

Part III describes the resilience of neighborhood, complexly interwoven from the threads of region, family, ethnicity, and religion. Pasieka criticizes an ethnographic tendency to treat religion seriously only in times of conflict—a view that underwrites secularism as the guardian of peace. In contrast, the people of Rozstaje express neighborliness through mutual religious respect, everybody “acting like Christians” (153) and refraining from outdoor work during other peoples’ holidays. But respect can obscure other attitudes: the Orthodox and Catholics admire Protestant teetotalism but resent the barriers it places on conviviality, while Adventists and Pentecostals privately treat their neighbors’ holidays as superstitious bacchanals.

The neighborly practice of interreligious respect reveals itself to be fragile and insufficient in the final chapter, “Debating Pluralism.” A seemingly trivial proposal—to add the Lemko names, in the Cyrillic alphabet, to village signs—quickly transforms the language of familiarity and fraternity into “us” and “them.” For a sour few months after the contentious vote over the street signs, “everyday politeness” came to seem a façade “obscuring the superficiality of local ecumenism” (191). However, locals eventually turned back to such politeness to heal the wounds it had failed to prevent: “despite their disillusionment with their neighbors’ behavior, it was precisely to neighborly relations that they pointed in order to imagine how a different outcome might have been possible” (208). Soon things returned to “normal”—to a Polish-Catholic hegemony allowing other religious lifeways to co-exist as colorful folklore (the Lemko Orthodox and Greek Catholics), admirable but prudish rigorism (the various Protestants), or harmless exoticism (the handful of Buddhists). Pasieka’s microcosmic study reveals both the importance and the inadequacy of “everyday practices of social conviviality,” which ease social strains while upholding the ethnoreligious status quo (212). Her discoveries are exportable westward.

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Tschernobyl in Belarus: Ökologische Krise und sozialer Kompromiss, 1986–1996.

By Aliaksandr Dalhouski. Historisch Belarus, 4. Wiessbaden: Harrassowitz-Verlag, 2015. 219 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Photographs. Tables. Maps. €38.00, hard bound.

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In his doctoral thesis, Aliaksandr Dalhouski analyzes the relationship between the Soviet authorities and the inhabitants of the polluted areas that became most affected by the radioactive fallout in the aftermath of the Chernobyl catastrophe. The author shows convincingly that for the first two years after the disaster there was still a thin line of mutual trust and cooperation. Dalhouski explains the close cooperation of 1986–88 by an unwritten contract between those who had to cope with the radioactivity in the southeastern part of the Belorussian Socialist Soviet Republic (BSSR). While Soviet citizens continued to provide loyalty, the Soviet state distributed a larger share of medical goods, services, and food to the Gomel’ region. The author bases his analysis on the Belorussian mechanism of the *skarha*, written letters signed by individuals asking the Soviet authorities to take care of their situation. As this was a legitimized form of public critique, even harshly formulated letters did work as incentives for the oblast leadership of the Communist Party to react to and meet a large share of the semi-publicly formulated demands.

An important finding of Dalhouski’s book, which was published in German in a series on Belarusian history edited by Thomas M. Bohn, is that the perception of the

post-Chernobyl crisis was not national by definition until 1988. Most Soviet citizens residing in the BSSR did perceive it as a regional issue. This changed in 1988 due to two developments. Many inhabitants from the Gomel' region were relocated to newly-built housing all throughout the BSSR. This changed the perception of their problems, because now the redistribution of goods and services by the state took place in direct competition with other citizens. Housing provided to resettled families meant less housing for the local population in other oblasts of the BSSR. At the same time a national interpretation of Belarusian history was projected on the catastrophe and towards the end of the 1980s: it increasingly was described as a national catastrophe. This process exposed the Soviet administration to a new form of harsh criticism, including arguments about a presumably genocidal dimension of the Chernobyl radiation. Dalhouski shows the increasing politicization of the public debate, which led to the highly symbolical relevance of the reoccurring Chernobyl March every 26th of April at the site and anniversary of the disaster. For several years the date and the march against the Soviet authorities and their management in the aftermath of the catastrophe became a hot spot of civil protest. This did not change after 1991, when a new Belarusian state emerged. In this final part Dalhouski explains how Aliaksandar Lukashenka managed to limit the relevance of the Chernobyl theme in Belarusian politics. While upholding a high level of symbolical recognition, he did slow down the redistribution of goods and services. Daulhouski also argues in this part that the legal practice of the *skarha* was included into a newly implemented constitution and remains a highly relevant source for studies of Belarusian society. Future research on the Chernobyl disaster could highlight the relationship between the emergence of a popular national movement in BSSR and the nearby Soviet republics. The Lithuanian SSR in particular was shaped by the link between nationalism and environmentalism, and it would be interesting to learn more about the links of both developments.

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