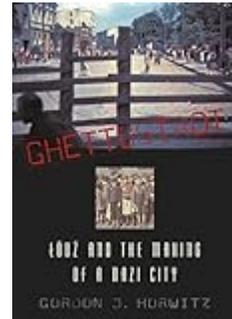




Gordon J. Horwitz. *Ghettostadt: Łódź and the Making of a Nazi City.* Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2008. 416 pp. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-02799-2.



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Reshaping a Holocaust City

In a very readable book, Gordon J. Horwitz traces the wartime transformation by the occupying Nazi German forces of the Polish city of Łódź into the German city of Litzmannstadt. As Horwitz demonstrates, central to this process of Germanizing the city was the segregation and removal of the large prewar Jewish community. Łódź had grown from a small town at the beginning of the nineteenth century to a city with a population of more than six hundred thousand by the eve of the Second World War as a result of the expansion of the textile industry in particular. When Nazi Germany occupied Poland in 1939, around one-third of those living in Łódź were Jews. However, they were to have no future in a city that was reshaped into a German city peopled by ethnic Germans. It is that process of reshaping that Horwitz describes, adopting a chronological framework to examine the ways in which the Nazi state radically restructured the city's infrastructure and demography.

One-half of Horwitz's story of the reshaping of Łódź concerns the city's large Jewish population.

Prior to being resettled in a ghetto, the city was reshaped through both territorial and chronological exclusions applied to the Jewish population. Jews were forbidden access to the up-market Piotrkowska Street, and subjected to a nighttime curfew keeping all but the few with passes off the streets between five in the afternoon and eight in the morning. The public spaces of the city were effectively made *judenfrei* early each evening. These early measures revolved around a concern with Jewish absence in the city—removing Jews both spatially and temporally from certain places at certain times.[1] By the end of 1939, plans were being formulated for a closed Jewish ghetto, and there was more concern with Jewish presences. Horwitz refers to two broad areas for the location of the ghetto being discussed, one of which was primarily occupied by Jews, but he does not give enough attention to the internal debate over where to place the ghetto. He sees ghettoization as a series of interweaving processes, which he dubs demographic, biological, economic, and aesthetic. Ghettoization was nothing less than an attempt at a radical restructuring of the city. However, in

discussing these motivations, I think he would have done well to pay more attention to the competing ghetto plans being considered at the end of 1939 as a way of uncovering how different aims of ghettoization were prioritized. Ghettoization could be implemented for demographic, biological, economic, and aesthetic purposes, but the priority given to these varied. As the late Raul Hilberg noted, the choice of location of the ghetto in Łódź created a dilemma for the authorities given that the choice of a slum quarter meant that the better houses, apartments and furniture were left behind. But this solution also had its difficulties, because the slums were often filled with warehouses and factories, which would now be inaccessible to the remainder of the city's population.[2] Although Horwitz is right to see ghettoization as the expropriation of Jewish assets, with the freeing up of better housing for resettled ethnic Germans, this economic advantage was countered with concerns over the potential economic impact of closing off an industrial and mercantile area from the remainder of the city (p. 29). In short, the story was more complex than Horwitz suggests.

In February 1940 a closed ghetto was created in Łódź. Ethnic Germans living in the area were to be relocated to newly available former Jewish residences in the center of the city. By contrast, Poles from the ghetto area were to be rehoused in Polish areas. Horwitz never fully explores the experience of the Polish inhabitants of the city. In the process of Germanization, the Polish population was marginalized, although not in the same way as the city's Jewish population. Horwitz does signal that in the process of making space for ethnic Germans, Poles were rehoused away from the center of the city and utilized as a workforce, but this de-Polonization disappears from the text, which focuses on the Germanization of the city and the expulsion of Jews to an urban ghetto. The book as a whole is largely a binary story of Germans and Jews, but the story of the making of a Nazi city in Łódź is one that involved three main groups of actors—Germans, Jews, and Poles.

This complexity comes across somewhat in the debates over the precise location of the ghetto boundary that was contested by ethnic Germans, Poles, and Jews in February 1940.[3] Ethnic Germans who owned property in the area petitioned for the ghetto boundary to be altered to exclude their buildings. Polish bishops were concerned about the presence of the Church of the Virgin Mary within the ghetto area. Neither opposed ghettoization in principle but the ghetto in practice. In response to their petitions, German authorities issued a leaflet in-

forming individuals that the ghetto area would necessarily include some properties owned by ethnic Germans as a result of the unfortunate fact that during the Polish era a large number of Germans lived and resided in the midst of these Jews" (p. 55). Ghettoization put an end to the historical realities of Jews and non-Jews living on the same streets and in the same apartment buildings. On April 30, 1940, the ghetto was sealed. Henceforth, more than 160,000 Jews were confined to around 4 square kilometers of the city that lay within the ghetto fence. Outside of the ghetto a new city was being created.

It is the story of the reshaping of a *judenfrei* Łódź into a German city which is the other half of the story that Horwitz describes, conjuring up a wonderful sense of place in the process. In describing this Germanization as context to and intimately connected to ghettoization, Horwitz broadens focus from existing work on Łódź, in particular the groundbreaking study written by Isaiah Trunk (*Łódź Ghetto: A History* [2006, originally published in Yiddish in 1962]), as well as the wider tendency within Holocaust studies that focuses narrowly on the ghetto streets rather than the city beyond their walls. Horwitz's great contribution is in looking beyond the ghetto to the wider city that underwent a policy of Germanization, in part through the renaming of streets and the city itself which became Litzmannstadt on April 11, 1940. Germanization also involved the physical remaking of the infrastructure of the city, both below and above ground. Central to this process was Wilhelm Hallbauer who was appointed director of the building department with a mission to modernize the city. He set about remodeling overcrowded streets and poor sewers into a city deemed fit for future generations of ethnic Germans, who were seen within Nazi thinking as at the pinnacle of a racist worldview. As Horwitz demonstrates, the wartime history of this place is a story of racial urban planning, with very different places created for Jews and Germans.

What was happening in Łódź reflected in microcosm the broader Nazi reshaping (both demographically and physically) of the East. However, rather than unpacking the precise relationship between the policies of resettling ethnic Germans and segregating and deporting Jews in this place, Horwitz tends to assert their connectedness. He situates the two cities—one (the ghetto) deemed temporary, the other (Litzmannstadt) part of the grand designs of the envisioned thousand-year Reich—side by side and highlights their contrasts in a book that tends more to description than explanation. This is not to downplay his achievement. The description is rich and evocative. However, the result is a tendency toward a

rather binary division of the city into ghetto and restructured German urban space, which not only squeezes out the story of the Polish population but also reduces the ghetto to a fairly homogenous space. There are hints of a variegated geography of the ghetto with, for example, smuggling being particularly marked in the early stages in the 'poorly secured southwestern sector' (p. 102). Unfortunately, Horwitz does not fully develop the complex geography of the ghetto and the variety of Jewish experiences of this place.

Jewish experiences of the ghetto varied widely, given the adoption of a 'productionist' strategy in Łódź by German ghetto manager Hans Biebow, whose thinking of exploiting labor in the ghetto meshed with that of the controversial head of the Jewish Council, Chaim Rumkowski.^[4] By the summer of 1941, there was, as Horwitz unpacks, 'a kind of fragile equilibrium,' with foodstuffs going into the ghetto and clothing, shoes, and other goods out (p. 131). However, all this changed in 1942 with the onset of mass deportations. In the spring, tens of thousands—in particular newcomers from the Reich—were deported to Chelmno. In September, young children, the sick, and the elderly were deported. By January 1943, just over half of the ghetto's original population remained, working in the many ghetto enterprises.

Horwitz is somewhat critical of Rumkowski's policy of stressing the productive capacity of the ghetto. He gives the example of 'special nutrition kitchens' set up by Rumkowski in the early summer of 1943 as an example of his flawed energy (p. 253). On the one hand, the establishing of these special kitchens proved Rumkowski's skills as an organizer. On the other hand, the fact that only those deemed essential workers could eat three course meals in situ (thereby preventing them sharing food with family members deemed less essential to the ghetto economy) points to Rumkowski's neglecting of the majority in favor of the few. This policy is one that was challenged within the ghetto, although Horwitz does not address opposition to his leadership from within

the ghetto as much as might be expected. In his epilogue, he offers a fairly generous assessment of Rumkowski's wartime role, pointing out that 'compliance under circumstances of extreme coercion is not the same as collaboration' (p. 317).

Ultimately, Rumkowski was powerless to oppose Heinrich Himmler's decision to close the ghetto in June 1944 as the Soviet Army advanced westward. In the summer of 1944 deportation recommenced, including Rumkowski. The ghetto buildings were cleaned in preparation for housing ethnic Germans in a new *judenfrei* Litzmannstadt. Such utopian visions for the city, however, were ended by the arrival of the Soviet Army in January 1945. Litzmannstadt was a short-lived German city. The process of its making—a story elegantly told by Horwitz—was one that had a devastating and terrible impact on the prewar Jewish population of Łódź. This city would never be the same again.

Notes

[1]. For more on my own work on ghettoization as reflective of creating Jewish absences and presences within the city, see Tim Cole, *Holocaust City: The Making of a Jewish Ghetto* (New York: Routledge, 2003); and Tim Cole, 'Ghettoization,' in *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, ed. Dan Stone (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 65-87

[2]. Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 224

[3]. For similar debates in Budapest, see Cole, *Holocaust City*, 131-156; and in Kármend, see Tim Cole, 'Building and Breaching the Ghetto Boundary: A Brief History of the Ghetto Fence in Kármend, Hungary 1944,' *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 23, no. 1 (forthcoming 2009)

[4]. Christopher R. Browning, 'Nazi Ghettoization Policy in Poland: 1939-1941,' *Central European History* 19, no. 4 (1986): 343-368.

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