

Cinzia D. Solari. *On the Shoulders of Grandmothers: Gender, Migration, and Post-Soviet Nation-State Building.* Routledge, 2018. xiv, 258 pp. Illustrations. Tables. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$41.95, paper.

The book *On the Shoulders of Grandmothers* by Cinzia D. Solari portrays an interesting contrast of gendered migration from Ukraine along two different migration routes: to Italy and to the United States. It demonstrates how migrations of middle-aged women from Ukraine who felt left behind in the post-Soviet transition influenced state building in the new Ukraine through migration. Although remittances only make up a small part of Ukraine's economy (Solari states that official estimates are four percent but that the actual number could be closer to twenty percent), Ukraine is one of the largest countries for emigration in the world (42-43). This book offers insights into the life of Ukrainian migrants from an interesting demographic—*babushki* (the word is a Russian equivalent of the Ukrainian *babusi*) 'grandmothers,' who embody the image of Eastern Europe. From the extensive ethnographic research, including one hundred sixty in-depth interviews across three different countries, we hear the voices of migrants and voices of older women, which are not often heard in migration research. *On the Shoulders of Grandmothers* offers a unique perspective on several migration dichotomies, such as push and pull factors, legal and illegal statuses, and East and West, all in search of what it means to be Ukrainian in the increasingly divergent political context of the new Ukraine.

The book examines the discourse of motherhood in exile (Italy) and exodus (the United States), as Ukrainian women navigate double marginalization from the labour market and from their familial role. This is because the collapse of the Soviet state led to the elimination of job opportunities for women and the supplanting of their *babushki* role since young women were expected to stay at home and raise their own children instead of having grandmothers raise them (7). Older women, instead of living out their golden years in Ukraine, have been forced by work and the lack of family obligations to leave their role as *babushki* and assume the role of *Berehynia* outside of Ukraine. *Berehynia* is an ancient pagan goddess and guardian of both the Ukrainian family and the Ukrainian nation (36). These women, often highly educated, live out their forced exile from Ukraine stuck in what interview subjects call the gulag in Italy or undertaking a voluntary exodus to the promised land of the United States. *On the Shoulders of Grandmothers* gives us a unique look at migration from the ground up in sending and receiving countries, providing contrasts to global migration trends and indications of how these places and people interact with one another, focusing on gendered migrant subjectivities (10).

The book is divided into three parts, consisting of five chapters and representing three distinct interview sites. Part 1, “Genesis: Ukraine” (25-50), begins in Lviv, Ukraine, with a history of the push factors providing the impetus to leave the country owing to the economic situation and lack of options after the transition from Communism. Solari also offers an in-depth discussion of the political drivers behind Ukrainian migration, including corruption, rule of law, societal divisions, and instability caused by various Europe-oriented versus Russia-leaning governments. The interviews with the children and families of migrants demonstrate how migration is perceived in the sending country by those who are left behind. The interviews are focused on markets, moralities, and motherhood as respondents discuss being stigmatized as “bad” mothers and referred to as “prostitutes” or “defectors” by politicians and the media for having left Ukraine (49). Migration deeply impacted those who stayed and those who returned to Ukraine since these transnational processes imposed value judgements not only on their status as mothers but also on their individual identity and their Ukrainian identity (50).

Part 2, “Exile: Italy” (51-124), takes us to the exile in Italy, where migrants from Ukraine arrive at the Garbatella metro stop outside of Rome to begin the process of looking for work as in-home care providers. The aging Italian population has driven the need for domestic workers, and these positions have been filled by foreign workers. This fact and the high wages as compared with Ukraine, existing migration routes, and a large Ukrainian community are just a few of the pull factors that motivated respondents to migrate to Italy. Ukrainians balanced the precariousness of legal versus illegal migration in Italy more so than in the United States. The narratives include many respondents waiting in limbo for their legalization paperwork to arrive and having to renew this paperwork yearly. However, Solari argues, they have more social protections and benefits, such as bonuses, vacation time, and support in the case of termination, as compared with migrants in the United States—benefits that are awarded to them regardless of their immigration status. Another interesting dynamic that comes through in the interviews in Italy is that respondents feel that Ukraine is somewhere between “Europe” and “Africa” and that they have to work in order to guarantee the future of their country within Europe. In doing this, “[t]hey carry Ukraine on their shoulders” (66-67) and participate in building the state from the outside for the sake of their children’s future.

The United States is the focus of part 3, “Exodus: The United States” (125-89)—specifically, San Francisco, California, where middle-aged women are, again, migrating to fill a care-worker role but most of the immigration is undertaken legally. The dynamics of migrations to the United States are shown as different from those relating to Italy, as the migrants to America

were also able to bring their families and most of the migrations were considered permanent. Still, there are interesting gender dynamics since many of these migrations were female led and the women were employed as domestic workers by a division of the California Department of Social Services. In contrast with the vibrant social community in Italy, Ukrainian communities in the United States, which were formed around previous migrations there, excluded newer migrants. Many of these communities viewed the newly arrived Ukrainians as Russified and not representing real Ukraine. As a result, immediate family relations were more important to the newer migrants, but many of them lamented the assimilation of their children, which, again, displaced them from their role as *babushki*.

The book *On the Shoulders of Grandmothers* weaves stories of migration, love, longing, and loss through detailed ethnographic interviews in which the author herself plays an active role. The study questions what it means to be Ukrainian in a time of political change through a double marginalization in the labour market and in domestic roles. We see migration in one time period, and we see its fluidity, with push and pull factors determining migration routes and with laws and regulations that are constantly changing. I believe that this book makes a valuable contribution to the migration literature and would be of interest to scholars of Ukraine, gender, migration, and Eastern European-area studies and, generally, to any scholars who wish to explore the building of the Ukrainian nation by grandmothers from the ground up.

Laura A. Dean
Millikin University