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EDITOR'S NOTE



FOR SEVERAL MONTHS NOW, I have been editing the papers of 24 women working in different fields and in different places throughout the world. These women also come from very different parts of the Jewish community and work in a variety of settings: some are academics; some are writers; some are social workers. All originally presented papers in 1997 and 1998 at the Hadassah Research Institute on Jewish Women located at Brandeis University. Reading their work, thinking about their ideas, and sometimes struggling to translate them into English has been an unexpectedly absorbing experience for me and I've wondered what it is, exactly, that I find so rewarding. I've concluded that spending time in the company of an international, interdisciplinary group of Jewish women begins to fill a most basic and persistent need in me: the need of human beings to see themselves sympathetically represented and reflected in their culture.

As a Jewish woman growing up in post-war America, I rarely saw any semblance of my reflection in the mainstream culture. Although I grew up in the middle of New York City where almost everybody in my immediate world was Jewish, representations of Jews were absent from the museums I visited, the movies I saw, or the books I read in school. Except for *The Diary of Anne Frank*, which I consider problematic reading for a young Jewish girl, there was no Jewish heroine in the books of my childhood. I identified with active, adventurous girls like Jo March, Nancy Drew or Cherry Ames and liked reading about the dramatic lives of European and English queens. I didn't then notice that none of the women I was reading about were Jewish, or that Archie and Veronica seemed to have no Jewish friends; that there were no Jewish Mouseketeers; or that there were no Jewish girls in *American Girl* or *Seventeen*.

I was in my forties and listening to West Indian writer Jamaica Kincaid speaking at the Isabella Gardner Museum in Boston, when I suddenly perceived their absence (like Pnina Motzafi-Haller in her essay about *mizrahi* women in Israel, I applied the insight of an African-American woman to my own life). Jamaica Kincaid had done a brilliant and audacious thing: invited to choose her favorite painting at the museum and speak to a large audience about the reasons for her choice, she had beamed an old snapshot of her mother on the museum's large screen and talked about it.

All of us in the audience, of course, had been accustomed to viewing the parade of art history on such a screen – from the Greeks to the Renaissance masters to the Impressionists and Abstract Expressionists. We were accustomed to oil portraits and elaborately framed photographs. The effect of Kinkaid's snapshot was shocking and made the author's point more forcefully than her words: Had we ever seen the image of an ordinary West Indian woman on the walls of a museum? Had we ever contemplated her face? Her body? Her surroundings? Her life? How did we ascribe value to this snapshot when it was viewed in a private photo album, in a newspaper, or here, in the context of other portraits in the museum? We had all read or at least heard of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, but what about the invisible woman? In this case, what about an entire sub-culture usually hidden by the majority African-American minority culture?

I viewed many of these working papers as such snapshots that raised some of these and many other questions.

In addition to experiencing a kind of invisibility as a Jewish girl in America, I also felt an invisibility in the Jewish community as the daughter of Czech Jews (of *ashkenazi* descent on my mother's side; *sephardi* on my father's). We lived on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, where there were many Jewish refugees from Central Europe but where the definition of Jewish culture was determined by people who, like the majority of American Jews, were of Russian and Polish descent.

This particular group, I later learned, had jettisoned their working-class, Yiddish-speaking parents (as well as their working-class culture) in the Bronx, or Brooklyn, or Queens, or the Lower East Side.

They were West Siders now, middle-class, highly educated, new Jews, who frequented the American – not Yiddish-language – theater and Lincoln Center, collected art, read the cultural sections of the *Times* and the *New Yorker*. The men worked as professionals; the women were delighted to be full-time homemakers in the image of Betty Crocker. Most were political liberals who had flirted with Communism or Socialism in college; they had friends or acquaintances who were blacklisted and were deeply affected by McCarthyism. They had also been deeply affected by the events of the second world war and were in every way invested in a prototypically 1950s American mainstream lifestyle.



My family entered this Upper West Side Jewish milieu towards the end of 1948 like creatures from another planet. My parents were *both* Holocaust survivors and political exiles from Communism. They had grown up middle-class, did not speak Yiddish, had never seen a bagel, and were not especially interested in Israel. Although they had no sympathy for McCarthyism, they were staunch anti-Communists who regarded Stalin as another version of Hitler. During the 1950s, they struggled to earn money and to adjust to America. Like many Jewish (and other) refugee women, my mother supported the family. My father – a former Olympic water polo player and sometimes officer of the Organization of Czech Sportsmen in-Exile-in-the Western World – was mostly unemployed until I was ten years old.

All this is to say that, as I was growing up, I felt as invisible in the Jewish community as I did in the American one. And when I had finished growing up, although I was counted as an American Jew, I still did not feel like American Jewish culture included me. G.B. could have been describing the Epsteins when she writes “Iranian Jews do not easily mesh with the majority Jewish culture. Those who live in North America feel marginalized: their experience has been that American Jews know nothing about them... The Iranian Jewish diaspora is triggering a re-examination of hegemonic notions of American Jewish identity. Iranian Jews with their own ethnic and cultural tradition are challenging the American Jewish culture that was brought from Eastern Europe and that is presumed to apply to all arriving Jews regardless of their background. This ashkenazi standard for Jews is similar to the WASP standard for assimilation to North American society.”

The issue of cultural hegemony is addressed in an even more dramatic way by South African Sally Frankental. “It is a truism to note that all Jewish communities, in all times and places, reflect the context in which they are located,” she writes. “In the South African case, the segregationist policies of the colonial authorities, the Boer republics, and the Union, followed by the apartheid system of the past fifty years, form the inescapable frame for all who live in South Africa... the disproportionate numbers who arrived from one region, Lithuania, gave the community an unusual degree of homogeneity relative to other diaspora communities. This was reflected in the virtual absence of Hasidism (until the 1970s), in the particular form of Yiddish



spoken, and in a variety of foods and customs particular to Lithuanian Jewry. In addition, the east Europeans' lack of exposure to Reform Judaism meant that Reform or Progressive Judaism was established in South Africa only in 1933, far later than in most diaspora communities." All this, of course, shaped the lives of South African Jewish women.

In reading these papers, I was struck by how many kinds of Jewish women there are, how profoundly we are influenced by our country of origin and the continuity or discontinuity of Jewish life within its borders, and by our experience of such factors as entitlement, dislocation, prejudice and outsider status. History, particularly this century's history, has not treated all Jewish women equally. In writing their papers, some authors – like Katalin Talyigas of Hungary – was reconnecting to and reconstructing the history of Jews in their country for the first time. Others, like Micaela Procaccia, who lives in Rome, is steeped in her history and writes with the surety of long immersion in the past: "In the year 1537, a Roman Jewish working class girl named Lariccia cried for days because of an unwanted match," begins her paper. "The day before the *qiddushin*, or betrothal, a washerwoman named Clemenza heard Lariccia saying to her father: "I do not like this man, nor do I desire him. I refuse him and reject him, nor do I want him." She declared herself to be "the unhappiest of all women," and on the next Shabbat, she told her father that she would not agree to let "the *qiddushin* become *nissu'in*.' Her father then hit her with the butt of a knife."

The biographical section of this volume itself makes for fascinating reading – as much for the wide geographical spectrum represented as for the facts each woman deemed important to include. As different as each woman is, I find much in common with her. It was easy for me to enter into her world.

Although this first HRIJW collection of writing by Jewish women around the world is inevitably uneven and incomplete, it is a respectable beginning. The authors represented here are, in some countries, part of a larger scholarly and cultural project of researching and writing about women's lives; in others, they are pioneers – the first of their kind. In some countries, they have been able to draw on a large body of data and literature; in others, they are themselves creating that data and literature. Ana Lebl from Split (now in Croatia) lives in an aging and relatively poor community of only 100 Jews

with scarce resources; Americans Riv-Ellen Prell and Pamela Nadell enjoy the support of Jewish Studies as well as Women's Studies departments at major American universities. Our Israeli and Latin American contributors bring both these realities into yet another perspective.

Some of the authors chose to spend time reworking their original presentations; others were content to have published what they originally presented. Many have struggled to express themselves in English – their second or third or fourth language. As a writer who has often had to communicate in foreign languages, I admire their pluck; as editor, I hope they forgive my journalistic bias, my many questions, and my inadvertent mistakes. Parts of all their work – even where it represents a starting point – moved and inspired me. I hope it will move and inspire you.

Helen Epstein

October, 1999

JEWISH WOMEN IN CHILE

by Marjorie Agosín

So many times I asked my grandmother, Josefina, if she met other women on her journey across the Andean Range from Neuquen, on the Argentine-Chilean border, to the hilly town of Valparaíso, where she made her home among the rocks and the sea foam. Her memory is frail and she remembers the hardships of the journey and the songs of the muleteers, but not the women. This anecdote is emblematic of the situation of Latin American Jews and especially Jewish women: forgotten in the annals of history,

not included in the national consciousness of society and made to feel like outsiders or distant neighbors. To quote the work of distinguished historian Judith Elkin, “Jews do not figure in the post-independence history of Latin America as currently written. Overlooked by Latin-Americanists as too few and too marginal to affect the areas of development, they have likewise been regarded by North American Jewish scholars as outside the course of Jewish history.” Elkin goes so far as to ask “Is there such an entity as Latin American Jewry?” Yet, we must remember that each republic of the 21 countries is absolutely different, that the Jewish experience in the Latin American republics was diverse and the history of Jewish immigration to Chile is inextricably tied to the politics of anti-Semitism and economics.



I wonder, if I may change the question and ask why such invisibility for the Jews, especially the women, of Latin America? Perhaps the answer lies in their small number: less than one per cent of the population of most Latin American countries. In Chile, Jews barely number 20,000. Yet, even if the numbers are insignificant, Jews have influenced and shaped the destinies of the Latin American countries in the areas of culture and commerce and they exemplify the fact that Latin America is not a monolithic construction of Catholics. The legacy of Spain's inquisitorial past and the difficulty of living in a profoundly Catholic society has made the presence of the Jews and their alliances ambiguous and complex.

Chile occupies an almost anomalous place in the wide spectrum of European Jewry because of its remoteness. The Jewish community has been very small there since the 1800s and the great distance between Chile and the rest of the world resulted in a slower and later emigration. The first identifiable Jew in Chile arrived in the 19th century. His name was Stefan Goldsscak, an engineer from England. The *ashkenazi* Jews at this early stage arrived individually in contrast to *sephardi* communities that arrived as families or in groups and settled in the Araucanian Indian territory of Temuco and called the first *sephardi* community Macedonia. The first Jew born into this community was Enrique Testa; he went on to become Minister of Defense in the Allende years. There are some Araucanian Indians who call themselves Iglesia Israelita and they practice religious rites. Jewish immigration to Chile was slow and intermarriages between *Ashkenazim* and *Sephardim* took place with great hostility. Little is known or has been investigated in the history of the Jewish women of Chile (I found no book-length study) and one can find out the most about Jewish women from archival records only dating from the 1920s in the *Departamento de Estudios Judíos*. The early documents of the *sephardi* women are not documented. Only the men appear in these documents. Most of my research was gathered from *Pasi Programa de Asistencia Israelita* and WISO. The Jewish community has strong leadership from women. There are seven organizations in the country

exclusively dedicated to women's issues and whose directors are women: WISO, Women's Zionist Organization, the Association of Professional Jewish Women, the Ben Gurion School for Higher Education in Santiago and in the provinces, as well as the Hebrew Institute of Viña del Mar and Santiago are all highly visible institutions by women. I would also like to point out Juanita Leibovich, Chile's first woman judge; Sonia Tschorne, Director of the School of Architecture of the Universidad de Chile, Jacqueline Weinstein, Director of the Agency of International Corporation; and Clare Budnik, Director of Public Libraries – all located in the capital of Santiago. Women have had a great impact on the leadership of the Hebrew schools in which I was educated and I must say proudly that the graduates of these schools were considered the best in the nation. The women that ran these schools at first were Eastern and Central Europeans. Starting in the 1960s and 1970s the leadership moved to the hands of the Chilean-born. We must note, that as in most schools of Latin America, there is an ideological definition of these schools and it is very much defined by socialist tendencies. The Hebrew schools have a socialist ideology.

The older generation of Jewish Chilean women, especially the ones born from the 1900s to the 1930s did not occupy public office, but neither did other women at that time. The great wave of women's participation in the public sector began in the 1950s as Chilean women in general entered the work force. Presently, 97% of young Chilean Jewish women are enrolled at university. The participation of Jewish women between the ages of 25 and 44 in the work force is 71%. 82% of the work force today was born in Chile and they have had an important impact in medicine, law and architecture, as well as the arts. Three Jewish women have been appointed judges of MINORS, directors of libraries, and directors of the Commission on the Status of Women. They have also had a very important role in journalism. Frida Modack, for example, was Salvador Allende's press attache. Today she writes for several national and international newspapers and is considered the most important woman journalist in the country. Two Jewish women have, consecutively, headed the School of Architecture.

In spite of the very small number of Jews in today's Chile, women have important leadership roles. Thanks to the progressive politics of Salvador Allende, an unparalleled number of Jewish men and women were able to enter political life. They included Allende's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Volodia Taitelbaum; Defense Minister Enrique Testa; Minister of Education Enrique Kirbe; and Press Attaché Frida Modack. Allende also appointed Lucia Guralnik as the secretary in Chief of the Socialist Party. She committed suicide when her son was murdered by the secret police in 1974. Unfortunately, the participation of so many Jewish intellectuals in Allende's government was looked upon with disdain by the right wing and their propaganda accused Chileans of being involved with Bolshevik commercialism. After Allende's fall, the Jewish community became very divided and I consider this to have been a period of great tension and migratory patterns, similar to the 1930s when the left-wing leader Carlos Vicuña Fuentes wanted to allow more Jews access to Chile while Foreign Minister Miguel Chuchaga opposed this migration. The names of approximately 20 Jewish women can be found on a list of disappeared people in early 1974. One of these women is Dena Arom, a promising young writer who was kidnapped in Argentina during operation Condor. Recently, the Latin American world Jewish community accused Augusto Pinochet of discriminating and persecuting Jews in Chile. After almost 20 years of silence, Chilean Jewish women now occupy a very important and visible place and their art is identifiably very Jewish. One example is the artist Patricia Israel. Her powerfully provocative paintings include versions of Lillith and Eve, and her ethereal invocations

of the *Shejina* and the Prophets make her the most visible Jewish painter of Chile. In the performing arts, actresses Anita Klesky and S'hlomit Baytelman have had an important role in national theaters and in a very small and at the same time extraordinary way they have tried to revive Chilean theater. In the area of literature, the situation of Jewish women is complex. Few writers have identified themselves as Jewish and thus, have not explored their complex hybrid identity – with the exception of Sonia Guralnik and myself. Guralnik came to Chile at the age of ten and began writing in the early 1980s, at the age of 60. Her work, which is not part of the mainstream of Chilean literature, depicts the tribulations of emigration and her life in *La Pensión de la Señora Gittle*. She also wrote an important collection of stories entitled *El Samovar*. To date, she has been unable to find a publisher for *Señora Gittle*.

Sonia Guralnik explores issues of displacement emigration and often the secondary role that women played in the Jewish household at the time of her married life. Chile, by no means, has produced the multifaceted memoirs of Argentine, Mexican and Uruguayan Jewish writers. Veronica Zondek is a Jewish poet inclined to a more abstract and utopian language. She was raised in both Santiago and Jerusalem and returned to Santiago in order to write in Spanish. And yet, both she and Guralnik remain odd, anomalous figures in the very politicized world of Chilean literature. I would also like to mention the work of Lucia Weissert, sculptor of international stature, Lea Klimer, photographer and Lotty Rosenfeld, who has had a very powerful impact during the years of the dictatorship doing *Acciones de Arte* which consisted of painting crosses on the pavement and stars with powerful statements written in them, such as: “*Aquí se tortura.*” These were some of the most daring forces in the resistance movement against the dictatorship. Chilean society until the Pinochet dictatorship was a flourishing artistic community with an important film festival, music and theater. Jewish women had a prominent role as actresses, filmmakers and musicians and integrated themselves in the community. Jewish culture in Chile and, especially in the neighboring Argentina, has survived in spite of political transgressions. We must remember that in both Chile and Argentina, 10% of the disappeared were Jews.

My own story is that I am a Jewish writer who lives in the United States and writes in Spanish. My contribution to this field is the writing of two memoirs dedicated to the lives of my mother and my father and through their lives, not only honoring them, but re-writing and reinserting the little spoken of and the little known life of the Chilean Jews. As a child I would always be asked whether I was Jewish or Chilean and thus, my identity became always conflicted, always a matter of either/or and seldom both.

The history of Jewish women in Chile is both transparent and profoundly complex. The lack of archival records in Santiago's Documentation Centers, the fact that many settlers (such as my own grandmother) changed their names, and Catholic dominance over the country's political affairs shadows the historical record of the country. Nevertheless, the presence of Jewish women is vital in a society that represents itself as homogenous. To speak and act, as well as to create as a Jewish artist and to redefine one's origin has been problematic and enigmatic. A constant hybrid existence where identity is not always so clear.

The constant question whether you are Jewish or Chilean, but never both, is ever present. The voice for Jewish women as a collective is yet to be created. What is most revealing is the fact that Chile has failed to recognize otherness. It is a society unconcerned with pluralism. The Jewish presence reaffirms the need for alternative options and the legitimacy of their contributions to a homogeneous society. The Jewish presence in Chile has forced the country to recognize the outsiders within.

