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GRIEF AND RAGE: COLLECTIVE EMOTIONS IN THE POLITICS OF PEACE AND THE POLITICS OF GENDER IN ISRAEL

ABSTRACT. Collective emotions of rage and grief dominate Israeli political discourses regarding the Middle East conflict. The weekly peace vigils of the Women in Black who protest the state’s occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and the opposition which the vigils encounter, publicly display polititized collective emotions. In these weekly confrontations, grief and rage articulate intense contestations regarding the politics of peace as well as the politics of gender in Israel. Rage and grief unravel two drastically different visions of transcending national vulnerabilities and two disparate constructions of gender identity.

This is not a war
It is only a chapter in the history
Of the powerless
Against themselves
Who cannot see
The rainbow from above
Stretching with abundance of color
Across borders.

Esther Yerushalem, Kibbutz Palmahim, 27.6.90

[A poem that she dedicated to a meeting between women of her Kibbutz and Palestinian women.]

On October 22, 1990 Hadashot, a leading daily Israeli newspaper, put forth a warning editorial to both Palestinians and Israelis of the dire consequences of pursuing endless vicious cycles of violence and counter-violence: “The Palestinian leaders who call for murder and revenge bury (kovrim) their people’s hopes in streams of blood, and for that they will be held accountable. On our side those who promote a policy of ‘only by force’, in effect, bury (kovrim) our chances to live here in peace and security.” Underneath the editorial a cartoon featured a couple: the woman wears an apron, holds a cooking spoon and has tears in her eyes, the man holds a pistol and grins mischievously. The woman asks him: “Why are you grinning?” and the man replies: “Next week it is our turn.” The cartoon reproduces the article’s theme of violence and counter-violence and brings to the fore a conjunction of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the politics of gender as it constructs different social identities for women and men regarding this conflict: men are the warriors, the fighters, and protectors, women are the domestic, the protected, worried, and distressed.

The editorial and cartoon comprise a single text that illuminates some facets of the Arab-Israeli conflict and of the construction of gender identities as seen...
through Israeli eyes. It uncovers ways in which collective emotions of rage and
grief have been deployed both in discourses about politics by the media and in
political discourses between groups. The phrases ‘only by force’ and ‘peace
and security’ remind the readers of two competing visions of transcending national
vulnerabilities, and the editorial underlines its political position by contesting
the violence and counter-violence solution. Phrases like “bury the hopes” of
Palestinians and “bury the chances” of Israelis reveal fears that underscore
national vulnerabilities and warn that the stance of ‘only by force,’ far from
overcoming these vulnerabilities, invites political death for both nations. Words
like “murder” (retsah) and “blood” (dam) intimate the terrors and realities of
physical death in the two communities. The word bury (kovrim) links political
and physical death as it brings to mind associated words of the same root, such
as grave (kever) and cemetery (beyt kevarot).

A similar stand is taken by an article in Al Hamishmar on October 23, 1990
but its warning speaks directly of death, graves and funerals: “In these hard
times what difference does it make who started and whose blood cries louder.
The many graves, of Jews and Arabs, are silent testimony to the futility and the
senselessness of violence and counter-violence.” The article goes on to say that
“the alternative to good will and understanding are…funeral processions – for
us and for them; to the last Arab, to the last Jew.” The article deploys collective
emotions in phrases like “the victims die on both sides and in the heart of each
nation are only wrath (zaam) and terror (eyma)” (Gefen 1990).

In the following discussion I examine collective emotions of grief and rage
that are displayed in public peace demonstrations initiated by women. I argue

that these protests and the opposition which they encounter reveal the ways that
grief and rage articulate two contesting positions regarding the politics of peace
and the politics of gender. I use the word grief here to approximate the Hebrew
word etsev, particularly as it is expressed in conjunction with mourning (avelut).
I employ the word rage to translate the Hebrew word zaam. In their discourse
about emotions, Israeli newspapers often use the word rage (zaam) regarding the
Palestinian-Israeli conflict, such as, “rage in Jerusalem is on the verge of
erupting” (Ben Ami 1990) and “rage and instincts conquer common sense,” or
“when rage blinds the eyes” (Gefen 1990).

For Israelis, rage and grief are not necessarily related concepts and are not
seen as intertwined emotions regarding death. Rage is not part of Jewish
mourning customs and the Kaddish, the mourner’s prayer, is recited in public
to signify the bereaved’s acceptance of death and the justification of God’s will
in the midst of grief. Rage has, however, recently emerged as a political feature in
the funerals of victims of political violence, and Israelis talk about the extreme
Right’s violence towards Palestinians that has come to mark some of these
funerals. This link between grief and rage introduced by extreme Right groups is
often considered a breach of customary rules of mourning and a violation of
proper behavior at funerals. An Israeli Jewish widow of a taxi driver who was
killed in retaliation for the killing of Muslims at the Temple Mount area on
October 8, 1990 said: “While the murder of my husband was motivated by
revenge I don’t want revenge visited on Arabs. ... I have not changed my views
after my husband was murdered. I am glad that his funeral was peaceful, without the participation of extremists, like Kahane’s people and others. We did not want them. I have never thought of, and will not think of taking revenge on all Arabs” (Al Hamishmar, 14.10.1990). A letter to the editor in the same newspaper, two weeks later, speaks to politically motivated solecism at funerals: “Whenever there is an attack (piguara), one immediately notices the political gamblers, the variety of ‘blood consumers’, those who never allow the mourners to be with their sorrow in a quiet and dignified fashion” (Al Hamishmar, 31.10.1990). These items reveal a recent politicization of funerals by extreme Right groups who enjoin rage to mourning. The items display two disparate positions on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the editorial in Hadashot, the article in Al Hamishmar, the widow, the letter to the editor, and the cartoon contest the ‘only by force’ position that attaches rage to grief.

My attention was drawn to collective emotions during my fieldwork in Israel in 1990 regarding women’s peace activities when I observed the vigils of one peace group, “Women in Black” (Nashim Beshahor) and a “counter-demonstration” (hafignat neged) that has emerged in response to the vigils. Once a week the two groups face each other in public and provide a dramatic display of competing constructions of transcending national vulnerabilities. In the following discussion I explore one way in which collective emotions of rage and grief and vulnerabilities are linked in this weekly political drama. I examine collective emotions of rage and grief that accompany contesting visions regarding national and gender vulnerabilities. But before I do that I want to make some clarifying comments on my discussion of ‘emotions’ and ‘vulnerabilities.’ Emotion as an analytic category has drawn both interest and criticism in anthropology. Some considered the discussion of emotions as outside the bounds of the discipline (Rosaldo 1989) implying a “division of labor between anthropology and psychology” (White 1990:46). Recently anthropologists like Lila Abu-Lughod and Catherine Lutz have called attention to the social features of emotions and particularly to “the role of emotional discourse in social interaction,” to the “construct of emotion as about social life rather than internal states,” and to “the close involvement of emotion talk with issues of sociality and power” (1990:1). My analysis of ‘collective emotions’ follows similar lines of locating them in social relations and in exploring their political significance in public discourses.

My use of the concept “vulnerability,” that is of a group’s, a nation’s, or a state’s collective sense of being perpetually exposed to attacks (physical, legal, psychological, etc.), situates it in social relations as linked to power struggles. I draw on Weber’s notion of power and his argument that “‘politics’ means ... striving to share power or striving to influence the distribution of power, either among states or among groups within a state” (1958:78). When such strivings for power among states remain unresolved and create endemic strife, as is the case in the Middle East, the nations and states involved all view themselves as perpetually vulnerable.

It is important to note that national vulnerabilities concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict go beyond present disputes and are rooted in Jewish and Arab ancient histories, in past glories and distant defeats (Cf. Goitein 1974; Horowitz and Lissak 1990). Historicity legitimates different national claims to the same territorial space. The past and present of nations are intimately linked: national fears in Israel and in the Arab states are often expressed by recalling the past and are sharpened by recent historical events. The Jewish experience of the Holocaust and the Arab experience of colonialism shape emerging political conflicts among and within the nation states of the region. While the Holocaust and the colonial experience are very different in many crucial respects, each tragedy has left its respective people with a deep sense of vulnerability that dominates not only the Arab-Israeli conflict but the struggles over the distribution of power in the entire region and within its states.

In this “anguished region” (Cowell 1991) the past has been kept alive for hundreds of years in collective memories through religious and national traditions. These historicities are often called upon to transcend political situations in which each side views itself in danger of being attacked. In the act of reconstituting a new past and present, nations express the wish to transform and overcome vulnerabilities. Masada, for example, has become a symbol for contemporary Israel, not only as a site of ancient power struggles and heroism but as a way to redress historical vulnerabilities. In vowing that “never again will Masada fall,” the past (the military defeat by the Romans) is merged with the present in vowing that Masada-Israel will not be vulnerable (by building Israel’s military strength).3

Ironically, both Arabs and Israelis may recast the very same history to address their respective vulnerabilities.4 These shared historical accounts of ancient Babylon enable Iraq’s president and an Israeli scholar to employ ancient Babylon and its ruler Nebuchadnezzar to make claims for the present. Thus, Saddam Hussein’s renovation of the palace in Babylon is employed to give modern Iraq the mantle of splendor and power of the past. A medallion, in which the modern President’s image is superimposed on that of Nebuchadnezzar, is not only a personal identification with the ancient ruler but an attempt to change the course of Iraq’s position as a nation state and overcome vulnerability (for example, the humiliation of colonialism) and to emerge as a state with a powerful military force (Cornu 1991).

Harkabi (1981, 1986), an Israeli political scientist, obviously from a different national perspective, enlists the account of Babylon to revise the course of Israeli politics. He examines the ancient Jewish military defeat by Nebuchadnezzar and the destruction of the first Temple, but his hero is the prophet Jeremiah who cautioned against swaggering politics that lead to defeat. Harkabi calls on
Jeremiah’s sensible and sound advice to alter present-day Israel’s frame of thinking and to urge it to take a more realistic and less ideological, fundamentalist approach. Historical national vulnerability (military defeat, the destruction of the Temple, exile) is employed to transcend the present national vulnerability by proposing a broader, more flexible political approach, including territorial concessions, to ensure the survival of Israel.

Moreover, these various national vulnerabilities in the Middle East are accompanied by collective emotions, like grief and rage, that shape political confrontations. Different national vulnerabilities have become matters of contestations between nations of the region and have forced the question: which side has greater claim to grief and rage and which side’s right to it is to be denied. The sense of vulnerability of each side in the Arab-Israeli conflict that the cartoon in Hadassot evokes is sharpened by the realities of physical harm, of scores of years of military encounters and deaths and the ensuing grief and rage. These emotions mark not only the Arab-Israeli conflict but also various other political contestations within the Middle East.

Collective grief and rage clearly have culture-specific constructions in the region. Good and Good’s (1988) analysis of the Moharram rituals in Iran, for example, highlights the convergence of collective emotions, religious rituals and state politics. The authors uncover a sense of collective vulnerabilities, both pre- and post-revolution, that are mapped onto the ancient Shi’a religious rituals. The reenactment of the Moharram rituals brings to the fore the ways in which past and present vulnerabilities “evolve anger, pity, grief, and great pathos” (1988:49). The force of emotions during the performance of rituals was such that “police patrolled these events to prevent outbreaks of violence” (1988:10).

The ways in which historicity is employed in striving to transform present-day collective vulnerabilities in Iran is seen when “religious leaders such as Khomeini had, at a number of moments during their opposition to the Shah, clearly identified the Shah and his government with that of Yazid, and had called for the Moharram dramas to be political rather than ritual” (1988:56).

Collective vulnerabilities and emotions take on, like the Moharram ritual in Iran, specific contours and are unique in the ways in which they are deployed within each particular sociocultural context in the Middle East. Attention to the vigil of Women in Black and the counter-demonstration uncovers one way in which they are articulated within Israel. I argue that the vigil and its opposition together unveils the articulation of grief and rage in contesting perceptions of transcending collective vulnerabilities. I propose that the Women in Black who protest the occupation of Arab territories deploy culturally encoded gendered elements to display grief and to transcend and transform national as well as gender vulnerabilities. I examine sociocultural constructions of the politics of gender and the politics of peace. The politics of peace is the women’s openly declared formal protest, while the politics of gender is the vigil’s underlying subtext, an informal protest that emanates, as I will note later, from women’s marginalization in organized politics in Israel. While I do recognize that for individual women the politics of gender is a more conscious and acknowledged element of the vigil, for the group as a whole it is, to use Freud’s (1969) term, a preconscious aspect. Yet often, the politics of gender take on an exegetical dimension “commenting” on the politics of peace. I explore the ways in which the Women in Black both challenge the state and appropriate some of the means by which the state makes power visible, for example, through ritual performance, proclamations, presence of police and gender encoded symbols (Cohn and Dirks 1988).

**A THEATER OF POLITICS: THE DRAMA OF COLLECTIVE EMOTIONS**

Friday afternoon is a time ordinarily devoted by Jewish women in Israel to Sabbath preparations. The Women in Black, Nashim Beshachor as they are known in Hebrew, gather in public every Friday afternoon between 1 p.m.—2 p.m. to protest the state’s occupation of Arab territories. “Women in Black” is one of 11 women’s organizations in the peace camp (mahane hashalom) which includes 58 joint (women and men) groups (Alternative Directory 1991). The women’s silent Friday vigil originated in Jerusalem shortly after the onset of the Intifada, the Palestinian uprising in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and it quickly spread to other parts of Israel. Although my fieldwork on women’s peace activities was carried out in 1990, just before the Gulf War, during the Gulf War, after some debates and discussions, the vigils resumed in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and Haifa. The Women in Black continued their Friday peace protest after the war as well. The vigils are now in the fourth year of consistent activity.

Sarit, one of the founders of the Women in Black, noted the vigil’s roots in the joint peace organization Dai Lakibush (End the Occupation) and described, in our conversation, an event that in her view was the launching point for a women’s peace vigil. “We had a man in Dai Lakibush who was a theater director and he and one of the women, who was a graphic artist, had decided that we should have a group of men in white and women in black and we would stand there to dramatize the situation. Well, the women showed up in black and the men never got together to come in white. It was very dramatic. Not a car went by without stopping and looking. And so we decided to have it as a separate women’s demonstration. At the beginning there were 8 of us. We stood in a different place every Friday between 1 and 2. At that stage the men from the group were around giving out leaflets but not demonstrating. And then it became a thing, other women started joining and eventually it separated off from Dai Lakibush and became what it is now, national and international.”

Sarit unraveled some of the structural, ideological and symbolic contours of
the conjunction of the politics of peace and the politics of gender: "Some of the women who joined the Women in Black in the beginning, not from the Dai Lakibush days but once it got a little bit beyond that, were politically active in the feminist movement here and they very much wanted it to be a women's thing. And it seemed to us logical that it would be. Part of the vigil's attraction and part of the reason why it has kept up the impetus is that it is women. We decided on the name 'Women in Black.' In Dai Lakibush we did not know what to call that section of it. When we gave reports though we said 'Women in Black.' So that was it. It was done for dramatic purposes but we did in a sense know the symbolism of black."

During my field work in 1990 I spent almost every Friday with the Women in Black. I was often in Jerusalem but have also been to various other vigils. I will pay close attention here to the vigil in Jerusalem but will also draw on material from a number of other vigils around the country.

France Square in Jerusalem is one of several squares intended by its architects to grace the city. It symbolizes Israel's desire to cast in stone its hopes for friendly relations with France. Given the latter's political shift toward Arab states and its more distant relations with Israel, the square signifies the transitory and unstable nature of political alliances that sharpen Israel's sense of its vulnerability. It is not surprising that the Women in Black chose it as a site to demonstrate their peace vision of transcending national vulnerabilities. Once a week this stage-like square, which is elevated above street level, is transformed into what might look like a theatrical performance. A group of women dressed in black, holding signs that say "Stop the Occupation" in Hebrew, Arabic, and English stand silently around the square. In the strong yellow and orange hues of early afternoon in Jerusalem, confronted by a raucous and aggressive opposition group that displays the national colors of white and blue and are surrounded by pedestrians dressed in gay and bright colors and cars whose drivers shout insults, curses and obscenities, it is impossible to miss or dismiss the vigil.

There are about 30 places around the country where the Women in Black keep a Friday vigil. The content of the signs in the various vigils are not identical. Each group of women is autonomous and decides locally on procedures. While in Jerusalem the women have agreed to display only a hand-shaped sign saying "Stop the Occupation," in other locations women carry signs like "Talks with the P.L.O." and "Two States for Two Nations." Women of all ages join, from young girls in their early teens to women in their 80s. Often mothers and daughters stand together and occasionally three generations of women join the vigil. On any given Friday the groups vary in size from under 10 in some places to over 100 in others.

Once a week, shortly before the Sabbath, France Square in Jerusalem and other places around the country are transformed into theaters of politics in which the vigils display collective grief that is linked to a vision of transforming national vulnerabilities. Several times a year the Women in Black mobilize a larger number of supporters and open the vigil to men. One of these took place after the Gulf War on Friday June 7, 1991. In their announcement of the event the Women in Black inscribed their call for peace: "End 24 Years of Occupation."

In the following discussion I provide mainly the Israeli Jewish perspective and note that while most of the women in the vigils are Ashkenazi and educated women, it is hard to neatly categorize them. There are religious and secular women, young and old, urban and rural; my observations are that the vigils differ from one location to another. Thus, in some places most of the women in the vigil are Israeli born and from kibbutzim, while in others, such as Jerusalem, there are also a number of American and European born women who have been in Israel for most of their adult life. In the Haifa vigil, for example, there is an active and vocal feminist core that includes Ashkenazi, Oriental and Israeli Arab women.

The Women in Black vigils comprise mostly Jewish women, but in a number of locations, particularly in the northern part of Israel, they include Israeli Arab women (Israeli Arabs constitute 18% of Israel's total population). For clarity in this discussion I distinguish between Arabs who are citizens of Israel and Palestinians who are from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. I note the participation of Israeli Arab women and the implications of gender for providing the ground for a joint Arab-Jewish women's protest. On special occasions, such as Women's International Day, Palestinian women have joined the Israeli Jewish and Arab women.

While short term demonstrations and vigils of all kinds abound in Israel (cf. Aronoff 1989; Wolfsfeld 1988) and are one way that frustrated citizens attempt to engage the state in a dialogue to register their demands, the vigil of Women in Black is in its fourth year and is a landmark of political endurance which has special contours. It displays women's interstitial position between their powerlessness in organized politics and their power as demonstrators and unravels various cultural, spatial and temporal contradictions and ambiguities. The choice of Friday afternoon as time for a women's vigil carries its cultural and social import as it is a time "betwixt and between" the profane week and the sacred Sabbath. While the country makes a shift from public life to the private domain and people make their way home, the Women in Black come out to stand in a public place. They have turned on its head the political silence that has been socially imposed on women by choosing silence as a way to be heard by the state. The vigil displays a weaving of roles of wife and mother and other domestic roles into a fabric of political peace protest. In embracing and subverting conventional gender roles the vigil underlines the confluence of the politics of peace and the politics of gender. As Rachel, one of the women in the vigil phrases it, "Some of the accusations and the nastiness that we get thrown
against us are: ‘How can we, as women, possibly spend time on Friday afternoon demonstrating when we should be home, we should be cooking, we should take care of the children?’ Yet I am here taking care of my child.”

Culturally encoded gender elements like feminality, motherhood, and domesticity are deployed by women in the vigil to transcend national vulnerabilities, both Israeli and Palestinian. Sarah who stands in the Jerusalem vigil says: “We get ready for the Sabbath. We are under the same pressures as everyone else. But we say that it is not possible to forget at any moment, including our busy preparation for the Sabbath, what is going on around us. And it is important enough to us that we try to be heard and do something about it and make a difference.” These Jewish women reconstitute their traditional roles as compelling elements in the politics of peace: it is precisely because they are mothers and because they care for and want to protect their children that they stand in the vigil. I will come back to discuss the vigil as reconstituting women as protectors.

At one level the Women in Black accommodate a broad span of political views. The Jerusalem Women in Black group’s written statement of May 1990 speaks clearly of both unity in striving to redistribute power between Israelis and Palestinians and multivocality regarding the ways to achieve it. The document states: “We are women of different political convictions, but the call ‘End the Occupation’ unites us. We all demand that our government take immediate action to begin negotiations for a peace settlement. Many of us are of the opinion that the P.L.O. is the partner for peace negotiations based on the principle of two states for two people – while others are of the opinion that it is not for us to decide who the Palestinian partner for negotiations is nor the exact solution on which peace will be based. We are unified in our belief that our message is powerful and just and will eventually bring peace.”

At another level the Women in Black are seen and see themselves united as women. Gender provides the glue of the vigil which is marked by the color of the black clothes, the structure of a vigil and the time of Friday afternoon. The only requirements for joining a vigil are gender and dress code: any female, young and old, dressed in black can do so. When men join on special occasions, they are guests and do not necessarily observe a dress code. Some wear black, others do not. While the practice of wearing black as a sign of mourning varies within both the Jewish and the Arab communities, the black clothes are gender-specific and highlight customs that apply to women but not to men. The significance of black to symbolize collective mourning is acknowledged by the women in the vigil as well as by those who oppose them.

GRIEF AND RAGE IN ISRAEL

COLLECTIVE GRIEF, GENDER, AND POLITICAL IDENTITY

The grief expressed in the black clothes speaks of both Jewish and Palestinian national vulnerabilities and is readily verbalized by the participants. Daphna, an Israeli Jewish woman, offers her understanding of it: “The black symbolizes our sadness and mourning. We have lost many, many Israelis in the war. And the other side has also lost, and so the black is a sign of mourning. We want this to stop. That is why we wear black.” The official statement of the Women in Black in Jerusalem [1990] says “The Black clothing symbolizes the tragedy of both nations, the Israeli and Palestinian.” A woman at the Tsomet Gilat vigil emphasizes: “I have a husband who is in the military reserve and two sons in the Israeli army. How long will they have to go to wars and the women will have to wear black?” (Bar Meir 1989).

The grief articulated in the vigil concerns the collective. It is displayed by the women’s emphasis on their mourning for the nation and has to be placed in the context of Jewish tradition that highly values such mourning. A story in Jewish folklore uncovers its import: it recounts that the prophet Jeremiah saw a woman in black sitting at the top of Mount Zion in Jerusalem. He went over to find out the reason for her grief and to comfort her. When he realized that her grief was not personal but that she was the Mother of Zion mourning for the nation Jeremiah went down on his knees and blessed her (Zmora 1964). Collective grief is also the theme of the Ninth day of the month of Av in the Jewish calendar which is a day of fasting and mourning for national tragedies. The Women in Black, like the Mother of Zion and the mourners of the Ninth of Av, mourn for the collective.

At the same time the vigils reveal the ways in which the collective is also concerned with the loss of individual life. The grief that marks the vigils resonates the value of human life in Jewish tradition which is expressed in “a famed Talmudic statement [that] equates the worth of an individual life with that of a whole world” (Yudelson 1986:23). It is precisely because the women, like the Talmudic statement, construe this value in its universalistic sense, and in this case that includes Jews as well as Palestinians, that their vigil is strongly contested by the counter-demonstrators. Precisely because the symbolic implications of the women’s mourning are anchored in Jewish tradition, the opposition that casts itself as the guardian of the state and of Jewish tradition contests the vigil’s grief.

Those who oppose the Women in Black insert gender elements to delegitimate the grief regarding the nation. They refer to the black clothes to deny the mourning articulated by the vigil in comments like, “Tell me (tagidi li) who are you mourning for?” They also contest the vigil as a public and collective expression of grief and so by using the singular pronoun in Hebrew in angry curses like, “May your husband die so that you will really be a widow.”
As the opposition attempts to personalize and depoliticize the vigil the women insist on their right to make public demands on the state and to share political power as citizens. This aspect of the confrontation needs some clarification since Israel has often been considered by anthropologists, social scientists and the media as having offered women equality. A close examination of documents written by women pioneers of the Yishuv (the early settlement pre-state period 1880–1947) and of women’s current striving to share power reveals a long history of women’s exclusion from various social spheres (cf. Arlozorof-Goldberg 1926; Azaryahu 1980). The confrontation between the vigil and the opposition uncovers the question that is the center of women’s relation to the state: What kinds of citizens are women? Are they, as the cartoon in Hadashot implies, different kinds of citizens?

From the very early days of the Yishuv, despite the promise of equality made by Theodor Herzl and the Jewish liberation movement, women time and again fought to be equal members of their community and struggled for political representation (Friedman, Shift and Izria 1982). Women’s accounts reveal a systematic exclusion from organized politics in the pre-state structure (Azaryahu 1980; Trager 1984). The state of Israel also promised women a feminist utopia: Its Declaration of Independence espoused gender equality, and in 1951 it reaffirmed its commitment in a Women’s Equal Rights Law which proscribed discrimination against women and introduced a number of laws to correct inequitable practices (Bowes 1989; Karp 1989).

And yet the reality of organized politics does not reflect equal power. While there are 120 seats in the Knesset (parliament), women held no more than 11 of them in any one term. The current Knesset has only 8 women. To put these figures in perspective, Israel’s percentage of females in parliament (6%) is the lowest of any European democracy. To this day women in Israel are not part of the political decision-making processes, and women’s roles as wives and mothers provide the “explanation” for excluding them from public and political positions of power and authority (Sharfman 1988). The absence of women in Israel’s organized politics is so pervasive that it is perceived by many Israelis as a natural phenomenon rather than as a cultural product of the politics of gender. As Wolfsohn notes, “Israel’s women are excluded ... that politics is a predominantly male concern” (1990:42). This view is that “even those women who do want to participate find it difficult to take part in institutional action ... The political parties may recruit from a variety of social classes, but it seems that they prefer men” (1988:67).

Exclusion of women from positions of authority is also obvious in the Israeli army. Women are excluded from combat units, and in effect from reserve duty, and consequently from most positions of power and authority in the Israeli army. The social difference between women and men soldiers has been noted in many conversations I had with women like Rachel, who in 1990 had two daughters in the army. She made the following comments: “Men learn to relate to women as something to defend, and to relate to everything, to all relationships, as competitive situations: everyone is either a friend or an enemy. All men here are fighters (kativim) or pseudo fighters and all the women are not. And it changes everything, it affects women’s life. Every man has something important to do in the army. He can be a total physical wreck, a ‘kalikker,’ but yet considered to have something important to contribute. Not so women. I have two daughters in the army and they do worthwhile things but they realize that they do not have responsibility. They work for someone (male: mishhehu) and while they acquire many skills they have no responsibility and they feel less important. They learn in the army that women are less important, that their tasks are less important, and that the relationship between men and women is unequal. Women soldiers have less responsible jobs despite the fact that things have changed in the army.”

Women’s secondary position in the army is highly significant because there are intimate links in Israel between army careers and political leadership, the former providing powerful and almost essential credentials for the latter (cf. Sharfman 1988; Hazan 1989; Ben Eliezer 1990). Some women speak clearly on this issue. Judy, who is a long time activist in the peace movement and one of the founders of the Women in Black, offers: “If you look at the position of the army in the culture of this country, women are almost totally excluded from that. There are women in Keva (the regular army) and there are women who are high officers but they don’t even figure in it. And the army is such a vital part of the culture in this country for protekzia (nepotism), for everything, and women are excluded totally.” Exclusion from combat and reserve duty has created not only political inequality but also a very different social reality for women that spills over to other areas. Esther, who positions herself in the peace camp and has written protest poetry (shirat mehara) says: “The war affects writing as well. How can I write about war in the same way as men poets who have been in the war? I do write about the war but my authority is less than the male voice who was there. It is seen that I have less legitimacy to write about the war.” The male warrior image clearly has serious implications for women’s sociality and the range and scope of roles available to them in Israeli society.

What are some of these implications? In the Israeli case a social male person embraces central military characteristics like warrior-hero-protector and these in turn become requirements for full male adulthood and success in organized politics. Accordingly, Israeli Jewish women are defined as actual or potential wives-mothers-protected and apolitical persons. This constitutes a barrier to sharing power between women and men. As Liebling articulates it, “the division of labor in [Israeli] society is clear and unequivocal. Men defend women and children. Women, like children and the elderly, are seen as helpless in times of war” (1988:221). Women’s identity as protected persons has wider civic
dislocate nationalism, not by denying it but by constructing a transnational women’s community. It allows these women to shift national boundaries, and to “universalize” and transnationalize grief so that traditionally competing Arab and Jewish national vulnerabilities are both acknowledged. It is revealed in The Women in Black document that states: “We are protesting against the occupation and against all its manifestations: destruction of homes, expulsions, administrative arrests, collective punishment, extended curfews, killings and bloodshed” (May 1990). Aliza, a woman from the vigil at Tzomet Gilat in southern Israel, explains: “We are standing here wearing black because we mourn the situation, the killing that is taking place in both nations.” Nadia, an Arab woman from a vigil in northern Israel, said to a young Jewish male counter-demonstrator, “I stand here so that young men like you don’t have to die. So that your mother’s son and my son can live.” The women’s emphasis on gender and the reiteration of “we are all women,” and their looking alike in black clothes provides one way to shift national boundaries and to stake a political position that the value of the lives of sons of both nations is the same.

The Women in Black’s striving to redistribute power between Israel and the Palestinians is linked to their striving to share power within the state. Discrimination against women, they say, makes them sensitive to other forms of oppression, and their de facto exclusion from political power enables them to empathize with other marginalized groups including the Palestinians. Hazan, a political scientist and a prominent peace activist, notes: “If we oppose the oppression of women, how can we fail to oppose the suppression of another people? In reality, many Israeli women’s rights activists merge their feminism with the quest for equal rights for the Palestinians” (1989:13).

COLLECTIVE EMOTIONS: RAGE OF CONTESTING GRIEF

The vigil is a dangerous business and is recognized as such by the Women in Black themselves and by others. For women to take an unpopular political position and to call for an end of the occupation, particularly on Friday afternoons, requires courage and determination. The Women in Black stand perilously close to the traffic at extremely busy and highly congested intersections and are exposed to the blazing sun in the summer and to the cold in the winter as well as to an aggressive counter-demonstration and belligerent and hostile drivers.

The counter-demonstrations are organized by people from the political fringe including Kahane’s Kach group and small, extreme Right political parties, like Tchiza and Moleder. While most, though not all, of their participants are Ashkenazi males (predominantly boys) the counter-demonstrations, like the vigils, do not fall into a tidy category and differences exist across the country. In
Jerusalem, for example, the counter-demonstrations included at the time of my fieldwork Kach supporters (many wearing Kach shirts or carrying identifying posters), religious boys, and a number of English speaking young people who could barely speak Hebrew. In other places, like Raanana in the center of Israel, the counter-demonstrations are more homogeneous, comprising Ashkenazi and secular adults and youngsters (male and female), who identify themselves as Tsiya and Moledet supporters (cf. Zaltsman 1989).

The counter-demonstrations were not organized independently but came into being in reaction to the Women in Black. In marked contrast to the women’s silent vigil they are usually extremely vocal. They take on the mantle of patriotism and have appropriated key national symbols, like the Israeli flag, and make much use of the national colors of blue and white to deny the need for black and the grief. Those who oppose the vigil call into question the women’s loyalty as citizens and cast them as traitors. The counter-demonstration that represents the “larger Israel” and “only by force” political position expresses vehement opposition not only to the call to end the occupation but also to the women’s very right to make a political statement as female citizens. Sarit, a 14 year old Jewish girl in the vigil, says “They don’t want us to stand here. They are angry because we are women. They think that women should not interfere (lehitarev) in politics.”

Those who oppose the vigil counter the women’s grief with rage which they express in various forms. In Jerusalem, this opposition took on a struggle over “territory” when the counter-demonstrators forced the women to leave France Square for several weeks and stand on the street while the counter-demonstrators occupied the square. Physical and verbal threats are quite common and in most locations attempts are made by the opposition to either force the women to leave or to obscure the vigil by standing in front of them. National vulnerabilities, like the Holocaust, are invoked against the women in painfully abusive signs such as: “The Women in Black are longing for Auschwitz,” (Gallili 1989) and inflammatory signs, like “The Women in Black – A Knife in the Back of the Nation” which shows a knife dripping with blood. Rage is also expressed in a statement handed out by the counter-demonstrators, such as “we recognize’ Black Widows. We recognize that they can kill and we recognize that they are insects.”

Rage is also displayed in the informal opposition by drivers and pedestrians who are predominantly, but not exclusively, male. They employ verbal abuse, like curses and sexual insults, and physical threats, such as pushing, spitting, and throwing food-stuffs. More importantly the threats which at times border on the dangerous uncover the extreme Right’s challenge to the law of the state. The extreme Right group’s position which regards Palestinians outside the protection of the law is also evoked in the threats that are made against the Women in Black and which disregard their civil rights. In some locations drivers have tried to run over the women (Keshet 1989). In Jerusalem a soldier pointed a gun from a car window towards the women and a young man in army uniform went from one woman to the next and cursed each one of them. The threat in some vigils “we will transfer you first” alludes to some Right extremists’ threats to transfer all Israeli Arabs and Palestinians out of Israel. A middle-aged man in Jerusalem kept shouting “We will visit Der Yassin on you” and made a throat cutting gesture. Der Yassin was a village in which Arabs were massacred by Jews, and by invoking the village the threat could not be clearer. Placing the Women in Black outside the state and the community is also constructed in politicized threats like: “Go to Iraq,” “Saddam will take care of you,” and in curses “I hope you die of cancer, slow, Palestinian cancer."

The counter-demonstration and others who oppose the vigil respond not only to the Women in Black’s politics of peace but also to its subtext of gender. Verbal assaults on the group’s legitimacy take several forms. Domesticity is inserted into the discourse to discredit the vigil in comments such as “Go back to the kitchen,” reminding the women of traditional definitions of the “good” mother. Also personalized questions in the singular present women as isolated individuals rather than members of a political group. Examples are: “Why don’t you (at – singular in Hebrew) go home, my mother is home right now and she is cooking. How come you (at) have time to stand here?” And some hecklers flatter individual women as objects of desire, “Not all of you are ugly. Some of you are really beautiful. So why are you standing here?” Rage is evinced in insults that sexualize not only the women but Palestinians as well, of which the most common are: “Whores,” “You like to fuck Arabs,” “Arafat’s whores,” and lately “Saddam’s whores,” and more recently since the Right has dominated the government, “this government will fuck you.”

The confrontation between the women’s vigils and the counter-demonstrations is also a contestation regarding the law of the state; while the latter challenge it, the women call on it. In response to the violence of the counter-demonstration, the Women in Black’s vigils have employed the state’s channels of protecting citizens: they have called for and receive police presence and protection. While the opposition casts the Women in Black outside the state by accusing them of being disloyal, “you are all P.L.O.” the women highlight their position as citizens who speak for Israeli society. Their position is inscribed in the Jerusalem vigil’s official declaration: “We, ‘Women in Black,’ citizens of Israel, have been holding a weekly protest vigil since the beginning of the Intifada. This protest vigil is an expression of Israeli society and expresses our need to actively and strongly oppose the occupation.”

While Israelis are fiercely divided on the question of the occupied territories, no peace demonstration that includes men elicits such violent reactions as the Women in Black. Some demonstrations express much sharper political messages, like the call to refuse military service in the occupied territories; yet none
elicit the kind of violent response that the Women in Black face. The intense response to the vigil has to do with the intersection of the politics of gender and the politics of peace and the particular discourse that it creates about "gyulo" — a Hebrew word that means, among other things, borders, boundaries and limits. In the Friday confrontations collective emotions of rage and grief articulate obvious contestations of the borders of the state of Israel (with or without the occupied territories). The discourse between rage and grief however is also about the subtext of boundaries between various cultural categories such as mourning and violence.

I want to recall my earlier discussion on the recent politicization of funerals of Jews killed in attacks (pigum) as Right-wing groups have linked violence against Palestinians with grief. The Women in Black pull apart the Right groups' elision of grief and violence in Jewish mourning and reconstitute the autonomy of grief. In the Friday political stage collective emotions display a dramatic reconstruction of boundaries: grief-mourning (the Women in Black) stand on one side of the street (representing one position regarding the Middle East conflict) and rage-violence (the counter-demonstration) stand on the other; they face each other, spatially divided and in political contestation. In their document the Women in Black in Jerusalem denounce violence and say "We have had enough of the legitimization of brutality, of violence" and declare "We call on all women to join us in our staunch, persistent and non-violent protest."

The Women in Black's insistence on disengaging violence from mourning has to be seen in a larger social discourse about gender in which attempts are being made to consider violence against women as a serious legal issue. While it is outside the scope of this paper to present a discussion on this theme, it is important to note that there have recently been attempts on the part of a number of organizations, including women's peace groups, to bring out the issue of violence against women from its domestic secrecy to public awareness, to hold the state accountable regarding prosecution and to sunder violence from relations between women and men (Swirski 1984). A feminist center that is active in a local Women in Black vigil launched a project in 1989 that, like the vigils, turns to the state to initiate legal action. It demands that the government "put an end to the conspiracy of silence regarding violence against women" (Isha L'Ishah 1990).

The Women in Black vigils construct one articulation of the conjunction of the politics of peace and politics of gender and one way in which women's groups strive to shift boundaries between women and the state. Vigils and demonstrations, as I noted earlier, are one way in which Israeli citizens who attempt to create change negotiate with the state. The Jerusalem vigil's document that speaks on the politics of peace states "we all demand that our government take immediate action to begin negotiations for a peace settlement." This position on the politics of peace, however, is also a statement about the politics of gender: the vigils display in full view of the nation and the community (kval am ve'edah) the way in which these women constitute themselves as protesters, that is, as active political persons who call for a redistribution of power between Israel and Palestinians and claim for themselves the highly valued state role of protectors.

THE GENDER OF EMOTIONS

Earlier in the discussion I described the opposition to the vigils as “mostly male.” This may suggest that grief and rage articulate boundaries between women and men in the sense that men are associated with war and rage and women are joined with peace and grief. However I argue that this is not the case: On the side of the counter-demonstration there are women, albeit few, and the Right wing parties include women, with the Tchiya party having a prominent, active and vocal woman leader.

As for the vigil, men periodically join the Women in Black, and there are men who would do so on a regular basis but for the women’s insistence on keeping it a gendered vigil. While it is obvious that the women choose to emphasize mourning in a way that joint peace demonstrations do not, when men join the vigil they become part of the collective grief. The incorporation of men in grief can be seen in a notice issued by the Coalition of Women and Peace that called on women and men to wear black and join in a silent memorial service for Palestinians who were killed by Israeli police in October 1990 in Jerusalem.

Moreover the attribution of emotions to women and rationality to men that has dominated Western philosophical ideas from the Greeks to Freud does not reflect Israeli cultural ideas. Women, as the vigils make clear, are not associated with emotions any more than men are associated with rationality and in this political confrontation both women and men articulate emotions.

I want to further explore the question of the gender of emotions and highlight a specific discourse regarding the Middle East conflict. I call on an exchange of letters and articles in several Israeli newspapers throughout August 1990 between at least 16 persons from the peace camp and attend to several items which were written by men about emotion (regesh). The themes that emerge in this debate, like the issues that feature in the Women in Black’s vigils, concern emotions and the politics of peace but do not link gender and emotion. While collective emotions in the Friday drama articulate disparate political positions, the following case offers a discussion concerning the legitimization of emotionally laced politics. At the center of this public storm was the Palestinians’ support for Iraq; it concerned several celebrated persons on the Left who have made some caustic comments regarding the Palestinian leadership’s embrace of Saddam Hussein after his invasion of Kuwait.
On August 17, 1990 one of the most prominent leaders of the peace camp and Member of Knesset, Yosi Sarid, responded to the Palestinians’ support of the Iraqi ruler in what Israelis described as an “emotional” article in Haaretz, a leading Israeli newspaper. He apprised the Palestinians that he is taking a distancing position: “From now until further notice the Palestinians can as far as I am concerned, look for me.” A debate glittering with phrases about emotions ensued in the Israeli newspapers. One phrase that emerged often was “emotional storm” (searat ruah), and it was linked to Israeli national vulnerabilities that were evoked by the Palestinians’ and Israeli Arabs’ support for Saddam Hussein.

In this discourse distinctions between political ideologies and emotions are often blurred. A.B. Yehoshua, one of Israel’s most prominent writers, attempted to deal with it by separating emotions from political wisdom in the following way: “I can understand Sarid’s emotional distress (mezuka rigshit) ... he has experienced an emotional storm (seara rigshit). I understand his feelings (hargashato) but I am sure that he does not mean that the dialogue is over.” Yehoshua suggests that what seems to be a major political shift from the “peace and co-existence” position is in reality but an emotional response. Emotions are revealed not to be associated exclusively with one nation’s vulnerabilities, and while the Israeli Left is overcome by emotions so, according to Yehoshua, are the Palestinians. On their support for Saddam he says “I understand it as an emotional act (akt rigshit), as an emotional storm (searat ruah),” with the implication that emotions reveal a sense of collective vulnerabilities and mask (momentarily) the political (co-existence) position.

Shternhal, a political scientist who enters the discourse, takes a different position. While participating in the debate about emotion Shternhal rejects the idea of political emotionality. As he chastises the Left for what he sees as a loss of rationality, Shternhal does not genderize emotions: “The Israeli Left has lost its head completely. There is something pathetic about this self-reflection (cheshbon hanefesh), of confession and self-flagellation that characterized last week. There is something repulsive about the emotional exchange of excited (nirgashim) letters, the emotional outbursts, this weeping of jilted lovers” (Shternhal 1990). But underlying his scathing remarks on the emotional storm is his political position regarding Israel’s national vulnerabilities. In his view (which reflects one political position in the Left) to secure peace in the Middle East means that the national aspirations of Palestinians will have be acknowledged and that it is in Israel’s best interests to address the Palestinian issue irrespective of what certain Palestinians do or say.

The emotional storm, implies another writer, David Grossman (1990) in Hadashot, has to be seen in the context of competing national vulnerabilities. He says “On first reading (Sarid and London’s articles) I was full of admiration for their total loyalty to their feelings (rigshoteyhem).” But he says that what they have left out is some balance between the Israeli Jewish emotional response and the Israeli Arabs’ collective vulnerabilities. According to Grossman, in expressing anger, the two Israeli Jewish leaders have ignored the fact that the Israeli government has done little to “prevent the feelings of frustration, discrimination and neglect among Israeli Arabs.” Grossman views this emotional storm as ways in which people in both nations respond to their respective sense of vulnerabilities. Like the Women in Black, he questions violence as a political position: “we are furious (zoamim) that in supporting Saddam the Palestinians show themselves to understand only the language of power, but if we too could stop, for a while, to talk to them the language of power and the rigid syntax of despotism ... we could have encouraged a more realistic group ... emotionally freer to identify the authentic Palestinian interest.”

Grossman’s position evokes some of the political themes that are featured in the cartoon and the editorial in Hadashot described at the beginning of this paper. The cartoon’s display of a couple of indeterminate nationality and the editor’s more specific references to Israeli and Palestinian identities reveal an endemic situation of competing collective vulnerabilities in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Emotions are not allocated to women but to nations, and both the cartoon and the editorial lay bare the tragic realities of political confrontations permeated by the collective rage of nations. Both the cartoon and the editorial expose the Middle East’s cycle of endemic rage: confrontations become, to use Rosaldo’s (1989:4) phrase, a matter of “balancing the ledger” between warriors.

The cartoon resonates the themes of grief and rage that mark the vigil and its opposition. But there is also a difference between the cartoon and the vigil. While the cartoon invites us to see women and men concerned with collective vulnerabilities, it displays two kinds of responses: a female passive and crying and a male active and raging. However, the Women in Black’s vigil and the counter-demonstration do not support this neat gender division into passive-grief and active-rage. Far from being passive females who cry into their aprons, the Women in Black subvert this gender construction. While the women’s grief certainly takes on some gendered traditional properties, like the black of mourning, in other respects it stretches the bounds of customary rules of mourning in several ways. The vigil has shifted the focus of mourning from that of the particular (the death of an individual) to the collective (many deaths) and from the specificity of nationality (Israeli or Palestinian) to a transnational inclusive one (both). The intensity, which in traditional mourning diminishes with time, here remains unabated. Where it is usually time bound (for Israeli Jews it is marked by the funeral, seven days, one month, one year, etc.) it is here politically bound: the women intend to mourn for as long as the occupation lasts. Obviously, the women’s grief in the vigil and the woman’s passive grief in the cartoon construct very different gender identities.

The Women in Black articulate one way in which gender and national politics
converge in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict. While Palestinian reaction to the Gulf War has recently divided a number of groups within the peace camp in Israel, for the Women in Black, gender has provided a fabric of unity that allows political diversity and has enabled Jewish and Arab women to continue to contest the state’s occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In the Friday theater of politics, the black clothes, like actors’ costumes, are employed to both mask and reveal: individual and national differences disappear under the black clothes and a women’s transnational grief emerges. The dramatic confrontation between the Women in Black and those who oppose them publicly unveils competing collective emotions. Rage and grief articulate two drastically different political positions in Israel regarding national vulnerabilities.

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NOTES

1 I am currently writing a book on women’s peace activities in Israel drawing on my fieldwork in 1990. The present paper uses material from that manuscript.
2 All translations from Hebrew are mine.
3 On a discussion on Masada see Bruner and Gofain 1984.
4 During the Gulf War Kuntras, a Jerusalem review of Jewish thought, displayed a weaving of past and present in which the former was called on to shed light on the latter in a discourse on the Shamir government’s policy of restraint regarding Iraq. Kuntras employed historicity to explain and justify the government choice not to enter the war: “The ways of fate decide that it is others, and not us, who will strike this land of Iraq where the Jewish people found shelter for many centuries, and developed generations of sages who gave us, among other things, the Babylonian Talmud” (quoted in Le Monde, February 27, 1991 under the headline “The sacred texts and the war”).
5 Sarit and the names of other women are pseudonyms for Israeli women whom I have interviewed.
6 The vigils take place all over the country, from Elat in the South to Rosh Pina in the North. They are in major cities such as Jerusalem and Tel Aviv and in cities with large

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Israeli Arab populations such as Haifa, Nazareth, and Acre. On most Fridays I audiotaped people (with their permission) on both sides. There were many other people from the media and others, such as tourists, audio-taping and taking photographs. When I was asked who I was I identified myself as an anthropologist.
7 The highest percentages of female participation in parliaments are found in Norway, 32.4%; Finland, 32.5%; and Sweden, 32.5%.
8 I have discussed this tradition of associating women with emotions elsewhere (Gabriel 1990). There is also an extensive feminist literature that takes up this debate (see Coole 1988; Ruddick 1989).

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