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**Bios of Israeli Feminist Leaders**

**Cohort 2019**

**Michal Avera Samuel** is a social leader and educational activist, advocating for the integration of Ethiopian Israelis at Fidel where she has been the Executive Director since 2011. Born in Gondar, the youngest of nine children, Michal made aliyah in 1984 as part of Operation Moses. Michal serves on Israel’s prestigious Round Table Panel on Social Issues.  In 2000, Michal represented Israel at the Epcot Millennium Village pavilion in Orlando and in 2004 spoke at the International Lion of Judah conference. She also volunteers at “Isha L’Isha - Haifa Feminist Center,” supporting victims of domestic violence.

**Naila Awwad** is a leading Palestinian feminist activist in the fight against violence against women in Israeli society, particularly in the Arab sector. She serves as Director of the Women Against Violence Association (WAV). Her advocacy team has worked hard to obtain three legislative goals: a law regarding family courts, a law to raise the marriage age from 17 to 18, and a law to encourage women’s representation in local and city councils. Naila also focuses on stopping the killings of women, and police behavior in turning a blind eye to this violence. She has an MA from Bar Ilan in Gender Studies.

**Nena Bar** is a disability rights lecturer who addresses disability and cinema from a feminist perspective. One of the founders of the Israeli Center for Deaf Studies, Nena is in charge of advocacy, research and Deaf Women’s rights. Nena led the protest of 2012 in front of the Social Welfare Ministry after a major cut in accessibility funds. From 2008-2017 she worked as the project director of Equality in Higher Education for Deaf students in Israel.  She gives workshops on self-advocacy and disability rights in higher education and is an advocate for the recognition of Israeli Sign Language.

**Riki Kohan Benlulu** is a single mother from Ashdod living in poverty in public housing. She is a key figure in the progressive, political Mizrahi feminist grassroots movement "Lo Nechmadot” (literally, the “Not Nice”), which spearheads a range of social struggles and issues, including the problems of women who live in poverty and suffer domestic violence. Riki is a leader in the struggle for public housing through the public Housing Forum, and a Project Coordinator in the leading feminist Mizrachi organization, "Achoti (My Sister) - For Women in Israel." She gives media interviews, lectures and is a lobbyist.

**Ella Berchansky** is the founder of "The League of Russian-Speaking Feminists" (“HaLeega”) movement in Israel, an activist online community. As a leader of “HaLeega”, Ella works to further the group’s goals of improving the economic and social status of Russian-speaking women in Israel and fighting discrimination, in cooperation with women from diverse Israeli backgrounds. Ella is a professional psychologist with extensive experience working with women and adolescents, and leads group facilitation. She has a rich background working in education, and multicultural work, with special attention to women’s rights. Ella combines theory and practice in her approach.

**Noga Dagan Buzaglo,** an attorney,is the incoming director of the Adva Center, a non-partisan policy analysis institute examining Israeli society through a social justice lens, and with a special focus on gender equality. She specializes in education, gender, labor and labor law, and social security. She holds an MA in Sociology from the Hebrew University and an LLB from Tel Aviv University. She is an activist in the fields of education, feminism, peace and more. She was among the founders of the Kedma School in Jerusalem, and a board member of HILA for Quality Education, promoting education in low-income neighborhoods, development towns and villages, through parents’ involvement.

**Sharon Cherkasky** has 20 years of professional experience in the nonprofit sector. Since 2015, she has been the Executive Director at the Israel Family Planning Association (Open Door) where she leads the non-profit to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights and sex education. Sharon previously worked at WIZO promoting legislation and policies concerning gender and women's rights. Additionally, Sharon developed women's leadership programs, managed campaigns to raise awareness about gender equality, established a coalition for gender equality in the IDF, created a forum for deputy directors in government ministries, and initiated a program to advance women in civil service.

**Lior Elefant** is the Chairwoman of the Israeli Women in Film and Television Forum; founder and manager of P.See, a feminist media initiative – an online community of over 45,000 followers; CEO of Women in the Picture Association; Director of Lethal Lesbian Film Festival; PhD candidate at Ben Gurion University of the Negev, and a feminist activist in subjects of media, culture, LGBTQ and the arts. For the past decade, Lior has been involved in several feminist media initiatives, and together with her colleagues is generating actual cultural change in Israeli society.

**Keren Greenblatt** is Founder and CEO of Gala, an online giving platform, and Co-Founder of Layla Tov, a venture that fights sexual harassment in nightlife. Keren worked as Director of “Shutafot” Coalition of Feminist Organizations, and Director of Policy at Israel Women’s Network. Keren consults for the Israel Ministry of Health and the Authority for the Advancement of Women. She holds a Law degree from Hebrew University Jerusalem, and an LL.M from Georgetown University. She is a Seeds of Peace GATHER Fellow and ROI Community Member, and was named in 2017's 50 Most Influential Women in Israel by Forbes Magazine.

**Nurit Haghagh,** Mizrachi feminist activist, has been a leader, group facilitator, and coalition builder in the Israeli social and feminist field for more than 30 years. She is a founder of Diversity in Action, connecting the personal and the political. In the 1990s she co-founded and managed the Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow, a movement for social advancement. Nurit is currently a project manager for Young Naamat and also leads women's groups of the Histradut and Young Naamat dealing with the rights of working women. She is a board member of Itach-Maaki and active in Women Wage Peace.

**Ghadir Hani** is active in economic development and empowerment of women in the The Arab-Jewish Center for Equality, Empowerment and Cooperation in the Negev (AJEEC), and works at the Wadi Atir project - a sustainable desert community. Active in a number of organizations for peace and co-existence, including Women Wage Peace, she is also an initiator of interfaith dialogue in the Negev and a Fellow of the Tikkun program. She is a board member of Ma’an – Forum of Negev Arab Bedouin Women's Organizations, focusing on the eradication of polygamy and violence against women, and volunteers and trains facilitators at a 24/7 hotline for women.

**Heli Jacobs** is co-founder and administrator of "Religious Women Entrepreneurs,” a Facebook community and non-profit project which caters to 11,000 religious women in Israel. She is head of business development and external affairs in the series of business meet-ups which are the non-virtual part of the Facebook group. The community aims to develop strong financial backing for women who consider themselves religious, and to create long-lasting substantial businesses and financial independence by sharing knowledge, strengthening the mutual ideals and building a platform for sustainability and, in general, creating a community where committed individuals can look out for one another.

**Fida Nara** is the Arab Palestinian Co-Director of Mahapach-Taghir - whose name means “change,” - a feminist grassroots Jewish-Arab organization dedicated to a shared society with equal opportunities for all. It encourages active citizenship and learning and promotes solidarity between marginalized social groups. For the last 22 years Fida has dedicated her life to women's empowerment and social change. Her activism started as a young woman volunteer at the Hotline for Victims of Sexual Violence. Fida worked as coordinator of the Awareness-Raising Project at “Women Against Violence” for 13 years and was the Director of its Social Change Unit. Fida received her MA in Gender Studies from Bar Ilan University.

**Tamar Schwartz** is Executive Director of “Ruah Nashit” (“The Female Spirit”), dedicated to helping women survivors of violence rebuild their lives through employment and financial independence. She was CEO of "Mesila", Tel Aviv's Special Unit for Refugees and Migrant Workers for eight years, working to change perceptions of that community, while implementing new procedures on local and national levels for their benefit. Tamar has devoted herself to the most needy in society - children at risk and women victims of violence, creating kindergartens, libraries, after- school programs, educational centers, aid facilities for human trafficking victims, and more. Tamar has won awards for her unique work, including the Presidential Award for fighters of human trafficking.

**Fainy Sukenik** is a Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox) feminist social activist. Fainy is chair and founder of Ba’asher Telchi (“Wherever You Go”), providing support for Haredi and Orthodox women going through separation and divorce. She is prominent in raising the visibility and empowerment of Haredi women. Fainy is a fellow in the Mandel School for Educational Leadership, a teacher and counselor. Fainy was one of 12 honorees lighting a torch at Israel’s Independence Day ceremony in 2016, was nominated as  one of the 20 leading women activists in Israel, and was listed in the “40 people under 40” who  influence Israeli society in 2018.

**Anat Thon-Ashkenazy** is the Executive Director of Itach-Maaki - Women Lawyers for Social Justice, a Jewish- Arab NGO working to promote the voices of diverse women in public discourse and decision- making. Anat is a senior attorney, specializing in law, gender discrimination and mainstreaming gender perspectives in policymaking, especially in peace and security issues. Anat holds an LLM and LLB with honors from Tel-Aviv University. In 2015 Anat received the 'Nachshonit Award' for her pioneering activities promoting gender equality in Israel. In 2011, the leading economic magazine, The Marker, selected Anat as one of the seven promising young lawyers in Israel.

**Olya Weinstein** is Director of Education and Outreach at Project Kesher Israel. Project Kesher empowers Russian-speaking women to be leaders and activists, building Jewish identity and influencing change on key issues. Olya is completing an M.A. from the Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies and will be receiving rabbinic ordination from HUC this year. She has worked as the Student Department Director and Congregational Coordinator for the Masorti movement, as Deputy Director of the Yuri Shtern Foundation, as head of the Russian-speaking department at ITIM-Navigating Religious Bureaucracy in Israel - and as associate director of Kashuvot which pioneers pastoral care in Israel. Olya created the first Russian language brochure on Freedom of Marriage.

**Steering committee:**

Prof Daphna Hacker, Chair, Tel Aviv University NCJW Women and Gender Studies Program

Hamutal Gouri, Feminist leader, consultant, storyteller, Women Wage Peace activist

Dina Charnin, NCJW Director of Israel Policy and Programs

Liron Peleg Hadomi, NCJW Representative in Israel

Nancy Kaufman – CEO, NCJW

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**“Connecting for Impact: Strengthening the Feminist Ecosystem in Israel**” is a project of NCJW in partnership with the Tel Aviv University NCJW Women and Gender Studies Program. The partners gratefully acknowledge the generous support of the Mazer Family Fund of UJA-Federation of NY, and the Rayah Fund of Pittsburgh.

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**“Connecting for Impact: Strengthening the Feminist Ecosystem in Israel”**

NCJW (National Council of Jewish Women) and Tel Aviv University’s (TAU) NCJW Women and Gender Studies Program have partnered in a new initiative to advance the feminist movement in Israel. The project is called “Connecting for Impact: Strengthening the Feminist Ecosystem in Israel.” Seventeen extraordinary and diverse Israeli feminist leaders of organizations and online communities have been chosen in a selective process to participate in the program.  The objective is to provide opportunities for these diverse feminist leaders to strengthen relationships, enhance skills, expand networking, and explore the possibilities of greater collaborative work; the long-term goal is to leverage this collective feminist power for greater impact on Israeli society – improving the lives of women and girls and all of Israel.

The women selected represent a spectrum of Israeli society. These leaders include Israeli Russians, Palestinians, Ethiopian, Haredi, Mizrahi, LGBTQ, and other-abled women. They  are NGO directors, CEOs, and online community leaders whose organizations are working on a variety of feminist issues: domestic violence and personal safety; equal employment/equal pay; gender equality in political representation; peace and security; women’s health; women and disability rights; women and film/arts; and more.

The project is an outcome of the 2018 year-long research report undertaken by NCJW and the Dafna Fund and conducted by Dr. Nancy Strichman; over 300 women activist and leaders  were interviewed for the research to determine the achievements, challenges, and future directions of Israeli women’s and feminist organizations. Additionally, last year the two organizations led a one-day symposium in Tel Aviv for more than 260 women leaders from all walks of Israel and women leaders from abroad. The feedback we received for the research and at the national symposium led us to this project to strengthen the feminist field in Israel.

The cohort will participate in a series of seminars throughout the year in Israel, and, in an historically unique event,  NCJW and TAU are bringing all 17 of this group of Israeli feminist leaders to Washington DC  for a week in the beginning of April to expand horizons and exchange ideas – the Israelis will meet with American women leaders to learn about the issues in the U.S. and engage in conversations about mutual interests and goals, and they will also participate in NCJW’s triennial advocacy conference, “Washington Institute,” and will be presenting on Israeli feminist issues.

***NCJW and TAU are grateful for the generous support of the Mazer Family Fund of UJA- Federation of NY and the Rayah Fund of Pittsburgh***

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