

# 'Riot grrrl' fuses feminism with Zionism in pioneering publication

By Raphael Ahren

Hadass Ben-Ari is not the first Anglo to move to Jerusalem because she "fell in love" with Israel during a short-term visit. But while most other Jews her age come to the capital to study or to work for a Jewish organization, the 26-year-old Ben-Ari spends her time publishing Fallopian Falafel, "the first and only Jerusalem-based feminist zine, bringing riot grrrl culture to the holy land."

"Riot grrrl" is no typo but an underground feminist punk/heavy metal movement that started in America in the early 1990s. Besides being a music scene, the riot grrrl subculture consists of political activism and a spirit of DIY (Do it yourself), which includes the publication of so-called zines (short for fanzine) – non-commercial pamphlets with small circulations.

"It was mostly a self-defense mechanism," Ben-Ari said in explaining how she got involved with the movement as a 22-year-old journalism student while living with her parents in Canada. "I had just gone through a really rough relationship with a guy who broke my heart," she said. "Feminism brought back all the power and encouragement to move past it. Feminism really helped me with that, and also the music encouraged

me." She started liking heavy music like Nirvana and Marilyn Manson when she was 16, but since she got involved in the riot grrrl scene, she is "more into death metal," she told Anglo File this week.

Born in Beit Shean, Ben-Ari moved with her Moroccan-born parents to Montreal when she was eight years old. In 2005, she came back to Israel to intern at the Jerusalem Post.

"I stayed here for four months and just fell in love with the place," said Ben-Ari, who sports five piercings, two tattoos – and earrings in the shape of a Star of David. "This is where I knew I wanted to be for the rest of my life, because it was just so exciting, so different, so open and so vibrant. It was sort of a positive culture shock."

But Ben-Ari wasn't destined for a career in Israel's mainstream media. "Whenever I want to write something for a newspaper," she said, "most of the time they are going to reject my articles on the basis that they are too radical or too outspoken - they are not looking for my style of writing. My style is very specific, very blunt and very honest. I am just saying exactly what I think."

Combining her passion for writing with riot grrrl's DIY spirit, she started publishing Fallopian Falafel, of which

she prints about 40 to 50 copies for each volume, paying out of her own pocket.

"I just thought it was interesting if I could write my own material, and phrase it however I want," she said. "That's how Fallopian Falafel got started, and I loved it. It has no barriers, no boundaries whatsoever. You can really write whatever you want."

Each issue of the 30-page zine deals with one specific topic – such as religion, pop culture, beauty – and includes Ben-Ari's own musings as well as poems and articles submitted by other riot grrrl hobby writers. The articles deal with a range of feminism, from "the spiritual emancipation of rural South African women" through a review of the controversial Amos Gitai film "Kadosh" to an essay entitled "Where is Miriam on the Seder Plate?"

In the zine's latest issue, which came out this summer, Ben-Ari wrote: "Yes, tattoos, piercings, metal chains, black clothes, stuff that I clearly like as a prerequisite for being a highly enlightened metalhead. Stuff that I also get bashed for or simply unappreciated for by highly close-minded dickheads. No, I do not do it for your attention, and no, this is not a phase. I'm 25. My time for 'phases' was over about 6 years ago. This is what you might call 'a way of life.'"

Although the riot grrrl subculture – which many people associate with anarchism or political indifference at best – is an important part of her identity, Ben-Ari describes herself as a feminist Zionist. "A lot of people think it's a contradiction because feminism is very leftist and Zionism is very rightist. I am really both," she said, adding that she wholeheartedly supports the state of Israel and the Israel Defense Forces.

## Oh, to do the army

Ben-Ari did not have to serve in the army after immigrating to Israel, but today, she regrets not having volunteered. "Being a woman and being a soldier, is that empowering or is that considered violent and oppressive?" she mused about what other feminists might feel about this. "Personally, when I see a female soldier on the street, with her uniform and her M-16, I just think: Wow, she's so powerful! I would have loved to be a soldier."

Not many death metal aficionados think that way. Maybe even more peculiar about Ben-Ari is that in a scene dominated by nihilism, atheism and sometimes even Satanism, she says she is respectful of Orthodoxy and even observes some aspects of Judaism, such as lighting

Shabbat candles and keeping kosher. Avoiding any conventional labels, Ben-Ari says she is a "kosher sinner," explaining that her "version of God is very complex."

Yet, she says she is very spiritual and reads a great deal of rabbinic literature, such as "The Way of God" by the 18th century kabbalist/philosopher Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto. "I just loved it," she said about the tractate, which expounds on the basic principles of the existence of God, the purpose of creation and other philosophical concepts. "It represented exactly what I feel that religion is."

Perhaps at odds with some conventional feminists, Ben-Ari believes that Judaism "in its essence" is not a misogynist religion. It actually empowers women, she said. "We don't have to wear a kippah, because we [are so spiritual that we] don't have to be reminded that there is somebody above us. Men do," she said, referring to a popular explanation of why women don't wear skullcaps.

"The only thing that makes religion misogynist is the people who practice religion in extreme ways," she added, asserting, however, that the Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox majority in Jerusalem do not make her feel uncomfortable.

"Where I work there are a lot of very Orthodox people,"



Her zine has "no barriers, no boundaries, whatsoever," says Ben-Ari.

Ben-Ari said, referring to the capital's Mevor Baruch neighborhood. "They don't look at me any different, they don't treat me any different.

I actually feel very comfortable there."

Ben-Ari also said that the often-made claim that there is "religious coercion" in



Editor-in-chief Hadass Ben-Ari

Jerusalem is exaggerated. "Jerusalem is a holy city, and there are religious people here. I don't agree if people go to protest a store that's open on Shabbat with torches in their hands, that's stupid. But these are very extreme people and not the majority. I really think people are blowing this out of proportions."

With all due respect to Israel's religious community, however, Ben-Ari wishes that her beloved riot grrrl movement would gain popularity in the holy land. She admits she just knows one other member of the movement. "I feel that women in Israel could use a riot grrrl kick," she said. "They have it in them, I know they do. They just need a spark and the riot grrrl in all of them will rear its gorgeous head."