

Polly Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma: Rethinking the Stalinist Past in the Soviet Union, 1953–70*. Yale University Press, 2013. xii, 362 pp.

The surge of books and articles about memory over the past couple of decades has created a new field of Memory Studies at the crossroads of history, literature and cultural studies. The field has not yet elaborated its own distinct comprehensive or specific methodology, and so the new literature is very diverse in its approaches; upon starting to read a book or article one can expect to find the logic of the author unfamiliar. As a historian by training, I always prefer books written with a historian's attention to the primary sources, analyzing details, people's motives, and the institutional logic that created and reformed people's memory at the crucial turning points in their countries' development. Polly Jones' book is exactly this kind of reading. Some might even argue that the absence of quotations from the founding figures of Memory Studies like Maurice Halbwachs should disqualify the book from the field of Memory Studies (despite the use of related key words in the title) making it just another "traditional history", but I would disagree: the problems that the author solves deal with the mechanisms of the social work of memory based on the use of a multitude of primary sources.

Polly Jones addresses one of the most important periods in the USSR's development. After Stalin's death the Soviet leaders made a decision to reveal the (partial) truth about the crimes of the regime. Yet at the same time they certainly did not want to lose power or destroy the Communist state; that is why theirs was an extremely difficult task. The author is right when she calls Khrushchev's 1956 Secret Speech denouncing Stalin an "unprecedented intervention in Soviet memory: an attempt to reveal and judge the complex truth about a (indeed, the) leading Bolshevik, without entirely forgetting or demonizing him" (p. 18). The discussions and vacillations about the national traumatic memory resulted in what we now consider a very important period of the nation's history; moreover, it can help us to understand better some of the problems that Russian society is facing now, another half a century later. Indeed, reading Polly Jones' book demonstrates to us that the major

divisions in the arguments about Stalin in today's Russia were already present in the discussions of the late 1950s-60s: the combination of terror and victory over Nazi Germany, Stalin's personal traits and immanent features of the Communist regime, successes in science and the destruction of peasant lives were juxtaposed in the debates after the XX Congress of the Communist Party denounced Stalin's "cult of personality". Even the major argument used by neo-Stalinists today had already appeared in that epoch: Stalin's "leadership of the war and the construction of socialism" (p. 45).

One of the best features of the book is the presence of multiple voices of the people reacting to Khrushchev's Secret Speech, the renaming of Stalingrad as Volgograd, or Konstantin Simonov's war novel. There is also some attention paid here to the institutional side of the fight, and thus the Moscow Writers' Union, the journal *Voprosy Istorii* and Moscow State University's Department of Party History are treated as actors in the debates of the late 1950s. In order to obtain all this wealth of primary sources, Polly Jones spent a great deal of time in the Russian archives, including regional ones.

During Stalin's time in the Kremlin he became an embodiment of state power and communist ideas, the author reminds us, and that is why an attack on Stalin was for many witnesses a suicidal attack on the state. The latter was proved, from the Stalinists' point of view, by local unrest in the USSR, the crisis in Poznan, and especially by the Budapest uprising, all happening just months following the Secret Speech. Those events were, in turn, reasons for the issuance of a "closed letter" in late 1956 that effectively decreased the level of criticism toward Stalin set by the Secret Speech. The result was ambivalent. Stalin lost his godlike status but did not make his way into the camp of perpetrators. It was only five years later, at the 22nd Party Congress, that the next step in de-Stalinization was taken; but after Khrushchev's dismissal in 1964 the state froze further discussions. The problems of the traumatic Past were posed during the Khrushchev epoch but the de-Stalinization agenda was not fulfilled. The resulting ambivalence could be seen even in the portrayal of Stalin in the second decade of the third millennium.

Indeed, reading the book in contemporary Russia forces the reader to compare the de-Stalinization and later "normalization" of

Stalin's memory described by Polly Jones to historical politics nowadays. Thus, the popular response to the Secret Speech called, among other things, for some sort of lustration, which never did take place in the USSR or Russia; even now we hear lamentations that it never happened. The 1961 debates over renaming Stalingrad also look unfinished: in the 2010s the Communists still appeal to the city's world fame as Stalingrad just as the Stalinists did 54 years ago (p. 118). Finally, reading the author's formulation of the approach that the Soviet state chose to promote on this issue also reminds us of very recent discussions in post-Soviet Russia: finding a "balance between deconstructing the Stalin cult and reinforcing the Stalin-era usable past" (p. 103; see also p. 243).

There are also important differences between the two epochs: the author analyzes two major fields on which the battle around Stalin's name was unleashed: history and literature. This is definitely different from the current situation, where history plays an enormous role while literature is relatively neglected. The reasons for the importance of literature in the late USSR could be specially addressed.

What is missing from this rich and important book? It seems that the author shies away from formulating the questions to which she helps to find answers here. Why does the memory of Stalin still divide Russian society sixty years after his death? And why is the memory of the war still the glue that most unites Russians as a nation? The book gives us some hints but Polly Jones does not offer responses to these questions. The reasons for the de-Stalinization and the vacillations between vindication and condemnation of Stalin throughout the entire period researched for the book could also be addressed with better focus. The author mentions Khrushchev's struggle for power as one of the reasons behind these developments, but does not elaborate that important hypothesis.

There are also other questions raised by the material that would be worth addressing. What alternatives to de-Stalinization existed at that time? It seems that the author wanted to touch upon this theme when she mentioned the Chinese approach to the memory of Mao (p. 98), or when she compared the Khrushchev epoch to the Gorbachev era (pp. 129–30). It might also be interesting

to compare forcible memory change (like the de-Nazification of Germany) to the voluntary decision of the regime itself, as was the case in the Soviet Union.

Overall, this is an important book that provides the reader with a better understanding of the unfinished de-Stalinization of Russia, its successes and natural limits, and gives us a new base for understanding the current turns in Russia's historical politics.

Ivan Kurilla

European University at St. Petersburg

Violeta Davoliūtė, *The Making and Breaking of Soviet Lithuania: Memory and Modernity in the Wake of War*. London and New York: Routledge, 2013. 212 pp.

This book offers a fresh perspective on the Soviet period of Lithuania's history. The historical narrative that Davoliūtė masterfully creates in the book goes beyond the ideas of genocide and oppression of the Lithuanian people and Lithuanian nation during the Soviet period. The book raises the issue of the agency of Lithuanian elites and local leaders of the Communist Party as well as posing the question of their responsibility for what occurred in Lithuania during the Soviet period. Therefore, Davoliūtė's research raises very sensitive issues for Lithuanian nation building.

The structure of the book is determined by the periodization of Lithuanian as well as Soviet history. Eight chapters cover the interwar period when independent Lithuania was established; World War II and its consequences for the changes in the ethnic structure of Vilnius; late Stalinism and Khrushchev's Thaw as the time of the rise of Lithuanian modernity; the Brezhnev era in the late 1960s–1970s, conceptualized as “the rustic turn” in Lithuanian culture; and, finally, the 1980s as the time of *perestroika* and *glasnost'* in Soviet history and of the national and political awakening of the Lithuanian people. Regarding each of these periods, Davoliūtė manages to