

during the war” (372), but also conclude that the war years pushed that state and its people to the limits of their capabilities. We see in this period not only the massive power that the state wielded over its population, but also the systemic and institutional limitations of that power to force its goals into reality.

GRETA BUCHER
US Military Academy, West Point

Eleven Winters of Discontent: The Siberian Internment and the Making of a New Japan. By Sherzod Muminov. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2022. xiv, 384 pp. Notes. Photographs. Maps. \$45.00, hard bound.
doi: 10.1017/slr.2023.144

In his classic *Embracing Defeat* (1999), John W. Dower said of the over two million Japanese who had still not been repatriated two years after the war’s end: “The fate of these Japanese is a neglected chapter among the countless epic tragedies of World War II” (50). Sherzod Muminov’s book *Eleven Winters of Discontent* is an attempt at filling out the “neglected chapter” of at least one group of the victims of the Japanese Empire’s collapse—the Siberian internees. In his introduction, Muminov promises a transnational book that will “write the history of the internment as an encounter that—despite the confrontations that conditioned it—defied borders, ideologies, and the divisions of the Cold War” (19). The book opens with a brief summary of the stories of three prominent Japanese, referred to as “three of our chief protagonists,” who spent ten years in captivity and were among the last to be released in 1956—the literary critic and future professor Uchimura Gōsuke; the Marxist Asahara Seiki, who as a Soviet collaborator was the leader of the reeducation program for Japanese POWs; and Sejima Ryūzō, Lieutenant Colonel in the Japanese Imperial Army and one of the future masterminds behind the Japanese economic miracle. To the reader’s disappointment, the plot of their internment experience and post-internment contributions to the making of the new Japan never materializes.

“A history of the Siberian Internment is inevitably also a history of the Soviet Union” (19). At the same time, Muminov wants to offer “a political and social history of Japan’s transition from empire to nation-state” (43). The internees represented the vestiges of the crumbled empire in the Japanese national consciousness. They were variously targets of empathy and exclusion. Their stories of suffering were incorporated into anti-Soviet Cold War propaganda, but they struggled for decades with the Japanese government to obtain war compensation. To Japan, they were both symbols and outsiders. Muminov wants to give agency to the internees “as direct participants in the great competition between the superpowers and their allies” (45). In fact, the claim of an active role comes from the internees themselves (47). However, Muminov credits the criticism of Japanese imperialism in the internees’ reflections on their experience to the camps’ political reeducation program (47–48): “Only in the Soviet camps, with the benefit of hindsight and help from propaganda instruction, did [the soldier] Itō [Masao] and many of his fellow captives realize that they, too, had been complicit in advancing Japanese imperialism” (59; emphasis added). Nowhere is the existence of a long-lived home-grown anti-imperialist and anti-war movement mentioned. After all, the first historical anti-imperialist treaty was produced in Japan.

Over 2,000 memoirs of Siberian detainees are recorded, reflecting a vast range of political and ideological persuasions and perspectives. Yet this book often dismisses their testimony. The witness of the survivors is repeatedly called a “myth.” A “brutal communist power that was hell-bent on sacrificing millions to its utopian ideals” is

for Muminov not a historical fact but “a Cold War trope” (19). Siberian winters are “an easy cliché” (90–91). The survivors’ “mythology of victimhood” (30) created “myths” about “a backward, brutal, and threatening Soviet Union that was not averse to using violence and subversion in its attempts to destabilize Japan” (32). Soviet violation of international treaties is not a historical fact but a “discourse” (37–38; 89). The shortage of food in the camps is “an impression” (96). The survivors’ memories of cold, hunger, exhaustion, death, and disease are characterized throughout as “simplistic.” Muminov discusses the leitmotifs of “cold, hunger, and labor that make up the so-called Siberian trinity of suffering” merely in order to challenge “the popular perception that the internment was only about suffering, injustices, and deprivation” (80).

Muminov explains that forced labor in the Soviet Union was “to compensate for the labor scarcity and supply the economy with workers” (120). The Gulag is justified as the “rapid industrialization of a backward nation, a task of epic proportions that required heroic sacrifices of the Soviet people” (118). Of course, Japanese detainees were not part of the “Soviet people.” Their captors’ “widespread belief in the moral superiority of the Soviet people in dealing with the former enemy,” according to which “the soldiers of former enemy armies. . . had gotten what they deserved” (40), delineates Muminov’s moral judgment. Muminov’s relativization of prisoner suffering in the service of national goals is in line with the recent turn in Russian public memory which, at the Perm-36 site for example, highlights the achievements of camp guards alongside the experience of the victims. Giorgio Agamben’s analysis of the “suspension of law” in Nazi extermination camps is cited once in the book—approvingly (101). “Along with memoirs that focused on misery and hardships, there were accounts whose authors were willing to see the good as well as the bad” (104).

Muminov doesn’t suppress historical facts or research but glosses over the findings of scholarship ideologically so that his interpretation contradicts his own evidence. The appalling death rate (roughly 60,000) and the eleven years of well-documented captivity shrink to the status of mere details, while the propaganda lens of the camp re-education program (produced by the camp paper *Nihon Shimbun*) is foregrounded and incorporated in his own analysis. While promising the reader a transnational perspective, the book is written from the perspective of the Soviet (specifically, the Stalinist) state. Slavacists who study this perspective and its contemporary legacy will find in this book an interesting case.

OLGA V. SOLOVIEVA
University of Chicago

Galvanizing Nostalgia? Indigeneity and Sovereignty in Siberia. By Marjorie Mandelstam-Balzer. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021. xvi, 254 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. Maps. \$31.95, paper.
doi: 10.1017/slr.2023.145

Recent decades have seen a proliferation of social science studies focusing on nostalgia in post-socialist countries. The number of nostalgia-driven takes on post-socialism has grown substantially, turning nostalgia into a dominant paradigm for understanding experiences of the social upheavals following the collapse of socialism. A range of scholarly discourses on post-socialist nostalgia with all its shades, twists, and turns is exhilaratingly wide ranging, from the politics of memory and past-oriented nostalgia to social action, cultural production, and affective futurities. In my view the most recent book by Marjorie Mandelstam-Balzer, presenting profiles of the three Siberian Republics of Buriatia, Tuva, and Sakha, stands out for its environmental