H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Lawrence H. Fuchs. *Beyond Patriarchy: Jewish Fathers and Families.* Hanover, New Hampshire and London: University Press of New England, 2000. xi + 216 pp. $24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-87451-941-9.

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Published on H-Ethnic (May, 2001)

Jewish Fathers and Fathering

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If the civilization of the Jews has one pre-occupation, it is with the family. No matter in what language or epoch–whether biblical or modern, European or American, in Hebrew, Aramaic, Ladino, German or English–Jews write about family; "mishpoche," in Hebrew. Adam had difficulty with Eve, Abraham nearly killed his own son, Kafka could not deal with his father, nor Alex Portnoy with his mother.

Jewish scholars have not missed the point. Now, one of the most eminent of contemporary social scientists, Lawrence Fuchs, focuses his attention on the unique characteristics of Jewish patriarchy as it evolved over 2000 years. Fuchs is more than just a sociologist of Jewish family relations. He is at home in biblical scholarship, Talmudic and post-Talmudic exegesis, Yiddish literature, and American suburban psychology. He also has a deep belief in shared parental responsibilities and is thoroughly committed to a vision of partnership in parenting. He is a modernist in every respect, but his beliefs are founded on a rabbinic view that was first expressed two millennia earlier, when the rabbis examined the abusive patriarchy of the Bible and decided that this was no model for the Jewish people. These Jewish church fathers consciously constructed a new Jewish paradigm which gave the female a unique place among the ancient religions. The Woman of Valour, treasured, valued beyond rubies, emerged out of the canonical interpretations of rabbinic commentators in the post-biblical period, and that taming of powerful biological patriarchy became one of the cornerstones of Judaism and Jewish family practice.

Of course, through the ages, what existed in theory often did not follow in practice. Perhaps valued more than the women in the other Abrahamic religions, the Jewish woman was still held in a position of at least religious peonage. Traditionally, she was not permitted to study Torah nor approach the Holy Ark. An image persisted down through the ages of the female as temptress, or worse, a menstruating abomination. As the modern age emerged, there was still plenty of room for the Jewish father to surrender some of the trappings of patriarchy in favor of a more satisfactory partnership approach to parenting.

Fuchs is at his best and most comfortable in his analysis of the East European Jewish world in Czarist Russia at the turn of the twentieth century. He is obviously a product of those remarkable generations that saw the unexpected liberation of Jewish women, often young girls like Emma Goldman, Rosa Luxemburg, and Golde Meier, brought up in rigorously orthodox homes, who took a look at their fathers and told them: It is over. These young Jewish women, denied access to one Torah, discovered yet another Torah: that of Karl Marx. Part III of this book shows Fuchs at his most expansive. In "The Jews and Modern Patriarchy" he examines the origins of the great Jewish literary revolution of the time, the birth of Modern Yiddish literature, through which the revolution of the Jewish female and the reconstruction of the Jewish father were given form.

The Yiddish language was considered by most educated Jews even in Eastern Europe as the poor man's tongue, a corrupt dialect of medieval German with no redeeming literary qualities. That it was destined to become the vehicle for a genuine literary renaissance would have shocked the Jewish intellectual world, and that is exactly what occured, as Fuchs points out. After Alexander III became Czar in l88l, all of the anti-Semitic laws of the previous tyrannies returned, and it became clear that there was no future for the Jew in Czarist Russia. A handful of Jewish writers took it upon themselves to communicate this message to the millions of wretched Jews trapped in the forced isolation of the Pale of Settlement. The only common language was Yiddish, and it was to Yiddish they turned to make the case: That the time had come to leave. Fuchs' earlier books had dealt

with the American immigrant experience, and it is at this historical moment in Czarist Russia that the great Jewish immigration began, with the birth of Yiddish literature.

The writer Sholom Rabinowitz took the name Sholom Aleichem and created a character who could speak to the Jewish masses and reflect their values. Who better than a faithfully observant Jewish father with seven daughters destined to disobey him and to break his heart. Fuchs makes Tevye the Dairyman the Jewish Everyman, as the role of fatherhood and husband begins its transition to a post-patriarchal form. Fuchs' unique training as both sociologist and literary historian gives him the capacity to understand the real-life tensions developing in the orthodox Jewish family and to see how Sholom Aleichem translated this reality into the fiction of Yiddish literature; a fiction, by the way, that the readers viewed as completely authentic. To the average readers of these stories, this was not literature; this was life, their lives. Fuchs demonstrates how the tragedy of his family's disintegration makes Tevye vulnerable to the winds of change. Within one generation, Tevye's fictional daughters will become real-life trade unionists, revolutionaries, and Zionists. The shtetl patriarchy was in ruins.

Fuchs examines the literary evolution as he had done earlier in his previous sociological studies. His subject is the image of the father in the Yiddish literary tradition which soon is destined to become Jewish-American fiction. From Sholom Aleichem, Fuchs takes us on a literary journey that touches on Saul Bellow and Phillip Roth within the context of the emerging crisis of fatherhood in America.

In the end, his message is more humanitarian than anything else. His is a plea for fathers without patriarchy. He is scholarly and compassionate; literate and persuasive. In America today there is a serious debate about the role of fatherhood. Evangelical organizations are looking for a re-establishment of some of the traditional guidelines, but even they are echoing the more humane vision of Fuchs' plea. Be a loving father, the message goes, and understand the needs of our children in a more reasoned world that has progressed in sharing the responsibilities of parenthood. This is not a book that fits comfortably into any academic straight jacket, and that in no way minimizes the delight in reading it. If there is a field called Parent Studies, Fuchs' slender volume belongs there, as an elegant contribution.

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Citation: Sol Gittleman. Review of Fuchs, Lawrence H., *Beyond Patriarchy: Jewish Fathers and Families*. H-Ethnic, H-Net Reviews. May, 2001.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=5119

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