
BOOK REVIEWS/COMPTES RENDUS

Diamond, Etan. *And I Will Dwell in Their Midst: Orthodox Jews in Suburbia*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2000. 159 pp.

Canadians know that the Toronto metropolitan area has become one of the more important Diaspora cities, playing a significant role in global Jewish networks. Because of the number and variety of Jews, Toronto offers many stories useful for understanding the contemporary Jewish condition. Diamond's book is one of those stories. Its aim, however, is not to present a descriptive account of Orthodox Jews in Toronto, but to use the Toronto experience as an example of a larger phenomenon, the successful adaptation of Orthodox Jews to suburbia. Diamond posits a clash between "the restrictiveness of traditionalist religion" and "suburban society's emphasis on lifestyle choices." (p. 5) Using the Toronto experience as a case study, he claims that Orthodox Judaism has "proved flexible enough in its structure and adaptable enough in its culture" (p. 10) to overcome the clash.

That Orthodox neighbourhoods have been established in various waves of suburban development in the Toronto area can hardly be contested. But it is questionable whether these neighbourhoods constitute some kind of accommodation to "suburban society." It is possible to find suburban households suffused with individualistic values of self-expression and self-fulfilment, but these are far from the whole story. Suburbs are also full of communities—Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, and others—whose members are committed to living by group norms and passing them on to their children, and households where there is much debate over the cross-pressures of individualistic and group values.

Imposing the concept of "suburban society" on this socio-cultural variety has a quaint sound to it, reminiscent of 1950s speculation about the novelty of masses of single-family

residential neighbourhoods built around automobile use. The value placed upon individual choice is really characteristic of modernity—a heritage of the Enlightenment. The debate over how to balance individual choice with group standards has been a continuing one in modern times rather than anything specifically geographic.

Despite this conceptual confusion, Diamond has identified the outlines of the history of Orthodox suburbanization in Toronto from the latter half of the 20th century to the threshold of the 21st, complete with some fascinating photos and easy-to-read anecdotes. He notes the importance of Bathurst Street, identifies and differentiates among six waves of Orthodox suburbanization, and explains the importance of *eruv*, the Sabbath boundary. He is particularly interested in that segment of the Orthodox community that combines ritual correctness with secular careers, noting a generational trend away from business to the professions. The challenges of educating the next generation and dealing with the inroads of consumerism are each accorded a chapter. The chapter on consumerism is about North America rather than Toronto, but it raises an important everyday issue. The availability of a wide range of kosher foods in supermarkets and restaurants is seen, Diamond notes, as a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it is a sign that piety does not mean a monotonous diet, and it is a symbol of respect for Orthodox Jews in the marketplace; on the other hand, it signals the potential growth within Orthodoxy of the values of consumer society.

Diamond's account of the success of the Orthodox in the suburbs is weakened by the absence of some data and the misleading nature of others. Because Orthodox identification and affiliation are minority choices, relationships with the wider Jewish community are of considerable significance. In his narrative of the movement of Orthodox synagogues from the central city to the suburbs, three major synagogues that affiliated with the Conservative movement when they moved are ignored. The detailed chapter on Orthodox education

contains a long paragraph complaining about the unwillingness of Jewish federations in the United States to provide financial support for Orthodox day schools. There is no acknowledgement that UJA/Federation of Toronto devotes about half of its local expenditures to Jewish education, with more tuition support given to parents of children in Orthodox day schools than to those of any other movement. This represents a considerable investment by the community at large in Orthodox education.

One also has to ask about the limitations of using the Toronto example to make a general point about the success of Orthodox life in North-American suburbs. Its high percentage of immigrants makes Toronto different from almost all American cities but like other Canadian cities. This applies to the Jewish population as well. Diamond is aware of this, but does not consider the possibility that it weakens his argument. Maybe it does not matter that there are many first- and second-generation Jews among the Orthodox in Toronto suburbs and few among the Orthodox in America, or that the many Israeli and Russian immigrants to Toronto suburbs come from settings where non-Orthodox Judaism is little known. As well, Toronto, like other Canadian cities, differs from American cities in its lack of a rooted, melting-pot ideology. Again, Diamond is aware that ethno-religious groups in Canada have a history of separation through strong social boundaries. Canadian culture has traditionally supported the legitimacy (although not the equality) of distinct ways of life, especially in the sphere of home and family. The United States may be “catching up” as a culturally fragmented society, but it stacks the deck to use a case study with Toronto’s cultural heritage as representative of a wider North-American phenomenon.

Finally, outside scholars are vulnerable to missing community nuances, which may be important, and Diamond is no exception. Citing the “Toronto Orthodox Community Directory” as his source, a map (p. 59) says that there was one Orthodox synagogue downtown in 1995. It would not have taken much research to find that the directory is incorrect and

that there were four. Central-city Orthodoxy is not gone from Toronto, and it, too, is changing in some interesting ways.

This book is a challenge to scholars of Canadian Jewry. There are more interesting stories here than we have investigated, particularly in exploring the meaning that Judaism has in our lives. May we be blessed with colleagues and students who go forth and study!

Stuart Schoenfeld
York University

Feldman, Jan. *Lubavitchers as Citizens: a Paradox of Liberal Democracy*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2003. 212 pp.

Professor Feldman's central issue in this political/ethnographic study is the question of whether the members of Lubavitch communities in Brooklyn, Montreal, and elsewhere in North America are fully legitimate citizens of the United States and Canada. Since their values and life style differ considerably from those of other Americans and Canadians, one may ask whether they uphold democracy in communities where they have the numbers to influence politics, whether they ultimately represent a subversive element undermining genuine democracy. In a larger sense, the question is whether in a healthy democracy an individual or group may have a life style quite different from that of other citizens and yet support democratic practices and a democratic polity. As a further rationale for this study, Feldman observes that 'The "Chassidic" groups of Montreal tend to be understudied by analysts of the Canadian Jewish community [which is arguable], and underrated as a political force. Just as in the United States, it is surprising how many Canadian studies of the Jewish community neglect to even mention the presence of Chassidim in their midst.' (p. 64)

In exploring these questions, the author devotes about half her book to describing the history and culture of the Lubavitch or Chabad communities, which she estimates as