

ture, and last but not least, flawed methodology outweigh the novelty of the questions addressed by this book, creating the impression of a work in progress, rather than a finished and polished project.

Lizaveta Kasmach
University of Alberta

Iryna Kashtalian, *The Repressive Factors of the USSR's Internal Policy and Everyday Life of the Belarusian Society (1944–1953)* (Historische Belarus-Studien, Bd. 5). Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2016. 345 pp.

and

Rayk Einax, *Entstalinisierung auf Weißrussisch. Krisenbewältigung, sozioökonomische Dynamik und öffentliche Mobilisierung in der Belorussischen Sowjetrepublik 1953–1965* (Historische Belarus-Studien, Bd. 2). Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014. 443 pp.

For several years now, based at Germany's University of Gießen and edited by Thomas M. Bohn, the "Historische Belarus Studien" series has been dedicated to exploring the post-World War II history of Belarus in all its social, political, and economic complexity. In this review, I discuss two recent titles published as part of the series, by Iryna Kashtalian and Rayk Einax.

Researchers working on twentieth-century Belarusian history have to grapple with serious political challenges, and the story of Belarusian historian Iryna Kashtalian is a case in point. For her doctoral thesis at the University of Minsk, Kashtalian researched the topic of how the population of the Belarusian Socialist Soviet Republic (BSSR) experienced the terror during the late Stalinist period. For political reasons, however, she was not awarded a doctoral degree for the work, which was criticized by the responsible state commission as "slandering" the Soviet past. Years later, a revised and expanded version of her study was published in Germany as the fifth volume of the "Historische Belarus Studien."

The book has a very clear structure, comprising a comprehensive introduction and three chapters on the topic under discussion. Two document collections form the fundamental source base: first, a collection of oral history interviews conducted with forced laborers and Holocaust survivors, available online via the Belarusian Oral History Archive (www.nashapamiac.org), together with forty-six interviews conducted by the author herself; and second, the rich archival materials of the BSSR branch of the Communist Party, today held in the National Archive of the Republic of Belarus. The latter collection covers, among other things, popular attitudes, armed resistance, and opposition to collectivization in the villages of Western Belarus.

Alongside traditional historical methodology the author also employs an oral history approach. Thus, much space is devoted to the critical analysis of the narratives employed by respondents. Nevertheless, in this reviewer's opinion, the study is characterized by an overly broad and generalized understanding of two core concepts, namely, everyday life, on the one hand, and repressions, on the other. Kashtalian uses these and other terms in line with the historiographical discourse in Belarus, but translated into English, this sometimes produces misleading results. Thus, for example, Kashtalian writes about the incorporation of Western Belarus or of the western territory of Belarus into the BSSR in 1939 (132), thereby suggesting the existence of a separate territory of that name. Legally, however, these territories were part of the Second Polish Republic at the time. The book also lacks even a brief description of the demographic, ethnic, and economic characteristics of this region, which made up almost half of the territory of the post-war BSSR.

The author rightly reminds us that the Belarusian lands, even before 1941, were subjected to repressions of various kinds. Life under conditions of extreme threat was a "normal" part of existence for several generations. The author shows how the authorities used ideology to create an alternative social hierarchy. In addition to the official division into peasants/collective farm workers, workers, and intelligentsia, other groups were also created. War veterans were singled out as a privileged group, and so too were various newly defined "suspect" or "unreliable" groups: repatriates

and re-settled populations from the west, “collaborators”/“traitors,” “kulaks,” and “Westerners” (residents of the former lands of the Second Polish Republic). Kashtalian contends that citizens were only partially aware of the scale of the repressions and their influence on everyday life. She argues that there were several reasons for this: the human tendency to focus subjectively on one’s own fate; the prevalence of defensive survival strategies, such as suppressing information about repressions in one’s family; the tendency to idealize one’s youth and the period following the liberation from German occupation; and the habit of focusing on the micro-dimension of one’s own reality and everyday routines.

Kashtalian’s book is of interest for at least two reasons. First, it helps to fill the gap in our knowledge of Stalinism, especially its late phase, from a bottom-up perspective, examining the choices and life strategies of so-called “ordinary people.” Second, the author sets out here to analyze the western peripheries and the process of integration of the Soviet and Polish parts of the territory of Belarus in the pre-1939 period. However, the interview materials presented in the book include only a single interview with a person of Polish origins. In addition, surprisingly little use is made of the Polish literature on the subject. While it is true that the Polish scholarship tends to be a little thin when it comes to the post-1944 period, one would have expected at least a few works to be listed in the bibliography.

The first chapter examines the impact of the repressions on different layers of society. Kashtalian shows how the Soviet authorities made use of various instruments in order to force the population to take up the desired positions and to take part in implementing the state’s plans. As a result of these policies, some groups attained privileged status and advanced up the social ladder. For other, these policies meant a loss in status, and in some cases, stigmatization, and isolation. In Kashtalian’s view, the borders between different groups and experiences were quite fluid, and the benefits particular groups derived from state policies were always ambiguous and selective.

The author also takes up the subject of the so-called “Easterners.” In her analysis of oral history interviews with members of

this group, she discerns stronger traces of the perception of “the West” through the prism of Soviet propaganda, but also an appreciation of the higher living standards enjoyed by the Western population (and especially of the Western peasant land ownership regime).

The second chapter looks at everyday life, over which the authorities strove to extend their control, while the population at least in part sought to avoid this. The author considers here working conditions, salaries, and taxes and other burdens borne by ordinary people. She draws attention to food supply problems, and describes the inefficient system of agricultural planning, price control, and monetary reform. Other aspects of everyday life covered here include reproduction, state regulation of the birth rate, and residential housing. The chapter closes with a discussion of crimes linked to the economic crisis, such as speculation, moonshine production, and theft. The author analyzes these crimes as motivated by the desire for profit, or (in the case of food theft) a result of extreme poverty, and of the negative effects of state policy, which led to the impoverishment and marginalization of “enemy” groups. She shows how such crimes at times became the only available means of ensuring survival.

The final chapter comprises a broader analysis of people’s behavior in the face of repression and interference on the part of the state authorities. Kashtalian identifies several types of behavior aimed at physical survival. She discusses practices involving active adaptation to Soviet reality and attempts to derive benefit from it, and confirms the standard view that the population of eastern Belarus generally tended to be more conformist. Kashtalian discerns here, on the one hand, the phenomenon of adapting without accepting ideological dogma (a position that was very widespread amongst the broader population), and on the other hand, the activeness of party members as a privileged group (here one would have liked to hear more about the development of the party rank-and-file and activists in the west of the republic). Kashtalian also analyzes the practice of living “a masked life” and the strategy of “blending in” with the aim of protecting oneself from excessive interest on the part of the authorities. She confirms the well-

established thesis that women have a greater tendency for critical self-expression and anti-systemic actions.

When it comes to oppositional attitudes, Kashtalian distinguishes between passive and active resistance. Her discussion of the latter is rather superficial when it comes to analyzing the relations between the anti-communist underground and the general population. Kashtalian emphasizes that for her respondents, even so many years after the events, the theme of resistance was still governed by taboo. If respondents did speak of resistance, then they did so most often using the labels imposed by the authorities, such as “bandits” and “deserters.”

The final element of everyday life explored here is religiosity among the representatives of different denominations. Kashtalian confirms the findings of other researchers that, although religion was changing as a result of pressure from the authorities, it nevertheless remained strong. Here I would have liked to hear more about the attitudes of West Belarusian peasants towards collectivization in the late 1940s–early 1950s.

Kashtalian’s book is the first comprehensive attempt at mapping out the social situation in Belarus in the epoch of late Stalinism. Its great merit is the author’s striving to present a bottom-up perspective, illuminating the aspirations and actions of so-called “ordinary people,” living under constant and very powerful pressure from the state authorities. Despite the shortcomings discussed above, this is a valuable study that may provide an impetus for more detailed studies on individual sections of Belarusian society.

Alongside volumes prepared by Belarusian colleagues, who are unable to publish their own research in Belarus, Thomas M. Bohn’s edited series also includes the work of German historians. These include a study by Rayk Einax, who defended his doctoral dissertation on the history of the Belarusian Socialist Soviet Republic (BSSR) from 1953 to 1965. The decade in question coincided with the difficult and complex transition from late Stalinism towards a new form of Soviet power. Einax analyzes this transition as it unfolded on the Western periphery of the Soviet empire, with a view to examining the local specificities of this process. He combines an

analysis of economic, political, and social dimensions, all of which were subordinate to the ideological core of Soviet power. The topic is of more than just historical interest; it was during this period that the foundations of modern Belarusian society were laid, and this history remains highly relevant for understanding the more recent development of Belarusian statehood. Industrialization and urbanization, combined with the strong influence of Communist propaganda and the politics of Russification, played an important role in shaping, or rather distorting, the emergence of Belarus as a modern nation.

Einax draws upon a very broad range of archival documents. These include materials produced by Belarusian party and state authorities, from the republican-level party Central Committee through to the state authorities—the government, various levels of administrative authorities, and plenipotentiary bodies in charge of dealings with religious groups. The author has consulted the National Archive of the Republic of Belarus as well as selected archives in Minsk, Mahiliou, and Maladzechna (unfortunately, the archives of the security apparatus remain inaccessible to historians.)

Einax pays particular attention to the reactions on the part of both the party elite and ordinary Soviet citizens to changes in the political situation and problems of everyday life during the first decade after Stalin's death. He draws on a wide range of secondary literature, including both the most recent studies and pre-1991 Sovietological works. Regrettably, however, he seems to have overlooked the work of Polish scholars on the Sovietization of the eastern provinces of the Second Polish Republic, such as Marek Wierzbicki, Krzysztof Jasiewicz, and Wojciech Śleszyński.

The book has a logical and clear structure. It comprises seven chapters, each of which addresses a well-formulated question, is informed by discussion of the relevant literature, and is well supported by evidence. Einax sets out to examine to what degree the reconstruction and integration of the territory of Belarus conformed to Stalinist models; what the reaction was here to the impulses flowing from Moscow; and whether and if so how this differed in the republic's western regions. The author embeds his discussion of these questions within the broader context of the

evolution of the relationship between “national” and “Soviet” interpretations of Belarusian history.

In the first chapter Einax analyzes the emergence and development of the BSSR in the pre-1953 period. There are several errors in a brief passage regarding the territories that were part of Poland in the interwar period (44–45). The “Kresy wschodnie” (or “Eastern borderlands”, that is, the eastern territories of the Second Polish Republic, some of which now make up the western parts of Belarus) comprised just under half of Polish territory at the time (not one-fifth, as Einax states). In the early 1930s this region was home to not 10%, but 37% of the population of Poland. Of course, the issue of the national identities of the inhabitants of those territories has been the subject of prolonged historical debate, especially when it comes to the Polish-Belarusian borderlands. But there are no empirical grounds for claiming, as Einax does, that ethnic Poles made up 6% of the total population in this area, or that the Polish population was mainly made up of civil servants, clergy, land owners, and military settlers. Here the author echoes the assertions made by some Belarusian historians, and neglects other conflicting findings (although he does mention the latter at times in his references). This approach makes it difficult to explain the strength of the Polish armed resistance in this area in the 1940s, or why the scale of the population transfers of ethnic Poles to West Belarus was so large after 1945, not to mention the emergence of what is a considerable Polish minority in Belarus today.

The author’s assertion that 60–80% of the inhabitants of the “North-Western borderlands” in the 1930s were illiterate is likewise unsupported by the evidence, as is his claim that Warsaw had no interest in fostering the economic development of this region. The latter reflected not a lack of interest in this specific region on the part of the Polish government, but rather a drastic lack of available funds for carrying out any large-scale economic modernization program at the time.

This section of the book links the post-war re-activation of the Soviet system with economic reconstruction; on both fronts, late Stalinism left its imprint (including in the form of harsh repressions, forced collectivization in the western regions, and the

political control of “Easterners” over “Westerners”). The remaining six chapters focus on various issues regarding de-Stalinization, broadly understood, and the socio-economic development of Belarus during the period under study.

In many regards this is a pioneering work of scholarship. It represents the first attempt to write a social history of Belarus for this period. After Stalin’s death Soviet Belarus, which had hitherto played a passive role, following Moscow’s lead, now entered into an era of uncertainty, change, and a radical reconfiguration of Soviet propaganda. Not just Soviet society, but even its communist “vanguard,” struggled to keep up with this fast-paced change. The public critique of Beria and Stalin created a deep uncertainty for many of them and paved the way for new practices, including rehabilitation of the victims of Stalinist terror. The Soviet regime’s policies were often selective, slow, and inconsistent, marked by an ever-present anxiety that the legitimacy of communist rule might crumble. All this played out against the backdrop of deep social transformations sparked by industrialization: urbanization, the modernization of traditional ways of life, rising levels of education, and the inclusion of rural migrants into Soviet mass culture. Upward social mobility took place as part of the process of building a new Soviet society, and Belarusian identity began to be viewed as “folklore,” as an element of rural culture. Einax analyzes these processes from several different perspectives. As a rule he begins by presenting events from the perspective from Moscow and the USSR, before then proceeding to analyze the situation in the BSSR against this background. He places great emphasis on setting out the conditions under which the Belarusian authorities were operating, taking care to establish to what degree they were autonomous in their decision-making, and to what degree they identified with Khrushchev’s position. In his reading of the party archival documents, Einax also sets out to discern the voices of ordinary inhabitants of the BSSR, to investigate how they perceived the authorities, and how they tried to find a way to meet official expectations while simultaneously pursuing their own goals—namely, effectively, meeting the basic day-to-day needs of their families under what remained very difficult conditions in post-war Belarus right up to

the early 1960s. It is remarkable just how marginal other issues (such as nationalist ideas) came to be in this context. Improving living conditions became the most important element shaping the Belarusian view of their republic and the Soviet system.

Einax devotes a great deal of space (more than 100 pages) to analyzing the anti-religious policies of the Khrushchev era, and the situation of believers of various faiths during this period. The eradication of religion was held up as a measure of Soviet society's modernity, but the intensity of the pressure exerted on religious believers by the authorities in Belarus is evidence that, contrary to the standard Polish assumptions regarding this issue, it would be wrong to assume that de-Stalinization also meant liberalization.

Małgorzata Ruchniewicz
University of Wrocław

Margarita M. Balmaceda, *Living the High Life in Minsk: Russian Energy Rents, Domestic Populism and Belarus' Impending Crisis*. Budapest and New York: CEU Press, 2014. 219 pp.

Energy politics endures as one of the thorniest elements in Belarus–Russia relations since 1991, with Belarus remaining one of the most gas dependent states in the world. Paradoxically, the Belarusian authorities long viewed dependence on Russian energy as an opportunity rather than a threat. As this book insightfully observes, the goal of diversification of the energy mix was absent from state policy until 2007.

Margarita Balmaceda explores the role of energy rents in Aliaksandr Lukashenka's survival. She argues persuasively that manipulating these rents is crucial in explaining his consolidation and maintenance of power. In doing so, Balmaceda does not overlook other factors such as the strategic importance of Belarus to Russia, or the role played by favorable international circumstances at key moments. She contributes to both our understanding of authoritarian resilience, and also our understanding about the levers of influence weaker states possess in asymmetrical power relationships.