

Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

Pierre Anctil. *A Reluctant Welcome for Jewish People: Voices in Le Devoir's Editorials, 1910–1947* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2019), Trans. by Tõnu Onu, 390 pp., ISBN: 978–0776627953

As Ira Robinson accurately wrote in the preface, one of the most pressing tasks historians and other specialists of Canadian Jewish history are faced with is assessing the questions related to antisemitism in Québec and Canada. Faced with a considerable increase in Jewish immigration, leading to the durable implantation of the community in the first half of the 20th century, the relationships—sometimes complicated—between these new populations and the Catholic French–Canadian majority give us a glimpse into the development of a form of antisemitism which will spark debates and controversies way beyond academic circles.

As often mentioned in the context of Canadian Jewish Studies—and other areas of Canadian Academia—there is sometimes a disconnect between French and English research. In that context, the translation of Anctil's book, originally published under the name *À chacun ses Juifs. 60 éditoriaux pour comprendre la position du Devoir à l'égard des Juifs (1910–1947)* in 2014, is a capital and welcome step towards plugging the gaps in the historiography of the Montreal Jewish community. Tõnu Onu's translation does an excellent job at conveying Anctil's analysis and contributes greatly to the opening of a long overdue multilingual conversation about antisemitism in Québec and Canada.

In the book, Pierre Anctil, a historian at the University of Ottawa and leading academic in Canadian Jewish Studies, addresses the position of *Le Devoir* through the careful analysis of its editorials published between 1910 and 1947. In order to fill gaps in the historiography of the interactions between French Canadians and the Jewish community, which he considers too often tainted by general impressions and indirect accounts, Anctil suggests an in-depth quantitative investigation. Out of the 11,000 editorials published by the newspaper during the period, he selected 60 to create a representative sample of the evolution of *Le Devoir's* position towards the Jewish community. The book does not cover questions relative to Judaism in the other sections of the newspaper, which could constitute a potential extension to Anctil's work. Though, the colossal quantitative analysis undertaken by the author is unquestionably one of the strengths of his investigation.

It is important to note that some editorials do not address the Jewish community directly. In fact, it is through other themes (immigration, education, urbanism, world affairs and the Second World War, etc.) that the opinions of *Le Devoir's* columnists on the Jewish community come to light. Grouping the editorials following these

themes, Anctil divides his book into eighteen annotated sections, thus allowing a contextualized understanding of his analysis of the sources.

As *Le Devoir*'s reputation has been tainted with accusations of blatant antisemitism coming from both the Jewish community and the academic world, especially during the first half of the 20th century, Pierre Anctil's work brings forth some nuances. By exposing the concentration of editorials regarding the Jewish community in the hands of a few journalists, Anctil highlights disparities in its treatment. As Henri Bourassa generally appeared uninterested to questions regarding the Jewish Community, his writings were generally neutral and devoid of animosity. This was also the case for Louis Dupire, who published 44 editorials during the period, often backed by serious empirical data, and whose sociological analyses were rarely characterized by a negative opinion of the community. To the contrary, editorials written by Omer Héroux (50 negative articles out of 90) and by Georges Pelletier (34 negative articles out of 45) were overwhelmingly tainted by a hostile perception of the community and contributed to the propagation of ill-informed stereotypes against the Jews. Anctil also exposes a major distinction regarding the negative opinions expressed by *Le Devoir*'s editorialists towards the Jews: the animosity tended to be expressed more directly when the topic of the article was not directly related to the local community. Indeed, the editorials dealing with international affairs tended to convey a significantly more negative sentiment towards the Jews. This situation could be explained by the over-representation of Dupire's articles regarding the Montréal community in which he very rarely expressed antisemitic views, which were, in turn, much more present in Pelletier or Héroux's writings.

Although Anctil's book offers an important quantitative analysis and impressive archival work, there are limits regarding the possible nuances in the antisemitism of *Le Devoir*'s editorials. As the author rightfully mentions, this antisemitism rarely expressed itself through race and biology, as it did in the interwar in Europe—reaching its pinnacle in Hitler's Nazi Party in the 1930s. *Le Devoir*'s antisemitism is, according to Anctil, in the lineage of the Catholic dogma known to have had a powerful influence on the newspaper's columnists. This distinction can be observed most notably with regards to the blind hatred displayed by the Nazis towards the Jews in Germany, which is qualified as heinous and stupid in the pages of the newspaper. Though, Anctil shows the development of the idea according to which the Jewish community constitutes an "other" impossible to assimilate within Québécois and Canadian societies. From the supposed financial and political power of the Jewish community, to the control they would wield over the media or the disproportionate place its members would hold in society, the constant perpetuation of antisemitic stereotypes in *Le Devoir*'s editorials appears important to emphasize.

Far from suggesting Pierre Anctil underestimates the negative impact *Le Devoir's* editorials could have had on the relationships between communities in Quebec in the context of the 20th century, it seems like the attitude of its columnists certainly contributed to what Anctil himself calls the “rendez-vous manqué” between the Jewish community and Québec. Though, the book undeniably brings a new and deepened analysis of the history of antisemitism in Quebec by exposing the complex rapport between the newspaper and the Jewish community. Anctil's book shows that *Le Devoir's* attitude towards the Jews, although incomparable to the obsessive writings of Adrien Arcand, still carries a palpable animosity towards the Jewish “other” and highlights the complexity of a phenomenon which different forms can resurface in the most insidious ways.

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