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Ekaterina Melnikova, et al., eds. *Granitsa i liudi: vospominaniia sovetskikh peregulentssev Priladozhskoi Karelii i Karel'skogo Peresheika*. Sankt-Peterburg: Evropeiskii universitet v Sankt-Peterburge, 2005. 478 p. ISBN 5-94380-041-4.

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Reviewing a book of “memories” is difficult; one cannot judge the way people remember. *Granitsa i liudi*, edited by Finnish and Russian scholars, consists largely of narrations collected during several research trips to the Karelian region of Lake Ladoga and the Karelian Isthmus, and might well be considered a collection of primary sources. Readers find a wealth of information about how and why Soviet citizens moved to formerly Finnish territories in the Northwest of the Soviet Union and how they made sense of both this move and the adaptation to a natural and socio-cultural landscape.

The book begins with a short introduction to the history of three mass migrations into and out of Karelia (1940, 1941, after 1945), and a discussion of the methodological framework. Aiming to uncover information about the process of migration and settlement and to identify common tropes in portrayals of the past, the project promises insights into the construction of social and communal memory (14). Accordingly, the book is structured into six sections, each of which addresses a different theme (The History of Migration; Appropriation of the Area; Relationships among Immigrants; Stories about Finns; Religiosity; Conceptions of Homeland [*rodina*]). Four full-length interviews are included at the end to show the “mechanics” of interviewing.

Each section begins with short introductory texts outlining sub-themes addressed in the chapter. The result of content analysis, these introductions comment briefly on the meaning of the ways in which narrators portray the past. This leaves the reader with up to 90 pages of largely unedited and uncommented sections from interview transcripts, an editorial decision that may produce varied expectations among readers: Does one want to learn about other scholars’ analysis, or do the work of analysis?¹

The rich material included in the book lends itself to a close reading and to exploring a variety of themes associated with the social and historical transformations that shaped the lives and environment of the interviewees. Significant questions pertain to individual and communal memory, the effects of displacement, resettlement and migration, but also to perceptions of political discourses affecting these processes and representations of the past.

¹ To learn more about the researchers’ analysis, readers should consult two articles by Ekaterina Mel’nikova on post-Soviet transformations in Karelia and the appropriation of Finnish history for the construction of Soviet Karelian memory (Mel’nikova 2009).

The interviewees' descriptions of their arrival in Karelia frequently evoke amazement at its rich natural resources, elaborate irrigation technologies, and overall order and cleanliness. The editors point out that this wonderment is motivated by previous experiences of disorder, artificial flooding that destroyed villages in the Vologda region, hunger in the 1930s, and evacuation and deprivation during World War II (17). These positive first impressions are contrasted with narrators recounting the quick deterioration of houses, infrastructure, and technology. The authors explain this framework as a reflection of a traditional Russian peasant narrative scheme foregrounding decline over time (21). In addition, one finds several references to a general Russian incapability to take good care of given conditions, displaying a sense of national self-hatred (61, 89).

Here, establishing a correlation to narratives about recent events could be productive. Interviewees speak about Finnish men and women visiting the area since the opening of the borders in 1993. They praise Finnish efforts to recreate churches or sponsor construction projects. One wonders whether this again indicates a sense of personal inadequacy or failure. These remarks also hint at an ongoing process of questioning the rightfulness of one's "being there," of having participated in appropriating land that was once inhabited and worked by others. Such questioning is obvious when narrators recount their sense of fear, in the early postwar years, of Finnish people returning to Karelia. While the editors are careful to point out that there is scant evidence for the rumored murder of Soviet farmers settling in Karelia (213), it is worthwhile to probe the prominence of these fears. Also, confronted with the possessions, and thus the lives, of the former owners of the very houses they moved into, some of the settlers may have questioned their right to usurp these belongings and their participation in a process of large-scale appropriation of a natural and cultural landscape.

Compassion with Finns who left behind their homes is evident in a number of narratives. Notably, the narrators' understanding of «home» (*rodina*) provides clues to this compassion, emphasizing relationships with kin and country. The flexible definition of belonging is reflected in a fluid conception of community that is based largely on the shared experience of immigration, settlement, and poverty among local residents (155). Where this unity is disrupted by the use of language and language patterns to identify "others" within this community, analyzing the function of these group identifications helps to further advance the study of the formation of a communal memory. This memory is founded on a past that is not one's own—the Finnish presence in Karelia, its lasting effects on Soviet citizens building new lives there, and the impossibility to forget expulsion, personal loss, and the impact of geopolitics and war on individual lives.

Many of these questions are hard to explore using this book; the narratives are broken up into small sections and anonymized, and it is difficult to trace individual patterns of recalling the past in an interview, or the personal and social forces that shape the portrayal. I wish the editors had made a different choice between publishing complete interviews or segments grouped by theme. This uneasiness shows the difficulty in working in, and with, a qualitative research framework, and

with providing sources that open up new perspectives on a (literal and figural) field and its history. Even more, the book displays an indecisiveness about what it is supposed to do: render original sources that contribute to historical research, or present a scholarly analysis of such sources. In any case, streamlining the material presented in *Granitsia i liudi* would be desirable, as showing variations of themes often results in repetition. The four full interviews included at the end of the book show the potential of a different form of presentation. These narratives enable readers to come to their own conclusions about the process of recalling the past and to learn about the past.

REFERENCES

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