

Disability and Mobile Citizenship in Postsocialist Ukraine By Sarah D. Phillips. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010. 318 pp. Notes.Bibliography.Index.Illustrations. \$70.00, Cloth; \$24.95, Paper.

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In her multi-sited ethnography of disability in postsocialist Ukraine, Sarah Phillips introduces the complexities of disability through life histories, participant observation, surveys, and interviews with a myriad of individuals and NGO's. Her research focuses on mobility disability, with an emphasis on individuals that have suffered spinal cord injuries, known as *spinal'niki*. At the heart of their struggles is a contradiction – they are caught between the Soviet era model of disability, which emphasizes “bodily infirmity,” and the postsocialist “can-do language of the free market economy, a language that emphasizes personal initiative and responsibility, individualism, and the entrepreneurial spirit” (2010:7). The disabled then have to “perform a balancing act” in order to keep their benefits, and employ creative strategies to assert claims to full, or “mobile,” citizenship (2010:7-8). The author describes Ukraine's current disability legislation and policies as a hybrid system. This system retains “Soviet-era classifications and definitions” which ranked individuals based on their ability to contribute to society through participation in the labor force (2010:3). Such classification effectively limited or denied those who could not work housing, certain kinds of medical care, access to education, and in extreme cases could result in deportation, arrest or forced labor (2010:58). Alongside these policies is post-Soviet reform that promises but does not deliver “increased access to education, employment, and basic civil rights” (2010:3).

Phillips begins her first chapter with an intimate personal history. Here we meet Sasha Pavlov and his parents, and are familiarized with their struggles after Sasha's “unlucky dive” into the Dnipro River which resulted in a spinal cord injury (2010:13). Through his experiences, the author advocates for “public storytelling” as a way to make disability familiar (2010:246).

In her second chapter, Phillips provides a history of disability in the Soviet Union, particularly Russia and Ukraine, to fill in the gaps of the “new disability history,” or rethink disability and its role in society (2010:43). The author contends that very little is known about the lives of the physically disabled prior to early 1920s. However, early accounts seem to suggest that “disabled persons were not socially isolated,” but instead were cared for by families, the elite, and the Orthodox Church, and worked alongside others in traditional, village-based lives (2010:44). A shift away from “religious moral culture” began in the late 18th century with the building of institutions, or German modeled asylums (2010:44). The emergence of the Soviet State was ushered in with revolution and war, which greatly shaped disability policy. Here, a “formal system of classification and administration of disability” was established (2010:50). This system appropriated the term *invalidnost*, or invalid, defining disability as an inability to

work and until the mid-1920's available only to those disabled in war (2010:50). The history described in this chapter is crucial to understanding Ukraine's current disability policies and issues.

Chapter 3 focuses on the current work of civic and charitable organizations and the challenges that NGO's face. These range from bureaucratic red tape and interorganizational competition, to the enticement into unlawful activity by businessmen who want to illegally import consumer goods under the guise of humanitarian aid (2010:104). The disability rights movement in general focuses on several goals, such as the need for alternatives to institutionalization, educational options for children, and better employment opportunities (2010:107). Other goals are more basic, such as the need for wheelchairs, accessible transportation options, and access to public spaces and buildings (2010:107). These organizations often serve as "a widespread empowerment strategy for the disabled in post-Soviet Ukraine (2010:106). One such organization originating from Sweden, "Active Rehabilitation," or AR (2010:108) has potential to support mobile citizenship, however its inflexible persistence on standardization does not take into account the specifics of the country and therefore does not allow for adaption to local conditions.

Chapter four takes a closer look at symbols; particularly how the disabled are represented "in advertising, public service announcements, the popular press, and contemporary Ukrainian visual arts" (2010:11). Phillips describes a controversial billboard with text that reads "Mama, why am I a freak?" accompanied with a single hand print with 6 fingers (2010:140). The gendered framing, labeling of the disabled as freaks, as well as the public reaction to this billboard rendered the disabled as noncitizens and without voices (2010:147). Opposing such a vision of disability, Phillips uses her interpretation of a photo exhibition and multiple ethnographic vignettes to show successful stories of the disabled taking control of their self-representation (2010:156, 163).

Following in the same vein, the fifth chapter focuses on gender. The author introduces the reader to two men and two women and their struggles to "sustain and subvert gendered expectations," as well as assert alternative gender identities and alternative claims to citizenship (2010:171). For example, a 'real man,' as one informant defined it, is someone who is "stinking, strong, and hairy" (2010:176), where the body is central to masculinity. Phillips writes how one informant, Dmitrii, embraces this vision through excelling in sports as a way to recover his masculinity that was challenged by disability.

The author concludes by suggesting ways to improve lives through inclusion and expanding disability narratives to make "disability familiar" (2010:245). She suggests rewriting kinship as an advocacy tactic through "public storytelling" of disability in order to facilitate "the reimagining of kinship" (2010:246). In this reimagining, the boundaries of kinship, "relatedness, mutual responsibility and interdependence" are not limited to the traditional nuclear family, but instead are extended into the "social body" (2010:240, 244). Phillips recognizes the tension, however, between competing ideologies: the current trend for individualization, and privatization combined with "a strong ethos of collective responsibility, shared experience, and mutual

assistance” (2010:242). She concludes that while some do reject the discourse of the collective good, for many, the “idea of a socially shared responsibility toward fellow citizens continues to ring true” (2010:242). This further supports the notion that despite current political-economic trends, socialism continues to matter.

This ethnography is quite accessible and would be appropriate for courses in applied, medical, and development anthropology, anthropology of globalization and cultural change, as well as to historians of disability, and gender studies scholars and students.