

REVIEWS

neglected in the otherwise comprehensive introduction).

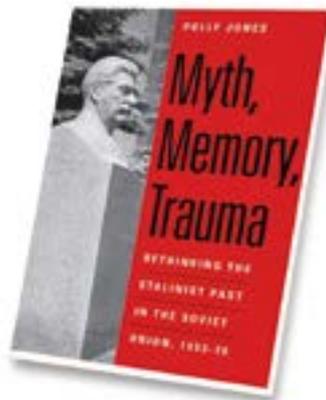
The investigation of popular responses to these narratives draws on a remarkably broad range of sources: postwar and post-Soviet interviews, citizens' diaries and letters, police surveillance and local propagandists' reports and memoirs. While offering one of the fullest pictures of popular attitudes in this under-researched period, the collation of these sources often overlooks the significant differences between them as sources, especially for the Stalinist *mentalité* that this book also seeks to reconstruct.

During this period, while official media often contained a bewildering shortage of information and coherence, its audience tried to dispel confusion through empirical observation, insights from other media or speculation and rumour. As Johnston persuasively argues, these practices extended beyond Stalinism, forming a consistent response to Soviet 'information hunger'. However, his conclusion, that 'unofficial' culture inexorably overwhelmed 'official' culture after Stalin's death and led to the Soviet collapse, underestimates attempts to inject greater 'truthfulness' and debate into post-Stalinist public culture, particularly under Khrushchev and Gorbachev.

The book's kaleidoscope of popular narratives amply confirms that Stalinist citizens could be 'creative' and far from 'passive'; however they were not necessarily more coherent or logical than the 'confused' media. The notions of bricolage and 'fusing' imply that 'unofficial' narratives were always more comprehensive and insightful than 'official' ones. Viewing any combinations of 'official' and 'unofficial' culture also conflates actions that were 'tactical' to different degrees. Was the life and death business of information-gathering about the war really comparable to consorting with foreigners, as described in the book's most captivating chapter, with Soviet sailors in

the Arctic circle enjoying Hollywood films and jazz? These all show that Soviet citizens could be flexible and pragmatic, but were they all equally important 'tactics' for the Stalinist 'habitat'? At times, the vivid picture of Stalinist life, so assiduously unearthed by the author, spills out beyond his tight theoretical framework, suggesting that there may be more ways to understand the different behaviours of this eventful period.

Polly Jones



Myth, Memory, Trauma Rethinking the Stalinist Past in the Soviet Union, 1953-70

Polly Jones

Yale University Press 362pp £45

FOR STUDENTS of Russian history and observers of Putin's Russia, the rehabilitation of the Stalinist past and Josef Stalin's resurgent personal popularity is a disturbing development. Ever since Stalin's death in March 1953, his ghost has continued to haunt contemporary Russia. Polly Jones' brilliantly researched study of de-Stalinisation in the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras provides a timely reminder of previous efforts to come to terms with Stalinism. From the mid-1950s until the late 1960s the Soviet Union attempted to confront the trauma, shame and guilt of political terror and the suffering of a brutal war. Jones argues that de-Stalinisation, although frequently imperfect, witnessed genuine attempts to work through the moral and historical complexities of Stalinism. Although a missed opportunity, it nevertheless revealed obstacles

to Stalin 'memory work', and binary positions to the Stalinist inheritance that are still with us today. *Myth, Memory, Trauma* forces the reader to rethink established truths about de-Stalinisation. It follows the complex twists and turns in the dynamics of memory, from Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech' in February 1956, his famous denunciation of the Stalin cult of personality, through to the commemoration of the 90th anniversary of Stalin's birth in December 1969. In the process we explore the increase in ideological vigilance and cautious praise for Stalin in the freeze of the late 1950s, followed in 1961 by the revival of traumatic narratives and attacks on cult symbols after the 22nd Party Conference. There was no single, clear or fixed interpretation of the Stalinist past under Khrushchev. Away from the key

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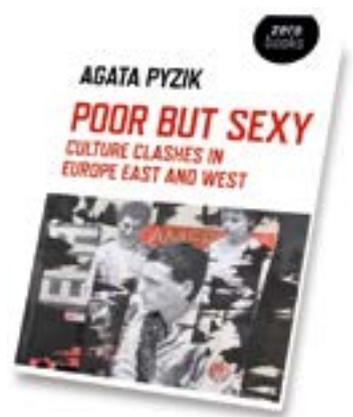
moments of assault, Stalin's image was unstable, subject to inversion and repeated reassessment. Political pressures meant negotiating a course between narratives of 'glory' and 'guilt'. In Brezhnev's early years pro-Stalinist sentiment re-emerged as Soviet culture moved away from discussion of tragedy and trauma towards a celebration of Stalin's achievements. Only towards the end of the 1960s was a stable discourse reached, albeit one which left Stalinism as an uncomfortable and unresolved issue in collective memory.

Jones' approach combines history and literary scholarship and draws upon an impressive palette of published and archival materials, including internal party reports, discussions about official historiography and the correspondence of writers, journal editors

and readers. Jones is at her most fluent when analysing literary texts, which explored the trauma of terror and the disastrous early months of the Great Patriotic War and the reception of these texts by readers and censors. These sources move the debate from discussions of de-Stalinisation within the elite to popular reactions.

Polly Jones provides one of the most sophisticated and nuanced analyses of the complexities of de-Stalinisation currently available. The Soviet Union never entirely silenced traumatic memories, although there were strict limits in which these could be expressed. Indeed the notion that repressing difficult memories was detrimental to the collective psyche enjoyed currency in the 1950s and 1960s. Yet this idea coexisted with a countervailing feeling that intro-spective or 'gloomy' discussion of war and terror was equally damaging. Although celebration of Stalin's modernising project and victorious military leadership triumphed in the late 1960s and currently holds the ascendancy, it is worth remembering, as this important study argues, that this outcome was by no means certain.

Robert Dale



Poor But Sexy Culture Clashes In Europe East And West

Agata Pyzik

Zero Books 310pp £15.99

A QUARTER of a century ago, when the Berlin Wall fell, there was an expectation that the Evil Empire's colonies, no longer subjugated by the yoke of statist