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# Globalizing ‘Postsocialism:’ Mobile Mothers and Neoliberalism on the Margins of Europe

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## Abstract

*In recent years, women’s transnational labor migration from Moldova has grown exponentially and their absence from families has provoked considerable anxiety over transformations in the social order. Few scholars of postsocialist states have explored transnational labor. Those who have focus on how new economic practices such as trading are anxiety-ridden because they index transformations from socialism to “postsocialism.” These scholars have not detailed nor theorized the gendered nature of migrant labor, representations of it, and states responses to it. Using ethnographic research and interviews with Gagauz Moldovan migrant women who travel to work as domestics in Turkey and their village compatriots in Moldova, this paper illustrates a discourse of blame that employs the trope of “mothers as key to the social order,” one complicated by notions of socialism, sexuality, ethnicity, work, wealth, and rurality. This trope plays a key role in blaming female migrant laborers for social disorder and in migrants’ own justifications for going abroad. I argue that the migrants’ gendered justifications constitute a new moral economy that aligns with global and Moldovan state neoliberal rationales. Drawing on a broad feminist and anthropological literature, this article problematizes claims about “postsocialist”*

*transnational labor experiences by specifying them in terms of other overlapping subjectivities, particularly gender. In so doing, it shifts the anthropological gaze from a narrow focus on "postsocialism" in this region to identify problems and processes of globalization that hold wider significance and questions our categorizations of states into "postsocialist," "postwelfare," "third world," "global south," and/or "postcolonial."* [Key words: socialism, post-socialism, transnational labor, migration, women, Moldova, Gagauz, Turkey, Russia]

In the past five years, labor migration from Moldova, known as the "poorest nation in Europe," has increased to stunning proportions. Statistics vary, but indicate that anywhere from one-fourth to one-third of the population works abroad, including half of the working population (GRP 2004, World Bank 2004, 2005, IOM 2005). While most migrants are men traveling to Russia, it is women's transnational labor and their absence from families and villages that has provoked considerable anxiety over transformations in the social order. Konstantinov (1996) and Humphrey (2002) are two of the few scholars of postsocialist states who have explored transnational labor activity.<sup>1</sup> In particular, they focus on tourist-traders and show most clearly how such new economic practices are anxiety-ridden because they index the transformations from socialism to postsocialism or new forms of capitalism. Humphrey also analyzes the ethnic dimensions of this trade. While it has been recognized that women are increasingly participating in such transnational activities, anthropologists have neither detailed nor theorized the gendered nature of migrant labor in this region, local ideas about it, and states' responses to it.<sup>2</sup> Focusing on the case of Gagauz Moldovan women who travel to work as domestics in Turkey, this paper explores how anxieties over political-economic transformations are manifest in the 'talk' that circulates about women's transnational labor migration. Drawing on ethnographic research in Moldova and Turkey,<sup>3</sup> I look at how narratives about the mobility of mothers reveal anxiety about a gendered social order and how these anxieties are expressed and contested by migrant women themselves. In these accounts, blame for social disorder in Moldova is placed upon migrant women—especially those who choose to work in Turkey, who are represented as irresponsible mothers, immoral wives, and selfish consumers. Migrant women themselves counter that local disorder and their migrant labor is caused by economic dislocation. They argue that in going abroad to work, they are selflessly sacrificing for their children and thus are more resourceful

and better mothers (even if transnational ones) than those who stay. These migrants employ the same trope of “motherhood as the key to social order” together with disapproving ideas about Turks, uncontained sexuality, and conspicuous consumption and positive notions of a rural work ethic and Russia as their village compatriots. Yet, through their practices and justifications of migrant labor, mobile mothers are insisting on a new social order for their lives. In so doing, they are constructing a new moral economy—a new way of organizing and understanding the responsibilities, rights, and entitlements of workers, consumers, and citizens. Through illuminating such subjective accounts, we can better judge the effects of political-economic transformations on women and advance our understanding of how people are interpreting such changes.<sup>4</sup> Here, it is clear that ideas about gender—especially about motherhood—are a particularly poignant way macro-transformations are taking root in individual lives. Moreover, I illustrate these gendered justifications of migrant labor by mobile mothers themselves to show how they align insidiously with rationales for neoliberal state practices—a new kind of governance that excuses state retraction from social and job-creation services and places more responsibility on individuals to provide for themselves. Drawing on a broad feminist and anthropological literature, this article problematizes general claims about “postsocialist” transnational labor practices by specifying them in terms of other overlapping subjectivities, particularly gender. This concern with gender and migrant domestic workers shifts the anthropological gaze from a narrow focus on “postsocialism” in this region to identify problems and processes of globalization that hold wider significance. In its concern with global and state neoliberal trends, it also questions our categorizations of states into “postsocialist,” “postwelfare,” “third world,” “global south,” and/or “postcolonial.”

While the literature on postsocialism has grown exponentially in recent years, surprisingly little scholarship has drawn on the parallels between the situation in third world and postcolonial states and those in postsocialist ones. The absence of this dialogue is especially noticeable in studies of gender. The literature is separated into works on “postcolonial feminism,” “third world women” or “women from the global south,” and “gender and postsocialism” that speak of ostensibly different states and women.<sup>5</sup> In the case of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (FSU), a rich literature attends to the effects on women of the fall of state socialism and how ideas about gender play a powerful role in politics—whether socialist or postsocialist.<sup>6</sup> Yet, the similarities of the plight of postsocialist women with women

in other types of states (besides, tellingly, Western states) have been left under-conceptualized. This literature compares and contrasts socialist and postsocialist states to welfare states in Europe and the United States and thus seems still confined to cold-war paradigms. The effect in anthropology has been an interest in drawing out local commentaries and meanings associated with "transitions" (albeit uneven, uncertain, and nonlinear ones) from socialism to postsocialism. Less noted is the coincidence of postsocialist and postwelfare processes and the convenience of encouraging neoliberalism in a region of collapsed states, in this case, postsocialist ones. The transformations associated with state retraction from social welfare not only in the West and its margins, but globally, prompted Nancy Fraser to posit our contemporary condition as less "postcolonial" than commonly "postsocialist" (1997). It is exceedingly clear that we need such a common global analytic to frame the political-economic dynamics of migrant domestics, who are now a common export not only of the South and Southeast Asia, Central and South America, and Africa, but of Eastern Europe and whose remittances serve to keep states in all of these regions afloat. The example of migrant domestics from Moldova illuminates how political-economic processes in these disparate regions are in fact very similar and thus how our categorization of states are problematic.

In the narratives that follow, Gagauz women detail changing conditions familiar to "global women," as Ehrenreich and Hoshshild call all poor women who migrate to work abroad (2003). Indeed, their migration is similarly the result of economic decline caused by policies associated with economic globalization and restructuring. As with the cases detailed in Ehrenreich and Hochschild's volume, the labor migration of Gagauz women also cannot be viewed as simply having improved or worsened women's status and helped or hurt communities, in any simple way. Such migrations may prompt some changes while also justifying some continuities in local social and economic stratification. We might envision this migration then as creating certain spaces for the maintenance of, resistance to, or change of norms and structural conditions. While they speak to different "states," feminist scholars insist that we look to women's own perspectives and experiences for a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of change and the multiple effects and contradictions generated by economic transitions. As Abu-Lughod reminds us, women's subjectivities themselves are multidimensional and involve the "multiple subjugations" of gender, class, ethnic, race, and citizenship positionalities (1999, see also McClintock et al



The Soviets combined the Bessarabian region east of the Prut River with land east of the Dniester River (Transnistria) to create the new Moldovan state after World War II and these borders still stand. A region known as Moldavia remained to the west of the Prut in Romania. On Moldova's eastern border, the Dniester Moldovan Republic, still vies for sovereignty, leaving a whole third of the Moldovan state's borders unmonitored by internationally recognized legal institutions. Gagauz Yeri (Gagauz Land, or as it is referred to in this paper, Gagauzia) is not geographically contiguous and contains spaces of territory around three semi-urban centers (here marked in Romanian: Comrat, Ciadir-Lunga, and Vulcanesti) in Southern Moldova (Map from King 2000, p. xviii).

1997). I stay attuned to this point by describing the particularities of these women's identities—as formerly socialist, but also as Gagauz, Russian-speaking Moldovan, Slavic, Russian Orthodox, and rural women holding particular positionalities in terms of wealth, education, age, and work experiences. These identities condition the various effects of political-economic transformations on women and inform women's perspectives on these changes, complicating and expanding our understanding of their experiences as 'postsocialist' subjects. What we find in their narratives is that migrant labor is anxiety ridden not only because it engages them in capitalist labor forms, as with trading, but for a number of other reasons: It involves migration to a city of a predominantly rural and agricultural population; it is a transnational activity for people who rarely, if ever, left the Soviet Union (going to Russia, in fact, is still not considered going abroad); and this labor takes place among Turks toward whom the Gagauz declare little connection, except for their language. Yet, most often, and loudly, what individuals to whom I spoke voiced as the problem with migrant labor was that mothers were engaged in it.<sup>7</sup> Migrant women and their communities understand transnational migration in Moldova in moral terms that are highly gendered. This paper contemplates the gendered nature of this transnational labor and the anxiety around it. It shows how community members who blame migrant women for local disorder and migrant women justifying their labors abroad as the key to a new order are guided by the same gendered logics. This it is not to say, however, that all is the same in Moldova or that things are not changing in Gagauzia. In fact, migrants' reasonings, as I see it, are constructing a new moral economy, one that coincides with neoliberal rationales.

Ethnographers of postsocialism who look to transnational economic practices in the postsocialist context, such as Konstantinov (1996) and Humphrey (2002), ask how "postsocialist" subjects and migrants envision their new capitalist practices. In Humphrey's case, she also looks to ethnicity to trace how states are responding to new trading. These works, as others in postsocialist literature in anthropology, are concerned with exploring the varied transformations from a known socialist past to the present, marked, still ambiguously here, as "postsocialist." Now, 15 years after the fall of communism, the time is ripe to ask: What really has come next?<sup>8</sup> This article reframes these concerns by detailing how new moral economies in Gagauz Moldova are affected by and coincide with global neoliberal processes and structures of oppression. I end by speculating on how these struc-



tures have influenced Moldovan state policies, prompting them to shift their policy priorities from providing jobs and social services to their population to supporting migration as a route to development.

### **Gagauz Women's Migration to Turkey: Neoliberalism Greeted Postsocialist Collapse**

Before discussing the representations and politics of these migrant laborers, it is important to contextualize the specificity of the Gagauz Moldovan case and how Gagauz women's migration responds to common global conditions of economic restructuring. The Gagauz are a predominantly rural population of Orthodox Christian Turkic-speaking peoples. There are about 160-170,000 Gagauz in Moldova, and another 50-80,000 mostly in Bulgaria, but also in small communities scattered in Ukraine and other former Soviet states, as well as in Romania, Macedonia, and Greece. How a Turkic-speaking population found itself here and why they are Orthodox, and not Muslim as most Turkic-speakers, are much-contested questions. In Moldova and Eastern Europe, it is widely acknowledged that Gagauz migrated from Bulgaria in the 19th century and, as a result, it is popularly believed that they are Turkic-speaking Bulgarians. In fact, on this basis, Gagauz are allowed Bulgarian citizenship. Yet, this definition assumes that they were Turkish Muslim Ottomans who converted from Islam to Christianity after the Ottomans retreated from the region during the 19th century. Most Gagauz people and historians, however, emphasize Gagauz difference from both Muslim Turks of Turkey and Bulgarians. They assert that they were shamanistic populations who migrated from Central Asia directly to Bulgaria (that they did not pass through Turkey and were never Muslim) who then mixed with local Slavic populations and converted from Shamanism to Orthodox Christianity. Either way, in the 19th century, as the Balkans experienced nationalist movements, conflicts among Orthodox Christians, and Ottoman retreat, Gagauz migrated from Bulgaria through Romania to Bessarabia (current-day Moldova and parts of Ukraine, see Map), where the Russians offered them land privileges. While retaining their Gagauz language, they took on the Russian language as well and allied themselves with the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate (as opposed to the Bulgarian or Romanian Orthodox churches). It was at least from this period that Gagauz aligned themselves with Russians against ethnic Romanians in the region. In the 19th century, Russians and Romanians fought over Bessarabia, including the region in which the Gagauz resided. Many elderly

Gagauz people cite harsh conditions for their communities during interwar Romanian rule. From the Gagauz perspective, then, it was relief when the Russian Soviets prevailed in this region after World War II and created the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic, which now constitute the current borders of Moldova (see Map). As a border of the USSR, the Soviets upheld the Moldovan SSR as distinct from Romania, despite the fact that much of its population was ethnically Romanian. The Soviets instituted a Cyrillic alphabet and relocated Russian-speaking populations from other parts of the USSR there. The Gagauz region in the south and the mostly Russian-speaking and industry-heavy Transnistria in the east were key to the new “multi-ethnic,” yet Russian-dominant, Soviet Socialist Republic. With the fall of socialism and Soviet control in Moldova after 1989 and as ethnic-Romanian Moldovans ruminated over merging with Romania, a Gagauz autonomy movement asserted itself. In 1995, Gagauz language rights were secured and Gagauzia acquired status as an autonomous region of Moldova. While plagued by the conflicts caused by its Soviet origins, Moldova has become an independent state that continues to try to incorporate a culturally and linguistically diverse population of a bit over four million people—65% ethnic Romanian (who speak Romanian/Moldovan) and 35% other ethnicities including Russians, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, and Gagauz, all of whom speak primarily Russian, and some of whom also have “native” tongues, like the Gagauz (Erden et al 1999, Gungor & Argunsah 2002, Radova 2004, King 2000).

Like other populations in post-soviet Moldova, those living in Gagauzia—and women in particular—were severely affected by an economic crisis in 1998-9. When economic collapse in Russia reverberated in the former Soviet sphere, the value of Moldovan currency declined precipitously, their main export market in the former Soviet Union collapsed, and the Moldovan state found itself no longer capable of paying wages or welfare benefits to its citizens. While the initial severity of this crisis was postsocialist in origin, these effects have declined in recent years. Yet, new structural adjustment policies have supported the state’s retreat from job creation and social service programs that had already collapsed. In this context, both men and women in Gagauzia, and in Moldova more generally, have been left unemployed and are taking advantage of their newly acquired mobility to go abroad to work.

These postsocialist and neoliberal dynamics have played out in the gendered division of migrant labor in Gagauzia, yet in ways not entirely unfamiliar to cases of migrant labor from non-postsocialist states. Gagauzia is a rural agricultural society, based mostly upon the harvesting of grapes for wine. Some

individuals work on collective farms in this capacity and most families have their own small plots. Traditionally, families work together to keep animals and grow their own food for subsistence. Villages often have their own schools, hospitals, state and private shops, churches, and some remaining kolhoz structures, although to describe them as dilapidated would be generous. In and around Comrat, one of the urban centers of Gagauzia, and where I did my fieldwork, conditions are dire. Homes in the urban area do have gas for heat, but most villagers heat their homes with peat burned in stoves. Rural and urban homes alike do not have regular running water. Roads are rarely paved. Some people have vehicles (either mule drawn, a moped/motorcycle, or a car), but most travel by informally hitchhiking or by the minibuses that traverse southern Moldova. In the Gagauz villages that I traveled through, women and men both work to support their households. Women work alongside men in the fields and many hold jobs with state institutions in the village such as hospitals, day care centers, and schools. As in other socialist states, women in Gagauzia during the Soviet era worked primarily in such state sector jobs and also may have benefited most from the free schooling, health care, and day care provided in these sites for their children. Many scholars note that because state socialism targeted services to women in particular, they may be the hardest hit by its withdrawal. Yet, it is also pointed out that the Soviets did not always come through on their promises for women (see, for instance, Ries 1994, du Plessix Gray 1989, Scott 1974). In the Gagauz case, while scaled back considerably after the fall of socialism, many of these jobs remain, but the problem is that the state, when it does pay them (and in 1999 there were six months when they did not get paid) does not pay them enough. Moreover, women working in schools, day care centers, and hospitals in Gagauzia feel compelled to offer their own wages for supplies and free labor for building upkeep. To top it off, now that services such as health care and education are no longer socialized, costs for living have increased. Most women make about US\$30-\$50/month (per capita GNP is US \$710). In 1999, 80% of the Moldovan population lived under the poverty line; only with the help of remittances has this shifted to 36% in recent years (World Bank 2004 and 2005, GRP 2004). While these data do not specify particular populations within Moldova, I would assert that these dynamics are reflected in the Gagauz case. Even while working (sometimes many jobs), women still hold primary responsibility for household labor such as cooking, cleaning, and caring for their children. Indeed, state socialism in Eastern Europe upheld women as “worker-mothers.” Women were expected to fulfill their roles as producers for the state, but also as repro-

ducers of the nation (see, for instance, Verdery 1996). This role is no less of a dual burden now for women in Gagauzia. In this too, however, Gagauz women's postsocialist situation is actually similar to that of women in postcolonial and third world literature (see, for instance, McClintock 1997). Scholars such as Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2002), Mills (2003), and Sassen (2000) explain that such crises in political and economic conditions (and most notably economic restructuring and fiscal reforms promoted by the World Bank and IMF) place an increasingly heavy burden upon poor women globally to support their families, what has come to be known in the literature as the "feminization of poverty." Because of such processes, to support their households, many poor women around the world have been forced into informal "flexible" labors of all kinds, including temporary work abroad as petty traders, sex workers, and domestic workers. While acknowledging the specificity of the postsocialist case it is crucial to recognize that these global neoliberal conditions are also shaping the need for migration of women from Gagauzia.

Migrant labor has become a way of life in Gagauzia. Both men and women from Gagauzia may want to go to Western Europe, where wages are higher, but it is very expensive to fund these trips and difficult to enter "fortress Europe." Language is also a deciding factor. Most Moldovans—especially men—go to Russia to work. It is inexpensive to go there and routes are well established, but the labor is usually low-paid construction work and often is only available for a few months. After Russia, the second highest numbers of Moldovan migrants got to Italy—where ethnic-Romanians find high wages and a similar language. For the Gagauz, however, Turkey has become the second most attractive option. While better known as a migrant "sender" nation (of *gasterbeiter* to Germany), Turkey has become a receiver of migrants from the former Soviet and socialist sphere mostly because of the ease and low costs of illegal entry and illegal work, but also because of language skills in the case of Turkic speakers like the Gagauz. Furthermore, Turkey's "care crisis" has prompted high demand for migrant domestic workers from the Philippines and other nations, and more recently and in larger numbers, from Eastern Europe and the FSU. In Turkey, Gagauz women thus find jobs more readily than men and, as a result, women often go there alone to work. While some women participate in trade and sex work as well, the Gagauz women I write of here are employed as highly-valued domestics and caretakers of children, elderly, or the sick in Turkish households for at least US\$400/month—over 10 times what they can make at home. As a result, the numbers of Gagauz women going to Turkey parallels or even exceeds the

case of Moldova at large. It is difficult to judge officially the number of migrants since their illegal movements are not generally detected and many go back and forth frequently, but we may estimate that about 50,000 Gagauz work abroad or have worked abroad and that about half of these are women who go to Turkey.<sup>9</sup>

Moldovan migrants (of any ethnicity) can gain entry as tourists to Turkey and stay for one month with possible extensions of another three months. Overstayers are charged fines according to the amount of time they have overstayed their visas. It costs about US\$400 for those who overstay six months, after which fines double. These individuals are not allowed to return to Turkey on any visa for the period of time they overstay their visas. With the help of illegal transnational services, migrants often find ways around these barriers. In fact, these services grease the wheels of female irregular migrant labor by recruiting women in Moldova for work abroad, funding their trips, and demanding pay-back and a half month's salary.<sup>10</sup> Yet, several women who worked as domestics told me that once they learned the routes, costs, and found a good employment agent or employer within Turkey, they begin to handle their own travel and employment arrangements. Often these women find employers to whom they return every year. Conditions vary—some employers are deemed good, giving the women their own rooms, time off, and paying for their visas, fines, and trips home. Others are less generous; still others, abusive.

What has developed over the years is a transnational migration circuit whereby, as locals explain, to run a Gagauz household, wives and mothers, usually in their thirties, go to Turkey to work as domestics for six months at a time, primarily in winter when work in the fields is not necessary. Husbands and fathers may go to Russia, usually for shorter periods of two months, but sometimes longer, to work in construction and painting. At times, husbands and wives travel to Russia where they can work together. Sometimes the couple leaves their children in the care of the grandparents or they alternate their migrant labor so that one of them is home with the kids. While still sending much of their wages home, some couples split up and remain abroad. The man may find a Russian woman and move in with her and the woman may find a Turkish male benefactor or even prospective husband. Female migrant labor has in some ways supported the continuity of Gagauz villages and local stratification in terms of gender, age, and wealth, and in other ways transformed them, but what is clear is that it has prompted a great deal of panic.

## **Migrant Women Turn Things “Upside Down”—Irresponsible Mothers, Immoral Wives, and Selfish Consumers**

Open the topic of migrant labor in Moldova and what one eventually hears is unbridled anger directed at migrant mothers for “abandoning children” and “splitting up families.” This is true not only for Gagauz migrants, but forms part of the discursive landscape of Moldova more generally. The panic about “trafficking in women” is one of the contexts in which this discussion about migrant women takes place and something I have covered elsewhere (Keough 2004). Suffice it to say that Moldovan and international non-governmental organizations, overpowered by concerns over trafficking, highlight in their campaigns how orphaned children are the main targets of traffickers.<sup>11</sup> Those mothers who do decide to leave thus face considerable moral ambivalence from their communities.

These kinds of moral suspicions of migrant mothers are found in Gagauz communities where women who go abroad to Turkey are perceived to be running off with men (or at least running around with them while they are there) and they are blamed for dissolved families and children left behind. Moreover, in this case, going to Turkey instead of Russia taints migrant women even more. Perceptions of Turkey in Gagauzia and Moldova in general are negative—Turks are perceived as conservative Muslims, fake and untrustworthy, dirty and even dangerous. Turkish products and the markets that sell them in Moldova are negatively valued. Anna, a village woman who is university educated and works as the librarian for what she calls the “anti-cultural house” because of the way the cultural center is falling apart was particularly eloquent on the topic of Turkish male–Gagauz migrant female relations. In one of several visits I made to her village home, she explained that everything has become “bottom-up” (*alt-ust olmus*)—the women in her village who go to Turkey to work:

...women who wouldn't be looked at in this village are treated like queens by Turkish men and come to think of themselves as something. Then they don't want to return to their husbands.

Women who go to Turkey are suspected of abandoning their motherly duties because they desire such treatment. They are compared to those who chose to stay. One couple I met had not gone abroad to work and are struggling to run a new business in their village. The wife, Pasha, also works as a cook at a boarding school for children (*internat*) in addition to working on the

farm. They have four children (sometimes five, when her sister goes to Turkey to work and leaves her son with them). “I can’t leave,” Pasha explained to me as many who had not gone abroad to work did, “I have children to take care of.” Huddled in her make-shift office for an interview with another woman from the same village, Miriam, at her place of employment as an accountant at the same boarding school, Miriam told me that she had been to Turkey once, and then decided not to go again: “I have one child—a daughter who was 10 years old when I left. She had to wash the laundry, take care of the house, and cook. She asked me not to go. So I don’t go.” Yet, interestingly, it is not that Miriam does not migrate abroad to work. It is just that she does not go to Turkey. Instead, she goes for short periods to Moscow with her husband. Migration to Russia is deemed less questionable than to Turkey in many ways. Several of my interviewees said that Russia is the site of a valued civilization and culture, whereas this was not true of Turkey. In fact, as former Soviets, Orthodox Christians, and Russian-speakers, traveling to Russia is not even considered going abroad in the same way as is traveling to Turkey (see also Demirdirek 2001).

If it is not for running around with men that a Gagauz woman goes to Istanbul instead of finding another way to get by, according to representations by community members, it is because she is willing to do particularly demeaning types of work to gain wealth, new consumer goods, and upward mobility for her household. This critique would seem to be valid for all those who go abroad to work, but in my formal and informal interviews it seemed particularly focused upon those who go to Turkey. This is not only because Turkey is negatively valued, but also because of the type of work they are willing to do—domestic service—to make money. As Miriam points out:

In Russia, you do physical labor, but you work alongside your husband, friends, and family during the day and have your own apartment with them at night. And the employers treat you better—they just give you the job to do and let you do it—they do not stand over you telling you how to do it.

As I sat around in Pasha’s living room one evening with three women from the village who had been to Turkey to work as domestics and two (Pasha and her mother-in-law) who had not, we talked about how people use the money they earn. Pasha’s sister, Tatya, is married with three daughters and had returned

from Turkey four months before we met. She had commuted to work for the same employer there for the past four years. As she told me:

I look around my house and I see my first trip to Turkey: the washing machine; the second: the gas line; the third: the kid's new furnishings. The next trip was my first daughter's university education.

Others have large and expensive weddings or build big new homes, she said. In visits to several households, I discovered that redoing rooms involves straightening crooked mud-brick walls, often plastering them with elaborate wallpaper, buying new sleeper-sofas, and putting paintings on the walls instead of carpets and placing carpets on the floors. Households were also fixed up by building a new fence or roof, or buying a washing machine, refrigerator, boom box, another television, or getting satellite television. The scrutiny of houses in Gagauzia is a common practice, as they are particularly representative of social distinctions. When I asked the elderly Babushka if in her day, people were concerned about building up their homes like this, she replied that "our people have gone wild/they are out of control" ("*bizimkiler cok azitti*"). Several others, even those who had been abroad themselves, concurred and noted that whereas people used to help each other, now it is everyone for themselves.

Interestingly, despite the fact that men leave too, the blame for social disorder is peculiarly focused upon women. For instance, in the context of a group interview with Miriam and another employee, Lara, a cook at the village boarding school for children, Miriam publicly scolded Lara. Lara has a baby and an alcoholic husband and had expressed a desire to go back to Turkey. In hearing range of Lara, Miriam remarked loudly:

...there are women here who are very into themselves, relaxed, who leave their husbands and children, despite the fact that they know how they'll become drunks and get worse when they go.

I witnessed several similar scenarios in which leaving to try to care for your children is not seen as a responsible option because it makes a self-destructive husband worse and leaves him as a burden on others.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, for those migrant women's husbands who do take care of their house and children, many women I spoke with exclaimed: "They make the bread now!" Tatyia, explained that men now pickle the vegetables come fall, cook for



the kids, dress them and send them off to school. Tatya said that while she sent her husband the money, he was the one that put the gas line in, paid the university fees, and took care of the children. Life in the village was hard and she appreciated him for doing these things. While women like Tatya may quietly respect their husbands, villagers more loudly pronounce husbands left behind as abandoned and pitiable. That they do these “womanly” tasks is an indicator of disorder in the village. Other men, who, assuming their wife in Turkey is running around with Turkish men, go to Russia for work and find a Russian woman are also perceived as pitiable. They are seen as making that decision because their wives left, as having no other choice, though perhaps less of a “sucker” than the man who stays.

Despite the fact that men are also choosing to leave, it is Gagauz women—as bad wives and mothers—who are blamed for the ruin of a man, the break up of the family, and the abandonment of children. Even when arrangements are made to leave children with their grandmother, an option fitting traditional gender roles, this is not perceived as appropriate. Miriam expressed a common sentiment: “This is not right, these women are too old to go running around after children, to sit and do their homework with them, a child needs its mother.” On a midnight tour down the muddy lanes of one Gagauz village, Anna, the librarian, and her husband, a high school biology teacher, pointed out to me all the houses without lights, and some under construction—almost every other house was dark and empty. The mothers were in Turkey, they explained. One Gagauz ethnographer even worried to me that Gagauz female migrant labor could lead to the extinction of the Gagauz people. These narratives reveal the judgment that women and not men are at fault for a man’s drinking and philandering, the abandonment of children, the break up of families, and even the dissolution of their communities.

The bottom line seems to be that, with Russia as an option, or even staying home and struggling through, why would a woman choose to work serving a newly-wealthy Muslim Turk, who tells you what to do day and night, alone without your family or friends, with only one half day off a week, and be thankful for the job, unless you are incredibly greedy and selfish, naive, fleeing your responsibilities to your children, and/or unhappy with your husband and searching for a new one? Migrant women in Gagauzia are thus tainted by their migration to Turkey, their labor, and even their wages—seen as naive and stupid, so greedy for money that they would do anything, selfish, morally sullied by their association with Turkey and with Turkish men, and, most of all, bad mothers.

## **Migrant Women “Raise Up” Communities—Selfless Mothers, Sacrificial Wage Earners, and Resourceful Citizens**

Ironically, as we even find in some of the above narratives, migrant women themselves often uphold the moralities implicit in these representations. While admitting that some migrant women are “like that” (“*oylede var*”), many distinguish themselves from morally corrupt or naive migrant laborers. In these narratives, I found migrant women use the same moral categories that marked them negatively—particularly that of the “good mother,” but also of Turks, sexuality, consumption, rurality, and work—to justify their migrant labor. They push the limits of village norms to position themselves against those who stay and also to form new ideas of what a “good mother” is. They thus tacitly accept these representations in some ways, employ them in others, and, in still others, resist them. At the same time, however, they argue for a new moral economy.

All of the women with whom I spoke who have been to Turkey justify their migration in the moral terms of motherhood much like those we heard above: They needed the money to take care of their children. All my interviewees claimed they would not go anywhere if things were stable in their village and if they had a job that paid enough. Yet, with economic conditions harsh, going to Turkey to help with the household budget and things like sending a child to university, making sure a musically-gifted child can afford a violin and lessons, or that your daughter has a big wedding are now part of the division of labor and a way of life. I spoke to a group of nurses at a village hospital who all said that they went to Turkey to work in order to raise their children and now they expect that their daughters, being responsible themselves, will do the same when they have children: “It will soon be their turn” said one nurse. Women who go abroad to work see labor migration as not only a legitimate way to get by, but, despite the costs of being away from their family, a continued and necessary one for any good mother.

One of the ways women articulate their image of the “good mother” is through narratives of saving their money and descriptions of the difficulty of being an illegal migrant worker. Many women talked about saving every penny to send home. One nurse from the hospital explained that she only saw her wages for two days before she sent it to her family. It is usually in this context that these women spoke about how hard the work was. Most admitted that their work was not physically, but psychologically challenging—that it was hard to get used to serving someone else and to make the time abroad pass quickly. Several women explained how, as illegal workers, they were at

the whim of their employers. Some employers took advantage of their situation, not allowing them to leave the house and taking their passports. Even if allowed to leave, many women feared being picked up, bribed, or deported by the police. As Tatya put it, what is hard about laboring abroad is that “we hide” (“*biz saklaniyoruz*”). Tatya also complained that local domestics get paid more and sometimes have health insurance, whereas illegal migrant workers were not privy to these benefits. All the women I interviewed talked about how much they missed their children when they were away, about the joys and pains of hearing their voices over long-distance phone calls, and how they counted the days they were to come home. Rosa, from the urban center of Comrat, who started going to Turkey to work as a textile merchant in the mid-1990s, but more recently to work as a domestic, explained:

There are women who stay two, three years. I cannot do that at all. One year goes by hard as it is. I miss my mother and daughter too much. I only have one daughter! But you have to go for one year, again, you have to go.

Many also talked about missing their homes in Gagauzia. One woman, Vera, also from Comrat and a single mother of a young boy, left him in the care of her mother while she worked in Turkey caring for an elderly lady. She now works for a day care in Comrat. She exclaimed: “I [even] missed my walls!” In these narratives, the women with whom I spoke perceived this hard wage-earning labor and absence from their homes, families, and communities as a motherly sacrifice they make for their children.

These women depict themselves as “good mothers” also by distancing themselves from their association with Turkish products and men and by using the same negative categorizations of Turkey detailed above. For instance, most claim they do not buy anything from Turkey to bring back, seeing products there as not valuable. When I asked Anna the librarian if anything in Gagauz culture seemed to have changed as a result of this back and forth labor migration and infiltration of remittances, she replied, “No. We have culture, we just need money.”<sup>13</sup> Another woman, Valentina, a village primary school teacher married with a son, who went to Turkey and worked as a domestic, confronted head-on the reputations of women who go to Turkey with a phrase I heard time and again from migrant workers: “I go there for the money, not for a husband.” When I asked if they spent their days off in Laleli, an Istanbul neighborhood known for the socializing of former Soviet women with Turkish men, many women were reluctant to say they did.<sup>14</sup> In

these narratives, Gagauz women migrants directly confront and resist the negative representations of them, while also participating in images of the “good mother;” they co-opt this category, redefining it, but also upholding this particular gendered morality.

Another way they articulate their roles as good mothers is through narratives of the domestic work they do in Turkey. They criticize Turkish “new wealthy” family lifestyles and gender roles and heartily defend the moral superiority of their Gagauz Moldovan village life. It is here that we find traces of what might be considered a socialist, but also again, rural ethic—and a gendered one at that. In this context, many insisted that they continue to go to Turkey because they have a good situation: They are paid well, treated well, and that it is not a hard job. Tatyia said brusquely, “We do this kind of work here [in Gagauzia] anyway, as part of our regular work. But here in the village, the work is even harder.” Several articulated a critique of gender and labor in urban and capitalist Turkish society, seeing their own system as morally superior, but harder on women. For instance, some see Turkish women as having easy lives. One of Pasha’s neighbors explained, “Turkish women don’t have to work, their husbands take care of them, they have household appliances which makes household work easy, they have a maid, a nanny, and often a cook.” Such criticisms of Turkish lifestyle work with negative representations of Turks in Gagauzia and Moldova and show migrant women’s allegiance to local moralities.

Both sets of these narratives—those blaming migrant women and those defending them—herald common cultural logics. All of these women’s judgments about changing wealth patterns and types of work, rurality, Turkey, Russia, changing wealth, consumption patterns, and types of work and ideas about rurality, women and men reveal similar combinations of cultural constructs at work in these communities, communities which are now, whether they like it or not, transnational. In terms of ethnicity, even though they speak a Turkic language, Gagauz define themselves in opposition to Turks, much like other Eastern European Orthodox peoples. When I asked women about such allegiances, all said that they consider themselves either Russian, Gagauz or both, but not Turkish. This, what we might call “slavic,” leaning is demonstrated in their views of wealth, consumption, work, and gender relations as well. In terms of wealth, whereas small differences among families are tolerated and supported, a person who gains a great deal of wealth and is ostentatious is treated with great suspicion. As in the Russian contexts discussed by other scholars, here too, if people are equally poor, poverty is perceived as bearable, but rising above the crowd tends to prompt jealousy.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, if

a Gagauz individual gains wealth through what is perceived as hard labor their social and geographic mobility is deemed legitimate. In a particularly rural and not necessarily socialist sense, both sexes are expected to participate in hard, physical, and often agricultural work, and this labor is much admired among the Gagauz and serves as a source of dignity. Jealousy of those perceived to be making money from doing little labor motivates rumors and, in the small setting of a village, such gossip serves as social control. These dynamics are compounded in the case of women in Gagauzia who forgo opportunities to do manual labor in what is considered the more civilized Russia, to go to Turkey, where they work as indoor caretakers, have “days off,” and potentially, socialize with Turkish men outside the surveillance of their communities. In regards to the latter, in Gagauzia, as in Moldova in general, women are expected to work and to participate with men in work and also in lively socializing and drinking. In fact, if they refuse, they may be considered arrogant. Yet a “good woman” does not overdo it—especially if abroad and among Turkish men. Migrant women are thus criticized for not sufficiently or appropriately laboring to gain wealth and new products for their homes, they are associated with “uncivilized” Turkey, and suspected of sexual indiscretions. Yet, as we see, the migrants themselves uphold these very ideals—by insisting that they do not buy Turkish products nor cavort with Turkish men, by respecting the physical labors of Gagauzia, while criticizing Turkish women as lazy and, most of all, by asserting that their work abroad is a sacrifice they make for their children.

The “good mother” trope goes a long way towards balancing criticism of migrant mothers. The importance of both working and mothering to Gagauz women is significant—after all, the anxiety here revolves around the geographic place of women’s work, not whether they work at all. This should be considered in the contexts of both the Soviet and pre-Soviet eras. As several scholars explain, particularly in the Stalinist era, the Soviet regime promoted both production and reproduction in the image of the good “worker-mother.” Yet, this “cult of motherhood” stems also back to pre-revolutionary times in Russia, where even now the trope of the “suffering woman” is “mythical” in its proportions (Ries 1994). Women’s suffering is representative of the dilemmas of the “Russian soul” itself and women are viewed as its repository.<sup>16</sup> The Russian women’s “litanies” described by Ries involve “poetic inventories of suffering, sacrifice, and loss” that complain of the burdens of women, the problems with the state and economy, but also “romanticize and legitimate women’s double burden itself” (1994:259). Bruno argues that

these types of representations play out in how women's economic activity is perceived. Whereas Russian men who trade are often depicted as "speculators," women are viewed as participating in trade to make money for their families and thus are not as suspect (1997:72). We may see Gagauz narratives of motherhood also as helping women engage more freely in new labor activities, in this case, transnational ones. According to sociologist Parrenas, such narratives of sacrifices by women working abroad also help children adjust better to their mothers' absence (2005). Gagauz migrant women too emphasize the tropes of the 'sacrificing mother' as the key to the social order to justify their labor for themselves and their children. Of course, their participation in and justification of this labor through such a discursive trope implicates them in wider nets of oppression.

Gagauz migrant women employ the logic of the "good mother" to defend their decision to work abroad, seeing this as not only a way to better their children's future, but the only route to improve conditions in their villages. As we walked through her village together, Tatya pointed out the construction and rebuilding of individual houses with better materials and noted that every one of those households has at least one person abroad making money. This was a strikingly different interpretation than the dark and empty houses perceived by Anna and her husband in another village. Gas heat, new markets, and better housing have come to the village with the help of these wages, Tatya explained. She insisted that the only way to change the conditions in her village is to go abroad to work. "People have to do things for themselves now—and they do—and that is how things get better for them." In another conversation, Anna the librarian complained, "There is no state left, our villages are falling apart." She herself had worked abroad, and while her impression of the dark and empty houses left by migrants seems to indicate that she doubted that migrant labor was working, she also sympathized: "People are trying to lift themselves up [*"kaldirmak"*] by going abroad to work." These assessments indicate that these migrant laborers see themselves as one of the most resourceful and responsible people in the community. They see migrant labor as a route to help their children and to better their village homes and lives, not escape them.

### **The New Moral Economies of Mobile "Worker-Mothers"**

In this "talk" we find that migrant women's desires are focused on changing and "lifting themselves up" (*"kaldirmak"*). At the same time, they are con-

structuring new moral economies. As one young woman whose father had worked abroad for over 10 years put it, “You can tell the people who have worked abroad: they hold themselves in a different way, they have self-respect now, they were drowning and now they are able to keep their heads above water.” Maybe they are even trying to swim, I commented, and she shrugged. Whether “raising” or “swimming” these transformations in their lives at home are accented by their migrant labor experiences abroad. Vera, who talked of missing her walls explained that “when I came back to my home, I looked around and got very depressed. The floors are dirty, the walls crooked, there is no running water, no washing machines.” She paused. “But then I thought, well, I can change that.” It is true that most of their wages do go to benefit their children and homes in Gagauzia. Yet, in conversations with these women over time, I also heard, perhaps more quietly, but nonetheless present especially when they were among other migrant women, other reasons they go to Istanbul to work, or, at least, other benefits it brought to them personally. One woman fled an abusive husband who she did not feel she could divorce outright; others felt they found some freedom in Istanbul. Tatya complained that a major difference in her life since she was back was that she had no time to herself, no days off, no vacations, and no time to visit with her girlfriends. “There, you can buy things for yourself and your kids. Here, you don’t think about buying things like that.” One of the nurses talked about what she learned in Turkey: “That it is necessary to talk like this, act like that.” In a certain sense, these village women found some worldliness in their work abroad—several reminisced about seeing the sea, going on a boat, an elderly nurse talked about wearing pants for the first time, Tatya about shopping in Istanbul, Vera about getting her hair cut. Some had never been to a restaurant before. Tatya explained that she became “caught in the middle” and one of the nurses commented: “One of my legs is still standing in Turkey.” Straddling Moldova and Turkey, even as they criticize Turkish households, they try to transform their own to have as many conveniences—indeed things such as wallpaper, kitchens open to other rooms, and washing machines are new markers of status in the community. Anna, ever the critic, even claimed that they were not changing enough, or in the right ways. She explained that two of her daughters had gone to Turkey. One had married a Turk, and the other intends to keep commuting to Turkey to support her children to grow up in the Gagauz village. “They are leaving, sure, but they aren’t really doing anything new or different. If it were me, I’d leave entirely—what is there to do here? Why don’t they take advantage of their opportunities?” Through

their geographic mobility and labors abroad, all of these women are struggling to better their lives and their families. Their new economic activities and desires and their continued justification of being 'good mothers' amount to a new moral economy. This morality is grounded still in Gagauz traditional values of rurality, hard work, and Russia as a beacon of civilization, but it also allows for and seeks out new and different lifestyles for migrant women and their families.

Tatya, who is placed in a lower stratum of her village than Anna, but has hopes of upward mobility, admitted how it may have become somewhat harder in the village because of labor migration. She admitted that she has gotten used to the convenience of household appliances. "Here we have to bring the water inside the house ourselves," she said, but then piped up: "But it is changing here too—I bought a washing machine for our house!" Yet, she also admitted that:

Even when you save, you sometimes can't make ends meet because then other things fall apart. Before you migrated for work, you used to be able to raise your food, and not have to buy it, but now, since you are in Turkey, there is nobody to take care of the land and the animals. It makes it harder here in some ways.

It also forces her to have to go abroad again. Moreover, in the early 2000s it was easy and cheap to go back and forth from Turkey, but every year fines go up. While in Turkey, several talked about how they are at the whim of their employers, have no health care, and no assurance that they will get paid. These women are growing increasingly weary of maneuvering in this visa regime and of living in fear of being bribed, deported, imprisoned, or abused by police or others. Miriam's solution is to go to Russia, where she did not even need a passport to enter. In this "talk," what some demand from their states now, if they cannot offer them a job that pays at home, is freedom of movement, fewer fines, and legal work opportunities abroad. I see their labors abroad and these kinds of demands as a new moral economy that works to excuse the Moldovan state from providing for their economic needs within Moldova. All the while, their transnational labors are changing perceptions of consumer needs at home and creating new and increasing desires that seem to implicate these individuals more directly into global capitalist processes.



## **Conclusions and Provocations: The Neoliberal Rationales of Mobile Mothers and the Moldovan State**

As we see in the narratives above, Gagauz Moldovan female migrant workers are associated with anxiety over new economic activity; accused of being “bad mothers” they are blamed for societal disorder. They respond by asserting a new moral economy based upon an idea of “motherhood.” These kinds of moral justifications of transnational labor in Eastern Europe and the FSU and the new moral economies they constitute, let alone their gendered dimensions, have been little theorized in anthropological literature. What does exist is limited to trading. Writing of the fall of communism in Bulgaria, Konstantinov details the moral justifications of new transnational “tourist-traders.” He explains that economic action is anxiety-ridden here and is presented as “emotionally colored—an object of attraction, indifference, or repulsion” (1996:769). He details how new market capitalism in Bulgaria is seen as chaotic and ambivalent and there is a nostalgic seeking out of “socialist” order. The “tourist-traders” he follows in this context are associated with new “disorder.” The same type of disorder is associated with new traders in Russia; according to Humphrey, they are perceived as participating in the “great trash road” from the east and Turkey (2002). These traders are seen as people who transgress not only state boundaries, but also loyalties, for money through “unproductive” labor (2002). Konstantinov argues that the Bulgarian traders respond to such accusations by seeking out order through what he terms “poetics:” Interpreting their position in reference to the stable orientation point of a “socialist” economic morality. These transnational traders posit themselves as different from both the “immoral speculators” of the new capitalist economy and the “suckers” waiting for the state to help them (765). They align themselves with hardworking people and a socialist morality. However, they also assert their moral worth in terms of being brave, imaginative, and adventuresome entrepreneurs. For Konstantinov this latter representation, along with traders’ attempts to normalize trading activities, represents a new “prospective moral economy.” Similarly, female migrant domestic workers from Gagauzia are associated with a negatively valued east and with societal disorder. The women reject these associations and assert that they are simply hardworking mothers and laborers trying to bring order to their lives. They defend their actions through a local morality stemming from the past. There is a nostalgia for a time when individuals helped each other in the community, when they were not just out to increase their own wealth. This could be envisioned, certainly, as a “socialist orientation,” as Konstantinov theorizes

for the traders with whom he travels.<sup>17</sup> Yet, in this paper, I have tried to illuminate how these transnational laborers' "interpretive poetics" also employ other ideas. They refer to their experiences not only as 'socialist' or 'capitalist,' but also in reference to their positions as rural workers, Gagauz, Russian-speaking Moldovans, Russian Orthodox, and especially as mothers trying to assuage conditions of poverty. These multiple and overlapping subjectivities also are relevant to the "prospective moral economy" they are mapping. In this case, these migrant women are redefining what it means to be a good mother—and in the process, they are constituting appropriate consumption for the household, what is necessary to provide a future for your children, and what kinds of rights to expect as a worker and as a citizen. In this case of migrant domestic workers, it is clear that both their "moral orienting point" at home and in the past and the "prospective moral economy" under development are understood through ideas about gender.

The practices and discourses of mobile mothers themselves—their gendered justifications for going abroad to find work instead of expecting their state to provide jobs for them and their attempts to constitute a new moral economy—align with the neoliberal practices of the Moldovan state and non- and inter-governmental organizations influential in Moldova. These institutions initially responded to women's migration with counter-trafficking policy agendas to keep young women from risking travel abroad. Yet, now efforts to stop migration are breaking under the very economic constraints that the migrant women quoted above point to: there are no jobs and social services in Moldova and most people live under the poverty line. As a result, women will continue to go abroad to work despite the risks for themselves or for their daughters left at home. Political-economic restructuring in Moldova, as elsewhere, is conditioned by the dictates of IMF and World Bank loans. These institutions influence individual states to shift to neoliberal priorities of fiscal responsibility, placing them in a cycle of loan acquisition and debt repayment. Because of Moldova's dire economic situation and this response to it, these and other development organizations have shifted to advising the Moldovan state not to prevent labor migration, nor focus on the difficult task of creating jobs at home, but instead to construct a system to "capture remittances" and use migrant labor as a tool for development.<sup>18</sup> The state no longer has a stake in keeping people in Moldova. Yet, they do have an interest in "ordering" the disorganized and illegal nature of such movements of people and especially of wages. According to Humphrey, in Russia, the state intervenes in "disorderly" trade to create "order"—licensing certain trading and attempting

to prevent other kinds (2002). Humphrey points out how new laws that guide trading behavior are often formed along ethnic lines and that these laws serve to construct new social and political categories, including a new Russian citizen (2002:75-6). In the case of Moldova, the image of disorderly migrant labor also gives the state reason to intervene through regulations and this may lead to constructing neo-liberal minded Moldovan citizens. Where Humphrey points to ethnicity in these state and citizen processes, I suggest we watch out for the way that gender plays a role in legitimating neoliberal politics. It is not just that these anxieties over social order are expressed because of the type of economic activity these women engage in (whether trading or serving), but because it is women who are doing it. How and why are men and women migrants differently targeted for regulation? How and why are certain routes regulated? How might the construction of migrant women as “bad mothers,” along with new state migration policies that restrict some movements and allow others, potentially lead to the further feminization of the private realm and masculinization of the public sphere that has been so much discussed in the “postsocialism and gender” literature. The relevant transformations here, while still not simply a linear change from socialism to capitalism, are a bit more certain than we were able to describe ten or even five years ago. The “transitions” are not from socialist to postsocialist, but the coincidence of the collapse of socialism and the welfare state and new forms of neoliberal governance. My analysis indicates that we need to reconsider the categorization of these dynamics in this region as “postsocialist” (as well as other scholars’ categorization of migrant women’s situation as “postcolonial,” “postwelfare,” “third world,” or restricted to the “global south”). As the case of the Gagauz migrant domestics demonstrates, there are common gendered neoliberal processes at work.

In conclusion, what clearly emerges from the narratives by all these individuals is a sense that “motherhood is the key to social order.” Migrant mothers are blamed for the loss of social order and they respond by pushing the limits of local norms to position themselves as better mothers than those who stay. In so doing, they assert new ideas of what makes a good mother *and* what makes a better social and economic order. At times, their concept of motherhood may work in their favor to defend their migration and economic actions. It may provide the reasoning for them not only to contribute their share to the household budget, but also to expand their imaginations and desires, and even help them to construct new lifestyles. However, in other contexts, this logic of “motherhood as the key to social order” and the new identities and labor prac-

tices of migrants may work to contain and oppress women and, as I have argued here, align them insidiously with neoliberal rationales.

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### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>There has been some work on migrant sex workers, known as "natashas," but few focus on migrant prostitution as a transnational labor practice. Instead, most hone in on cases of sex trafficking. This argument is outside of the scope of this article. For analyses of this problem in one context see Uygun (2004), Keough (2004), Demirdirek and Whitehead (2004).

<sup>2</sup>One sociologist, Yukseker, has explored the gendered nature of transnational female "tourist traders" ("*chelnoki*") in Turkey (2004).

<sup>3</sup>This ethnographic data on representations of migrant women and their responses was collected as part of 15 months of transnational dissertation research in Turkey and Moldova (February-April 2002, and June 2004-May 2005). In addition to one week in April 2002, I spent September to December 2004 in Moldova, where I conducted participant observation and collected over 20 formal interviews and many more informal interviews in homes and workplaces in several Gagauz villages, in the Gagauz capital, Comrat, and in the Moldovan capital, Chisinau. In Chisinau, I interviewed government, inter-governmental, and non-governmental organizations about migration from Moldova. While it would be ideal to have ethnographies of Gagauz life (particularly regarding gender relations) in Moldova to support this work, unfortunately, only one dissertation on Gagauzia exists in English (Demirdirek 2001). Yet, as will become clear, the experience of former Soviet Russia is also relevant for the Gagauz case and thus I draw on the scholarship on Russia and gender in anthropology to contextualize the experiences of women in Gagauzia. This research was conducted primarily in Turkish and Gagauz. Gagauz is the Turkic language (Azeri is a close second) most similar to the Turkish spoken in Turkey, in which I am fluent. I also speak some Russian. At various times, a Russian and English speaker or a Russian, Turkish, and Gagauz speaker was present during an interview (usually a migrant woman herself) and helped to translate on the spot.

<sup>4</sup>Ries points out that people work through the changes around them through such "talk" (2002). She focuses on Russian stories and mythologizing as agency and argues that discourses about cynicism, mafia, and privatization, among others were used to "express in a simple, linear fashion the enormously complicated, multidimensional realities of their changing society" (278). While Ries does not explore gender in relation to these representa-

tions in this piece, the current article on Gagauz “talk” is inspired by the significance she places on narratives as moral work.

<sup>5</sup>Some works in postcolonial feminist studies include, for instance, Abu Lughod (1992), Grewal and Kaplan (1992), McClintock et al (1997). Anderson (2000) Chang and Groves (2000), Chin (1998) Constable (1997), Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2002), and Parrenas (2001 and 2005) are representative of works that deal with migrant women from the ‘third world’ or ‘global south.’ See footnote 6 for ‘postsocialism and gender’ literature.

<sup>6</sup>A few examples relevant here are Berdahl (1999), Borneman (1991, 1998), Bruno (1997), Gal and Kligman (2000a, 2000b), Gal (1994, 1997), Hemment (2004), Kaneff (2002) Pine (2002), Ries (1994), and Watson (1997).

<sup>7</sup>Moreover, discourses that appeal to their roles as “good mothers” can also be found in narratives of migrant women from other, non-post-socialist, parts of the world, making the case that this is a peculiarly ‘postsocialist’ sentiment less compelling (see Parrenas 2005).

<sup>8</sup>I refer here to Verdery’s *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next* (1996).

<sup>9</sup>While I did not do a comprehensive survey, my sense is that, proportionally, there are more Gagauz women in Turkey than ethnic Romanians in Italy. IOM statistics (2005) show that 34% of migrants from Moldova are women (these statistics are not broken down by ethnic group), but it seemed to me that closer to half of Gagauz women in the villages I traveled through had been to Turkey at some point.

<sup>10</sup>These firms (“*firmalar*”) are essentially travel and employment agencies, but also can be involved in trafficking. They place women in domestic work positions or, especially if they are young, in entertainment or sex work positions.

<sup>11</sup>In fact, in the recent popular film representation of trafficking victims, *Lilya Forever*, it is a mother leaving her daughter to go abroad with her male lover, that is seen as one of the primary reasons that the daughter is later trafficked. Such representations construct one solution for desperate women like Lilya and her mother: Don’t be a slave to passions for men or money, stay home, buck up, and take care of your responsibilities.

<sup>12</sup>Some Gagauz women migrants acknowledged that migration is sometimes a response to domestic abuse, yet this should not be taken to mean that this is peculiar to the Gagauz case. I mention this here because of the perception I found common in the NGO community and among ethnic-Romanians in Moldova that Gagauz participate in more ‘traditional’ gender relations than their counterparts in Moldova. Domestic abuse in Gagauzia is said to be more pronounced than in Moldova more generally. From what I witnessed in Gagauz homes and outside them, however, Gagauz women are not more vulnerable to men’s abuse than other women in Moldova. I would suggest we take into account the negative images of the Gagauz to understand these representations. As discussed previously, to whom do the Gagauz belong—Central Asian Turks, Turkey, Bulgaria, Russia, Moldova—has long been a question. For ethnic-Romanian Moldovans, the Gagauz inhabit a liminal identity vis-à-vis the key divide of European civilization and Oriental barbarism (which in this case means both Islamic Oriental, but also Russian Oriental) and are thus associated with these backwards ‘Others.’ It places them as ambiguously aligned with Turkey or with Russia and supports the distrust of them as some sort of ‘fifth column’ in Moldova.

<sup>13</sup>Granted, her definition of “culture” was “civilization,” which is not the definition I was using, but her quick reply, despite her previous characterization of the “anti-culture” house at which she works, still indicates that she does not see Turkey as having anything civilized to offer, but only money.

<sup>14</sup>“I hate going to Laleli,” one urban woman, Marina, who I spoke to at a stall in the outdoor market in Comrat told me. She had been to Turkey several times to work as a domestic. She did not have any children, but she said she went for her nieces and nephews. She explained, “I have to go to Laleli in order to send things home to them on the minibuses that go back

and forth from Laleli to Comrat." She went on, "our women have a reputation in Turkey. How should I put it, your men fancy our women. And 10% of the women deserve the reputation—there is nothing they wouldn't do for 10 or 20 dollars. And we have destroyed Turkish families, split up husband and wives. But the other 90% pays for it. Most of us just want to go to make some money for our family."

<sup>15</sup>For further discussion of this in the Russian case see Pesman (2000), Ries (2002), and Humphrey (2002). According to Ries (2002), people who are doing well financially in the context of postsocialist Russia are considered "smart" meaning "active, energetic, ambitious." They are also considered "shrewd, always on the lookout for opportunities to make money or gain power; and especially in the current context, it seems to mean negotiating the margins of danger and taking risks, but only those for which you have adequate 'cover'" (2002: 300). As also discussed in Humphrey (2002) and Pesman (2000), Ries too explains how trade is seen as immoral speculation. People who make money are suspect and honest hardworking people are perceived as getting the short end of the stick.

<sup>16</sup>This is familiar to the dynamics of gender and nationalism in other, non-socialist/post-socialist contexts, as well; from my own research, I found this certainly to be true in the case of Turkish women, for instance (for one example, see Kandiyoti 1997).

<sup>17</sup>Such nostalgia over socialism, however, may mark a kind of sentiment that stems from historically deeper cultural ideas about the past in Eastern Europe. For an argument regarding these deeper historical cultural patterns in the Czech case, see Lass 1999.

<sup>18</sup>IOM-Moldova policy agendas, for instance, have moved in lock step: shifting from a counter-trafficking campaign that tells women that they "are not a commodity" to a "smart migration" model that emphasizes getting information before a woman leaves.

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