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Sarah D. Phillips. *Women's Social Activism in the New Ukraine: Development and the Politics of Differentiation.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008. xvi + 206 pp. $65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-253-35164-7; $24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-253-21992-3.

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The Politics of Femininity, Class, and Need in Post-Soviet Ukraine

Women's Social Activism in the New Ukraine is a nuanced and intimate ethnographic account of the implications of the large-scale realignment of state and supranational priorities concerning members of vulnerable populations in post-Soviet Ukraine. Sarah D. Phillips deftly weaves together narratives of the lives of several women activists with a discussion of Ukrainian politics of femininity and nationhood as she makes an argument about the importance of processes of differentiation that are occurring within Ukrainian society. Phillips contributes an ethnographic study of the politics of class differentiation to the large body of scholarship on the ramifications of the fall of the Soviet Union on women's lives, including the dismantling of state subsidized entitlement programs and the rise of a professionalized civil society in the form of the nongovernmental organization (NGO) sector. She does this through her use of the concept of "differentiation," which she defines as "separating groups and individuals according to new criteria, standards and calculations of need and entitlement" (p. 8). She focuses on three aspects of this process of differentiation: through the reform of state entitlements; through the work of NGOs on multiple scales; and through interpersonal relations, where activists make judgments about their own and others' value to society. One of the strengths of this approach is that it facilitates the demonstration of one of Phillips's key points–that the activists she profiles are "agents of differentiation" as well as subject to it (p. 8). In this way, Phillips provides scholars with a rich and multifaceted entry point into talking about social stratification within postsocialist societies.

Phillips bases her project on the in-depth study of the lives of eleven female activists in ten "mutual-aid" organizations. These organizations are so called because they not only provide needed assistance to members of vulnerable populations, but are also founded and operated by those with similar needs themselves. Although Phillips is careful to point out that both women and men participate in the NGO sector in Ukraine, she makes the point that the subsectors that deal with vulnerable populations are highly feminized. The organizations in Phillips's study focus on the needs of those who have been economically marginalized in post-Soviet Ukraine, including single mothers of "many children," elderly retired women, young people facing poverty, and children who are suffering from the effects of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. Her data are based on one year of intensive fieldwork from 1998 to 1999 and a series of follow-up visits to the field through 2006. Her methodological approach capitalizes on the strengths of ethnography to bring the everyday into dialogue with the abstract in a way that vibrantly brings to life such concepts as "post-socialism," "neoliberalism," and "privatization."

Phillips frames these women's stories with a discussion of the ways in which images of women, real and mythical, have been deployed during the Soviet and post-Soviet eras as symbols of motherhood and nation. One image that has gained particular salience is that of the Berehynia–the mother and divine protector of the nation. In the literal shadow of the Berehynia, whose statue towers over the Kyiv skyline, real women are experiencing a push out of politics and lucrative employment while at the same time being pulled into what the activists call "social work"–work in charities and aid organizations. Her informants, however, are not all in agreement in their explanation of what drove them into NGO work. Ivana, for instance, emphasizes the role that her "natural" capacity as a woman and mother has played in her career choices over the years. In her analysis of Ivana's narrative, Phillips does not dismiss Ivana's assessments of her maternal aptitudes out of hand. Rather, she suggests that many scholars and activists from abroad have been

too quick to dismiss women's utilization of discourses of the feminine and the maternal as catalysts for political and social action. By discussing the salience of the divine feminine images along with the real-time political decisions that have affected women's lives, Phillips paints a nuanced picture of how her informants situate themselves within these strong and often counteractive discourses.

Over the last twenty years, the Ukrainian state (like many others) has been dismantling its social "safety net" for groups of citizens who were considered entitled to protections and benefits during the Soviet era. As a result, Phillips argues, people are being differentiated in ways that are different from those of the previous regime. This differentiation can be one of a rising or lowering of prestige or wealth, but it can also mean a process of reconceptualization. For instance, women with three or more children were considered to be a population in need of particular state support during the pronatalist Soviet era. As Svetlana, the founder of an organization to assist such women and a "mother of many children" herself, points out, although in the past people were envious of their increased access to rationed foodstuffs, in the neoliberalist present people see them as "parasites" who are "giving birth to the poor" (p. 111). Thus, while mothers of many children have continued to be seen as a particular class of citizens in need of assistance, public perception of their social worth has shifted. Along with this, Phillips analyzes the effects of "targeted assistance" and other ways in which state bureaucracies work to determine who is "deserving" of state support and who must make ends meet on their own. Through all of these processes of differentiation, citizens who are barred from being able to participate fully in profit-generating activities find themselves on the margins of the "new Ukraine." In the wake of the state's departure from their lives, the activists in Phillips's study turn to "civil society" as both a way to participate in public life and as a way to make ends meet as members of marginalized populations as well.

The stories of Phillips's four main key respondents illustrate the power of the transnational NGO sector to differentiate worthy projects and organizations from unworthy ones, to differentiate appropriate ways of behavior and self-presentation from inappropriate "Soviet" ones, and to thus empower some activists while marginalizing others. Phillips argues that NGOs are agents of several kinds of differentiation. Through both participant observation and attention to respondents' descriptions of them, Phillips pays special attention to "trainings" provided by foreign NGOs as agents of differentiation. In these trainings, activists were taught to engage in a reframing of themselves as individuals rather than as people who understand themselves in relation to others. Phillips found that many of her informants subsequently went on to use these frameworks of self-reliance, self-esteem, and individualism in their assessments of others as well as themselves. In addition, those activists who could adroitly employ the frameworks and language of the NGOs could also go on to secure employment, grants, or valuable contacts who could help them monetarily and materially. Phillips found that although all of her respondents had gained valuable professional experience, both in the formal sector through additional education and in the informal sector as directors of NGOs, they were not all able to utilize their skills to thrive in the new Ukraine. For instance, while Ivana had gained access to contacts within influential foreign NGOs, Svetlana had not. Because of this differentiation, Ivana also gained access to resources that allowed her to thrive in the NGO sector and beyond, while Svetlana by contrast was not able to put her skills to use in an environment where she could do much more than survive. Phillips threads her informants' stories through a deft and thorough overview of the state of NGO organizing in Ukraine and the vast body of scholarship on this topic more generally.

One of this book's particular charms is in the way that Phillips provides the reader with a diachronic view of her key informants' organizational lives. When we learn about Lotus, Our House, and For Life at the start of the ethnography, we meet their members at one point in their trajectory. Through transcripts of letters and interviews situated at different moments in time, Phillips engenders curiosity in the reader as to what their fates will be. Because she was able to gain so many years of updates, her informants' stories span a decade or more, reaching from memories of Stalin's Terror (in one case) to stories of life after the Orange Revolution. Along with its general clarity and its measured tone, this makes *Women's Activism in the New Ukraine* a pleasure to read. While I believe its greatest contribution is to advancing the body of scholarship on stratification and gender in postsocialist societies, this ethnography will be a welcome addition to graduate and advanced undergraduate courses as well.

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