

pessimists as well, and the optimists were ultimately disheartened by defeat, but the optimism was real. Recognizing this, Stahel goes further to suggest that Nazism had rendered the German generals incapable of recognizing reality. They were “largely oblivious” (141), saw iron will as capable of triumphing over facts on the ground (153), and went well beyond the point of rationality (305–6). Though Stahel has not entirely clinched his case, he has made a powerful argument.

DAVID R. STONE  
US Naval War College

***De-Stalinization Reconsidered: Persistence and Change in the Soviet Union.*** Ed. Thomas M. Bohn, Rayk Einax, and Michel Abesser. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2014. 276 pp. Notes. Bibliography. \$52.00, paper.

Since the turn of the century, the decade and a half that followed Stalin’s death in 1953 has emerged as a period of significant scholarly interest, resulting in a number of conferences and essay collections. Contributors and editors have wrestled with the question of how these years should be characterized. What labels are appropriate? In the volume reviewed here, the editors use the title “De-Stalinization Reconsidered,” although they articulate their doubts about the term “De-Stalinization,” noting its failure “to incorporate numerous central developments of the 1950s and 1960s” (14), as well as about the perhaps more popular term “Thaw.” Both designations, they suggest, invoke a “far reaching liberation which was often neither intended nor achieved” (15). In their stead, they suggest using Karl Popper’s concept of an “open society—based on individual decisions and abstract social relations,” when considering the “failure of the Soviet Union” (13).

The first three chapters are similarly devoted to reflecting on how the post-Stalin era should be conceived. In an original and thought-provoking essay, Stephen Bittner questions the “thaw” metaphor, but also urges us to ask new questions. Challenging the tendency to see the USSR’s final decades in terms of “collapse and decay,” he instead presents them as a time that was “fertile” for new cultural forms (41). Stefan Plaggenborg engages critically with the term de-Stalinization, arguing that even if terror was vastly diminished after Stalin’s death, many Stalinist structures survived 1953 and that Khrushchev used many of his predecessor’s methods. Like Bittner, he also extends his discussion into the very late Soviet era, and these sections are perhaps the most original, offering a depiction of Soviet social relations made up of “loose, small, and informal communities” (64), rather than either a wider sense of social solidarity or an atomized society based on the nuclear family. Stephan Merl is the most explicit in his criticism of the term “de-Stalinization,” which he claims “lacks the analytical clarity necessary to describe ‘post-Stalinism’” (67), stressing that paternalistic modes of political communication continued under Khrushchev. For him, it was only under Brezhnev that the “mobilizational dictatorship” ended (92).

The remaining chapters in the collection are more typical research-based pieces. Although the editors’ divisions are rather different, I identify three core themes, the first of them being popular opinion and dissent. In his contribution, Yuri Aksyutin draws on material from the retrospective interviews he conducted in 1999–2002, much of which was presented in his monograph, but now brought to an English readership. For him, Stalin’s death was a very painful caesura, but the 1950s and 1960s all the same saw dissent and divisions begin to emerge. Robert Hornsby’s study focuses specifically on the years 1957–58 when, in the wake of the Secret Speech and society’s sometimes troublesome responses, convictions for “anti-Soviet agitation and propa-

ganda” rose steeply, hitting workers with little formal education particularly hard. He suggests that before alternative means of curbing problematic behaviors—such as techniques of mutual surveillance—were adopted, the regime returned briefly to using the tried and tested tool: repression. Simon Huxtable examines the role of the press and journalism, arguing that newspapers were much freer to criticize the failures of local bureaucracy, but also had limits placed on them. While an editor who allowed his publication to go far in terms of criticism would not face the summary punishment as under Stalin, he could still expect to face stern criticism and potentially lose his job. In the field of literature, Maria Zezina also finds the party reasserting its control over writers who now became starkly divided between those who supported reform and those who clung to the past. Michel Abesser’s examination of jazz is particularly interesting, for it shows not only how the regime might temper potentially problematic behaviors, but also how ordinary people might participate in this neutering of cultural forms once considered politically subversive. Jazz was re-invented by young musicians themselves, who now cast it as a cultured activity, encouraging concert-goers to listen in a well-informed and considered manner, rather than dancing.

A second important contribution of the volume is to our understanding of regional issues. Rayk Einax argues convincingly that after a brief show of greater independence, Belorussia became a particularly conformist, stable republic, not least because it was exactly at this moment that the country underwent rapid and far-reaching industrialization and modernization. Thomas Bohn also focuses on Minsk, examining the regime’s attempts to control this wave of urban migration through the registration (*propiska*) system, though many people circumvented official channels and set up home in the city, albeit on an informal and therefore second-class basis. Nataliya Kibita shows how the Ukrainian party leadership hoped that economic reforms of the Khrushchev era might allow it greater independence from central planners, but the economic regional councils (*sovmarkhozy*) in fact diverted power away from the party elites in Kiev. Neither Kiev nor Minsk emerge here as being able to establish a strong sense of autonomy in the 1950s and 1960s, although Moscow could not always dictate the nature and pace of development either.

The remaining two articles concern the nature of social relations, daily life, and the welfare state after Stalin. Galina Ivanova’s chapter on the welfare state presents a relatively significant break in the mid-1950s, charting how concerns about popular wellbeing came to replace the more repressive practices of the Stalin era. Melanie Ilic examines the women question in a balanced manner, suggesting that there was an attempt to expand women’s involvement in political life and to encourage popular mobilization, but that patriarchal attitudes survived and in their daily life women continued to carry the double burden.

One of the most remarkable contributions to this volume is Dietmar Neutatz’s conclusion “Taking Stock of the Khrushchev Era.” Neutatz, a commentator at the conference on which the book is based, writes, rather unexpectedly: “It is not easy to grasp the analytical essence of the volume” (252). As always with edited collections, the editors certainly had a hard task, trying to identify shared findings from a set of conference papers that are inevitably diverse in both their approach and conclusions. That said, at times I share Neutatz’s reservations. Neutatz’s conclusion that “historical research on Khrushchev’s Russia still has some way to go” (252) is in itself thought-provoking. What should we hope for from the ongoing and future research into this period? Will we find resolution to the debates about labels and nomenclature? These discussions have certainly been valuable, prodding us to clarify our understanding of the period and crystallizing differences of interpretation, but we should not assume that scholarship will ever find a consensus, or even that one would be helpful.

Scholars of the post-1953 era in Soviet history seem to have been particularly pre-occupied with periodization. Perhaps the time has come to start asking different questions. For example, how do policies and experiences of Soviet society from the 1950s onwards compare with those of other cold-war societies? Or, as Bittner provocatively asks, how and when were the seeds of 21st century Russia sown?

MIRIAM DOBSON  
*University of Sheffield*

***Stalin and the Struggle for Supremacy in Eurasia.*** By Alfred J. Rieber. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. x, 420 pp. Notes. Index. Maps. \$39.99, paper.

This is an ambitious and overarching reinterpretation of Stalin's domestic and foreign policies—or actually the connections between the two—from the revolution and civil war periods through World War II and the dawn of the Cold War. It appears to be the second installment to Alfred Rieber's well-received *The Struggle for Eurasian Borderlands*, a comparative study of the Hapsburg, Ottoman, Russian and Xing empires. Like that volume, this new book has a wide geographic scope, but with a greater focus on the internal politics and security calculations of a single power—the USSR. Based on documents from archives in Russia and a broad array of memoirs and secondary literature, Rieber highlights the importance of border security as a central theme in Russian history and one that transcends the revolution and political ideologies. His definition of Eurasia is certainly broad: it includes the western borderlands of Poland and Finland, European territories that were annexed formally into the USSR (the Baltics and Moldova), the southern frontier with Turkey and Iran, and the Asian frontier with China and Japan, ranging from Central Asian East through Siberia to the Russian Far East.

Stalin's main foreign policy tasks in the 1920s and 1930s were to re-build what was left of the Russian empire, transform it into a multi-ethnic state, and to secure that state from hostile neighbors, many of whom were smaller successor states to the empires of Rieber's previous book. Even though some of those successor states were weak, they had strong ties to the major powers of the day and many were revanchist—which posed potential insecurity in the Soviet frontier. Rieber identifies Stalin's key approach to this foreign policy challenge as his “borderlands thesis”: a remarkably flexible series of attempts to protect the Soviet border regions from incursions and foreign influence, to expand Soviet power both within the USSR's borders and beyond, and to punish borderland peoples who showed any sign of disloyalty.

Stalin's policies towards security in the borderlands were rooted in his own past as a Georgian revolutionary in the multi-ethnic Caucasus—an experience that set him apart from Lenin, Trotsky and other early Soviet leaders and were key to his evolution as a thinker and political leader. This led him to take uncharacteristically flexible—and at times contradictory—approaches towards relations with the Soviet Union's neighbors and eventually with the major powers of Europe and Asia, particularly once German and Japanese militarism and expansionism became a clear threat to Moscow's influence in the country's periphery.

This flexibility evolved with time, dictated in large part by circumstances. It included cutting security deals with foreign rivals, installing friendly regimes in some buffer states, annexing neighboring lands and peoples, and in some cases choosing not to annex such territories—particularly because of a postwar realization that annexing too many hostile nationalities and could prove difficult to absorb them and thus pose demographic challenges.