

Kathie Friedman Kasaba, *Memories of Migration: Gender, Ethnicity, and Work in the Lives of Jewish and Italian Women in New York, 1870–1924* (1996), xii + 242 (State University of New York, Albany, \$59.50, paperback \$19.95).

In *Memories of Migration*, Kathie Friedman Kasaba contrasts the experiences of Italian and Russian-Jewish women in New York during the peak years of immigration to the United States to determine whether and to what extent migration to the United States altered the social positions of these women. By doing so, she places gender and the experiences of women at the heart of immigration analysis. Such an approach is still relatively new, and it has important implications for our interpretations of migration and immigration.

Friedman Kasaba begins with a lucid and very readable analysis of immigration historiography. She differentiates her own study from the earlier immigration schools like that exemplified in Oscar Handlin's *The Uprooted*, which (while implicitly considering gender) left women out of the story, and that of social historians like Herbert Gutman, Virginia Yans-McLaughlin and John Bodnar, whose vision of cultural persistence tends to 'romanticize immigrants' pre-industrial practices and societies' (23).¹ Influenced by the work of Donna Gabbacia, Friedman Kasaba places herself between these two positions and carves out a new role for women in this immigration saga.² Rather than being the bearers of traditional culture and the pillars of 'transplanted' families, women, in their search to 'become persons', were in the vanguard of modernity. While this may merely invert a modernization dichotomy that is at its heart problematic, it nevertheless provides a plausible picture of how many women may have perceived of some of their experiences.

Friedman Kasaba proceeds on to a compelling and nuanced study of the two places of origin of these immigrant women – Russia and Italy. These were not monolithic societies breaking apart and leaving peasants nowhere to go but to America. Using insights from historians who have placed immigration within the framework of emerging industrial capitalism, the author shows how Russian-Jewish and Italian women endeavoured to respond to their changing societies.³ Confounding the old stereotypes, Friedman Kasaba reveals that Russian-Jewish women did not always wish to leave their homelands; in spite of the threat of pogroms, while Italian women frequently wished to join their husbands in America rather than remain in their villages. Friedman Kasaba is particularly adept at showing change over time, highlighting, for example, the shift in migration patterns of Italian women from Brazil and Argentina to the United States around 1900; showing the growing desire for migration among these same women owing to the increasing difficulty of providing dowries for their daughters; detecting a shift among Russian Jews from a seasonal labour migration to Germany to a more permanent 'American option' when the Russian government tightened its 'restrictions on Jewish entitlements to practice particular livelihoods in given localities'; and, additionally, recognizing that these restrictions fluctuated, so that migration patterns among Jews were not uniform.

Friedman Kasaba brings to the study of immigration an awareness of its relational aspects, a

¹ Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted* (New York, 1951); Herbert Gutman, *Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America* (New York, 1976); John Bodnar, *The Transplanted* (Bloomington, 1985); Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, *Family and Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo* (Ithaca, 1977).

² See Donna Gabbacia, 'Immigrant women:

nowhere at home?', *Journal of American Ethnic History*, x, 4 (Summer), 61–87.

³ See Ewa Morawska, 'The sociology and historiography of migration' in Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, *Immigration Reconsidered* (New York, 1990), 187–238.

comprehension of the ways in which immigrants were racialized both by those who condemned them and those who endeavoured to aid them, as well as a firm appreciation of the roles of women in the new immigrant communities. In each case, however, one might wonder whether it is possible to go further than Friedman Kasaba does.

It is clearly important to compare different groups' immigrant experiences to gain a better understanding of each one. The question is, however, whether it is sufficient to compare just two, and whether the relationship between each group and others is not also of considerable importance. In this case, the author seems to have more familiarity with Jewish experiences (drawn in part from personal memories of her grandmothers) than Italian ones, for which she is more reliant upon secondary literature. Her familiarity with one group makes it seem easier to observe Jewish women making the plunge into 'personhood' than attempts that may have been made by Italian women. Consequently, Jewish women's associational behaviour is contrasted with an apparent lack in this area among Italian women. Such a contrast might have been less stark, perhaps, had the latter been compared with other Catholic women in order to see, in their own terms, how they may have undertaken other kinds of self-affirming and empowering behaviour (particularly in their churches).

Friedman Kasaba also borrows very effectively from the work of Michael Omi and Howard Winant to discuss the way immigrants were racialized.⁴ In the process she ties in women's experiences with the emergence of Social Darwinist racism. But again, the discussion might proceed further to an appreciation of the process of 'whitening', discussed by so many historians recently, a process of deracializing oneself and becoming an ethnic.⁵ This might lead to a closer analysis of and comparison with African Americans who were clearly important as negative referents for members of both groups. Was there more room for the Jewish woman to express some freedom and individuality because the Jews were considered by many to be culturally more distant from African American freed people from the South who were also entering northern cities at this time, than there was for their Italian counterparts?

Similarly, gender receives great attention here. But while earlier historians like Handlin could write about gender without women, showing men suffering as a result of their emasculation, this study brings us gender largely without men. Consequently, the question that comes to mind is how immigrant men felt about women 'becoming persons' in the ways described? Were there not tensions involved in this process, ones that could lead to significant repercussions for women who overstepped the limits their group placed on individuality? Since such questions, as well as a focus on familial conflict and violence, have been staples of migration literature from Anzia Yezierska and Theodore Dreiser to James Baldwin and Paule Marshall, it is curious that these issues have not found their way into historical studies of immigration.

The implications of this omission seem clearest in the discussion of prostitution, which is largely seen in this study as an anti-Semitic slight on Jewish women, when it might be considered from a different vantage point an outgrowth of some women's attempts at self-empowerment, matched

⁴ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (New York, 1986).

⁵ See James R. Barrett and David Roediger, 'Inbetween peoples: race, nationality and the new immigrant working class' in Rick Halpern and Jonathan Morris (eds.), *American Exceptionalism?*

U.S. Working-Class Formation in an International Context (London, 1997), 181-220; David W. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York, 1991).

by a campaign among both Progressives and ethnic leaders to restrain them.⁶ Whether or not particular ethnic groups engaged in prostitution more than others, either at the level of supply (as pimps and prostitutes) or that of demand, is perhaps less important than the fact that claims about such things could be used by some people sharply to curtail the independence of women. For if, as Friedman Kasaba suggests, the lines between 'good women' and 'bad women' were becoming increasingly blurred (148), then the ability of an individual woman to affirm her 'personhood' would be limited by internal and external restraints which would perhaps be reflected in a still greater degree of ambivalence and ambiguity about the whole experience of immigration than Friedman Kasaba has already acknowledged.

Such caveats, though, suggest the strength, rather than the weakness of a work such as this one. Instead of just accepting earlier historians' claims of emasculation and family breakdown, or the arguments of others regarding cultural persistence, using *Memories of Migration* as our starting point, we can now debate more fruitful questions about immigrant communities, all the way down to the meanings of migration memories themselves.

Robert Gregg
Princeton University

Mary Buckley (ed.), *Post-Soviet Women: From the Baltic to Central Asia* (1997), xvii + 316 (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, £50.00/\$59.95, paperback £16.95/\$22.95).

How have women fared in the transition from socialist to 'free market' economies? The answer has arrived from one of capitalism's many global fronts: the situation of women in the successor states to the USSR is grim and growing worse. In this timely collection, Mary Buckley assembles an interdisciplinary group of sociologists, political scientists, anthropologists, literary critics and feminists to survey the status of women throughout the former Soviet Union. The essays, which focus on economic conditions, political participation, gender roles and women's movements, capture a disillusioning present in which the promise of democracy has been radically undercut by the collapse of economic and social institutions that once provided a measure of security. As editor, Mary Buckley takes an unusually broad approach, exploring women's complex and often vexed relationships to the movements of nationalism, political democratization and privatization. Drawing on women's experiences in Russia, the Ukraine, Armenia, the Baltics, Central Asia and Georgia, the contributors put aside the old notion of a common 'Soviet' national experience to study women within their own specific national and cultural milieus. Despite the laudable attention to difference, however, one of the most striking conclusions to emerge from the collection might be termed 'the commonalities of collapse'.

The researchers find that women are desperately struggling to maintain subsistence. Everywhere, the early euphoria over independent feminist movements has dissipated, fewer women are involved in government today than under socialism, and social welfare guarantees, so critical to the well-being of women and children, have largely disappeared. Many working-class and rural women, regardless of nationality, have been reduced to beggary. The book's greatest

⁶ See Philippa Levine, 'Rough usage: prostitution, law and the social historian' in Adrian Wilson (ed.), *Rethinking Social History: English Society 1570-1920 and its Interpretation* (Manchester, 1993).