

*Modelska, A.P. Review of "Ghost Citizens: Jewish Return to a Postwar City"*  
*Australian Journal of Jewish Studies XXXIII (2020): 293-294*

**Ghost Citizens: Jewish Return to a Postwar City. By Lukasz Krzyzanowski, Translated by Madeline G. Levine. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2020. ISBN 9780674984660**

*Alexandra P. Modelska*

Several important works have already been published on Jewish-Gentile relations in Poland both during and after World War II. While increasingly adopting a social-historical and micro-historical perspective, many of these contributions have convoluted the categories of perpetrators, victims, and bystanders in the Holocaust, presenting thereby a more nuanced history of the events of the 1930s and 1940s. Moreover, many of these newly published works have demonstrated some degree of skepticism as to whether the year 1945 was indeed a milestone as far as popular moods and attitudes towards the Jews are concerned.

What new does Lukasz Krzyzanowski's book, first published in Polish and now available in English-language translation, bring to the table? Whilst much of the scholarship continues to look at the surviving Jews as a subject rather than an object of history, Krzyzanowski, "interested in the actions undertaken by the survivors of the Holocaust and their interpretations of reality," succeeds in not only giving voice to the Jewish victims but also in restoring their agency (p. 7).

*Ghost Citizens* focuses on the city of Radom in 1950s Poland and the small group of Jews living there in the aftermath of the war. Radom was one of the larger urban centers of the Kielce province, with Jews (approximately 90,000 in 1938 numbers, marking one-third of the population) actively participating in the life of the city, while maintaining "a strong cultural distinctiveness. They used Yiddish mainly or exclusively and lived in partial or even complete isolation from the community of Polish Christians" (p. 14).

Originally from Radom himself, the author integrates events that preceded and followed the Holocaust, elucidating the devastation caused by the war. Krzyzanowski's investigation is based on institutional written materials, interviews, memoirs and, still oftentimes omitted in scholarly works, historical photographs. The author's intention to write an integrated account is well-demonstrated by the concepts he used for the two main groups in Radom, referred to by Krzyzanowski as "Christian Poles" (or "non-Jewish Poles") and "Jewish Poles."

The monograph follows a clear structure, with postwar violence, adaptation strategies of the Jewish community and attempts at regaining property at its core. At the crux of the book located in the physical space of the city, the reader is exposed to the stories of despair, loss, emptiness but also a collective journey in the search for a new meaning. For many Jews of Radom, the joy of the end of the war was extinguished by a wall of indifference and hostility, marked by plunder and violence. Indeed, while

*Review of "Ghost Citizens"*

Krzyzanowski's account goes beyond physical attacks, the book is strongest in the contextualization of violence, interpreted through the meaning of it for the remaining Jews in Radom.

As the author concludes in his epilogue: "It was precisely the violence accompanied by the suffocating atmosphere that proved to be the fundamental factor shaping the postwar Jewish community in Radom and most likely the communities of survivors living in other medium-sized cities in central Poland" (p. 266). Throughout his book, Krzyzanowski demonstrates not only how non-Jewish Poles filled the space left by the annihilated Jews, but also how the postwar Polish state failed to protect its Jewish citizens. Most importantly, the author illustrates how Jewish survivors understood the hostilities not as individual acts "but as manifestations of the same phenomenon – Polish anti-Semitism" (p. 118).

Albeit an excellent translation, there is some notable amount of repetitions, while some passages could use a smoother transition (this is particularly evident in the transition from the fourth chapter to the epilogue). While seemingly written for a more general audience in mind, there are parts of the book that contain an overwhelming quantity of almost encyclopaedical data, hard to follow for someone who is not an expert in Polish-Jewish history. Surprisingly, the book also lacks a proper conclusion.

*Ghost Citizens* is a timely, unsettling, and provocative work, which draws attention to the alarming historical complexity of Polish- Jewish relations in the past and in the present. The study is meticulously researched, the prose is excellent, yet its message is daunting. This is why it deserves instant attention. The book should be a mandatory reading not only for those interested in the aftermath of the Holocaust in Poland but also in the ongoing Polish debates on the country's troubled past.