

Esther Fuchs, *Jewish Feminism: Framed and Reframed* (Feminist Studies and Sacred Texts Series), Lanham and London: Lexington Books, x + 211pp, ISBN 978-1498566490.

In *Jewish Feminism*, Esther Fuchs reflects on the developments in Jewish Feminist scholarship over the past decades. In just over two hundred pages Fuchs maps a wide field of research in Jewish studies. Two types of work are included, those by self-defined scholars of Jewish feminism; and main anthologies that thematically deal with gender and Judaism. Fuchs' methodology is a form of "critical retrospective", which is a close reading of anthologies across disciplines (viii). The main point of *Jewish Feminism* is that Jewish studies, especially Jewish feminist scholarship, could benefit from a more in-depth engagement with existing feminist philosophy and theory. This would move beyond attempts to "add women and stir" in Jewish studies, to a critical epistemological engagement with existing hegemonic frameworks of knowledge. Fuchs shows great engagement with existing feminist scholarship and as such the book functions as an extensive and impressive review of this scholarly field.

After devoting the introductory chapter about feminist theories and approaches, *Jewish Feminism* moves through the decades of Jewish scholarship on gender through four dominant frameworks. The four main chapters look at, what Fuchs calls the 'liberal frame', 'the personal frame', 'the masculinist frame' and 'the essentialist frame'. The last chapter is the only one devoted to a specific thematic issue, namely Women and Holocaust studies. In each chapter, Fuchs analyses three or more anthologies and as a reader one comes across influential scholars such as Daniel Boyarin and Laura Levitt. The book deals with almost all more or less well known edited volumes about gender and Judaism, such as Levitt's *Judaism Since Gender* (1997) and *Feminist Perspectives on Jewish Studies* by Lynn Davidman and Shelly Tenenbaum (1994).

In the third chapter, called 'New Jewish Studies', studies of masculinity and homosexuality come across as well, such as *Eros and the Jews* by David Biale (1997). Throughout all chapters Fuchs points to the limits of gender critical approaches in Jewish studies. There is, first of all, the question of in- and exclusion of certain authors and epistemological justice to feminist scholars. There are many scholars of 'gender' who do not refer to the major authors in gender studies such as—Fuchs argues—Judith Butler, Adrienne Rich, and Teresa de Lauretis. Secondly, many scholars of 'gender and Judaism' equate gender with women, and tend to use these terms uncritically and even at times in essentialist ways. According to Fuchs, the anthologies analyzed in chapter one and four do not engage with broader theoretical questions. But the

problem not only lies with these broader questions and the politics of citation, Fuchs argues.

In chapter two on ‘the personal frame’ Fuchs notices a depoliticization of feminist scholarship. She warns against an overt focus on the ‘personal’ which obscures political questions underlying the field. Chapter three is then the counterpart of this critique, where works come across that do use feminist theoretical interventions, but do not implement a similarly feminist research practice that acknowledges the personal (113). By omitting the personal and political questions of feminist studies, a ‘Masculinist Frame’ continues to impact Jewish scholarship.

In her close reading of the many published works on Judaism and gender, Fuchs does not beat about the bush. The author is sharp and at times unforgiving in her criticism, which appears somewhat contradictory considering how Fuchs considers feminist theory to be a “relational, dialogical, and contextual activity” (90). In this regard, *Jewish Feminism* could benefit from more productive dialogue with and among the bodies of research analyzed. Most anthologies lack a brief introduction and positioning, which could offer more contextualization and affirmative understanding of the limits or gaps in existing gender studies. The aim of Fuchs, as stated in the introduction, is to “draw connections, correlate, and juxtapose discrete areas of inquiry that rarely engage each other” (vii), referring to the two fields of gender studies and Jewish studies. This aim is somewhat confusing because *Jewish Feminism* has a rather limited dialogue with gender studies and studies of religion and gender outside of (or in relation to) Judaism or Jewish studies.

Since Fuchs’ work can be located in the tradition of feminist epistemology, it is especially remarkable that she does not dedicate much space to the situatedness of her own feminist perspective. The body of work Fuchs refers to includes scholars such as Judith Butler, Joan Scott, Teresa de Lauretis, and—primarily—Adrienne Rich, who are all situated in a particular postmodern stream of feminist theorizing. The choice for these scholars is not well explained and the particular limited inclusion of women of color and black feminists is surprising. As a reader, I am confronted with somewhat of a paradox. Fuchs aims to problematize the limits in Jewish gender studies and Jewish feminist theory, but in doing so is rather uncritical of her own situatedness and blind spots.

Throughout the book, Fuchs rightfully points to intersectionality, and questions of race and religion. In, for example, the fourth chapter on Women and Holocaust studies, she argues that “without engaging with work that has already been done on Nazi racism, focusing on gender alone is not an addition, but a separation (164).” At the same time, intersectionality as a critical analyt-

ical tool is not conceptualized by Fuchs herself, but instead taken for granted without much reference to the context of black feminism and WoC feminism, besides occasional reference to Gayatri Spivak.

Secondly, I wonder about the relevance of the argument against neoliberal uses of feminism in the broader field of scholarship on gender and religion. In the second chapter, Fuchs argues that “feminist knowledge [is] aligned with social activism which has primarily sought transformation rather than integration.” (32) Without being specific, Fuchs supposes that “transgressing disciplinary boundaries”, “creating serious disturbance” (40) and “oppositional intent” (42) are the ideal aims of feminist research. The assumption of subversion in feminist scholarship is rather questionable and has come under increasing scrutiny by scholars following Saba Mahmood and Joan W. Scott. This is echoed by Fuchs in somewhat in the second chapter but reinstated in the other chapters. Some of the issues raised in this second chapter are crucial for the continuation of critical gender studies, such as the relation to neoliberalism and questions of appropriation and incorporation.

Regardless, the book leaves little space to recognize the multiplicity of feminisms and conceptualizations of agency as potentially non-subversive or complying. Such critique has also been taken on within Jewish feminist studies recently, such as by Lynn Davidman or Orit Avishai. Influential scholars of religion and gender, albeit not necessarily on Judaism, such as Linda Woodhead, Ursula King and Line Nyhagen are additionally absent from the theoretical framework of Fuchs. It could be the case that all these perspectives are not present in the anthologies discussed by Fuchs, but *Jewish Feminism* would certainly benefit from engagement or comparison with this existing scholarship on religion and feminism.

Jewish Feminism is strongest in its meticulous analysis of three decades of scholarship in Jewish studies related to questions of gender and feminism. As such, it is devoted to feminist epistemology where the power of knowledge production is questioned. The book is an important contribution and critical assessment of the existing literature, and in its methodology and references a good addition for scholars of religion and gender without much prior knowledge of Judaism. The main focus of the book is on the analyses of existing research and less on productive suggestions for future research. Because of the limited engagement with similar critiques in the wider field of religion and gender, it might be too narrow for those readers wishing to ‘bring the two fields together’. It does convince in the argument that Jewish studies can—or should—be questioned related to uncritical use of terms like gender and feminism, and rightfully warns for appropriation or liberalization of feminism. Nevertheless, those interested in what Jewish studies might contribute to gen-

der studies; or how this relates to the existing and developing work of feminist scholars of religion, might not be entirely satisfied.

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