

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



**Raz Segal.** *Genocide in the Carpathians: War, Social Breakdown, and Mass Violence, 1914-1945.* Stanford Studies on Central and Eastern Europe Series. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016. 232 pp. \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8047-9666-8.

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Raz Segal's monograph, subtle in format yet thick in the narrative provided, traces the transformations of the multiethnic and multireligious society in Subcarpathian Rus' in the first half of the twentieth century. Drawing from official, state-authored sources and ego-documents in five languages, the author sets high goals for his second book.[1] In what is an analysis of intertwined pasts in the borderlands of eastern Europe, Segal questions numerous postulates and concepts that continue to dominate scholarship on the Holocaust in the region and beyond. While many treat the Holocaust in Subcarpathian Rus' as a predominately German story, and hence limit their investigation to events that followed the German invasion to Hungary in March 1944, the author stretches this timeframe to place emphasis on the processes rather than outcomes of mass violence. Furthermore, by utilizing scholarship in Jewish history, eastern European history, genocide research, and history and sociology of emotions, the author offers a fresh perspective on the terms "antisemitism" and "bystanders" when scrutinizing the coexistence of Jews, Roma, and Carpatho-Ruthenians at the periphery of Czechoslovakia and Hungary before and after the German occupation.

Luckily for those hungry for exploring this region full of pluralities—be it people, languages, borders, and identification markers, but also political visions—Segal delivers on (at least most of) his promises. As shown by the author and in contrast to the territory being inhabited by many and claimed by lots throughout its modern history, Subcarpathian Rus' has been rather neglected in historiography of twentieth-century Hungary (but also Czechoslovakia, I would add). Important contributions

to the history of the Holocaust in Hungary, including *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary* by Randolph Brahm (1994), *In Defense of Christian Hungary: Religion, Nationalism, and Antisemitism, 1890–1944* by Paul A. Hanebrink (2006), or, more recently, Tim Cole's *Traces of the Holocaust: Journeying In and Out of the Ghettos* (2011), overlook the region that was home not only to Carpatho-Ruthenes, Magyars, and Jews but also to Czechs, Slovaks, Romanians, Germans, and Roma prior to the outbreak of the Second World War. And while Yeshayahu A. Jelinek pointed to the richness of the region to scholars of Czechoslovak history throughout his life, Subcarpathian Rus' and the fate of its Jews remain largely excluded from the history of this country as well.[2]

Subcarpathian Rus' might not be in the center of scholarly attention, but as we learn "the region became the object of fantastic dreams and conspiracies of politicians and ideologues from beyond and below the Carpathians" (p. 54). Quickly forgetting about the autonomy promise, the Czech administrators colonized the land after October 1918 and demanded loyalty to the political project of Czechoslovakia. Czech rule, along with the new meaning given to concepts of belonging and foreignness in the interwar years, brought new dynamics into the relationship between Carpatho-Ruthenians and Jews, a relationship that unlike many other in the region, was not marked by deep-rooted hostility. When exploring this qualitative change in the interethnic relations between Jews and the majority society, the author's criticism of antisemitism as an analytical category makes much sense, and so does his instance on being precise about "what we actually mean when we use the word

*hatred* to define an anti-Jewish state or process” (p. 49).

In five chapters, the author indeed offers what seems to be the buzzword of today’s historiography, an “integrated” history. Observing events unfold through the lenses of the “Great Hungary” obsession, Segal points to something he terms throughout the book as “multilayered mass violence” in the region—spanning from massacres by Hungarian soldiers on Carpatho-Ruthenes in March 1939; unorganized expulsions of Jews following the Hungarian takeover in November 1938; deportations of “foreigners” in the summer of 1941; expulsions, ghettoization, and deportations of Jews in Hungary in the spring of 1944; and increased assaults on Roma men and women between June and October 1944. Stretching the timeframe and adopting a catchall concept of genocide enables him to present a history of the region in which pasts and future visions of individuals and groups are indeed intertwined. He also makes a convincing case for “considering the entire period of the war, before and after March 1944, in order to understand the perceptions and choices of *both* Jews and non-Jews” and hence also for integrating Jewish studies with (eastern) European studies (p. 106, emphasis in the original).

Whereas understanding the author’s criticism of anti-semitism being far more used as a conclusion rather than a category of analysis, I was less convinced by his “novel” perspective on bystanders. Perhaps this has something to do with the author’s point of departure. As Segal tells us early into his book, “existing scholarship ... tends to use *bystanders* as a static category, similar to the prevalent treatment of perpetrators and victims;... *specific* conditions rarely figure in the discussion” (p. 11). As I see it, the very essence of the meticulous research that scholars have undertaken on “bystanders”—especially in settings that Omer Bartov has termed “communal genocides”—was to activate the role of the “bystander,” and discuss all the little elements that conditioned his or her actions in the Holocaust.[3] Also Segal’s argument about the meaning of “bystanding” in Subcarpathian Rus’ compared to, for instance, east Galicia does not hold. For concepts to be “good” and thus analytically useful, they cannot be case study specific, but generic. Or, to put it differently, what makes a concept is precisely that it covers a range of actions, positions, or factors.[4] The question is,

of course, whether the term “bystander” (or any catchall term for that matter) makes sense when used on the very ground level of abstraction (in this case microhistory).

Despite this minor criticism, Segal’s work presents a rare example of an integrated narrative of Jewish and eastern European history, something that in effect many of us strive for. It presents a vital reading about the past for the future, in the borderlands and elsewhere.

#### Notes

[1]. His first book was *Days of Ruin: The Jews of Munkacs during the Holocaust*, trans. Naftali Greenwood (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2013).

[2]. In English, see esp. Yeshayahu A. Jelinek, *The Carpathian Diaspora: The Jews of Subcarpathian Rus’ and Mukachevo, 1848-1948* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

[3]. Omer Bartov, “Communal Genocide: Personal Accounts of the Destruction of Buczac, Eastern Galicia, 1941–44,” in *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands*, ed. Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 399–420. See also David Cesarani and Paul A. Levine, eds., *Bystanders to the Holocaust: A Re-Evaluation* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Monika Vrzgulová, “Memories of the Holocaust: Slovak Bystanders,” *Holocaust Studies* 23, nos. 1–2 (2017): 99–111; Natalia Aleksion, “Neighbours in Boryslaw: Jewish Perceptions of Collaboration and Rescue in Eastern Galicia,” in *The Holocaust and European Societies: Social Processes and Social Dynamics*, ed. Frank Bajohr and Andrea Löw (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 243–266; and Christina Morina, “The ‘Bystander’ in Recent Dutch Historiography,” *German History* 32, no. 1 (2014): 101–111.

[4]. John Gerring, “What Makes a Concept Good? A Criterial Framework for Understanding Concept Formation in the Social Sciences,” *Polity* 31, no. 3 (1999): 357–393; Giovanni Sartori, ed., *Social Science Concepts: A Systematic Analysis* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1984); and David Collier and John Gerring, *Concepts and Method in Social Science: The Tradition of Giovanni Sartori* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

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