

very likely that you will set this book down feeling like few have pondered the issue with more concern for the underlying power structure than Finkelstein.

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SARAMO, SAMIRA. *Building that Bright Future. Soviet Karelia in the Life Writing of Finnish North Americans*. University of Toronto Press, Toronto 2022. x, 267 pp. Ill. Maps. Cad. \$85.00. (Paper, E-book: Cad. \$34.95.)

Writing to her sister in Saskatchewan, in 1935, Lisi Hirvonen, one of the 6,500 Finnish North Americans who caught “Karelian Fever” earlier in the decade, reported on the October Revolution celebrations in Petrozavodsk, capital city of the Karelian Autonomous Republic of the Soviet Union. “[E]ven I was allowed to be free from work for four days”, she wrote. “[I]t was lots of fun [...] we had a fun shock worker party at the ski factory [...] we ate and drank [...] there was entertainment and at the end we danced [...] everything was free for the shock workers [...] and the third evening I was at *kinos* meaning moving pictures. And I was in a parade”. (p. 137) Most of the letters to relatives and friends in Canada and the United States that Samira Saramo quotes in her study of those who answered the “call of *Karjala*” were of this unadorned nature. Short on eloquence, they nonetheless convey a broad range of information about the ups and downs of life in the backwoods of Karelia that goes well beyond what newspapers, organizational records, and other sources might contain.

Fourteen of Lisi’s letters to her sister, written between 1932 and 1939, survive in York University’s special collections along with the correspondence of other North American Finns who migrated to Soviet Karelia. Assembled by Saramo’s Ph.D. advisor, Varpu Lindström, they, together with collections at the University of Minnesota, and memoirs, both published and unpublished, comprise the “life writings” that Saramo relies upon and analyzes. The migrants themselves, recruited by the Finnish-language communist press and the Karelian Technical Aid Committee, were mostly from working-class and farming families from the American Upper Midwest and Canada’s Ontario province. Escaping from “the reality of curtailed opportunities” (p. 49) during the Great Depression and attracted by the prospect of lending their skills to the building of communism, they experienced all manner of challenges, albeit as relatively privileged foreign workers.

The book follows them from their recruitment and departures, to their first impressions of Karelia, their housing, health and hygiene, working and leisure activities, children’s upbringing, and the Great Terror of the late 1930s to which, as ethnic Finns inhabiting territory adjacent to a hostile foreign power, they were particularly subjected. It situates these aspects of their lives – and deaths – within the broad framework of Soviet social, political, and cultural history as well as works that share the same or similar methodological concerns. The life writings approach

works well at articulating both the individuality of those producing the documents and what they shared as collective subjects.

Saramo is an excellent guide to the gendered dimensions of these Finnish North Americans' lives as they confronted Soviet notions and practices, themselves in the process of transition from revolutionary to more conventional ways. There is much here that is both intellectually engaging and emotionally moving.

But the book is flawed in three ways. First, it relies on the trope of the "socialist utopia/workers' paradise" for which no *contemporary* evidence is provided. That is because, contrary to popular belief, there was none – Soviet propagandists never claimed the USSR was a utopia or workers' paradise, though the Nazi German propaganda machine did use these terms to ridicule the land ruled by the "Judeo-Bolsheviks". To be sure, Saramo quotes two life writers who employ the terms (pp. 43–44, 148), but both are in memoirs (that is, retrospective), and one refers to a disgruntled American returnee who, the memoirist seemed to recall, yelled at her father "Some paradise! Some utopia! Everything you told us was a pack of lies!", only to be contradicted by another who is quoted as saying: "He told us it wouldn't be easy [...] He promised no paradise. We just didn't listen." To claim repeatedly, as Saramo does, that Finnish North Americans were inspired by a "utopian dream" (p. 39) and that "many strongly believed [...] that the Soviet Union was a workers' paradise" (p. 162) is at best tendentious.

Second, the book's reliance on Robert Conquest's figures from 1990 for the number of victims of the Great Terror is unfortunate, because subsequent research has shown them to be exaggerated. So, not "at least one million [...] executed by late 1938" (p. 151) but a still horrific 750,000. More serious, though, is the omission of one of the more persuasive interpretations of the Terror as it affected borderland peoples including the Finns. This is Terry Martin's, which, in *The Affirmative Action Empire* (2001), characterized the initial encouragement of indigenous languages and cultures to project Soviet influence into neighboring states such as Finland as the "Piedmont Principle", and the reversion to ethnic cleansing in such areas as based on "Soviet xenophobia". Use of this framework would have helped to underscore the tragedy and pathos befalling the North American Finns as described in the "chilling letter" from Aino Pitkänen, who escaped to Finland from Karelia in 1938. Writing to her husband's brother in Ontario, Aino referred to the "big cleansing" that Russia was undergoing, the burning of "all the Finnish books", and mandatory use of the Karelian and Russian languages such that "we forcibly became illiterate" (pp. 156–157).

Finally, the book suffers from poor editing – or, perhaps, none at all – which is inexcusable from a reputable university press. Misplaced modifiers, use of "proscribed" twice instead of "prescribed", the misspelling of an author's name ("Hoffman") and that of a large Soviet city ("Sverdlovski") detract from the book's appeal, which is otherwise considerable.

My "takeaway" from the book is not the foolhardiness of the "Karelian fever". It is not the fact that of the 6,500 who ventured to help build socialism some 1,300 to 1,500 soon returned "often very vocal about what they had experienced" (p. 124), nor that an additional 741 were arrested during the Terror, the vast majority of whom were executed. It is that while in the Soviet Union, the Finnish North Americans "wanted to uphold the labour practices and policies they had fought for with unions and socialist organizations before moving to Karelia" and thus, when

the Soviet government moved away from equal pay to clearly distinguish worker heroes from “slackers”, they resisted. As one of them, Lauri Hokkanen, put it, “[w]e had been taught that even though some people weren’t physically able to do as much as the others, they deserved full pay if they were doing their best” (p. 119). Not the workers’ paradise, but perhaps pointing to a brighter future.

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HUTCHISON, ELIZABETH QUAY. *Workers Like All the Rest of Them. Domestic Service and the Rights of Labor in Twentieth-Century Chile*. Duke University Press, Durham (NC) [etc.] 2021. xviii, 206 pp. Ill. \$99.95. (Paper: \$25.95.)

Elizabeth Hutchison’s new book adopts a historical perspective to address the struggles of Chilean domestic workers for the recognition of their rights. It is the result of more than three decades of investigation, which involved research in various archives and consulting numerous historical sources, including workers’ and activists’ life stories, union archives, parliamentary debates, and bills. Hutchison’s study shows that the alleged absence of domestic workers in the historical archives is nothing more than an image that results from a process of invisibilization, which minimized their importance for labour history and validated their marginalization from the labour movement. The book highlights the relevance of paid domestic work in the reproduction of Chilean households and in the economic survival of poor families, and also how social asymmetries were configured and disputed in Chile throughout the past century.

Workers Like All the Rest of Them analyses the strategies of domestic workers to demand rights and improve their working conditions at different historical moments and their ability to adapt to distinct political scenarios. The chapters follow a chronological order starting with the first struggles of domestic workers against their exclusion from the labour rights sanctioned in the 1920s, to their activism during the military dictatorship between 1973 and 1990. The book presents workers as active agents, capable of developing strategic alliances, with the socialists, the Catholic Church, the feminist movement, and it addresses the changes both in workers’ demands and in the language in which they expressed them, showing how they responded to broader social, political, and economic transformations, as well as in the worlds of work and in the occupation itself. In this way, the book “disrupts the orthodox binaries of public-private, skilled-unskilled and productive-reproductive labor and obscured the role of service workers in the history of Chilean class relations” (p. 26), challenging established historiographical interpretations of the history of domestic service, work, and the state in Latin America.

The book also calls into question the image of domestic service as a colonial remnant, demonstrating both how the modern state influenced domestic service labour conditions and the impact domestic workers had on the history of state regulations.