

women, and economic stability have converged, so that congregants no longer defer to rabbis because of their intellectual attainments or position. And that affects the derivative rebbetzin's role. One major change Rubin Schwartz highlights by citing articles from the 1950s which "reflected the sense of camaraderie...among American rebbetzins" (p.173) and others from the 1980s which show the fault lines between Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform to have irreparably widened. Congregational expectations of rebbetzins changed drastically in these decades, depending on whether the community was Orthodox, Conservative, or Reform. Rubin Schwartz notes that interviews and other research indicate that only the Orthodox continue to have expectations of their rebbetzins.

This book brings the rebbetzin role to the center of thinking about American religious leadership, though she suggests that the importance of the role peaked in the mid-twentieth century, and that today, at least within Conservative and Reform congregations, its influence has eroded. The author has provided scholars of Jewish women's religious history with a solid starting point from which to explore further this role among North American Jews. Her research also invites thought about the role of the rebbetzin outside the American milieu, in communities where rabbis' wives continue to labour alongside their husbands nurturing congregants and their families

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Shapiro, Faydra L. *Building Jewish Roots: The Israel Experience*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006. 226 pp.

A recurrent theme in Jewish history has been the question of maintaining Jewish cultural identity while Jews integrate into the societies in which they live. Today, this theme is at the forefront of Jewish interest as a result of the successful integration of young Jewish adults into North American societies. Their high

mobility and social involvement raise concerns about their increasing detachment from Jewish roots and the continuity of Jewish tradition.

Jewish intellectuals and community leaders are searching for ways to ensure the survival of Judaism as a distinct cultural entity in contemporary America and often define the present situation as a “crisis.” That crisis is frequently attributed to the failure of the Jewish educational system to transmit meaningful Jewish values to young people. As a result, it is argued, they are ignorant, rootless, and alienated from their own heritage.

One of the popular quick fixes for the problem is the “Israel experience,” i.e., study programmes in Israel for American-Jewish youth. *Building Jewish Roots* is an ethnographic study of one such programme, Livnot u-lehibanot (Hebrew for “building and being built”). The book describes an educational experience whose declared uniqueness lies in “offering a vision of Judaism that might speak to the questioning individual, but one that is grounded in a historical Jewish tradition and the Jewish community.” (p.8)

The programme is carefully designed and executed. The participants chosen to participate are mostly well-educated, middle-class, young adults active in mainstream American life and religiously unaffiliated, who have had little Jewish education and perhaps negative experiences in Jewish schools. The participants express a sense of meaninglessness regarding the Jewish life style they saw at home or in school. They are ambivalent and even hostile towards Judaism.

The staff members of Livnot u-lehibanot are mostly Orthodox Jews, many of them “ba’alei teshuvah” (Hebrew for born-again Jews) from the United States. The book describes them as sincere, committed, and charismatic. Shapiro does not specify who funds the programme or what its political orientation, if any, is. The campus of Livnot u-lehibanot is located in the “spiritual centre” of Safed in the Galilee Mountains.

The daily routine of participants includes community work and study sessions focusing on Jewish law, tradition, and

history. The young men and women are taken on regular hikes and trips to historical sites in Israel and are introduced to Orthodox Jewish practices, such as a traditional Sabbath celebration. Special events and ceremonies are staged in locations associated with events in Jewish history and have an immediate effect on the participants, according to Shapiro. For instance, in a dark cave used during the Bar Kochba revolt in the second century, a single flashlight lights the scene, while the students are lectured about the heroic revolt crushed by the Romans. The staff member uses the setting to draw a parallel with more recent events:

“And then the Romans did one more thing that beat us,” he says. “What did they do? What’s the one way you can get people out of this cave? Smoke ‘em out...”

And “what’s the first thing you think of when you hear that story? Tunnels and smoke. What association does anybody have? Warsaw.... And the only way they [the Nazis] beat them was the smoke, the poison gas. And that’s history repeating itself. This is our Holocaust museum, guys.”(p.80).

The aim of the programme is described as moving Judaism “closer to the centre of the individual’s priorities, concerns, and psyche.” (p.46) This is done, according to the author, by presenting the many facets of Judaism in a way consistent with the participants’ modern Western values. Shapiro admits she has been overcome by the condensed programme. *Livnot u-lehibanot*, she writes, empowers its participants to become “Jews by choice” rather than “Jews by accident.” It offers the participants a “Jewish supermarket,” stocked with a range of emotional and intellectual “products.” It equips them with the tools and vocabulary to search for a meaningful, knowledge-based Judaism. The experience, she writes, allows the young men and women to formulate their personal Jewish identity rather than remaining “victims” of their parents’ Jewish choices.

From this study, one gets the impression that *Livnot u-lehibanot* is an attractive programme reminiscent of a theme

park. Such a “big visualization of Judaism,” (p.101) as one participant calls it, may, moreover, suffer from the problems theme parks are known for: trivialization, selectivity, partiality, and manipulation. The author is aware of this, but she chooses to stress the positive vision of Judaism offered here in contrast to that of present-day institutional Judaism.

The programme—particularly the special effects it uses, such as the Bar Kokhba cave ceremony—may have a dramatic short-term impact on the participants. One wonders, however, whether it enhances “Judaism by choice” in the long term. Romanticized, mythologized presentations of Judaism of the kind Shapiro describes can hardly be seen as “knowledge-based.” In the opinion of this reviewer, moreover, knowledge of Jewish tradition and a genuine dialogue regarding its relationship to contemporary liberal values are essential if real and lasting choices are to be made. In fact, they are crucial, if Jewish culture in North America is to survive.

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Simon, Sherry. *Translating Montreal: Episodes in the Life of a Divided City*. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006. 280 pp.

Boundary-crossing encounters over language, culture, and space characterize Montreal. Sherry Simon’s *Translating Montreal: Episodes in the Life of a Divided City* masterfully delineates a series of such cultural exchanges formed in the middle ground between French and English. It is this contact zone, torrid and fertile, which defines Montreal’s uniqueness and inspires much passion and unparalleled creativity.

Simon succeeds in placing Montreal on a world map of historically divided cities and offers much by way of comparison and contextualization with cities such as Calcutta, Prague, and Trieste, also defined by separate but overlapping spheres. In this way, Simon “translates” Montreal to the greater public