

Vacation from War

Steps toward the Concrete Utopia of a Peaceful World

Encounters for young people from Israel and Palestine

Concluding Remarks

“I think **THIS IS A BLESSED INITIATIVE**, and it has real potential to make a change!”

Compilation: Wilfriede Dieter

In the last days of the seminar in some groups we ask the participants to answer some questions concerning a ‘feedback’. The questionnaire was developed and evaluated without any scientific demanding.

We cannot present as many examples of Palestinian comments as of Israeli opinions. This may result from the fact that the Palestinian women didn’t have the same chance to learn English and consequently were reluctant to write down the answers to our questions in English language.

Question 1

Why did you decide to take part in this seminar? What was your motivation?

Palestinians

I decided to show our real life and how it becomes harder by the time. I want to let the other side know what happened to us.

Maybe I can share my feelings and thoughts with the Israeli people and let them know our needs.

I wanted to share my thoughts with the Israeli side. Moreover I wanted to listen to the other side.

Israelis

The biggest motivation for me was meeting the Palestinians because I have never met one. I wanted to know about their lives, what they feel about the situation and most important, what would be the solution of the conflict in their eyes?

I wanted to come to know the reality of the Palestinians’ life for the first time not from the media.

For a long time I have been trying to find something together with the other side in my political activities.

Curiosity and the wish to do things in my country, thinking that knowing some women of the other side might help.

I wanted to meet Palestinian women and wanted to participate in a women’s seminar about the conflict. Most of all I hoped to make a strong experience that will help me to progress my thought of the political situation and basically make me get a different view of reality.

Question 2
What did you expect from the seminar when you came here?

Palestinians

I expected to change the other side's point of view. I think that now they know more about us.

I expected to have peaceful talks with the other side which would make them understand us. And I wanted to get to know the other side's point of view.

I expected that so many topics would be opened for discussion, such as refugees, wall, water and some women issues related to the conflict.

I expected to get as much information as possible from the other side, but also from my side, too.

I expected to have a hard time in communicating and understanding the other's points of view, but it was the opposite, most of the time.

I expected to talk in a peaceful, open way with the other side, asking and answering many questions considering the conflict. And we did..

I did not expect to have good relationships between both sides, but I'm happy the opposite happened.

I found what I expected: change the other side's ideas about the situation in Palestine and have relationships that can last.

Israelis

I expected to talk and understand more from both sides and also to talk about solutions. What can I do and what does the other side think is the right way?

I expected to see the persons behind the opinions and to prove to myself that women can make politics in a different way.

To open my mind and to meet open-minded people from the other side.

I expected to learn and hear true and honest facts about the conflict, that are not affected by the media etc. I expected to get to know the Palestinian girls personally.

I expected to hear real-life stories about being a woman under the occupation. I expected to be intense and emotional.

I expected to make friends with some Palestinian girls (she is living near Sderot !!).

I expected to get to know women from both sides and talk to them in a direct way, and also to get some inspiration about things we can do together for a change of the situation in general.

To get to know interesting women, to learn more about the Palestinian culture and traditions, to make new acquaintances.

Question 3

Have you ever really met Jewish/Palestinian people before this seminar?

Palestinians

Yes, I am living in Jerusalem.

Yes, I have. It was in the Netherlands in 2003.

Israelis

Only in my work at the Allenby bridge (as a soldier?) and during activities with left wing organisations.

Not so closely as in the seminar. I'm glad of this chance!!

Question 4

**Have you ever been committed to the peace process before?
Have you joined seminars like this before?**

Palestinians

I have joined other seminars, but never any seminar related to the peace process.

I joined an organisation called "Follow the Women" cycling from Lebanon to Syria to Jordan and then to Palestine.

A peace camp last year "Building Bridges For Peace" and another one 2004 with "Hands Of Peace".

In a camp in the Netherlands 2003.

Israelis

I consider myself as a left wing person. But this was the first time I did something meaningful for the peace process.

I'm going to demonstrations sometimes and to political activities like the organisation „Zochrot“ (remembering the Nacba). One time in a seminar in Neve Shalom I met Palestinians living in Northern Israel.

I usually don't do any political activity, but in the future I will be trying to explain the situation to people in my close environment.

I have never attended seminars like this before, and I expect this one to be the beginning of my commitment to the peace process.

Question 5

Do you have any specific personal experiences or incidents with the conflict or is it just something you heard or saw on TV or read in the newspapers?

Palestinians

I was sexually harrassed in a little room - with no one watching - with 2 young Israeli soldiers for half an hour, and they came soo close to me with guns pointed at me and flirting and talking and getting so close to me in a way anyone would feel threatened and scared.

The Jewish attacked my house more than three times. And the checkpoints everywhere!

The soldiers shot my brother.

We suffer so much from the checkpoints and the invasions.

I'm living the conflict day by day as a Palestinian young woman.

I have to cross checkpoints to come to my job. So I'm confronted with the soldiers every day. The conflict is in my daily life.

I have many experiences and incidents with the conflict. I was 7 years old when the 1st Intifada started and for me it was like a nightmare. I really did not have a normal childhood. And I have seen many shootings and arrests in front of my eyes. The soldiers used to come at night and knock on our door and a couple of times they arrested my brother. In the 2nd Intifada I was at the university and it was also a disaster for me.

While passing the checkpoints and dealing with the soldiers we feel that they fear and hate us.

Israelis

Three of my friends were killed in a suicide bombing.

I live in Tel Aviv, so many terrorist attacks were very close to my home and I could hear the explosions a few times. Almost every day I ride by bus, and each time I'm worried. My friends and my family go to the Army and I'm scared for them.

I live in Israel, so I think I live the conflict. Everything I can say about me is that the conflict refers to me inside and outside.

I know someone who got hurt during his military service.

I was living during the past few years in the kibuz 'Nir Am' which was under attack of kasam bombs every day.

I served in the army and I lived in Jerusalem for 25 years, near the center of the town where there were a lot of bombings.

The conflict is in my life through the news and the general political situation, but I have had close incidents with it in the past and present, not in a daily way though.

I was involved in demonstrations and activities against the occupation and the separation wall. And I'm in charge of a mixed group of Jewish and Palestinian youths from Israel.

Question 6

Looking back on the seminar till now, do you have the feeling that it has changed your mind, your feelings, your knowledge, your attitude towards the conflict? How?

Palestinians

(Palestinian, 48 th) I started to have friendship with most of the Israeli team. I felt that we can communicate, it's not hard to live together and we can find a solution of our conflict one day.

When I came here I didn't know the other side's thoughts and sufferings in their lives before 1948, and I didn't know how they think about the conflict. Their thoughts and the way the seminar developed has changed a lot in my attitude and in the way I think about the conflict and the other side. Now I'm thinking about how to struggle for making an end to the conflict.

Yes, in many ways. First I learnt to listen and to relax, not to shout but to try to understand the other's feelings and sufferings.

I didn't change my mind, but it added something new to me, especially when hearing how the other side thinks about both of our lives in the conflict.

I got new information and got to know that there are Israeli people who do think about peace. I learnt a lot. It changed a lot of things in my mind.

Changing my mind's feelings, knowledge and attitude? No, they didn't change, except for being able maybe to listen more and try to deal with people as human beings.

I changed my mind a little bit about the Jewish and I have now a different view on them.

This seminar added to me some points that are important for women's relations in the conflict.

A lot of things changed! Before coming here I thought that in the discussions we will fight with the Israelis. Now I think we can do a lot together in the future.

Israelis

Things became more concrete for me. Now I remember faces and specific incidents of the seminar. Now I feel the need to see who I am and to find my own identity in this complex situation.

Meeting the women and hearing their everyday's suffering, I could see them as human beings and not only as enemies.

The seminar has sharpened my political opinions and helped to structure some more clearly. It made me much more aware and emotional towards the other side.

The seminar made me more sure in my opinions. It was very important to me to hear about the feelings of the Palestinian women and what they are going through every day. Now I know more about the troubles they have all the time and what is happening to people who just want to live their lives.

I think that the seminar totally changed my mind. Now I think the opposite of what I thought before. I became aware and more sensitive to the Palestinian group, their status and their daily lives.

I also know that the more time passes by the more it's dangerous for both sides, because the Palestinians' anger keeps growing. Nevertheless I believe that Israel is the place for the Jewish people. And we will have to work out a solution that satisfies both sides.

I'm sure I have changed – first the knowledge and the awareness of the situation, and also my attitude, my feelings and actually everything! Now I feel much more involved and obliged to do something and to forward my conclusions.

It has affected me enormously, I really want to be involved and do something!

It definitely changed my mind. I know the life of the other side now and I heard the history of the conflict from their side, which explains a lot about their feelings and actions.

From now on I will think of the other side as individual people and not only as part of 'the enemy'.

The seminar gave me the chance to know personal stories beyond the news, the chance to understand people behind the conflict.

Right now I want to further inform myself about the history from the Palestinians' point of view.

I still feel so bad about the Palestinian people and the horrible reality we cause for them.

Yes. First of all it gave the other side individual names. Secondly it motivated me to take a more active role in working for peace.

I met wonderful women and it changed my point of view about the Palestinians. It made me understand that we have a lot in common. I learnt a lot about the other side and I made new real relationships (woman from Sderot).

Question 7

Was there a certain moment (a sentence, a thought, a narrative from another participant) that changed things for you?

Palestinians

It was that session when we talked about famous women of our families and mostly of moms.

Yeah! "I understand you, BUT". This sentence was always said by an Israeli participant. Always having the BUT!!

Israelis

In our discussions the others could understand that we are also victims of the conflict and not only they.

For me the most important moment was our historical narrative, the moment when I realised that I don't know what really happened – and I had the strange feeling that the Israeli government is hiding information - and I believed them without questioning them and getting my own answers!

Yes. The Palestinian women granted the Israeli people to have their own state in Palestine and to defend themselves, even by checkpoints.

The moment when I spoke with a Palestinian and she told me about the people she knew that got killed.

When I was talking about my military service and expressed regrets, one of the Palestinian girls told me it wasn't my fault.

When one of the Palestinian women who came with a lot of anger showed her sensitive and understanding side.

Question 8

Is there anything else you want to tell us?

Palestinians

I feel that the others want to do something to solve our problems. They are not comfortable with the situation.

I think they felt our suffering. And they disagree with the defense wall. In a certain moment my friend N. said, that they shouldn't call us terrorists. If they do so, we will call them terrorists also.

I know how important this seminar is. Before I came here I didn't believe that things like it can make a difference.

As Palestinians we need to be more respected by the Israelis and all the world!!!

Israelis

Every Israeli should go to this seminar – each and every one!

Thank you for the great job you're doing. It's so important. I'm happy to have the chance to be here!! Thanks!

I think **THIS IS A BLESSED INITIATIVE** , and it has real potential to make a change!

I believe that every Israeli / Palestinian should participate in a seminar like this and listen to the others at least once in his life.

For this opportunity, thanks to the volunteers, to the donors and to Helga.

Thank you so much for your intentions and efforts. I really appreciate your organisation. Keep that spirit, we truly need it.

Question 9

What were the advantages that in this Israeli-Palestinian encounter seminar only women took part?

(Women's seminar only.)

As we are women we have the same feelings and thoughts and we regard problems from more sides than men.

We concentrated on the role of women in the conflict, which is neglected by many people. Since we were all women we expressed our feelings freely and in comfort.

There weren't any „poses“ while discussing, this made everything much more real. I can't say exactly why, but it was just great.

I think women have an ability to talk honestly and openly when men are not around.

For me the experiencing of a feeling of 'women power' was very important and supporting.

The possibility to talk about women's problems and feminism.

- to do shopping together
- not to feel shy
- to feel free to dance.

Everybody is still alive (smily). Ok – it felt great!!!

Now I feel more aware of the fact that the media are sexist.

Women all over the world share the common gender-conflict.

In mixed groups men take a lot of space and women talk very little. In this seminar I could hear the women's voices.

There was a lot more understanding.

It gave us the opportunity to be closer, honest, and open-minded with each other, and to talk about special women's problems (away from politics). Also it changed the atmosphere and made the seminar very interesting.

The women had a chance to talk without men's guidance and control.

The atmosphere was very open, sensitive and emphasized similarities more than differences.

We could talk and feel the similarities between all of us as women. The talks were less aggressive and more empathic.

A lot of listening, no tension between the sexes, a feeling of community, less dominance.

Being only women present makes a different kind of discourse altogether. Nothing in this seminar would have been the same with guys around. We passed through violence, skipped our anger and went on talking and listening, which is the base for communication. We could do things this way because we are women.

The atmosphere was so calm and happy, we got along so well.

Question No 10:
What do you think could women do to promote peace?
(Women's seminar only.)

Women should interact more in politics and influence their families.

I think that women can bring calmness and different attitudes to the peace process by understanding each other better because of listening well in the first place.

We can do a lot by telling people about our experiences here. We can plan actions together.

Women can speak with each other, contact each other, share the positive emotions towards each other and make practical steps to a peaceful future.

Women can rise their voices and show the whole world that they can do what men can do. Women should use their imagination and strength. They can be creative and find many ways to change things.

We should get politically involved, then we can fight the occupation in a non-violent way.

Participate in seminars, in protestmarches, educate their children for peace.

Promote more meetings between women. Promote education for peace. Promote art of Palestinian women.

Communicate. Try to influence, in order to give our children a better place to live in.

We can try to meet again when we go back home. We can spread our experience to other women in our societies. Moreover, we are mothers and can transfer what we have learned here to the new generation.

I think without women in decision making positions there will be no peace.

I believe in non-violent actions. And women are perfectly skilled to promote it by talking, writing, creating and just being.

Women could be aware of what the other side wishes and think about how to establish life and politics without violence in the future.

For a start - listen to each other. Women express things by emotions and by knowledge. I think, this kind of seminar is a contribution to peace-making.

Women can influence their social environment, they can educate their children against violence and reach more people than men, since they usually work in social professions. Thank you for your generosity and willingness to work towards peace.

I think, if anyone can promote peace, it's women.