

Frankl, Michal: *Občané země nikoho. Uprchlíci a pohyblivé hranice středovýchodní Evropy 1938-1939* [*Citizens of No Man's Land. Refugees and Shifting Borders in East-Central Europe 1938-1939*].

Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, Masarykův ústav a Archiv AV ČR, Praha 2023, 294 pp., ISBN 978-80-7422-924-4 (NLN), 978-80-88611-07-3 (MÚA).

Michal Frankl's *Citizens of no man's land* presents a nuanced exploration of borders and refugees during the late 1930s, an essential yet still largely overlooked aspect of the history of the Holocaust and the region. This work stands as the first comprehensive analysis of stateless spaces in East-Central Europe on the brink of World War II and provides insights into how states, peoples, and crises intersected in the area.

Frankl's analysis extends to the broader context of East-Central Europe, where no man's lands mushroomed in the late 1930s. Unlike brief episodes in the West, the stateless areas in East-Central Europe were often inhabited for extended periods, resulting in an enduring impact on those who lived there as well as on the states that lost or eventually took control of these places. Given its geographical focus, Frankl's book will likely find its primary audience among specialists and students of the region. That said, it also offers a wider theoretical appeal by offering tools and mechanisms for scholars studying stateless spaces here as well as elsewhere. The author's examination of the social relations that construct, alter, and reproduce borders adds a rich layer of understanding concerning people and places in distress. Moreover, the multidisciplinary approach incorporating perspectives from geography, spatial studies, anthropology, and Holocaust research invites readers from other disciplines, broadening the book's relevance and making it a valuable resource for a more diverse scholarly audience.

With regard to East-Central Europe, Frankl focuses on four events on the Czechoslovak and Polish borders. They include the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany in March 1938 and the expulsion of local Jews, who were now considered alien either because they lacked Austrian citizenship or because they resided in the borderland Burgenland state. The precarious situation of these Jewish men, women and children was further complicated by the shifting borders and ethnic policies of the region. Furthermore, the book also documents the experiences of Czechs, democratic Germans, and Jews expelled from the Sudetenland following the Munich Agreement, as well as the aftermath of the First Vienna Arbitration, where ethnic minorities such as Hungarians, Slovaks, Czechs, and Jews faced forced migration. Notably, the closing of borders specifically targeted Jewish populations in all these cases, highlighting the discriminatory practices of the time. Finally, the *Polenaktion* of October 1938, in which Germany deported approximately 17,000 Polish Jews

outside of Poland's borders, enabled the Nazi government to implement measures against all "foreign" Jews.

Apart from the stateless zones on the Czechoslovak and Polish borders, the book also explores the evolving border practices within these two countries and their different contexts, in particular the holding of apprehended individuals in interior shelters and the mass revisions of citizenship in 1938 and 1939. As shown in the book, these differing practices intertwined in specific ways with the physical spaces and the histories of displaced people in the region, further complicating the narratives of citizenship and belonging.

Perhaps unintentionally, the interdependence of physical spaces, citizenship, and belonging is further accentuated by the book's source base, which includes twenty-three archives across Austria, Czechia, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Slovakia, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Often working with fragmented documentation from humanitarian organizations, the author skillfully reads these sources against witness testimonies and press reports, underscoring the extensive research and effort that went into his book.

The structure of the text occasionally makes for somewhat awkward reading, however: In building his narrative around key issues and themes, Frankl frequently shifts back and forth in time. The first chapter follows the journeys of displaced people, linking their radicalized removal to the histories of ethnically mixed regions. Here, Frankl argues that the periphery became a focal point for dramatic changes and experiments in citizenship in 1938, claiming that these "borderlands offered a platform for staging the nation and experimenting with radical ideas about the remaking of citizenship" (p. 60). As Frankl demonstrates, it is not surprising that the first no man's land was created here, and that its inhabitants were not only foreign Jews but also those with uncertain or otherwise "problematic" identities. The second chapter examines the interplay between citizenship and exclusion, revealing how Poland and Czechoslovakia sought to marginalize refugees who were also citizens. By treating citizenship as a border zone between states and individuals, Frankl "offers a productive insight into the interaction and operation of different actors in this figurative space beyond the letter of the law" (p. 89). In the third chapter, he focuses on the expellees at the borders, exploring how these individuals and their interactions with aid workers and state officials transformed physical spaces. This chapter highlights the significant role of refugees in shaping the history and geography of no man's lands during the Holocaust. The fourth and final chapter addresses the contemporary and historical interpretations of wandering and confinement in these stateless areas, bringing societal agency and popular discourse into the discussion. Returning to his reliance on the concept of bordering—in which a space is not carved in stone but rather socially constructed—it is in these two latter chapters that Frankl brings the voices, emotions, and overall agency of people at the borders to the fore. He argues that the hopelessness, despair, and passivity captured in the memories of refugees do not imply a negation of their agency:

While refugees recounted wandering or immobility, shock, and emotion, they also acted, made decisions, organized, corresponded, and used their social networks. The contradiction between passivity in the narrated no man's land and independent action and decision-making speaks to

the nature of no man's land as a benign space to exist and be seen, but in which refugees also acted and socialized. (p. 252)

While *Citizens of no man's land* is an invaluable addition to Holocaust and refugee studies, the book would have benefited from an experienced developmental editor to help refine its structure and more prominently highlight the author's own contributions, which are sometimes overshadowed by numerous references to other scholars and repeated mentions of gaps in the literature. Despite these structural issues, *Citizens of no man's land* is a seminal work that deepens our understanding of the complex dynamics of borders and statelessness during a pivotal historical period.

Frankl's work underscores the emergence of lawless spaces as a critical aspect of the Holocaust. *Citizens of No Man's Land* reminds us that borders are social spaces where the state, citizens, and refugees negotiate their visions of the future. His interdisciplinary approach and meticulous research provide a compelling, academically rigorous, and deeply human narrative not only of refugees and borders in the late 1930s but of people and places in general.