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“These Could be Our Children:” Israeli Women Opposing the War, an Interview



Photo: Nimrod Kerrett.

Not only abroad, but also within his own country, Israel's Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu is finally facing growing and substantial protests against his war in Gaza. After he broke the ceasefire on March 18 and launched a new attack on Gaza, a number of women took the initiative to set up ‘Action for Children’.

“We woke up to the horrifying news that over 100 children had been killed in Gaza that very night. The four of us—myself, Amit, Alma, and Danielle—were devastated. We couldn’t stop crying. We felt we had to do something. We, Israeli Jews are also against this terror and

this oppression. This matters. The memory of Shoah is alive for us and Never Again also means Never Again for the Palestinians as well” says Neora Shem (71).

Together with Amit Shiloh, Alma Beck, and Danielle Cantor she took the initiative to a silent protest against the killing of Palestinian children. The idea of children being “*forcibly involved*”—a term borrowed from *The Daily Page*—anchors the group’s message. “The Israeli military and media often describe victims as ‘uninvolved,’” Shem says, “it means that the children, and other civilians, who die can’t choose whether they are involved. But their deaths involve them! This challenges the rhetoric of dividing people to *combatants* and *uninvolved*, so often used in the Israeli media. When a child dies, they are involved, because we’ve involved them. A child is a child is a child.”

How did your protest started?

“We printed the photos of the dead children, sourced from *The Daily Page*, a website maintained by Adi Argov who has been documenting child deaths in the Israel-Palestine conflict for over four years. We used our home printers, and stood in silence the next day, holding the images and candles. No megaphones, no chants, no signs, no slogans, no flags, no political parties. Just our silent bodies. We came together in grief. Protesters wear plain clothes, hold images of killed children, and light memorial candles. The simplicity is key.”

How do people respond to what you are doing?

“Of course in the beginning we were terrified. Being Israeli, being Jewish, and opposing the war in public, it feels dangerous. But people didn’t attack us. Many came closer, stood with us. People instinctively understand. Some stand next to us and cry. Others leave candles. Many just stand with their hands on their hearts. Silence refuses the violence of language, it holds space for grief. Without slogans, people see what matters: The faces of children who could be ours. Silence disarms anger.”

What began as four friends mourning in public has become a rapidly growing, decentralised protest movement. Hundreds now join the silent vigils each week in Tel Aviv.

The silent protesters stood outside IDF headquarters on Kaplan Street and even outside Yad Vashem on Holocaust Remembrance Day. The movement has inspired similar vigils abroad, in cities including New York, London, and Vienna.

What do you hope to achieve?

“The silence invites people to see the faces of these children who could easily be our children. They could be Jewish, they could be Israeli. We believe that no child should be sacrificed. Without slogans or political messaging, people understand the core message intuitively: This war must stop. We’ve seen the impact. Hundreds and hundreds of new

people join us each week. They get it. This action feels like shifting public perception, even slightly. You can see it in online discussions, Facebook posts, and how people are starting to respond to us on the streets. Just last week, that political figure here, Yair Golan said publicly: *“This government is illegitimate—it kills children. The army kills children as a hobby.”* Now, that wording “as a hobby” was clearly too much for some. He later clarified that he meant the *government*, not the *army*. But the point stands. People are starting to say things out loud that would have been unthinkable before.

Do you think the current attitude in Israel is changing, or is it getting worse?

“It’s getting worse. The current atmosphere is being actively maintained and cultivated by Bibi and his propagandists. There’s a deliberate effort to dehumanise the Other, meaning Palestinians, war opposers, and even freed hostages, to radicalise people in this country. To turn them into homicidal nationalists. Unfortunately, it’s working. Take what happened on Memorial Day in Raanana: A group of nationalists disrupted a synagogue event with violence, even targeting elderly women. Imagine such an attack on a synagogue in Europe! These violent attackers were released after five minutes. Meanwhile, protestors from *Standing Together* who tried to march to Gaza on a Friday were held in jail for four days. Another example: My sister-in-law posted a critique of the Eurovision song, rewriting the lyrics to say: *“The sun will not rise because it’s covered with smoke.”* She was threatened so violently she had to shut down her Instagram. She hid in her apartment. People were literally threatening to kill her. It’s also the public, the people.”

Do you expect your protests to have an impact in Europe or the US?

“Absolutely. We hope that people in Europe, when they see pro-Palestinian protests, also realise that there are *Israeli Jews* opposing the war. Not just Palestinians, we, Israeli’s, are also against this terror and this oppression. Europeans need to understand that there’s another side to Israel, not just that of the Army or the Settlers or the Netanyahu Government.”

Beyond visibility, what do you want people in Europe or the US to do?

“Refusal can take many forms. For instance, European companies don’t have to sell equipment to the Israeli military. Artists can speak out. Voters can demand action. People can apply pressure in so many ways. Take a recent example, during a Microsoft conference, someone stood up and said: “You’re helping a genocide.” That person got fired. Everything just carried on. So, we need to stop buying Microsoft. Like Ben & Jerry’s has openly boycotted Israel and is demanding an end to injustice against Palestinians. It’s really about targeting complicity. I remember the global pressure on apartheid South Africa—that kind of international resistance *worked*. I expect something similar here.”

Do you see your movement as parallel to the anti-apartheid struggle?

“I would like to believe so. I *wish* it were as strong. But here is a major difference: Global reach of Israel's political, military and financial power is much more entrenched now than it was during Apartheid. And the term “Jew” itself has been horribly distorted. These days, when people say, Jews they often mean those who support Netanyahu. That is not Judaism. That is not the Jewish people! That is a dangerous conflation of religious identity with right-wing extremism.”

What is motivating you to keep on going?

“Being a peacenik is dangerous in today's Israel. But holding up a photo of a dead child, whose face could belong to any of our own, has a powerful emotional impact. It strips everything down to the human core. This is not about sides. It's about children. Since October 7, nearly 20,000 children have been killed across Gaza, Israel, the West Bank, and Lebanon. Hundreds since March 18th alone. This has to stop. And that's what keeps us going! That's why we stand together in silence to stop Bibi's genocide. A genocide not in our name!”

Neora Shem

She is an Israeli author, journalist, digital artist, and software developer, recognised as a pioneer in internet culture and open-source advocacy in Israel. Her 1993 novel *Digital Affair* is considered the first cyberpunk novel written in Hebrew. She has taught at Tel Aviv University. Beyond her contributions to digital culture, she has been the creator of the complete archives of Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, and other cultural figures like Uri Avnery, Hanoah Levin and Shmuel Agnon ae... Now she has been involved in pastoral care since 2015, working as a death doula and providing spiritual support to terminally ill patients.

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Ibrahim Quraishi is a conceptual artist and writer dividing his time between Berlin and Amsterdam. His work has been exhibited extensively across Europe, South/East Asia and the Middle East. He is a regular cultural-political contributor to the German newspaper TAZ : die tageszeitung. His first historical novel, “being everywhere, being no where” (part I of a trilogy), is forthcoming from Seven Stories Press, NY.<