Marrying a German citizen appeared to have been easier for women than for men, whom the authorities viewed from a traditional patriarchal standpoint. Benjamin Frommer discusses the convoluted policies of the Nazi authorities in the protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia towards the large number of Jews who had German or Czech spouses, and the different strategies they adopted in response.

In their studies on former Yugoslavia, Fedja Burić and Keziah Conrad discuss mixed marriages with special attention to Bosnia. Burić challenges the assumption that the Yugoslav state had a coherent state policy towards mixed marriages. He presents the example of a newlywed couple in Mostar, one declaring Croat nationality, the other Serb, yet both with Muslim names (89). The author argues that "mixedness should be studied within the context of historical moments when it is recorded by nationalists, who mobilize against it, or antinationalists, who celebrate it" (103). Conrad's contribution is based on a single, in-depth interview with a young Bosnian couple, the husband a Serb from Republika Srpska who moved to Sarajevo to live with his wife, a Bosnian Croat. Focusing on their subjective experiences, the author portrays their struggle with everyday life; she argues that multiple identification can easily be misunderstood in the divided community, leading to a sense of alienation and mistrust. To me the case begs an important question. Would their lives have been any different if they had moved to Republika Srbska or to Serbia? Or, for that matter, to "the West," where they believe would encounter less prejudice?

Four chapters address the phenomenon of intermarriage in regions once under the Soviet Union. The contributions investigate a range of themes, from attitudes towards Russian-Estonian marriages in Estonia (Uku Lember), to marriage strategies in the industrial city of Khujand, present day Uzbekistan (Sophie Roche), and intermarriages in the post-conflict communities of Osh in the Ferghana Valley (Askana Ismailbekova), to personal vignettes of ethnically and religiously mixed couples and their perceptions of identity in Georgia (Milena Oganesyan). Finally Rosa Magnúsdóttir discusses Soviet-American intermarriage during the Cold War.

Taken together these essays offer some fascinating material. Not all of them escape the dangers of stereotyping through inconsistent or inappropriate categorization. The very act of classification can be a straightjacket which prevents us from seeing the fluid spectrum of identities that form reality for so many. Not all of the contributions are clearly structured, and in some cases readers will struggle with the abundance of local detail that could have been introduced more effectively for those unfamiliar with the region under investigation. Several chapters have "Conclusions," which, rather than pulling the arguments together, extend the discussion into a subsequent period and in the process abandon their evidence-base in favor of generalization. A firmer editorial hand might have improved the overall coherence of the volume and—the excellent introduction notwithstanding—drawn out more points for cross-cultural comparison. Nonetheless, this pioneering collection should open up an important field and serve as a springboard for future research.

Silvia Sovic
Independent Scholar

Soviet Signoras: Personal and Collective Transformations in Eastern European Migration. By Martina Cvajner. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019. x, 265 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. $30.00, paper.
doi: 10.1017/slr.2022.41

The only unsuitable part of this book is the title. The book is about the pioneer women migrants from former Soviet republics who started coming to a northern Italian town

https://doi.org/10.1017/slr.2022.41 Published online by Cambridge University Press

in the 1990s. And although the study is indeed about the personal and collective transformations of this group of women care workers, these transformations are not about marrying an Italian man and becoming "a Soviet Signora" but about reclaiming dignity and respect. During the more than a decade of ethnographic research in which Martina Cvajner followed their lives, some of them did marry, but this is not the book's point. The point is a truly fascinating portrait of complex strategies invented by women migrants to elevate themselves from the degrading position in a receiving society to a self-constructed social position of moral worth and recognition. These women are also not Soviet women but members of different ethnic and national entities. This fact became decisive at the end of the over a decade long process of constructing the social space for themselves in the society of the Italian town when their tight informal group of support and empowerment dissolved into national/ethnic formal immigrant organizations.

We follow the research story from the beginning when the author met a group of Russian-speaking women strolling on the streets of the town to which she had also emigrated as a refugee from former Yugoslavia and began communicating with them. They are middle-aged women who migrated to Italy because of economic hardship after the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, in the book's prologue, which describes the party after the end of the research, we encounter the women not as a homogenous group but as individuals with personal and unique views, opinions, and moral stances as well as particular national, ideological, and educational backgrounds. After the prologue, in which we meet the protagonists and their different contemporary social situations, the author takes us back more than a decade and reveals the complex, dynamic, and dramatic story of lost and found self-esteem and pride. The pioneer women migrants left their places as respected middle-aged, mostly divorced, highly-educated women with careers and children. They had lost their middle-class position, income, and jobs due to the post-Soviet era economic crisis. In the Italian town, they took on jobs as live-in care workers for elderly members of working and middle-class families. The work, regarded as the lowest of all jobs, became the only defining factor of their social status. None of the former attributes of their identity—motherhood, education, maturity, class—mattered any longer. They became invisible, insignificant, genderless, poorly paid, despised, live-in domestics with no room or voice of their own—they became *lavaculi* (those who wipe elderly asses).

Cvajner vividly describes the evolution of their unstoppable resistance and the role of the informal community they established to support it. The women slowly developed strategies to become less invisible, less insignificant, less silent. The context of an Italian town with cafés and bars along the streets and the culture of observing passers-by is crucial here. In this specific setting of the public space, in their free time, the migrant women gradually invented a way to become visible by strolling for hours; to become heard by talking and laughing loudly; to become feminine by wearing high heels and heavy make-up; to become significant by shopping and spending; to have a room of their own by appropriating public spaces for their gatherings. Cvajner describes the most intimate aspects of the identity transformations that the women experienced in the process of resistance against the designated social status as *lavaculi*. She also describes the group dynamic, support and control essential in overcoming the social oppression, powerlessness, humiliation, and degradation in their migration trajectories.

This micro-ethnographic study of a particular group of pioneer migrant women who did not have any existing support network, established organizations or transferred knowledge for orientation in the receiving society is a valuable contribution to the field of migration studies. Moreover, it offers a glimpse of the subjective experiences in the complex process of invented self-representation

https://doi.org/10.1017/slr.2022.41 Published online by Cambridge University Press

as a resistance strategy to the devaluing and dehumanizing status designated for migrants in our societies.

Mirjam Milharčič Hladnik
ZRC SAZU, Slovenian Migration Institute

The Socialist Good Life: Desire, Development, and Standards of Living in Eastern Europe. Ed. Cristofer Scarboro, Diana Mincytė, and Zsuzsa Gille. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020. ix, 244 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Photographs. Tables. $32.00, paper.
doi: 10.1017/slr.2022.42

The Socialist Good Life: Desire, Development, and Standards of Living in Eastern Europe turns a critical lens on the way that the practices, policies, and promises of socialist economics shaped consumption and functioned to legitimize (and sometimes delegitimize) political power in the communist states of eastern Europe. The book opens with a chapter penned by the editors, "The Pleasures of Backwardness." The title draws together two issues addressed in the book: first, the question of whether state socialism was able to fulfill its promise of "overcoming backwardness" and fostering the development of modern (and consumer) societies; second the question of whether state socialism could provide pleasure in the form of a "good life" measured in consumption. Significantly, consumption cannot be defined exclusively in individual terms, but encompasses "collective consumption" of the myriad goods and services that were free or nearly free for citizens, including healthcare, meals at schools and workplaces, childcare and education, and cultural opportunities. The authors recognize a paradox in the success of state socialism: the rise of a socialist middle class that embraced the material fruits of socialism but eschewed the ideological trappings of this "alternative modernity" (6).

The question of development is fraught, as the determination of backwardness may depend on whether it is measured using western indicators that privilege the consumption and production that characterize capitalist countries, and whether it accounts for the location of the region in the global economy or history. The label of backwardness cannot tell us how life in state socialism was experienced and the chapter authors explore aspects of what constituted a "good life" in eastern Europe, how governments constructed and pursued the means to provide that, and to what end.

Mary Neuberger's "Consuming Dialogues: Pleasure, Restraint, Backwardness, and Civilization in Eastern Europe" focuses largely on Bulgaria, but her most trenchant observations concern Iosif Stalin's USSR. She points out that "the politics of consumption was connected to the new regime of control," which entailed stark limitations on consumption (in the form of deliberate famine), as well as the use of consumer goods to co-opt citizens into an ostensibly progressive and prosperous system that would eradicate backwardness and build socialism (38–39). Neuberger makes the observation that nostalgia for the socialist past has become a feature in postcommunism. On the one hand, as later chapters show, attempts to substitute needs for desires and to create socialist versions of "synonyms of modernity" (133) like VCRs often failed. On the other hand, citizens enjoyed security in access to at least basic healthcare, education, and employment that is unimaginable in postcommunism and, Neuberger notes, access to "simple pleasures" like a Black Sea holiday, unfettered permission to smoke in public, and foods unpolluted by artificial flavors that have been swept away by globalization and the free market (42).

https://doi.org/10.1017/slr.2022.41 Published online by Cambridge University Press