

# What does Beautiful Trouble have to do with feminism and nonviolence?

Contributed by [Rae Abileah](#) on January 21, 2015

“I don’t have the privilege of losing hope,” said Nabila Espanioly, a Palestinian feminist activist speaking on stage. “The urgency of action requires reflection to be more sustainable and effective.” In two breaths, Espanioly addressed two ongoing philosophic activism questions — How can we find hope in such troubling times? How can we find time for thoughtful reflection amidst the chaos outside? — and poised herself as a beautiful troublemaker.

Espanioly was speaking on a panel titled “Is Nonviolent Struggle Necessarily a Feminist Struggle?” at a conference in Jaffa, the port city that was once the thriving center of commerce in Palestine, now the neglected south end of Tel Aviv. The conference, titled [A Hole in a Brick Wall](#), was coordinated by the [Coalition of Women for Peace](#), a feminist organization in Israel working against the occupation of Palestine and for a just peace.

Women-led Palestinian resistance may not make the front page of the NY Times, but it is happening, and it is bold, creative, and determined to end the Israeli occupation. From my seat on stage alongside Espanioly, I began my remarks with a bow of awe to her and her work. As a grassroots organizer, and former Training Director at Beautiful Trouble, I was invited to speak at this conference to share tactical and strategic tools on building diverse movements and engaging the arts in street activism. As a Jew with family in Israel (not to mention an American taxpayer contributing my hard-earned meager activist wages to the stockpile of weapons in Israel), I felt a particular responsibility to take action for human rights and a just peace for Palestinians and Israelis.

After Espanioly, Dr. Dalit Baum took the mike. Baum is an Israeli organizer with American Friends Service Committee. She cofounded [Who Profits?](#), a research group whose reports form the backbone of many global boycott and divestment campaigns. She noted that across the 20th Century’s nonviolent movements, from Gandhi to King to Mandela, the most indelible images tended to be men of color refusing to strike back when being beaten by white police. These images were shocking and surprising; they helped to reverse stereotypes, capture the moral high ground, and win the “battle of the story.” However, if women had been enlisted for the exact same form of resistance, Baum speculated, the image might not be nearly as jarring, since the image of women being beaten mercilessly without rebuke is a gravely familiar and all-too-commonplace phenomena in our patriarchal societies. I’d never considered this before.

Instead, Baum offered seven principles of specifically feminist nonviolence (which I hope she will turn into a submission for Beautiful Trouble’s [growing library](#) of principles!) Baum’s list includes fun and audacity, flexibility and intersectionality. She cited the bold, often humorous, tactics used by the women’s peace group,

[CodePink](#), such as a [kiss-in](#) outside a military recruiting office, or a canoe [boat blockade](#) of a senator's yacht to protest a proposed US naval blockade on Iran.

Echoing Riane Eisler's "[dominator versus the partnership model](#)," Baum also discussed the need for feminist actions to unfold from organization structures that are flexible, supportive, and horizontal. Goodbye patriarchy. Hello collaboration. In addition to resisting, Baum asserted, feminist nonviolent movements tend to be also dedicated to creation, to building viable alternatives and proofs of concept. After her talk, I invited the audience to participate in the sequel to Beautiful Trouble — [Beautiful Solutions](#) — which is gathering the most promising and contagious strategies for building a more just, democratic and resilient world.

Espanioly then explored whether there could be a feminist struggle without addressing issues of state violence, and also critiquing the privileged Jewish feminist movements in Israel that have sought to uplift women's rights while ignoring Palestinian rights. For Palestinian women, she argues, there is no separation between their rights as women and national rights to freedom, equality and justice. As she saw it: gender self-determination and national self-determination go together. After all, what does female empowerment even mean in a village surrounded by a segregation wall; with no right to vote, no freedom to travel, and lacking the security to live in peace and right livelihood?

We troublemakers are in trouble if we fail to make these connections. We need to simultaneously challenge racism and sexism (and other -isms), and boldly, audaciously, creatively, and with both good humor and serious commitment, get on with the job of creating the kind of world we'd be proud to live in. While Beautiful Trouble is informed by the history of feminist action, it has much to continue to learn from current feminist struggles (and wouldn't hurt to have more pieces written by women in the growing library too)

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Coalition of Women for Peace poster remembering 36-year-old Palestinian activist Jawaher Abu Rahmah, who was killed in 2011 by inhaling (Made in the USA) tear gas fired by Israeli soldiers at demonstrators protesting the Wall.

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<http://beautifultrouble.org/2015/01/21/beautiful-trouble-feminism-nonviolence-2/>,  
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