

ever, he must keep these narratives abstract and indeterminate. One example shows the inaccuracy of such an analytical construction. The Czech liberal-national narrative that allegedly dominated the transitional years and had its origins in the first, interwar Czechoslovak republic has been upheld by the Masarykian myth and was revived in the anticommunist opposition's discussions in the 1970s and 1980s. Its main representatives in Sniegón's account are Charter 77 and Václav Havel, as the first democratically elected president after 1989. Such gross abstraction disregards critical facts, such as the internal ideological rifts between chartists, including their often completely incompatible historical interpretations; the harsh criticism of Czech Masarykian nationalism and the First Republic by an important number of the chartists (e.g., P. Pithart, M. Otáhal, B. Doležal); and the fact that the "traumatic historical point," which in other contexts, such as the Slovak and the Polish—not to speak of the German—is played by the Holocaust and its implications, is in the Czech case the expulsion of the Sudeten-German population from Czechoslovakia after 1945.

Sniegón has good intuition and, indeed, "Czech liberal nationalism" has become a matrix of many, though not all, mainstream Czech political currents since 1989 (liberal conservatives, left liberals, social democrats) that appropriated it, each in their different way. Yet with his vague construction of the Czech national-liberal narrative, Sniegón does not show its internal dynamism, its many tensions, or its obsessions. Thus, he also fails to provide a credible answer for why it did not raise the Holocaust to the position it has held in other European historical cultures. Blamed instead are mostly nationalist stereotypes and historical continuities. Yet these are commonplaces we already know. Similar criticisms could be made of the other three "dominating narratives." This vague and schematic conceptual framework does not allow the author to utilize the rich empirical material and to answer to the main question raised.

Finally, the publisher should have taken greater care with the quality of the language. Sniegón strives to do his best, but non-native English speakers' work ought to be copyedited thoroughly in order to produce the best possible English-language books.

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Jewish Life in Belarus: The Final Decade of the Stalin Regime (1944–1953). By Leonid Smilovitsky. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2014. xviii, 327 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Glossary. Index. Tables. \$60.00, hard bound.

If Belarus had been an independent country at the end of World War II, its death rate of more than 25 percent would have made it the biggest national victim of any place in the world. The Holocaust in Belarus killed nearly all Jews originally from the region, so its postwar Jewish population was made up of Jews primarily from other places. The archives give detailed statistics on the tiny numbers of Jews remaining after the war: in Polotsk, 2,500 Jews; Mogilev, 12,000; and the capital, Minsk, 15,000 (compared to 71,000 in 1939). It is in this world of utter ruin that Jews have attempted to re-establish some semblance of Jewish life. Leonid Smilovitsky, in his deeply researched book *Jewish Life in Belarus*, searches for evidence of how Jewish religious institutions and rituals reemerge in such a war-torn place. And he finds it.

In May 1944, almost simultaneously with the Soviet Union gaining full control of the new Belarusian borders (which by then included territory from interwar Poland

and Lithuania), the Soviet state established the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (CARC). Iosif Stalin had allowed Orthodox Christianity to reemerge in the latter part of the war, and Smilovitsky examines how this phenomenon manifested itself in Belarusian Judaism. He worked in the CARC collection, some of whose documents appear in full in English translation in the book, to see how this new state institution responded to, supported, but more often squelched the aspirations of local Jews.

Even before the end of the war, in December 1944, Jews across the BSSR petitioned CARC to reoccupy buildings that had once been synagogues but that had been taken over by state authorities and turned into clubs, libraries, or other institutions in the 1920s and '30s. In nearly every Belarusian town with a Jewish population in the postwar period, local Jews petitioned higher authorities to establish a minyan, reopen an old synagogue, or, in some cases, build a new one.

Because the state rarely if ever funded these efforts, it allowed (one might even say tacitly encouraged) private fundraising to build Jewish communal institutions, at least in the immediate postwar period. The chief rabbi of Minsk, Yaakov Berger, organized a *vokher* (Yiddish for “weekly donation”) for Jews to support local Jewish institutions. A Professor Shapiro, a wealthy Jew in Minsk—apparently such people still existed—helped fund much of the city’s Jewish religious life after the war. He gave 500 rubles a month to rebuild the synagogue and to establish what is likely the first public monument to the Holocaust in the world: a black granite stele commemorating, in Yiddish and Russian, the Jews murdered in the Minsk ghetto.

Smilovitsky’s important findings prompt the question: how much of the Jewish religious life he has shown to be reemerging in postwar BSSR was about Judaism per se and how much was about Jews more generally? In other words, in a world where the space for other forms of specifically Jewish culture—such as state-sponsored Yiddish culture, which had been shut down back in the late 1930s in most of Belarus—had been severely curtailed if not eliminated, it should be no surprise that when the state again allowed religious practice, Jews also sought out those forms of communal gathering.

The author depicts these acts of petitioning the state for the right to build synagogues, eat kosher food, tend Jewish cemeteries, and establish prayer quorums heroically, as elements of “the self-sacrifice and devotion to his faith that characterized the observant Jew in postwar Belarus and his tenacity in continuing to practice his religion whatever the risks and consequences” (87). While Smilovitsky reads this as a romantic story about the tenacious Belarusian religious Jew, one might also read these efforts as expressions of the desire to find some semblance of dignity in difference in a ruined postwar Belarus. The war years had marked Jews for death, and now Jews came together *as Jews* in life. In documenting that, Smilovitsky shows how desperately Belarusian Jews wanted to maintain a public Jewish identity.

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Ukrainian Nationalism: Politics, Ideology, and Literature, 1929–1956. By Myroslav Shkandrij. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015. xii, 332 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$85.00, hard bound.

The history of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) has been subject to heated debates for many years. During the current crisis in and around Ukraine, the attitude to the OUN and UPA’s contested historical legacy has become the central issue of memory politics. Recent “memory laws”