

People in Spite of History: Stories Found in an Attorney Archive in the Banat Region. By Tibor Várady. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2021). vi, 335 pp. Notes. Illustrations. Photographs. Figures. Tables. Maps. \$85.00, hard bound.

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Drawing on the records of his family law firm's archive, Tibor Várady crafts a portrait of human relations and everyday life in mid-twentieth century Becskerek, a small town in the Banat, today in northern Serbia.

The backdrop of the book is a familiar political history. The collapse of the Austro-Hungarian empire in 1918 and the reordering of Europe ushered in decades of mass violence and trauma. Like towns across east central Europe, Becskerek had a multinational population comprised of Jews, Germans, Serbs, Hungarians, and Roma. As borders and regimes changed, different groups were deported, arrested, or killed, their property seized, their family members marginalized. Nazi invasion unleashed racial politics and genocide during the war. Yugoslav Communists initiated a revolutionary project designed to transform people, economy, and society. Culling through postage receipts and forgotten currency, correspondence, complaints, affidavits, and personal letters, Várady illuminates a human side of law in times of crisis and a society where individuals worried about being victims of slander, escaping unhappy marriages, and winning as they navigated Nazi terror, an impending Soviet invasion, communist revolution, expulsion, and flight. Through the lens of quotidian paperwork, we witness how the social fabric persisted, and how it came undone in the 1940s and 50s.

The book is divided into eight thematic sections that explore legal matters of personal, property, criminal, and family law. The author adopts a sympathetic approach to his subjects, capturing their voices, curses, slang, and songs while avoiding caricature.

The book's greatest strength is in the way it ekes out a human side of legal history that is too often erased by the official archive. Even as their lives were turned upside down, many people did not know which government was legitimate, what laws applied to them, or where they belonged. The attorney's office became a place to work things out, both within and beyond the law. During Várady's brief stint working in the office, for instance, he found himself writing to a woman whose husband caught her having sex with a neighbor. Acting at the husband's behest, and using official letterhead that was stamped with his professional seal, Várady warned her that continuing the dalliance could have "grave consequence." The letter worked and the husband rewarded him with a bottle of "homemade pálinka spirits in a wicker cover" (136–37). In another example, we learn of a Jewish couple who migrated to Israel after the war and turned to a local attorney to negotiate the sale of their property. They agreed on a price with a buyer, but there was a catch: it was illegal to mail Yugoslav dinars to Israel. The local attorney thus creatively worked out a plan to send them fatty bacon, goose breast, ham, and salami, foods they could not easily acquire in Israel. But he faced another bureaucratic hiccup: individual citizens were prohibited from mailing international packages. And so the attorney negotiated with local companies and a Jewish organization to manage the exchange (75). Instances of divorce run through the book. Most thought-provoking for Várady are non-Jews divorcing their Jewish spouses during the Holocaust, as well as Hungarian women divorcing their German husbands late in the war as Germans faced expulsion and property seizures. Through these and countless other examples, Várady illuminates the daily challenges posed by dilemmas of citizenship laws, foreign status, and migration, reminding us of both the epic and the mundane effects of war.

People in Spite of History defies genre. The author jumps back and forth chronologically and thematically, moving between his own life and the lives of the people in his documents. There is no index, no bibliography, and no footnotes. There is no discussion of complementary literature or how these legal cases might challenge or augment arguments on wartime and postwar border regions in Hungary and Yugoslavia, such as those developed by Holly Case, Emil Kerenji, or Mirna Zakić. Indeed, there is little tying together the individual sections other than a desire to recreate the lives and dilemmas of a town in crisis. Yet, through these bottom-up narratives, the book reveals new sides of institutions and regimes, a pragmatic side to German officials' legal decision-making that sometimes conflicted with their racial agendas and a complexity to communist revolutionary policies as lived experience. The result is a book in which we, as readers, feel as though we are accompanying the author to his attic, unpacking boxes, and making sense of the people whose lives comprised this tumultuous and devastating moment in the region's history.

EMILY GREBLE
Vanderbilt University

Lviv and Wrocław, Cities in Parallel? Myth, Memory and Migration, c.1890-Present. Ed. Jan Fellerer and Robert Pyrah. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2020. xvi, 358 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Photographs. Figures. Tables. \$95.00, paper.
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This is a volume of preponderantly high-quality contributions. Jan Fellerer's introduction, however, simultaneously inflates its originality and undersells its significance. He claims it represents a third approach, next to national or multi-national narratives, namely—in essence—a bottom-up history that stresses the influence of agency from below. The implication of a gap in the existing literature on L'viv and Wrocław is, unfortunately, strongly exaggerated and thus misleading.

The purpose of thinking in terms of this specific set of, arguably, inconsistently juxtaposed approaches remains unclear. Instead, histories that (still) seek to “nationalize” these cities are dated; histories recognizing their (former) realities of diversity and remaking are up-to-date; and the interaction of multiple agencies is not terra incognita, so that Fellerer's claim of novelty for treating agency from below as more than ancillary does not match the existing literature well. His assertion that “the Sovietization of Lviv... often remains in the background” (7) sits badly with the historiography, too; it is easy to look up a small handful of studies that have already addressed the Sovietization of the city explicitly and extensively.

Robert Pyrah provides a useful overview and acute discussion of “parallel” Polish and Ukrainian histories, combined with a cautiously hopeful argument about the making of “placeness” from other materials than national and nationalist narratives.

Focusing on a struggle over migration between late-Habsburg officials and informal agents, Keely Stauter-Halsted brings to bear cutting-edge scholarship on migration and a sense of Habsburg and Galician peculiarities. In this volume her essay also serves as an especially useful reminder of a history of migration beyond war, refugees, deportations, and forcible population transfers—and of the fact that this history is also pertinent for places such as L'viv and Wrocław, even though they have suffered so much from the “weaponized” variant.