

and Catholic involvement with the state and the Stasi as East Germany has adapted to reunification. Daniela Kalkandjieva, while concentrating primarily on Bulgaria, presents an interesting comparison between responses by the various Orthodox Churches and other religions to the challenges presented by COVID. Milan Vukomanović assesses the tensions generated by liberal clergy and laymen who have opposed the denial of evolutionary biology by Serbian Orthodox Church authorities. In further chapters, Christopher Adam writes about Reverend Gábor Iványi's Hungarian Evangelical Fellowship, Lavinia Stan discusses the dissident Romanian Orthodox Priest Gheorghe Calciu-Dumitreasa, and Isa Blumi describes how, despite various external religious influences, Albania pursues a secular tendency.

Professor Ramet herself contributes a short chapter on 'the Role and Functions of Religion in Eastern Europe and Elsewhere' (p. 374) in which she reflects on how the often non-negotiable moral/political demands of monotheistic religious authorities, as the supposed commands of God, can be in tension with those of individual conscience and/or the dictates of the moral law — such as loving one's neighbour as oneself. Arguably, this chapter contextualizes the content of the entire volume and even if one were to read it alone, the book would be worth acquiring (though perhaps on open access or from the library as it is not cheap). But not to read the other eighteen chapters would be a great loss; there is a wealth of both theoretical ideas and empirical data to be found within their pages.

*Department of Sociology*  
*London School of Economics*

EILEEN BARKER  
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Parasecoli, Fabio; Bachórz, Agata and Halawa, Mateusz. *The Pierogi Problem: Cosmopolitan Appetites and the Reinvention of Polish Food*. California Studies in Food Culture. Simpson Imprint in the Humanities, University of California Press, Oakland, CA, 2025. xi + 239 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$95.00; £80.00; \$29.95; £25.00 (paperback & e-book).

WHAT does Polishness taste like? Who defines its flavour? How is it connected to Poland's history and the global consumer movement? These questions are explored by a team of scholars working at the intersection of Polish (Bachórz, Halawa) and international (Parasecoli) food studies.

The book is organized into two major sections. The first two chapters provide historical background and trace the evolution of Polish cuisine. The second part examines the people, places, time and materialities that shape what the authors call 'Polish taste'. Particularly noteworthy is the methodological

appendix, where the authors reflect on the dynamics of collaboration within a research team composed of scholars from diverse national and disciplinary contexts.

Contemporary Polish society — and its evolving foodscape — stands at a fascinating crossroads. After decades of political transformation, modernization and often uncritical adoption of external models, Poland is caught in a dilemma between imagined tradition rooted in a conservative search for national identity, and the embrace of progressive, cosmopolitan values. Food and consumer practices provide a compelling lens through which this tension becomes visible. On one level, they reflect the transformation of Polish society. On another, they actively shape it. The authors analyse this dynamic through what they term the ‘pierogi problem’, an analytical thread encompassing culinary traditions, the homogenization of taste under socialism, and the global hierarchies that have historically devalued Central and Eastern European cuisines.

Poland is experiencing a renaissance of interest in its culinary heritage — a selective revival reconstructing fragments of historical memory and national food culture. While this rediscovery is valuable, it is often partial. The movement relies heavily on written sources from noble, courtly and bourgeois kitchens, thereby privileging upper-class culinary practices. The book identifies two concurrent processes. The first is socialist modernization, which expanded access to previously scarce food products such as pork but also standardized recipes and eating habits, eroding regional culinary identities. The second centres on ‘childhood tastes’, customers’ memories rooted in the rural origins of earlier generations and the flavours of family life.

At the intersection of these trajectories — and amid the growing cosmopolitanism of Polish society — a new culinary space has emerged. It is cultivated by tastemakers who form the core of this analysis. The culinary landscapes of major cities and upscale rural spas now serve as laboratories for a new generation of chefs, entrepreneurs and restaurateurs. This group, often well-educated and connected to upper social strata, is attuned to global gastronomic trends. Their work revolves around a creative reinterpretation of tradition, a reimagining of locality and an eclectic dialogue with history. The result is a selective, stylized rebranding of Polishness — one that packages culinary heritage to resonate with the aspirations and sensibilities of middle- and upper-class consumers and international audiences. The outcome is a visually appealing collage of traditional elements, recipes and reinvented dishes. No longer are we served a steaming bowl of rustic dumplings. Instead, we are offered a few artfully arranged *pierogi* drizzled with sauce, styled for Instagram or fashionable restaurant menus.

This reinvention of Polishness extends beyond the food itself. The authors also examine the spaces and materialities that shape food production and

consumption. They describe how former industrial districts have been transformed into high-end culinary hubs and how once-humble worker cafeterias, or milk bars, have been reimagined as artisanal eateries. Even the *pierogi* — the book's titular symbol — has undergone reinvention through new fillings, spices and accompaniments. Collectively, these transformations produce a hybrid culinary world blending tradition with modernity and catering to the class-specific tastes of the global tourist.

*The Pierogi Problem* is an erudite, richly textured book filled with vivid examples of culinary innovation, portraits of the people behind them and nuanced analyses of food as a social and cultural force. It captures the tension between tradition and the search for identity in an increasingly globalized world. Yet, as a reviewer, I note that its perspective remains somewhat selective: it focuses on a particular slice of the story — the tastes and aspirations of a distinct social class. The analysis, while elegant and perceptive, could have benefited from greater dynamism. Ultimately, the subject is not merely the 'pierogi problem' but the 'pierogi battle' — a contest of class and politics over who has the authority to define Polish taste and, by extension, Polishness itself. The book captures this landscape with empathy for its protagonists — the class-based culinary artisans — but leaves the reader wishing for more friction and a deeper exploration of the cracks shaping Poland's contemporary foodscape.

Nicolaus Copernicus University

WOJCIECH GOSZCZYŃSKI

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Garner, Ian and Kuzio, Taras (eds). *Russia and Modern Fascism: New Perspectives on the Kremlin's War Against Ukraine*. Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society, 292. *ibidem*-Verlag, Hannover and Stuttgart, 2025. 311 pp. Notes. Select bibliography. Index. €34.90: £31.00: \$40.00 (paperback).

IAN GARNER and Taras Kuzio's edited volume on Russia and modern fascism is a timely and masterful contribution to the debate on how to classify the current Russian regime. The importance of the proper classification lies in the evaluation of the threat now faced by the West and its likely duration. As such it is a welcome riposte most obviously to Marlene Laruelle's *Is Russia Fascist?* (Ithaca, NY, 2021), and others who do not believe the denizens of the Kremlin quite measure up to the F-word, the fascist label. The accessibility and recent provenance of the volume makes it of interest to all academic observers of Russian politics but also those in the policy realm.

The introduction sets the context of both Russia's fascist development in historical terms and the implications for the academic study of fascism,