

BOOK REVIEWS

The Long Hangover. Putin's New Russia and the Ghosts of the Past, by Shaun Walker, New York, Oxford University Press, 2018, vii, 278 pp., \$22.37 (hardcover), ISBN 978-0190659240.

“Russia was like a party host who awoke the morning after, started making a cursory effort to clean up the mess all around, but after a while simply gave up and slunk back to bed to nurse its hangover” (18). Shaun Walker describes the Russian approach to dealing with its Soviet past with a fitting metaphor. *The Long Hangover* is a deeply researched bottom-up analysis; it paints a vibrant picture of how Russia's President Vladimir Putin enlisted the Soviet past in his quest to rebuild Russia and how the complicated character of this past has shaped individual and collective memory.

Walker has been the Central and Eastern Europe correspondent for the *Independent* and the *Guardian* for almost two decades. His book presents the reader with a vivid journalistic portrait of how contemporary events in Russia are riddled with memory. Targeting a wider audience of Russia observers, *The Long Hangover* fits into the Oxford University Press's policy of reaching out beyond academic researchers to feature academic debates with policy relevance.

Walker aims to “chart Vladimir Putin's mission to fill the void left by the 1991 collapse and forge a new sense of nation and purpose in Russia” (9). Yet he treats Putin as but one character in a diversified cast of actors as the author works to uncover how ordinary Russians' memory is influenced both by the Soviet past and Putin's memory politics. Walker's main argument is that the Soviet past did not end with the collapse of the Soviet Union. It keeps on inspiring current political and societal evolutions, by both complementing and opposing them.

Twelve chapters, divided into four sections, form the core of the book. A prologue and epilogue frame the body; a list of notes and a bibliography allow for further reading. Each chapter is exceptionally well-documented and colorfully written. They revolve around the role of memory in the Russian collective nation-building and individual sense-making process, both in daily life as well as during periods of upheaval and conflict. Grouping the chapters into four parts cannot hide the fact that the structure comes across as somewhat meandering. The abundance of salient anecdotes adds to this feeling but is also what makes the story so compelling to read.

The four chapters of part 1, “Curating the Past,” focus on the deliberate remembrance and forgetting of specific historical episodes. Walker starts off with the new national myth Putin built around the Great Patriotic War, masterfully contrasting the grand Victory Day parade in 2015 with the personal testimony of veteran Evgeny Kuropatkov. The Kalmyk, Chechen, and Ingush deportations as well as the Kolyma Gulag labor camps illustrate the selectiveness of the official narrative on the Soviet period. The Chechen wars and their aftermath serve as an example of memory contestation and the population's acceptance of a selective narrative in exchange for stability.

Next, part 2, “Curating the Present,” takes five chapters to chart the historical legacy of present events and of how warring parties instrumentalize memory in this context. Walker's account of how the 2014 Sochi Olympics opening ceremony walked the audience through Russia's history illustrates Putin's careful crafting of the memory narrative in his quest to a great power status. The next chapters focus on Crimea. The starting points are the historical sensitivities of Ukraine-Russia relations, their instrumentalization in the 2014 conflict, and the political background against which the Maidan revolution took place. Walker's analysis on Stephan Bandera's role in the warring parties' propagandic discourse is especially enriching.

Part 3, “The Past Becomes the Present” consists of two chapters on the War in the Donbass. First, it addresses the Soviet legacy of the Donbass region and the role this plays in the run-up to the war. It then delves into the actual conflict itself, including the instrumentalization of the Second World War narrative by the warring parties.

Part 4, “The Past in the Future,” concludes with a chapter on how the Ukrainian conflict has influenced the historical narrative in Crimea and the Donbass, and in Ukraine and Russia as a whole.

By the end of the book, Walker has made two points very clear. First, he has shown how the propagation of specific historical episodes, such as the Great Patriotic War, leads to the deliberate forgetting of other events, such as the Soviet gulags and mass deportations. Second, he has successfully illustrated the interaction between Putin’s memory politics and local remembrance, showing both the synchronization and dichotomies.

Walker’s book strikes true with its diversity and richness of sources. He interviews post-Soviet citizens from all spheres of society, ranging from middle-aged military commanders in Donetsk to elderly women living in a town in the Russian tundra. By wielding a journalistic angle rather than an academic one, he paints a lively portrait of the plethora of characters playing a role in the formation of individual and collective memory within Putin’s nation-building quest. Walker complements his interviews with sources such as Russian newspaper articles and Levada surveys.

Another strength is how clearly Walker spells out the complex interaction and interconnectedness of all actors, levels, and spheres of society surrounding memory. This relationship has been frequently emphasized by memory scholars but has rarely been captured more clearly. Throughout the chapters, he seamlessly charts the individual and collective remembrance and amnesia of the Soviet period, providing historical context and analyses of contemporary events. He masterfully uncovers the interaction between political, socioeconomic, and historical elements. Throughout this process, he smoothly alternates between the macro perspective of the official historical narrative and the micro perspective of grassroots individual memory and factchecking.

Walker successfully walks the fine line between apologetic and judgmental. He understands Russia on a deeper level and succeeds in capturing the complex and multifaceted character of the post-Soviet Russian Federation.

From an academic viewpoint, engagement with the academic debates surrounding memory and nation-building would have added extra value to Walker’s broad collection of presented sources and allowed layman readers to contextualize the author’s viewpoints and analyses.

The Long Hangover lends enriching insights in the hearts and minds of the Russian people and shows how the official narrative interacts with grassroots remembrance. The book illustrates how the Soviet past floods into the Russian present and how both collective and individual memory are fickle and frail shifting sands. Putin’s attempt to sculpt these sands into his desired form is largely successful, but in this process he neglects dealing with the darker pages of the past. In the meantime, the past is weaponized during periods of conflict, and the population’s remembrance proves both highly personal and politicized. This book leaves both experts and laypeople understanding Russia a little better than before.

Laura Vansina 

Brussels School of Governance, Vrije Universiteit Brussel & Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Warwick

laura.vansina@vub.be

[doi:10.1017/nps.2022.23](https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2022.23)

Nested Nationalism: Making and Unmaking Nations in the Soviet Caucasus, by Krista A. Goff, Ithaca [New York], Cornell University Press, 2021, 336 pp., \$49.95 (hardcover), ISBN: 9781501753275; \$32.99 (Ebook), ISBN: 9781501753299

In *Nested Nationalism: Making and Unmaking Nations in the Soviet Caucasus*, Krista Goff examines through the example of Soviet Azerbaijan the ways in which changing political priorities and relations between Moscow and titular elites created different opportunities for the recognition and