



Łukasz Krzyżanowski. *Ghost Citizens: Jewish Return to a Postwar City.* Translated by Madeline G. Levine. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020. 352 pp. \$35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-674-98466-0.

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How do survivors of a mass atrocity reconstitute their personal, social, and professional lives in their home country and hometown? Sociologist Łukasz Krzyżanowski grapples with this question by looking at how Jewish Holocaust survivors navigated immediate postwar reality in provincial Poland. His book, *Ghost Citizens: Jewish Return to a Postwar City*, offers a haunting microhistory of a time period, a community, and a place.

Ghost Citizens engages with burgeoning scholarly turns that investigate the rebuilding of Jewish life in Europe after the Holocaust, examine postwar Polish Jewish history, and zoom in on peripheral areas. To tell this history, Krzyżanowski highlights the situation of Jews in Radom, outside the major centers of Jewish life in the immediate post-Holocaust years such as Łódź and cities and towns in western Poland. Radom had been a prewar industrial—albeit unremarkable—Polish city and a wartime seat (one of five) of the German-created district of the General Government. Radom was home to approximately thirty thousand Jews (one-third of the population) on the eve of World War II. After the war, several hundred survivors trickled back into their hometown. The center of their lives was the District Jewish Committee. The documents of this Jewish entity dedicated to helping survivors and representing Jews before the government, illuminate the challenges, ten-

sions, and hopes of rekindling Jewish life in a typical medium-sized Polish city. These sources, as Krzyżanowski distinctively shows, relay the Jews' agency in asserting their place in postwar Poland and in their efforts to rebuild a Jewish community.

The four chapters (in addition to the introduction and the epilogue)—“The City,” “Violence,” “Community,” and “Property”—provide a detailed analysis of key aspects of the survivors' experiences in the aftermath of the Holocaust and World War II. The first chapter contextualizes the history of Radom and Polish-Jewish relations by looking at the prewar situation and at what happened in the city during the Holocaust. This background shaped the immediate postwar reception of Jewish returnees. Chapter 2 delves into a defining feature of postwar Jewish life in Poland: violence and pervasive antisemitism. Harassment and murder of Jewish survivors, as well as vandalism of Jewish spaces, were inconsequential for the Polish authorities. Krzyżanowski traces the reasons, modes, and effects of attacks against Jews in Radom, as well as pieces together information about the victims, the perpetrators, and persons in positions of power. Chapter 3 outlines the means of creating and fostering a Jewish presence and community in Radom. The emergence of accidental leaders after the war and of seeking justice for the behavior of some Jews who had held leadership positions dur-

ing the war, are some of the most illuminating aspects about the challenges and expectations of reconstructing a Jewish community. The fourth and final chapter, engages with uncomfortable and divisive (from the Polish perspective) and painful and essential (from the Jewish perspective) aspects of ownership. Here, Krzyżanowski examines the survivors' pursuit of justice, but also the gray zone of property restitution. With heated debates erupting in Poland today over the issue of restitution of and compensation for Jews' property, this chapter offers an insightful and methodical discussion about the legal, social, and political ramifications of efforts by Jews to recover their property in the early postwar years.

Forced by circumstances that dominated in the outlying areas of Poland, Jewish survivors tried to find safety and a sense of belonging in closed communities. The few survivors, Krzyżanowski claims, were basically invisible in the social landscape: "They were ghost citizens—physically present, but socially nonexistent for the majority of the city's inhabitants" (p. 135). This notion becomes increasingly apparent with every chapter and every personal story in the book. What is more, as Krzyżanowski observes toward the end of the book, this immediate postwar approach of non-Jews toward the Jewish people, Jewish life, Jewish heritage, and Jewish property reflects an ongoing struggle to recognize Jewish suffering and Jewish presence in the hundreds of towns and villages dotting provincial Poland. Jews and everything connected to Jews was, in fact, a specter that loomed, and continues to loom large. The book does not make this claim, but the narrative demonstrates that Jews, in fact, were quite visible to the Polish population. For the Polish residents of Radom, the continued existence of Jews in the city threatened the post-Holocaust order and reminded the Polish population of the crimes they had witnessed and, in some cases, committed against their Jewish neighbors.

Although the author does not specifically frame it this way, this book is not only a social history, but also an emotional history of post-Holocaust life. Krzyżanowski threads emotional responses of survivors to the realities of their lives. The history of Jews in postwar Radom elucidates the immense loneliness of Jews, individually and collectively. Tied to this, as Krzyżanowski so well analyzes, was fear—of retribution for survival, of anger, of incitement to violence, and of outright violence on part of the Polish population. On the one hand, Jews were disillusioned by the reception they received from the non-Jewish Polish population upon returning to their hometown. On the other hand, Jews harbored hope for restoring their lives, for creating new forms of community life that also drew on past experiences, and for serving as guardians of the memory of their loved ones. As Krzyżanowski demonstrates throughout the book, emotions guided the behavior of non-Jewish Poles (both ordinary individuals and persons acting in the context of the authorities)—from indifference to envy and hostility. Greed for perceived Jewish wealth and for Jewish property was another emotional driver. This desire engulfed both non-Jews and some Jews, the latter being a novel and controversial topic that Krzyżanowski does not shy away from but handles with scrutiny that this problem deserves. Therefore, this is both a history of the Jews' efforts to reconstitute their lives and a narrative about how non-Jews navigated having witnessed the Holocaust and how they confronted the few Jewish "ghost citizens."

While this is primarily a collective history about a community (or rather communities) emerging from destruction, *Ghost Citizens* is also a collection of personal histories of survivors and witnesses. Krzyżanowski stitches his narrative from personal accounts to provide people's names, backgrounds, feelings, thoughts, assessments, and experiences. The focus on individual histories is a great strength of the book. In addition to using primary documents, Krzyżanowski illustrates the

complexities of the immediate postwar reality by highlighting research on the topic by scholars, particularly those writing in Polish (and thus whose work is often not accessible to English-speakers). Doing so provides needed context for readers unfamiliar with post-Holocaust Polish history.

Ghost Citizens reconstructs, often in painstaking—and necessary—detail, the experience of return to a hometown, a home, an environment, a profession, and a society in the immediate aftermath of a genocide. Therefore, this book moves beyond generalizations about “the return” of Jewish survivors in Poland. Instead, it zooms in on key aspects of how that return took place, the reasons people returned, their expectations and the challenges they faced, how they navigated the obstacles, and how the population around them reacted to the appearance of the surviving remnant. This book tells a remarkable history that demonstrates the hopes, endeavors, and ordeals of Jewish Holocaust survivors who struggled to rebuild their lives and rehabilitate their community in Poland. In doing so, it challenges the narrative that Jews wished to leave Poland as soon as possible. Krzyżanowski elucidates the mentality and mechanisms in the Polish environment in the first years after the war that prompted many Jews to relinquish their resolve to remain in Poland and instead pushed them to leave the country. This is an important book that will pave the way for further studies into the issues raised in *Ghost Citizens* and that is bound to inspire fresh perspectives on the return home after the Holocaust.

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