

Ayelet Harel-Shalev

Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

BIO:

Harel-Shalev is Associate Professor in Ben-Gurion University's Conflict Management and Resolution Program, and the Department of Politics and Government. Her research is at the intersection of Politics, Conflict Studies and Feminist International Relations. Particularly, her research interests and publications focus on Critical Security Studies; Ethnic Conflicts and Democracy; Minority Rights; Religion and Politics; Feminist Theories; and Women in the Military.

She won the 2017 Glatt teaching award for the 10 best professors at BGU; and was the recipient of the 2018 AIS and Israel Institute Young Scholar Award. The prize is given jointly by AIS and the Israel Institute to researchers under the age of 45 who have made a unique and significant contribution to Israel Studies. Additionally, she was awarded ERGOMAS Guiseppe Caforio Book Award 2021 for her recent book (co-authored with Shir Daphna-Tekoah) – “Breaking the Binaries in Security Studies – A gendered analysis of women in combat” – published by Oxford University Press in 2020.



Opening Keynote: Who protects whom? The Case of Women in Combat in the IDF

The talk focuses on the study of women combat soldiers in the fields of Security Studies, International Relations and Gender Studies. It addresses this issue by bringing the soldiers' voices and silences to the forefront of research in these domains. Identities of men as “protectors” and women as “protected” afford women and men differing access to power and decision-making in the state, in Israel and elsewhere. Women are thus expected to be loyal, obedient, and grateful to their protectors, and they are also expected to take on the role of “carers.” The narratives of women soldiers, interviewed in my ongoing research projects, clearly indicate that while they do indeed express “care,” they themselves viewed their actions as “protection.” The women soldiers themselves broke the carer–protector binary and the act of protection was dominant in their narratives. Moreover, narration of the soldiers' experiences sheds light on the analysis of violence, state violence, combat trauma, security and insecurity. The talk explores women who served in combat roles and combat support positions in the Israel Defense Forces; but the analysis extends beyond the Israeli case insofar as the discussion offers important general insights into the larger issues of the links between war, gender, trauma, protection and politics. Presenting soldiers, veterans and women soldiers as narrators and describing their multiple nuanced perspectives make a valuable contribution to understanding political violence and to comprehending the multiple and multilayered battles faced by soldiers within the spaces of the new wars in Israel and beyond.