Samira Saramo, *Building That Bright Future: Soviet Karelia in the Life Writing of Finnish North Americans* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022)

In the past two decades, the studies of the Soviet historical experience were increasingly addressed in transnational terms, as part of the global experience of modernity in the 20th century. It was a refreshing contrast to many earlier works that treated it as a historical deviation from the civilizational normality represented by Western liberal democracies. The effect of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 on academia was, unfortunately, a major disruption of these conversations and the re-emergence of teleological narratives that seek to establish linear cause-and-effect links between Soviet socialism and the current Russian-Ukrainian war, treating both as a lapse from "civilization" into "barbarism." Yet academia also has its inertia, and at least for some time we can hope to enjoy a steady stream of previously conceived scholarship that examines the relationship between modernity and Soviet socialism from the transnational perspective.

Samira Saramo's recently published monograph *Building that Bright Future: Soviet Karelia in the Life Writing of Finnish North Americans* is a fine example of such a transnational perspective on the Soviet historical experience. It examines personal accounts of Finnish Canadians and Finnish Americans who moved to the Soviet Union during the Great Depression in search of a better society based on the ideals of socialism yet found themselves amid hardships of the Stalinist industrialization drive and eventually as one of the groups targeted by indiscriminate state violence of the Great Terror. The book does a masterful job of recovering and presenting the historical experience of these immigrants. Saramo places this experience in the context of global socialism, Soviet history, and the Great Depression delivering us an exemplary trans-Atlantic history with an unusual twist: the "reverse" (West to East) immigration pattern. The focus on personal accounts allows Saramo to explore how personal experiences of historical transformations and state violence translated into life narratives; in this respect, the book will be interesting not only for the scholars and students of Soviet history and history of the global Finnish diaspora, but also to those working on broader theoretical issues of history, narrative, and memory. With its rich historical materials, recovered historical voices, vivid descriptions of everyday life in Stalinist Russia, and interesting life trajectories of the main protagonists, Finnish-Canadian and Finnish-American immigrants, this book will also appeal to the general audience interested in 20th-century history.

Building that Bright Future is organized as an exploration of the key aspects of immigrant life in Soviet Russia. This narrative organization enables Saramo to give a complex and balanced picture of immigrant experience. It starts with a chapter providing the general historical background of the mass immigration of Finns from North America to Soviet Karelia, a region in the Northwest of the USSR where Finnish was recognized as the second official language and where the local administration headed by Finnish Communist émigrés built a comprehensive Finnish-language educational system from preschool to college. Chapter 2 then examines the organization of the resettlement from North America to Soviet Karelia. This story, known in Finnish communities in North America as the "Karelian fever" because of a relatively large number of people who resettled to Karelia (ca. 6,500), is well-documented in historical

scholarship, so there is not much original material in the first two chapters. They nevertheless serve Samiro's book well, as they create the necessary context for her original scholarship, presented in Chapters 3 through 7.

Samiro is at her strongest when it comes to the study of social history of immigration through personal sources, and these five chapters deal with exactly this aspect of the Finnish-American and Finnish-Canadian labour in Soviet Karelia. In Chapter 3, Saramo moves into the explorations of living conditions experienced by Finnish-Canadians and Finnish-Americans in Soviet Karelia. The immigrants were arriving in Karelia in the early 1930s, at the time when the forced collectivization created an acute food crisis and eventually famine. Even though most of them belonged to the privileged group of skilled workers, their food provision was very limited, and so was housing, since most investments were directed to the means of production. The household labour fell disproportionately on women, and this chapter also investigates the gender dynamics in the immigrant community. Chapter 4 represents in insight into the history of childhood in Finnish diaspora – perhaps, the most ignored theme in the previous scholarship, as it has been addressed only in memoirs. While rather cursory itself (it is the shortest chapter in the book), it thus demarcates a whole new direction of research. Chapter 5 then explores labour as the central aspect of life in North American Finnish immigrant communities in Soviet Karelia. The claims that, under socialism, labour is no longer alienated from workers were, perhaps, among the most appealing to Finnish workers radicalized through numerous labour organizations in the United States and Canada. That explains the workplace enthusiasm that almost all sources mention; that also explains a feeling of frustration and betrayal when immigrants discovered that the conditions of alienation did not dissipate under state socialism, with state bureaucracy playing the role of the oppressing class.

Chapter 6 moves from labour to leisure showing the organization of free time that was deeply rooted in the practices of workers' clubs in Europe and North America. Merging with the new culture of the strong and healthy Soviet body, the leisure practices of Finnish communities made many of them exemplary Soviet citizens, as they excelled in performing on stage and stadiums. Yet they could only stay in this role for a few years before the obsession with state security triggered the Great Purge that targeted Finnish communities from the spring of 1937 through the fall of 1938. Their association with Finland, the United States, and Canada meant that many of the immigrants were arrested and sentenced to camps or executed, while others had to cope with the fear for oneself and their close ones, as well as to make sense of the indiscriminate violence by the state. For that they turned to writing, which Saramo examines in the last, seventh, chapter of her book.

The focus on life writing is the strongest theme of *Building That Bright Future*, and, coupled with Saramo's attentiveness to social categories of age, gender, and, most importantly, ethnicity, it makes the book a fascinating exploration into the politics of power and identity in the immigrant community of North American Finns. For example, Saramo addresses the question of immigrants' involvement in colonial projects expressed through what she calls a "civilizing-modernizing life trope," suggesting that the prevailing approach to immigrant communities as subalterns can sometimes disguise their privileged position vis-à-vis indigenous populations and their cooptation into modern settler-colonialist projects. (6–7)

One just wishes this observation were extended to the book chapters rather than being limited to the introduction. For one thing, the index does not even carry an entry on the Karelians as the title nation and Indigenous population of Soviet Karelia, a symptom signaling their marginalization in the life writings of Finnish immigrants. There is also one question that is implied throughout the book yet remains unanswered: did immigrants not identify themselves with the community of Soviet people and, even more generally, in terms of the global socialist movement? Were their forms of identification eventually boiled down to their Finnishness? Did the project of socialist modernity eventually leave no trace on the selves of immigrants?

But, perhaps, it is only good that the book, which has produced an important contribution to its particular subfield of immigration from Finnish communities in North America to the USSR in the 1930s, and the bigger field of migration studies in general, leaves a number of open questions that can further drive the scholarship in these fields. *Building That Bright Future* is recommended to both academic and non-academic audiences, thanks to its combination of thorough research and accessible language. In today's academic landscape, witnessing a renewed trend to reduce the socialist experience of the 20th century to an endless cycle of violence, it is also noteworthy that Saramo takes the story of Finnish immigrants in Soviet Karelia on its own terms and merits.

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Charters Wynn, *The Moderate Bolshevik: Mikhail Tomsky from the Factory to the Kremlin, 1880-1936* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2023)

Ambitieux, charmeur, sûr de lui, à la fois jovial, sans détour et sarcastique, peu intimidé par les nombreux intellectuels à l'intérieur du parti bolchévique, bon orateur et bagarreur à l'occasion (même avec Lénine en 1917), quoique naturellement enclin à chercher le compromis, travailleur acharné mais de santé plutôt fragile, finalement seul prolétaire autodidacte parmi les dirigeants du parti, Mikhail P. Tomsky joua un rôle important durant la période de transition de la Russie tsariste à la Russie stalinienne. Son entrée au Politburo (le lieu privilégié de l'univers soviétique où toutes les décisions importantes étaient soit prises, soit approuvées) en avril 1922 témoigna éloquemment de cette nouvelle réalité. Que faut-il donc savoir de plus à propos de ce charismatique « Moderate Bolshevik »?

Né en 1880 de parents pauvres (un père métallo abusif et une mère couturière et blanchisseuse), le jeune Mikhail ne resta que trois années à l'école primaire pour ensuite passer, dès l'âge de 12 ans, son adolescence dans une sordide banlieue industrielle de Saint-Pétersbourg (Kolpino), une expérience qui le sensibilisa aux multiples problèmes liés à un début d'industrialisation sur une large échelle en Russie tsariste. Devenu maître lithographe à 21 ans, il joignit en 1904 un cercle d'études social-démocrate et, la même année, les rangs du parti bolchévique qu'il jugea avec raison plus radical que son rival menchévique. Tant en Estonie durant la révolution de 1905 qu'à Moscou durant celle de 1917, il aida à mobiliser avec succès la classe ouvrière. Cet engagement en faveur de changements radicaux lui valut de passer pas moins de neuf années de sa vie tantôt en prison, tantôt en exil dans la frigide Sibérie.

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