

The Making of the No Man's Land

Forced migration, border violence and spatial statelessness in East-Central Europe at the end of the 1930s

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The paper examines the history of the no man's land for refugees on the borders of East-Central Europe at the end of the 1930s. On many spots alongside the shifting borders of East-Central Europe, groups of Jewish refugees were confined to spaces between border guards and often "camped" in fields or provisional shelters. I argue that this no man's land, so far not analyzed comparatively and poorly understood, holds important insights for the connections between forced migration, citizenship and space.

The appearance of the no man's land was an unplanned consequence of the interplay between expulsions and border closures instituted by nation states. In this paper, I will scrutinize how these unintended stateless spaces were created through the movement of refugees within the border zones. Building on approaches from border studies, anthropology and sociology, I will analyze testimonies and other sources to reconstruct the spatial and temporal facets of these border experiences and to examine the perceptions, emotions and interpretations triggered by interaction with such unfamiliar environment. Walking the border created meanings: Reading the violence in the border spaces as rites of passage will make it possible to probe not only the physical, but also the symbolical exclusion of refugees into a space outside of society and "civilization".

Michal Frankl is a senior researcher at the Masaryk Institute and Archives of the Czech Academy of Sciences. He is the author of „*Prag ist nunmehr antisemitisch*“ (2011), a history of Czech antisemitism at the end of the 19th century and together with Miloslav Szabó of *Budování státu bez antisemitismu?* (Building of a State With No Antisemitism?, 2015), an analysis of the role of antisemitism in the transition from the Habsburg Empire to the Czechoslovak nation state. With Kateřina Čapková, he wrote *Unsichere Zuflucht* (2012), a critical history of Czechoslovak refugee policy in the 1930s. He is the principal investigator of the ERC Consolidator project "Unlikely refuge? Refugees and citizens in East-Central Europe in the 20th century". Currently, he finishes a book manuscript about the no man's land for refugees and denationalization in East-Central Europe at the end of the 1930.

<https://www.unlikely-refuge.eu/project-team/frankl/>

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