



Why now? Why write about anti-Semitism and the Women's Movement when we have the Moral Majority and Ronald Reagan to worry about?

Because, very simply, it's there. And because I am a Jew who has been finding problems where I had felt most safe—among feminists.

- On hearing that I planned to write about anti-Semitism, one feminist asked, "Won't Ms. have to give equal time to the PLO?" Incredible. When did anti-Semitism turn into a "balanced issue," with Palestine Liberation Organization interests skewed into a respectable other side? Must we remind people that those who are against anti-Semitism are against Jew-hating? The opposite is not to be pro-PLO. The opposite is to be *for* Jew-hating.
- A white civil rights activist proudly described having organized interracial groups of women in Little Rock, Arkansas. "We went out in teams," she said. "A black woman, a Jewish woman, and a white woman." She never noticed that she had made Jews a race apart.
- Midge Costanza gave me a view from the inside: "Because I'm known as an

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Italian-Catholic, Gentile women feel they can say anti-Semitic things to me, like 'Why should we carry the Jews on our backs,' as if Jews are responsible for the energy problem, or 'That one's a Jew so there's no arguing with her.' But the worst was at the 1980 Democratic Convention when a bunch of women were tossing around names to speak on various platform issues. I was amazed when both Jews and non-Jews discarded certain Jewish names because they thought having a Jew associated with an issue would hurt."

● A month or so before the United Nations Women's Conference in Copenhagen in 1980. I asked a black friend to sign a petition. Five years before, the PLO had monopolized the Mexico City women's conference to drag Israel through the mud and to declare Zionism racism. There were signs that Copenhagen would be exploited for a similar purpose, and some of us felt a petition warning against this time bomb might defuse it.

My friend told me the Copenhagen conference was a hot topic in the black community. Trade-offs were being negotiated; an anti-apartheid resolution might be passed in return for American

blacks' compliance on a Palestinian agenda item.

"Please understand," said my friend. "I can't afford to sign."

I understand that large numbers of Jewish women, far out of proportion to our percentage in the population, have worked for civil rights, welfare rights, Appalachian relief—issues that did not necessarily affect our own lives. What I do *not* understand is how much we must live through before our non-Jewish sisters can "afford" to make anti-Semitism their concern.

● When American Jewish women returned from that Copenhagen conference stung by anti-Semitic experiences (see box, page 48), some women here at home chose not to believe their stories or called their reactions "Jewish paranoia."

I cannot think of any feminist context in which a woman's testimony—whether about sexism or racism—would be disregarded or labeled "female paranoia." Why the gap when women speak bitterness about anti-Semitism?

Are Jewish women overreacting? Evelyn Torton Beck, professor of Women's Studies at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, thinks not: "At one

community conference, our posters advertising a full-day workshop on homophobia and anti-Semitism were torn down—and this happened in locations that sponsored feminist activities, in women's bathrooms and women's bars. At the university where I teach, posters for my course on 'The Jewish Woman' were

friends' commitment to Jewish survival and about their opinions of events in the Middle East.

I considered why Jewish women *are* validated by the Women's Movement when we trudge through Judaic subcultures ruffling beards with our demands for reform but not when we bring Jewish

in the nonfeminist world as well. But are we? Or is this perception part of the stereotype and thus part of the reason why anti-Semitism remains the hidden disease of the Movement?

To cure it, we need to examine the five problems basic to Jews and sisterhood.

PROBLEM 1

FAILURE TO SEE THE PARALLELS

Time and again I heard women use the phrase "Jews are the women of the world," or its converse, "Women are the Jews of the world." Yet feminism has never systematically analyzed the similarities between anti-Semitism and sexism the way that racism and sexism are understood as twin oppressions. The parallels are striking:

- Just as woman comes in two opposing archetypes, Madonna and whore, so is the Jew split in two: victim (Anne Frank) and victimizer (Shylock).

- The myth of "female power" (in terms of sexual or maternal omnipotence) recasts the male in the vulnerable role and thus justifies discrimination against women; the myth of "Jewish power" recasts the Christian majority as pawns, and helps justify repression of the Jews.

- "Jews really control the press," "White women really control the wealth," and "Black matriarchs really control black men" are three equally inaccurate clichés invented to mask the overwhelming concentration of power and money in the hands of *white Christian men*.

- The existence of some leisured women and some affluent Jews is claimed as proof that *all* members of both groups are privileged.

- Woman (wife, prostitute, secretary) serves as a buffer between the capitalist system and the exploited male worker; thus sexism absorbs men's economic frustration by buying them off with privatized patriarchal power. Similarly, Jew (landlord, teacher, or homemaker-employer) serves as a buffer between the dominant class and the underclass, thus deflecting their rage onto a convenient scapegoat.

- All-purpose inferiors, both women and Jews are reminded incessantly of how we differ from the "norm." We are, interchangeably, the "quintessential Other," says historian Paula Hyman. Each group is hated because it demands "the right to be both equal and distinctive"—whether that distinctiveness means women's culture or Jewish culture, women's physical differences or Jewish religious differences. We make the "superior" group angry because we want to maintain our uniqueness without being penalized for it.

Must we identify as Jews in feminism with as much discomfort as we identify as feminists in Judaism?



ripped and defaced. I heard someone say that Jews were "taking over" the local chapter of the National Lesbian Feminist Organization in Madison."

Because anti-Semitism has been an issue at the National Women's Studies Conference, last summer, an ad hoc group called Feminists Against Anti-Semitism* organized a panel on "Anti-Semitism as Racism." One panelist, Esther Broner, asked rhetorically "Why this eternal buzzing of the Jew?"—and then answered: "Because we Jews feel fragile. Because a third of our people have been destroyed in our own lifetimes and the ashes of mourning cling to our clothes."

Before accusing us of overreacting, our Christian sisters should try to understand the immediacy of our mourning and the 5,000 years of terror that echo in our souls.

After the great outcry against Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights, I heard a woman joke, "Israel is Hitler's last laugh on the Jews"—as if Menachem Begin's ultra-nationalism would ultimately destroy the Jewish people better than Hitler could. I do not think criticism of Begin is automatically anti-Semitic any more than criticism of Ronald Reagan is anti-American. However, now that it is open season for attacks on Israel, such criticism, often under the rubric of "anti-Zionism," is sometimes a politically "respectable" cover for anti-Semitism. Jews learn to call it as we feel it. I felt the woman's "joke" was anti-Semitic, but I did not insist that far from being a joke, Israel is a haven for a people against whom someone is always engineering the "last laugh." I said nothing. For the first time, I felt afraid. I worried about my feminist

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consciousness back the other way into feminism; or why we are cheered when we critique the Bible for its antiwoman bias but not when we criticize feminists for their anti-Jewish jokes.

I thought of how often I had noticed Jews omitted from the feminist litany of "the oppressed." And I began to wonder why the Movement's healing embrace can encompass the black woman, the Chicana, the white ethnic woman, the disabled woman, and every other female whose struggle is complicated by an extra element of "outness," but the Jewish woman is not honored in her specificity? Will feminism be our movement only so long as we agree not to make our Jewishness an issue? *Must we identify as Jews within feminism with as much discomfort as we identify as feminists within Judaism?*

I needed to know if these questions were plaguing anyone else. So for many months I talked to more than 80 women from several feminist constituencies and other than the half dozen who said they had never been made to feel uncomfortable as Jews in the Movement, every woman had a story to tell.

Of course, it should not surprise us to find anti-Semitism within feminism. Unless one consciously explores the connections between all forms of oppression, it is possible to, say, work for black rights and still be a sexist or work for women's rights and still be a racist.

Racism among feminists has long been admitted, or at least given lip service, when women assemble anthologies, courses, or conferences. My point is that anti-Semitism has not yet risen to the level of concern or talk, much less action. Maybe this is because we Jews have not made it an issue; or because Jewish women are perceived as influential within the Movement and often

- Both women and Jews have to struggle to have their oppression recognized, even by its victims, because neither misogyny nor anti-Semitism always results in economic privations. Instead, these hatreds are their own weapons honed by age-old mystical fears. The mystique of the *intrinsic* sexual-psychic evil of both women and Jews makes plausible periodic purges of Jews and bizarre accusations against women.

- "Women are too powerful" was the underlying impetus for the slaughter of 9 million "witches" and the advancement of a repressive patriarchal religious establishment. "Jews are too powerful" was the argument Hitler used to promote himself as champion of the working class against rich "Jewish bankers." (Similar anti-Semitic innuendos are used today to mobilize Polish nationalism, a trick that utilizes Jew-hating even in a country that has only a handful of Jews left.)

Every so often, when times are especially hard, Jews get identified as "the problem." Lately, so do women. Times are harder now—and both anti-Semitism and antifeminism are on the rise. Nevertheless, Jewish women concerned about anti-Semitism are often scolded for raising "side issues," and are asked to wait until "larger" inequities are solved.

Here too, there is a parallel: those who would berate us for mentioning anti-Semitism at this time—for "holding the interests of Jews above the interests of women"—ignore the fact that some of all women are Jews and half of all Jews are women. Like those who berate feminists for "holding the interests of women above the interests of blacks," or poor people, or any group, such critics ignore that half of *every* group is women. In short, asking Jews to blur themselves into womankind as defined by non-Jews is like asking feminists to blur themselves into humanism as defined by males.

The failure to see these parallels and make them integral to feminist theory has meant that anti-Semitism and we who care about it are not yet taken seriously in the Women's Movement.

PROBLEM 2 THE BIG SQUEEZE: ANTI-SEMITISM FROM THE RIGHT AND FROM THE LEFT

In the current climate, Jewish feminists have a special need for the Women's Movement to be a safe harbor from two raging storms.

On the lunatic right, overt anti-Semitic violence, vandalism, swastika-painting and desecrations have increased in the last three years. The KKK, Nazis, White Solidarity Movement, and
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National States' Rights Party burn crosses and curse Jews, blacks, and feminists in one fiery breath. Such groups accuse the Women's Movement of forcing Christian women into the workplace and

Christian America" or disingenuously stigmatize Jews.

Reverend Bailey Smith, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, followed his claim that "God Almighty does not hear the prayer of a Jew," with this comment in a subsequent sermon: "Why did God choose the Jews? I don't know

struggle fits fairly comfortably into a leftist economic analysis: most U.S. blacks are poor or working class, with little access to good jobs or the education that might lead to them. . . . But the oppression of Jews does not so easily lend itself to a simplistic class analysis." (As noted, neither does the oppression of women.)

Ellen Willis goes further: "The oppression of Jews is not economic oppression, it is the dynamic of anti-Semitism. It is when anti-Semitism exists and people do not admit it exists and accuse the victim of paranoia."

Another painful phenomenon on the left is the guilt of Jewish children of families who made it into the middle class; their disavowal of their parents' values and fear for their leftist credentials prevent them from identifying with other Jews. In the civil rights years, Lindsey recalls, they "identified themselves more as white oppressors than as Jewish oppressed, and their Gentile co-workers did nothing to discourage this view."

This sort of guilt-tripping and radical myopia is even more blatant in connection with Israel. "I've never recovered from hearing a woman at a feminist meeting scream, 'Golda Meir is not my sister; she's a fascist,'" says Elenore Lester. "By making Israel a macho imperial stand-in for all the world's male supremacy, the Women's Movement threw me into the arms of Judaism."

Somehow, leftists who espouse one-world transnationalism make exceptions for "national liberation" struggles and independent nation states in Latin America, Africa, or anywhere *but* Israel.

Israel is supposed to commit suicide for the sake of Palestinian "liberation." Jewish women are supposed to universalize themselves so that Palestinian women can have a national identity. Zionists have no standing on the left. Palestinians are all assumed to be have-nots and Israelis the affluent hosts—the parents who made it.

"Anti-Israel leftists have no idea of who Zionists are," says Sharone Abramowitz. "They don't know that the majority of Israeli Jews are dark-skinned, poor, and uneducated refugees from Arab and north African countries."

Asked to justify their PLO support, many leftist feminists say that they are taking sides in a clash between European imperialism and Third World anticolonialism. They do not see the Israeli-Palestinian problem as a conflict between two national movements with complex historical origins. Pressed, they show ignorance of even the vaguest outlines of Jewish experience, and yet they freely prescribe what Jews or Israel

The oppression of Jews does not lend itself to a simplistic class analysis."



the military where blacks and Jews are conspiring to commit lesbianism and miscegenation. The purpose of the Equal Rights Amendment, they say, is to "destroy the white Christian family and discourage the birth of white children."

To build opposition to the ERA, the extremists appeal to anti-Semitic feelings that the Harris and Yankelovich public-opinion polls have found present in one third of Americans. At the Houston Women's Conference I remember banners saying "Kikes for Dykes" and "Abzug, Friedan, and Steinem are all anti-Christian Jews." Comedian Maxine Feldman got police protection when she performed at the conference. "There were three hundred KKK in the audience carrying placards that read, 'Kill all dykes, kikes, commies, and abortionists,'" she recalls, "and I was three out of four."

In Illinois, fliers bearing a picture of a mutilated woman warned that if the ERA passed, women would be drafted to fight in Israel and would end up looking like her. A broadsheet sent to each state senator lists "Zionist names" connected to the ERA plot to wreck Christian homes by "pitting wives against husbands." It cautions: "Wake up, Americans! Roll back Zionist one-worldism before . . . the ruling Jews take all the honey, leaving only the wax for you Christian Goyim."

Lyndon LaRouche's U.S. Labor Party and Willis Carto's Liberty Lobby hammer at three themes: the Jews killed Christ; the Holocaust is a hoax; and Zionism is racism.

These cranks used to be easy to ignore, but the proliferation of vandalism and assaults in "respectable" neighborhoods makes the fringe seem less remote. What's more, the lunatics have made it seem reasonable and tame when Birchers or fundamentalists call for "a

why. I think they've got funny-looking noses myself." He later said he was misunderstood.

The Rev. Dan C. Fore, former chair of the New York Moral Majority, told the *New York Times*: "Jews have a God-given ability to make money. . . . They control the media; they control this city."

Confounding the landscape on the right are:

- Neoconservative Jews like Norman Podhoretz and Irving Kristol who, along with Reagan Republicans, are smugly anti-affirmative action and antifeminist.

- Anti-ERA, antichoice Orthodox Jews, such as the organization of rabbinical wives who invited Phyllis Schlafly to be their dinner speaker.

- Fundamentalist Christians like Jerry Falwell who claim to support Israel, but whose support does not seem to be founded on any dedication to Jewish survival but on a biblical prophecy that says a Jewish state must exist in order to set the stage for Jesus' Second Coming—after which all Jews must convert or be damned.

What concerns me as much as these unholy alliances are those feminists who seem to believe that a monolithic right-leaning "Jewish vote" has been responsible for the defeat of some feminist issues or candidates when, in fact, we have our Ayatollahs and our Gandhis like every group.

While the right plays new tricks with American Jews, the problems on the left are old and familiar. Much leftist anti-Semitism stems from radicals' inability to understand that individual Jews' economic success is not the same as Jewish political power, let alone the power to assure one's own group safety.

Karen Lindsey explains: "The black

should or should not do.

"I try to give feminists a thirty-minute crash course in Jewish history, but they don't want to know," says Judy Dlugacz. "It's just not cool to be a Zionist. It makes you a pariah in radical feminist circles."

Many Jews believe that pro-PLO women in America are expressing their anti-Semitism as surely as pro-Afrikaner whites in South Africa are assumed to be expressing their racism:

- Barbara Seaman faults the Southern women's health center that displayed pro-PLO posters on the walls—as if anti-Zionist Third World solidarity went hand-in-hand with justice in health issues.

- A British feminist said anti-Zionism turns into anti-Semitism because people define "Zionism as a racial characteristic instead of a cultural phenomenon."

- Three New York women protested when the 1981 International Women's Day forum sponsored by a "Committee Against Genocide" paired a speaker decrying apartheid with a speaker decrying Zionism—implying they are comparable evils—and when *Womanews*, a feminist paper, chose to list the forum as an important *women's* event.

- Phyllis Chesler is tired of hearing women say that Israel's Law of Return is racist. (Mindful of the time when Jewish refugees were the "Boat People" of the world, the Law grants automatic Israeli citizenship to any Jew.) "I am saddened and angered by feminists who would never call a separatist coffeehouse or women's center sexist, but who are quick to call the Law of Return racist," insists Chesler.

And I agree. If we can understand why history entitles lesbians to separatism, or minorities and women to affirmative action, we can understand why history entitles Jews to "preferential" safe space. *To me, Zionism is simply an affirmative action plan on a national scale.* Just as legal remedies are justified in reparation for racism and sexism, the Law of Return to Israel is justified, if not by Jewish religious and ethnic claims, then by the intransigence of worldwide anti-Semitism.

Because nations tend to be capricious about protecting Jewish rights, our survival has been tenuous through the ages: think about the Diaspora (the Babylonian exile of Jews from the Middle East in the sixth century B.C.), and the crushing defeats by the Romans in the first century; think about the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition of the 16th century, the 19th-century pogroms that drove Jews out of Eastern Europe, Stalin's purges, Hitler's "final solution," or the fact that both the Pope and Franklin

Roosevelt were silent after receiving graphic early reports on the fate of European Jews in the concentration camps, and "ordinary" French, Italians, and Poles turned in their Jews to the Nazis.

Given virtually every country's record of treating us as surplus citizenry, the survival of Israel is vital to the survival of

dead. . . . But the power of Jews as emotional symbols would mean little if they were not hugely outnumbered and so in reality powerless. It is that combination that makes anti-Semitism so appealing: to kill a gnat, imagining it's an elephant, is to feel powerful indeed."

Where does all this leave us? Caught

In the world I want, nation states will not exist. But in the world I live in, I want an Israel."



Jews. It's that simple.

Like many, I cling to hopes of a two-state solution that does not demand Israel's suicide. I long for a PLO counterpart to the Israeli peace groups so that rational dialogue may begin. But PLO moderates, rare as they are, seem to have been silenced by their own violent hardliners: I have heard that many—including some peace-seeking women—fear for their lives. In the absence of peace initiatives and open sisterhood, I am left to assume (according to PLO sentiments expressed in Copenhagen) that the average Palestinian woman would wish me dead. Until this changes, I have no tolerance for anti-Zionists even if they are feminists. Again, like many Jews, I have come to consider anti-Zionism tantamount to anti-Semitism because the political reality is that its bottom line is an end to the Jews.

Andrea Dworkin put it brilliantly: "In the world I'm working for, nation states will not exist. But in the world I live in, I want there to be an Israel." To those leftists who excuse their anti-Israel position because of the Begin administration, Dworkin answers: "I resent the expectation that, having been oppressed, Jews should exercise a higher morality running their country than anyone else. The idea that suffering purifies is Christian, not Jewish."

Some assert that anti-Zionism has become the left's socially acceptable response to "the uppity kike" the way anti-feminism is to "the uppity broad." Ellen Willis cites the case of Vanessa Redgrave, the pro-PLO actress who "exemplifies a mentality that has flourished ever since 1967, when Israel became the prime metaphor for the powerful Jew: [Redgrave] hates Bad Jews—Zionists—and loves Good Jews—victims, preferably

in the big squeeze. The Moral Majority uses its pro-Israel position as proof that it likes Jews. The left insists that its anti-Israel position doesn't mean it *doesn't* like Jews. "Attacked from the left for being too well-off and from the right for being too left wing, Jews lack even the contingent power of dependable political allies," says Willis, describing our classic double bind. To the Third World, we are white oppressors, but to our fellow white oppressors, we are Jews. No wonder so many Jewish women are finding it harder and harder to find an ideological home. And no wonder we so badly need to create a feminist politic flexible enough to absorb differing views of Jewish women's issues, but firm enough to resist anti-Semitism with a single voice.

PROBLEM 3 THE THREE I'S

What women experience as anti-Semitism varies from *invisibility* (the omission of Jewish reality from feminist consciousness) to *insult* (slurs, Jew-baiting, and outright persecution) to *internalized oppression* (Jewish self-hatred, which some call the most pernicious anti-Semitism of all).

Invisibility. Andrea Dworkin calls it "being insensitive to genocides that are immediate to me." When the reality of the Holocaust is denied or trivialized or labeled "Jewish self-centeredness," Dworkin feels the chill of anti-Semitism. "My whole family in Eastern Europe was almost totally wiped out. I grew up among the few survivors. I understand when someone says, 'My great-grandmother was a slave,' but I don't feel the same understanding from others when I say, 'My aunt was in Auschwitz.'"

Evie Beck described invisibility as a

form of oppression that works against both Jews and lesbians. "When you're invisible, you lose your voice," she says. "But becoming visible opens you to attack. I found it easier to tell straight people I'm lesbian than to tell some feminists that I'm Jewish."

T. Drorah Setel, a student rabbi and coordinator of the Feminist Task Force

of survivors of the Holocaust. I was brought up to take risks. That style is a threat to some women. They've tried to destroy the behavior I need to survive."

Insults often result from an ironic overlap between the typecasting of Jews and feminists: both groups are characterized by outsiders as loud, pushy, verbal, domineering, middle class. Yet, with-

luptuous, close to "animal" sexuality and privy to carnal mysteries. This feminized "dirty Jew" stereotype gave the Cossacks an excuse to rape women of the *shtetl* (a small ghetto village); it is useful to pornographers, sexual sadists, and even to the Christian mainstream in which Eve, the Old Testament temptress, is cast as inventor of Original Sin. Diane Gelon, administrator of Judy Chicago's "Dinner Party," says she often heard comments like "It must have been done by Jewish women; it's so blatantly sexual."

Add to these distinctly female stereotypes the old "classics," the Jewish Intellectual, the Jewish Moneymaker, and there is no room for us to be *anything* without triggering someone's preconception.

Gloria Greenfield's experiences illuminate the point:

"As publisher and treasurer of Persephone Press, I get a lot of heat. When negotiating the financial terms of a contract, I've been accused of being 'cunning,' a 'cheap Jew,' or of 'Jewing someone down.' When Evie Litwok and I gave financial workshops, several women said we were only into money because we're Jews. They reduced our revolutionary strategy for women's economic self-sufficiency to a Jewish *business*."

"As for the intellectual put-down, a lot of feminists see women's studies as an organizing tool; when I say I see it as serious research, I'm called a bourgeois Jewish intellectual. Bourgeois! My parents are Russian immigrants. Neither of them went to high school. My mother is a janitor; my father works as a cabdriver and a hospital worker. Feminists could try to understand what education means to someone like me."

Andrea Dworkin has altered her behavior to defy the stereotype: "I keep quiet at meetings more than I should because I don't like feeling singled out as the Jew with the words."

"I grew up poor in Camden, New Jersey, where Jews had to stay on our own block. For us, reading and writing was the only thing they couldn't take away from us. Even though I was a girl, my family encouraged me to become literate. And now, in the Women's Movement, I am made to feel self-conscious about being 'an intellectual.'"

As feminists should know well, stereotypes often originate in group survival techniques and coping mechanisms that have been flattened into caricature. Stereotypes are also barriers to intimacy because they deny individual complexities. They add insult to injury, transforming group pride and survival strengths into cause for shame. And they hurt.

The Jewish Princess stereotype runs dead against the feminist ideal of a strong, self-supporting woman."



of the New Jewish Agenda, laments: "I am unseen as a feminist among Jews and unseen as a Jew among feminists. Had I been black or Latina, my commitment to my community of origin would have been acceptable and my attachment to my people would have been honored."

Miriam Slifkin, a scientist and former president of North Carolina NOW, remembered a conference in her state at which some women insisted on an opening prayer that was "full of Our Fathers and Christ's name. It never occurred to them that there were Jews in the room. I asked that the prayer be struck from the record in respect for non-Christian women and the chair, Libby Koontz, made it official."

Other complaints of invisibility focus on scholars overlooking the latent anti-Semitism that fueled the nativism of some suffragists who objected that ignorant immigrants could vote while native-born *Christian* women could not. Or on women's courses and conferences that always include suffragists, slaves, Christian temperance workers, but not always Jewish garment workers, labor organizers, or ghetto social workers.

Insult. Women's testimony about anti-Semitic insults is more complex. "Everyone's so laid back out here," says Phyllis Katz of Boulder, Colorado. "When someone attacks you as an 'outspoken, intellectual female from New York,' you're not sure if they're putting you down as a feminist, a Jew, or an Easterner."

"I'm perceived as intimidating and overbearing; in other words, Jewish," says Philadelphia's Evie Litwok. "Well, my style is a result of my being the child

in feminism, the attributes and expressive habits culturally associated with Jewish ethnicity—such as being raised to speak our minds, to trade on education and eloquence when there is no other currency, to interrupt or else be interrupted—contradict the ideal of (Quaker meetinghouse turn-taking) sisterhood.

Jewish stock types also present extra problems in feminism. For instance, the Jewish Mother epitomizes the self-sacrificing, maternal role that many feminists most vocally repudiate.

Pauline Bart of Chicago is troubled by this: "My Jewish qualities are as discriminated against in the lesbian movement as a height requirement would discriminate against Puerto Ricans in the fire department."

"The ideal dyke personality is in direct conflict with my socialization as a Jew. The acceptable dyke is a jock. She's into mechanical things like fixing cars or carpentry. She's tough, unemotional, nonmonogamous. In short, the model for the ideal dyke is an adolescent, working-class Gentile male—right down to the body build, the cap, and the butch jacket. There's no way I can fill that role."

The Jewish Princess stereotype—a materialistic child-woman, indulged by her parents and educated to lure a husband—runs dead against the feminist ideal of a strong, up-front, self-supporting radical who demands her rights, and makes her own life. (In 1971, *Off Our Backs* ran a comic strip lampooning "a Jewish Princess named Felicia" who had a nose job, a lawyer father, a dentist husband, three children, a split-level in Jersey, a powder-blue Mustang, and played bridge every Thursday.)

A third stereotype, the Exotic Jewess, is usually portrayed as dark, vo-

Internalized Oppression. Both Inge Lederer Gibel and Cynthia Ozick reminded me of the words of Rosa Luxemburg, the German Communist leader who had this response to a letter about the atrocities and pogroms against the Jews in Eastern Europe: "Why do you pester me with your special Jewish sorrows? . . . I cannot find a special corner in my heart for the ghetto."

Luxemburg, a Jew, went on to speak movingly of suffering Africans, Asians, and Indians—which at the time prompted one historian to marvel at the phenomenon of a group so capable of compassion for others but only of contempt for its own. Of course, the overall record of Jewish philanthropy to other Jews disproves that generalization, but it is true enough in its particulars to rankle. (And to give me the chills, for not one Jew in Rosa Luxemburg's Polish town was left alive by the Germans in World War II.)

If today's women also slough off our "special Jewish sorrows," it is because many of us have internalized anti-Semitic views of everything Jewish—including our suffering—adding a double unworthiness for being both female and Jewish. Self-hatred and denial of a part of oneself or one's origins is a kind of *invisibility* imposed from within.

Oddly enough, internalized oppression is a luxury. Like the Queen Bee, the "only Jew in the club" functions best when denial of one's group is possible and assimilation is permitted. As factual oppression worsens, assimilated Jews have historically been forced to rediscover their Jewishness one way or another. (Although under most conditions Jews can choose to pass where blacks cannot, Hitler proved that a society can rout out its Jews regardless of their denial or disguise.)

I think the current rebirth of Jewish identity among feminists—or at least the desire to confront anti-Semitism—is a repudiation of that internalized oppression that kept us closeted.

It is no accident that this Jewish "coming out" process has in many feminist communities been spearheaded by lesbians. Having opened the windows on one secret identity and not only survived but flourished, lesbians seem less willing to live with another part of their identity repressed—and more willing to brave the consequences within feminism for calling attention to those "special Jewish sorrows."

No matter how "un-Jewish" we are, no matter how unobservant, atheistic, disconnected to the Jewish community or the State of Israel, more and more women who were *born* Jewish are com-

ing to believe they must deal with what that identity means to them and how they feel about other Jews and Jewish issues.

On January 11, 1981, at the San Francisco Women's Building, 350 Bay Area feminists showed up for a forum on "Anti-Semitism in the Women's Community." Fifty had been expected. The

She preferred to identify as a Marxist, a veggie, a radical feminist — anything but a Jew.



women who organized the event—Sharone Abramowitz, Marsha Gildin, Chaya Gusfield, and Pnina Tobin—filled the program with a history of anti-Semitism, a short skit on women resistance fighters in the Warsaw ghetto, a presentation on Jewish women in the labor movement, another on anti-Semitism in the early suffrage movement, and a listing on a blackboard of all the Jewish stereotypes called out by women in the crowd. But it was the speak-out on "passing" that brought forth visceral pain and dammed-up tears.

Rising from the audience, woman after woman told of how she hated her "Jewish nose" and had it "fixed"; how she straightened her despised kinky "Jewish hair"; how she allowed herself to be mistaken for Italian or Puerto Rican; how hard she worked to get rid of her "Jewish accent" or to force herself to stop talking with her hands; or how inevitably she preferred to identify as a civil rights worker, a Marxist, a veggie, a radical feminist—anything but a Jew.

Tobin felt that the forum was important to build Jewish awareness and strength in the face of the rise of the right. She, too, had been denying her roots. "In the 1960s, I tried to be a hippie mother—white Anglo Southern California mellow," says Tobin. "Only now am I reclaiming the positive qualities of the Jewish mother in me: the strength, the warmth, the characteristics of the *shittel*. They may seem outmoded here, but when children's lives are in danger, like in the pogroms, it's important for women to hover and protect. Also I was finally able to admit that the feminist format for consciousness-raising is not right for me; it's frustrating for anyone whose training is to get excited, interrupt, argue within the *mishpacha* [family], and expect enough love and warmth to absorb it all."

Another common symptom of internalized oppression is described by Maxine Feldman: "As a kid, I was the only Jew on my block to keep my own nose, and in the Movement's early days, I was the only one to keep my own name. Women were changing their names if they had a 'man' ending. They said it was

to deny the patriarchy, but they were also denying their Jewish identities. Feldman is a Jewish name, not a male name. When they asked why I didn't change it, I answered, 'Why don't Margie Adam and Cris Williamson change theirs?'"

Pianist-composer Davida Goodman also uses the name Ishatova, which is "good woman" in Hebrew. She chose to identify as a Jewish woman for the first time at the West Coast Women's Music Festival at Yosemite. To a hushed audience she talked about her pianist mother, a survivor of Auschwitz; she played the same Chopin piece that her mother played in the concentration camp and read a poem about her mother.

"People came up to me crying," said Goodman. "They told me, 'I'm Jewish' or 'I live with a Jew' or tried to make some connection. Since then I have a feeling of 'my people' with Jewish women."

"I feel reborn as a Jew in the Women's Movement," said Arlene Raven, founder of Chrysalis and the L.A. Woman's Building. "What had been shushed out of me is up front now."

For poet and writer Louise Bernikow, the absence of negativism is enough of a positive: "I came from a lower-class Jewish family and I had an image of a Jewish girl locked in the attic with the Nazis outside her door. I obliterated my own Jewishness. Most of my friends were Christian. The night I went to the New York feminist seder was the first time I'd ever been at an organized Jewish women's event. I was deeply moved by the ceremony. But I was more moved by the fact that Gloria Steinem was there talking about her Jewish grandmother and identifying as a Jew when she is half-Jewish and had the choice *not* to."

This business of *identifying* was posited in a new way by a Gentile friend:

"Would you say to your c-r group 'I'm a Jew' or 'I'm Jewish?'" she asked. "Why does 'Jew' seem to be a racial slur, and 'Jewish' the polite liberal term?"

Her questions made me realize that almost all the women I interviewed called themselves "Jewish"; few said, "I'm a Jew." Is this a clue to our self-hatred? Do we avoid the noun as too strong an embodiment, too central an identity? Is the adjective a means of diminishing or taming the Jew-part of our identity? (Jewish woman is as bland in its way as working woman, Democratic woman, Southern woman). Have we absorbed the anti-Semite's invective use of "Jew" to the point where we cannot speak our tribal name without fear?

PROBLEM 4 RELIGION, GODS, AND GODDESSES: THE 5,000-YEAR-OLD MISUNDERSTANDING

There is a morning prayer in which every Orthodox Jewish man thanks God for not creating him a woman. "I wish I had a nickel for every time a feminist has quoted that prayer to argue the supreme sexism of the Jewish faith," says Pnina Tobin. "That prayer has probably been spoken more often by anti-Semitic non-Jews than by Jewish worshippers."

Several years ago, Leonard Swidler wrote an essay that has become the basic catechism for Christian feminists. In it he argued that "Jesus was a feminist" because he broke with many Jewish customs that mistreated women. However comforting this thesis may be for some (especially in view of the misogyny of the religious right), it leaps over all the Christian sexism perpetrated in Jesus' name, from the masculinist liturgy to the lack of women apostles, to the Catholic refusal to ordain women priests—and it has been used to make Judaism the heavy among patriarchal religions. In fact, a major focus of attention at the December, 1981, convention of Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant Feminists of Faith was the "disconcerting trend toward anti-Semitism" in the writings of some Christian feminists.

"The more negative they can make Judaism," explains Judith Plaskow, who teaches religion at Manhattan College, "the more feminist Jesus appears for veering away from it."

When asked if she was flatly denying the sexism in Judaism's origins, Plaskow replied: "Obviously Judaism is patriarchal. This hurts us deeply. Yet it's one thing when we articulate it in our terms and another when it is taken up by Christians as evidence that Jews are *more* patriarchal than any other people. Just as

Jews have been called *more* Communist, or *more* stiff-necked, or *more* whatever, this kind of projection of humanity's ills onto one group has been used against women. It is what we as feminists are committed to destroy."

Speaking of projection, a feminist who believes menstrual blood is sacred told me flatly one day that Jews killed the pagan glories of the female religion by inventing the patriarchal God of Abraham. As I listened to this spiritualist "sister," the commonality of our menstrual blood disappeared. It was my Jewish blood that ran cold. We "Christ-killers" had become "Goddess-killers." Feminism or not, how far have I come if I am still called murderer?

Miriam Schneir points out that ancient Judaism was against polytheism, rather than against women, and that it took Christianity to articulate the rabid woman-hating that culminated in church-led witch-hunts. Yet, Judaism takes the rap for the death of the female deity in several Spiritualist/Matriarchist books, most notably *The First Sex*, by Elizabeth Gould Davis (Putnam's, 1971), and *A Different Heaven and Earth*, by Sheila D. Collins (Judson, 1974).

Plaskow, who is also coeditor of *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion* (Harper & Row, 1979), says of those authors: "They overlook the fact that many goddess-worshipping cults were themselves patriarchal or that the Goddess was being dethroned long before Judaism came along."

Goddesses may have become important symbols to many feminists for whom both Christianity and Judaism are beyond the pale. But, warns Cynthia Ozick, "Let's not romanticize them. Their purpose was often human sacrifice. Babies were killed to appease them. Mothers were brainwashed to want their children chosen for death."

"The present feminist spirituality movement wipes out the fact that for its time, Judaism was a tremendous step forward," insists Tillie Olsen. "The old religions were terrible. And who needs goddesses anyway? Why not dignify ourselves with the actual achievements of real women: shelter, food gathering, the invention of language. Why let men's definition of religion be the source of our spirituality?"

PROBLEM 5 BLACK-JEWISH RELATIONS

If parallels between women and Jews are sometimes missed, parallels between Jews and blacks are almost too obvious—so close, in fact, that rather than inspire coalitions, they incite what Susan Weidman Schneider calls "a com-

petition of tears."

I think the reason we often fail to identify together is the same for both black women and Jewish women: we do not always have the ability to be feminists *first*. Right now, for example, I feel more vulnerable in America as a Jew than as a woman.

Many black women have suffered more for their race than their sex. Many Jewish women, from biblical times through the Holocaust, have been slaughtered not because they were female but because they were Jewish. As a result, both groups have often chosen to stand in solidarity with their men against a hostile world rather than explore shared circumstances and synthesize an analysis that includes racism, sexism, and anti-Semitism.

Black women have been criticized by some white feminists for putting race ahead of sex. From my new perspective and with my sense of Jewish vulnerability, I understand this and I wonder whether the feminist world view needs to be expanded to recognize times when sisterhood must bow to "peoplehood" for blacks and Jews.

Instead we do little more than compare burdens and police one another's privileges. Historically, we have been pitted against each other: in ghetto slums as the poorest housing passes to the lowest newcomer group; in competition for liberal philanthropic dollars; in transitional neighborhoods and suburbs; in schools and jobs where a finite number of slots is reserved for all non-WASPs to divide amongst themselves. That this game of blacks versus Jews is continued in the Women's Movement is one of the gravest failures of feminism.

Many Jewish women specifically resent that, for years, they have talked openly about "confronting" their racism, while with a few noteworthy exceptions black women's anti-Semitism has been largely unmentionable.

My interviews suggest this is changing. Jewish women are asking their black sisters to deal with the fact that they (like other Gentiles) stereotype, scapegoat, and stigmatize Jews—not just because we are white, but because we are Jews. Don McEvoy of the National Conference of Christians and Jews puts it succinctly: "Being anti-Semitic is one way for blacks to buy into American life."

Jewish women I interviewed mentioned certain grievances more than once. For example, this passage from Iva E. Carruthers' "War on African Familyhood," an essay in the anthology *Sturdy Black Bridges* (Anchor, 1979): "Today one of the most serious assaults to African familyhood is being forged

by the white feminist movement; the theory for which is emerging from a predominantly Jewish elite group...

Carruthers goes on to identify "Aryan intrusion" as the means by which Jewish feminists destroy African familyhood; the grating irony of equating Jew and Aryan is evidently lost on her.

Also cited by some Jews as deeply offensive were two poems in *Conditions* 5, the issue on racism. In Carole Clemmons Gregory's poem, "Love Letter," a

black Delilah suggests that the Jewish Samson would use his God-given strength to kill black people. And these lines from Judy Simmons' poem, "Minority," seemed gratuitously divisive: *mine is not a People of the Book/taxed but acknowledged;*

*their distinctiveness is
not yet a dignity; their Holocaust
is lower case*

That "competition of tears" foolishly pits slavery against the Nazi genocide as though inhumanity was a zero-sum phenomenon and there was only so much moral outrage to go around.

"Over and over again I heard blacks complain that 'The Holocaust' film on television was the Jews' way of stealing the spotlight from 'Roots,'" said a black friend. "The average black is not sympathetic toward any white person who is brutalized or discriminated against. A lot of black women resist the Women's Movement because they think it's full of pushy Jewish women who have nothing to do but complain; but when the going gets rough they have their men to protect them."

Barbara Smith, the black feminist writer and activist, said: "I think it's important for Jewish women to claim their oppression but acknowledge their white-skin privilege. At the same time I understand why women of color find it hard to accept that anyone with white-skin privilege can be oppressed. It is necessary for both groups to make an effort to comprehend each other's situation."

Renée Franco runs workshops on black-Jewish issues in Boston and Atlanta. "Anti-Semitism from minority groups, as well as from people in general, is based on misinformation about Jews," she maintains. "Women say to me, 'You don't look or act Jewish,' and when I challenge them they say they mean I'm not loud or rich and I don't have a Jewish accent." Franco is a Sephardic Jew who was raised in the American South.

Inge Lederer Gibel spent most of her adult life in the civil rights movement. At a retreat organized to discuss sexism and racism, Gibel raised the problem of elderly Jewish women living in poor neighborhoods. "If they have been mugged and robbed by black teenage boys and they are now afraid of black males, do we tell them they are racists?" she asked. Gibel reported that one black woman fliply answered: "Nobody gets mugged unless they're looking for trouble."

"I said, 'I don't think mugging old women is funny,'" Gibel continued. "The black woman yelled back at me, 'That's why you people have always been in trouble, and are always going to be in

FURTHER READINGS

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The American Jewish Woman, 1654-1980, Jacob R. Marcus (*KTAV Publishers, New York, 1981*)

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Genesis 2, special issue on Jewish women, March, 1981 (*233 Bay State Road, Boston, Massachusetts 02215*)

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"Anti-Semitism in the Lesbian/Feminist Movement," **Off Our Backs**, Vol. XII, No.4, April, 1982

trouble.' I asked her, 'What do you mean by "you people?"' She snarled, 'You know what I mean,' called me a racist, and suggested I go into the next room with her and fight it out physically.

"Some people see white racism as the *only* evil on earth, but ignore anti-Semitism, which is the oldest form of racism."

In 1979, when United Nations Ambassador Andrew Young resigned after admitting he had met secretly with a PLO representative, many blacks blamed his ouster on "the Jews." Among those heard from were several important black women. Esther E. Edwards, director of the Regional Office of the National Black Human Rights Caucus, said, "Young was used as a scapegoat to appease Jewish ethnics here and in Israel..."

Sherry Brown, president of the Frederick Douglass Community Improvement Council of Anacostia, told the *Washington Post*: "We have to understand who our true enemies are. Jews have historically profited as slumlords and merchants from the suffering of black people."

Most disturbingly, Thelma Thomas Daley, then president of Delta Sigma Theta, a predominantly black sorority of

some 100,000 members, took off from the Young affair to accuse Jewish groups of "subverting affirmative action programs." She showed no awareness of the great numbers of Jewish *women's* groups who have worked for affirmative action from the very start.

In an interview in the *New York Times*, Daley said of Jews: "We have been patient and forbearing in their masquerading as friends under the pretense of working for the common purpose of civil rights. . . . Their loyalties are not compatible with the struggle of black Americans for equal opportunity under the law. Indeed, we question whether their loyalties are first to the State of Israel or to the United States." Given black Americans' special support for African nations, this statement seemed especially insensitive.

Of course, while our groups remain divided, our most violent enemies continue to see us as one and the same. According to Klanwatch, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, men and women in the KKK are "prepared to kill black people and Jews in the 'race war' their leaders say is coming." And pornographers, sadists, and rapists make interchangeable use of black women and

Jewish women as the ultimate sexualized victim. As Susan Brownmiller points out, "the reputation of lasciviousness and promiscuity" is black women's and Jewish women's historic common bond. Unless we ourselves forge a healthier, more life-enhancing bond, we leave it to our enemies to tell us who we are and what we have in common.

Some readers may be relieved that this report corroborates their own experiences. Others may feel disheartened and wish for some hopeful proposals for dealing with anti-Semitism in the Women's Movement so that it doesn't divide us. I'm sorry to say I have no such proposals. Instead, I feel suddenly akin to the many black women I know who have refused to take responsibility for curing white racism. I feel angry and sad and I find myself agreeing with Cynthia Ozick: "It is for decent persons to come forward and sound that note of hope, either through self-repair or through declarations of abhorrence for anti-Semitism. We Jews can't get rid of anti-Semitism by ourselves."

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