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Return to Sepharad: Citizenship, Conversion, and the Politics of Repair

More than five centuries after Sephardi Jews were forced to convert to Christianity or be expelled from Iberia, an unlikely constellation of political projects are seeking the “return” of Jews to Spain and of Spaniards to Judaism. "Return to Sepharad" draws on a decade of fieldwork with Sephardi descendants applying for Spanish citizenship, Spaniards converting to Judaism, and the authorities who evaluate their claims. At the heart of this ethnographic monograph is the question: what does it take to return to a place or a people? To address this question, the book pursues “return” as an ethnographic object, a political concept, and a mode of self-transformation. It finds that these otherwise disparate and often incompatible projects have something in common: they are upending the very categories of belonging that “return”—as a mode of politics—promises to stabilize and reproduce. As the “return to Sepharad” unfolds, it is not only breathing new life into old debates about who counts as a Jew or a Spaniard. It is also reconfiguring how race, religion, and citizenship are reckoned and lived across borders, galvanizing new political selves and communities in its wake.