# Women's Experiences During the Holocaust – New Books in Print

Dalia Ofer and Lenore Weitzman, eds., *Women in the Holocaust,* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998, VII + 402 pp.; Judith Tydor Baumel, *Double Jeopardy: Gender and the Holocaust,* London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1998, XIX, 292 pp.

Reviewed by
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In 1999, for the first time in twenty-nine years of conferences, the Annual Scholars' Conference on the Holocaust and the Churches presented a plenary on women and the Holocaust. As co-chairs of this plenary, Dr. Myrna Goldenberg and I decided to feature recent scholarly books on the subject and to entitle the session "Women's Holocaust History: Books in Print." The occasion was historic beyond the fact that the subject was deemed important enough for a plenary, because, by early 1999, a core of "books in print" had made possible a session with such a title.

While some women's diaries and first-hand accounts have been available in English since the late 1940s and 1950s,[1] in 1998 there was an unprecedented crop of more analytical publications; and even more began to appear in 1999. Two out of the three finalists for the 1998 National Jewish Book Awards in the Holocaust category were about women and gender: *Between Dignity and Despair* by Marion A. Kaplan[2]; and *Women in the Holocaust,* edited by Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman. The Ofer-Weitzman book and another by

[1] For example, Mary Berg, *Warsaw Ghetto: A Diary* (New York: L.B. Fischer,1945); Kitty Hart, *I Am Alive* (London: Abelard-Schumann, 1946); Olga Lengyel, *Five Chimneys: The Story of Auschwitz* (Chicago: Ziff-Davis, 1947); Gisella Perl, *I Was A Doctor At Auschwitz* (New York: International Universities Press, 1948); Anne Frank, *The Diary of a Young Girl* (first published in English in 1952) which was most recently published as *The Diary of a Young Girl: The Definitive Edition* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), and Gerda Weissman Klein, *All But My Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1957), republished in 1992.

[2] Marion A. Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

Judith Tydor Baumel, *Double Jeopardy: Gender and the Holocaust,* are the focus of this review. However, I have also included brief comments about some of the other books on women and the Holocaust that appeared in 1998 and early 1999.

All the books discussed in this review address the specific gender-related questions that make the female experience different from that of the male — although some do so more forcefully than others. They explore whether gender affected women's ability to struggle against the subhuman conditions of degradation, deprivation, terror, and even death, and how being female offered benefits yet also produced liabilities. Among the possible benefits were homemaking and nurturing skills that equipped women to form surrogate families, care for one another, and keep themselves and their living space as clean and hygienic as possible under the circumstances. Liabilities included the difficulty of overcoming inbred modesty and submissiveness.

In addition to gender-related issues, other variables, such as the socio-economic, political, religious, and national backgrounds of the women, as well as their ages and family situations, played a definite role. And the obvious biological differences between men and women, especially with regard to women's reproductive systems and their vulnerability to rape and sexual abuse, were significant factors in the situation.

Writers about women during the Holocaust need to keep in mind that it is not possible to analyze the experiences of women (or men) during the Holocaust without understanding gender issues. There is a need for studies "to reveal the ignored and complex relationship between antisemitism (as a form of racism against Jews) and sexism prior to and during the Holocaust," as Joan Ringelheim has written.[3] "While it appears that antisemitism contains a monolithic view of Jews, in fact it looks at and treats Jews who are male and female quite differently. Our ignorance of these differences creates blind spots in the memories and reconstructions of the Holocaust."

In order to clarify what I mean by the word "gender," I offer two explanations that I consider clear and succinct. Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Ringelheim point out that "for humans, biology becomes important largely as it is

[3]Joan Ringelheim, "Thoughts about Women and the Holocaust," in Roger S. Gottlieb, ed., *Thinking the Unthinkable: Meanings of the Holocaust* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), p. 145.

interpreted by the norms and expectations of human culture and society."[4] In other words, gender is considered the social-political aspect of biological sexual differences. It is a class in which women have a particular status different from that of men, and it cuts through economic class lines and ethnic differentiation. "Woman's biological sexual self is never just that because of the gendered (socialized, culturalized, economized, politicized) relations of patriarchy, which continuously seek to hierarchically differentiate woman from man," in the words of feminist political scientist Zillah Eisenstein.[5] The theoretical assumption behind the new books on women and the Holocaust is that, within the universal suffering of all of the victims of the Holocaust, men and women's experiences were different because of gender.

The essays in *Women in the Holocaust,* edited by Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman, contain a broad geographic scope and range of experiences, with the focus on the women as their common denominator. This book is the outgrowth of an unprecedented conference on women and the Holocaust organized by Ofer and Weitzman at Hebrew University in 1995. The combination of Ofer's expertise as a historian of the Holocaust at Hebrew University, and Weitzman's, as a feminist sociologist at George Mason University, works well to balance historical accuracy with an American understanding of feminist social theory. They write in their introduction:

> When we undertake gender analysis, we typically look at the relative positions of men and women in the social structure (their occupations, wealth, or political power, for example); the cultural definitions and expectations of the two sexes; and the differences in how men and women experience their lives (p. 2).

As this is an anthology, the emphasis on gender analysis varies with the background of the authors and their individual sensitivity to these issues. On one hand, chapters by such scholars as Marion Kaplan, Myrna Goldenberg, Sarah Horowitz, Joan Ringelheim, Gisela Bock, and Weitzman, who are known for their ground-breaking work related to women and gender, strongly define how gender played a role in Holocaust experiences. In some of the

[4]See Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, eds., *Woman, Culture, and Society*, (Stanford University Press, 1974), "Introduction,"p.4.
[5] Zillah Eisenstein, *Feminism and Sexual Equality* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984), p. 150.

other chapters, however, the analysis is less overt, and one sometimes has to read “between the lines” in order to draw her or his own analytical conclusions regarding the role of gender. It is to the credit of the co-editors that they included a broad range of views. The one exception is author Lawrence Langer, who concludes that gender differences are not as important as other factors, but uses the term “gender” to simply mean men and women, rather than the editors’ definition of a hierarchy of social differences.

For each of the sections, the editors provide an introduction that also serves as a summary. This volume is rich in the variety of topics addressed, with survivors and scholars covering gender-related experiences preceding World War II, in Polish ghettos, in the resistance and rescue, and in labor and concentration camps. The book is divided into these four sections. In the section entitled “Before the War,” the Holocaust and the role of women are put into historical context by Paula Hyman, comparing gender and the Jewish family in pre-war Western and Eastern Europe; Gerson Bacon, writing on Jewish women in inter-war Poland; Marion Kaplan on Jewish women in pre-war Germany; Daniel Blatman presenting a detailed account of women in the Jewish Labor Bund; and Gisela Bock on non-Jewish women in Germany.

Kaplan’s chapter, which is based on her prize-winning book, details how women, grounded in neighborhood and household activities, began to sense that they and their families had been turned into pariahs. Regarding *Kristallnacht*, the “November Pogrom” in her words, she writes that women’s recollections were of flying feathers, symbolic of their destroyed households, rather than of broken glass. Afterward, women took on new roles. They were crucial in arranging to free their husbands from concentration camps and, sometimes, in organizing their families’ subsequent emigration.

The section is generally well integrated and coherent, with, for example, Blatman quoting Hyman and Hyman quoting Kaplan. Bock’s excellent analysis of “Ordinary Women in Nazi Germany,” however, has at least as much to say about the war years as the pre-war era. As all of the other chapters and sections in the book concern only Jewish women, I imagine that there was no better place for her fine contribution, but the co-editors would have done well to warn readers that this chapter overreached their time delineation. As

Blatman says of the pre-war period, “My firm conviction is that the two eras are connected. It would be a mistake to regard the Holocaust period, no matter how unique its horrors, as somehow detached from the rest of history” (p. 64).

In the section on “Life in the Ghettos,” we see a clear difference in the approaches between survivors and scholars, even when the survivor is a scholar herself. Liza Chapnik, a survivor and resistance fighter who has a Ph.D. in foreign languages, wrote a personal account that is anecdotal. On the other hand, Dalia Ofer’s discussion of gender in the Warsaw ghetto (based on a study done in the ghetto by Cecilya Slepak) and Michal Unger’s account of women in the Lodz ghetto are analytical. As always, Ida Fink is brilliantly able to sum up the ghetto situation in two and a half pages, in a fictionalized and previously published story entitled “The Key Game.”[6]

In the introduction to “Resistance and Rescue,” the co-authors offer a broad definition of resistance that includes spiritual resistance and defying the Nazis in any way possible. Bronka Klibanski, a survivor and former archivist at Yad Vashem, was in the underground in Bialystok with Liza Chapnik. Although her account is personal and not analytical, she presents important evidence about women as leaders in the resistance. Weitzman, on the other hand, in her “Living on the Aryan Side in Poland,” offers a scholarly account, based on interviews, written testimonies from the Yad Vashem Archives, and secondary sources. Another sociologist writing in this section, survivor Nechama Tec, writes about women among the forest partisans and concludes that both old traditions and new arrangements “shaped the lives and destinies of men and women differently” (p. 231). Historian Renée Poznanski, an expert on the Holocaust in France, writes about women in the French underground and offers an insightful analysis of why their role was not better recognized. Finally, Yehuda Bauer, one of the most respected Holocaust historians, writes about Gisi Fleischmann, who played a major role in the Zionist leadership and the Judenrat in Slovakia. Although Bauer does not usually approach history from a feminist perspective, he acknowledges in his conclusion that “gender studies provide us with an additional perspective on a case like this” (p.263).

[6] English translation first published in 1987 by Pantheon Books.

While the section on labor camps and concentration camps is filled with rich material, the introduction is somewhat problematic. Ofer and Weitzman make a statement that should have been worded more carefully in a book about women in the Holocaust: “After the pogrom of November 9-11, 1938, the concentration camps were packed with German Jews” (p.267). However, the camps were, in fact, packed with German Jewish *men*. This is an important gender distinction that needs to be emphasized and not glossed over in a volume that strives to demonstrate that Jewish men should not be considered the norm for all Jews (e.g., see Kaplan, pp. 46-47 in this volume). Likewise, in mentioning the selection process upon arrival at Auschwitz, it should have been emphasized that mothers, rather than fathers, went to the gas chambers with their young children. Furthermore, Ravensbrück, the only major concentration camp that the Nazis created exclusively for women, is not even mentioned.

In this section, survivors Lidia Rosenfeld Vago, Felicja Karay, and Ruth Bondy, who in various ways have all devoted themselves to Holocaust education, present graphic testimonies about women and gender issues in camps. The section also includes chapters by Myrna Goldenberg, Sarah Horowitz, and Lawrence Langer, who are professors of English and Holocaust literature, and Joan Ringelheim, a pioneer on women and the Holocaust. In examining the memoirs of three survivors, Goldenberg finds common denominators in their sexual humiliation and their social bonding as women and restates her belief that “hundreds of memoirs written by women survivors document ‘different horrors within the same Hell’” (p. 327). Ringelheim sums up her chapter in a similar manner:

> If in the gas chambers or before the firing squads all Jews seemed alike to the Nazis, the path to this end was not always the same for women and men. The end — namely, annihilation or death — does not describe or explain the process (p. 350).

And Horowitz, speaking of the experiences of a female survivor, writes:

> The bringing together of both sets of details — one particular to women, one relevant to all Jewish inhabitants of the camps — implies that

survivors' reflections are inevitably gendered, and also that gender does not constitute the totality of one's experience (pp. 370-71).

The only discordant voice is that of Lawrence Langer, who uses survivor testimony to try to demonstrate that "gendered behavior" played a "severely diminished role" (p. 351). Throughout his chapter, he uses the term "gender" to mean the male or female sex, as opposed to the social relations between men and women. His examples, moreover, are all biological and deal with motherhood, as if this were the only relevant aspect of womanhood. "I have found little evidence that mothers behaved or survived better than fathers," he wrote (p. 362). Perhaps this is because the mothers who went to the gas chambers with their small children were unable to leave evidence or testimony.

One-third of the twenty-one chapters are personal recollections by women survivors who are themselves scholars or professional writers. The breadth and depth of this book make it an invaluable tool for those who are integrating the study of women and gender during the Holocaust into their personal or classroom readings on the Holocaust.

Judith Tydor Baumel, who now teaches at the Department of Jewish History at Bar-Ilan University, is the author of another book published in 1998, *Double Jeopardy: Gender and the Holocaust*. Much of the material in this book enriches our understanding of gender and the Holocaust, and one wishes that Baumel's publisher had provided her with an editor who could have better shaped the material into a coherent package. Although this collection of essays is written entirely by Baumel, like the Ofer-Weitzman book its chapters do not all approach the issue of gender with equal strength. Perhaps this is because — with the exception of the introduction and one chapter — all of the essays included in the book originally appeared elsewhere; sometimes in Women's Studies' journals, but more often in general historical, or Jewish and Israel Studies' publications (Baumel, pp. xviii-xix). Baumel states that "several of the essays included in this book originally appeared in historical journals or conference proceedings and have been updated and expanded for inclusion in the present volume" (p. xv), but then lists all but one of them as having already been published. Furthermore, poor editing resulted in a lack of

updating in some cases. For example, in her 1998 book, she refers to a book published in 1993 as “in print for only a year” (p. 61).

After an introduction and a discussion about the history of publications on women and the Holocaust, Baumel divides her book into sections on wartime interaction, heroism, postwar life and representation, and education. Some of her analyses make major, unprecedented contributions to addressing the issue of gender; for example, her chapter on a gender analysis of the memorialization of Hannah Senesz and the other paratroopers, and another on the representation of women in Israeli war memorials. A chapter entitled “The Heroism of Hannah Senesz” provides an insightful political and historical analysis of the ill-fated parachutists’ mission and how it has been remembered in Israel, but the question of gender is not emphasized. However, in the next chapter (the one new chapter in the book), “The Parachutists’ Mission from a Gender Perspective,” there is a significant analysis about both the mission and its official memory. For example, we learn that the British army provided more life insurance to the males than to the three female parachutists and that the men were considered soldiers, but the women were considered spies. Baumel concludes that Senesz is remembered as a “daughter-virgin” and her colleague, Haviva Reik, as a “sacrificing mother” (p. 195).

The chapter on the portrayal of women in Israeli Holocaust memorials focuses on the representation of women in the Carmiel memorial park, Yad Vashem, Beit Lohamei Ha-Getta’ot, and other remembrance sites in Israel. Baumel brings examples of women memorialized in four ways: as mothers, warriors (resisters), virgins, and either weeping or elderly. She concludes that the image of the mother is the most prevalent, stating:

> While it is not the norm for Israeli Holocaust memorials to portray male figures primarily as fathers, they are portrayed in over a dozen different situations: in the process of forced labor, being tortured, praying, being transported, marching, fighting, protecting, being murdered. This multiplicity of roles has little parallel in the iconographic representation of women in Israeli Holocaust memorials ( p. 225).

This chapter is an important contribution to understanding how gender affects memorialization in Israel.

Nevertheless, the book is not without problems. In the introduction, there is accidental use of both Nazi and sexist terminology, which should have been edited before the book was published. Jewish women are described "by nature of their race" (p. 3), and this Nazi terminology is not placed in quotation marks to signify that the author does not accept a racial definition of Judaism (which she obviously does not). On the next page, when referring to male and female Jews, she uses the term "German-born brethren" — terminology that is not appropriate in a book that claims to be "illuminating the factors which shaped the lives of Jewish women during and after the Holocaust" (p. x). In general, by trying to use this introduction to link all of the following chapters, the author sometimes makes blanket statements that could confuse the less knowledgeable reader. For example, she writes, "Throughout 1943 and 1944 hundreds of thousands of Jews from Italy, Norway, Denmark, Greece and Hungary were exterminated, primarily in Auschwitz" (p. 24). If one knows the statistics and chronology, one can decipher this statement, but lumping these five countries and these two years together to arrive at a total of "hundreds of thousands of Jews" is misleading.

The book has a limited but valuable overview of the literature and historiography of women, gender, and the Holocaust in an essay on "Gender and Family Studies of the Holocaust" and in another entitled "Women's Holocaust Literature." Again, a more careful editor of these two earlier essays could have combined them to make one more coherent chapter. There is some repetition and no clear reason for making a second short chapter about "literature." Baumel is not referring here to fiction or fictionalized accounts (which she does not address), but to memoirs and "academic research." As the first chapter includes a great deal of information about studies on children (without analyzing the differences between boys' and girls' experiences), it might have been more relevant to omit this extraneous material and combine the two chapters into one and, thus, more sharply address the question of gender.

Furthermore, there seems to be some editorial confusion. In the first chapter on books, the last subtitle is "Publications of the 1970s," but the discussion covers books published up until 1991. In the second chapter, there is a style

change, and some of the notes appear in parentheses in the text (e.g., pp. 60-61), as opposed to the endnotes that are the book's general style. Such style inconsistencies, as well as a number of typographical and grammatical errors throughout the book, should have been corrected before the book was published. While Baumel obviously could not include any of the other books mentioned here (as they were being written at the same time as her own book), the reader should be aware of the abundance of other books on gender and the Holocaust that were published in 1998.

The inappropriately named section on "Wartime Interaction" — as the Holocaust was not the war — contains two essays about a group of Jewish women, the Zehnnerschaft, who stayed together and supported each other in a series of concentration camps. Again, there is some repetition, because the two essays deal with the same general subject. The first is about the interaction among the women and offers some interesting, although unproved, insights about women's support groups during the Holocaust. The second focuses on the three women who were the group's leaders.

The third essay deals with the story of the ninety-three Beth Jacob girls who may have committed suicide rather than become prostitutes for the Nazis. The authorship of this essay is unclear; it seems to have been co-authored by Jacob J. Schacter, according to some of the footnotes, yet he is never credited as the co-author. Unfortunately, this essay misses the opportunity to "illuminate the factors which shaped the lives of Jewish women" during the Holocaust. Instead of discussing the gender implications of this story, Baumel discusses whether it actually happened and how it was memorialized. The same story could have been used to discuss gender and the Holocaust, for example, by analyzing the different vulnerabilities of men and women. In most cases, rape and forced prostitution were inflicted upon women rather than men, and there is no attempt in this essay to deal with the issue of gender.

The final chapter, on teaching through the use of *The Diary of Anne Frank,* does not seem to have any place in a book on gender and the Holocaust. Other than the obvious fact that Anne was a girl, there is no discussion or analysis of gender in this chapter.

Despite these problems, however, the chapters on Hannah Senesz and memorialization make the book an important addition to the new analytical literature on women and gender during the Holocaust. If one is knowledgeable enough to read between the lines and insert one's own gender analysis into chapters such as the one about the Beth Jacob girls, one can benefit all the more.

Other noteworthy books on women and the Holocaust published in 1998-99 include the aforementioned *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* by Marion Kaplan (reviewed in *Yad Vashem Studies*, vol. 27); *Mothers, Sisters, Resisters: Oral Histories of Women Who Survived the Holocaust*, edited by Brana Gurewitsch (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998); *Women's Holocaust Writing: Memory and Imagination* by Lillian Kremer (Lincoln University of Nebraska Press, 1999); *Sisters in Sorrow: Voices of Care in the Holocaust* by Roger Ritvo and Diane Plotkin (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1998); and *Women and the Holocaust* edited by Esther Fuchs (Blue Ridge Summit: University Press of America, 1999).

Kaplan, whose chapter in the Ofer-Weitzman volume is a precursor to her new book, is also the author of *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class: Women, Family, and Identity in Imperial Germany* and *The Jewish Feminist Movement in Germany*. In her latest book, Kaplan, the daughter of refugees from Nazi Germany, wrote that she "wanted to fill in the missing stories, to try to understand how Jews like [her] parents grasped the meaning of Nazism."[7] Kaplan's account of the intimate everyday life of Jews in Germany continues through their ultimate despair in forced labor and then deportation to concentration camps. She also presents cases of the alternative, life-threatening risks of living in hiding in Germany. "The social death of Jews and German indifference to their increasingly horrific plight were absolute prerequisites for the 'Final Solution,'" she concludes.[8]

Gurewitsch has said of *Mothers, Sisters, Resisters: Oral Histories of Women Who Survived the Holocaust* that one of her prime purposes in editing it was to give women their own voice in relating Holocaust history. She has certainly

[7] Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair*, p. viii.
[8] Ibid., p. 229.

accomplished this. One of the greatest strengths of this book is Gurewitsch's rigorous verification of the oral histories that she presents. She used documentary sources, first-person accounts in *Yizkor* books, and other oral histories or personal memoirs, as well as secondary sources, in order to corroborate and confirm the twenty-five oral histories that she compiled and edited. The footnotes, in which the verification process is documented, will be extremely useful to researchers and are an indispensable part of the book. Gurewitsch uses for her book testimonies from the Oral History Archives of the Brooklyn Center for Holocaust Studies, Documentation and Research, which, in 1990, merged with the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, in Manhattan.

At times she seems to have missed opportunities to apply gender analysis to help the reader better understand the role that gender played in these women's stories. Again, one often has to read between the lines, using his or her knowledge of gender issues, in order to interpret these oral histories. However, Gurewitsch does a superb job of giving each of the women her own voice, and all of the stories of mothers, sisters, and resisters can be used as springboards for discussions about how men's and women's experiences differed during the Holocaust.

Lillian Kremer's new book, *Women's Holocaust Writing: Memory and Imagination*, is a careful literary criticism of American Holocaust writing by and about women. In her detailed and profound introduction, she analyzes why it is important to study Holocaust literature from a gendered approach. She differentiates between the works of the American-born authors in her book, Cynthia Ozick, Susan Fromberg Schaeffer, Norma Rosen, and Marge Piercy, and those who lived through the Holocaust, Ilona Karmel, Elzbieta Ettinger, and Hana Demetz. In addition to her expertise in literature, Kremer displays a substantial knowledge of writings in psychology, history, and women's studies, all of which she employs in her literary analysis. She also interviewed all seven of the authors whose works she studied, and this has given both Kremer and her readers a better understanding of why they write as they do. "Collective memory is realized through reading histories and testimonies. It is

also achieved through subjecting the documentary to the artistic imagination," she concludes (p. 237).

*Sisters in Sorrow: Voices of Care in the Holocaust,* edited by Roger Ritvo and Diane Plotkin, has a specific focus. It presents twelve narratives, eight of which deal with women's experiences as caregivers during and immediately after the Holocaust. The other chapters are related to women and illness. W*omen and the Holocaust*, an anthology edited by Esther Fuchs, was not available before this article was written, but should also contribute to the growing core of books that help us better understand the question of gender and the Holocaust. Its wide-ranging chapters deal with such topics as Edith Stein, lesbians, a feminist theology of Holocaust testimonies, women in Holocaust films, and Israeli daughters of survivors.

It is so critical that we have books in print and more coming out that enable us to analyze the experiences of women during the Holocaust. All we will have in the future are these books (or electronic versions of them), and so they will become more and more valuable as time goes by and the Holocaust completely fades from the personal memory of living survivors and others. Scholars started very late to address the special gendered experiences of women, because even when the Holocaust finally became a "legitimate" scholarly and literary subject, gender and women's studies were still in their initial stages.

It took some time to bring the two areas together, and now scholars are being criticized for doing so. One of the most blatant and crude examples is the article by Gabriel Schoenfeld entitled "Auschwitz and the Professors," in the June 1998 issue of *Commentary*. In this article, he accuses those who are researching women, gender, and the Holocaust of having "counseled, nudged, prodded, and rebuked" survivors until they believed that gender issues were important in concentration camps. He believes that all we will accomplish is "to sever Jewish women, in their own minds, from their families as well as from the larger community."

Those working on this facet of the Holocaust (including the authors mentioned here) know that gender — the social, political, and economic differences between men and women in society — indeed played a role during the

Holocaust. Furthermore, we know that studying and writing about these differences and this aspect is a valid and necessary exercise in learning about the totality of the Holocaust. We can begin to learn about the enormity of the Holocaust only if we approach it from many angles and analyze its many components.

We have really only scratched the surface, and much work still has to be done. There are a number of books in progress, both in Israel and in the United States; however, unfortunately, those working in this field still sometimes feel defensive. In one way or another, and sometimes without realizing it, most writers on the subject of women, gender, and the Holocaust begin or end their work with a justification or apologia for bringing up the issue — as though they might be diminishing the Holocaust by looking at it with gendered eyes. For example, Ofer and Weitzman begin their introduction by asking, “Why women? Why should a book on the Holocaust — which targeted all Jews for annihilation irrespective of their sex or age or any other social characteristic — focus on women?” (p. 1). And, in her conclusion, Baumel begins by asking her readers, “Is it possible to examine the Holocaust from a gender perspective without diminishing its Jewish significance?” (p. 259).

While great strides have been made in the field, scholars still seem a bit uncomfortable when writing about women and gender. Perhaps this, too, is a gender issue. We are, as yet, by no means living in an egalitarian world, and, thus, it cannot be taken for granted that a gendered approach to the Holocaust — or even to a less emotionally explosive subject — is universally acceptable. Scholars will know that we have made genuine inroads only when we no longer have to defend our work, when a gendered approach to the Holocaust and the inclusion of women in history is simply the norm.

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