

Who can advance Israeli-Palestinian peace? Contributing actors to the peace process

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Women's Peace Groups in Formal Peace Processes: Benefits of Participation, Price of Exclusion

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Abstract

Women's peace organizations work to end violence and promote peace agreements almost everywhere where conflicts occur. Studies and observations from the past 20 years show that these organizations contribute significantly to peace processes, despite their variation in forms, methods, and the extent of their involvement. In the context of formal negotiations and the formulation of peace agreements, the integration of women's peace organizations was found to increase the prospects of reaching an agreement, as well as to change and enhance the nature and content of the agreement itself (including governance, social justice, rehabilitation, gender equality, etc.). Their integration was also found to significantly increase the feasibility of implementing the agreement and promote women's representation in the political system. However, in Israel, as in most countries, decision makers marginalize women's peace organizations despite their extensive work and significant contributions. This article examines the main barriers preventing the participation of women's peace organizations in Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking, the price of their exclusion, and the actions needed to integrate them and express their potential. The article is based on interviews conducted in 2019 and 2020 with women-peace activists from Israel and beyond, as well as a review of research literature and case studies of women's peace organizations in Israel and abroad. It outlines some of the prices Israeli society pays for women's exclusion and recommends actions that may promote their integration into formal peacemaking efforts.

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A. Introduction

Women's peace organizations² work to end violence and advance peace agreements almost everywhere where conflict occurs. However, despite the extensive cross-border efforts of these organizations, they are conspicuously absent from the formal negotiation process of peace agreements.

Twenty years after the UN Security Council adopted its landmark Resolution 1325, calling for recognition of women's organizations' contribution to peacemaking processes and the integration of women in all political processes, many countries have successfully implemented change.³ Examples include recognition of the Somali "Sixth Clan" coalition comprised of women from the country's five ethnic tribes, which led the mediation efforts among rival factions during the civil war. Currently, the coalition holds 12 percent of representative seats in Somalia's Constituent Council.⁴ Other examples include the recognition of the "Mothers of Manipur" as the force entrusted with maintaining the agreement that ended hostilities in the northern state of India,⁵ the indigenous women's involvement in terminating violence and establishing a peace treaty in Colombia,⁶ and more.

The information gathered from observing women's peace organizations shows that they contribute in a variety of ways at multiple stages of negotiation processes and in the formulation of peace agreements. Their activities include calling for an end of violence, influencing public opinion, creating connections of trust between communities and societies in conflict, facilitating access to opposing sides, encouraging international involvement, conducting informal negotiations, mediation activities, humanitarian assistance for civilians, and protecting human rights. In addition, women's peace organizations often contribute greatly in shaping Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR) processes, as seen in El Salvador, Uganda, Yemen, Iraq, Colombia and other countries. The integration of women into DDR processes (whether they are fighters, educators, community leaders or survivors) has helped international bodies understand the importance of founding peace processes through bottom-up activities based on cooperation with local communities from the beginning stages of the DDR process and throughout all levels of decision-making (termed "Second Generation DDR").⁷

² I use the term "women's peace organizations" to refer to a wide variety of organizations, activities (spontaneous or organized) and movements of women working to stop political violence and promote peace processes in conflict zones. This formulation is not necessarily used as the self-determination of the various organizations, which differ considerably in terms of structure, strategy, composition, and nature and duration of activity. But all these networks are led by women, women are the majority of their activists, and they see the integration of women and the female voice as having a significant and unique contribution to peace processes.

³ Kew, D., and John, A. W. S. (2008). "Civil society and peace negotiations: Confronting exclusion". *International Negotiation*, 13(1): 11-36.

⁴ Timmons, D. M., and King, M. E. (2004). "The Sixth Clan: Women organize for peace in Somalia: a Review of Published Literature". University for Peace.

⁵ A group of women from the Manipur ethnic minority in northern India, who protested against the Indian army following the rape and murder of a Manipuri woman. See, Kansal, S. (2021). "Book review on 'The Mothers of Manipur by Teresa Rehman'". *Contemporary Literary Review India*, 8 (1): 300-305.

⁶ Bouvier, V. M. (2016). "Gender and the role of women in Colombia's peace process". United States Institute of Peace.

⁷ Tarnaala, E. (2016). "Women in armed groups and fighting forces: lessons learned from gender-sensitive DDR programmes". Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre.

The integration of women's peace organizations in formal negotiation processes and the formulation of peace agreements was found to increase the prospects of reaching an agreement, change and improve the content and nature of the agreement (including more references to proper governance, social justice, rehabilitation, promotion of gender equality, etc.), significantly increase the feasibility of implementation and adherence to the agreement, and promote women in the political system.⁸

Similar contributions are evident in Israel, which has been involved in a variety of conflicts since its inception and where several peace processes have taken place over the years. Women play a significant and dominant role in Israeli peace activism, and women's peace organizations have successfully influenced international spaces. Women in Black, for instance, has become a model for women organizations against political violence elsewhere in the world,⁹ and Women Wage Peace was recognized as an advisory body. Women's organizations have even influenced security measures, for example, the "Four Mothers" organization led a public campaign requesting the withdrawal of the IDF from southern Lebanon. However, an examination of the various peace processes in Israel shows that at no point were women's peace organizations integrated into the formal peace process.¹⁰

This article seeks to examine why women in Israel remain outside of the negotiating rooms, despite the significant potential contribution of women's peace organizations' to formal peacemaking processes, as observed by the theoretical literature and many examples around the globe. What are the main barriers that prevent women from being included? What are the social costs of their exclusion? And what is required to allow them to maximize their potential?

The article is based on interviews conducted in 2019 and 2020 with women from Israel and around the world who have spent years working to promote peace, as well as an analysis of research literature and case studies of women's peace organizations in Israel and abroad.

The article will include a brief overview of the contribution of feminist theory to feminist security studies and will address a number of key concepts that have emerged in recent decades, such as women, peace and security as a field of knowledge, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325), and the theory of intersectionality and the practices that derive from it. The article will then address the Israeli case, with a brief review of women's peace organization activities, examining the barriers that stand in the way of their participation in formal peacemaking processes, describing some of the prices Israeli society pays for this exclusion, and recommending a plan of action to promote women's integration into formal Israeli peacemaking efforts.

⁸ Krause, J., Krause, W., and Bränfors, P. (2018). "Women's participation in peace negotiations and the durability of peace". *International interactions*, 44 (6), 985-1016.

⁹ Baiocchi, M. L. (2009). "Women in Black: Mobilization into anti-nationalist, anti-militarist, feminist activism in Serbia". *CEU Political Science Journal*, (04), 469-500; Svirsky, G. (2001). "The impact of Women in Black in Israel". *Frontline feminisms: Women, war, and resistance*, 229-240.

¹⁰ Lieberfeld, D. (2009). "Parental protest, public opinion, and war termination: Israel's 'Four Mothers' movement". *Social Movement Studies*, 8(4), 375-392.

B. Women, peace and security – what is it all about?

To answer the question of how women's peace organizations contribute to peace processes and the resolution of violent conflicts, it is necessary to first examine the relationship between women, peace and security. This includes an examination of gender perceptions at the foundation of conflict formation and resolution. Specifically, attention should be drawn to the unique effects that violent conflicts inflict on the experiences of women, men and the gender-power relations in societies that experience such conflicts.

Despite the recognition of the dramatic effects of violent conflicts on the lives of women and men, the prevailing view in conflict studies is that war is a "men's business", with women perceived as supporters of warfare, helpless victims, and mothers of soldiers and/or the nation.¹¹

The feminist approach to conflict studies, however, is based on the premise that the integration of a gender perspective is a necessary condition to understand the complexity of a society experiencing violent conflict. This approach allows the examination of basic concepts within conflicts, such as security and violence, and reveals how narrow mainstream definitions fail to include a wide range of manifestations of violence and insecurity experienced by women from societies in conflict.¹² Likewise, this approach highlights the flexibility and diversity of roles that women play in these societies,¹³ and contributes to recognizing the importance of integrating women in conflict resolution processes and peace promotion.¹⁴ Furthermore, the integration of a gender perspective in conflict analysis allows for the identification of how structures of gender inequality and perceptions of masculinity and femininity fuel violent conflicts.¹⁵

In the early 2000s, there was significant growth in the scope and nature of feminist research on security and peace. Two factors were significant in this development:

(1) Adopting the concept of *intersectionality* as a tool for theoretical analysis of gender and conflict relations. This concept, originally coined by black feminist scholars in the United States, sees gender as one structure in a complex web of relationships between ethnicity, class, and nationality, and analyzes the power relations between them.¹⁶ The adoption of intersectionality expands the understanding of the complex effects of these structures on the needs, experiences, and coping mechanisms of different women from societies in violent

¹¹ Afshar, H. (2003). "Women and wars: some trajectories towards a feminist peace". *Development in Practice*, 13(2-3), 178-188.

¹² Cohn, C. (Ed.). (2013). "Women and wars: Contested histories, uncertain futures". Cambridge: Polity Press, John Wiley & Sons.

¹³ Anderlini, S. N. (2011). "WDR gender background paper"; El-Bushra, J. (2003). "Fused in combat: gender relations and armed conflict". *Development in Practice*, 13(2-3), 252-265.

¹⁴ Confortini, C. C. (2006). "Galtung, violence, and gender: The case for a peace studies/feminism alliance". *Peace & Change*, 31(3), 333-367.

¹⁵ Caprioli, M., Hudson V.M., McDermott, R., Emmett, C., and Ballif-Spanvill, (2007). "Putting women in their place". *Baker Journal of Applied Public Policy*, 1(1): 12–22.

¹⁶ Crenshaw, K. (1989). "Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine". *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1., 139-167.

conflicts, and reveals how treating women as a single homogenous group fails to provide an understanding of inequality between women and other social groups.

For example, when Israel wages a military campaign against Gaza, the military and government approach focuses on issues of "hard security". For the women living in the combat zone, however, the question of whether there are protected structures in or near their home that will provide reasonable protection for their family is of paramount interest, as those who have easy access to a safe room and those who do not have completely different life experiences. Similarly, when it comes to the dilemma of whether to lose workdays in order to stay home with the children during alarms (of incoming rockets), women who work for minimum wage will have a different approach than women who make a comfortable living that includes paid vacation days, and will certainly make a different decision than a man, who in most cases will go to work as usual.

Another example arises in the case of women activists. Such activism usually requires easy access to either a car or public transportation. Obviously, this condition is not the same for different population groups. Likewise, when the activity is conducted in the public sphere, the exposure to gender violence among women from certain social groups is much higher than among other groups.¹⁷

(2) *Resolution 1325 adopted by the UN Security Council in October 2000 (UNSCR 1325)*. The adoption of Resolution 1325 was a significant step for feminist scholars and activists promoting the importance of a gender perspective when analyzing conflicts. Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security rests on four main pillars: (a) recognition of the different effects of conflicts on women and men, (b) protection of women and girls in conflict as well as the definition of gender violence (GBV) and sexual violence (SGBV) as a weapon (referring not only to rape and attempted rape but also to sexual exploitation, forced marriage, domestic violence, spousal rape, FGM, and trafficking of women), (c) inclusion of women in all decision-making processes related to peace and security, and (d) assimilation of a gender perspective in all activities of international bodies related to issues of peace and security.

Passage of the resolution led to the formulation of regulations that require a collection of gender data in surveys and research by international bodies. This move contributed to the establishment of a research body dealing with women, peace and security, and it shed light on the reality of life in societies in conflict. The expansion of information and research on women's peace organizations helps to understand the characteristics of these organizations and explain their successes, as well as the barriers they face. For example, on the one hand, most women active in such organizations have no political or public experience and act in their social role (often by virtue of their motherhood), and most organizations emerge as a pragmatic response to an extreme situation (not necessarily as an expression of an ideology or agenda). Most organizations also operate contrary to the expectations of society and

¹⁷ Aharoni, Sherry (2019). "Belonging as a feminist problem, or: Should I commit suicide in the face of fascism?". *Politics*, 28: 127-149; Coalition of Women for Peace and the Women's Security Index (2017). "The confidence of activists and new horizons for action." The Security for Peace Index (in Hebrew).

without organized resources.¹⁸ On the other hand, membership in these organizations is a source of strength for women who manage to promote action and create alternative social networks that enable mobility, partnership-building, mentoring and diversity.

Empirical studies and statistical data collected since the passage of Resolution 1325 have grounded the argument that the integration of women's peace organizations into formal peace processes is necessary and significant, beyond their importance in the civilian field. Studies by Nilsson (Nilsson, 2012; 2014), Krause (2015; 2018) and others, as well as the periodic reports of UN Women¹⁹ have all determined that the integration of women's organizations in negotiating processes and the formulation of peace agreements significantly increases the feasibility of the agreement, its assimilation, and the reduction of violence thereafter.²⁰ In addition, it was found that the integration of women's peace organizations improves adherence to human rights protection and promotes post-conflict economic recovery. The peace treaties in Northern Ireland,²¹ Liberia and Colombia offer three prominent examples of how women's organizations contributed to a formal peace process.

Northern Ireland:

In 1976, Máiread Maguire, Betty Williams, and journalist Ciaran McKeown founded the Peace People community to end violence. When accepting the Nobel Peace Prize a year later, Williams said that the "voice of women has a special role and a special spiritual force in the struggle for a non-violent world". The cross-sectoral community activities led by the women of Northern Ireland continued over the years, peaking in 1996 with the establishment of a broad-based coalition consisting of women representing the entire political spectrum to run in elections which would eventually determine the composition of the peace negotiation body (a forum of 110 representatives from the population of Northern Ireland). The coalition won 8,000 votes and elected two representatives - Monica McWilliams (a Catholic) and Pearl Seger (a Protestant), as representatives of the coalition. It is said that the 1998 Good Friday Agreement included a number of elements reflecting the issues that the Women's Coalition sought to promote: recognition of the suffering of victims of violence in the reconciliation process in Northern Ireland, recognition of women's right to full and equal participation in political processes, and recognition of the importance of education for reconciliation. Women's participation in the Forum often allowed them to reconcile the parties that threatened to quit the process. Furthermore, the coalition was entrusted with a central role in sharing the draft agreement with the communities of Northern Ireland to

¹⁸ El-Bushra, J. (2007). "Feminism, gender, and women's peace activism". *Development and Change*, 38(1), 131-147.

¹⁹ UN Women (2021). "Meeting Report: Gender-inclusive peace processes: Strengthening women's meaningful participation through constituency building". UN Women. Retrieved from: <https://www.unwomen.org>.

²⁰ Krause, J., Krause, W., and Bränfors, P. (2018). "Women's participation in peace negotiations and the durability of peace". *International Interactions*, 44 (6),985-1016; Gizelis, T. I., and Krause, J. (2015). "Exploring gender mainstreaming in security and development 1". *Gender, Peace and Security*, 165-184. Routledge; Nilsson, D. (2012). "Anchoring the peace: Civil society actors in peace accords and durable peace". *International Interactions*, 38 (2), 243-266; Nilsson, D. (2014). "Civil society in peace accords and the durability of peace". *Accord: an international review of peace initiatives*, 25.

²¹ O'Reilly, M. (2015). "Why women". *Inclusive Security and Peaceful Societies*, 10.

ensure that the agreement represented the needs of the public and was ratified by a referendum.²²

Liberia:

After 14 bloody years, the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace movement ended the country's Second Civil War in 2003. The movement was instigated by a social worker named Leymah Gbowee, who spent months gathering thousands of women in peaceful protests at a local fisherman's market. Their activities included, among other things: pressuring the leaders to negotiate, harnessing diaspora communities, and using local cultural values to frame goals and mobilize public support. The movement led to the signing of a peace treaty between the parties, as well as democratic elections, whereby Liberia's first president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, was elected. Johnson Sirleaf and Gbowee were awarded the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize for their contribution to peace in Liberia.²³

Colombia:

The 2016 peace agreement, which ended 52 years of conflict, was the first to include gender references in all aspects of the peace and reconciliation process (within 130 articles, including the first-ever reference to the LGBT community). Women's groups contributed significantly to motivating the formulation of the agreement and the peace process. These groups, mainly from indigenous populations, creatively and courageously exerted pressure on the parties to stop the violence and begin the process of rebuilding the country.²⁴

However, despite the encouraging data, no dramatic change has occurred to include women's peace organizations in other formal processes in various countries, including Israel. An analysis of peace agreements compiled by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) shows that between 1990 and 2014,²⁵ only 13 of 130 agreements signed included women's signatures.²⁶ One of the few participants in formal peacemaking was Prof. Miriam Coronal Ferrer, appointed head of the negotiating team between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, following her joint work with women's peace organizations²⁷ on both sides. Her contributions led to a peace treaty signed in 2014.

C. The history of the Israeli case

The history of the peace movement in Israel indicates that women have always been active partners in organizations, associations and initiatives to promote peace. A number of factors have led to the flourishing development of women's peace organizations in

²² Kilmurray, A., and McWilliams, M. (2011). "Struggling for peace: How women in Northern Ireland challenged the status quo". *Solutions Journal*, 2 (2).

²³ Gbowee, L. (2009). "Effecting change through women's activism in Liberia". *Ids Bulletin*, 40(2), 50-53.

²⁴ UN Women (2016). "Gender and the role of women in Colombia's peace process". UN Women. Retrieved from: <https://www.unwomen.org>.

²⁵ Högbladh, S. (2011). "Peace agreements 1975-2011-Updating the UCDP peace agreement dataset". *States in armed conflict*, 55, 85-105.

²⁶ Krause, J., Krause, W., and Bränfors, P. (2018). "Women's participation in peace negotiations and the durability of peace". *International interactions*, 44 (6), 985-1016.

²⁷ Coronel-Ferrer, M. (2021). "Miriam Coronel-Ferrer on bridging the gap "Between heaven and earth" to find peace in the southern Philippines". *The Mediators Studio 2* (8). Centre for Human Dialogue.

Israel. First and foremost is the sense of exclusion and marginalization among activists in peacemaking organizations consisting of both men and women. Among the women interviewed for this study, many who were active in such peace organizations reported being pushed aside, their contributions unrecognized, despite the many resources and abilities that they brought to the table. A well-known example is the case of Peace Now, which did not allow activist Yuli Tamir to sign the "Officers' Letter" (1978) (urging then-PM Begin to sign the peace agreement with Egypt) despite the fact that she was an officer and one of the movement's founders. Peace activist Rela Mazali talks about the efforts she and other women made to influence decision-making in the "21st Year" peace movement, and how their proposals were ignored. After the movement disintegrated, Rela accounts *"We left feeling very bad; we are being oppressed in precisely those cases that we never expected to be told 'women later'"*.²⁸ It is evident that women working in senior positions in academia and the military also share this sense of exclusion. When interviewed about her experience as a woman in a peace organization composed of lieutenant colonels and above, Yehudit,²⁹ who held senior positions in military and defense establishments, said *"They understood that it was not politically correct to be without women, they understood that it didn't look good, so they made a pretense of adding women"*.

Increased political violence in the region – the first and second intifadas, the wars with Lebanon, and the battles against Hamas in Gaza – have motivated women to stand up and respond to extreme situations, not necessarily as one organization focused on a specific idea or ideology. Women's organizations tend to emerge in response to the need to "protect the home, the children, the community", and out of an impulse and a sense of having "no choice," not necessarily out of an orderly political agenda or even a desire for political participation. These organizations often express the personal manners of women, based on their experiences; alongside political and economic aspects, their activism often includes psychological and spiritual elements. These organizations, such as "Women in Black",³⁰ "Bat Shalom", "Coalition of Women for Peace" and many others, create a safe space for women to act, investigate, formulate a unique position and voice on issues of peace and security. These organizations create a social network where women can find partners for their cause (not always acceptable in their environment and in the public in general).

Women's peace organizations differ in size, composition, and theory of change. They differ in their attitudes towards the occupation, in their perception of the connection between feminism and peace, in their view towards cooperation with Palestinian women, in their definition of organizational identity (motherhood, expertise, activity, representation), as well as in their target audience and centers of influence they want to impact.³¹

²⁸ Issachar, H. (2003). "Sisters for peace-voices on the feminist left." Tel Aviv: Resling (p. 24) (in Hebrew).

²⁹ Pseudonym

³⁰ El-Bushra, J. (2007). "Feminism, gender, and women's peace activism". *Development and Change*, 38 (1), 131-147; El-Bushra, J. (2003). "Fused in combat: gender relations and armed conflict". *Development in Practice* 13 (1 and 2).

³¹ Haghagh, N. and Levinas, S. (2020). "[Make room for peace, belonging, partnership and diversity in women's work for peace in Israel](#)". Democracy and Human Rights, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

Galia Golan (2015) proposes³² categorizing women's peace organizations according to the following types: (1) those that promote gender impact, such as "Four Mothers" and "Machsom Watch" (2) those working to change the gender effect, bolstered by Resolution 1325, such as "Itach-Maaki" (Women Lawyers for Social Justice), "Forum Dvora" and "Women's Commission for Peace" and (3) those that explicitly reject militarism, such as "New Profile" (the Movement for the Demilitarization of Israeli Society).

The use of the term "motherhood" for political means aroused a discourse among these organizations, with some encouraging its use (Four Mothers and Women Waging Peace, although unofficially) while others are speaking out against it (Women in Black and the Coalition of Women for Peace). According to Sari Aharoni (2017:319),³³ organizations adopting the narrative and representing themselves as the nation's mothers increased their ability to influence women and evoke hope. At the same time, it created unrealistic expectations for women and preserved their marginal place in society. Hearings held in the summer of 2006 by the Coalition of Women for Peace revealed that women in Israel identify with the role of motherhood and with the values attributed to it (such as empathy for the other, containment and compromise), but are unaware of the disagreement between such values and the difficulty to identify with the suffering of Palestinian mothers, or the contradiction that arises between opposition to war and, for example, pride in one's son who joined the military.

The adoption of UN Resolution 1325 expanded the possibilities for a more fruitful and meaningful cooperation between women's peace organizations and the international community, which would hopefully provide an easier access to resources and joint work with Palestinian activists, as well as more opportunities to pressure decision makers.³⁴

The first decade following the decision was marked by intense activities in Israel: conferences³⁵ and meetings were held on the implication of gender issues related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and organizations (such as the International Women's Commission for a Just and Sustainable Israeli-Palestinian Peace) were established to promote the integration of women (including those from civil society) in advancing a solution to the conflict, while opposing any use of force.³⁶ In addition, Yuli Tamir and Ety Livni, Knesset members at the time of the Ariel Sharon government, pushed through an amendment to the Equal Opportunities for Women Law (section 6c) in 2005, stipulating the representation of women from diverse populations in political decision-making processes.

³² Golan, G. (2015). "Militarization and Gender in Israel". Maureen Flaherty et al. (eds). *Gender and Peacebuilding: All Hands Required* (213-228). Lexington Books.

³³ Aharoni, S. (2017). "Who needs the Women and Peace Hypothesis? Rethinking modes of inquiry on gender and conflict in Israel/Palestine". *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 19 (3), 311-326.

³⁴ Greenblatt, T. (2004). "Strategies for Renewing International Initiatives: An Israeli Perspective, the UN Security Council," in S. Aharoni and R. Diab (eds.), *Where are the women all? UN Security Council Resolution 1325: The gender aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict* (pp. 40-43). Haifa: Pardes (in Hebrew).

³⁵ For example, a 2003 conference on "UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and its significance in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict".

³⁶ Saragusti, A. (2009). "The Secret Revolution: Integrating Women into the Political Process," in Saragusti, A., Limor, G. and Haghagh, N. (eds.) *Women in the Face of Peace: Voices from Israel* (pp. 7-12). Tel Aviv: International Women's Commission (in Hebrew).

These events have led Israel to become the first country to set Resolution 1325 in domestic law.

In 2012, work began on formulating an action plan for women's organizations in Israel, led by the organizations Itach-Maaki, Equals, and Agenda. It served as the foundation for a governmental action plan, which was published in 2014. This move strengthened the link between feminist and peace issues, but also exposed gaps and disagreements among women's social groups. A striking example was the withdrawal of a group of Palestinian citizens of Israel from the project of "formulating a comprehensive action plan in Israel" due to the disputes over inclusion as a result of the Israeli occupation.

Until the Oslo Accords (1993), women's peace organizations in Israel were largely ignored by the political establishment and excluded from the peacemaking processes. Even the Oslo process, characterized by initial contacts and operations involving civil society representatives (Track 2), failed to recognize the contributions of female Palestinian and Israeli participants and relegated them to secondary roles as advisors, spokespersons, and administrators.³⁷ The negotiating teams of the Annapolis process (2007-8) included a balanced presence of women in the committees formulating the agreement, which were led by Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. However, these processes never matured. No representatives from women's peace organizations, civil society or government took part in Israel's recent normalization agreements with Bahrain and the UAE (2020). Moreover, branding the agreements as the "Abraham Accords" emphasized a patriarchal partnership and conservative religious values based on a shared male founder.³⁸

Although women's peace organizations in Israel have recorded some achievements in the political arena, their contribution is mainly evident in other fields. It is reflected, for example, in their insistence on keeping the issue of peace in the public discourse in Israel, in their efforts to increase the participation among women not previously involved in social action, and in promoting support around the world. However, their extensive activity was not rendered (even partially) into participation in formal peacemaking processes.

D. Structural and conceptual barriers to the participation of Israeli women's peace organizations in formal negotiation processes

Many barriers stand in the way of integrating women's peace organizations into Israel's political and formal arenas. Some are similar to barriers that are common in other areas of conflict around the world: for example, structural barriers, such as lack of access to resources and lack of organizational infrastructure. Others barriers comprise of psychological, social and cultural issues that reinforce the concept that "war is a business for men", which qualifies as the "natural" and "logical" way of the world, since it serves the

³⁷ Aharoni, S. (2011). "Gender and 'peace-work': An unofficial history of Israeli-Palestinian formal peace negotiations." *Politics & Gender*, 7 (3), 391-416.

³⁸ Aharoni, S. B. (2020). "No entry: how Israeli women were barred from peacemaking". *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture*, 25 (3 and 4), 70-75.

existing power structure. However, there are also barriers (structural and perceptual) specific to Israeli society, such as the centralization of military at all levels of Israeli society (politics, education, business) and the way in which the military defines who belongs where. There is also the lack of separation between religion and state as well as the monopoly given to rabbinical courts on matters of matrimony, which subject women to conservative, patriarchal³⁹ and religious conceptions. In the current review, I refer to five barriers, which do not provide the full picture, but serve as examples for key "barrier groups".

"What do you understand about security?"

Societies stuck in violent conflict often hold a binary and rigid conception of gender roles.⁴⁰ Despite the accumulated experience and observation regarding the roles that women play in these societies, the traditional perception of women as passive, innocent victims, who in the "best" case are seen as combat support, which is associated with the private sphere, is widespread among the public and most decision makers. Leymah Gbowee, leader of the Liberian women's struggle, recalls them being referred to in a derogatory manner as "Toothless Bulldogs".

In Israel, these perceptions are reinforced by a militaristic concept in which masculinity and the battlefield play a significant role in shaping thought patterns. In fact, the defense establishment also plays a central role in matters of peace. Military personnel are the leaders and chief designers of peace talks, and both the broad security doctrine of the State of Israel and the military considerations they engender dictate the peace process accordingly.⁴¹

The militaristic culture and dominance of the security system additionally serve as "entry tickets" to centralized influence for the men associated with it. Informal social networks emerging from the Israeli security agencies are comprised of men who serve or have served in the defense establishment in the past, and from which women are practically excluded.⁴²

The centralized military and militaristic culture in Israel is also reflected in refutation of the "feminine peace hypothesis", which argues that women in the West tend to hold views that favor peace over the use of violence. Studies conducted in Israel over the years show that, contrary to women in Western countries, women in Israel do not support peace processes or the prevention of war any more than men do, and they fully support the military and security operations. There may be several explanations for this finding. First, it is important to take into account that these studies focused on Jewish women and not all female Israeli citizens.⁴³ An additional explanation for this phenomenon may stem from the compulsory

³⁹ These affect civil society organizations in general.

⁴⁰ Asadi, M. (2010). "Militarization and gender: pathways to a violence-based patriarchy," *Journal for the Study of Peace and Conflict*, 100; Sjoberg, L., & Via, S. (2010). "Conclusion: The Interrelationship between gender, war and militarism," In *Gender, war, and militarism. feminist perspectives* (231-239). Santa Barbara.

⁴¹ Aharoni, S. (2014) "'Living in Peace with Ourselves' on Gender Equality and Feminism during the Oslo Process," in: *Twenty Years of the Oslo Accords*, Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Studies.

⁴² Barak, O., & Sheffer, G. (2006). "Israel's "security network" and its impact: an exploration of a new approach". *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 38 (2), 235-261.

⁴³ Gedalya, E., Herzog, H., & Shamir, M. (2017). "Tzip(p)ing through the Elections: Gender in the 2009 Elections". In *The Elections in Israel 2009* (165-194). Routledge.

service of Jewish women in the Israeli army and the struggle they wage through military service to promote gender equality. It is also possible that through association with men's military service, Jewish women (wives, sisters, daughters) view themselves as part of the "IDF" family, demanding their loyalty and identification with the organization. This concept is clearly expressed in the struggle of the "Four Mothers" who described their motivation in campaigning for the IDF's pullout from Lebanon as stemming from the very fact that they are the mothers of soldiers. An examination of these factors, based on the theory of "intersectionality", indicates that the "gender" variable does not allow for a true and complete picture of voting patterns, since the treatment of women as one distinct category is lacking and ignores the diverse life experiences of women in different social positions.⁴⁴

Another barrier stemming from the militaristic culture in Israel is reflected in the priorities of women and men. Demands made by women during conflict situations are often rejected as "petty" and proof that women do not know their place. "While the south of the country is under missile attack, are we discussing matters of flowers and sexual assault?" was former MK Moshe Feiglin's response to a proposed law on sexual harassment that came up for Knesset debate during the July 2014 Gaza war. Despite data indicating dramatic increase of sexual assaults and domestic violence in times of conflict, this response once again reflects the secondary place of women's priorities and lives compared to those of soldiers.

In the name of honor

Many countries experiencing violent conflict are characterized by a culture with a traditional conservative orientation. Peacemaking processes that include international actors often "surrender" to conservative demands that oppose the integration of women, citing potential complication of the process, and even worse, the need to "respect the local culture". Afghanistan is a contemporary and painful example of this process, where negotiations between US forces and the Taliban failed to include measures that would ensure the safety and rights of Afghan women. In addition, the sweeping use of economic sanctions, which included, indiscriminately, funds and resources intended to be used by women's organizations and support for their struggle, has severely harmed women in Afghanistan.⁴⁵ It is noteworthy that a review of studies on peace processes did not find any evidence that the "demands of women's peace organizations" hampered agreements.

In Israel, this phenomenon is more visible in various instances of religious coercion, which excludes women from political parties, rabbinical courts, and has increasingly affected the military over the past decade. In the name of the "dignity" of religious soldiers, women are often excluded and prevented from engaging in certain combat roles and are subject to additional restrictions for those that they are allowed participate in.

Interviews conducted with women who held senior positions in the IDF and in peace organizations show that they were often excluded from meaningful discussions and

⁴⁴ Aharoni, S. B. (2017). "Who needs the women and peace hypothesis? Rethinking modes of inquiry on gender and conflict in Israel/Palestine". *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 19 (3), 311-326.

⁴⁵ Karim, F. (2022). "Freshta Karim on how to change the lives of Afghanistan's women". *The Economist*. Retrieved from: <https://www.economist.com>.

meetings under the pretext that "the other side might oppose a female presence", even though there were women on the other side who played important roles, such as Hanan Ashrawi, the spokeswoman for the Palestinian delegation for peace talks with Israel, and Buthaina Shaaban, Syria's representative. The Abraham Accords are also a contemporary example of the exclusion of women and the framing of an agreement that reflects religious-conservative cultures.

Hard to make room – diversity, partnership and inclusion

Contemporary theories in conflict studies and international relations, as well as feminist theories, have emphasized the importance of partnership, diversity and inclusivity as necessary components of peacemaking processes. Women's peace movements leverage these arguments in an attempt to promote their integration into the formal process. However, the perspective of women's peace organizations in Israel shows that the struggle for partnership, diversity and inclusion takes place not only between women's peace organizations and government mechanisms, but also within women's peace organizations themselves.

The issue of women's participation in formal peacemaking processes is critical. It also begs the question of which women are participating in the struggle for peace. Are some women's activities also subject to exclusion and being ignored by certain women's groups, and what are the implications of such conduct for their ability to exert influence? In Israel, women have a distinctive approach to civil rights, which are related to social status and other collective identities, such as nationality (Jewish/Arab), religion (religious/secular), sexual orientation (LGBT), and ethnicity (Mizrahi/Ashkenazi). As a result, access to peace organizations continues to be easier for Ashkenazi Jewish, secular, and educated middle-class women.⁴⁶

Over the years, sincere attempts have been made to expand the circle of partnership to include a wider range of women, but these attempts have also encountered intra-organizational barriers, such as threshold requirements for activities related to self-determination (for example, the expectation for women to define themselves as feminist or left-wing), or the lack of access to certain activities (such as knowledge of English or the economic ability to free up time and resources). Nurit Haghagh, a veteran Mizrahi feminist peace activist, describes this reality based on her personal experiences:

"The past few months have been, among other things, a personal journey. I tried to wonder about the feelings that accompanied me during some of the activities in which I was involved. I have dealt with questions of identity and status in the past. I knew I had been invited as a Mizrahit, but at the same time I felt lucky to be invited. I was pained by the fact that my partial command of English was a barrier for me... It occurred to me that I had been given a key to the main door, but without a code to enter the house. The code was seemingly clear to the 'landlords', and you are a guest in new, challenging, intriguing and hopeful districts. It reinforced in me the need for a simple wooden door with a key of yesteryear, not doors that only open to certain fingerprints."

⁴⁶ Issachar, H. (2003). "Sisters of Peace: Voices on the Feminist Left". Tel Aviv: Resling (in Hebrew).

Additional barriers arise from the struggle for resources that are limited which impairs the ability to establish collaborations, violence between different social groups, and lack of easy access to the organizations' map, activity and knowledge.⁴⁷

Homogeneous peace movements have little chance of influencing general public opinion, and/or exerting electoral pressure on decision makers. The continued assimilation of critical concepts and policies of diversity and inclusion, and improvement of the mechanisms that enable their implementation, may greatly assist organizations in expanding their range of activities, and thereby their legitimacy and influence on the public and decision makers.

The pendulum⁴⁸ – between rights, social justice and the pursuit of peace

The direct link between gender equality and political violence generates multiple struggles among women's organizations, which find it difficult to create a unified agenda on the issue of peace. Resolution 1325 was based on the contribution of women to conflict resolution processes and their unique experiences in these situations, but it equally translates into the broader issue of integrating women into decision-making centers, combating gender violence, struggling for justice and social equality, and promoting gender awareness throughout life. In Israel, the pendulum movement ranges from harnessing 1325 to promoting peace and ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, harnessing the resolution to promote internal political issues related to women's security, with no direct connection to the peacemaking process.

One way to lift the barrier lies in expanding the concepts of peace and security. When these concepts include, among other things, aspects of job security, housing, education, health, domestic violence, public space planning, and accessibility, the connection between gender inequality, social justice, and peace will become clearer and sharper.

Lack of enforcement

The UN and other international bodies continue their efforts to embed gender awareness among member delegations and their activities. On September 22, 2021, the countries of the Abraham Accords presented a joint initiative at the UN, with representatives from Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Morocco calling for promoting the importance of women's integration in peace processes and conflict prevention and to ensure women's integration in diplomacy and peace processes on the basis of Resolution 1325. The absence of women's involvement in the process that led to the Abraham Accords clearly highlights the gap between words and practices, as well as the way in which hollow declarations can be used vis-à-vis international bodies without a commitment to uphold them, and without an enforcement mechanism that allows mediators to "demand" the inclusion of women in peace-promoting processes. In an interview with a senior UN representative working in

⁴⁷ Haghagh, N. and Levinas, S. (2020). "[Make room for peace, belonging, partnership and diversity in women's work for peace in Israel](#)". Democracy and Human Rights, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

⁴⁸ This image is borrowed from Nurit Haghagh.

conflict zones, she noted that despite her efforts and good relations with women's organizations in a country, she cannot force the parties involved in the negotiations to include women. In contrast to most barriers, this barrier can be removed with relative ease if the donor countries condition their funding for the peace process on the integration of women's peace organizations.

E. Summary and discussion: advantages, costs and recommendations

Information regarding the contribution of women's peace organizations to the advancement of formal peace processes is accessible to decision makers in a large number of studies and examples. These studies show, for example, that women are perceived as more honest mediators. Prof. Yifat Maoz (2009, 2010) conducted a series of studies in which she found that compromise proposals submitted to rival parties were perceived as more credible when the parties were told that they were drafted by women.⁴⁹ Examples from the Philippines, Liberia, and Somalia have shown that women's peace organizations have greater access to opposing sides and this access facilitates the initiation of negotiations at the formal levels.

Additionally, the participation of women's peace organizations makes it possible to connect the discussions being held in conference rooms on the contents of agreements to realities of daily life. US ambassador and peace activist Swanee Hunt, who was present at negotiations to end the civil war in Burundi, recounts an incident that might be perceived as amusing. One of the issues discussed dealt with territorial control of the river region separating the rival groups. When (under pressure from international elements) women's peace organizations were included in the discussions, they burst out laughing at the argument,⁵⁰ since it turns out that the river had dried up long ago. In Northern Ireland, the integration of women's peace organizations in the negotiation process and the formulation of the agreement made it possible to present the draft agreement to the public in order to adapt it to the populations' needs, which contributed greatly to the positive results of the referendum.

The integration of women's peace organizations also reduces gender inequality and the political inequality of women from a variety of population groups. This variable is of special importance since feminist researchers point to the relationship between gaps in gender equality and the likelihood of political violence.⁵¹ The exclusion from formal processes of women who worked resolutely to promote peace on the ground and among the international community, prevents their achievements from materializing into "political capital". This exclusion, known as a "return to the kitchen," conceals women's contributions and prevents recognition of their importance and activity in the history of struggles for peace and in

⁴⁹ Maoz, I. (2009). "The women and peace hypothesis? The effect of opponent negotiators' gender on the evaluation of compromise solutions in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict". *International Negotiation*, 14 (3), 519-536.; Maoz, I. (2012). "The women and peace hypothesis". In Christie DJ, editor. *The Encyclopedia of Peace Psychology*.

⁵⁰ UNIFEM (2000). "Breakthrough for women at Burundi Peace Negotiations". UNIFEM. Retrieved from <https://reliefweb.int>.

⁵¹ Caprioli, M. (2005). "Primed for violence: The role of gender inequality in predicting internal conflict". *International studies quarterly*, 49 (2), 161-178.

national narratives. In Israel, heroic tales of battle and sacrifice by men, even before the establishment of the state, clearly dominate the narrative, and an ongoing and stubborn effort by women's organizations is required to return the "her-story" to national awareness. Where women were able to integrate into formal processes, their achievements in the struggle for peace rendered into the promotion of gender equality. The most striking example is Rwanda, where their dominant integration into the peace process subsequently translated into a change in the social and political status of women. With women's representation in parliament rising regularly for ten consecutive years, Rwanda leads the world in women's parliamentary representation (61%).

The contribution of women's peace organizations in each of the examples mentioned in this article, as well as the costs associated with ignoring them, are very clear in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The integration of women's peace organizations into formal process could address a myriad of needs: building trust and reducing suspicion between the parties, agreeing to initiate a negotiation process and creating a broad public consensus that supports the agreement, lowering the level of violence, forming an infrastructure for embedding the agreement to enhance its sustainability, and promoting gender equality and the representation of women in Israeli politics.

The inclusion of women's peace organizations in formal processes will also help promote the notion that "peace belongs to everyone." Global trends recognizing the importance of gender equality and perceptions of diversity, partnership and inclusion support and reinforce this concept. Processes of public participation, roundtables and grassroots committees (which are very common in the government of Northern Ireland and have recently helped pass laws allowing abortion and same-sex marriage), are increasingly visible in public bodies (at this stage mainly among local governments).

Women's peace organizations realize this concept through a variety of strategies, whether collaboration with men in positions of power, creation of a national women's network from the community to national level, or the use of language and formulations based on the local way of life. Most of the strategies are based on the understanding that peace processes require the population's identification with the contents of any agreement, both as a factor that moderates fear of change and one that creates a positive change in the lives of the affected population and a better hope for the future.