, racism, truth and peace have been at the forefront of the struggle for power⁷ and change. As to **equality**, like most critical Zionists groups, Bat Shalom did not take on board the task of addressing the issue of equality per se. It was addressed for the first time in the updated version of the Jerusalem Link principles in 2001, due to the insistence of the JCW (Interview with Salwa Hdeib, Head, Board of Trustees, Jerusalem 2018). For BS, and like other Israeli protest groups (such as Ta'ush, Women in Black, Gush Shalom, and Yesh Gvul who held similar views to those of Bat Shalom), the main focal issues were raising awareness about the atrocities of the occupation and the call for the ending of the occupation.

When the Jerusalem Center for Women raised the issue of right of return of the Palestinian refugees in the context of the existing Israeli Law of Return, which allows any Jew from any part of the world to come to Israel and become a citizen, the common counter-argument was that equality could be applied in different ways (Badran 2010:13). In this case, it was not applicable because for some it endangered the existence of Israel as a Jewish state, or for others, a state with

⁶ Regarding the role of morality, the realist stands at the opposite end from the idealist. The idealist emphasizes morality as a major determining factor in deciding what is equal and just. It is a position that the realist considers illusionary. Raymond Aron (2003: 584, 585) argues that there are two reasons behind the realists' point of view: first, the reality of international politics is that of power politics, where the main role of statesmen is to protect the state's national interest and to consider relative morality only as what a state is capable of. Secondly, if idealism takes the path of deciding the good and the evil, it falls into the trap of power politics as it takes on the role of punishing the evil and supporting the good, during which it might go to the opposite extreme.

⁷ In this context, the meaning of Power exceeds that of political, military and economic power to that of ideas, arguments, morality and national pride. The struggle for power meant for the Israeli side keeping control of land and imposing political hegemony. For the Palestinians, it meant exercising the right to self-determination.

a Jewish majority.⁸ Bat Shalom would argue for the need to compromise and to be creative in addressing this issue. Here it is important to note that those that stand politically to the left of Bat Shalom, i.e., the tiny anti-Zionist individuals or groups who adopt the universal values of human rights and accept international law as the term of reference, believe in the applicability of equality in this context.

In this context too, it can be argued that in cases of conflict situations, the privileged side usually favors vague answers and an argument for political compromise, contrary to that for clear rights and law that are stressed by the underprivileged. They adopt, partially or fully, those theories that promote compromise as a pragmatic choice, since the gap between how the two sides perceive equality is quite wide. International law is not accepted fully and unquestioningly as the term of reference. Bat Shalom, like many other Israeli protest groups, advocates for different formulas of compromise based on the existing balance of power and a vision of peace with security (Interview with Mariam Irbash, 2018). In the Israeli context the latter is an inflated concept.

As to Jerusalem, the maximum that the Jerusalem Link was able to agree on regarding the future of Jerusalem was a general and vague statement: "The whole city of Jerusalem constitutes two capitals for two states" (The JL Principles, 2001). The JCW failed to incorporate Palestinian rights in West Jerusalem into the JL principles (i.e., against Palestinians being evicted and their property confiscated), nor was it able to get a clear statement stipulating that all of occupied East Jerusalem was to be the capital for the future Palestinian state (Interview with Zahira Kamal, board member of JCW, 2018).

The latter is compatible with the vision of compromise stated in Article One of the JL principles. Article One sets the framework of the envisioned political settlement when it stipulates: "Recognition of the *right to self-determination of both peoples in the land*, through the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel on the 4 June 1967 boundaries". Not only does this Article state the vision of a two-state solution as the formula for peace, but it also encompasses a Palestinian legitimization of the Zionist project in Palestine. Israeli acceptance of a Palestinian state has been linked to Palestinian recognition of an Israeli right to self-determination in Palestine, not as a *de facto* recognition but as a right. This article reflects the asymmetry of power within the JL and the fact that the Palestinian women continued to accept the premise of the Oslo Accords even after eight years after it had been signed and its substantive flaws understood (interview with Zahira Kamal). The premise of the Oslo Accords being an expression of the ideology in power, and the asymmetry of security-driven power, is reiterated despite the fact that other articles address the applicability of international law as a term of

⁸ Interviews with Dr Naomi Chazan, member of board of trustees of Bat Shalom, August 2005. Dr Chazan refuses the term Jewish state because it encompasses a tribal notion.

reference. This contradiction or ‘vagueness’ provided opportunities for women on both sides to claim that their views were addressed in the JL’s vision for peace. It is important to note that the Oslo Accords are based on only two UN resolutions (242 and 338) as terms of reference.

As to **justice**, there is agreement that equality is an intrinsic part of justice and that justice is associated with pursuing ideals, which are not necessarily stressed equally or in the same way. Agreed upon, or imposed, justice could include restoring the balance that had existed before a wrong was committed, providing other forms to address the wrong act, or keeping the status quo. A balanced verdict could be considered by one or more sides as a victory for justice, a miscarriage of justice, or somewhere in between. In the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, the ideals of justice, redistribution of political and social power, and retributive justice have been core elements in the conflict. Conflicting claims, justifications, and legitimacy are at the heart of the discussion of the concept of justice.

In the debates between the Jerusalem Center for Women and Bat Shalom, the latter, like other liberal Zionist groups, argued for the just cause of Zionism. The problem was perceived to be the occupation of 1967 (Interview with Galia Golan, board member of Bat Shalom, Jerusalem, July 2005). They shared such views as ‘in reality there is no justice’, ‘search for justice, get no peace’, or ‘through compromise an attainable justice for both sides can be found’ (Badran 2010: 16). Galia Golan says: ‘I don’t believe justice can be restored ...we don’t talk about justice, we start with the situation in 1967’ (Golan interview 2005). Only by the end of the 1990s, and after long discussions, did Bat Shalom begin to make linkages between the ramifications of the 1948 war and the occupation of 1967 and the effects on the Palestinian people and, as such, on the conflict as a whole (Interview with Zahira Kamal, June 2018). They began to mention the issue of the Right of Return of the Palestinian refugees, and the argument for a need to compromise on justice was common, not only on this but on other contested issues as well, e.g., settlements, Jerusalem, and the sovereignty of the future Palestinian entity (Badran, 2010: 16).

Concerning the Palestinian Right of Return, no agreement was reached on this issue in the Jerusalem Link and its principles therefore expressed two positions, one being that of the Jerusalem Center for Women and the other that of Bat Shalom. The two were as follows:

The Palestinian position: Israel accepted its moral, legal, political and economic responsibility for the plight of Palestinian refugees and thus must accept the right of return according to relevant UN resolutions. **The Israeli position:** Israel’s recognition of its responsibility in the creation of the Palestinian refugees in 1948 was a pre-requisite to finding a just and lasting resolution of the refugee problem in accordance with relevant UN resolutions (JL principles, 2001).

A concept relevant to that of justice and equality is **racism**. Racism too is at the core of the conflict despite the fact that in the case of Zionist Israel it is rather covert, since Israel has been able to project the conflict as one between two nationalities fighting for the same land (Badran 2010:17). This framing for the cause of the conflict won over anything that looked into the exclusivity of Zionism and its policies of colonial expansionism before, during, and after state establishment. Also, fear of accusations of anti-Semitism and the fact that there are many definitions to racism have so far secured Zionist Israel from being associated with racism by western mainstream politics and scholars.

The state of Israel adopts closed nationalism.⁹ It is because of this feature that it developed institutional forms of discrimination that were defined as forms of racism according to the 1965 United Nations International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination. The Israeli political system meets the definition of Article 1 of the Convention which defines racial discrimination as:

any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on **race, color, descent, or national or ethnic origin** which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life (UN OHCHR 1965).

It should be noted that Israel managed to cancel the UN decision in this regard in 1991, shortly after the Madrid Peace Conference had taken place under the auspices of the United States and the Soviet Union. Ironically, the peace process that further institutionalized Israeli racism in Palestine paved the way for the repeal of UN Resolution 3379 of 1975 which equated Zionism with racism (Bishara 2001: 132). The Oslo Accords fragmented the Occupied Territories (that had resulted from the 1967 war) into Areas A, B, and C, enhanced a system of checkpoints and barricades around Palestinian-populated areas, grabbed more land through settlement expansion, and built up a network of bypass roads, thereby breaking up Palestinian areas and populations, while linking exclusively to Jewish settlements.

Bearing this in mind, the JCW nevertheless raised this issue, knowing that the gaps between it and Bat Shalom regarding the problem were quite wide. Bat Shalom did not view Zionism as a racist ideology, arguing that Zionism was not racist, but that the Zionist movement and later Israel had implemented racist policies (Interview with Galia Golan 2005). On an individual basis, a few members of Bat Shalom who preferred to describe themselves as non-Zionists or post-Zionist would, for example, criticize the component of exclusivity in Zionism and its

⁹ 'Closed nationalism' contrasts with 'open nationalism' and is based on race/ethnicity, whereas open nationalism is based on a universalistic conception of the nation.

ramifications, such as inequalities, segregation and occupation. Others would only criticize the results of exclusivity. But they would not question Zionism or the legitimacy of Zionism or the state.

For Bat Shalom, the Zionist movement was/is perceived as a national liberation movement like any other in the world, which unfortunately had made some mistakes during the stage of state establishment (Interview with Galia Golan 2005). As this discourse did not acknowledge racism, it was therefore absent in the Jerusalem Link's document of principles. Consequently, issues of legitimacy and narrative continued to be highly contested between the women of JCW and BS.

While the root causes of the conflict from the Palestinian perspective were colonialism and exclusivity (Interview with Mariam Irbash 2018), these were denied and/or ignored by the Israeli women. Within the formula of a two-state solution Bat Shalom argued for the importance of giving up part of the Occupied Territories of 1967 to the benefit of the two sides; to protect Israel as a state with Jewish majority and to provide the Palestinians with a state (Interview with Naomi Chazan). This position was in line with that of the Labor party which had negotiated and signed the Oslo Accords. Thus, it is not a coincidence that the women of the Jerusalem Center for Women found themselves negotiating with their partner within a framework similar to what was happening at the formal level of the leaderships. It was a framework that addressed the ramifications of the 1967 war — not the nature of the Zionist project in Palestine which had led to the Palestinian Nakba in 1948. It was one which reflected the balance of power but did not challenge it.

From the Palestinian women's perspective, such a framework is not feminist because it does not abide by human rights principles unconditionally, and because it argues for a political compromise based on power politics and the exceptionality of this conflict (Interview with Mariam Irbash, June 2018). Also, it is not feminist because this framework falls short in terms of supporting the oppressed women in their struggle against colonialism, colonization and the different kinds of political subjugation associated with these aspects (Interview with Salwa Hdeib, head of JCW's Board of Trustees, June 2018).

The fourth controversial concept in the quest for understanding peace-building in the experience of the Jerusalem Center for Women is **truth**. Truth has been the issue that has dealt with history and narratives across the divide. For Naomi Chazan, truth is not a mainstream issue; it does not come often (Interview with Naomi Chazan 2005). This is a reality despite the fact that the issue of truth is connected with legitimacy, upon which rests the status of war, violence and peace. While Bat Shalom argued for the need to accept the existence of two narratives, the Jerusalem Center for Women argued for the need to recognize wrongdoings and take responsibility for them (Interview with Salwa Hdeib, 2018). The former position reflected their commitment to

Zionism as a legitimate ideology and to the history of state establishment. However, their commitment to Zionism and the state is beyond any recognition of the consequences of establishing an exclusive Jewish state. In addition, the two narratives approach is part and parcel of their commitment to a two-state solution formula, without digging into the state's history pre-1967. Terry Greenblatt of Bat Shalom addressed truth, saying:

...the Middle East conflict's ultimate resolution is embedded in our ability to envision and create a common truth that is as nuanced and complex, as deep and as profound, as the conflict itself — a truth that encompasses and legitimizes both the Israeli and Palestinian narratives, even when they contradict each other, a truth that permits each side to maintain its dignity and political integrity within its own community (Greenblatt 2004).

The above discussion has prepared the ground for examining the concept of **peace** in the context of the Jerusalem Link. Peace as a word has many meanings and it has been badly served in the Palestinian–Israeli context, having been exhaustively used or misused to such an extent that it is difficult to refer to it in a positive or neutral way. Thus, it is important to note that the activists of the Jerusalem Center for Women linked the word peace with justice, ‘just peace’. The latter is meant to be a human rights-based designation, where international law is *the* term of reference as mentioned earlier. The Palestinian women of the JCW continued to disagree with their Israeli partner on the meaning of ‘just’ and ‘equal’ as mentioned above. Peace — with security — by compromise has been a common feature in the discourse of Bat Shalom, which, like others, requested the Palestinians to compromise over land, water, the right of return, Jerusalem and the sovereignty of the future Palestinian ‘state’ to be established on (the) land occupied in the 1967 war. The conflict was addressed haphazardly and the argument was a compromise that could be arrived at from within the existing power structure, despite the fact that many members of Bat Shalom recognized the failure to address the asymmetry of power between the Palestinians and the Israelis in their peace work (Interview with Zahira Kamal 2018).

As such, the demand of the Jerusalem Center for Women to accept international law as the term of reference, in order to protect Palestinian rights with legal guarantees and empower the weaker side, was addressed in 2001 and the views of both sides were incorporated, which resulted in vague and/or contradictory elements being produced within the stipulated principles. There are two articles in the Jerusalem Link principles that address international law:

The permanent settlement negotiations must resume without any delays on the basis of the agreed agenda of the Declaration of Principles, the terms of reference being all relevant UN Resolutions, including 242 and 338 [and] Respect for

international conventions, charters and laws and the active involvement of the international community in the peace process are crucial to its success.

These two articles include the concerns of the two sides, with the Palestinians insisting on enforcing international law as a whole in resolving the conflict, while the Israeli side insisted on the relevance of the Oslo Accords and the terms of reference that in particular specified UN Resolutions 242 and 338. These two resolutions reflected the balance of power that prevailed between the two sides as at 1967, while providing weaker legal grounds for Palestinian rights.

Parallel to this bi-national political relationship, the JCW functioned as a component of Palestinian civil society.¹⁰ The JCW aimed to provide women with a better political deal, to contribute to the national debate around the peace process, and to reach out to the Palestinian establishment. With regard to the peace process it also hoped to gain recognition as a member in the decision-making circle. This aim correlates with one of the JL principles: "Women must be central partners in the peace process. Their active and equal participation in decision making and negotiations is crucial to the fulfillment of a just and viable peace." Contextual reality, however, was not conducive to such aims.

Palestinian civil society¹¹ was weakened during the Oslo period and afterwards, due mainly to the Palestinian National Authority's policies, intra-Palestinian identity crises after the establishment of Hamas, and mistakes that were made by different sectors of Palestinian civil society. On the one hand, the Palestinian National Authority developed a competing relationship with Palestinian civil society organizations aiming to control the national discourse, and minimize their funds and ways of spending. This enhanced the fragmentation of efforts in both sectors of society (the formal and the informal). On the other hand, the establishment of Hamas in late 1987 created an identity crisis among Palestinians. Hamas elevated the Islamic component of Palestinian identity over other components and managed to reach out and mobilize substantial portion of Palestinian society around a different political platform and strategy for liberation ('Abd al-'Ati 2016: 20-21). This created a reality that later manifested itself in the decline of the PLO's agenda and influence among the public and led to political divisions. Consequently, Palestinian civil society became divided and lost direction compared to the period of the 1980s when a national agenda had geared

¹⁰ Because of its partnership with Bat Shalom, the JCW was continuously rejected for membership of the Palestinian Network of Non-Governmental Organizations (PNGO), since the partnership was viewed solely as part of a normalization scheme. According to Mariam Irbash: "it was black-listed within civil society; it was attractive to the donors but not to the Palestinian grassroots nor civil society".

¹¹ When the components of Palestinian civil society are discussed, Palestinian political factions are integral elements of it. In the Palestinian context, political factions historically took the lead in organizing the Palestinian people around the liberation and development agendas: they also established many organizations, some of which have continued to function as leading NGOs and unions.

the work of this sector towards an agreed-upon agenda and strategies. Thus, two parallel civil society organizations operated separately, each with a different agenda and priorities.

In the case of the secular institutions, the focus was on “development and state-building, and confrontations with Israeli occupation policies were contained within the sphere of documentation of Israeli violations of Palestinian individual and national human rights. Some redressed this balance in later years, while others did not, leading to de-politicization and marginalization” (Salem 2012: 5). This affected a large portion of Palestinian society. The Hamas-affiliated organizations worked independently, serving a different social and political agenda from that of the secular institutions. This had a negative effect on people’s feelings of loyalty towards common national aims, and strengthened their devotion to conservative ideas, extremism, and a family-oriented patriarchal system (‘Abd al-‘Ati: 21).

The weakness of Palestinian civil society had become evident by the late 1990s. Reaching out to the public, recruiting, organizing and mobilizing across secular factions and groups had almost died away, and debating national political issues became limited to a small political elite. The NGO sector, financed by foreign donors, flourished, and NGOs such as the JCW survived in the realm of building peace. However, because of its partnership with Bat Shalom, the JCW did not succeed in recruiting either civil society or public support. Because of the reasons explained above, the JCW functioned as a weak institution within a weak Palestinian civil society. Also, due to its weakness, and to the weakness of Palestinian civil society in general, the PLO and the Palestinian National Authority did not take seriously women’s efforts at building peace. The PLO, entrenched in centralization, a traditional patriarchal ethos, and an individualistic type of leadership has not been keen to incorporate women active at the informal level into the formal elitist ranks that are responsible for the peace process.

To conclude, the JCW found itself partnered with Israeli women who were Zionist but critical towards the occupation and some of its government’s policies. It is a fact that hindered development of a fully agreed-upon joint vision for peace. Values of equality and justice continued to be contested, and subsequently issues such as the Right of Return, Jerusalem, and others continued to be disputed. The applicability of international law was hindered by commitment to the Oslo Accords and thus contradictory statements or messages were put parallel to each other in the JL principles.

Thus, the researcher concludes that aside from the process of peace-building, the role of the JCW was limited and marginal in terms of reaching out to the Palestinian civil society. Functioning as a small and non-mainstream NGO in a weak civil society restricted its size in terms both of membership and of numbers. In terms of shaping or preserving the existing moral order and promoting parameters for a projected settlement, the JCW played a limited role due to the

increasing rejection of Oslo Accords and the vague and/or contradictory elements within the principles of the JL itself. Nor did it manage to develop a specific feminist political discourse that would express a vision for, and the needs of, Palestinian women in any peace deal. Furthermore it failed to reach out to the political establishment and influence it, even when they tried to activate UN Resolution 1325 through the establishment of the International Women's Commission (IWC). The latter is a forum that included 20 Palestinian women, 20 Israeli women and 20 international women, all have been 'feminist' leaders at governmental and parliamentary levels. Consisting of such high caliber it was viewed as a 'formal framework' that is capable of addressing the decision makers in both sides (interview with Zahira Kamal 2018). The IWC encompassed members from the JCW Board of Trustees and gradually it took the lead in advocating to bring Palestinian women to the negotiation table and into decision-making circles in connection with the peace process (Interview with Mariam Irbash 2018).

Appendix:

The Jerusalem Link Declaration of Principles

We, Palestinian and Israeli women, united in a joint effort to bring about a just, comprehensive, and lasting peace between our two peoples, affirm our commitment to working together, within the framework of The Jerusalem Link, for the rapid realization of our common vision of peace. This effort is based on the following principles.

- ❏ Recognition of the right to self-determination of both peoples in the land, through the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel on the June 4, 1967 boundaries.
- ❏ The whole city of Jerusalem constitutes two capitals for two states.
- ❏ The Oslo Declaration of Principles, signed on September 13, 1993, and all subsequent agreements must be implemented immediately and in their entirety.
- ❏ The permanent settlement negotiations must resume without any delays on the basis of the agreed agenda of the Declaration of Principles, the terms of reference being all relevant UN Resolutions, including 242 and 338.
- ❏ It is our conviction that all Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967 are illegal, as stipulated by international law, and violate the requirements for peace.
- ❏ **Palestinian:** Israel accepts its moral, legal, political and economic responsibility for the plight of Palestinian refugees and thus must accept the right of return according to relevant UN resolutions.
- ❏ **Israeli:** Israel's recognition of its responsibility in the creation of the

Palestinian refugees in 1948 is a pre-requisite to finding a just and lasting resolution of the refugee problem in accordance with relevant UN resolutions.

- ⌚ Respect for international conventions, charters and laws and the active involvement of the international community in the peace process are crucial to its success.
- ⌚ The realization of political peace will pave the way for mutual understanding and trust, genuine security, and constructive cooperation on the basis of equality and respect for the national and human rights of both peoples.
- ⌚ Women must be central partners in the peace process. Their active and equal participation in decision making and negotiations is crucial to the fulfillment of a just and viable peace.
- ⌚ We women are committed to a peaceful solution of our conflict, also as a means for the promotion of democratic and non-violent norms and the enhancement of civil society.
- ⌚ A peaceful solution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territory, including Lebanon and Syria, are prerequisites for a just and comprehensive peace. This will pave the way for a Middle East characterized by good neighborly relations and regional cooperation.

We call on women and men in the region and elsewhere to join in making our vision of peace a reality.

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