

**Maryna Hrymych, editor. *Zrulist': Zhinotstvo; zhinocha subkul'tura* [Adulthood: Womanhood; Female Subculture]. 2012. *Narodna kul'tura ukrainsiv: Zhyttievyi tsykl liudyny* [Folk Culture of Ukrainians: The Human Life Cycle], vol. 3, Duliby, 2008-15. 5 vols. 480 pp. Notes on contributors. Cloth.**

**S**pecific aspects of adult women's lives are the focus of the third volume of the five-volume collection *Narodna kul'tura ukrainsiv: Zhyttievyi tsykl liudyny* (*Folk Culture of Ukrainians: The Human Life Cycle*). The overall collection is the ambitious project of inspired researcher Maryna Hrymych, who is also the editor the volumes. Volume 3 consists of nineteen essays, by twelve contemporary scholars, and two classic studies with accompanying biographic entries about the authors of those studies. There is an impressive array of ethnologic, folkloric, and socio-anthropological essays, which describe and reimagine different aspects of a woman's life in the traditional Ukrainian agricultural village. Ethnographic research often intersects with folklore, linguistics, gender studies, philosophy, economics, and history in the studies of renowned scholars Oksana Kis', Iryna Ihnatenko, and Hrymych, who provide insightful explanations of material relating to the customs and practices of traditional agricultural societies. At times, the authors paint somewhat contradictory pictures, as in the case of two essays dealing with the wedding rituals connected with virginity and defloration. However this type of contradiction makes the book even more interesting and discussion worthy, as the essays reflect off of each other and generate new questions and ideas.

From the reader's point of view, this volume could benefit from a different order of entries, but this is only a minor drawback as the book can be read and reread in any number of ways. Keeping this in mind, there are several particularly effective thematic groupings, such as four essays about wedding customs and rituals—by Iryna Nesen, Valentyna Borysenko, Ihnatenko, and Hrymych—and two essays about motherhood and abortion, respectively—the first by Kis' and second by Ihnatenko. The latter two essays address social norms influenced by social and religious morality and the deviations from those norms that are designated as sinful and harmful. The two researchers emphasize that both childbirth and abortion were dangerous to women's health and that the death rate among women was high. Ihnatenko writes that in villages it was quite difficult to find a person qualified to perform abortions, while folk remedies, with their herbal potions, offered little assistance. In addition, village midwives usually did not perform abortions. Ihnatenko explains that this was owing to their religious beliefs, but it also seems probable that since performing abortions ran counter to the midwives' usual occupation, engaging in this practice could

harm their reputation. Perhaps for village midwives, performing abortions was neither economically attractive nor culturally useful and the potential losses outweighed any benefits.

The activity of traditional agricultural societies of the past was connected with rituals, which were employed to ensure the best possible outcome in any given situation. A specific example of this is laid out in Mykhailo Krasnyk's essay, "Zhinochi taiemni znannia: kupivlia korovy ta dohliad za neiu" ("Women's Secret Knowledge: Buying and Tending a Cow"). The researcher writes that, traditionally, Ukrainian women actively participated in purchasing and tending cows and took part in certain rituals that were considered to be indicators and predictors of success. Is it any wonder, then, that some of that folk knowledge would still be practiced today? A recent report of the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations states that about eighty percent of milk in Ukraine is produced by private households and small family farms (*Ukraine xi*), making husbandry the primary source of income for many Ukrainian village families. Krasnyk's essay helps show how traditional perspectives and approaches can exist within modern-day contexts.

While most of the essays in the volume adopt a pragmatic approach in dealing with ethnologic material, one essay stands out, and deserves special mention, for its philosophical and conceptual approach. Kis's "Zhinoche nachalo v narodnomu svitohliadi ta tradytsiinyi stereotyp feminnosti" ("The Feminine Essence in the Folk Worldview and the Stereotype of Femininity in Folk Tradition") employs structuralism and gender studies concepts to explore the duality of the sacred and profane that is attributed to women in Ukrainian folk tradition. After a substantial philosophical foray, Kis' provides a good wife/bad wife profile: a good wife was one who was wise, obedient, and hardworking, while a bad wife was one who was lazy and angry. Kis' draws examples from folklore as well as archival documents to illustrate the fact that men were seen as more valuable than women. Her conclusion is that men and women were conceptualized as existing within a dichotomy and a hierarchy, while their social roles were seen as distinct but complementary. The researcher points to the strenuous nature of physical labour in agricultural societies as the main factor in the perception of disparity between the sexes.

This book provides rich ethnographic information about many different areas of life and inquiry: women's property and inheritance rights, division of labour, family life, seasonal rituals, virginity in wedding rituals, childbirth, motherhood, contraception, abortion, abuse, betrayal, witchcraft, makeup, fashion, and alcohol use. Despite a few qualitative and other minor issues, the

volume is an important information source and, thus, has high overall value in the field of Ukrainian studies.

Marta Kondratyuk  
*Donetsk National University*

Work Cited

*Ukraine: Improving Milk Supply in Northern Ukraine. Technical Assistance to Ukraine's Dairy Sector.* Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations / European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, September 2013. Report Series 18. [www.fao.org/3/a-i3446e.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/a-i3446e.pdf). Accessed 3 Mar. 2017.