

populations qui en avaient bénéficié. Dans la nuit du 9 au 10 novembre 1938, Hitler mettait à sac près de 200 synagogues allemandes monumentales du type de celles érigées dans le contexte décrit par Coenen Snyder. Même la synagogue de la rue Oranienburger, véritable gloire du judaïsme berlinois, n'échappa à ce sort. L'édifice a été restauré après la guerre, mais les nombreux fidèles qui s'y pressaient pour prier ont pour la plupart péri dans les flammes de la Shoah et le lieu de culte se dresse dorénavant seul dans une Allemagne privée de son importante présence juive d'avant-guerre.

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CONFINO, Alon – *A World without Jews: The Nazi Imagination from Persecution to Genocide*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014. Pp. 296.

As in his earlier work, Alon Confino challenges us to think anew a topic with which we think we are familiar. In *A World without Jews: The Nazi Imagination from Persecution to Genocide*, he has written a novel study of the advancing mental landscape that allowed Jews to “disappear” or cease to exist in Germany and across Europe, from 1930s legislation to 1940s killing. Taking as its centerpiece the symbolic and actual destruction of the Torah (the Old Testament) that accompanied Kristallnacht in November 1938, *A World without Jews* begins by posing the question of why this artefact was targeted for destruction and what this singular act meant. As the argument unfolds to trace the anti-Semitic persecution from the beginning of the regime in 1933 through to its end in 1945, the significance of this act is made clear: the destruction of the Torah was not a random act of vandalism but instead was key to the intellectual destruction of the Jews and their religion as the forebears of European culture.

The extension of this idea provides a fascinating argument; namely, that Nazi anti-Semitism was part of a national revolution that meant to eradicate historical roots and create a new civilization in its place. In essence, Confino argues that the Nazi persecution of Jews was a by-product of the Nazi desire to achieve a cultural genesis rather than the simple result of a racial ideology put into practice. As Confino himself puts it, “The Nazis persecuted the Jews because they were a key element that came from within their own German and European-Christian civilization; to rebuild this civilization anew, they had to destroy a central part of their own culture” (p. 131). This is not to say, however, that “modern race theories” did not play a part; rather, they were an element—alongside “moral religious sentiments associated with a tradition of Christianity, and key elements of Heimat and German national identity”—that together formed what Confino calls “a modern salvation worldview” that became the main aim of Nazi policy, the elimination of “evil” Jewry serving as the central feature of the application of

this worldview (p. 237). As such, Confino sees the entire period as a “powerful continuity of making since 1933 a Nazi world without Jews” (p. 191).

Confino’s writing is persuasive and compelling, though there is a slight tendency towards repetition that could have been avoided. At times, one also wishes that the images that accompany the text and underline many of Confino’s points had been more carefully aligned with the text itself, eliminating the need to travel back and forth between text and image to find the connection. Slight improvements to the quality of the images would have also been welcome, though in their present format they still represent excellent examples of the type of anti-Semitic activity found throughout the period and effectively punctuate Confino’s argument.

This work is without doubt a fascinating read, challenging us to resituate the Holocaust not only as part of Jewish history but also as part of German history, and particularly, as a realm of European intellectual expression. As a result, Confino’s work represents a significant contribution to modern European intellectual history. In embedding his study of the Holocaust in this wider intellectual culture, however, one fears that the book might find criticism among some readers on account of its focussing less on the Jewish victims themselves and more on the thoughts and actions of Nazis and Germans (as well as other Europeans complicit in the killing). But this is precisely the point—Confino explores the topic from an unusual and interesting perspective that enriches the subject and its meaning as a domain of European intellectual and cultural understanding. It also situates European Jews within a European tradition, providing them with a validation of their centrality to European culture decades after Nazi policies attempted to expunge them from this history. Moreover, the closing chapter—including a sophisticated and at times heartbreaking exploration of the sense of cosmological finality and doom shared by Jews and Germans alike as the end of the war approached—also illustrates in abundance the dovetailing of Jewish and German thought and the fact that however far Nazi actions had gone they had in fact failed to rid Germany and Europe of the Jewish inheritance.

But no book is perfect and Confino’s work possesses another element that to some may be problematic. As the author admits in his introduction, Confino was heavily reliant upon Freud’s work. Referencing Sigmund Freud’s *Moses and Monotheism* explicitly in the introduction, the idea of rebellion (and ultimately destruction) against one’s forebears as a necessary act in the movement towards individual or in this case societal maturity is the central thought that underpins the work. While this device presents an interesting way to approach the subject and is in fact effectively wielded by Confino, for some this type of engagement may be too great an intellectual abstraction and lead to a dismissal of the historian’s generally well-considered argument. As such, the question of whether the fascinating argument is convincing is answerable only by each reader and their willingness to be led down the intellectual channels constructed for us by Freud and employed by the author.

I would further note that Confino’s misses the opportunity to engage more deeply with historiographical debates particular to the Holocaust. The question

of the Final Solution arising as a consequence of functionalism, for example, is clearly incompatible with Confino's argument, though his explicit engagement with this issue is limited to its mention in the introduction and the epilogue, wherein he dismisses this position in a most cursory fashion by way of a single sentence: "The approach that has viewed the Holocaust as a result rather than a goal of Nazism, growing out of the specific circumstances of the war, can account neither for the consistent apocalyptic role of the Jews in the Nazi imagination nor for the Nazi urgency to kill all the Jews but not all the members of other persecuted groups" (p. 239). Indeed, it is particularly lamentable that the author only engages with these historiographical debates in passing; given Confino's probing intellect, it would have been interesting to see a further engagement with these ideas and arguments, if only to more deeply immerse the work in the general literature on the Holocaust.

But no matter. Ultimately, Alon Confino's work is a work that compels and fascinates—as well as disgusts—in its recounting of the Holocaust. Given the subject matter, this very much illustrates the effectiveness of this work not only as history but as an emotional engagement with a topic that has perhaps too often been dealt with too methodically for its own good. That is to say, it is important to achieve a type of study that achieves a balance between emotional engagements with the Holocaust and the more rational but overly cold intellectual studies of an event that simultaneously strikes at our intellectual and moral cores. Confino's work, in balancing the emotional with the intellectual, achieves a balance that echoes the complexity of the subject itself and serves to remind us of the Holocaust's uniqueness as well as its often overlooked place within European culture.

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DORROCH, Gordon (ed.) – *The Dawn of Canada's Century: Hidden Histories*.
Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014. Pp. 498.

Gordon Darroch's edited volume *The Dawn of Canada's Century: Hidden Histories* is the first study to be produced by the Canadian Century Research Infrastructure (CCRI), an interuniversity project providing researchers with national historical microdata sampled from the Canadian Censuses. Principally authored by members of the CCRI, *The Dawn of Canada's Century* is a compendium which the editor states are "concerned with connecting the circumstances and experiences of ordinary individuals with larger structural changes," but also "reconstituting these experiences in their own terms" (p. 3). In other words, these studies seek to connect the stories of Canadians to larger regional or national themes, with an emphasis on framing these connections in the context of individual perspectives. The articles in this volume incorporate a variety of analytical approaches, each