



Culture

Israel, Palestinian Stories Share Pages in Same Book

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By Lensay Abadula
WeNews correspondent

Coinciding with Israel's 60th anniversary, 60 Israeli and Palestinian women tell their often conflicting stories in a new book. They also share a common conviction that peace is still possible.

(WOMENSENEWS)--Despite being polarized by religion, ideology and territorial boundaries, Palestinian and Israeli women share their stories side by side in a new book entitled "Sixty Years, Sixty Voices."

12 New Writers



Patricia Smith Melton

There, 30 Israeli women and 30 Palestinian women offer perspectives on living in one of the world's most hostile places through their stories presented in English, Arabic and Hebrew. Some have disagreements, but if they have one thing in common it's the belief that peace is possible.

Although the book does not envision a specific road map to peace, its editor, Patricia Smith Melton, founder of the women's organization Peace X Peace, says the book, which shares equal space for the Palestinian and Israeli narrative, offers its own springboard, especially since women are involved.

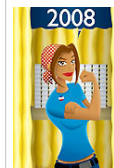
"We do know that both through experience in life and through the sort of emotional and psychological predispositions of women in life, that they have some additional tools," Smith Melton said in a recent phone interview. "Of course their experience in life teaches them to care for children, care for the society. We learn early to listen to different viewpoints and we believe in connecting with each other."

The book, published by Peace X Peace in 2008, came as Israelis and Jews celebrated the 60th anniversary of the state of Israel and Palestinians continued to grieve over 60 years of the "Naqbeh," or the catastrophe. The book's stories are told by a range of women from all walks of life.

Dreamed of Israel

Tova Dmbulu Gette, a Jewish conversion counselor, describes her family's difficult journey to Israel. Gette, at age 6, and her family were among 8,000 Ethiopians, who as part of Operation Moses in 1984, were brought

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12 New Writers



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across the Sudan before eventually reaching Israel. Gette reveals that she does not feel like a "settler," particularly as an Ethiopian who has long dreamed of Israel.

Naomi Chazan, a former member of the Knesset, Israel's parliament, says in the book that she was one of the first Israelis supporting the two-state solution, which entails the creation of a separate national state for Palestinians. Jews should not allow the injustice they suffered from the Holocaust during World War II land on anyone else, she says.

Reem Alshareef is the principal of the Cordoba School, located in an Israeli-administered region in Hebron. Sometimes settlers attack her students on their way to school and she must send them to the hospital, says Alshareef, who traveled to Washington, D.C., in November for the launch of "Sixty Years, Sixty Voices."

"I'm not going to tell my child to love the settler, love the soldier," she said. At the same time you have to be optimistic about life, she added.

In the book, each woman is asked several questions about her work and role in society as well as her ideas on peace in the region.

One of the women, Barbara Sofer, director of public relations for the New York-based Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, said she was not comfortable with all of the voices chosen for the book, such as an activist of the Hamas movement, who takes a strong stance against the existence of the Israeli state.

'Grating to My Ears'

"Many of the voices are grating to my ears," said Sofer, who grew up in the United States but moved to Israel in 1971. She acknowledged that her words might be abrasive as well. "The truth is Palestinians have not pulled themselves up as they need to in order to squash hatred," she says in the book.

But Sofer, who also traveled to Washington for the book launch, understands the need for these thoughts to be aired out. "The listening is the first part," she said.

Elana Rozenman decided to take a more active role in working for non-violence after her son was severely injured in a Palestinian suicide bombing 11 years ago. Rozenman, executive director of Trust-Emun, a Jerusalem-based organization that builds trust between people in the region, directed the selection of the Israeli women for the book. She said it's easy for women to bridge differences and relate to one another in an informal, sisterly manner.

"You get strange women in the room who never met each other and never would normally come together--Palestinians, Israelis who are so separated and alienated from each other--and within a half an hour they're talking about their children, their husbands, their struggles as women within their societies, within their work," she said.

Among their many roles, the shared experience of motherhood between Israeli and Palestinian women offers them a strong basis for mutual understanding.

"I sincerely believe that generally all women bring children into the world for them to live and grow and prosper," Rozenman said. "They don't bring children into the world to be soldiers or to blow themselves up."



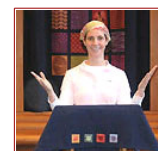
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A Perfect Time for Peace

For Palestinian human rights lawyer Rawia Aburabia, who also attended the book launch, now is the moment for peace. The recent election of Barack Obama makes the timing perfect, said Aburabia, who is a New Israel Fund fellow studying international legal studies at American University. As in other areas of the world, people in Israel and the Occupied Territories have high expectations of the first African American U.S. president.

"They are thrilled because Obama is a very charismatic young leader," she said. "He gives hope especially to groups that are under occupation or part of a minority, oppressed or marginalized because of their position."

As conditions in the Gaza Strip grow increasingly dire, Israeli and Palestinian authorities have become increasingly strained. U.N. officials have urged Israel to ease a blockade in Gaza that has gravely restricted humanitarian aid. Recently, though, some aid has been allowed into Gaza, as well as a large cash delivery to banks to ease currency shortages, according to BBC reports. In early November, Israel tightened the blockade that was imposed after Hamas took control of Gaza in June 2007, in response to rocket fire attacks.

Amid such tensions between authorities, Smith Melton emphasizes the importance of dialogue on the ground.

Because traveling to visit one another is extremely difficult and often illegal, Smith Melton encourages the Israeli and Palestinian women from the book to use other forms of communication. "Use the Internet, send messages in any way you can, get citizen-level conversation happening, and then work that from the bottom up," she said.

Smith Melton started Peace X Peace in 2002 after she sought a feminine response to the violence of Sept. 11. Peace X Peace, which is based in Washington, uses the Internet to connect women together from around the world.

Through the organization's Internet Global Network, which is similar to the Facebook social networking site, women from about 120 countries create profiles and can leave messages online for other network members. Women form "circles," or groups based on shared interests through a profile-based matching system.

Lensay Abadula, a native of the Washington, D.C., area, graduated from Northwestern University in June 2008 with a degree in journalism.

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Women's Mideast Peace Movement Marks 20 Long Years



Nida Awine paints the separation wall.
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Women Put Their Mark on MidEast Peace Efforts



Asia Istoshina, left, and Zahava Galon speak at 2006 conference.
Credit: The Coalition of Women for Peace

Israeli Women Challenge Meaning of Security



A woman chants slogans at July 28 protest.

Jewish and Arab Women Unite Against War



Cathy Sultan

Sultan Offers Candor From Mideast Battleground



Naomi Chazan (left), former Knesset member and Maha Abu-Dayyeh Shamas (right), Palestinian member of coalition, in Turkey last year.

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