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**Between “Europe” and “Africa”:
Building the “New” Ukraine on
the Shoulders of Migrant Women**

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Abstract: Female-led migration is usually explained by a “push-pull” framework. Poverty “pushes” Third World women desperate to feed their children to work abroad where higher salaries “pull” even professional women into domestic labor in First World countries. In this paper I broaden this framework by thinking of gender as “constitutive” of migration and placing the migration of Ukrainian women to Italy in a larger context of post-Soviet transformation. The coming of capitalism has forced many women out of the labor market and necessitated a shift from extended families with working-mothers, peripheral men, and grandmothers as primary caregivers of their grandchildren to nuclear families with mother-housewives, father-breadwinners, and displaced grandmothers. Yet men’s salaries are unable to sustain this new gender order which relies on grandmothers, doubly marginalized from the labor market and their families, to work abroad. Gender is constitutive of migration and the construction the “new” Ukraine. At a time when the definition of Ukrainian nationhood is highly contested, migrant women are working towards a vision of Ukraine as “Europe,” a utopia of consumer capitalism. But the fear that Ukraine will instead become “Africa,” the underbelly of the global economy, is always looming. Migrant women bear the painful contradictions of this nation building project.

No one knows how many Ukrainians are working in Italy.ⁱ *Forum*, a Rome-based newspaper published in Ukrainian and Russian argues for two million. The Bishop of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in Rome proposes that 500,000 is a more realistic number based on what they see at Church events. The head of the Italo-Ukrainian Christian Association suggests over one million. What is certain is that every Sunday between 8AM and noon 5,000 Ukrainians pass through a large parking lot behind Rome's Garbatella metro station. The metro's main exit brings you out to a neighborhood with small shops and apartment buildings. I notice that the few Italians on board exit through the main doors. I follow a group of women out the back exit chatting in Ukrainian rather energetically for 8:30 on a Sunday morning. Here, the subway station narrows into a hallway that leads us outside onto a square cement platform. It overlooks a large parking lot known as "the Garbatella," and is packed with mostly middle-aged women whose winter coats cover straight, solid-colored skirts and button-down blouses with busy prints. Despite the cement staircase descending into the throng of people, the platform gives the impression of being suspended in mid-air. I lean up against the retaining wall to take in the scene.

Fifty white courier vans, most at least a decade old, line the perimeter of the rectangular lot. Some vans carry workers with valid documents between Rome and what seems like most cities and even villages in Ukraine, but drivers make the bulk of their money carrying goods back and forth.ⁱⁱ Many of the people below come every Sunday to send packages and money back to their families in Ukraine, building relationships of trust with specific drivers who they know will personally hand the money or package to their loved ones. Loved ones in Ukraine may then send with this same driver letters, photos,

mayonnaise, or *kovbasa* (sausage) to their family member working in Rome, nostalgic for anything from home. All the vans have their double back doors thrown wide open in front of mountains of plastic bags stuffed to capacity. Women stand in small groups fussing over whether the breakables are well packed, sharing the latest pictures of their grandchildren, and comparing notes on their jobs as domestic workers, mostly live-in care givers to the elderly. In the center of the rectangular space, lined with courier vans on all sides, is a row of tented booths selling newspapers, magazines, and books in Ukrainian and Russian. Thousands of people are browsing the books, chatting with long lost friends, or hurrying to find their courier van, arms weighted down with bulky plastic bags.

Surveying Rome's Ukrainian community from above, I am struck by the fact that the crowd of thousands below is almost all women. Even more striking is the age of these women. Unlike most migrant communities that are made up of young people in their 20s and 30s, the women bustling below are in their 40s, 50s, and 60s. Teresa, a Filipina woman in her mid-30s and my contact in one of the domestic worker unions with a mostly Filipina and South American clientele, commented last week, "I just don't understand. Lots of the Ukrainian women who come here to care for the elderly look like *they* could use a caregiver! What is wrong with their daughters that they send their elderly mothers abroad to work instead of going themselves?"

Why babushka works in Rome

Nearly all of the Ukrainian workers I speak with in Rome are university-educated with professional work histories, and most assert that they never imagined they would go

abroad to work. Rather, they expected to finish careers, retire, and raise their grandchildren, so the decision to leave home was a profoundly painful one. In Soviet Ukraine, women with young children were expected to work while their mothers as grandmothers or *babushky* cared for the children, did the housework, and stood in bread lines, freeing their daughters and daughters-in-law for the labor market (Verdery 1994). Roxalana expected to do for her daughter what her mother had done for her.ⁱⁱⁱ She says: “I am a *babushka* and I thought I would be with my grandson during the day and take care of the house while my daughter worked.” Yet the coming of market capitalism to post-socialist Ukraine has meant the expulsion of women from the workforce and Roxalana’s daughter, like many others, is now a career housewife by default (Bonnell 1996, Zdravomyslova 1996, Zhurzhenko 2000). Roxalana explains, “I felt useless at home. All I was doing was fighting with my daughter over, you know, what to feed my grandson, how to dress him, and how to discipline him. And with just my son-in-law working and my small pension there was not enough money. So I came here [Rome].”

It is precisely older women who have been doubly displaced from their jobs and their expected roles within extended families. Marginalized in Ukraine, many have left to work in Italy. It is no surprise then that looking out over the Garbatella I should see a sea of middle-aged women rather than young women or men of any age. I remembered the last time I stood on that cement platform. I was with Tanya, a vibrant woman in her 50s who taught Ukrainian history to high school students in Lviv before leaving for Rome to, as she put it, “clean toilets.” She said bitterly, “Do you see all those women down there? They carry Ukraine on their shoulders and don’t think they don’t know it ... and don’t think they are happy about it either.”

Not only is the Garbatella a site where goods and people are shuttled between Italy and Ukraine, but it is also where many come in the hope of finding work. Or, in Tanya's words, this is where "*babushka*, who has worked all her life and should be retired, comes to ask for more work." I descend from the cement platform into the crowd. At the bottom of the staircase women are lined up on both sides making a human corridor through which we are all forced to walk in order to enter the Garbatella. Some women hold signs that say: "Looking for work" while other women murmur discreetly to those entering the Garbatella that they are "selling work." Selling work is considered morally reprehensible. It means that a woman has been working for an Italian family for several years but now, having learned the ropes, has found a higher paying job in some other family. She tells her first family she is leaving but not to worry, she will recommend a competent replacement. She goes to the Garbatella where the newly arrived and the most desperate go to find work and offers, sometimes for several hundred euros, to sell the telephone number and address of her former employer with the promise that she will *most likely* hire her.

Women who have a friend or a relative in Rome have someone to help them find a place to sleep and hopefully a job. The friend or relative will ask her employer, always referred to as "my *Signora*," if she knows of anyone who is looking for a woman to care for her mother or children. Sometimes women are lucky. One informant, Oksana, tells me that she met a Ukrainian woman, Olga, on the bus. Chatting she told Olga that she was looking for work. Olga quickly took her number saying that her *Signora's* sister was looking for a woman and all her friends had work right now. Oksana explains, "Olga told her *Signora* that we went to university together and that I was a very reliable worker. I

got the job! I never saw Olga before that ride on the bus! We're not even from the same city!" The women holding the "Looking for work" signs have not been so lucky. I used to look at their faces as I entered the Garbatella, but today I stare at my feet to protect myself from the pain I know I will see there and push through the corridor to the other side.

Looking over my shoulder back at the platform at the top of the stairs, my eye catches lettering on the side of the retaining wall on which I had just been leaning. Someone has spray-painted in large orange stenciled block letters: "*YUSHCHENKO NASH PRESIDENT*" (Yushchenko our president). However, it is October 2004 and Leonid Kuchma is Ukraine's president. It would not be until a month later that I would come to recognize the full significance of that sign, when people would fill the streets of Ukraine in protest, in defense of fair elections, and in support of the pro-Western presidential candidate Viktor Yushchenko; and when I would see the mass demonstrations in solidarity with the Ukrainian protesters in Rome and witness the long lines of people waiting to vote at the Ukrainian embassy, many of them holding "*Tak Yushchenko!*" (Yes Yushchenko!) banners. They were dressed in the same bold orange color as the spray-painted letters above us.

There are many competing visions of the Ukrainian nation struggling for ascendancy (Wilson 2002). The majority of Ukrainians working in Rome come from Western Ukraine (Shehda and Horodetsky, 2004). Lviv, Western Ukraine's cultural center, is home to a particular vision of Ukrainian nationhood sometimes referred to as Galician nationalism. While eastern and southern Ukraine were absorbed by Russia in the 17th century resulting in a weak sense of Ukrainian national identity in those regions,

western Ukraine's contentious relationship with Poland has led the former Habsburg territory of Galicia to see itself as "the potential agent of national unity and the keeper of the true faith on behalf of the rest of Ukraine" (Wilson 2002:43). In this nationalist vision, the Ukrainian ethnic nation has been around since the dawn of time and its linear progression was interrupted by Russian imperialism which severed Ukraine from its European roots (Wilson 2000, Wolczuk 2000). The nation-building project associated with this variant of nationalism, a minority view but one with disproportionate influence, is to follow a European model of nation-building where the Ukrainian nation is based on Ukrainian (not Russian) ethnicity, Ukrainian (not Russian) language, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church or Ukrainian (not Russian) variants of Orthodoxy, and a reconstructed historical memory of an authentic, pre-Soviet Ukrainian culture (Wilson 2000; Wolczuk, 2000). This is expressed by many of my informants as: Ukraine should be unified like Italy: a nation made up of Italians, who speak Italian, share a Catholic religion, and have an Italian culture. Migrants in Rome are well versed in this nation-building project (Solari, 2006b). While I do encounter dissenting opinions, the majority of migrants I speak with equate the election of Yushchenko with joining "Europe" and a resulting economic prosperity that will enable them and all those working abroad to finally go home. "Europe" is a state both of being (abundant consumer goods, unfettered economic opportunities, political freedom) and a destination, the goal toward which they are all working.

Is Ukraine “Europe” or “Africa”?

I make my way to the #8 courier van for Lviv to meet Valya. When I find her, the driver, a young man, is weighing her many plastic bags on a bathroom scale and charging her €1,80 (US\$2.35) per kilo. Valya hugs me and introduces me to the driver saying that his sister is a wonderful pianist, one of Valya’s former students. She then eagerly shows me what is in the bags. Her *Signora* gave her some used clothes in good condition and Valya pulls on the tags reading, “Prada, Prada, Valentino, Promodo.” Valya’s eyes beam. They are her daughter-in-law’s size. “She is young,” Valya says, “and she should dress nicely.” Another bag has foodstuffs in it—Baci chocolates, parmesan Reggiano cheese, Lavazza espresso coffee, and Mulino Bianco cookies. She would never buy these name brands for herself, she says with a wink; they are gifts. She has also found a good deal on a set of pots and pans and is sending the whole set over. I see that there are two other women in line who have found the same deal and are also sending the pots and pans back to Ukraine. Valya takes an envelope from the driver containing photos her son sent her from Lviv. There is no place to sit at the Garbatella so we find a spot on the periphery of the lot out of the flow of foot traffic, and Valya tears open the envelope. She scans all the photos quickly, smiles to herself, and then goes through the pictures again slowly. They are all of what to my eyes is a beat-up car with various people standing in front of it. Valya explains that her son bought the car with the money she has been sending home. “It is a nice car! And see how pretty my daughter-in-law is?” I look down at a petite blond woman draped over the hood of the car laughing for the camera. “No, no, Ukraine is not Africa!” Valya exclaims as if in response to an unarticulated question we all knew was hanging in the air.

The question “Is Ukraine ‘Europe’ or ‘Africa’” does seem to be always hanging in the air at the Garbatella. Italians, whose limited understanding of Ukraine is simply that it is “in the East” or “part of Russia,” often presume that Ukraine is a Third World country in the same category as African countries. Until recently, Africans made up the largest percentage of migrants in Italy. In the last decade, Africans have been surpassed by migrants from Eastern Europe. Many Italians assume that Ukrainians and all migrants *del’Est* (from the East) come from a place that is undeveloped, lacking running water, electricity, proper housing, and an education system—a place that in their popular imagination is like “Africa.” Why else would all these women come to Italy for work? My informants bristle at the comparison.^{iv} Valya is not alone in saying indignantly, “Italians think we live in mud huts like in Africa!” Just as “Europe” refers to an ideal of plentiful consumer goods and democratic freedom, for Italians and Ukrainians alike, “Africa” symbolizes a condition of abject poverty, starving children, and stunted human potential.

In Italian spaces, I often hear migrants from Ukraine tell a consistent and coherent narrative of Ukrainian nationhood in which not only is Europe the inspiration or the destination for a particular kind of nation-building project, but Ukraine *is* Europe. Yet the Garbatella, one of the few meeting places for a population that is otherwise atomized, each worker isolated in the private home of an Italian family, is a space of collective imaginings and possibilities. Here Ukraine has a much more precarious status. At the Garbatella, “Europe” and Ukraine’s impending glorious entrance into the global middle class exists simultaneously with the fear that Ukraine could go the way of “Africa” and descend into the abyss of poor countries, the forgotten underbelly of globalization.

The Garbatella is made up of something more than the people, the buses, and the plastic bags. Hope and desperation, difficult pasts and possible futures wax and wane with the crowd. Roxalana peers over Valya's shoulder as she shows me another photograph, this time of her cousin smiling and standing by the driver's door of her son's new used car. "Next week, my daughter is sending me new pictures of my grandson," Roxalana announces. Looking at the courier vans, Roxalana asks, "Will you go home this summer, Valya?" Valya nods yes without taking her eyes off the pictures. Roxalana does not have documents and has not been home in five years because of the difficulty of reentering Italy.^v "It is nice to think that if I really had to, I *could* go home. Maybe my daughter's letter will say: Things are much better here mom. Please come home." Valya casts a doubtful look in my direction but says nothing. In this Ukrainian space on the outskirts of Rome, the possibility of the journey home and the possibility of Ukraine's bright future are tangible and ephemeral, certain and precarious, clear and contradictory.

The contradictions of living between

The position these women inhabit is one of contradictions that often bubble to the surface. But at the Garbatella, the women have room to navigate these tensions and smooth over the rough spots. Here one can hold contradictory tastes and beliefs. Speaking with your *Signora*, for example, requires a consistent narrative about what Ukraine is and why you are in Rome. But at the Garbatella, you can run into an old friend and ask: "Olya, after all these years we meet in Rome?! Why are you here?" "Same reason you are here: Bread! Money!" At the same time she asserts that Ukraine is not poor, is not Africa. You pay to send Baci chocolates back home while maintaining

Ukrainian chocolate is far superior. You send Prada clothing to your daughter-in-law, while your own clothing marks you as “Eastern,” *una donna del’Est*. You meet university friends who graduated with you from the engineering program and exchange stories of how to best deal with your elderly Italian ward’s prickly personality. You explain how in Italy you “feel like a human being” and in the next breath explain that doing live-in work is “like being in prison.” Once I make it through the corridor of desperate women looking for work, I can almost feel the complex mix of East and West, Soviet and European, sometimes co-existing peacefully and sometimes in conflict, but always with a hint of possibility, brush up against me. What news will the courier van bring? When can I return home to visit? Perhaps things in Ukraine are getting better and I can go home for good? Soaring above it all is the promise of joining “Europe” in bold orange lettering against the gray concrete: “*YUSHCHENKO NASH PRESIDENT.*”

If the promise of Europe in the form of consumer capitalism and self-determination soars above it all, the changing gender regime underlies it all. In fact, gender is constitutive of both this migration pattern and the nation-building project. The coming of the market to Ukraine has displaced older women, many *babushky*, from the workforce and made them redundant in their families as their daughters become housewives fulfilling, in the current post-Soviet discourse, their “true” biological calling as women.^{vi} *Babushky* become a pool of workers who migrate abroad, satisfying a demand for capital back home and domestic workers doing “women’s work” in Italy. Gender constitutes migration. This migration in turn supports the Ukrainian nation-building project and becoming “Europe” (a move toward the capitalist market and prosperity) rather than “Africa” (no market, but poverty).^{vii} The nation-building project

requires a reconfiguration of Ukraine's gender order.^{viii} In contrast to the Soviet extended family now criticized for distorting the "natural" personality of men and women by producing "masculine" working mothers, "weak" men, "abandoned" children, and strong *babushky*, the post-Soviet Ukrainian family is based on a mother-housewife and husband-breadwinner model (Ashwin 2000, Wanner 1998). Yet, this nuclear family upon which the economic and social structures of the "new" Ukraine are being built is not economically feasible in today's Ukraine. In order to make it possible for daughters to become housewives and their husbands to be "restored" to their status as "breadwinners," *babushky* must go abroad to work and send back their wages. Here gender constitutes the nation.^{ix}

If the contradictions of the position these women inhabit bubble to the surface and are smoothed over or negotiated at the Garbatella, these tensions reassert themselves more forcefully and explode into view as workers return to Lviv by bus to visit their families. The bus ride from Rome to Lviv is not a site of open possibility like the Garbatella, where one has not yet embarked on the journey, and likely will not leave at all. This allows them to imagine many possibilities for the future. At the Garbatella, there is enough room for the many contradictions to exist side by side. This becomes impossible on the bus. Moving between—the journey itself—is a site of "maybe," of more limited imaginings where the material reality of things imposes itself more forcefully as the bus moves one closer to the object of one's imaginings (Ukraine, home, family). At no other point in my research is the tension between these many contradictions so pronounced, so palpable, and ultimately unsustainable as on the bus leaving Europe and approaching Ukraine.^x Here the painful sacrifices these women make

and the ironies created by the way gender constitutes migration in one direction and the nation-building project of the “new” Ukraine in the other become inescapable.

Getting on board

Several months after my visit with Valya at the Garbatella, I ask Natalya how to get a seat on one of the vans. Natalya, a strong and fiery personality, is in her early 30s; she works for a Ukrainian-and-Russian-language newspaper in Rome. Natalya says that I am crazy for even thinking about taking a courier van to Lviv. She says she did it once, was miserable, and now she flies even though flying is three times as expensive. Besides being uncomfortable, Natalya says the guards at the border tried to make her pay a bribe. She showed her employee card identifying herself as a journalist and threatened to write about it in the paper. They let her go, but she knows of drivers leaving passengers not willing to pay the bribe at the border. Natalya’s brother walks in shaking his head at our conversation. He says his computer was confiscated at the border because he did not have a receipt of purchase and suggests I create a fake receipt for my laptop and get someone to put a stamp on it. “If they want it they’ll take it, but it is worth trying.” The horror stories of the courier vans continue. One informant, Sasha, tells me he rode back to Lviv, a three-day trip, and they never stopped, not even once for a bathroom, because the driver said if they stopped bandits would rob them. Even Ukrainian priests had stories to share of vans full of women returning to Ukraine with their “pockets stuffed with money” being robbed and losing all they had worked for. I am not planning on “stuffing my pockets with money,” but as a researcher, losing my laptop would be tragic and being left at the border, perhaps precisely because I do not have my pockets stuffed with money,

does not sound appealing either. Yet it seems to me that more recently the van rides have become rationalized in the Weberian sense. A complicated system of bribes, included in one's ticket, appears to keep the bandits at bay and the border guards happy without the passengers ever knowing who is getting paid what.

Much of Italy goes on vacation in August and, according to the national labor contract for domestic workers, domestics are also entitled to a month of paid vacation. Many women cannot go home because they do not have documents that will allow them to return to Italy. Others choose to stay in Rome and cover for women who are going home, earning double wages for the month. Oksana is going back to a village outside of Lviv. While I do not have a reservation on the bus she is taking, she suggests I try to ride with her. Oksana has many bags and her friend Sofiya comes with us to help carry them all. Sofiya, 58, has white hair, watery eyes, and a quiet sadness about her. August 7, 2005 is the second Sunday that the Ukrainian meeting place has been moved from the Garbatella to Rebibbia, a site even further outside Rome's city center. Everyone is complaining about how uncomfortable Rebibbia is, and I heartily agree. Whereas the Garbatella is a paved parking lot and a well delineated space flanked by fencing and the metro station, Rebibbia is a vast expanse of cracked red earth. Oksana's reservation is not on a courier van, but on one of the much larger buses that seats 40 people as opposed to the vans' 8-10 passengers. As the moment of the journey approaches, I begin to realize how helpful having a travel companion is and will be. I anxiously attempt to wish myself onto the bus with Oksana. Meanwhile, it is only 9AM, but the sun is already hot and beating down on us. Every time a car drives by or the wind picks up we are covered in Rebibbia's thick, red dust which sticks to our sweaty bodies. While I nonchalantly

announce that I will just take a courier van if there is no room for me on the bus, Sofiya senses my increasing concern and says, “Don’t worry. This is a small thing compared to the bad that can happen.” I smile weakly and answer, “Of course, everything will work out.” I am embarrassed. I have not one but two passports in my pocket (both a US and an Italian passport) and am worried about what risks I am willing to take to keep to my research schedule. Sofiya has been working in Italy three years and because she does not have documents, has not been home in all that time. She watches with longing as people pay their fare, €90 (US\$115), and board the bus for home.

While I chat with Sofiya, Bohdan, a man I have met a few times through an informant, recognizes me. He is also in line for the bus and when he pays for his seat, he goes to see if he can find me a place on one of the vans. He announces that van #25 is going to Lviv and the driver is a friend of his so “my safety is guaranteed.” Oksana becomes visibly upset repeating that the vans are not safe while Bohdan continues to insist his friend will look after me. “Why don’t you go with your friend and give your seat to Cinzia. You are a man,” suggests Oksana. Bohdan shrugs his shoulders and walks away. “You see? Even he doesn’t want to take the van. They are not safe and will only cause you problems, Cinzia. Trust me. I would never take one of those vans. If you don’t get on this bus, make a reservation and get on this bus next Sunday... You see what weak men we have?” At noon, covered in dirt and exhausted from standing for hours in the sun, the last of us, including me, finally board the bus and begin our three-day journey to Ukraine.

THE BUS RIDE: MOUNTING CONTRADICTIONS

Passengers on the bus are, of course, mostly middle-aged women, but there are a few exceptions. There are three young Ukrainian women with their Italian partners, visibly working-class men. One couple is bringing their three year-old daughter to Ukraine to see her grandparents for the first time. There are also a few Ukrainian men including Bohdan and a twenty-something Ukrainian boy who speaks Italian with a Roman accent and wants to talk about cars: how much they cost in the United States new and used and whether I know anything about how much it costs to rig the suspension so that they bounce like in rap videos. Unfortunately I am of little help. Then there are two older Italian men with their middle-aged Ukrainian girlfriends sitting up front. The older Italian men are loud and even though they are at the front of the bus, the whole bus can hear their conversation. They keep complaining and joke condescendingly about the “rustic” situation in which they have found themselves. After several crude comments about the lack of a toilet on the bus, a Ukrainian man from the back of the bus shouts at them in Italian to be quiet, then goes on to say that they are unable to handle the bus ride, not surprising since “Italians fall apart at the first whiff of bad coffee.” The Italians quiet down but their hand gestures make clear they continue complaining to each other and their girlfriends. Oksana is more sympathetic, saying that the trip is harder for Italians than Ukrainians because Ukrainians are “used to it.” “Used to what”? I ask. “Hardship,” Oksana replies.

This sentiment that Italian bodies are “soft,” therefore experience the bus ride as more difficult than their Ukrainian counterparts, reflects an understanding that the differing histories of the two countries are borne on the physical bodies of its citizens.

Some scholars think of Ukraine as “post-colonial,” recently emancipated from Russian imperialism (Rubchak 1996, also see Wilson 2002). A complex dislike of Russian domination permeates the stories of these women. On the one hand, many women have stories of relatives who were sent to the gulags^{xi} for wearing Ukrainian peasant garb, speaking Ukrainian, or accused of being a Ukrainian “nationalist.”^{xii} On the other hand, migrant women bemoan the loss of economic stability under the Soviet Union and the security of knowing your social place in the world. Even as many of these women celebrate Ukraine’s freedom from Russia, there is a recognition that, not only is this freedom from Russia precarious, but the push towards Europe may simply be exchanging one master for another. There is concern that Ukraine may enter this new world of global capital as a slave to the national interests of others.^{xiii} This relationship of inequality between countries is writ small in Rome, in the relationships these women have with their European *Signoras*.

Liuba and Giuglio: Weak/young Italian bodies vs. strong/old Soviet ones

Liuba, 32, has been working in Italy for four years as a live-in caring for two children ages 7 and 4. She is stocky with straight, chestnut brown hair, a round face, and large brown eyes. Liuba is an economist by training and worked in a bank in Kyiv until her pay was cut repeatedly, and she was forced to quit. “So,” she says, “I decided to embrace capitalism and start a small business.” She traveled to Russia to buy shoes and sold them at a profit in Ukraine. Liuba explains that she was doing quite well for herself and even managed to buy an apartment. “But then,” she goes on, looking out the bus window, “things got worse economically and standing in the bazaar all day, even when it

was 25 degrees Celsius below zero, was no longer worth it.” She nods when I suggest that it is more common for older women to come to work in Italy. “Yes, but when you are 28 and unmarried, life is difficult for you in Ukraine. If you are not married by 25, you are already an old maid! My parents have small pensions and I have no husband to help me. My mother’s friend was returning to Italy. She invited me and I came.” Economic philosopher Tatiana Zhurzhenko (2001) notes that women’s identities in post-socialist Ukraine are mediated by a free-market ideology, and while the possibilities might at first glance seem endless, there are in fact two acceptable identities for women: housewife (in support of a male breadwinner) and businesswoman (who should nurture the Ukrainian state by bringing morals and values to the market). For Liuba, a woman considered too old to marry and lacking the capital to make entrepreneurship economically viable, both identities are out of reach. Liuba has much in common with the middle-aged women that make up most of the passengers on the bus: she too was doubly marginalized in Ukraine before migrating to Italy.

Liuba sends money back to her parents who keep what they need and put most of it away for her. However, glancing at Giulgio, Liuba says she no longer knows where she will live. In his early 30s, Giulgio has a factory job as a welder. They have been dating for five months and are on their way to visit the hot springs in the Carpathian Mountains for a week of vacation. Giulgio looks classically Roman with jet black hair, dark eyes and is gentle, almost bashful. His face is pale despite his olive skin and he is holding his stomach and trying not to move. The bus we are riding is not Greyhound. It spends so much time swaying side-to-side I wonder if we are moving forward at all. The bus stops at a gas station so we can use the restroom. Back on the bus, one of the men tells Liuba,

loudly enough for others to hear, that Giuglio vomited. Oksana calls out, “Does anyone have anything for this boy to take?” Almost instantaneously over a dozen surrogate Ukrainian mothers are hovering over Giuglio offering all kinds of home remedies. I am grateful that I have not let on how queasy I am feeling. “Italians are just not used to hardship,” Oksana announces. Several women pipe up in agreement. “They cannot take this ride! When I tell my *Signora* how I go home she just says ‘*Mamma mia, oooo mamma!*’” (Laughter) “The smell of bleach alone gives my *Signora* a headache. Can you imagine if she had to actually use it to clean?” scoffs another. A third woman chimes in on a serious note, “I think our bodies are just made differently.” “Don’t be silly, we are hard because Soviet times made us hard. My *Signora* is 82 and she looks like our women do at 55! She never had to *work*; she never had to *worry*. These things make you old.” “Oooo,” exclaims the woman whose *Signora* could not handle bleach, “When we join Europe we will all look younger!” (Laughter). “Actually, I think I am getting more wrinkles the closer we get to Ukraine!” (More laughter.) For the rest of the trip, Oksana would call out periodically, “So how do you like the ride, Giuglio? Next time you’ll fly, right?”

Italians and Ukrainians have had different pasts, and that is reflected in these women’s understanding of weak Italian bodies and strong Soviet ones. While we usually assign a negative connotation to the adjective “weak” and a positive one to “strong” it was not consistently so in this context. On the one hand, weak Italian bodies were disparaged—the Romans who would “fall apart” at the “first whiff of bad coffee” or the *Signora* who “never had to work.” And yet, these women hope their children will be spared the harsh circumstances of their life and have the “weak” bodies that result from

an abundance of consumer goods and never needing to stand in a bread line. The discussion of bodies moves from being about the past to being about possible futures. Their “strong” Soviet bodies are also “old”—prematurely aged—but the economic prosperity represented by joining the European Union might erase somewhat the physical marks of Soviet era hardships. Just as one woman imagined her face gaining in age as she moved towards Ukraine, one could also imagine a woman looking younger as she moves towards Italy. In Lviv I would interview the children of women working in Rome, several of whom would note that their mother did in fact look “10 years younger” since migrating to Italy. Ironically, these “old,” Soviet bodies that to Western eyes need the aid of a care provider are in fact providing care to Italians whose “bodies at 82 look like a Ukrainian’s at 55.” The caring labor that Ukrainian bodies perform for Italian bodies such as bathing, dressing, cooking, and cleaning preserve the “youth” of Italian bodies while aging their own. Perhaps it is this relationship between bodies—Italian/Ukrainian, master/servant, Europe/Africa— that gives the dichotomy between “Europe” and “Africa” and concern over Ukraine’s future such power in the collective imaginations of these women. These tensions are inscribed not only on the bodies of migrant women, but on their psyches, as the following discussion of Polina and “*la Depressione*” or “the Depression” attests.

Polina: La Depressione

Polina, 46, is going home for the first time in five years. On a bus of matronly Ukrainian women, Polina stands out. She has a stylish haircut and deep red highlights. She is slender, dressed attractively in Italian garments, and oozes what I can only call

“attitude.” She often sits on her heels with her knees on the seat so that she can face backwards and chat with Liuba and Giuglio who are in the seat in front of me and Oksana. Polina eyes my wedding band. “Your husband lets you ride a bus into a foreign country where you will stay for months by yourself? He isn’t jealous? Are you sure your husband is Italian?” she inquires in Russian loud enough for others to laugh and nod their heads. “Ahh, but you do not know where I will sleep in Lviv. I am staying at a Catholic convent once I get there,” I quip back with a smile. Polina laughs, leans her belly up against the back of the seat and settles in for a chat.

Polina cares for an elderly Italian woman with Parkinson’s disease. Live-ins have only Thursday afternoons and Sundays off and, like most women doing this work, she describes it as “being in prison.” Polina speaks Italian well and has an Italian boyfriend. She says, “I go from being in prison all week to being in prison with him on the weekend. Even if I just raise my eyes to look at someone he says, ‘Oop, there she goes! Who did you find?!’” Polina jokes that she is not used to jealousy because Ukrainian men are “not so jealous.” “Plus, my ex-husband was such a drunk that he never knew where I was or with whom most of the time.”

Before leaving for Rome, Polina worked as an accountant in a state-run store on the periphery of Lviv. She explains that she never expected to go abroad to work, but now she likes Italy and does not want to live in Ukraine again where she says it is “dirty” and the people are “uncivilized” and “rude.”^{xiv} The only way to stay in Italy is to marry, but she is not convinced this is her best option. Her boyfriend is much older than she and jealous; marriage, she says, would be like “living in a golden cage.” While Polina asserts that she does not miss anything about Ukraine, she does miss her children and is

outwardly excited to see them. Polina has a 20- year-old son, Yuriy, and a 26-year-old daughter, Anna, who has three children of her own, a large and expensive family by Ukrainian standards. In the five years Polina has been away, Anna had twin girls and Polina has yet to meet them. Yuriy, a 15-year-old boy when she left, is now a university student studying business. In the Soviet Union, making profits from the market was not only considered immoral but was for the most part illegal (Humphrey 2002). Now, many of the children of my informants are majoring in “international business.” Polina explains that she is working in Italy to pay for her son’s university education and to earn money to help her daughter and three grandchildren. She says, “The world has been turned upside down.” Not only is her son’s chosen career alien to Polina, but so is her daughter’s. Anna, despite having a university education, is a housewife. Her husband does not want her to work and Anna does not see herself returning to the workplace. For women of Polina’s generation, reared in Soviet Ukraine where housework was considered “unproductive” labor and being supported by one’s husband an embarrassment, it is difficult to imagine “housewife” as a chosen identity (Zdravomyslova 1996). Polina believes her daughter’s university education is “going to waste.” Shaking her head in disbelief, she describes what a good student Anna was declaring forcefully, “She is a chemist not a housewife!”

Polina’s daughter illustrates that not only have the structural opportunities for women and men in the labor market been altered by the coming of the market and the retreat of the socialist state, but the ideological terrain has shifted as well. The icon of the “Soviet superwoman,” a celebrated and capable woman worker building socialism alongside men, is now seen as an enemy of nature responsible for the weak families that are said to be the cause for much of what is wrong with post-socialist society (Rubchak

2001, Verdery 1994). In fact, returning women to the home and their “natural” roles as mothers and wives is understood in nationalist discourse as a “way of getting back to the essence of what it means to be Ukrainian” (Rubchak 1996:318). The new icon of Ukrainian womanhood is *Berehynia*, a modern incarnation of an ancient pagan goddess imbued with the contemporary meanings of protectress of Ukraine’s “true” culture and language as well as guardian of the domestic hearth (Rubchak 1996). Yet Polina and many other women like her working in Rome are weary of this new image of ideal womanhood. They experience a range of emotions from ambivalence to disappointment and even outrage that their daughters, after all the sacrifices they have made for their education, do not work in their fields of expertise but “sit at home.”

The process through which gender is mobilized as a constitutive element of both migration and nation adds other layers of irony and contradictions to the reality of Ukraine’s nation-building project. Women like Polina migrate to make being a career housewife--an identity they often wish their daughters would reject--economically possible by doing paid “housework” abroad. Most of the women I spoke with in Rome noted painfully that Ukrainian President Kuchma publicly called “all our women abroad” “prostitutes.” One informant exclaimed sarcastically, “Well then, I must be a 50 year-old prostitute!” They suffer this indignation so that their daughters can be celebrated as “*Berehyni*” back home. These women find that the patriarchal nature of the European family model subjects them to living in “golden cages” if they should marry in Italy. And yet their labor reproduces this model in Ukraine, rendering their sons patriarchs and their daughters dependents.

As the bus moves closer to Ukraine, the space these women have to negotiate these contradictions is compressed until, unlike at the Garbatella, they can no longer coexist. Since the contradictions cannot be resolved, they are displaced and take on a life of their own in the women's collective understanding as "*la Depressione*" or "the Depression." My conversation with Polina is interrupted by people at the front of the bus singing a Ukrainian folk song. Polina props herself up on her knees and begins belting out the tune waving her arms in the air as if directing a choir. Oksana raises her eyebrows and turns to me, "I am *very* surprised someone with her character can do live-in work." Another woman, Sveta, leans over and says sympathetically, "Let her enjoy herself now; '*la Depressione*' will soon arrive." Oksana nods knowingly.

While our conversation is in Russian, 'the Depression' is always said in Italian, "*la Depressione*." When I ask Sveta what she means, she says, "When she [Polina] gets home and realizes her son has been paying his teachers to pass his classes rather than studying and her daughter tells her she has no right to tell her how to raise her children or handle her husband because she has been doing just fine without her, *la Depressione* will appear. I was as happy as she when I went home the first time. I had been in Italy four years and I went home for my son's wedding. I paid for that wedding—every kopeck—but I was just a guest! I was a *guest* at my son's wedding, understand?" Another woman whose name I never learn smiles widely, revealing a mouth full of gold teeth, "It's true! When you are here the first time you think *la Depressione* only exists in Italy because you are alone and far away from your family. And then you go home and see no matter how much money you make you will always need more, that all the same problems are still there and your children grow up even without you." She shakes her head and retreats

back to her seat. Others chime in speaking of *la Depressione* as if “it” (or rather “she” since it is feminine in Italian) is a fellow passenger on the bus, one who keeps to herself and then shows up, unexpected, on your doorstep in Ukraine, an unwanted houseguest at a time when you thought you would be happiest. “You realize that in Italy you are a *straniera* (a foreigner) and you have been dreaming about going home, crying because you miss your family, your friends, being in charge of your own house, then when you get there you think, ‘How did I ever stand these dirty streets, this small kitchen, these rude, unintelligent people?’ And so *la Depressione* arrives.” “Well,” interjects Sveta, “right now we are going home to our Ukraine!” She leads them into another folk song about *nasha Ukraina* (our Ukraine).

It is through changes in the gender order that both this migration pattern and “*nasha Ukraina*” are achieved. This mutual constitution forces these migrant women to inhabit a contradictory space. They are school teachers, economists, and engineers doing paid domestic work abroad, a job category considered so lowly it did not even exist in the Soviet Union in which they grew up.^{xv} Through remittances, these migrant women are making economically possible a nuclear, European family that has no place for them as Soviet *babushky*. They are agents in building the “new” Ukraine, one that scorns the “old” Soviet Ukraine and the moral system that shaped their way of understanding the world. These Soviet women are building European Ukraine. While the nation-building work older women do through migration is unrecognized in public discourse or denigrated by the label “prostitute,” the women themselves are painfully cognizant of their sacrifices. Indeed, as Tanya said standing on the cement platform and looking down at the expanse of women at the Garbatella: “They carry Ukraine on their shoulders and

don't think they don't know it." Yet, these women believe Ukraine's European future is not guaranteed. Despite all their efforts, they fear their children might end up living in "Africa"—an economically depressed space populated by "broken" families and "weak" men and racked with corruption. When we arrive at Ukraine's border, events that suggest to them that Ukraine might indeed go the way of "Africa," cause these irresolvable tensions of gender's mutual constitution of migration and nation to explode.

Oksana: Exploding contradictions on the Ukrainian border

Oksana, 51, has been working in Italy for almost four years. She is from a town an hour outside of Lviv, but as a young student she won a competition to enter a five-year university program in literature and writing at an institute in Moscow. She hoped to get what she called a "literary" job in film, theater, radio, or newspaper but her religious leanings always kept her out of the Komsomol, the Young Communist League, and without membership, she was denied access to those jobs. Instead she taught courses at a local university. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Oksana landed a job at a publishing house where she translated religious texts from Russian, Polish, and Church Slavonic into Ukrainian. Her economic problems increased as her parents became ill and their pension barely paid for one trip to the pharmacy a month. A neighbor suggested she go to Italy with her for the Year 2000 Catholic Jubilee, and she did, overstaying her visa to work as a live-in.

Now riding through Northern Italy on Sunday afternoon, Oksana speaks a lot about "our Ukraine." When she is not teasing Giuglio by repeating— "So how do you like the bus ride? Will you fly next time"?—she asks him jealously about his vacation

plans in the Carpathian Mountains. “Yes,” she says to Giuglio in Italian, “Italians think that Ukraine is Africa, but when they see our rolling hills and green fields they too say Ukraine is beautiful. Wait until you bathe in the springs! I am a patriot! I love Ukraine and you will too! Really, it is just like Europe.”

We ride through Austria all night and stop at the Hungarian border for passport control early Monday morning where we are held for four hours. When we finally make it past the check point, we get off the bus for a bathroom break. Bohdan had spent considerable time at the last rest stop trying to convince me (he just assumed I needed convincing) that Lviv was “just like Rome”: “just as beautiful,” “just as cultural,” “just like Europe.” During this stop he goes to buy his morning coffee. Back on the bus he announces solemnly, like a melodic tolling of a bell: “Europe ends here: €2 for bad coffee.”

Our passports are checked again on the way out of Hungary, and we wait three hours at passport control to enter Ukraine. While the bus is stopped, we walk across the border to the bathroom. Oksana is horrified by what we find. The bathroom is filthy and there is an elderly Ukrainian woman who wants to be paid for the use of a toilet and the right to one square of toilet paper. Oksana says to the woman, “If you are asking people to pay then the bathroom should at least be clean.” This quickly escalates into a screaming match that leaves Oksana furious. As we wait for others to exit and walk back to the bus, we hear Bohdan also giving this old woman a piece of his mind screaming “Europe! You people want to be Europe?!” Oksana is fuming and a general frustration and anger is bubbling under the surface that in reality has little to do with the old woman and the dirty bathroom. “You see?!” Polina shouts, “The bureaucracy does not work

here! Nothing works here! How could I ever live here again? NOTHING WORKS!" I note that we had waited just as long at the Hungarian border but the comment is lost in an eruption of laughter. I look out the window to see a man running alongside his car with the front door open and one hand on the steering wheel and the other on the open door, literally pushing his car across the border. "See, Cinzia"? Oksana yells, "This is Ukraine! Get your camera ready, you will see a lot more things like that!" She shakes her head, "This is Ukraine."

Our passports are finally returned and, as we start to pull across the border, we are stopped again by a border guard who tells us he wants to inspect our bags. I silently will him not to find my laptop. Polina screeches, "I don't even want to go home anymore! This crap is our life!" To my surprise, the whole bus rises in spontaneous protest. The many tensions of these women, caught between "Europe" and "Africa," "old" and "new" Ukraine explode out of the bus. People stream out onto the asphalt and everyone is yelling. The border guard is absolutely taken aback. Oksana begins organizing sending some people to stay in the bus and watch peoples' belongings there and asking others to stand beside the bus in front of its main luggage compartment. In the meantime she rips a sheet of paper from my notebook and starts to collect people's signatures yelling that she is going to immediately fax a petition to the Ukrainian embassy in Rome. "Cinzia, are you writing all this down?! Make sure it all goes in your book!" She turns to the border guard and says, "We have a foreign journalist writing a book about Ukraine with us. She'd like your name for her book and I'd like your name for my fax to the embassy in Rome!" Polina stomps over, looks the guard in the face and yells, "We're in AFRICA!" pulling at her stylish red hair. The Italian men are yelling and gesticulating as only

Romans can, egged on by their Ukrainian girlfriends who figure angry Italian men cannot hurt the cause. The border guard decides that this is more trouble than it is worth and, after opening one bag and waving his flashlight around, he sends us on our way.

It is quiet on the bus as we ride into Ukraine. Looking at the faces of my fellow travelers, Soviet people, I try to make sense of the revolt I had just witnessed and wonder what gave them the courage to stand up to the border guards. Was it a sense of indignation that Ukraine was not behaving like “Europe” in front of migrant workers who have made such painful sacrifices to build a European Ukraine? Did they feel they had a lesson to teach about behaving like “Europeans?” Perhaps having lived in Italy where corruption is not part of everyday interactions, they simply had less tolerance for the bribes the border guard was sure to ask for? Or maybe the courage came not from their experiences abroad but from the stories of their children and those who stood up in Independence Square in Kyiv a few months earlier for the values of the Orange Revolution: honest elections, transparency, eradication of corruption, social and economic justice, and full membership in the European Union?

We do not reach our final destination of Lviv until early the following morning. As we ride through the Western Ukrainian countryside, Oksana explains the topics of various folk songs that speak of rolling hills, beautiful women, the family hearth, and the plight of partisan soldiers. “You see, they are all about the beauty of Ukraine and the beauty of its people.” It has been a bumpy ride since we crossed the border and the side to side swaying of the bus is now joined by a sometimes violent bouncing up and down. Giuglio grows ever paler. We hit a patch of particularly bad potholes and Oksana’s face sours, “How do you like our roads? That’s Ukraine!”

EPILOGUE

After three months in Lviv, I board a bus headed back to Rome. This time I am without a travel companion. The bus is still empty and I slip into a window seat. Three women get on the bus chatting and laughing swapping stories about how many times their *Signora* had called them in Ukraine begging them to come back soon, what a mess the houses they had been cleaning would be, and even whether their elderly wards would still be alive when they got there. Two of the women slide into the seat across from me, so one woman sits next to me still chatting across the aisle. I am thrilled. I imagine the three of them taking me under their wings much like Oksana did on the trip here. At a pause in the conversation, my seat mate turns and looks at me. Before I can say a word, she grabs her bag and switches seats. As the bus begins to fill another woman boards, begins to sit down next to me but, before she actually hits the seat, she realizes that I am not of this context and, in a move I can only describe as an impressive showing of abdominal strength, stops herself mid-air and moves to another seat. As we depart, trying not to melt into the side of the bus, I brainstorm how to make this a meaningful ethnographic experience. The bus stops in small villages outside Lviv picking up people at each stop. At one of the more remote villages, a woman wearing a kerchief on her head, her arms weighted down with plastic bags that I later learn are filled with enough fried fish to feed a small army for much more than three days, boards the bus and sits down heavily next to me. Slava has a round face, brown and creased from the sun. I notice that her hands do farm work. She smiles at me as she removes her kerchief. Several hours pass before Slava realizes I am not Ukrainian. My foreignness seems indistinguishable to her from the city-dwellers who boarded the bus in Lviv.

As the bus moves us closer to Ukraine's border, Slava begins sobbing as she kisses a wallet-sized picture of her 11-year-old son. Slava's husband left for Poland two years ago. He has been working off and on and sends back what money he can, but it is not enough to send their son to university one day. Slava has a sister already in Italy and Slava is on her way to join her in the hope of finding work as a live-in. Slava's sister gave her half of the €2,200 (US\$2,860) it cost to buy a 10-day tourist visa and she borrowed the rest with an interest rate of 12 percent. The plan was that her husband would come home and take care of their son while Slava is in Italy. But one never knows when the visa will come through and Slava had to leave today, the day before her husband is supposed to return. Slava shakes her head, "Already I have not seen him for two years and now I don't know when I will see him again. When will I be able to go home?" Her question hangs answerless between us.

They take our passports at the Austrian border, the border with the European Union, the border that matters most. I am terrified for Slava. Nothing about her looks like a tourist and I am afraid they might not let her through. Slava is too preoccupied by the photo of her son—wondering if she will find work right away, if her husband will really make it home from Poland, and if her aging mother can keep up with an active 11-year-old boy—to also worry about crossing the border. I sigh with relief as the bus pulls into Austria. Slava's tear-filled eyes meet mine as she offers me a piece of fried fish, "You see, when my son is grown he will either say to me, 'We have nothing. Why didn't you go abroad like everyone else?' Or 'Why did you abandon me?'" She did not like her "choices." If Slava stays, she risks that her son will live in "Africa." In order to ensure that her son will live in a "European" Ukraine, Slava must migrate to Europe, leaving

Ukraine and her son behind. The mutual constitution of migration and nation, achieved through the manipulation of gendered relations has forced Slava to join the other migrant women in this space of impossible contradictions, sometimes negotiable, sometimes exploding to the surface, but always experienced as a deep ache by the individual women and the loved-ones they leave behind.

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ⁱ This paper draws on material I gathered in August 2005 riding the migration circuit from Rome to Lviv and back as well as six months of research in Rome's Ukrainian community where I conducted ethnographic research, 61 formal in-depth interviews with domestic workers from Ukraine, and over 20 interviews with community leaders. It is also informed by data gathered in 2004-2006 as part of a larger project. This data includes interviews and ethnographic data collected during my time in the field in Lviv, Ukraine interviewing 38 children with one or both parents abroad and 53 domestic workers from Ukraine in San Francisco and Los Angeles. I am a US born, native speaker of English. As the daughter of Italian immigrants, a care-provider and a gardener, I grew up speaking Italian at home. While fluency in Italian proved to be invaluable in many ways, my language of communication, even with Ukrainophone informants, was Russian. At the Garbatella and on the migration bus informants spoke Ukrainian, Russian, and Italian depending on the context and also Ukrainianized and Russified many Italian phrases for which direct translations do not exist.

ⁱⁱ Ukrainian workers usually enter Italy on a tourist visa bought at Ukrainian "travel agencies" and then overstay the visa to work. In 2004, a tourist visa to Italy cost up to €2,500 (\$3,300). In order to work in Italy legally, foreign workers must have a work visa or *permesso di soggiorno*. The majority of foreign workers in Italy are without legal papers. Those who have been legalized usually obtained legal status during an amnesty period. Italy's 1998, 2000, and 2002 amnesty laws contained special provisions that

avored the legalization of domestic workers. The Italian state recognizes that its increasingly elderly population is facing a “care crisis.” Because migration to Italy from Ukraine began in the second half of the 1990s with the largest influx occurring in 1998-1999, many Ukrainians were legalized during the 2002 Bossi-Fill Bill. This required employers to fill out paperwork and agree to pay social security (*contributi*) to the government on behalf of their employee. Foreign workers who obtained a *permesso* must renew it every or every other year and show proof of employment.

ⁱⁱⁱ A relatively young retirement age supported the extended family so that grandparents were still physically able to provide child care and other reproductive labor. The official retirement age is 55 for women and 60 for men. Those who performed jobs considered “dangerous” retired at even younger ages. Many of the migrant women I met in Rome were high school teachers like Roxalana who were able to retire even in their early 40s after 20 years of service.

^{iv} One informant, Klara, says that working with Italians is difficult because, “We are of different nationalities and they do not think highly of us. They say we are people from the Third World! Yes, this is how they translate us—

Third World women—and it isn’t true at all!” Yet Klara is often asked by Italian employers to explain why she is doing live-in work in Italy, and she finds this task frustrating: “Even their [Italian’s] mentality is different. They cannot understand how you can work your whole life and have nothing.... We come here to earn money so we can send our kids to school, buy an apartment, and also to buy meat.” Another informant, Olena, expressed this frustration in another way, “How can I explain to Italians that I have higher education and I remember the respected person I was in my country; *and* with the first money I made in Italy I put in a water line to my house because before there was only a well?” These women are caught between global discourses of the First World (“Europe”) and the Third World (“Africa”), neither of which these women felt captured the complexity of Ukraine in transition. Without access to a global discursive script that encapsulates their experience of Ukraine in terms of an everyday understanding of “development,” migrant women in Italy grappled with the gap between Ukraine and First and Third World discourses signified by “Europe” and “Africa.”

^v All names are pseudonyms.

^{vi} Anthropologist Katherine Verdery (1994) notes that socialist states pushed labor-intensive industrialization plans that required women’s labor power. This economic fact produced socialism’s emphasis on gender equality and the policies that facilitated it such as generous maternity leaves and state sponsored child care. According to Verdery, this altered gender relations within families. Women’s participation in the labor force gave them increased power relative to men in the household unit. At the same time, the state usurped certain patriarchal functions and undercut the familial authority of men. The state’s socialization of some household tasks made women dependent on the state rather than their husbands. In fact, in what Verdery calls the “gender regime of socialism,” both men and women were dependent wards of a paternalist state that made decisions in the whole family’s interest. With the coming of market capitalism, the socialist welfare state that had once taken on some of women’s nurturing and care-giving roles is now considered too costly in a free market economy and it is de-volving these responsibilities back onto the shoulders of women. Indeed, the gender organization of capitalist households cheapens the cost of labor for capital by assigning reproductive labor to women and calling it “housework” which is unpaid. This cheapening—calling reproductive labor “housework”—makes post-socialist economies more viable. Verdery writes, “The chief alternative Eastern Europe’s women might anticipate is what has happened in more-advanced economies: the commodification of household tasks into services (day care, cleaning, meal provision, and so forth) for which a working couple pays something closer to their real cost than is paid when these are “housework.” Until the commodity economy becomes as pervasive in Eastern Europe as it is in the developed world, however, post-socialist Eastern-Europe will be returning to the housewife-based domestic economy superseded at least in part by both socialism and advanced capitalism” (254).

^{vii} Wilson (2000) argues that whether Ukraine follows a path of integration with Europe or a return to the Russian sphere is far from determined. Which way Ukraine orients itself is of great geopolitical interest and will have an important affect on the balance of power in the whole Eurasian region. Here I argue that not only are migrant women engaged in a particular nation-building project, but through migration these women actually push Ukraine and the (re)construction of its institutions (social, economic, political), perhaps unwittingly, down the path towards Europe.

^{viii} Zhurzhenko (2004) notes that in Ukraine the shift to this nuclear family model, what she calls the rise of “neofamilialism,” is “indispensable to the process of constructing the national identity as European” (p. 27).

^{ix} The theoretical orientation of this paper was inspired by Hondagneu-Sotelo (2003). In her introductory essay, Hondagneu-Sotelo argues that the gender and migration literature can be grouped into three stages. The first stage emerged in the 1970s and early 1980s. Feminist scholars simply studied women, long neglected in migration studies, and added them to existing paradigms. This was superseded by an interest in gender as a set of relations but the studies, according to Hondagneu-Sotelo, focused primarily on changing gender relations in families and local immigrant communities as if institutions such as labor markets or welfare agencies are devoid of gender. She argues that there is a third stage of gender and migration research emerging and suggests that we think of “gender as a key constitutive element of immigration.” In this paper I have taken Hondagneu-Sotelo’s suggestion seriously and wrestled with what it might mean for gender to be “constitutive” of migration. I might have explained this migration of women from Ukraine the way female migration is usually explained following Anderson (2000), Chang (2000), or Hochschild (2002): Poverty in Third World countries “push” women who desperately need to provide for their children to migrate to First World countries where there is a simultaneous “pull” of higher wages. While I am not suggesting this framework is inaccurate, I am proposing that thinking about gender as constitutive allows us to see a much more complicated story in the case of Ukraine, one that pushes our thinking outward to economic systems, moral orders, and nationhood.

^x See Solari 2006b for a time during the Orange Revolution when the claim to Europe by Rome’s Ukrainian community was made with great consistency.

^{xi} “Gulag” refers to a system of forced labor camps in the Soviet Union.

^{xii} Soviet nationality policy sought to root out “bourgeois nationalism” while fostering “internationalist values” in the hopes of creating a single “Soviet people.” I found that informants reclaimed the term “nationalist” and gave it a positive connotation. They proudly declared, “I am a nationalist!” with the same if not more frequency as the more acceptable phrase by Soviet standards, “I am a patriot!”

^{xiii} These sentiments point to a possible tension between this type of nation-building project (emphasizing a shared ethnicity, language, religion, and historical past) with a simultaneous claim to a supra-national European identity. See Taras et al. (2004) for an interesting discussion about the appeal of “transnational identities” in Ukraine.

^{xiv} During the course of my research, many women expressed sentiments similar to Polina’s while also expressing pride in their country citing great literary figures, the richness of their history and culture, and the hardworking nature of Ukrainian people. This ambivalence, like many of the contradictions tied to the social space these women inhabit, was particularly salient during the bus ride. For most, this ambivalence existed alongside a deep yearning to return to their families and lives in Ukraine.

^{xv} For a look at how Ukrainian and Russian domestic workers in San Francisco negotiate this change in work status see Solari 2006a.