

have happened had the First World War ended with a German victory: whether the colonialist *Ostraum* fantasies of Ludendorff would have been realized or whether a moderate policy would have prevailed that accepted the existence, at least formally, of an independent Polish state within a German-dominated eastern Europe.

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***Soviet Soft Power in Poland: Culture and the Making of Stalin's New Empire, 1943–1957.*** By Patryk Babiracki. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015. xvi, 344 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Photographs. Figures. Tables. \$37.50, hard bound.

Patryk Babiracki's brilliant, big-hearted book burrows inside the aspirations and failures of the Soviet imperial project in eastern Europe. Focusing on Soviet cultural diplomacy in Poland, Babiracki uses political scientist Joseph Nye's term "soft power" to suggest what this project both was and was not. While key actors on both the Polish and Soviet sides—among them writers, scientists, and journalists—attempted to extend Soviet influence "by forging sensitive and reciprocal cultural relations" between the two countries, "their efforts were stifled by the system that Stalin had brutally hammered into place" (236). The result, by the mid-1950s, was to alienate even those Polish intellectuals who had once actively supported the Soviets, and to leave "large, resentful, captive audiences" susceptible to the lure of better-quality cultural goods from the west" (239).

While this conclusion might not be surprising, Babiracki's contribution is to highlight the reservoirs of genuine effort and goodwill that were squandered in the process. In fact, the exercise of Soviet "hard power" in the Polish cultural sphere—heavy-handed propaganda and censorship, officially delimited styles, and limitations on artistic freedom—was opposed by a range of mid-level actors, both Polish and Soviet. It was perceived as counter-productive even by Party hardliners like Jakub Berman. Babiracki also disputes the assumption that Poles' inherited mistrust of Russian/Soviet imperialism must have doomed the soft-power project to failure. On the contrary, the opportunity to be "close affiliates of a culturally able military superpower" (83) was far from unattractive to many, he argues, in the wake of World War II.

Babiracki illuminates this through meticulously researched, thickly layered vignettes describing encounters between Soviets and Poles of various stripes. These start with a chapter on the creation of the Kościuszko Division of the Red Army in 1943, and end with a portrait of the Soviet editor Nikolai Bubnov, who quixotically tried to turn the Soviet mouthpiece *Wolność* into a good read, inspired by the "thaw" in Polish culture a decade later.

The fact that people like Bubnov were repeatedly recalled, ignored, and/or silenced by fear only underscores their commitment to a vision of Soviet "soft" influence very different from that of the political center. Babiracki reminds us that Soviet writers, artists, or scientists went out on a limb to build bridges with their east European counterparts; Sovietization was a risky business, most of all for the Soviets themselves. For instance, while Soviets might welcome the chance to travel abroad on a cultural or scientific delegation, this would redouble pressures upon them to critique, say, the "bourgeois" tendencies of their Polish hosts. Often, this led to abortive encounters that confirmed both sides in their mistrust of the other. On the other hand, Babiracki sees evidence of an unrequited "craving for more interaction" (169) between representatives of the two groups, embodied in Polish writer Zofia Nałkowska's fleet-

ing Moscow romance with the poet Alesksandr Tvardovskii or Soviet writers' continually frustrated requests for more contemporary Polish literature in translation.

Babiracki is especially interested in individuals whose positions between cultures and systems made them both particularly qualified to interpret Soviet soft power and particularly vulnerable to Stalinist depredations. This includes Soviets of Polish descent (notoriously, Marshal Konstantin Rokossovskii), and Jewish Communists like Berman or the sympathetically portrayed Jerzy Borejsza. As Babiracki shows, antisemitism, too, contributed to soft power's downfall, as Jewish Communists like Berman, driven by fear, advocated the Sovietization of Polish culture not out of conviction, but to save their skins.

Ultimately, Babiracki argues that "Sovietization" is a flawed model for understanding the dynamics of Stalinist cultural influence in communist eastern Europe, for it describes the monochromatic end-result of a process, but not the process itself. As he writes, Soviet cultural imperialism in Poland was a "mélange of aggressive overtures, tactful involvement, and plain inaction" (95). If the vision of soft power held by so many of his protagonists—that of a stable empire built on long-term cultural influence—failed, it was not because of some eternal antagonism between Poles and Russians, but because there was "nothing soft about Stalinism in the Soviet Union" (236). Babiracki's book is not for the faint of heart—only the strongest undergraduates will follow his winding narratives of failed encounters, misunderstandings, and missed opportunities to the bitter end—but for those who stay the course, it richly rewards.

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***Jewish Space in Contemporary Poland.*** Ed. Erica Lehrer and Michael Meng. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015. vii, 299 pp. Notes. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. Figures. Tables. Maps. \$35.00, paper. \$85.00, hard bound.

This innovative and important volume focuses, theoretically as well as empirically, on the intersection of memory and space in the Polish-Jewish context on the territory of Poland since 1989. The book's expressed goal is "to shed light on the role of the material world in the complex, unfolding encounter with the Jewish past in contemporary Poland, in spaces that conjure up ambivalent, often conflicting memories and emotions" (4). Following the lead of historian Diana Pinto, who penned the epilogue, the "Jewish space," the title is not understood as the realm of contemporary lived Jewish practice (of which there is little in contemporary Poland); rather it lies in the built environment, in the public domain, where Poles encounter the remaining signs (including synagogues and cemeteries, some invisible to all but the initiated) of what once was thriving Jewish life in the Polish lands.

As presented in the strong introduction, penned by editors Erica Lehrer and Michael Meng, the book sheds light on the "how" and "why" of Poles embracing the country's Jewish heritage and of their nostalgia for the Jews no longer in their midst. Witness, for example, the seemingly improbable yet real "I miss you Jew!" graffiti campaign as well as Jewish-themed festivals and especially the renovation and/or reconstruction of elements of the built environment. The "how" is demonstrated in numerous empirical treatments of Jewish spaces ranging from the ever-central realm of Auschwitz; big cities such as Warsaw, Kraków and Łódź; down to smaller provincial towns and villages. The "why" is seen by some as a sign of a longing for a different, less nationalistic, more pluralistic Poland, while a healthy relationship to the