

While the three main political camps, the Catholic and conservative Christian Socials, the Social Democrats, and the National-Liberals, cooperated pragmatically during the immediate postwar crisis, they began to attack each other more harshly as the elections for a new parliament drew close in early 1919. These elections could only be held in less than two-thirds of the territory claimed by German-Austria because the remaining districts had been occupied by other successor states. This reduction especially concerned the German-speaking regions of the Bohemian Lands. Consequently, the German nationalist, or National-Liberal, camp lost many of its strongholds. Austrian politics turned into a contest between red and black, that is, between the Social Democrats and the Catholic-Conservatives.

Societal tensions increased, which also expressed itself in the controversies about workers' councils, which the center-right parties considered dangerous alternatives to legitimate government. The establishment of Soviet republics in neighboring Hungary and Bavaria encouraged Communist coup attempts. The subsequent defeat of these revolutionary experiments also brought a backlash in Austria. At first, the Social Democrats began to lose their former dominance in government; thereafter, their Grand Coalition with the Catholic-Conservatives began to crumble. In a final effort, the major parties agreed on a new constitution. In late 1920, however, the Conservatives switched coalition partner and started the series of center-right governments that were to dominate interwar Austria.

In his composite conclusion, which also contains two excursuses, Kochne presents his assessment of the nature of the Austrian revolution, of the viability of the new state, and of its national identity. His arguments are sound and much needed in an otherwise largely descriptive work, but they are not always built upon the preceding analysis. His fundamental conclusion that Austria's First Republic failed due to a lack of agreement on its purpose and fundamental structure remains plausible, however.

Die unbeabsichtigte Republik will not significantly alter our perception of the early Austrian republic. The study does not provide theory or comparison; it condenses familiar sources and literature and intersperses them with didactic comments. Its bibliography is almost exclusively in German; even the few English texts cited are mainly by Austrian scholars. Analytically, the author tends to project current conditions back in time, which also expresses itself in rather apodictic dismissals of the alternative solutions pursued by contemporary political leaders.

In spite of these weaknesses, the study might be valuable for readers searching for a concise summary of Austria's passage from monarchy to republic. Even if some pivotal assessments would have profited from concrete documentation, Kochne has made competent use of the relevant sources. Thus, *Die unbeabsichtigte Republik* provides a solid introduction to the legal and parliamentary history of the early Austrian republic.

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Kornbluth, Andrew. *The August Trials: The Holocaust and Postwar Justice in Poland*

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Sarah A. Cramsey 

Leiden University

Email: s.a.cramsey@hum.leidenuniv.nl

A searing dedication “to the innocent” sets the tone for the sometimes brutal and often poetic narrative by historian Andrew Kornbluth. His prize-winning *The August Trials* is already an important book for those of us who study the Holocaust in Eastern Europe, the memory of the Holocaust everywhere, and

how justice functions legally and metaphorically after war, genocide, and revolution. After reading this book carefully, however, I remain unable to resolve some fundamental tensions about relationships between people living under occupation in Poland and how those relationships developed in the first half of the 1940s.

First, however, let me outline what the book does, and does very well. Kornbluth plunges us into the legal ecosystem that coalesced around roughly 32,000 trials “for war crimes and collaboration” (7) that ensued from the so-called Decree of 31 August 1944. The backbone of this study is comprised of the abundant records of eight hundred trials, half of which feature crimes against “Jewish” victims and half of which feature crimes against “Polish” victims. These polyvalent records allow for the study of “the perpetrators themselves, the communities they lived in, the response of neighbors, peers and family members to their crimes” over time. In short, these archives contain “almost the entire microcosm of the crime” (17) and reveal the months-long and sometimes years-long legal processes unleashed by the August Decree until changes to the law implicitly ended “the large-scale pursuit of wartime offenders” (7) in 1956.

Kornbluth’s well-sourced evidence allows him to tell two distinct stories. His wartime-focused research “suggests that the involvement of Poles in the ethnic cleansing of their Jewish neighbors, particularly in the countryside, was more enthusiastic, more elaborate and more widespread than previously believed” (269). Those prosecuted in the August Trials and an unknown number who avoided prosecution killed, Kornbluth estimates, tens of thousands of Jews in the part of Poland that was under Nazi occupation. From this vantage point, Kornbluth’s contribution aligns with those offered by other historians like Jan Gross, Jan Grabowski, Alina Skibińska, and Barbara Engelking who explore the systematic extent to which non-Jewish Poles enabled and participated in the genocide against Polish Jews in the early 1940s.

That the killing of countryside Jews was frequent, systematic, and desirable in the eyes of many Poles, however, is only *half* of Kornbluth’s story. The evidence gathered by the postwar trials that implicated Polish Christians in this “crowdsourced” genocide did not always result in commensurate verdicts issued in the initial trials or in the appeals that followed. This horrifying dissonance grew exponentially when the war as well as the genocide committed within it receded from short-term memory and when changes in definition, leadership, and jurisdiction combined to diminish the responsibility of perpetrators or blame the Jewish victims (151). Kornbluth is at his best in chapter 5, “Rewriting the Narrative of the Past,” when he traces how various trial testimonies (problematically and definitively) evolved in a way that exonerated those accused of crimes against Jews and placed blame on Jewish victims. Beyond this, he shows (at least) two other developments. First, how the courts came to judge more leniently those who participated in the “technical putting to death” (187, 203, 234) that was a key part of what Kornbluth calls “the conveyor belt of genocide.” And second, how (over just a few years) an alternative reality (207) of the “Holocaust” became real to the “fiercely independent judiciary,” the “Soviet backed state,” and the “recalcitrant society” underpinning both (269).

For Kornbluth, this evolution indicates something more broadly about society beyond the courtroom. The August Trials, he writes, “(reflect) a consensus about the need to excuse much of that wartime conduct and codify a variety of exculpatory myths about the war” that would protect non-Jewish Poles, particularly those who populated the working class (269). The disparity between the evidence and the verdicts matters because the question of Polish Christian involvement in the events that added up to a Jewish genocide continues to be hyper-politicized, fiercely debated (or silenced as Jan Grabowski recently was at the German Historical Institute in Warsaw) at academic events, unresolved over dinner tables, and the most urgent “historical” question in Poland today. The contents of the August Trials “have propelled all the major research into the subject since the fall of Communism,” and yet the “story of how they were generated has been forgotten” (273). Kornbluth’s robust intervention has vanquished the forgetfulness surrounding the origin and development of the August Trials, and he has offered us a new way to understand how Communist Poland came into being and was sustained by a systematic revision to the collective memory of World War II.

My critique of this book stems from the binary of “Poles” and “Jews” that infuses its telling and its incomplete treatment of this wartime occupation. Footnote 12 of the introduction explains why the

author uses this binary, despite the charge from “contemporary critics” that the use of these terms “reifies the racist and segregationist distinctions of the occupiers” (287). Kornbluth argues that “the reality is that, with the exceptions of some small liberal corners of Polish society, the term ‘Pole’ then and now is understood to mean a Catholic citizen of Poland with no Jewish heritage.” He then notes that in the case files of the “August Trials,” Jews were never referred to as “Poles” but as persons or Polish citizens “of Jewish ethnicity.” As these trials presided over crimes committed in an occupied Polish context that was stratified according to Nazi ideas about “race,” and because this language was commonplace (and not necessarily presumed to be antisemitic) already in the interwar period, such language should not surprise us. But we should not assume that this wartime distinction is timeless or monolithic. “Rarely,” John Connelly reminds us, “has a society been more violently divided, Jews from Poles, but also Poles from other Poles” than during World War II and the Holocaust (Connelly, *From Peoples into Nations* [Princeton, 2020], 474). Simplifying, therefore, the category of “Poles,” and the distinction between “Jews” and “Others” obfuscates important grey zones, to echo a concept from Primo Levi, between and within these two categories. This is surprising especially because the evidence presented in this book reveals grey where Kornbluth’s ultimate analysis sees more black and white.

For instance, the clear distinction between Poles and Jews becomes less clear when we turn to characters involved in the August Trials. An important character in this narrative, Leon Chajn, is described as a “lawyer of Jewish origin” (90). On the postwar Supreme Court sat several “jurists of Jewish descent” (194). At the postwar Ministry of Justice, Arnold Gubiński was born into “a wealthy religious Jewish family” that in the assessment of a future Minister of Justice Leszek Kubicki, was “expressly inclined to assimilation” (175). Other “ethnic Jewish personnel” at the ministry included Jerzy Sawicki, who was born with the name Izydor Reisler, who was active as a lawyer in the 1930s, escaped from the Lwów ghetto, and survived the war “in the countryside under an assumed identity” (173). Language and evidence presented by the author within this book contradict the simplistic Pole/Jew distinction as well as the monolithic treatment of how these two presumed collectives experienced wartime occupation.

The intriguing and difficult records from the August Trials reveal how relations between people categorized as Poles and people categorized as Jews developed in complex directions during a particular historical context: Nazi-occupied Poland. This was “a place of unremitting terror, where any non-German native might be arrested and then murdered without any charges, let alone suspicions” (Connelly, *From Peoples into Nations*, 468). I’m a devoted student of this period and still it is not always easy for me to understand this particularly harsh occupation and the attitudes, behaviors, and actions that developed under it. For instance, I was struck by how many times the issues of “help” for the Jews or “empathy” toward the Jews came up in the testimonies that Kornbluth quoted but did not necessarily analyze with these themes in mind. From the watchmen who bandaged Ajzyk Wasung’s “bloodied face and hands” (57) after his capture, to a woman who witnessed her friend in a gruesome procession to a German police station and cried (63), to the horrible story of Henryk Janczuk who killed a Jewish man hidden by his uncle (150) to the confusing case of the Blue policeman Walenty Chojnacki who shot a Jewish mother and her child but aided and eventually adopted a Jewish girl (214); what are we to make of these crude juxtapositions? The Jews who were killed in the countryside were often Jews that “had been” hidden in the countryside until the cleaving moment when they were not. Maintaining and murdering could be done by the same hands, as the courageous testimony of Abram Rozenman so clearly reveals (224–25). Kornbluth finds Rozenman’s more nuanced attitude toward Polish society “interesting” (225) but I think the complexity inherent in Rozenman’s account chimes with other sources (like the diary of Dr. Zygmunt Klukowski, the work of Shimon Redlich and the *Ur-text* on the topic, Emanuel Ringelblum’s *Polish Jewish Relations during the Second World War*), that force us to reckon with the chaotic reality of occupation.


Had Kornbluth reflected on the simultaneity of harm and help that are encapsulated in these trial documents, he could have unravelled questions that continue to interest me and others drawn to this era. Why and to what extent did non-Jewish Poles who hid Jews during the war deny the help they gave after the war (249)? How should we understand the decisions that caregivers made to hide (someone

categorized as) a Jew and how did those caregiving situations become untenable in some (most?) circumstances? How did “neighbors” react to changing societal norms, a specific ideology inspired by Adolf Hitler and the Nazi movement, and a more aggressive form of antisemitism that coalesced under a brutal occupation (Cramsey, *Uprooting the Diaspora* [Indiana, 2023], 250–53)? And finally, how did “ethnic communities that had coexisted more or less peacefully for generations, often in fruitful cross-pollination, dissolv(e) in fear, hatred and recrimination from the middle of the twentieth century onward” (Connelly, “Poles and Jews,” *Contemporary European History* [2002]: 658)? By detailing the instances of help alongside the instances of harm, we can approach a more realistic picture of wartime Polish society and understand why narratives of help and narratives of harm were submerged by the postwar consensus that Kornbluth so eloquently describes. His book should inspire other researchers to build on his findings and draw us even closer to the complex events that added up to the Holocaust, how we (as people, jurists, societies, and states) collectively came to know about them, and to what degree we have misremembered them.

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Le Normand, Brigitte. *Citizens without Borders: Yugoslavia and Its Migrant Workers in Western Europe*

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Francesca Rolandi 

Masaryk Institute and Archives of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague, The Czech Republic
E-mail: rolandi@mua.cas.cz

Over the last two decades, renewed interest in Yugoslavia’s social history has resulted in a burgeoning scholarship on a specifically Yugoslav phenomenon: the liberalization of economic migration and export of labor to Western countries. This was a unique case in the realm of state socialism. Le Normand builds on this research and views this topic from the angle of transnationalism. She shows how the Yugoslav authorities, experts, intellectuals—and the migrants themselves—made sense of external migration. To preserve ties with migrant workers abroad, they were framed as “workers temporarily employed abroad,” which thus emphasized their future reintegration into Yugoslavia.

Yet, the book shows that this concept was coproduced, strengthened, and contested by different actors, and this led to different and often conflicting understandings of the idea of a “homeland.” What is more, this happened amid domestic tensions between the federal leadership and advocates of major autonomy for the Republic of Croatia, which resulted in a crackdown on what became known as the Croatian Spring. This conflict features centrally in the volume, as the book focuses on the first phase of Yugoslav labor migration (until the mid-1970s, but occasionally stretching to the end of that decade), when Yugoslav citizens with an ethnic Croat background dominated among the migrant population.

A top-down project underpinning the establishment of a network designed to nurture migrant workers’ sense of belonging was combined with spontaneous initiatives that were later absorbed into the state-organized infrastructure. Furthermore, migrants appropriated tools available to convey their narratives and requests, and even to point at the system’s flaws. Yugoslavs abroad are written back into history as a multifaceted, heterogeneous group, marked by different political views colored by social, gender, and generational aspects. They are also given their own voice, and Le Normand draws on a wide range of sources to achieve this. Similarly, the Yugoslav system’s multilayered quality is portrayed in the coexistence of different agendas for the federal, republican, and local authorities.