

kulturhistoria, samt presentationer av politiker, befattningshavare, journalister och författare samt "vanliga människor" som levde sina liv under andra världskriget, varav ett fåtal påverkade svenska förhållanden.

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Li Bennich-Björkman, *Bakom och bortom järnridån: De sovjetiska åren och frigörelsen i Baltikum och Ukraina* (Stockholm: Appell förlag 2023). 446 s.

When one speaks about the Baltic countries, one often assumes certain similarities that allow one to think about the region as a whole; as if all three countries – Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania – that shared their history under the Soviet Union undergo the same developments today. At first glance, it does seem that the Baltic countries are very similar. But when we look closer, we see these countries demonstrate significant differences. Estonia is usually described as a "star student" among other Baltic countries. The country leads the European and even global rankings in different categories that show the country's impressive results, especially in economic development and democratization. For instance, as of the time of writing (2023), the Index of Economic Freedom ranks Estonia as the sixth most liberal economy in the world (Sweden is ranked the 10th). To compare, Latvia is ranked 17th and Lithuania – 20th ([www.heritage.org/index/ranking](http://www.heritage.org/index/ranking)). How was it possible that the country that was a part of the Soviet Union with a planned economy and suppressed political and intellectual life, just like all other republics in the Soviet Union, could reform its economy, politics, and the state itself so quickly and so effectively? This is the main question of the book *Bakom och bortom järnridån: De sovjetiska åren och frigörelsen i Baltikum och Ukraina* written by political scientist Li Bennich-Björkman. To answer this overreaching question, Bennich-Björkman takes a comparative approach and includes in her analysis three more countries: Latvia, Lithuania, and Ukraine.

While the choice of two other Baltic countries for comparison is more obvious, including the third case – Ukraine – can seem surprising. Why should one include Ukraine – the country that is not a member of the EU or NATO, the country that arguably took a totally different path and has little in common with the success stories of the Baltic states? In fact, though, as the book convincingly demonstrates, there could not be a better choice for comparison than Ukraine when it comes to understanding the developments in the Baltic countries. Suffice to mention that Western Ukraine became a part of the Soviet Union almost at the same time when the Soviet Union occupied

the Baltic states. For many in Western Ukraine, the establishment of the Soviet regime in the region meant occupation – in a similar way as it was for the Baltic republics. The anti-Soviet underground was active in this part of Ukraine up to 1956. Religion here played as an important role as in Lithuania. These experiences became decisive when it came to the development of the dissident movement in the 1960s and subsequently to the liberation under *perestroika* that led to the referendum of 1991, where more than 90 percent of Ukrainians voted for the country's independence.

Li Bennich-Björkman argues that although all four countries were part of the Soviet Union, they experienced Soviet rule differently. There are even reasons to speak about several "Soviet Unions" if we thoroughly examine each republic separately regarding its relations with the center and the relations between different actors inside the four republics. The author structures her comparison not only across countries but also across different time periods. The study is divided into three main sections: "Bakom järnridån", that presents the analysis of the post-Stalinist years; "På väg mot pluralism", that encompasses the years of *perestroika*, and "Bortom järnridån", that concentrates on the post-1991 developments in all four countries. The author uses a wide range of previous studies to present the synthesis of each case. She also relies on a wide range of new material: interviews, memoirs, biographies, media coverage from the respective countries; correspondence and memoirs of Swedish diplomats and politicians active in the Soviet Union and/or working with Baltic republics; archival collection of Christian Democratic Party in Bonn. Such richness of sources enables the author to write a meticulous history of four countries under one book cover.

It is not, though, only the richness of sources that makes this book worth reading. Theoretically, the author proposes to approach the countries through two levels of analysis: 1) first, to analyze the relations between the center in Moscow and each individual republic; 2) second, to analyze relations between political and cultural elites inside each individual republic. The author proposes to approach these two-level relations through the concepts of non-Soviet (*ickesovjet*) and anti-Soviet (*antisovjet*) resistance. Non-Soviet resistance is conceptualized as existential resistance to the Soviet system without necessarily being openly opposed to the system. Because the fact that the Soviet regime was suspicious of individual expressions that did not comply with collective values and ideals, the initiatives directed at expressed individuality were connected to non-Soviet ideology and had traces of existential resistance. Those who were engaged in non-Soviet expressions of their individuality did not necessarily see themselves as resisting the Soviet authorities. Still, in the long run, their ideas and actions played a significant role in liberation. The non-Soviet resistance was not about criticizing the

system; it was more about acting beyond it. Such an existential resistance was a gray zone for the Soviet authorities. While a direct critique could be controlled and punished, the gray zone was more challenging. In the gray zone, it was impossible to demarcate the limits of what was allowed and what was not. In this way, non-Soviet resistance was a more tolerated form of resistance. Moreover, the non-Soviet resistance could easily become anti-Soviet because these categories were quite fluid. These theoretical arguments are thoroughly discussed on concrete examples throughout the book's sections.

To sum up, Li Bennich-Björkman's book presents a history of Baltic states and Ukraine under Soviet rule and during the first three decades after the Soviet Union's collapse. It will become a standard reading for those interested in the history of the Soviet Union or the histories of the countries discussed.

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Mattis Bergwall, Per Wallin & Fredrik Hagelin, *Rysslands militära fuck-ups* (Stockholm: Bookmark förlag 2024). 327 s.

Krigshistoriepodden är en humoristisk militärhistorisk podcast som drivs av Mattis Bergwall och Per Wallin, med Fredrik Hagelin som producent och klippare. I skrivande stund har podden sänt omkring 190 avsnitt och har fått en trogen lyssnarskara. Bergwall och Wallin har också länge underhållit sina Patreon-mecenater med korta artiklar som skickas ut per mejl varje fredag, och har där visat att de även behärskar det skrivna ordet väl. Nu har de dock tagit steget och gett ut sin första bok.

Titeln på Krigshistoriepoddens andra avsnitt, som släpptes den 4 maj 2020, är kort och gott: "Varför är ryssarna så dåliga på krig?" En av poddens ständiga käpphästar har nämligen varit att Ryssland och Sovjetunionen sällan har levt upp till sitt rykte som militär stormakt. Bergwall, Wallin och Hagelin har utforskat detta ämne i ett flertal avsnitt, och har nu sammanfattat sina slutsatser i bokform.

Boken inleds med slaget vid Tannenberg 1914 och slutar med den ukrainska sommaroffensiven 2023. Mellan dessa händelser görs, i varsitt kapitel, nedslag i sex olika ryska krig: första världskriget, polsk-sovjetiska kriget (1919–1921), andra världskriget, sovjetisk-afghanska kriget (1979–1989), första Tjetjenienkriget (1994–1996) och slutligen dagens Ukrainakrig. Krigskapiteln varvas med fem kapitel som fokuserar på fenomen som logistik, alkohol-