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Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), x + 293 pp.

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examination of radio and the effects of foreign radio, there is a perplexing lack of detail about the content of Soviet broadcasts and why foreign radio was so attractive – with no reference to the differences in the framing of stories, the reporting or non-reporting of certain stories, or the ideological content of non-news material. As someone who monitored both Soviet radio and broadcasting from the BBC World Service during the Cold War, I found the radio section disappointing and unenlightening.

One of the contradictory aspects of the book is the non-academic and racy language. Sometimes this is a way of lightening the presentation of a heavy subject, but at times it is just irritating and vague. I am still trying to work out – as it is not elaborated upon or illustrated with examples – what is meant by saying that the ‘audio invasion’ by foreign radio ‘confirmed their worldview . . . while helping explain some obvious flabby spots on the domestic ideological body’ (p. 133). Similarly with this: ‘the Soviet cultural model was grounded in a bedrock exceptionalism whose vagueness only contributed to its power’ (p. 4). But how does one characterise that exceptionalism and in what ways was this exceptionalism vague – a clear, in-depth analysis of the cultural model and its ideological content is much needed here.

There is no analysis of how Soviet foreign radio, Radio Moscow, actively aped the style of the BBC World Service while obviously offering ideological content and a worldview that was substantially different.

Overall, this book will be of use to researchers who can mine lots of information about the working of the system, but it is not for those looking for ideological analysis or for an examination of the role of the Soviet media in the propagation of communist values.

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Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), x + 293 pp.

Sarah Snyder has made an important and valuable contribution to the historiography of the tail end of the Cold War. In this well researched book based on her doctoral thesis, she has combined an examination of human rights issues in relation to the Cold War with their impact on the eventual downfall of the USSR. She has supplemented her extensive archival research with those ‘oral history tools’ that, when used judiciously, can enable a richer and more nuanced analysis to emerge. Snyder’s approach has enabled her to seamlessly bring together international and transnational

approaches to history and paint a lucid and fascinating narrative that aims to explain how decisions at the top and developments at grass-roots level – what Snyder describes as transnational networks – converged to undermine the USSR over the final twenty five years of the Cold War and hasten the end of bipolarity.

The crux of her thesis is that the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, culminating in the Helsinki Final Act (HFA) in 1975, ‘spurred the development of a transnational network that significantly contributed to the end of the Cold War’ (pp. 2, 238–239, and 245–246). Snyder dates the ideological end of the Cold War to 19 January 1989, using as her criterion the transformation of Soviet attitudes with regards to human, civil, and religious rights issues (chapter 7). In eight well written chapters, she examines how the convention of the CSCE – based on a longstanding Soviet initiative – gave rise to a process that boomeranged to become a Soviet own goal. It spawned activist networks that were able to publicise human rights abuses in the USSR and its satellites to the world. This delegitimised it and at the same time encouraged further dissident activity.

Similarly, her book explores the rather tardy identification by US foreign policy makers of the value of human rights issues as a powerful weapon against the USSR. She explains the importance of key individuals in the US Congress whose enmity of détente and Nixingerism led them to support this issue and highlights the impact of the Carter administration’s nurturing of the issue despite its deep-seated unwillingness to collaborate with the CSCE set up (pp. 81–139). Thereafter, she illustrates the process by which the Reagan administration came to adopt human rights in its ‘all out’ campaign against the ‘evil empire’ (pp. 163–212) – from its hesitant initial stages (p. 160) until the time Reagan was ready to proclaim that ‘... security and human rights must be advanced together, or cannot truly be secured at all’ (p. 210). Where Snyder is at her strongest is in illuminating the activists’ personalities, politics, and motives, thus making their activities understandable and accessible even to readers who have little or no knowledge of the period she handles. She weaves these vignettes seamlessly into the rest of her analysis and keeps her reader fully engaged throughout.

One is left wondering though, if only to fulfil fully the promise alluded to in its title, whether the book needed to have delved deeper into the recent pre-history of human rights; especially the increasing concerns with this issue in European and North American public opinion in the 1960s and early 1970s as a result of human rights abuses, in particular by the Greek, Portuguese, and Chilean dictatorships. The growth of transnational networks she describes may have been so because they capitalised on the experience and membership of earlier human rights organisations that sprang up spontaneously in response to these dated dictatorships. Snyder could have then expanded her focus to run over the differences in US and Western European human rights pressure groups and thus assess the combined impact of the two diverse human rights approaches. Finally, the failure of the USSR to appreciate the possible side-effects of the CSCE and its inability to tackle these before they grew strong enough to undermine the creaking Soviet edifice needed to be explored in more detail.

Despite this, this reviewer judges that Snyder has accomplished more than enough in this volume and these comments must not detract from what is an excellent account. Her book is a seminal addition to the still embryonic Cold War literature on human rights and fully merits a place on the library shelf next to the works of Moyn, Inboden, Iriye et al, Simmons, and Simpson. It also deserves to find a prominent place in all Cold War related reading lists.

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