All This is Your World: Soviet Tourism at Home and Abroad after Stalin

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officials, because of the increasing amount of violence between the different religious and ethnic groups. Turkish and French relations during the period of martial law are the dominant subject of this chapter.

All of the chapters of the book give detailed information about the role of the League of Nations, the French Mandate officials, Turkish and Syrian governments together with the politically active and inactive groups within the local population. What distinguishes this study is that it is the first to make extensive use of League of Nations documents and intelligence reports of the involved countries. Since the main aim of the book is to take into account the perspective of the European countries, their definitions of “identity” and their perception of the mixed structure of the Middle Eastern countries were what mattered the most. As Shields states, the French authorities and other European countries within the structure of the League of Nations were unable to understand the peaceful cohabitation of various religious and ethnic groups in the Sanjak, as was often the case in many Middle Eastern countries.

The emergence of the idea of the protection of minorities by the League of Nations was actually what caused separation and the formation of ethnic and religious factions within the Sanjak. The possibility of a single person carrying more than one identity was ignored for political benefits. The locals reacted differently when faced with the necessity to choose among their identities. Economic and practical reasons affected people’s decisions in most cases. For instance, Non-Kemalist Turks refused to register as “Turk” since there was also the category of “Sunni Muslim”.

Shields’s book on the Sanjak of Alexandretta certainly deserves a special place in the literature through its use of a wide range of primary and secondary sources. The sparse usage of Arabic documents can be understood when the situation of most of the countries’ archives – including Syria – is taken into account. It would be better if excerpts of oral history accounts were also combined with passages from the intelligence reports and official documents. Nonetheless, this book is a well-researched study and an important resource for the students of the Sanjak, as well as of European diplomacy on the eve of World War II.

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All this is your world: Soviet tourism at home and abroad after Stalin, by Anne E. Gorsuch, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, 222 pp., US$110.00 (hardcover), ISBN 978-0-19-960994-9

All This is Your World offers a meticulously researched and engagingly written account of Soviet tourism within and outside the Iron Curtain in the 30 years after Stalin’s death in 1953. Gorsuch’s monograph addresses several intersecting fields of study: the history of the USSR after Stalin, the history of tourism and mobility, the history of Cold War cultural relations, and the history of postwar consumerism. While taking on a tall order, Gorsuch delivers on all counts as she aptly demonstrates the multiple meanings and agendas underlying the seemingly uncomplicated practices of travel and tourism.
By opening up the country to the outside world as part of the de-Stalinization drive, Khrushchev and his successors were forced to determine, as Gorsuch puts it, “what, in sum, did it mean to be ‘Soviet’ in a country no longer defined as Stalinist?” (p. 3). By analyzing the ways in which the post-Stalin order responded to this question in the context of domestic and international tourism, Gorsuch’s study helps us understand a range of dilemmas facing Soviet society after 1953. How did the previously xenophobic Soviet authorities and (patriotic) Soviet citizens reflect on the “decadent” West in the context of Cold War competition that was itself moderated by the policy of peaceful coexistence? How did the heretofore repressive state apparatus begin trusting millions of its citizens to act patriotically outside the country’s borders? How did the political establishment and individual tourists negotiate and reconcile the spirit of consumerism, leisure, and comfort with socialist ethics?

In six thought-provoking chapters, Gorsuch scrutinizes a range of reactions to these quandaries of the post-Stalin era in four geographic and/or symbolic spaces: the Baltic region of the USSR, the “brotherly” countries of the Warsaw Pact, the democracies of Western Europe, and Soviet cinematography. The book thus begins by relating the condition of the tourist industry during the final years of Stalin’s reign and then moves geographically outward “in concentric circles,” from the republic of Estonia (the “inner abroad”), to Eastern Europe (the “near-abroad”) and the capitalist West. The monograph concludes with a chapter-length analysis of how Soviet film represented foreign travel. By examining tourism in a transnational perspective, Gorsuch provides persuasive conclusions about both the psychology of Soviet post-Stalin society and its relationship to the outside world. Gorsuch therefore does not restrict herself to investigating the viewpoint of Soviet tourists and authorities, but places Soviet attitudes within a comparative perspective. This transnational approach effectively illuminates how the official and popular conceptions of tourism on the opposing sides of the Iron Curtain simultaneously differed and resembled each other. Even though both socialist and capitalist establishments promoted tourism as part and parcel of the peaceful coexistence agenda, ideological differences continued to distinguish and define central aspects of travel: mobility, consumption, and the nature of internationalism. Consequently, although the focus is on the Soviet experience, Gorsuch offers a continental, pan-European perspective.

The monograph is as chronologically comprehensive as it is geographically broad. While the book focuses on the 1950s and 1960s, it provides valuable insights into how Thaw-era tourism evolved from Stalinist conceptions of travel and eventually influenced tourist practices well into the “late socialism” of the Brezhnev era. Thus Gorsuch’s approach crystallizes the continuities and breaks in Soviet understanding of how tourism facilitated the creation of Homo Sovieticus and reaffirmed the authority of the Soviet regime at home and abroad. Gorsuch achieves the impressive geographic and chronological scope in no small measure because of the rich array of primary sources she utilizes, which include: Soviet, East European, and Western archives, works of fiction, film, visual and material culture, the popular press, and travel accounts. Gorsuch thoughtfully mines this variety of documents to provide a multi-layered perspective on issues relating to Cold War cultural politics, the phenomenon of consumerism, and the de-Stalinization of Soviet identity. Consequently, the book advances a complex view about how the party leadership and the groups of Soviet tourists negotiated their collective identities as they traveled the European continent (most for the first time) in the wake of de-Stalinization.

Ultimately, Gorsuch’s book poignantly exposes the many paradoxes that Soviet authorities and citizens faced as de-Stalinization took its course. The government made the
obtainment of visas logistically and financially prohibitive while simultaneously making travel abroad a key signifier of cultural sophistication. As Gorsuch points out: “Exposure to difference, be it controlled, was now part of what made a good Soviet citizen” (p. 93). But enabling citizens to experience life abroad brought its own set of problems. While official discourse presented the Baltic republics and Eastern Europe as ideologically immature peripheries of the Soviet empire, some Russian tourists could not but notice that, for instance, Estonian and Czechoslovak locals enjoyed higher life standards and did not always welcome their more advanced socialist brothers with open arms. In Gorsuch’s words: “If, in theory, the material superiorities of many East European countries might be taken positively as evidence that socialism and consumerism could coexist, in practice, it was hard to explain why the socialist younger brother was so much better off than his elder sibling” (p. 105). The difficulties Soviet authorities experienced in projecting an unproblematic imperial image in Estonia and the countries of the Eastern bloc resurfaced as they aimed to portray themselves as the superior competitor in the Cold War ring. Because consumption was a central aspect of the competition between the two superpowers, attitudes toward consumer goods and material bounty attained critical importance in the eyes of the Soviet authorities. But although the official post-Stalinist socialist code of morality supported shopping as a rational and educative experience, it disapproved of consumption as compulsive acquisitiveness. Reflecting on the practical implication of this philosophical distinction, Gorsuch observes: “Consumptions reveals the contradictions inherent in sending people abroad to further the collective cause of Soviet socialism, and then giving them hard currency, even if in limited amounts, to satisfy individual desires while there” (p. 97). The paradoxes of post-Stalin travel and tourism enumerated above offer but a highlight of Gorsuch’s account but hopefully effectively allude to the solid research, thorough analysis, and compelling conclusions characterizing this study.

This compelling monograph should find its way to the shelves of scholars who are interested in the de-Stalinization process, Cold War cultural relations, Soviet nation and empire-building after Stalin, and the history of consumption and leisure in the socialist context. Gorsuch’s analyses are subtle and perceptive; her conclusions are insightful and consequential. This book deserves to be read widely.

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How to create and sustain successful environmental organizations is a question to be asked in any nation, but how it is occurring in Russia’s post-Soviet era of political, social and economic transformation is the topic of Laura Henry’s book, Red to Green: Environmental Activism in Post-Soviet Russia. Taking a comparative politics perspective, Henry identifies two main objectives for this book about the rise of environmental organizations: “to identify the factors that promote and inhibit different types of citizen mobilization in