

«Immigrant» ayant été toujours «émigrant» dans le vocabulaire de Fuks, sa description biographique aussi a été sans doute conçue «depuis l'intérieur de la culture yiddish vers l'extérieur, et non pas l'inverse», comme Pierre Anctil le constate avec justesse (p.24). Fuks, en classant et reclassant ses innombrables fiches, n'aura pas beaucoup songé aux lecteurs non-yiddishophones, encore moins aux chercheurs d'un pays extrême-oriental. N'empêche que son travail, ainsi traduit, vient de renaître pour devenir une source inépuisable aussi pour quelqu'un d'«extérieur» comme moi, littéraire japonais francophone, éternel débutant en hébreu et non (encore) yiddishophone.

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Heilman, Samuel C. *Sliding to the Right*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006. 363 pp.

Now that Orthodox Judaism has been recognized by many as the strongest “branch” of the North-American Jewish tree, and not, as once, a dying stump from another time and place, it is increasingly being studied and discussed as much as the Conservative movement used to be. Samuel Heilman's new book, while its evidence comes mainly from the United States, is of relevance to any consideration of Orthodoxy in Canada. It follows his numerous earlier contributions to the social scientific understanding of traditional Jews on this continent and their “worlds,” which had formerly been unknown to outsiders.

Heilman summarizes his thesis this way (p. 58): “In what has become a struggle to determine the character and direction of American Orthodoxy, the question is who will lead in the future. If the early aftermath of the Holocaust made it seem that the modernists would come out ascendant, the trends now seem to have switched.” He describes two “camps” in contemporary Jewish Orthodoxy, which compete for the “soul” of the younger generation not yet fixed in their religious life

style. Who are these rivals, and what does each claim to be the “correct” way?

One group (culture?) is “at home” in modern (or post-modern) America, accepting the blessings and duties of middle-class life as it is for most, but making sure that halacha (Jewish law) is maintained in their own lives and transmitted to their offspring. Other than head coverings, their clothing is standard-issue American, and their professions mostly require university study and scientific or professional credentials. Their children attend all-day Jewish schools, where both their Jewish and secular studies are taught with (nearly) equal seriousness. They have a (kosher) turkey dinner on Thanksgiving; they vote in elections and a few run for public office.

The other group is in permanent “strangerhood,” geographically located in modern society but not integrated into it. It strives to preserve fully what it believes to be true “Yiddishkeit” (Jewishness) by rejecting TV, movies, university degrees, and much else that could threaten its way of life. The central institution of this group is the yeshiva, the Talmudic academy, which seeks to teach the culture of Jewish eastern Europe a century or two ago as the only legitimate model for living Jewishly today. Typically, males wear black suits and white shirts at all times. Families are large, but income is often limited. Yiddish is their language, and they usually speak English with a strong accent, although born in the United States or Canada. No turkey dinner here!

Heilman tells us that the “modern Orthodox” way dominated 50 or 60 years ago, but now has lost ground to “frummer” (more traditional) people and institutions. Black is the only acceptable colour for men’s hats and other garb, while more and more young Jews stay in yeshiva in Israel or in North America for long years and do not obtain post-secondary training. Affluent grandparents help out economically, and their support is welcome. Anything remotely connected with American culture and values is avoided, and the ideal life is that of yeshiva faculty. Doctors and lawyers are not the occupational

goal, because those paths require extensive secular education.

What has happened between the post-war, “Baby-Boom” era and the last years of the past century to cause such a major shift in the perspective of Orthodox Jews? Heilman’s explanations can be summarized under these 4 headings:

- (a) Synagogue and teaching rabbis used to be “*Torah im Derech Eretz*” men, who believed in a “synthesis” between Torah and modern knowledge. Their successors, however, were schooled at Torah-only institutions, such as the Lakewood, New Jersey yeshiva; they did not attend university, nor did they want their students to do so (pp. 34-43).
- (b) In yeshivot, more young, Orthodox males and sometimes females (in separate institutions) have been continuing their Talmud studies through and beyond high school. There these young people have been intensively exposed to the attitudes of American- and Israeli-trained faculty, who increasingly propound the *charedi* or Torah-only perspective. “Modern Orthodox” youth become doctors and lawyers, not yeshiva scholars (pp. 101-08).
- (c) American culture has changed greatly during the past generation. In the early postwar years, mainstream values and norms in the United States and Canada were quite close to traditional Torah values and norms. During the 1970s and after, however, “conventional” morality was jettisoned by many in academia and the middle class as rigid, homophobic, misogynist, and obsolete. The gap between Orthodox Jews and others in the larger society widened, and synthesizing traditional and contemporary culture became more difficult. Orthodox Jews now sought moral stability in their own community and not in the host society (pp. 47-57).
- (d) Non-Orthodox Jewish denominations followed American trends to a considerable degree and pulled

away from Jewish tradition. Women in the clergy, the acceptance of gays in most aspects of Jewish life, accepting as Jewish those with a Jewish father rather than a Jewish mother, and other innovations, all served to distance Orthodox Jews from their non-Orthodox peers (pp. 52-54).

Heilman also suggests other changes and challenges, such as “off-the-*derech*” youth who leave Orthodoxy (pp. 112, 163-65). He notes that observant Jews who are many decades removed from pre-Holocaust Jewish life have an idealistic but inaccurate understanding of the “good old days.” They are trying to restore a traditional European- Jewish culture that idealized image. And he talks about poverty prevention (chapter 5). Despite suspicion and hostility from yeshiva spokesmen, many younger *charedi* men and women do attend courses at Touro College’s Orthodox-students-only alternative to the higher-education settings found elsewhere. Touro’s idea is to preserve undisturbed the perspectives and life style of *charedi* students, while giving them some employment-relevant skills. How accurate are Heilman’s observations? In my view, very accurate; it offers readers an HD picture of the issues and people discussed. Although the concepts and data might well have been presented more compendiously, Heilman’s descriptions and excurses, including analysis of internet Jewish humour (chapter 6) and wall posters (chapter 7), make the book accessible to “outsiders” and document his arguments. And they may help bewildered modern Orthodox parents understand how their son, Seymour, became Shloimie, and why he has rejected college for a *charedi* yeshiva.

No one can predict what North-American Orthodox Jewry will be like in 2050, but *Sliding to the Right* can at least help us to understand some of the forces and factions which are shaping the contemporary landscape and on which the future of diaspora Judaism will, in part, depend. For those concerned about the Jewish future, Heilman’s book may suggest some

policy guidelines, although his own conclusion is rather modest, reminding readers that the future is as unpredictable as the present was half a century ago. "Orthodox Jews in America," he says, "will . . . reinvent themselves and their movement again and again, generation after generation" (p. 305).

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Laverdure, Paul . *Sunday in Canada: The Rise and Fall of the Lord's Day*. Yorkton, Saskatchewan: Gravelbooks, 2004. 253pp.

In 1905, Great Britain passed the Aliens Act, which imposed heavy restrictions on immigration. In this manner, the British government tried to lower the growing number of foreign immigrants, many of them eastern-European Jews, who had entered the country in the previous decades. A year later, Canada passed the Lord's Day Act, which was meant to promote a Sunday Sabbath imbued with tranquility and spirituality on which businesses were closed and secular commercial amusements of all kinds were suspended. At first glance, these two Acts have little in common apart from their timing. In *Sunday in Canada*, however, Paul Laverdure demonstrates that the moving spirit behind the latter had a great deal to do with the former.

The main group spearheading this drive for legislation in Canada was a Protestant group known as the Lord's Day Alliance. This organization had existed since the 1880s, and from its inception had been pushing the Canadian government to introduce a bill making Sunday Sabbath observance mandatory. The group made little headway, however, until it infused its spiritual rhetoric with a mixture of Canadian nationalism and anti-immigration xenophobia more characteristic of the supporters of the British Aliens Act. The threat of foreign immigration dovetailed with threats to the legal, moral, and social order epitomized, in the eyes of the Alliance, by desecration of the Sunday Sabbath. Proponents of the Canadian act railed against the tragedy of "our law...being so flagrantly broken;