

within its individual parts than in its sum total, wherein the recurrent themes, far from appearing redundant, develop a rhythm which serves to reinforce within the determined reader that the triumphs and travails of restive laborers were not isolated among miners, longshoremen, construction workers, teamsters, steelworkers or any other group of laborers commonly associated with American labor history. But, rather, otherwise disparate workers such as newsboys, telegraphers, waitresses, plumbers, and office workers, as well as millions of other strikers, have shared a commonality of cause despite their apparent diversity.

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SHULMAN, ELENA. *Stalinism on the Frontier of Empire: Women and State Formation in the Soviet Far East* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2008; doi:10.1017/S002085901000043X

Studies of the frontier as a separate and gendered space have proliferated in recent decades, with women being portrayed as agents of civilization and colonization, as well as having a role in nation-building. However, although present at every phase of Russian empire-building, Russian women have seldom been the subject of research, or even mentioned as active agents of colonization in either Soviet/Russian or Western historiographies. Shulman's book fills this gap by presenting a valuable contribution to the field of gender studies, to the history of Stalinism, and to the history of Soviet women in the process of state-formation and empire-building in a very complex and challenging region of the Far East. Taking the Khetagurovite campaign of 1937 as an example of Stalinist policies of recruitment, Shulman re-evaluates the whole concept of women's roles, contribution, and participation in the processes of empire-building.

This book focuses on the life stories of women recruited in the Khetagurovite campaign to settle in the Far East in 1937. It is through their experiences that the Soviet empire-building process is reflected and analysed, enabling the reader to see how the lives of ordinary women interacted with the powerful movement towards state-formation. These stories are recovered from archival letters, party documents, memoirs, press reports, and films of that era and constitute quite a rich source base, allowing multifaceted analyses of women's participation in the colonization of the Far East and their contribution to what in the historiography is called "Stalinism" (pp. 23–24). Shulman defines her subject matter in clear terms and provides quite an extensive theoretical framework for her study, summarizing historiographical discussions on such subjects as the "frontier", "Stalinism", and "Soviet women's status" (pp. 9–23).

The book is divided into six chapters dealing with both frontier fantasies and women's real experiences in the Far East. Shulman starts with a general description of the position of women under the Soviets in the 1920s and 1930s, providing a background to the personal stories of the women who ended up going to build the Far East in 1937. Chapter 1 argues that in the context of the Great Terror, packed labour camps, and the deportation of Soviet Koreans and Chinese migrant workers finally appeared as obligatory keystones in Stalinist state-building and national security at the frontier.

Chapter 2 continues to sketch the background to the Khetagurovite campaign by illustrating the history of the colonization of the Far East. In Shulman's opinion, as a region the Far East was underpopulated and underdeveloped, and represented essentially a masculine space as all the settlers were men who left their families behind in seeking a

temporary income in the Far East. The majority of the population consisted of convicts traditionally sent to Siberia and the Far East by the Tsarist and later the Soviet authorities. Attracting women meant creating a stable reproductive society in the vast region crucial for the industrialization process, as the Communist Party and Soviet authorities then saw it. However, women were regarded not only as biological producers; they were also called upon as a qualified workforce that represented the ideal New Soviet Woman – a working mother. It was in this context that on 5 February 1937 Valentina Khetagurova, the young wife of a Red Army officer, appealed in *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* for women to settle in the Far East. Although the number of applicants was quite high, the authorities selected just one-tenth actually to go (p. 67). The personal stories of these women reveal the clash between the mythology of expected hardships and the ugly realities of the Gulag and suspicion of newcomers.

Who was Valentina Khetagurova, whose name means nothing to the contemporary reader, even in Russia? Chapter 3, “Our famous Valia: the rise of a Soviet notable”, explores the ways and strategies of making a model Soviet woman. Being a representative of a young generation of Soviet women who grew up entirely under Soviet power, Khetagurova accommodated important ideological messages of the new gender order: she had the right social origins (she was the daughter of a Putilov factory worker), she was married to an army officer, her marriage was inter-ethnic (her husband was a Northern Ossetian), and she worked actively and eagerly for the strategically important frontier, promoting Soviet ideological slogans. On the other hand, she genuinely believed in the success of the campaign and acted as a patron to the settler women, trying to support them though the hardships of life in the Far East.

The backgrounds of the women coming to the Far East as part of the Khetagurovite campaign was quite diverse and their motives very different, as Chapter 4 shows. Shulman gives two sides of the story. She shows how the mass media (film, literature, and newspaper coverage) created certain mythologies of the Far East frontier to inspire these women to take up Khetagurova's call, while also examining how those representations shaped the imaginations of the target audience. A close reading of volunteers' letters suggests that the newcomers were quite disappointed at what they found on the frontier, especially the treatment meted out to them by men in general and party bosses in particular. These women were ready to be heroes building a new society, but ended up reinforcing the totalitarian boundaries of the Stalinist state.

Female morals came under scrutiny as soon as the campaign showed the first signs of failure. Chapter 5 deals with the problematic issue of sexual behaviour in alien spaces. Shulman argues that women often found themselves in compromising situations due to the unbearable economic and material conditions in the Far East, and that they were universally regarded as having poor judgement in relation to the men with whom they had sexual contacts or with whom they entered into unsuccessful marriages. Shulman blames the inability of party and Komsomol officials to articulate useful guidelines for sexual behaviour in a rapidly changing social world which led to disorderly lives and light-hearted attitudes to the institution of marriage. Women were sexually exploited and used sex partly as a means to provide for themselves.

By 1940, the Khetagurovite campaign had been proclaimed a failure as many volunteers returned home and the arrival of women failed to change the society in the way expected. Chapter 6, “Snivelers and Patriots”, shows how the reality of life at the frontier disillusioned those women who had found themselves in a very patriarchal culture of Soviet male society untouched by the new ideology. The women were not ready to defend themselves

against misogyny and the traditionalism of the isolated areas in the Far East where the regime's authority was weak and the state was unable to help them to reassert their position. Industries did not welcome female volunteers, who were poorly paid, much less than men; there was inadequate housing and social services; and the distribution of goods was corrupt and under the control of dishonest local party bosses. The major disillusionment came when the women realized that they could not exploit their privileged position as representatives of the Communist Party and the Soviet state, as their status was not recognized by the locals.

In her conclusion, Shulman argues that the Khetagurovite story underscores the differences between Soviet empire-building and that of the Western European powers. These differences include the primary motivation of Soviet women, who sought to partake in the unfolding epic of Soviet conquests in the harsh but supposedly bountiful natural world of the Far East but not to function as guardians of racial boundaries (p. 222). She also suggests that while the frontier epitomized promises fulfilled for some women in Soviet society, the Stalinist frontier exaggerated some of the most difficult aspects of the Soviet system for women and their children (p. 225).

Stalinism on the Frontier of Empire is an excellent piece of scholarship, contributing to the development of the history of Soviet women and Soviet society in general. Shulman demonstrates an impressive ability to elevate the argument to a new cognitive level and shows the complex diversity of women's lives under Stalinism. It is beautifully written and gives an exciting glimpse of the private lives of those women who decided to try to build a new society. But one major reservation is the author's tendency to simplify the motives of both the state and the women themselves; Shulman constantly uses the argument of the lack of women and their difficult material situation as a reason for both the failure of the Khetagurovite campaign and of attempts to resettle the Far East. Women certainly exploited opportunities to adjust to the situation, but their choices were not as voluntary as they would have liked, and sexual and gender politics forced them into certain patterns of passive resistance that women could and should have exploited to their advantage. The rich material presented in the book shows extreme anxieties about independent women being present in the masculine space of settlement society, and those anxieties were traditionally connected with female bodies and sexuality, that, once uncontrollable, were more likely to disrupt than to create a society.

This book is definitely an event in the contemporary historiography of Stalinism, and can be warmly recommended not only to academic readers but also to the wider public.

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EYFERTH, JACOB. *Eating Rice from Bamboo Roots. The Social History of a Community of Handicraft Papermakers in Rural Sichuan, 1920–2000*. Harvard University Press. 335 pp. Ill. \$45.00; £33.95; € 40.50; doi:10.1017/S0020859010000441

This study explores a branch of rural craft production that continues to survive in the villages of Jiajiang County in central Sichuan Province into the twenty-first century. Research for this study was done in many months of field studies in Jiajiang papermaking villages during the years 1996–1998, 2001, and 2004.