

WEEKEND

Just don't call them feminists

Discrimination against women was rampant in Israel's early years, but it was largely accepted by women themselves. Female MKs supported it, and research reveals that some of today's chauvinist attitudes go back half a century and more

Ofer Aderet

Of all places, it was in the archives of the Israel Defense Forces that Dr. Sharon Geva found the answer she had long been searching for. Geva, a historian who is interested in the role of women in Israel, wanted to find out why, for so much of the country's history, there were no women in the air force.

"We were told all along that the reason was concern about what our enemies would do to female pilots who might be captured if their plane was shot down," says Geva, a former reporter for the Israel Air Force Magazine.

However, she was startled at the official explanation, which she found in an air force document from 1957. "The air force commander does not think it would be moral [for women] to commit to not marrying or bearing children for five years," wrote IAF commander Maj. Gen. Dan Tolkowsky, justifying the dismissal of a woman who had been enrolled in the flight academy school (and referring to the minimum duration of service for pilots at the time). In other words, it wasn't fear about a female pilot's capture by the enemy that barred women from that position, but concern that their service would adversely affect another role, perceived as more important: bearing and raising children.

The archival document appears in Geva's new book, "Women in the State of Israel: The Early Years" (Magnes Press, in Hebrew). During its first decade, Israeli society was taking shape and fateful political and administrative decisions were being made on foreign policy, security, the economy and the country's social fabric. From the private kitchen to the corridors of power, from the laundry room to the Knesset, from diapering to flying fighter planes – Geva examines what women thought, wanted, felt and said.

The book's Hebrew title ("What Does the Woman Say?") and its chapter headings derive from women's columns that appeared in the Israeli press in those years. These included Shulamit Levari's popular Haaretz column, "For Woman and for Home." Indeed, Geva's historical research is based largely on newspaper items like these.

"There is no better historical source – certainly given the abundance of newspapers in Hebrew at the time – for becoming acquainted with the prevailing and implicit moods and viewpoints among the Israeli public in the country's first years," Geva told Haaretz.

In addition to her very comprehensive survey of the valuable nuggets waiting to be mined in the newspapers of the period, Geva conducted research at the Israel State Archives, the Israel Defense Forces Archives and the Central Zionist Archives. She also perused women's memoirs and interviewed memoirists, including some who were key figures in the unfolding history of women in Israel after 1948.

One of them was Ester Spinat (née Ribak), who was a cadet in the IAF flight school in the 1950s. Cut from the roster, she wanted to find out why. As an adolescent, Spinat, who was born in Tel Aviv in 1935, had joined Air Force Youth, the branch of the prestigious corps that prepared pre-draft teenagers for flight tasks. Her parents objected, arguing that flying was not a proper profession for a woman. But she was determined.

"I am ready to give up everything in order to fly, it's a wonderful feeling, incomparable," she told the women's magazine La'isha in a 1954 article headlined "Even a teen girl can be a pilot!" She added, "When you're up there in the blue yonder, everything looks so beautiful. No flight is like any other, and you start to feel that you're about to sprout wings."

Closed cockpit

Two months after the interview, Spinat entered flight school, the only woman among 120 cadets – and was cut half a year later. "I wrote to everyone I could think of," she told Haaretz last month, but failed to persuade the air force to reverse its decision. The list included Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, Chief of Staff Moshe Dayan and President Itzhak Ben-Zvi.

However, anyone who thought that Spinat would turn herself into a symbol and harness her personal cause to a campaign to fight discrimination and further women's rights and pre-

vent, would have been disappointed. In the IDF Archives Geva found a letter Spinat wrote to a variety of political and military leaders. "I do not intend to fight for women's rights and prove their place [in society]," Spinat wrote. She was, Geva notes, "loath to identify her struggle as being for the rights of women as such."

In her letter to the luminaries, Spinat noted the "injustice" that had been done to her – and to the air force. "I was no less skilled than any of the others, maybe I was even one of the best," she asserted. "This is not opinion. There were qualified people who said that if I had remained in the course I would have met all its demands." She pointed out that she had successfully met all the physical criteria, which, as Geva notes, "were set for men, by men," and she "placed the army at the top of her order of priorities, even though that was not expected of a woman."

Spinat added in her letter that a few days before she was cut, another cadet told her, "Look, Esther, for us, we don't even think about the fact that you're a girl." Geva takes this to be proof – in Spinat's eyes – that she, as a woman, had excelled among the men and had even surpassed them. "She met criteria that others set," Geva says.

'I am not rejecting love and not forgetting for a moment that I am a girl,' wrote Spinat, 'but just because I was endowed with the ability to bear children, will you deprive me of flying?'

Throughout the letter, Spinat emphasized that her behavior was not driven by sentiment. "I am not saying this in a fit of emotion... I am not trying to condemn the injustice of this step from a sentimental perspective," she wrote.

On the contrary: Her reasons for sending the letter, she said, were "first of all the air force's considerations, especially the material ones, and its considerations are also mine, because I see my future in it." Geva explains that Spinat "was careful, lest her words be taken as a display of sentimentality – a saliently feminine trait that bespeaks 'weakness.'"

Subsequently, however, the letter became, even if not planned, "a protest in the name of women as such," in Geva's words, albeit still in the spirit of the period and its limitations. "I am ready to forgo childbearing or at least to put it off to a later time," Spinat wrote. "I am not rejecting love and I am not forgetting for a moment that I am a girl, but just because I was endowed with the ability to bear children, will you deprive me of flying?"

Spinat's point of departure was extremely naive in 1950s Israel, Geva observes; she had tried to explain that "the womb should not be an obstacle on the way to the cockpit. But the role of women at that time was to stay home and raise children, not to fly planes."

The office of the defense minister transmitted Spinat's letter to the IDF chief of staff's bureau, and it was sent to the commander of the air force for a response. That is the historical background to the document Geva found

in the IDF Archives, setting forth the army's view that it would not be moral to ask a woman to promise not to get married or have children for five years.

Geva: "She was cut because of air force policy that a woman's path to the cockpit was should be blocked – not because she was a poor pilot or unsuited for combat; not for fear that she would be taken captive; and not because of the policy of the senior commander that held that combat posts were off-limits to women. The air force's reasons were political, social and gender-based."

Underlying this approach, Geva maintains, was the perception of "a traditional division of roles between women and men in the society and in the world of work," in which a woman's biology and gender identity are seen as inferior. "For them, to be a woman was a defect, like color blindness or shortsightedness. The ability to bear children was a defect," Spinat told Geva.

"I could have been a professional pilot today," Spinat, who turns 85 this year, said with a smile in her interview with Haaretz. With her civil aviation pilot's license, which she acquired through the Israel Aviation Club before she was drafted, she continued to fly as an amateur even after she became a mother. "So I proved that a woman could fly even after giving birth," she said.

Maternal destiny

Geva met Dan Tolkowsky, now 99, who was commander of the air force in the years 1953 to 1958, in the course of researching the book. When she asked him why he objected to women serving as pilots, he replied, "I liked order, and there must be order. A woman wouldn't have been able to keep it up for five years, it would have deprived her of a woman's regular rights."

By "rights," Tolkowsky meant marriage, childbearing and raising children – the leading tasks the nascent state earmarked for women, so as to create the essential labor force needed to consolidate its existence. "Ribak's [Spinat's] role was to be a human resource, a bearer of sons who would enlist in flight school – not to be a pilot in the organized military," Geva writes in the book.

Yet, it wasn't only men who felt this way. Geva relates the story of Rina Levinson, who is today 92. She obtained a pilot's license in the United States and served as a pilot in the IAF in the 1956 Sinai War. In 1958 she worked as a pilot for Arkia Airlines, but was laid off after a short while. Levinson said she was cold-shouldered at the time by Senetta Yoseftal, a female MK for Mapai, forerunner of Labor. Levinson recalled that Yoseftal told her: "I would not feel safe in a plane if I knew there was a woman at the wheel."

At the time, Geva writes, many women mobilized totally to fulfill what was perceived, in a patriarchal society, as a woman's vocation, and saw motherhood as the realization of their destiny.

"Women's role in society was seen as raising, caring for and educating the coming recruitment of IDF soldiers, with the aspiration that their daughters would behave exactly like them," Geva writes. Back then, no woman openly challenged that destiny. "It was clear to them: Every woman of sound body and mind wants children," she notes in the book.

To back up her argument, Geva collected statements by the leading wom-



Rina Levinson, during her air force service as a pilot in 1955. Later, a female Knesset member told her, "I would not feel safe in a plane if I knew there was a woman at the wheel."

Ilan Bruner / GPO

en of the generation covered in her research. In this context, she quotes a 1955 speech by MK Beba Idelson (Mapai), a leading women's rights activist, on the subject of women's roles in Israel. She spoke about "pioneer mothers," "farming mothers," "working mothers" and "heroine mothers." The bottom line was that for Idelson they were first of all mothers. It's not for nothing, she emphasized, that (in Hebrew) "the words 'mother' and 'nation' derive from the same root."

"We are fulfilling our obligation to the state, we are furthering its achievements," Idelson maintained, explaining that women bore and raised not only their own children, but also the next generation of fighters. And thus, Geva says, "she endowed nursing and feeding, diapering and cradling with national significance."

In this connection, Geva points out that then, as now, bereaved mothers were the object of extraordinary esteem, bordering on adoration. First and foremost among them was Rivka Gruber, who lost two sons in the War of Independence. Known as "the mother of the sons," she preceded by decades Miriam Peretz, an educator who lost two sons during their army service and has also become an iconic figure. (By the way, both Gruber and Peretz are Israel Prize laureates.)

Shunning feminism

Spinat's mid-1950s protest did not become part of the public dialogue – it resonated only in the corridors of the air force – but in historical perspective, she was 40 years ahead of Alice Miller. In 1995, Miller persuaded the High Court of Justice to oblige the air force to accept women into the pilots' course. She herself didn't make the cut, but she paved the way for 50 female IAF pilots since then.

As noted, Spinat did not consider herself a feminist. This also applied to other historic heroines in Geva's book. On the contrary: In the 1950s, which Geva terms the low point in the history of Israeli feminism, even women who tried to achieve breakthroughs in women's rights did not want to be tagged "feminists." "Maybe in this way they wanted to tone down resistance in advance and prevent people from closing their ears whenever they heard the word 'feminist' or its variations," Geva says.

To back up her argument, Geva quotes MK Rachel Cohen-Kagan (who served first as a representative of the WIZO women's Zionist organization, and later represented the Liberal Party), one of the two women who signed the Declaration of Independence (the other was Golda Meir), and the first and only person to date to head a women's party in the Knesset. "The approach we, the women, take is not that of the suffragettes," Cohen-Kagan said in 1949 when explaining her position on the recruitment of women to the IDF.

Similarly, there was Tehila Matmon, publisher of Ha'isha Bamedina (The Woman in the State) – "the first

feminist journal in the country," according to Geva, who rediscovered Matmon in her research. Matmon noted at the time that the call to enshrine women's rights in law was not "some equal rights caprice according to the current fashion in the world." She added that "the rise of women should not be seen as feminism or as sheer rule by women."

In retrospect, some readers of the book may wonder why these women stopped halfway and did not label themselves feminists. Geva, again referring to the spirit of the time, recalls that in the 1950s the approach of most women – those who didn't make it into the Knesset, get into flight school or voice their views in a newspaper – was even more conservative.

In an era of decisions on a national scale, Geva points out, Israel's women

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internalized the idea that "women's causes were subordinated to state interests." She adds, "It was determined for women – and they accepted – that their place was in the home, their task to raise a family and manage the household. From their place behind the scenes they mobilized to establish the state."

Her conclusion may sound overstated. "The women were an element of the very mechanism that held them down. They were suppressed and were also suppressors," Geva says. She is even more acerbic in the book.

"Women were a significant factor in weakening Israel's female population, irrespective of party, origin or length of time in the country," she writes. "Women replicated and perpetuated their weakness, and thereby weakened other women as well. They reaffirmed the accepted norms and cooperated with the forms of their own suppression, and thus were complicit in entrenching gender boundaries."

At the same time, she insists that women should not be blamed for their fate. "I have a bone to pick with everyone, irrespective of gender. Feminism is good for women and men alike," she says.

'Fertility prize'

Against this background, it's the exceptions to the rule who stand out in the book – those who voiced clear-cut calls of defiance. One was a reader of

the journal Ha'isha Bamedina, who in the early 1950s wrote a letter to the editor in which she wondered why MK Cohen-Kagan, from the women's party, did not take part in the Knesset session about the status of Jerusalem. "Do we women have nothing to say on the question of Jerusalem?" she asked.

Cohen-Kagan's reply is the best evidence that she, too, had "internalized the gender boundaries," Geva says. "All my many years of public work have not been in the military sphere or in the realm of foreign policy, and as such I was convinced that I would not be able to add anything to these questions," she wrote.

A bold approach, rare for the time, was presented by Haaretz columnist Shulamit Levari. In 1961, she tackled a sensitive issue: a woman's right to autonomy over her body. "She explained directly and clearly why it was the state's obligation to allow every woman to terminate a pregnancy if she wants to, and why the popular notion that linked an increased birth rate to the country's resilience was unfounded," Geva says.

"We can assume that Mr. Ben-Gurion, too, knows that quantity is not always a blessing, even though he continues to advocate and encourage reproduction totally, and continues to mechanically distribute the fertility prize to every mother who bears 10 children," Levari wrote.

"Every such mother receives the prize, even those who gave birth against their will, because they didn't know how to prevent the pregnancy or the birth," she added. In the years after Israel's establishment, against the background of the pressure on women to bear as many children as possible and the law prohibiting abortions, Levari's view was quite exceptional.

Other unorthodox voices that spring from the pages of the book are those of women who felt imprisoned in the kitchen, which they likened to a prison cell, and who sounded their outcry after buckling under the burden of housework, and of raising children and serving their husband. They were women who refused to accept the idea of "endowing the exhausting drudgery of household chores with national significance," Geva avers, women who did not accept the notion that washing the floor, cleaning the toilet, setting the table and folding the laundry were "essential to consolidating the existence of Israeli society."

A case in point is Rachel Galk, a Jaffa resident of 40 and the mother of two children, who was a preschool teacher. In 1952, she won first prize for an article she submitted to a competition sponsored by the newspaper Maariv. Her goal, as she put it, was to express the voice of the "nondescript, everyday woman, the one that people see everywhere, without stirring any special attention... like a sidewalk that's trod on or like the air we breathe."

The woman described by Galk

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Ester Spinat. "I proved that a woman could fly even after giving birth." Tomer Appelbaum

disappeared. If this crisis lasts a couple of weeks, it's not that significant; but if it goes on for some time, it will be catastrophic. Even if 2,000 people die from the coronavirus – and I don't make light of that – the collateral damage of the lockdown and the isolation will be more serious. And I also think the authorities are scaring us and that not so many people will die."

Lahad also notes the damage stemming from the surge in the number of unemployed – a situation that will also take a psychological toll.

"Studies show that when we approach 10 percent unemployment, a rise in the general mortality rate occurs. According to European data, the mortality rate increases by 0.4 percent for every 1 percent increase in the unemployment rate above 10 percent.

"So, 20 percent unemployment will add another 4 percent to mortality. That's 1,600 people more a year. I can't state on the certificate that a person died of unemployment, but that could actually be the cause. And I'm not just talking about suicides, but also about incidence of sickness."

Given what is happening in Italy, don't you think the decision about social distancing is justified?

"No one is wise enough to know. You need to check the direction the curves are taking. Israel [its population] is much younger than Italy. The question is what safety precautions you take. And that has a price in health, too, not only regarding the economy. Social distancing is needed, and it's a good thing the theaters were closed, and maybe even the schools. But to paralyze the economy is a different story."

So, what is your opinion about how the crisis has been managed so far?

"I think the prime minister is getting advice from a narrow range of people. There are wonderful people involved, but there isn't even one who's seen the whites of the eyes of patients lately. And that's a problem."

Dr. Kobi Arad, ER director, Yosefthal Medical Center, Eilat

"If there's a periphery in Israel, then I am the 'mother' of all the peripheries," says Dr. Kobi Arad, of his hospital in the southern resort city.

"We are working furiously treating water to keep our heads above the surface. That's the essence of our activity here, amid the sense of a grave lack of resources and technologies, and because of the inherent difficulty of recruiting people [to work here]. The usual situation is one of everything on the edge. And if you extrapolate from that to the whole health system in Israel, that's how it works. Everyone can cope with a capacity of 130 percent, but for us it's routine. We are at the bottom of the ladder."

What will happen if the coronavirus strikes Eilat in a massive way?

"When you work in a system with no room for deviation at all, you're used to functioning regularly in a state of congestive failure. But now, with the coronavirus, we are having to carry out a huge geometric leap. Sheba [Medical Center], for example, has a huge number of ventilating machines, elective services and clinics, so they've shifted masses of personnel to the essential places. We have nowhere to draw on, so I am recruiting from any place I can, but not on

a scale that will provide a response to an extreme scenario.

"As it happens, we're covered when it comes to ventilators. Because of our remoteness, and the need to be ready for a multiple victim [i.e., terror] event, we have hard-core equipment in the store-rooms that can provide a specific response. But that machine is not the only variable here. Every ventilated person constitutes a whole system of monitoring, physicians, nurses, ICU. Anyone who just counts ventilators doesn't grasp the complexity of the problem."

Arad believes that also from a national perspective, the excessive focus on available ventilators is diverting attention from treating other vulnerable individuals. He is referring, in part, to the guideline to cease elective surgery at government hospitals.

"That is an epidemiological disaster foretold," he says. "The only thing that was excluded from that blanket directive is oncological operations; but between saving lives and cosmetic procedures there is an infinite list of orthopedic operations, joint replacements, intravitreal injections to save eyesight. None of these will happen. People will go blind, will deteriorate, will be in mortal danger. This will have long-term consequences that I'm not sure anyone in the country is weighing."

Lahad: 'We've stopped doing [routine] mammographies and tests for occult blood. That means there will be a rise in cancer cases, which we'll see in only a few months.'

What particularly upsets Arad, he adds, is "that a whole country is in a state of emergency, but elective medicine continues to take place in private channels, like at Assuta. Those sort of personnel are not being shifted from the private sphere to the public one, which is simply not logical."

Tell us a little about what's happening now on the ground.

"What's happening in practice is that the hospitals are thumbing their noses at the instructions from above, or are doing things before the instructions arrive. The issue of the tests, for example. When someone arrives at the hospital with symptoms including fever and a cough, it's inconceivable that the physician cannot administer the test for the coronavirus without authorization from the Health Ministry, in order to get a correct clinical picture. It's unprecedented."

Has that happened to you?

"Of course, but I'm one of the nose-thumpers, because not to administer a test like that has ramifications. A sick person could shut down an entire department. After all, there's a dire shortage of N95 face masks. I keep them in a safe and hand them out sparingly, per person, per shift. They're a rare resource."

It's that bad?

"We hold video calls with colleagues

in China, and they use N95 masks routinely. The fact is that among the 40,000 medical personnel in Wuhan, there was not even one case of infection, other than the ones at the very start when they didn't know what they were up against."

For his part, Arad is astonished that the Mossad was enlisted to obtain medical equipment. "If it weren't sad, it would be funny – that at the last moment they send our security services to snatch up equipment at the expense of other countries."

But he does have praise for the Health Ministry's conduct, early in the outbreak: "In January, when the coronavirus was an event that was happening only in China and nearby countries, the Health Ministry initiated a series of meetings of professionals. They need to be complimented for that."

"There was a conference in Jerusalem, in which Prof. Sadetsky and Dr. Vered Ezra [head of the medical management unit in the Ministry of Health] presented scenarios according to which we would see sporadic cases of the virus in Israel, brought in by people coming from abroad. That forecast set the policy. They spoke of a procedure for testing a patient in the ER – a process that takes 45 minutes. I got up and said that it's not a task that's appropriate for ER. An argument started, and then someone said, 'We see the numbers, they're not so big, you will be able to handle it.' Anyone who says something like that, well, you see how far removed they are from day-to-day medical practice."

You're angry.

"You have to understand, Sigal Sadetsky is a highly esteemed woman, of real caliber in her field, but patients are not her area of expertise. I would imagine that it's been very many years since she saw a patient face to face. That's one example of many of the absence of clinical insight at the apex of the system."

Yoli Gat, director of an old-age home in Herzliya, and a member of the executive committee of the Israel Gerontological Society

"On the cruise ship Diamond Princess it emerged that quarantine does not prevent infection," says Yoli Gat, who for the past 30 years has held a variety of management positions at both public and private assisted-living institutions. "To this day, it's not clear where the infection came from, but the source was probably with one of the crew that prepared and served the food."

It's self-evident to Gat that the lessons of the "coronavirus ship" should have been applied immediately to assisted-living centers, old-age homes and nursing facilities in Israel. She notes that quarantining of the elderly population, however strict it may be, does not take into account the direct, ongoing and necessary contact of the population at these institutions with the staff there.

"The infection that is now occurring in protective housing facilities shows that we didn't have to wait for the appearance of the coronavirus," she says. "At the very least, it's essential to test the staff that serves residents of these homes. Not when symptoms appear, but now, at this point in time. Because if a young member of the staff is a carrier of the virus, he will likely overcome it, but for the elderly person he's caring for, it will be too late."

There have been increasing reports of cases of infection in old-age homes – on the backdrop of the Health Ministry's refusal to conduct comprehensive tests on residents and staff alike, unless they report symptoms. About two weeks ago there was at last a shift in policy, when a Health Ministry team issued a directive to do as much testing as possible among caregivers who come into contact with an elderly population, even if they haven't developed symptoms.

The symbol of the failure, at the time, was the Nofim Tower assisted-living facility in Jerusalem, where the Health Ministry agreed to test all the occupants after three cases of coronavirus deaths.

"Even there it took three weeks of shouting before anything was done," Gat says. "There were cases of infection in other facilities, but that didn't induce the Health Ministry to change course."



Gat. "The state could recruit students, soldiers, National Service volunteers for every old-age home."

Ofer Vaknin



Shental. "We don't have proof that artificial respiration in elderly patients like these saves lives."

Meged Gozani

Maybe because there aren't enough test kits.

"It's true we're talking about tens of thousands of staff, but their location is known, it's easy to get to them – what could be simpler? Everyone who comes into contact with an elderly population must be tested. Doing a pilot with random people who come to a supermarket is logical, but to neglect those who work with the high-risk population?"

"This a recurring ritual," Gat continues. "First come the shouts and the catastrophes, and then the Health Ministry gets its act together." Before the new recommendation was issued, she says, "Prof. Sadetsky actually came up with a guideline extending the testing possibilities at old-age homes, for both staff and residents, but then added a qualification: 'For those who display symptoms.' So what was the point?"

According to Gat, "When guidelines are finally handed down, they are of a type that can't be implemented, and after we explain that to them, the authorities send a correction. For example, at midday [on March 29] the Health Ministry issued a directive barring the employment of staff who also hold jobs elsewhere. Obviously, that is unrealistic. Nurses always work in at least two places, not to mention the multidisciplinary teams in nursing units, people who work for a few hours in a number of departments. A directive like totally rules out the possibility that they will be able to reach and work in every place."

What is the alternative?

"There are tasks that everyone can perform. Feeding people, kitchen services. The state could recruit students, soldiers, National Service volunteers, and allocate them to every old-age home, assisted housing units or nursing departments, based on the number of occupants. They would first be tested to ascertain that they are negative for carrying the virus, and from that point on they are seconded to an institution and sleep there. At the moment I am in a situation where I allow people to enter without knowing where they were 10 minutes earlier."

Are you and others initiating solutions independently?

"Well I, for example, took two apartments here, furnished them and allocated them to caregivers, and told them: 'From today you work here, sleep here and don't go home.' It's a very small staff, and naturally they start to get tired, but that way infection is prevented."

Dr. Omri Shental, an internist and director of the hospitalization department, Sabar Health

Dr. Omri Shental, of the Sabar Health company, which provides home hospitalization services, is managing to take an optimistic view of the situation. "We have an opportunity here to

carry out correct management of resources and to foment social change," he says, adding that his basic assumption concerning the epidemic is that it particularly strikes the elderly, many of whom will require ventilation.

"The deterioration from the coronavirus takes the form of double pneumonia and respiratory failure," Shental says. In that situation, very often, artificial respiration is required.

"However, in contrast to such classic diseases as influenza or pneumonia, where improvement is visible after two-three days and the patient can start to be taken gradually off the ventilator – with the coronavirus, the lung infection is very serious and the improvement isn't evident for two-three weeks."

The question is then, he says, "what the anticipated benefit is for the patient. When someone is connected to a ventila-

tor for such a lengthy period, the prognosis is that even if he recovers, he will be in a very deteriorated state physically, mentally and functionally. And with people of 80-plus, the assumption is that at the end of the ventilation period they will remain with major lung damage. Moreover, we don't have proof that artificial respiration in patients like these saves lives. What we do know is that it causes considerable suffering."

What's the alternative? Not even to try?

"The basic principle is to ask people in a high-risk group what they would want to happen if they are infected by the coronavirus and develop complications. You tell the patient: 'You are over 80, the ventilation is likely to be prolonged, there's a high probability that you won't survive, and if you do survive, you will likely come out of it a wreck. What do you want to do?' The patient should have the option to choose."

For his personal welfare, or in order to help the system?

"Both. In the war against the coronavirus, the concept of the system in Israel, and worldwide, is that we must not lose a single soldier. Accordingly, we buy ventilators, clear out hospital wards and erect tents. We mobilize everything possible to fight it. That is a mistaken conception."

Explain.

"At the end of the day, a large proportion of the patients with serious cases of the coronavirus are elderly people who are fundamentally ill. On a normal day, two months ago, if a person like that had arrived in the hospital with a serious case of pneumonia, he or his family would have been sat down for a conversation, the situation would be explained and they would be asked whether they want ventilation."

"On a normal day, patients like that don't even enter intensive care, they are transferred to the internal medicine ward. But today, if an 80-year-old with multiple illnesses who has deteriorated because of the coronavirus arrives, he will be ventilated and the physicians will fight for him."

And in the meantime they will possibly lose others.

"Correct, because if a patient like that occupies a ventilator for three weeks, then at some stage, as happened in Italy, there are no more ventilators available."

What about the possibility of disconnecting a person from a ventilator?

"That is done abroad; in Israel it's forbidden to disconnect a person from the ventilator. We live in a country with a dominant foundation in Jewish religious law, and doing that would stir such harsh opposition that there's no point acting on that front."

"But there are many things that can be done, so I focus on having a conversation beforehand. Even if only 10 percent of the 80-plus patients say in advance that they don't want to be connected to a ventilator if their situation deteriorates, that will have a tremendous effect. To order one machine from China costs something like \$90,000. Add to that their operation and the costs in personnel, you reach astronomical amounts."

"The moment the patient, the family and the medical team become aware that another option exists, it becomes possible to exploit the resources more correctly and also to prevent wholesale abuse of the elderly."

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Kopelman: 'What really makes me boil is the private hospitals. It's inconceivable that they should be conducting private operations while we are in the throes of battle.'



Arad. "What's happening is that the hospitals are thumbing their noses at the instructions from above."

Udi Portal

FEMINISTS

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was very remote from the "glamorous" image of the winners of contests such as the "Israeli Mistress of the House," the "Israeli Housewife," and, of course, the recipients of the fertility awards.

No girls need apply

Geva, 47, married and a mother, lives in Ra'anana and teaches at the Tel Aviv-based Seminar Hakibbutzim Teachers College and at Tel Aviv University. Her first book, "To the Unknown Sister: Holocaust Heroines in Israeli Society" (Hebrew), was published in 2010. Based on her doctoral thesis in history, it is a study of how Israel coped with the Holocaust through the prism of women's narratives.

Geva also writes a self-styled "feminist" blog, about women who made history but were left out of the history books (<http://sharon-geva.blogspot.com/>). She initiated and managed a project in which her students wrote entries for the Hebrew-language Wikipedia about 110 women who had not been accorded sufficient presence on the web. In each episode of a weekly radio program on Kan Bet, part of the public broadcasting system, she talks about a different historical female personage who is not well known to the public.

Asked what a contemporary woman would be likely to feel if she were to leaf through the women's magazines of earlier generations, Geva offers a one-word reply: "Gloom." However, she adds, the question is what to do with that gloom. "It's banal, but it needs to be said: Knowledge is power. It's essential to know the history of women in Israel, as women told it."

Geva hopes that her new book will serve not only as a reference point

in history lessons but will also enter the ongoing dialogue on the status of women in Israel. Readers of the book will definitely find echoes of the situation she describes in Israel today, such as the current debate about whether women should serve in IDF tank crews.

A historical lesson with contemporary resonance can also be derived from the story she tells of Dina Deutsch, who from an early age grasped the depth of the discrimination between men and women in Israel. Deutsch (née Pik) served in the IDF as a radio operator in 1948; after her discharge she tried to enter the same profession in civilian life, but she discovered that the doors were closed to her. Wherever she applied, she received the same reply – "Regrettably, we do not employ girls" – as she wrote in a letter to the newspaper Davar in 1953.

In her book, Geva quotes the straightforward reply of rejection Deutsch received from El Al. "Even though there is no explicit law among

the international airlines concerning the non-hiring of women for the flight crews, other than stewardesses, in practice that custom exists as an unwritten law," the Israeli national carrier wrote. "In the international community, including countries that have been flying far longer than Israel, we have not yet reached a situation in which the average passenger will place their trust in air crews if they include women who wield any sort of influence on the execution of the flight technically."

It would be decades – not until 2016 – before the online news site Ynet ran an article headlined: "History made in El Al: All-female cockpit." It was the first flight in the company's history in which everyone in the pilot's cabin was a woman.

Geva was curious to get Deutsch's take on the progress that's been made since the 1950s. With the perspective of one who has seen it all, she said, "Not much has changed."



Sharon Geva. "Women replicated and perpetuated their weakness," she writes.

Meged Gozani