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End the Occupation!

Jewish Feminists in the U.S. Working for Peace in the Middle East

TATIANA SCHREIBER

There’s a Jewish expression, “You are not expected to complete the work in your lifetime. Neither must you refuse to do your part.” For a long time I have wanted to do my part in speaking out against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Yet, as one murder of a Palestinian teenager at the beginning of the Intifada became one murder every day, as homes were demolished, as Palestinian schools were arbitrarily closed, as Palestinians were summarily expelled from Jerusalem, I remained very quiet.

I don’t know exactly why I have found it so difficult to know what my work should be, but I suspect it is largely due to some buried fear that in speaking out I could be cast out from my home, such as it is, in the Jewish community. But, in the last few years, as editor of the Resist newsletter, and as a member of the Resist board, I’ve had the opportunity to learn about the kind of work other Jewish feminists were doing around the Middle East. I realised I was in a perfect position to answer some of my own questions. What had pushed the women to begin this work? What were their fears when they first wanted to speak out? How did their friends—Jewish and non-Jewish—react? Were their families supportive or critical? Had they grown up in a Zionist tradition? Did their feelings about the work change as the Intifada continued into two, now three years? Did they feel a particular responsibility toward this work because they were Jewish? For the many lesbians that are active on these issues, I wondered how their lesbian identities shaped their thinking about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

What follows is a sampling from the many conversations I had with Jewish women determined not to “give up, shut up, or put up” with the Israeli government’s version of reality. That phrase comes from Israeli feminist Rachel Ostrowitz in her article “Dangerous Women: The Israeli Women’s Peace Movement” which appeared in the June/July issue of New Outlook.

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Again and again, the American women I spoke with said it was largely contact with Israeli feminists that convinced them to act. Having heard the passion of Jewish women in both countries, and their sense of the urgency of this work, I too feel ready to do my part. There are groups across the U.S. organized to provide Jewish women a context for their opposition to the occupation, and a place to agitate for change in U.S. policy toward Israel.

I should note that although some of the women I talked with are members of groups that have received Resist funding, others are not, and their inclusion here does not reflect any involvement with Resist. I want to thank all the women I spoke with, and apologize to those whose voices couldn't be included. This article does not address all the kinds of Jewish feminist activism taking place in the U.S. today, nor does it try to decide which political ideology is the best, or most effective. But it does reveal a common terrain on which Jewish feminists are engaged in a concerted effort to end the occupation.

My Parents Made Me This Way

The women I talked to included some who have worked on Middle East issues for ten years or more, and those who have only recently taken action. Some grew up in religious homes, others had parents who were adamantly opposed to all religion. Some had a strong Jewish cultural identity, others were reclaiming that identity. A few called themselves Zionist, most were non-Zionist, and others were strongly anti-Zionist. Despite these differences, I often found myself nodding in agreement with the way each woman attributed her need to speak out to the influence of her Jewish family. There seems to be a common understanding as Jews that to be silent when we recognize evil is to collaborate with that evil. However, as Irena Klepfisz remarked in a speech marking the 45th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, in order to know how to act we need inspiration and models. To many of us, Irena has been such a model.

Irena Klepfisz (New York)

When we talked, Irena had just returned from a trip to Jerusalem to join in a week of demonstrations and events focused on the theme "Women Go For Peace." Between 5,000 and 6,000 people joined a women's march to East Jerusalem on December 29. She has also been speaking out and writing about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and her own secular Jewish identity in her poetry and many articles. She co-edited The Tribe of Dina: A Jewish Women's Anthology, and contributed to Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology. She is also a founder of the New York City based group, Jewish Women's Committee to End the Occupation (JWCEO).

In a piece she wrote in Genesis II last spring, "'Yom Hashoah, Yom Yerushleyim,'" Irena describes standing with ten other Jewish women outside the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations in New York, in April, 1988: "What I did not expect was the intensity with which my doubts kept surfacing . . . despite my convictions that the evil had to be stopped, I found that standing in front of a Jewish organization and publicly questioning its integrity, was not easy. A number of Jews came by and asked, 'Aren't you ashamed?'

But despite doubts, she's been part of the women's vigil almost every Monday evening since then, handing out leaflets protesting Israeli policies in the occupied territories, and calling for a negotiated solution to the conflict and a Palestinian state. The remarks from other Jews passing by included statements wishing another Holocaust on the protestors, or saying the action would lead all Jews "back to the ovens." Irena, herself a Holocaust survivor, says the deeply entrenched fears of many Jews are understandable, but that Jews also need to deal with other fears, fears of Israel becoming completely militaristic, non-democratic, and perpetually oppressive to others.

In her speech before some 500 to 600 people, many survivors or children of survivors, she said that one of the worst continued on page five
Grassroots Report

Breaking the Silence:
Jewish Women Muralists in Palestine

"Throughout my childhood, I had been haunted by images of my mother, climbing the rocky hills of the new state of Israel... It had been her dream, this state, based from the beginning on the tragic fallacy that Palestine was a land devoid of people, or worse, that the Palestinians did not matter; after all, they were not Europeans. I remember Jewish children sending a dollar to plant a tree in Israel, 'to make the desert bloom.' I later came to know that a terrible crime was taking place on that 'desert,' a crime committed in my name."

—Dina Redman

Dina Redman is one of four North American Jewish women who formed the Break the Silence Mural Project in order to replace those images with new ones — images of Palestinian resistance to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and images of Palestinian and Jewish artists collaborating in a project that would build friendship in the midst of fear and hatred.

In 1989 the four artists and a diverse group of friends and supporters applied for a Resist grant in order to do an initial fundraising mailing for their project. They wrote: "As the occupation grows daily more brutal, and the resistance to it deepens, as Jewish women we feel a need and a responsibility to stand up for what we believe and to ally ourselves with others to help to end the occupation and change public consciousness. As artists we believe in the power of artistic expression and cultural interchange. Through our many years in progressive movements in the United States we know what an important tool cultural work is in a general political strategy. We also believe that the American people, when they are mobilized, wield considerable power to change the policies of our government. For these reasons we decided to do a cultural project around the issue of the right of the Palestinian people to a homeland, and the need to work together to achieve that."

"The project that evolved has two facets, one taking place in East Jerusalem, and one here in the United States. The centerpiece of the work is a large mural to be painted in East Jerusalem. We will be painting with Palestinian artists and will also be connected to a network of progressive Israeli artists. We will spend two months in the area. We have been formally invited... [and our hosts] are very excited about the project. Collectively we have both the artistic and political experience to create a beautiful work of art as well as build some important ongoing ties between our peoples.

"We believe the aspect of the project that occurs here in this country is very important. We want to inspire and mobilize U.S. citizens, in particular American Jews, to take an active stand around these issues. We want to provide access to information and discussion... [and this will be accomplished] by house meetings, public events, articles, radio interviews, participation in coalitions, and national report-backs on our trip. We also want to help build, on our return, an organization of cultural workers to create ongoing artistic solidarity projects.

"We are asking Resist for help because, although there is a growing opening for new solutions, and some headway is being made in ending the ignorance and confusion around the Palestinian struggle, there are still few funding agencies that would even consider such a project. We desperately need some money..."

Fortunately, a few small grants, 1500 letters asking for donations, and a public event featuring Margaret Randall and Al Awda (a Palestinian cultural ensemble) brought in enough money to make the project a reality. In July of last year, Dina, along with Miranda Bergman, Marlene Tobias, and Susan Greene left for the West Bank. Miranda and Susan were experienced muralists, but Dina and Marlene were new to the process, having worked in graphic design and illustration. What they shared was the conviction that Palestinians have a right to make their own choices, and should have the freedom to live in peace in their own sovereign state.

On their return from the trip, Miranda wrote to Resist, "Our trip was more productive and educational and heart-healing than we could have imagined. We feel our work is just beginning..."

She sent us newspaper articles and later talked with us on the phone about the project and the ongoing work. The rest of this report is based on our phone conversation with Miranda and one of Dina’s articles.

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Within a day of their arrival in the West Bank village of El Bireh, the artists were sipping thick coffee from tiny cups and examining the staircase that would be the canvas for their first mural. The staircase connected the Friends of the Community Charitable Society, and the Center for Popular Arts. The Friends of the Community distributes food to the poor, offers classes in literacy, health and nutrition, and traditional sewing and embroidery and runs a medical clinic. The Popular Arts Center preserves and promotes folk culture, using traditional elements in innovative ways.

To help the North Americans understand the environment they would be painting, the Palestinian hosts organized a series of excursions. "For two weeks we drank in the new images," Dina wrote. "The land itself, more beautiful than I had imagined, the muted green of the olive trees, the multitude of stones with their dramatic and improbable shapes, the Palestinian houses blending into the hillsides, merging gently with the landscape, while the Jewish settlements loomed ominously above them, looking stark and out of place.

"And we saw the rubble of houses where families once lived, the overturned gardens, the uprooted groves of olive trees, roots drying in the sun. We saw soldiers on the rooftops, eternal voyeurs spying through binoculars, shooting abruptly into crowded streets, shooting at children. The soldiers seemed to be everywhere, their radios buzzing like wasps. We saw flags the children had thrown, hanging precariously from electrical wires, anchored by stones or bottles, symbols of resistance."

The Women's Committees escorted the women to schools, cooperatives, hospitals, and families of the dead and imprisoned. "Sometimes we felt we were in a woman's world, there are so many men in jail," Miranda said. "In the last few years doors have burst open in terms of women's liberation, because now women are doing everything. The day we arrived our hostess was at a meeting, but her living room was full of women, some in traditional dress, some in jeans and sneakers. The house was like this all the time, like a community center. The women are determined that the new Palestine will be different for women. 'This isn't Algeria!' they say, where after the revolution it was back to the veil.''

A boy learns to read and dreams of being a doctor... Break the Silence Mural Project. Photo: Miranda Bergman

Miranda said it was difficult, as Jewish women, to go to a place where the oppressive force is Jewish, but, she added, "our welcome was completely whole-hearted. Once the Palestinians knew we were there in friendship, and we were able to share our cultural connections, our cooking...we were told all the time that we were family, and we were treated as such. There's the belief on the part of many Jews that the Palestinians hate us. There's a systematic campaign both here and in Israel to make us feel that way. It's a lie. There's a coordinated educational effort within the Intifada to distinguish between the Israeli government and individual Jews."

But including all they were experiencing in a mural was complicated by working under occupation. Dina wrote, "We would have to use symbols, avoiding images that would provoke the authorities into closing the center or destroying the mural. No children throwing stones or holding their fingers in the victory sign; no flags. Even combining the colors of the flag in another form could be seen as inflammatory." The artists could not work at night, when the lights might draw attention from soldiers.

As the women began their work, all kinds of people, many who came to the center to use its services, joined in the painting. Some were accomplished artists, others new to the whole idea. Others came by just to talk, and the women heard stories of imprisonment and torture, the loss of family members and the loss of land. They also heard stories of love and of hope for the future.

Dina described the scene that unfolded at the beginning of the staircase mural: "On entering the building you see the land, traditional stone archways framing the rolling hills and distant villages. A large cactus stands as a symbol for patience and for the Palestinian villages that were destroyed. Under an olive tree made of linked hands, a boy learns to read and dreams of being a doctor...On the opposite wall stands a tall woman in the traditional embroidered dress, the first woman martyr in the Palestinian struggle. She rises proudly from the roots and rocks, holding in her hand a baby with an olive branch in one small hand and a stone in the other."

The artists were soon inundated with requests to do other murals, and several were created. One, with a group of professional Palestinian artists, was done on a rocky wall behind a theatre and cultural center in East Jerusalem. Each artist designed his or her own section and then all participated in the final painting. "The high level of artistic col-

**CONTEST**

**Standing Up for Peace**

Why have some people risked their jobs, their homes, their families and even prison to take a stand for peace? This is your chance to find out. The Standing Up for Peace Contest invites you to talk face to face with someone who has refused to fight in war, pay taxes for war, or build weapons for war, and then to express what you think and feel about what you heard through writing, art or music.

The contest is open to young people ages 15-23. The deadline for entries is May 1, 1990.

To enter, send for the Standing Up for Peace Contest booklet, Fellowship of Reconciliation, Box 271, Nuyack, NY 10960 (914) 358-4601.

$500 PRIZES $100
The trip lasted nine weeks before the four women returned to California. Reflecting on doing this work as a Jew, Miranda said, “It was tremendously healing to be totally myself. I grew up in a Black and Latino neighborhood in San Francisco, and my step-mother is Black. I never hid that I was Jewish, and I wasn’t ashamed of it, but it really wasn’t part of my life. I thought of myself as a human being and an internationalist. This project was the first time that I really came out and identified as Jewish. It made me question why I hadn’t identified that way before. It was partially internalized antisemitism, and partially wanting to distance myself from the political stance of organized American Jews.”

Miranda felt it was important for the group to be visible as American Jews with a different perspective, and she said the personal bonds of friendship that developed on the trip were deeply moving. Dina asked Suhaib, one of the Palestinian hosts, what he thought about the project, now that it was finished. He answered: “Your way of working with the people was very beautiful. Regular people come in and say, ‘Oh, these people are Jewish women from the United States, painting all this in support of our Palestinian struggle.’ It emphasizes that the problem is not a religious problem. We cannot only be friends; we can be working with each other toward a specific thing, regardless of religion. I always believe the struggle is not a Palestinian struggle only but is part of an international struggle for peace.”

Miranda said the group wants to continue to work with women and American Jews, and also with the wider movement in the U.S. against the occupation. This spring the group plans to bring Palestinian artists to the Bay Area to do street murals, along with street music and education calling for a U.N.-sponsored peace conference and an independent Palestinian state. They also plan a nationwide speaking tour, slide presentations and production of a video. To contact the group about any of these projects, write: Break the Silence Mural Project, 1442A Walnut St., #252, Berkeley, CA 94709.

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legacies of the Holocaust was that it denied so many (those who died as well as those who survived) the opportunity to live an ordinary life.

“One way to pay tribute to those we loved who struggled, resisted and died is to hold on to their vision and their fierce outrage at the destruction of the ordinary life of their people. It is this outrage we need to keep alive in our own daily life and apply to all situations whether they involve Jews or non-Jews.”

Irena told me she has three kinds of passions in her life: a passion for Yiddish language and culture and her identity as a secular Jew; her lesbian and feminist politics and culture; and now her work against the occupation. But lately she says she needs to find a balance. More and more her work has been among Jews, and primarily in the straight world. “The more I’ve worked with heterosexuals, the harder it’s become. I’m tired of the sexism and homophobia within the Jewish left.” For instance, one woman who joined the September “Days of Awe” actions in New York (in support of Women in Black), wrote a flier with the words, “as mothers, sisters, and wives.” When Irena asked about changing it to include lesbians, the woman felt put upon, and at first said lesbianism “wasn’t a relationship.” “It’s painful to work with people who have such compassion for Palestinians, and though it’s not a comparable situation, it’s still difficult that they have no sensitivity at all around gay issues. You have to fight the battles all over again.”

In Israel, Irena said, it was wonderful to work with the many Israeli activists who are lesbians. Some are out and many are not, because the repercussions would be so great.* Irena says she’s not sure how often in her Middle East work she is perceived as a lesbian. However, she can’t imagine any kind of long-term dialog taking place in which she didn’t come out. “I can’t talk about Jewish activism without talking about what has happened to me as a lesbian in the Jewish community. I need to be fully who I am. I couldn’t tell someone I was a refugee and not also tell them I was a lesbian.”

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*There’s now an Israeli lesbian organization, CLAF, with 250 women on its mailing list. They can be contacted at P.O. Box 22997, Tel Aviv, Israel 01228.
Irena says there are two things that need to be done by those who want to contribute to solutions in the Middle East. One is to raise funds for Israeli and Palestinian peace groups, and the other is to educate the community here. “It’s very slow, involving housemeetings, cultural events and it has to begin where people are, which is often not where you want them to be. There are no short-cuts.”

Sarah Jacobus (Los Angeles)

Sarah Jacobus, a videographer and radio documentarian, recently returned from six weeks in Israel and the occupied territories where she worked on her upcoming video about the effects of the Intifada on Israeli and Palestinian societies. She’s been working on Middle East issues for some eleven years, but it was a 1983 trip to the Middle East to interview Israeli and Palestinian women interested in dialog that sparked more intense involvement.

Sarah said growing up she absorbed messages from her family and community that included negative stereotypes of Arabs and the idea that the survival of Israel was necessary for the survival of the Jews; that the country needed protection and support. “You know I have my trees in Israel!” she said, referring to the way most American Jews who went to temple were encouraged to raise money for Israel where “they were making the desert bloom.”

Sarah has done a lot of speaking on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, and helped form a Jewish/Arab women’s dialog group in Los Angeles. Recently her father described himself as “non-Zionist,” which she’d never heard before. In the past, she said, they’d had bitter fights about Israel, particularly around the issue of negotiating with the PLO. But just prior to the start of the Intifada, she brought her parents to one of her speaking engagements. In the course of the weekend, her father said he had been thinking about all the things she’d been saying over the years, and now he believes if there is to be a just peace, it will mean talking to the PLO. Now in his Dallas community he’s made all the contacts to establish Arab-Jewish dialog groups there. “It’s been very gratifying to me,” said Sarah.

“At times when I get discouraged and think people aren’t changing, I think of my parents and it’s energizing.”

Sarah feels it’s essential to do the work “as a Jew” because as the occupation continues, fundamental issues about Judaism are called into question, in terms of the way the Israeli government operates. “It’s not functioning according to the Jewish values and beliefs I grew up with, yet as a Jewish state it is a reflection of Jewish ‘peoplehood.’ I think Jews have a right to a homeland, and I want to see Israel continue to exist as a homeland for Jewish people, but I’m concerned about the health and well-being of Israeli society. More and more Israel is a very militarist place. The Ramboesque image of Israeli teenagers, who have only known the occupation, is very ugly.

“The flipside of that is that people live with a tremendous amount of fear. It’s our collective and communal experience of oppression as Jews that brings this fear. It doesn’t appear rational, but it comes from our experience as a people. We have to break through that fear because that’s where the intransigence of the Israeli government comes from. It’s an illusion that military strength brings security. There could never be enough security to address the fear people feel inside. But my sense is that more and more people understand this and are becoming publicly involved in peace activism. People have been shaken by the ways the government is repressing the Intifada. Parents do not want their children to grow up to be policemen who break little children’s hands in the occupied territories. There’s a lot of soul searching going on.

“In the Arab/Jewish dialog group we started in 1986, we wanted to create a framework where real exchange would be possible. There was a level of comfort and safety and trust that could exist because we were all women and we listened well to each other. We began to do speak-outs and vigils against the occupation and we’ve been a very visible part of the coalition work that has gone on in L.A.

“It’s been important to me, in our group and generally, to feel good and proud about being a Jew, though having a great deal of rage towards the policies of the Israeli government. We aren’t a Palestinian solidarity group; we are a group of Jewish and Palestinian women committed to learning about and understanding each other. I need the Palestinian women to understand my experience growing up as a Jew and experiencing anti-Semitism, and I need them to be willing to interrupt anti-Semitism. It’s difficult because today there is a power imbalance between the...
occupiers and the occupied. Still, we need an equality of understanding within the group. “I am studying Arabic, and this has made a wonderful difference in my relationships with Palestinians. It’s usually received as a gesture of respect. Especially in Gaza, where few people speak English, it’s been very rewarding. People are surprised and pleased. Having the chance to meet people in their homes has really fleshed out what had only been an intellectual willingness to understand Palestinian history and culture. I feel an affinity for that culture . . . something in my bones is stirred by the cultures of this region.

“Last year it seemed that Palestinian women were focusing on the immediate transformation of women’s social roles. This year they seem to be grappling much more with what will happen in the long term, creating an infrastructure around women’s issues for when the state is created. I’m struck by the apparent unity and fearlessness and pride in the Palestinian community. The sense of “no turning back” is very exciting.

Eleanor Roffman (Boston)

Eleanor was also just back from the Middle East when we spoke. She has been working on Middle East issues since 1978 when she hosted a meeting of people returning from a delegation. The meeting turned into a very heated discussion about Zionism. Her parents, immigrants from Russia, were culturally Jewish-identified but weren’t religious. She grew up “with a passive acceptance of Zionism as it was taught in Hebrew school.”

Eleanor joined “Jews for Justice” in Boston around the time of the invasion of Lebanon. “The invasion wasn’t blurry, it was a direct invasion and I could go to the Israeli consulate and demand that this stop.” The men and women in the group tried to educate themselves about Zionism and Judaism and their Yiddish roots, strengthening their identities as Jews. After two years, the women separately organized M’t’ai, to try to find ways to express their Judaism in a feminist context. Though the women felt safe and supported there, it was still hard for the diverse political ideologies in the group to emerge.

In 1983, Eleanor, as a representative of M’t’ai, became involved with the June 6th Coalition, a mixed gender group that included Arabs, Arab-Americans, Jews and other North Americans. “It was challenging because the group had developed an anti-Zionist posture, and some women in M’t’ai felt uncomfortable making that public statement. They felt so isolated and alienated as it was, they were afraid of further isolation from feminists.”

But this organization soon became the focus of Eleanor’s work. “I feel it is very important to oppose Zionism. Zionism is about religion and nationalism. Why can’t leftists step over the line that prevents them from confronting the true nature of the Israeli government? I think it has something to do with taking what has been a private matter among Jews (coping with anti-Semitism and differing views about the meaning of Zionism) and making it a public matter. There’s a sense of shame because Jews are supposed to be smarter and more moral than other people and here they are fucking up. It’s a shame, a shanda, like being caught in public with your pants down.

“There was one crystalizing experience for me. When a Palestinian and an Israeli came here to talk, everyone was . . .
discussing their fears, and many were children of Holocaust survivors. The Israeli asked the group, "Why is one person's pain more important than another's?" I remember that moment. It became clear to me that to take care of yourself at someone else's expense isn't taking care of yourself. It's a path to destruction and that's what we're seeing right now.

"When I came back from my recent trip, I felt like I'd just spent six days in fascism... I witnessed violent attacks by the military on youth. They were visibly provoking violence and beating on people... They were shooting at everyone with water that was dyed green so they would know you were there."

"When I came back from my recent trip, I felt like I'd just spent six days in fascism. I went to the week of events focused on the theme, "Time for Peace, 1990." At the 'Hands Around Jerusalem' event, I witnessed violent attacks by the military on youth. They were visibly provoking violence and beating on people. We were scared. It was clear where the power was. They had these enormous guns with tear gas equipment attached. They looked to be in their early twenties, and they were beating on other kids. Women tried to stop the attacks, so the military beat on the women, and then on everyone. They were shooting at everyone with water that was dyed green so they would know you were there.

"In East Jerusalem they sprayed these water cannons at the hotel where many participants in the events were staying. The glass on the doors was shattered and one woman lost her eye. On our trip to the West Bank we were continually stopped at road blocks and prevented from traveling. There is arbitrary blanket control over people's everyday lives and livelihoods. There are curfews restricting travel and every kind of activity.

"I am involved with a women's project in support of women political prisoners.* I got to meet a Palestinian woman for whom we had collected signatures, petitioning for her release. She had been taken from her two young children in the middle of the day; her crime was that she was politically active. She had been abused in prison. Yet she was as intently involved in her liberation on the day I met her as the day before she went to prison. When I met her she was limping because she had been trying to help a kid who was being beaten by the military and they started beating her on the backs of her knees. Her clarity and courage were an inspiration to me.

"It became clearer to me on this trip that if American Jews can hear Israelis who are critical of their own government, it gives Americans permission to join in that criticism, and our job on the Left is to forge greater bonds with the Israeli Left so they can feel our support and we can hear their words more clearly.

"My struggle as a feminist and as a lesbian is a resource for understanding this issue. It teaches me, and it's given me a whole lot of patience. It's enabled me to stand up and take an unpopular position in this country, challenging Zionism. It's a lot to take on. Zionism meets the needs of American imperialism and we've been conditioned to accept it. My family is very angry with me. We have two taboos in my family: sex and Israel. They feel I'm betraying not only the family but the larger Jewish family.

"But confronting the ideology of Zionism is embedded in Jewish culture and history. I'm following in the footsteps of the Jewish opponents to Zionism in Europe prior to World War II. I'm following in the footsteps of a Jewish tradition which is to stand up for what you believe in. I'm not betraying my Jewish roots, I'm honoring them."

Lois Levine Barrett (St. Louis)
Lois currently serves as national co-chair for the Middle East Task Force of New Jewish Agenda (NJ). She says since she began working with the Task Force in 1984, "It's led me down a path I'm still walking, confronting and exploring my identity as a Jew... I feel a responsibility not to dissociate myself from the state of Israel, but I've had to confront the current situation of Jews being oppressors. It's an extremely difficult process. I'm sometimes very scared and5856d because the work we do is public work, and the feeling of wondering how the Jewish community will view this is ever-present. But, doing the work with other Jews who share my goals makes it possible to move forward.

"There could never be enough security to address the fear people have inside... My sense is that more and more people understand this and are becoming publicly involved in peace activism... Parents do not want their children to grow up to be policemen who break little children's hands in the occupied territories."

*The "Women's Organization for Women Political Prisoners" can be contacted at P.O. Box 8537, Jerusalem, Israel 91083. WOFWPP has issued a 32-page brochure which provides a history of the group, an outline of the legal status of detainees, and testimonies of 10 detainees. The brochure is available for $3 from JWCEO, P.O. Box 1178, 163 Joralemon St., Brooklyn, NY 11201.

"Our work involves short-term responses to urgent needs and a longer term strategy involving housemeetings and dialog. We have to form coalitions with Arab-Americans and others to lobby Congress to bring all parties to negotiations. There's a burning, intense feeling about this issue that we share with Palestinian and Arab-American organizations. There's a high level of self-interest for all of us. As Jews, many of us relate to the Jewish state. I have many friends in Israel. So we have, oddly enough, a natural linkage. There's an understanding that can be built, though it's not easy. There are strains, frustrations, and Arab-Americans are increasingly frustrated and angry that nothing is happening in
the peace process. The costs are so high.

"I think we've had difficulty with the notion of Jews as oppressors and understanding it in some way that does not make us not proud of being Jews. I've visited Israel, the West Bank and Gaza. It gave me strength to meet Israelies working twenty-four hours a day, incensed by the conflict. We need to get this out to other Jews.

"When we participate in coalition events, it's clear that non-Jews come at it from a different emotional point of view. There's a strong Catholic Left here and they've wanted to work in coalition . . . [but] they don't understand Jewish fears; they are confused about Jewish history and don't understand why Israel came into being. They think of Israel as "the holy land," an important place for Christians, and they have an ambivalence to it as a Jewish state. Many Christians are afraid to speak about their feelings for fear of being called anti-Semitic. We need to have dialog with them in a safe place where they will not feel attacked.

"We must impress on the U.S. government that Jews do not speak in one voice. Growing numbers of us insist that uncritical support of Israel has to stop. I've been inspired by the Palestinian women I've talked with. I'll never forget one experience I had in a Gaza hospital. When I got there, ten people had been wounded in a clash with Israeli soldiers. A 12-year-old boy had been shot in the stomach and was probably dying. As a woman, I was overwhelmed with what that boy's mother was going through, and what it meant for her life. Young life is being smashed. Seeing children's lives sucked out of them . . . I thought, 'they're leading such abnormal lives . . . when will they be able to lead a normal life?'"

"The Palestinians said to me, 'You have to deal with your government; it's your government that has the power to bring about peace. Your work is at home.'"

"The work is very slow. Things are slowly changing, but do we have that kind of time? We need more people to be involved. We need more of a movement.*"

Tatiana Schreiber is a radio journalist and editor of the Resist newsletter.

*New Jewish Agenda, which has 50 state chapters, can be contacted at 64 Fulton St. #1100, NYC 10038. Lois Levine and the NJA Middle East Task Force can be contacted at P.O. Box 3068, St. Louis, MO 63130.

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coalsitions, some organizers didn't want to pass out fliers with the word lesbian on them, but Samowitz said persistence has paid off and now the group is generally accepted on its own terms. The group has joined protests against racist hate groups in the area, and is a member of the No Aid for the Israeli Occupation Coalition. Several group members have organized a Women in Black monthly vigil at the Federal Building, and they are working on establishing a sister-city relationship with a West Bank or Gaza town.

Students and Faculty to End Israeli Occupation, c/o Sharon Gluck, 19988 Observation Drive, Topanga, CA 90290.

This group of Jewish, Palestinian, and non-Semitic faculty and students at California State University (Long Beach) came together to organize activities against the Israeli occupation and to work for Palestinian self-determination. Initial vigils in commemoration of the 1982 massacre at Sabra and Shatilla soon led to weekly vigils, leafleting and to educational programs.

The group then began a campaign to make their campus a sister university with Bir Zeit University on the West Bank. The relationship would foster exchange programs, speaker forums, and the development of Middle East studies curriculum. Resist supported the campaign, which included outreach outside the university. After two semesters of organizing, the group reports that they have successfully shepherded through the academic senate a resolution recommending the sister-city relationship be established. Part of the campaign included changing the group's name to "Students and Faculty to Re-Open Palestinian Universities," and framing the discussion in these terms.

Members of the group traveled to the Middle East in December to participate in the 1990 Time for Peace activities, and met with faculty and students from Bir Zeit. They made plans for these educators to participate in programs on the California campus this year, and to speak at other U.S. campuses.

Nadja: Women Concerned About the Middle East, 1400 Shattuck Ave., Suite 2, Berkeley, CA 94709.

Nadja was founded in Berkeley in 1960. Its first project assisted Algerian refugees during their war of independence. Later Nadja's Scholarship Program gave grants to young Palestinian women students in the occupied territories. Over the years the group has held monthly public forums, and produced The Arab World: A Handbook for Teachers. Nadja continues to provide material support to Palestinian women's projects — agricultural cooperatives and kindergarten programs. The group is particularly interested in producing pre-collegiate educational materials and participating in school programs and teacher training workshops.

Nadja came to Resist for assistance in producing its premiere issue of Middle East Resources, a quarterly newsletter designed for Social Studies teachers. The newsletter includes primary source documents (such as the Israeli, U.S. and Palestinian declarations of independence), resource materials (articles and books about Islamic women were featured in a recent issue) and suggestions for classroom activities.

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This month we feature a longer than usual report on one group doing work on Middle East issues, along with very brief reports about two other projects. All the information here is provided by the groups themselves. For more information, contact the groups at the addresses provided.

Palestine Panel Project/Lesbian Work Group, P.O. Box 22061, Seattle, WA 98122.

The Palestine Panel Project/Lesbian Work Group evolved from an earlier group of Jewish and Arab women, Semitic Women Take Action. According to Ilene Samowitz, a member of the original group, several of the Jewish lesbians in the group wanted to take on an action-oriented project in support of the Intifada, in which they could be visible as lesbians. They hoped to participate in coalitions with other groups doing Middle East work, without losing that visibility.

They joined with other lesbians, Jewish and non-Jewish, to make a series of panels depicting Palestinian life in the occupied territories. The five panels focus on daily life under occupation; the organization of the PLO; women's and children's lives; economic relationships between Israel and the occupied territories; and Israeli resistance groups. A planned sixth panel will address the effects of the occupation on the Israeli economy and on political life. Four of the panels were initially set up in Seattle's public market, creating some lively discussion.

The group soon decided the panels would be an excellent educational tool for use in high schools, community colleges and libraries, accompanied by speakers and printed handouts. A Resist grant was used to rainproof the panels for outdoor use. The group aims to promote discussion, activism and understanding about the nature of the conflict, and about anti-Jewish and anti-Arab racism.

The panel concerning daily life under the occupation includes information about the arrest and imprisonment of suspected activists without charge or trial, a policy which has meant the detention of thousands of Palestinians, mostly teenagers, 12-17 years old. The panel also addresses deportations, town arrests (in which a person is restricted to their town or home), military law, house sealings and demolitions, the closure of institutions (schools, universities, unions, and newspapers have been closed and their staffs imprisoned) and the destruction of trees and crops.

So far the panels have been displayed at the market, a local bookstore, the state of Washington's centennial celebration, at various demos and events, at a regional lesbian-feminist conference, and at a local community college. Shortly after the group applied to Resist for funding, we learned that the display at the community college had been forced to close because of one man's complaints. According to an article in Seattle's Jewish Transcript, Lawrence Black, a member of a group called Americans for a Safe Israel, complained that the library site was offensive because "a library ... is supposed to be the sacred center of knowledge and truth, not a forum for international politics." Black also felt the display didn't provide a balanced view on the uprising.

The display was removed on the day of Black's complaint, and was never seen by other Jewish groups which might have commented. However, the Palestine Panel Project quickly arranged to display the panels at another site in the school, near the lunch room, and agreed to have someone present to answer questions. Samowitz said the display attracted the attention of many students, most of whom responded positively. They were particularly interested in the controversy within Israel over the Intifada and about Israel's military ties to other countries.

Samowitz said the group usually sends both a Jew and a non-Jew to speaking engagements. She said they do not always say they are lesbians, though they try to take a strong stand against anti-gay as well as anti-Jewish and anti-Arab sentiment when it comes up. The group is particularly interested in encouraging lesbians who are active in international solidarity work to become involved with Middle East work. They try to counteract people's fears of being seen as anti-Jewish by being outspoken themselves, as Jews critical of the Israeli government.

The group demonstrated with street theater at a celebration for the 40th anniversary of Israel. Samowitz said some people were hostile, even screaming at them. "I was told I should be inside praying instead of outside protesting," said Samowitz. Though the group is at odds with the mainstream Jewish community in the area because of its strong positions (such as its call for Israeli withdrawal from all occupied territories including the Golan Heights and Arab Jerusalem), it has had good relations with most of the local groups doing Middle East work.

The Project is open to all women who are willing to work in a group with lesbian in its title. In the past, when the group has participated in

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