



Where the Jews Aren't: The Sad and Absurd Story of Birobidzhan, Russia's Jewish Autonomous Region (Jewish Encounters Series)

Masha Gessen

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The previously untold story of the Jews in twentieth-century Russia that reveals the complex, strange, and heart-wrenching truth behind the familiar narrative that begins with pogroms and ends with emigration.

In 1929, the Soviet Union declared the area of Birobidzhan a homeland for Jews. It was championed by a group of intellectuals who envisioned a place of post-oppression Jewish culture, and by the early 1930s, tens of thousands of Jews had moved there from the shtetls. The state-building ended quickly, in the late 1930s, with arrests and purges of the Communist Party and cultural elite, but after the Second World War, the newly named "Jewish Autonomous Region" received an influx of Jews dispossessed from what had once been the Pale, most of whom had lost families in the Holocaust. In the late 1940s, another wave of arrests swept through Birobidzhan, traumatizing the Jews into silence, and effectively making them invisible. Now Masha Gessen gives us a haunting account of the dream of Birobidzhan—and how it became the cracked and crooked mirror in which we can see the true story of the Jews in twentieth-century Russia.

(Part of the Jewish Encounters series)

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