When “Westerners” think of the Great War, the primary image that comes to mind is that of the western front. Much less defined in the collective memory are associations with the eastern front.[1] Here, some of the deadliest battles took place on the lands of historic Galicia of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, particularly along the Carpathian Mountains. One visible legacy of the fighting is the more than four hundred war cemeteries unique to the territory of Western Galicia, painstakingly designed by architects of the Austrian War Ministry. Among others, the scrupulously arranged graves display the names of Hungarians, Czechs, Rusyns, Poles, Croats, Jews, Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians, while Latin crosses comingle with three-barred Orthodox crosses, Stars of David, and Muslim symbols (usually Bosnian soldiers).

Visitors to the northern slopes of the Carpathian range—known today as Poland’s Subcarpathian (Podkarpackie) region—will be struck by the overlap of markers commemorating both world wars. In this “shatterzone of empires” (from Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz’s Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands [2013]), the geography has a tendency to blur the temporal frame of reference. Scenic Habsburg-era war cemeteries lie dispersed among sites of Nazi German atrocity, and vestiges of a “gentleman’s war” sit suggestively close to reminders of “total war.” Thus, when the Jews of the village of Rzepiennik Strzyżewski (near Gorlice), among others, were marched to their execution in the summer of 1942, they stepped across the remains of trenches dug in 1915, still visible today. In these European “borderlands,” a landscape inscribed by two cataclysmic wars foregrounds questions of the broader processes that rocked the subcontinent.

It is perhaps no accident that Israeli historian Raz Segal chose the geographical zone inhabited by the Subcarpathian Rus’—located on the southern slopes of the Carpathian range—to explore these historic linkages in his book, Genocide in the Carpathians: War, Social Breakdown, and Mass Violence, 1914-1945. Segal is assistant professor of Holocaust and genocide studies, as well as Sara and Sam Schoffer Professor of Holocaust Studies at Stockton University. In contrast to his previous monograph, Days of Ruin: The Jews of Munkács during the Holocaust (2013; Hebrew, 2011), the book under review signals Segal’s conceptual shift from a framework anchored in the “Holocaust” to that of “genocide.”
Popular knowledge of this struggling entity—known throughout its history as Subcarpathian Rus', Ruthenia, or Carpatho-Ukraine—is usually limited to passing awareness of this ephemeral statelet.[2] After World War I, the new state of Czechoslovakia that emerged from the rubble of empires annexed Subcarpathian Rus’ in 1920. Though the 1919 Treaty of St. Germain detailed the autonomous status of the region within the new state (incorporated into the constitution), Prague never fulfilled its promise, and Subcarpathian Rus’ found itself on the receiving end of the Czechoslovak state-building project during the interwar period as its easternmost region. Prior to the Second World War, the population of the region counted approximately 725,000 inhabitants, 445,000 of whom were Carpatho-Ruthenians (63 percent), 115,000 Magyars (15 percent), 100,000 Jews (13 percent), and the remainder Czechs, Slovaks, Romanians, Germans (Karpatendeutschen), and Roma.

By the end of the interwar period, the political center had begun to shift from Prague to Budapest. This took place in two stages. First, in November 1938, as a result of the Munich Conference, the southern part of Subcarpathian Rus’ was ceded to Hungary (the First Vienna Award), with the remainder given autonomous status. Second, following the Slovak proclamation of independence on March 14, 1939, and the Nazi seizure of Czech lands on March 15, Subcarpathian Rus’ declared its independence as the Republic of Carpatho-Ukraine, only to be crushed by the Hungarian army the following day (hence the frequent appellation of a “Republic of One Day”). The Hungarian army occupied the region until March of 1944, at which point it was invaded once again by another army—this time the Wehrmacht. It was in the crucial months of April, May, and June that Hungarian authorities joined hands with the Third Reich and its “genocide specialists” (p. 91)—composed of Adolf Eichmann and his associates—in ghettoizing and deporting the region’s Jews to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Approximately ninety thou-
Jewry is seen as a culminating point in this larger process. The micro perspective is thus highly attuned to this broader macrohistorical canvas in a period of war. It is noteworthy that Segal is assisted in this effort by the Polish-Jewish lawyer Raphael Lemkin, who discussed the takeover of “Subcarpathia” in the context of introducing the concept of “genocide” in his foundational work, published during the war.[4]

As a consequence of this commitment, Segal’s methodology aims to overcome the bracketing of the Holocaust “from key events that affected non-Jews during World War II.” Historian Saul Friedländer’s highly touted “integrated history,” notes the author, “integrates rather selectively” (p. 10). Segal’s corrective—developed in chapters 4 and 5—assumes an analytical lens that foregrounds the “links between the layers of violence against different groups rather than the more common tendency to think about the fate of the Jews in comparison to that of another group” (p. 17). His version of “integration” is a close study of “the connecting threads in this multilayered system of violence,” here carried out by Hungarian authorities against three ethnic groups: Carpatho-Ruthenians, Roma, and Jews, with the latter “imagined as the most urgent danger” (pp. 17, 117).[5] In this context, the Holocaust is understood as “a nexus of multidimensional processes of mass violence” (p. 18).

Second, Segal shifts his findings away from a German-centric account of mass violence by mapping them onto local and national contexts. The Yale anthropologist James C. Scott wrote that “hill peoples” have historically been “fleeing the oppressions of state-making projects in the valleys.”[6] It is Scott’s own Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed (2008) that serves as a foundational critique of the panoptic reach of state power. The fact that the Subcarpathian Rus’ and its hillside inhabitants were subject to rule by six different regimes and occupations allows Segal to pay close attention to the shaping of social relations in this “borderland society” under the influence of various state-building projects—particularly the Czechoslovak and Hungarian variety—and the layering of these attitudes.

However, in post-Versailles East Central and Southeastern Europe the operative grammar of state power was dominated by strains of ethno-nationalism. In Segal’s powerful retelling, the primary dialectic of ethno-nationalism occurred between competing visions of “Greater Germany,” “Greater Hungary,” “Greater Bulgaria,” “Greater Croatia,” and the like, with mutual claims for overlapping borderland territories. In this “fissured arena” of nationalisms, the Jewish population—disqualified at the outset from laying territorial claims in the name of a “Greater Israel,” one might add—found itself stuck in the midst of opposing national aspirations, energized by a center of political gravity emanating from Berlin and encouraged by a new sense of possibility “under the cover of a world war” (pp. 44, 117). In the words of a Hungarian official to the Ministry of the Interior in April 1942, the war afforded a “trapdoor of history,” in which “nations sink from one day to the other” (p. 79).

Segal effectively shows that the fault lines between “Greater Germany” and “Greater Hungary” set the parameters for the specific course that the destruction of the Jews took in the borderlands of the Subcarpathian Rus’. For example, the combined Nazi German and Hungarian attack on the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941 served as a “pretext for the first major attempt to implement large-scale deportations from Subcarpathian Rus” (p. 71). Segal speculates that as many as twenty thousand Jews, or one-fifth of the region’s Jewish population, plus an unknown number of Roma, were “literally dumped” on the other side of the Carpathian Mountains, where most met their death in the mass killing of Kamenets-Podolsk by German units and their Ukrainian accomplices (pp. 75-76). By the same token, further ethnic
cleansing was not possible, as German authorities beyond the Carpathians would not accept more deportees after August 15, 1941. The imposition of this limit presumably halted any plans for similar deportations of the Carpatho-Ruthenians from the region. “Greater Germany” and “Greater Hungary” clashed again in the summer and spring of 1944 over the wealth and possessions left by Jews deported to Auschwitz, and they clashed for the last time over the deportation of around two hundred thousand ethnic Germans, this time under Soviet occupation (pp. 97, 120).

Third, the state-building dimension is also key to understanding the realignment of relations that took place between Jews and their neighbors and to Segal’s critique of the limits of “antisemitism” as an explanatory concept. The history of the Jewish community within the ethnic mosaic of the region provides a unique set of circumstances to explore these issues, as Subcarpathian Rus’ represents “a case of an eastern European society with no tradition of what we call antisemitism” (p. 115). Jewish life under Habsburg rule was remarkably intertwined with the non-Jewish world, where many Jews worked in agriculture as did the majority of Carpatho-Ruthenians, and no Jewish quarters existed in its major towns of Uzhhorod, Mukachevo, Berehovo, Vonyhradovo, and Khust. Subcarpathian Rus’ also stood in sharp contrast to other parts of Eastern Europe in terms of grassroots violence: “There was neither a Jedwabne in Subcarpathian Rus’ nor cases of postwar anti-Jewish violence such as Kielce or in other places in Poland, Romania, and Hungary” (p. 118). According to the author, whatever operative anti-Jewish attitudes one can speak of here had their origins in the rift that began to grow under Czechoslovak rule, in which Jews were perceived as “agents” of “Czechization” and hence “traitors” to the Carpatho-Ruthenian project (p. 48).

Segal’s criticism of the way that “antisemitism” has been deployed in the historiography is thus twofold. In the first instance, he argues that its tendency is to smuggle a teleology of inevitability into historical contingency, in which events are “read less within their local contexts than according to a teleology leading, more or less explicitly, to the Holocaust” (p. 9). This approach, argues Segal, assumes a “direct connection” between “antisemitism” and “hatred,” which can be observed in the work of such historians as Isaiah Trunk, among others, who, in Trunk’s own words, assumed an “age-old, almost atavistic hatred of the Jews ... such a familiar phenomenon that it needs no elaboration” (p. 49). Thus, the self-explanatory premise advanced by Trunk is precisely what Segal wants to bring into question.

In the second instance, Segal moves beyond this implicit determinism by situating anti-Jewish sentiments of the Carpatho-Ruthenians within the “loyalty crisis” sparked by Czechoslovak state building. He identifies the nature of these sentiments as rooted in “political resentment” toward Jews, who came to be regarded as “obstacles to their emerging national sentiments and rights,” not some ancient or metaphysical hatreds (p. 48). A close reading of the unfolding tensions—a major strength of a microhistorical lens—reveals a “process” rather than a “condition commonly called antisemitism” as well as a “relational,” not a culturally innate, set of attitudes (p. 47).

Fourth, and perhaps most intriguing, Segal brings the notion of “bystanders” under powerful criticism, if not its negation, as an analytically useful concept. Political scientist Raul Hilberg’s classic typology of perpetrators, victims, and bystanders (Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933-1945 [1995]), which has functioned as a pillar of Holocaust studies for over two decades, has come under increased scrutiny in recent years. The brunt of the criticism has primarily been directed at the “bystanders,” largely by historians working at the local level.[7] The undoing of the “bystander” has generally meant its fragmentation into the two remaining categories of “perpetrators” and “victims.”
On the “perpetrator” end of the spectrum, the turn in scholarship since the publication of Jan T. Gross’s *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (2001) has played a decisive role in dislodging an entrenched view of Poles solely as victims and recasting them as victimizers in specific moments under German occupation, while extending this insight into non-Jewish behavior in East Central Europe more broadly. Gross later elaborated his position on “bystanders” by noting that, in the context of the Judeo-Christian tradition, the introduction of “violence” into human relations creates specific cultural “obligations” among “witnesses” to “act” and “do” something to “oppose” the violence and persecution. In this phenomenological interpretation, doing “nothing” vis-à-vis the Holocaust was itself a decision and a form of “action,” therefore the term “bystander,” concludes Gross, is an “oxymoron” and an “impossibility.”[8] Similarly, though less invested in a normative cultural argument, historian Omer Bartov has argued that in the case of Buczacz and Eastern Galicia “the category of bystanders in these areas was largely meaningless, since everyone took part in the events” of “collaboration and the genocide of the Jews.”[9]

On the more ambiguous end of the “complicity” spectrum, historian Tim Cole, examining non-Jewish “bystanders” in the context of ghettoization in Hungary, has argued against a reliance on a “binary division,” calling for the writing of a history of the Holocaust in which “the full range of involvement—and non-involvement—by ‘non-Jewish’ neighbors is considered in all its complexity.”[10] Likewise, Tony Kushner has noted that while the “ambiguities and contradictions of human nature make the study of bystanders so fascinating, significant and ultimately relevant today, there seems to be little desire for this to be brought out in studies of the Holocaust,” while warning about the moral assumptions built into the concept: “the bystander category is in danger of aiding the tendency to see the subject in Manichean terms, as symbols of mass evil alongside much less prevalent absolute good.”[11] These two trends in the historiography have largely passed like ships in the night.

Segal’s understanding of “bystanders” aligns much closer with the second of these two ongoing trends, which he brings to a head. Like Bartov, he finds the category “largely meaningless” but for entirely different reasons. The cornerstone of Segal’s critique is the juxtaposition of Jews as “onlookers” to the persecution of the Carpatho-Ruthenians following the invasion by the Hungarian army in March 1939, when Jews observed the killing of their “neighbors” in forests, with a similar response of alleged “indifference” or “inaction” among Carpatho-Ruthenians toward the persecution of Jews by Hungarian gendarmes five years later in March 1944 but without participating in it (pp. 58, 106). In effect, the juxtaposition functions as a reductio ad absurdum of the concept of “bystander.” The importance of studying the “entire period of the war” to generating such insights into “the perceptions and choices of both Jews and non-Jews” becomes apparent here (p. 106).

In sum, *Genocide in the Carpathians* delivers on its promise of showing how a “small place” like Subcarpathian Rus’ can help us “think big” in terms of modern European history (p. 18). By the same token, this microhistory leaves something to be desired, at least in terms of making its scale and methodology more transparent. At times it is not clear if the reader is dealing with a microhistory or simply the history of a small region. Such scholars as Evgeny Finkel and Scott Straus have called on the need to distinguish the micro and meso levels of analysis in the study of genocide, while paying particular attention to the latter.[12] Mapping the findings more clearly onto the micro, meso, and macro levels would help to elucidate the social processes under investigation.

In terms of sources, historians better acquainted with the relevant archives, such as Yuri
Radchenko, have suggested that Segal may have underestimated the nature and extent of anti-Jewish sentiments among the Carpatho-Ruthenians by not sufficiently consulting Ukrainian-language sources, especially those related to the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), whose activists were present in the region in the late 1930s. Radchenko notes that this particular “imported” antisemitism had strong ideological ties to visions of Ukrainian imperialism.\[13\] Radchenko’s criticism may point to the need to situate the dynamics of Subcarpathian Rus’ with the pressures of “Greater Ukraine.”

Despite these criticisms, *Genocide in the Carpathians* carries great potential in expanding its key insights into the study of genocide in East Central Europe during the war. In particular, Segal’s claims surrounding “antisemitism” and “bystanders” can help historians to unlock longstanding challenges and act as a corrective in clearing a path for more confident research. Historian David Engel has noted that “eschewing ‘antisemitism’ as a ready-made category and seeking new frameworks for analysing its traditional constituent elements may well have a salutary effect on historical research.”\[14\] Likewise, historian Doris L. Bergen has observed that describing antisemitism in the Nazi era is no simple matter and questioned the conventional “linear equation” of “extreme antisemitism → Nazism → Holocaust,” noting the counterintuitive category of “antisemitism as a product of the Holocaust.”\[15\] For scholars of National Socialism and the Holocaust within German historiography, Friedländer’s “redemptive antisemitism” has proven to be a powerful and enduring concept in understanding Adolf Hitler’s radical antisemitism and beyond.\[16\] For scholars of Eastern Europe during the Second World War, such an overarching concept does not exist. Rather, explanatory frameworks, especially in relation to Poland, have relied most heavily on the notion of “Judeo-communism” (Żydokomuna) and the impact of centuries of Christian anti-Judaism.

However, these factors can be overworked in attempts to explain local realities, especially in regions that never experienced the Soviet occupation. Using the all-purpose adhesive of “antisemitism” to hold together a microhistory of the Holocaust serves as a poor analytical substitute. Therefore, the logic of ethno-nationalism may provide the central explanatory function for the region as a whole. It also makes Segal’s critique of the “bystander” all the more relevant, especially in studies of “bystanders among subjugated groups.” As the author argues, historians who are interested in understanding the “limited agency” of witnesses are better served by focusing on processes of “social disintegration,” rather than “producing shallow descriptions that portray bystanders only when they kill Jews or watch as others murder” (p. 104). According to genocide scholar Martin Shaw, “the conventional trinity” has contributed to a “lack of a coherent sociological understanding of genocide.”\[17\] Jettisoning the moralizing assumptions behind the Hilbergian triptych in particular can help open the way for more sociologically informed accounts.

Further, a number of studies suggest that the “footprint” left by the occupation and genocide on the “host” society may be just as important as an object of study as the targeted victim group. In this respect, *Genocide in the Carpathians* may perhaps be too focused on the destructive capacity of states, in contrast to Timothy Snyder’s thesis of a more linear relationship between Jewish survival and state sovereignty.\[18\] For example, in her comparative study of postwar anti-Jewish violence in Poland and Slovakia, historian Anna Cichopek-Gajraj found that one reason why the level of intensity was much higher in the former was that “the struggle for survival” of Polish citizens was much longer (the entire period of war) than in Slovakia (eight months), with the prolonged period of occupation doing profound damage to Poles as “a community of citizens,” undermining “the notion of morality in daily life.”\[19\] Similarly, in her examination of 255 letters of denunciation...
sent to the Gestapo in the Warsaw district early in
the war, psychologist Barbara Engelking noted
that the great majority of letters were aimed at
fellow Poles, while approximately 30 percent of
the letters concerned the Jews, though not all
were “prompted by antisemitism.”[20] Again, the
long arc of the entire wartime period is key to un-
derstanding the evolution of non-Jewish attitudes.

In the post-Communist years, much historical
paint thinner has been spilled in an e-
fort to re-
move the varnish from the notion of “peaceful So-
viet citizens” in order to recover the ethnic identi-
yty of all actors involved in the Holocaust. But the
pendulum may be poised to swing back as the
field of Holocaust studies in East Central Europe
appears primed for reinjecting these experiences
into a more comparative and “integrated” picture
of genocide. Thus, in another borderland society
between Belarus and Lithuania, historian Volha
Bartash has argued that integrating the Romani
experience with Holocaust studies can help shed
light on both genocides.[21] The “forgotten geno-
cide” of Soviet prisoners of war (POWs) and their
fate as fugitives amid the local populations awaits
a proper integration.[22] Research into the Sub-
carpathian region of Poland reveals a layered and
“relational” history of violence: peasant participa-
tion in the “hunt for Jews” (Judenjagd) overlapped
with a hunt for other targeted groups (especially
Soviet POWs); areas that experienced German
state violence against locals for the shelter of Jews
could rapidly transform into zones of communal
violence against Jews; and local dynamics fre-
cently gave rise to subcategories of perpetrators,
including “perpetrator-rescuers.”[23] Further, Se-
gal’s recovery of the grammar of nationalism
could help to realign episodes of mass murder
normally left outside of standard histories of the
Holocaust within the same framework, such as
the ethnic cleansing of Poles in Volhynia and East-
ern Galicia by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army
(UPA) following the Holocaust in the region,
which consumed as many as fifty thousand to sixty
thousand lives.

Much of the innovative work in bridging the
seemingly disparate histories of violence and
their more puzzling aspects is coming from out-
side of Holocaust studies, especially the field of
political science. In their study of pogroms in the
summer of 1941 (Intimate Violence: Anti-Jewish
Pogroms on the Eve of the Holocaust ([2018]), Jef-
frey S. Kopstein and Jason Wittenberg found that
pogroms were difficult to start and local condi-
tions in most places prevented their outbreak (oc-
curring in fewer than 10 percent of communities).
Where incidents of extreme anti-Jewish violence
did take place, argue the authors, they were not
due to antisemitism (despite its prevalence) but
were concentrated in regions where Jews had
been significantly involved in Zionist parties at
the municipal level in the previous two decades,
which translated to a refusal to join another
group’s nation-building project—conclusions that
find echoes in Segal’s findings. Yet perhaps no one
in recent years has given us a new language for
understanding intercommunal violence as Max
Bergholz in his study of a border region in Bosnia
and Herzegovina during the Second World War,
where violence functioned as “an immensely gen-
erative force” that “forged new communities, new
forms and configurations of power” along an “eth-
nic axis.”[24]

Remarkably, it has taken over seventy years
to produce the first monograph on the Holocaust
in Eastern Europe—incidentally, published this
year by Waitman Wade Beorn (The Holocaust in
Eastern Europe: At the Epicenter of the Final Solu-
tion [2018]). The situation is hardly better in
terms of the national historiographies of individu-
al countries. Even Poland, the ground zero of the
Holocaust, despite major advances in scholarship
in the last two decades, still lacks a proper mono-
graph of the Holocaust on Polish territories. Fur-
ther, as Segal notes, the difficulty of such works in
general is their taking for granted the way that
the epistemological horizon of the nation-state has shaped discourse around the Holocaust and the stability of national and ethnic “groups” in times of war and social upheaval. As the field continues to grapple with findings that complicate the standard categories and narratives of Holocaust studies, the power of *Genocide in the Carpathians* lies in its potential as a catalyst in ushering in a paradigm shift imminent in the above works, anchored to Lemkin’s conception of genocide in the study of East Central Europe.

Notes


[20]. Barbara Engelking, *Szanowny panie gestapo. Donosy do władz niemieckich w Warszawie i okolicach w latach 1940-1941* [Dear Mr. Gestapo: Denunciations to the German authorities of Warsaw and surrounding areas in 1940-1941] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, 2003), 100.


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