

PART II. NEW FRONTIERS OF MOBILITY

Chapter 3. Migration, Transnationalism, and Social Change in Central Asia: Everyday Transnational Lives of Uzbek Migrants in Russia

Rustamjon Urinboyev, *Lund University*

Transnational migration has been on social scientists' agenda for nearly three decades.¹ The initial approach that confined the study of migration to the territory of a single nation-state² seems to have lost its relevance and been sidelined in favor of an ever-growing literature on migrant transnationalism. While acknowledging the similarities to long-standing forms by which migrants have maintained their connections to their homelands, current studies argue that today's linkages are different from earlier forms due to rapid developments in information and communication technologies (ICT) that enable migrants to be "simultaneously situated" both in their host country and in their society of origin.³ The concept of migrant transnationalism rests on the idea

that migrants live their lives between two (or more) nation-states, remaining part of the fabric of everyday life and social relations in their home country while becoming part of the socio-economic processes in their receiving country, thereby making home and host societies a single arena for social action.⁴ These transnational linkages are multi-stranded (economic, social, cultural, political, institutional, and emotional) and entwined in the lived experiences of migrants and the families and communities they leave behind.⁵

A review of the international migration literature indicates that transnational migration research has gone well beyond its initial economic framing, in which migrant transnationalism was seen main-

-
- 1 See, for example, Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Blanc-Szanton, "Towards a Definition of Transnationalism," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 645, no. 1 (1992): ix-xiv, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-6632.1992.tb33482.x>; Alejandro Portes, Luis E. Guarnizo, and Patricia Landolt, "The Study of Transnationalism: Pitfalls and Promise of an Emergent Research Field," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22, no. 2 (1999): 217-37; Steven Vertovec, "Conceiving and Researching Transnationalism," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22, no. 2 (1999): 447-62; Peggy Levitt, "Transnational Migration: Taking Stock and Future Directions," *Global Networks* 1, no. 3 (2001): 195-216, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-0374.00013>; Michael P. Smith and Matt Bakker, *Citizenship Across Borders: The Political Transnationalism of El Migrante* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008); Jørgen Carling and Marta Bivand Erdal, "Return Migration and Transnationalism: How Are the Two Connected?" *International Migration* 52, no. 6 (2014): 2-12, <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12180>; Valentina Mazzucato, Bilisuma Bushie Dito, Marzia Grassi, and Jeanne Vivet, "Transnational Parenting and the Well-Being of Angolan Migrant Parents in Europe," *Global Networks* 17, no. 1 (2017): 89-110, <https://doi.org/10.1111/glob.12132>.
- 2 See, for example, Robert Park, *Race and Culture: Essays in the Sociology of Contemporary Man* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1964); Stanley Lieberson, *A Piece of the Pie: Blacks and White Immigrants Since 1880* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980); Brackette F. Williams, "A Class Act: Anthropology and the Race to Nation across Ethnic Terrain," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 18, no. 1 (1989): 401-444.
- 3 Nancy Foner, "What's New About Transnationalism?: New York Immigrants Today and at the Turn of the Century," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 6, no. 3 (1997): 355-75, <https://doi.org/10.1353/dsp.1997.0013>; Ewa T. Morawska, *The New-Old Transmigrants, Their Transnational Lives and Ethnicization: A Comparison of 19th/20th and 20th/21st C. Situations* (Florence: European University Institute, 1999); Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt, "The Study of Transnationalism"; Steven Vertovec, "Transnationalism and Identity," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 27, no. 4 (2001): 573-82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691830120090386>.
- 4 Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Blanc-Szanton, "From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration," *Anthropological Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (1995): 48-63, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3317464>; Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt, "The Study of Transnationalism"; Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller, "Conceptualizing Simultaneity: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society," *International Migration Review* 38, no. 3 (2004): 1002-39; Janine Dahinden, "Contesting Transnationalism? Lessons from the Study of Albanian Migration Networks from Former Yugoslavia," *Global Networks* 5, no. 2 (2005): 191-208, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-0374.2005.00114.x>
- 5 Peggy Levitt, *The Transnational Villagers* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2001); Yen Le. Espiritu, *Home Bound: Filipino American Lives across Cultures, Communities, and Countries* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003); Philip Kelly and Tom Lusia, "Migration and the Transnational Habitus: Evidence from Canada and the Philippines," *Environment and Planning A* 38, no. 5 (2006): 831-47, <https://doi.org/10.1068/a37214>.
-

ly as a border-spanning economic practice.⁶ Critical views, often from anthropology and cultural studies, have suggested that in addition to economic perspectives, migrant transnationalism may also reflect cultural values and affective bonds that sustain transnational activities and networks.⁷ Geographers have argued for the necessity of considering the “varied geographies of transnationalism,” illustrating the way transnationalism as a global process is locally embedded and how it varies from place to place or even from one ethnic group to another.⁸ Another account gleaned from scholarly works calls for the grounded study of transnationalism (transnationalism from below), suggesting that an analytical focus on the everyday circumstances of transnationalism at the level of individuals and families does not preclude us from exploring the impact of macro structures and forces; indeed, it is through the analysis of embodied experiences that we can understand state power and policies.⁹

While recognizing the importance of the transnationalism paradigm, a number of recent works have suggested that translocalism may be more a relevant concept. Based on Appadurai’s framework,¹⁰ studies have emphasized the primacy of place/locality

as the context for cross-border activities, arguing that the substantive links between transnationals are not actually nation-to-nation but local-to-local (e.g. village-to-village, village-to-city, or city-to-city).¹¹ This rests on the assumption that migrants do not necessarily depart from a place of origin and permanently settle in a receiving country. Rather, they remain situated in one “translocal social field” that emerges through daily cross-border exchanges between migrants, former migrants, and migrants’ families and communities at home. Hence, “the formation of migrant selfhood is usually more closely related to localities within nations than to nation-states.”¹²

As shown above, there is extensive literature on transnational practices, communities, and identities. However, much of the literature on transnational migration is based on case studies of immigrant communities living in Western democracies (e.g. the United States, Canada, Western Europe, and Australia), whereas comparatively little has been said about the transnational practices of Central Asian migrants in Russia, despite the fact that Russia receives the third-largest number of migrants in the world (behind the US and Germany) and the Central Asian republics are some of the most remittance-de-

6 Alejandro Portes, “Transnational Communities: Their Emergence and Significance in the Contemporary World-System,” in *Latin America in the World Economy*, ed. Patricio Korzeniewicz and William C. Smith (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 151-168; Thomas Faist, “Economic Activities of Migrants in Transnational Social Spaces,” in *Minorities in European Cities*, ed. Sophie Body-Gendrot and Marco Martiniello (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 11-25; Patricia Landolt, “Salvadoran Economic Transnationalism: Embedded Strategies for Household Maintenance, Immigrant Incorporation, and Entrepreneurial Expansion,” *Global Networks* 1, no. 3 (2001): 217-42, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-0374.00014>.

7 M. Kearney, “The Local and the Global: The Anthropology of Globalization and Transnationalism,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 547-65; Dahinden, “Contesting Transnationalism”; Clemens Greiner, “Patterns of Translocality: Migration, Livelihoods and Identities in Northwest Namibia,” *Sociologus* 60, no. 2 (2010): 131-61.

8 Jørgen Carling, “Toward a Demography of Immigrant Communities and Their Transnational Potential,” *International Migration Review* 42, no. 2 (2008): 449-75, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7379.2008.00131.x>; Alejandro Portes, “Conclusion: Theoretical Convergencies and Empirical Evidence in the Study of Immigrant Transnationalism,” *International Migration Review* 37, no. 3 (2003): 874-92, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7379.2003.tb00161.x>; Kevin Dunn, “Embodied Transnationalism: Bodies in Transnational Spaces,” *Population, Space and Place* 16, no. 1 (2010): 1-9, <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.593>.

9 Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo, *Transnationalism from Below* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1998); Adrian J. Bailey, Richard A. Wright, Alison Mountz, and Ines M. Miyares, “(Re)producing Salvadoran Transnational Geographies,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 92, no. 1 (2002): 125-44, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8306.00283>.

10 Arjun Appadurai, “The Production of Locality,” in *Counterworks: Managing the Diversity of Knowledge*, ed. Richard Fardon (London: Routledge, 1995), 204-25.

11 Smith and Guarnizo, *Transnationalism from Below*; Roger Waldinger and David Fitzgerald, “Transnationalism in Question,” *American Journal of Sociology* 109, no. 5 (2004): 1177-95, <https://doi.org/10.1086/381916>; Michael Peter Smith, “Power in Place/Places of Power: Contextualizing Transnational Research,” *City & Society* 17, no. 1 (2005): 5-34, <https://doi.org/10.1525/city.2005.17.1.5>; Selvaraj Velayutham and Amanda Wise, “Moral Economies of a Translocal Village: Obligation and Shame among South Indian Transnational Migrants,” *Global Networks* 5, no. 1 (2005): 27-47; David Conradson and Deirdre McKay, “Translocal Subjectivities: Mobility, Connection, Emotion,” *Mobilities* 2, no. 2 (2007): 167-74, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450100701381524>; Ruben Gielis, “A Global Sense of Migrant Places: Towards a Place Perspective in the Study of Migrant Transnationalism,” *Global Networks* 9, no. 2 (2009): 271-87, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-0374.2009.00254.x>; Kelly Main and Gerardo Francisco Sandoval, “Placemaking in a Translocal Receiving Community: The Relevance of Place to Identity and Agency,” *Urban Studies* 52, no. 1 (2015): 71-86, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098014522720>; Marta Moskal, “When I Think Home I Think Family Here and There: Translocal and Social Ideas of Home in Narratives of Migrant Children and Young People,” *Geoforum* 58 (January 2015): 143-52, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2014.11.011>; Jennifer McGarrigle and Eduardo Ascensão, “Emplaced Mobilities: Lisbon as a Translocality in the Migration Journeys of Punjabi Sikhs to Europe,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (2017): 1-20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1306436>.

12 Conradson and McKay, “Translocal Subjectivities.”

pendent economies in the world. Given the socio-political and cultural differences between Western and post-Soviet societies, we cannot assume that the methodological tools and theoretical perspectives developed in Western contexts are necessarily applicable to Russia, where the repressive socio-political environment, the lack of democratic culture, and arbitrary law enforcement leave little room for migrant legalization, transnational activism, and collective mobilization. Armed with the “varied geographies of transnationalism” perspective,¹³ it is reasonable to assume that migrant transnationalism is not the same everywhere and may take on different meanings, forms, and functions depending on the socio-political context, the legal environment, the economic system, and cultural factors. From this perspective, there is a great need for empirically grounded knowledge of migrant transnationalism.

In spite of a growing body of literature on migration flows and processes in the post-Soviet context, the literature on migrant transnationalism, especially with regard to Central Asian migrants in Russia, is still limited to a handful of review articles and empirical studies.¹⁴ The existing research focuses on “push” and “pull” factors influencing migration,¹⁵ the economic impact of migration and remittances on migrant-sending societies,¹⁶ migrant strategies for dealing with law enforcement and informality in the host

country,¹⁷ sexual risks,¹⁸ difficult living and working conditions,¹⁹ xenophobia and discrimination,²⁰ the political impact of migration in sending societies,²¹ and the effects of migration and remittances on the ritual economy, gender-based power relations, traditions, social norms, status, and hierarchies in sending communities.²² Common to this literature is a focus on social processes and events that occur in either migrant-sending societies or migrant-receiving ones, but not both.

Accordingly, there has been little scholarly investigation of Central Asian migrants’ transnational practices within the Russian migration regime. Addressing this research gap is particularly important in view of the growing use of everyday technologies of transnationalism (smartphones and social media) among Central Asian migrants in Russia, which may trigger social changes in both migrant-sending and -receiving societies. Moreover, the study of Central Asian migrants in Russia has important implications for the broader literature on migrant transnationalism, for a number of reasons.

Firstly, unlike Western-style democracies, where the rule of law is embedded into the national culture, Russia is characterized by weak rule of law, malfunctioning institutions, large shadow economies, a poor human rights record, widespread xenophobia, and weak civil society.²³ This implies that Central Asian

13 Dunn, “Embodied Transnationalism.”

14 Touraj Atabaki and Sanjot Mehendale, *Central Asia and the Caucasus: Transnationalism and Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 2004); Marlene Laruelle, “Central Asian Labor Migrants in Russia: The ‘Diasporization’ of the Central Asian States?” *The China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 5 (2007): 101-119; Vanessa Ruget and Burul Usmanalieva, “Social and Political Transnationalism Among Central Asian Migrants and Return Migrants,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 58, no. 6 (2011): 48-60, <https://doi.org/10.2753/PPC1075-8216580604>; Philipp Schröder and Manja Stephan-Emmrich, “The Institutionalization of Mobility: Well-Being and Social Hierarchies in Central Asian Translocal Livelihoods,” *Mobilities* (2014): 1-24.

15 Matthias Schmidt and Lira Sagynbekova, “Migration Past and Present: Changing Patterns in Kyrgyzstan,” *Central Asian Survey* 27, no. 2 (2008): 111-27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634930802355030>.

16 Gianni Betti and Lars Lundgren, “The Impact of Remittances and Equivalence Scales on Poverty in Tajikistan,” *Central Asian Survey* 31, no. 4 (2012): 395-408, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2012.738849>.

17 Madeleine Reeves, “Clean Fake: Authenticating Documents and Persons in Migrant Moscow,” *American Ethnologist* 40, no. 3 (2013): 508-24, <https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12036>.

18 Stevan Weine, Alexandra Golobof, Mahbat Bahromov, Adrianna Kashuba, Tohir Kalandarov, Jonbek Jonbekov, and Sana Loue, “Female Migrant Sex Workers in Moscow: Gender and Power Factors and HIV Risk,” *Women & Health* 53, no. 1 (2013): 56-73, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03630242.2012.739271>.

19 Tatiana Nikolaevna Yudina, “Labour Migration into Russia: The Response of State and Society,” *Current Sociology* 53, no. 4 (2005): 583-606, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392105052716>.

20 John Round and Irina Kuznetsova, “Necropolitics and the Migrant as a Political Subject of Disgust: The Precarious Everyday of Russia’s Labour Migrants,” *Critical Sociology* (May 2016): 1-18.

21 Marlene Laruelle, *Migration and Social Upheaval as the Face of Globalization in Central Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

22 Madeleine Reeves, “Black Work, Green Money: Remittances, Ritual, and Domestic Economies in Southern Kyrgyzstan,” *Slavic Review* 71, no. 1 (2012): 108-34, <https://doi.org/10.5612/slavicreview.71.1.0108>.

23 Vladimir Gel’man, “The Unrule of Law in the Making: The Politics of Informal Institution Building in Russia,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 56, no. 7 (2004): 1021-1040; Alena V. Ledeneva, *Can Russia Modernise?: Sistema, Power Networks and Informal Governance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Anna-Liisa Heusala and Kaarina Aitamurto, eds., *Migrant Workers in Russia: Global Challenges of the Shadow Economy in Societal Transformation* (London: Routledge, 2016).

migrants in Russia can hardly engage in collective action or transnational activism due to structural constraints and widespread anti-migrant sentiment. Central Asian migrants do engage in transnational practices, but their activities and networks are hidden from the public eye and based on a low-profile social order,²⁴ the study of which requires the use of context-specific methodological tools and analytical frameworks.

Secondly, this restrictive socio-political environment means that transnational practices, relations, and identities are produced and maintained via smartphones and social media. The role of these technologies in everyday transnationalism is well researched within the literature on transnational migration.²⁵ They play a different role in the Russian context, however, providing a virtual platform for translocal place-making and the reproduction of transnational relations, identities, and communities in an undemocratic and xenophobic environment.

Thirdly, as migrants work in the shadow economy and live in a context of weak rule of law, migrants' transnational relations and identities serve as an enforcement mechanism for the informal market, regulating the contractual relations between migrants, their home communities, and other actors.²⁶ Thus, transnationalism can be interpreted as a form of informal governance and legal order produced through cross-border interactions between migrants and the families and communities they leave behind.

The above considerations inform my position in this chapter, which is intended to contribute to the debates on migrant transnationalism in two distinct ways. Empirically, I present the results of extensive multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork undertaken in Moscow, Russia, and Ferghana region, Uzbekistan. My case study looks at Uzbek migrants in Moscow and their families and communities in Shabboda village in Ferghana. Unlike in Western countries, where migrants establish relatively functional transnation-

al communities, there is little in the way of "Uzbek transnational community" in Russia due to the restrictive legal environment and anti-migrant sentiment. Even though Uzbek migrants' transnational activism is hardly visible in public places, I argue that rapid improvements in communication technologies (e.g. smartphones and social media) have enabled Uzbek migrants to stay in touch with their home societies, as well as create permanent, telephone-based translocal communities in Moscow, usually centered around migrants who hail from the same *mahalla* or village in Uzbekistan. In other words, Uzbek migrants' transnational place-making occurs via smartphones and on social media. The existence of this telephone-based transnational environment helps migrants cope with the challenges of *musofirchilik* (being alien) and avoid or maneuver around structural constraints such as complicated residence registration and work permit rules, social exclusion, racism, and the lack of social security.

Through an ethnographic study of Uzbek migrant workers and their families, I demonstrate the "everydayness" of material, emotional, social, and symbolic networks and exchanges that connect Shabboda village to Moscow. More specifically, I show how village-level identities, social norms, and relations (e.g., reciprocity, trust, obligation, age hierarchies, gossip, and social sanctions) are reproduced and maintained across distance using smartphones and social media, and have an identifiable impact on the outcomes of many practices in which Uzbek migrants (and other actors) engage in Moscow.

Theoretically, I use the aforementioned "thick" ethnography to advance the notion of "telephone-based migrant translocal communities" as a subset of the migrant transnationalism/translocalism literature that describes hidden and low-profile transnational practices, relations, identities, and networks in undemocratic political regimes that emerge out of the necessity to cope with the repressive politi-

24 Rustamjon Urinboyev, "Establishing 'Uzbek Mahalla' via Smartphones and Social Media: Everyday Transnational Lives of Uzbek Labour Migrants in Russia," in *Constructing the Uzbek State: Narratives of Post-Soviet Years*, ed. Marlene Laruelle (Boulder, CO: Lexington Books), 119-48.

25 See, for example, Paul C. Adams and Rina Ghose, "India.com: The Construction of a Space Between," *Progress in Human Geography* 27, no. 4 (2003): 414-37, <https://doi.org/10.1191/0309132503ph4370a>; Steven Vertovec, "Cheap Calls: The Social Glue of Migrant Transnationalism," *Global Networks* 4, no. 2 (2004): 219-224; Deirdre McKay, "Translocal Circulation: Place and Subjectivity in an Extended Filipino Community," *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 7, no. 3 (2006): 265-78, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14442210600979357>; Miyase Christensen, "Online Mediations in Transnational Spaces: Cosmopolitan (Re)formations of Belonging and Identity in the Turkish Diaspora," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35, no. 5 (2012): 888-905, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2011.628039>; Lisa Nakamura, *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet* (London: Routledge, 2013).

26 Rustamjon Urinboyev, "Migration and Transnational Informality in Post-Soviet Societies: Ethnographic Study of 'Po Rukam' Experiences of Uzbek Migrant Workers in Moscow," in *Migrant Workers in Russia: Global Challenges of the Shadow Economy in Societal Transformation*, ed. Anna-Liisa Heusala and Kaarina Aitamurto (London: Routledge, 2016).

cal environment, xenophobia, weak rule of law, a lack of social security, and the risks of informal employment. I also contribute to the debates on migrants' legal transnationalism through an investigation of daily transnational interactions between Shabboda migrants and the families they leave behind. Like all other transnational or translocal communities engaged in the production of locality and identity, Uzbek/Shabboda migrants based in Moscow maintain daily interactions with their village. What is distinct about this community is that they reproduce and rely on their village-level identities, social norms and relations (e.g., reciprocity, trust, obligation, age hierarchies, gossip, and social sanctions) as a form of law and governance when regulating their contractual obligations and relations in the informal market.

This paper is based on multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Moscow, Russia, and Ferghana, Uzbekistan. The fieldwork took place for a total of 13 months in the period between January 2014 and May 2017. The fieldwork sites were chosen because Moscow is the city with largest number of Uzbek migrants, while Ferghana—due to its population density and high unemployment rate—is one of the main migrant-sending regions in Uzbekistan. During my field research, I strived for spontaneity and sudden discoveries and therefore went to fieldwork sites “blank”—that is, without any established fieldwork strategy or preconceived theoretical framework. I also treated migrants as experts on the migration situation in Russia, refraining from bringing in my own perspective. Due to my own village background and Uzbek ethnicity, I was well connected to the Uzbek migrant worker community in Moscow. This enabled me to participate in migrants' daily lives and understand what it was to be a typical migrant worker. Informants were asked for their consent to participate in the study. Due to the sensitivity of the data, I have changed the names and locations of all informants and omitted any information that might jeopardize the actors concerned.

The rest of the chapter proceeds as follows. The next section presents the socio-political and legal

context of the Russian migrant market, which is instructive for understanding the nuances of Russian migration governance and the perspective I take on migrant transnationalism. The chapter then lays out the basic characteristics of the case study group (Uzbek migrants) on which my empirical data and analysis focus. I go on to present the results of my fieldwork. Finally, the chapter draws out the implications of the ethnographic material for debates on migrant transnationalism and the area studies (post-Soviet and Central Asian studies) literature, as well as highlighting the study's theoretical and empirical contributions.

The Russian Migrant Labor Market

With 11.6 million foreign-born people on its territory, Russia is the third-largest recipient of migrants worldwide, behind the US and Germany.²⁷ The majority of migrants (approximately 5 million) originate from three Central Asian republics—Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan—and generally come to Russia under the visa-free regime.²⁸ These flows can be explained by Russia's declining population and increasing demand for cheap foreign labor, on the one hand, and poverty and unemployment in Central Asia, on the other.²⁹ Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Yekaterinburg have the highest concentrations of migrants.³⁰

Despite the existence of a visa-free regime between Russia and other post-Soviet republics under the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) agreement, labor migrants are required to obtain residence registration within seven days of arrival and proper documentation for employment within thirty days.³¹ The work permit (*patent*) is expensive and difficult to obtain, especially since legislative changes in 2015. Migrants will spend at least 22,000 rubles (US\$385) on a work permit, as well as a 4,000-ruble (US\$70) monthly fee. In addition, they must purchase health insurance, provide proof of medical tests, and pass a test on Russian language, history,

27 “International Migration Stock 2015,” United Nations Population Division, 2015, <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates15.shtml>.

28 Sergei Abashin, “Central Asian Migration,” *Russian Politics & Law* 51, no. 3 (2013): 6–20, <https://doi.org/10.2753/RUP1061-1940510301>.

29 Emil Nasritdinov, “Only by Learning How to Live Together Differently Can We Live Together at All”: Readability and Legibility of Central Asian Migrants' Presence in Urban Russia,” *Central Asian Survey* 35, no. 2 (2016): 257–75, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2016.1153837>.

30 Heusala and Aitamurto, *Migrant Workers in Russia*.

31 Following the accession of Kyrgyzstan to the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union, the legal status and conditions of Kyrgyz migrants have improved to some extent. Kyrgyz migrants are no longer obliged to obtain work permits (*patents*), but they are still required to comply with residence registration rules.

and law. However, many migrants can barely comply with these requirements due to their extremely low salaries and poor knowledge of Russian language and laws.³² Hence, most migrants remain undocumented: they lack residential registration, a work permit, or both. A large proportion of them work in the construction sector, where there is a high demand for cheap labor.

This situation is exacerbated by the Russian legal environment, which is notorious for corruption and the weak rule of law.³³ What this means in practice is that even those migrants who possess all the required paperwork cannot be sure that they will not experience legal problems when stopped by Russian police officers and migration officials.³⁴ Under these circumstances, “legal” or “illegal” status becomes contingent on contextual factors, e.g., how, when, and where the interaction between migrants and Russian state officials take place, as well as on individual factors, such as migrants’ knowledge of informal rules and their ability to adapt to the legal environment (their street smarts, ability to find common ground (*obshchii iazyk*) with state officials, bribery skills, and connections with street institutions, such as racketeers). Hence, it is almost impossible for a migrant to be fully formal.³⁵

Due to exorbitant work permit fees and the arbitrariness of the law, many migrants end up working in the shadow economy, where they can survive

with limited language skills and documents. This trend seems to be confirmed by the Russian Federal Migration Service’s (FMS)³⁶ 2015 statistics showing that nearly 3 million foreign nationals in Russia had violated the legal terms of their stay.³⁷ Russian migration experts estimate that the number of undocumented migrants could be around 5 million, nearly twice the figure reported in official statistics.³⁸ One indication of the size of the shadow economy is the lengths to which the Russian authorities go to limit the phenomenon through draconian laws and border control infrastructure, including widening the grounds for issuing re-entry bans to migrants who have violated laws during previous stays in Russia.³⁹ Such bans are applied even for minor infractions. As Kubal notes, 1.8 million foreigners were banned from re-entering Russia between 2013 and 2016; the majority of these foreigners are citizens of the three Central Asian republics.⁴⁰

However, there is no evidence that these measures have produced the desired effect. This can be explained by dysfunctional institutions and the lack of a rule of law,⁴¹ which create a space for various informal strategies and allow migrants to maneuver around the restrictive legal system. This implies that the more restrictive the immigration laws are, the higher will be the value of bribes that migrants give Russian police officers, migration officials, and border guards in order to continue working in Russia.⁴²

32 Yuliya Zabyelina, “Between Exploitation and Expulsion: Labour Migration, Shadow Economy and Organised Crime,” in *Migrant Workers in Russia: Global Challenges of the Shadow Economy in Societal Transformation*, ed. Anna-Liisa Heusala and Kaarina Aitamurto (London: Routledge, 2016).

33 Gel’man, “The Unrule of Law”; Alena V. Ledeneva, *How Russia Really Works: The Informal Practices That Shaped Post-Soviet Politics and Business* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

34 Madeleine Reeves, “Living from the Nerves: Deportability, Indeterminacy, and the ‘Feel of Law’ in Migrant Moscow,” *Social Analysis* 59, no. 4 (2015): 119–36, <https://doi.org/10.3167/sa.2015.590408>; Agnieszka Kubal, “Spiral Effect of the Law: Migrants’ Experiences of the State Law in Russia—A Comparative Perspective,” *International Journal of Law in Context* 12, no. 4 (2016): 453–68, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1744552316000215>.

35 Round and Kuznetsova. “Necropolitics and the Migrant.”

36 It should be noted that FMS was disbanded on April 5, 2016 and its functions and authorities were transferred to the Main Directorate for Migration Affairs (GUVM), a newly established law enforcement agency that is part of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia.

37 Michael Pochuev, “Law Imposing 10-Year Entry Ban on Violators of Sojourn Procedures Comes into Force,” TASS. January 10, 2015, <http://tass.ru/en/russia/770591>.

38 S. Ryazantsev, *Trudovaia migratsiia v stranakh SNG i Baltii: Tendentsii, posledstviia, regulirovanie* (Moscow: Formula prava, 2008); Elena Chikadze and Olga Brednikova, “Migrants from Uzbekistan in Russia: Communicative Strategies and Practices of Consuming (Mass-Media) Information,” Centre for Independent Social Research, <http://cisr.ru/en/projects/migranty-iz-uzbekistana-v-rossii-praktiki-potrebleniya-informatsii-i-kommunikativnye-strategii/>; Lyubov Bisson, “Russia’s Immigration Policy: Challenges and Tools,” Russia/NIS Center, https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/ifri_rnv_91_liubov_bisson_eng_january_2016_protege.pdf.

39 Sergey Abashin, “Migration Policies in Russia: Laws and Debates,” in *Migrant Workers in Russia: Global Challenges of the Shadow Economy in Societal Transformation*, ed. Anna-Liisa Heusala and Kaarina Aitamurto (London: Routledge, 2016), 16–34.

40 Agnieszka Kubal, “Entry Bar as Surreptitious Deportation? *Zapret na V’ezd* in Russian Immigration Law and Practice: A Comparative Perspective,” *Law & Social Inquiry* (2016), <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/lsi.12232/full>.

41 Caroline Humphrey and David Sneath, “Shanghaied by the Bureaucracy: Bribery and Post-Soviet Officialdom in Russia and Mongolia,” in *Between Morality and the Law: Corruption, Anthropology, and Comparative Society*, ed. Italo Pardo (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 85–99; K. Hendley, “The Puzzling Non-Consequences of Societal Distrust of Courts: Explaining the Use of Russian Courts,” *Cornell International Law Journal* 45 (2012): 517–67.

42 Rustamjon Urinboev, “Arbeitsmigration und Schattenwirtschaft in Russland,” *Religion Und Gesellschaft in Ost Und West* 7, no. 8 (2017): 18–19.

Moreover, the risk of not re-entering Russia prompts many migrants to limit their returns home and concentrate on one long stay, during which they try to earn as much as possible, knowing that this might be the only opportunity they have for a long time.⁴³ A small decrease in the number of labor migrants is more the result of the recession in Russia in autumn 2014, which caused a drop in workplaces and incomes, than it is proof of the efficiency of the prohibitive measures.⁴⁴ Thus, a distinctive feature of the Russian migration regime is a large shadow economy heavily reliant on cheap and legally unprotected foreign labor.⁴⁵

This restrictive legal environment can be seen as an outcome of the societal clash between the economic need for cheap labor, on the one hand, and xenophobia, on the other.⁴⁶ The rise of anti-migrant attitudes is partly connected with the absence of formal migrant integration policies in Russia.⁴⁷ Instead of introducing migrant integration measures, the Russian authorities balance these conflicting social and economic demands by tightening migration control policies that push migrants further into the shadow economy.⁴⁸ These measures intensify xenophobic and pejorative attitudes toward migrants. A survey conducted by the Levada Center in 2016 showed that the majority of Russians (52 percent) agreed with the statement, “Russia for ethnic Russians,” while nearly 70 percent of respondents said that the government should restrict the influx of Central Asian migrants

and that undocumented migrants should be expelled from Russia.⁴⁹ The prevalence of such anti-migrant sentiments can be explained by biased portrayals of migrants in the Russian mass media, which have produced animosity, fear, and distrust among the host population.⁵⁰

Racism is an integral part of everyday life for Central Asian migrants. Such negative attitudes toward Central Asian workers existed even during Soviet times, in spite of the popular discourse of *druzhba narodov* (friendship of the peoples). Central Asians who worked on construction sites (*limitchiki*) in Moscow and Leningrad were perceived as *chernye* (black) and faced discrimination.⁵¹ According to Svetlana Gannushkina, chair of the Civic Assistance Committee, a Moscow-based migrant rights NGO, antagonism toward Central Asian migrants is no surprise; she says there has never been a warm attitude toward Uzbeks and Tajiks, even during the Soviet period.⁵² Human rights groups have demonstrated the harsh living and working conditions of labor migrants in Russia.⁵³ The academic literature paints a similar picture, showing that migrants in Russia experience numerous abuses, such as exploitation, discrimination, unsafe working conditions, wage theft, physical violence, extra-judicial detention, arbitrary law enforcement, and a highly punitive judicial system.⁵⁴ On top of this, migrants have to deal with corrupt police officers, who regularly extort money from them.⁵⁵ Today, anyone walking on the streets

43 Alexander Maier, “Tajik Migrants with Re-Entry Bans to the Russian Federation” (Dushanbe, Tajikistan: International Organization for Migration, 2014).

44 Abashin, “Migration Policies in Russia.”

45 Zaybelina, “Between Exploitation and Expulsion.”

46 Caress Rene Schenk, “A Typical Country of Immigration? The Russian Immigration Regime in Comparative Perspective” (PhD diss., Miami University of Ohio, 2010), https://etd.ohiolink.edu/ap/10?0::NO:10:P10_ACCESSION_NUM:miami1274997400; Abashin, “Migration Policies in Russia.”

47 Dmitry Gorenburg, “The Adaptation of Migrants in Russia: Editor’s Introduction,” *Russian Politics & Law* 52, no. 6 (2014): 3–7.

48 Schenk, “A Typical Country of Immigration?”; Heusala and Aitamurto, eds., *Migrant Workers in Russia*.

49 Karina Pipia, “Intolerantnost’ i ksenofobiia,” Levada Center, 2016, <http://www.levada.ru/2016/10/11/intolerantnost-i-ksenofobiya/>.

50 Zaybelina, “Between Exploitation and Expulsion.”

51 Jeff Sahadeo, “Druzhba Narodov or Second-Class Citizenship? Soviet Asian Migrants in a Post-Colonial World,” *Central Asian Survey* 26, no. 4 (2007): 559–79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634930802018463>.

52 Ekaterina Nerozhnikova, “Strangers in the Village,” *openDemocracy*, July 13, 2017, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/ekaterina-neroznikova/strangers-in-village>.

53 “Russian Federation: Violent Racism out of Control,” Amnesty International, 2006, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR46/022/2006>; “Are You Happy to Cheat Us?: Exploitation of Migrant Construction Workers in Russia,” Human Rights Watch, 2009; Umidbek, “Sverdlovskda ish haqini ololmagan O‘zbeklarni sudlaladilar,” *Ozodlik radiosi/Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, September 16, 2015, <http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/27251868.html>; Nerozhnikova, “Strangers in the Village.”

54 Laruelle, “Central Asian Labor Migrants”; Asel Doolotkeldieva, “Conducting Interviews with Labor Migrants in Moscow,” *Central Eurasian Studies Review* 7, no. 2 (2008): 29–33; Schenk, “A Typical Country of Immigration?”; Sergej Abashin, “Migration from Central Asia to Russia in the New Model of World Order,” *Russian Politics & Law* 52, no. 6 (2014): 8–23; Reeves, “Living from the Nerves”; Kubal, “Spiral Effect of the Law.”

55 Matthew Light, *Fragile Migration Rights: Freedom of Movement in Post-Soviet Russia* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016); Round and Kuznetsova, “Necropolitics and the Migrant.”

of large Russian cities will quickly notice police officers checking the documents of Central Asian and Caucasian migrants. This is especially visible on the Moscow metro, where police officers usually stand at the top of the escalator to catch migrants.⁵⁶

Given that the majority of labor migrants are undocumented and work in the shadow economy, Russian employers have a strong incentive to exploit migrants and withhold or delay their salaries. Under the Russian Civil Code, cases regarding transactions completed in the shadow economy—in violation of labor regulations or tax codes—cannot be heard in state courts. Moreover, migrants might be reluctant to approach state institutions because doing so would reveal their undocumented status and invite punishment by the state. Even those migrants who possess all the required papers and work legally cannot be sure that they will get paid for their work. A good example of this phenomenon is the subway construction project in Moscow: a scandal erupted when it emerged that the Uzbek and Tajik migrant workers who were building the subway had not been paid for five months. Migrants gathered near the office of the Ingeocom construction company demanding their unpaid wages, but the company management said that these workers did not have the right to strike, as they were not citizens of the Russian Federation.⁵⁷

All in all, the general political situation in Russia leaves migrants entirely vulnerable to the whims of their employers.⁵⁸ There are very few civil society organizations and migrant rights activists that labor migrants can approach for protection.⁵⁹ Although diaspora groups are assumed to be the first port of call for migrants seeking assistance, their role and utility in migrants' lives is quite limited. Media reports indicate that certain members of Central Asian diaspora groups have actually facilitated the exploitation of migrant workers, at times acting as middlemen between abusive employers and potential migrants.⁶⁰ A rare

example of an effective migrant rights organization is a Civic Assistance Committee in Moscow that assists migrants in obtaining unpaid wages and appealing deportation orders. The Trade Union of Labor Migrant Workers also assists migrants in recovering their unpaid wages from employers. It should be noted, however, that the resources and reach of these two organizations are limited to a very small segment of the migrant population; the majority of migrants rely on their transnational networks, kinship groups, and informal social safety nets to organize their precarious livelihoods.

Thus, the everyday lives of labor migrants in Russia are characterized by a constant sense of insecurity, with the ever-present threats of exploitation, deportation, police corruption, racism, physical violence, and even death. The unrule of law is pervasive and a migrant's "legal" or "illegal" status is contingent on contextual factors and individual skills. Employment in the shadow economy is the rule for many migrants, and there is little or no room for collective mobilization. Despite all these hardships, migrants see working in Russia as a vital economic lifeline for their families back home, a fact that leads them to accept everyday injustices, exploitation, and racism.⁶¹

It should be noted, however, that Central Asian migrants are not merely passive, agency-less subjects constrained by structural barriers. Indeed, their total lack of security has compelled them to create informal networks and structures for coping with risks and uncertainties.⁶² These migrant communities and networks serve as an alternative integration and adaptation mechanism, providing access to basic public goods, such as jobs, housing, and physical and economic security. The networks usually revolve around the bonds of kinship, region of origin, or ethnic affiliation, which adapt many "domestic" practices to the conditions of migration and temporary residence.⁶³

56 Round and Kuznetsova, "Necropolitics and the Migrant."

57 "Moscow Metro Construction Workers Strike Over 5 Months' Unpaid Wages," *The Moscow Times*, March 11, 2017, <https://themoscowtimes.com/news/moscow-metro-construction-workers-strike-over-5-months-unpaid-wages-52139>.

58 Laruelle, "Central Asian Labor Migrants."

59 Andrei V. Korobkov, "Migration Trends in Central Eurasia: Politics versus Economics," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 40, no. 2 (2007): 169–89, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2007.04.001>; Yan Matushevich, "Understanding Migrant Mobilization in Post-Soviet Russia: Do Existing Theoretical Frameworks Apply?" (MA Thesis, University of Oxford, 2015), https://www.academia.edu/15577867/Understanding_Migrant_Mobilization_in_Post-Soviet_Russia_Do_Existing_Theoretical_Frameworks_Apply.

60 Qudrat Davlat, "Rossiyadagi o'zbeklar jamiyatlari liderlari orasida yangi mojaro boshlandi," *Radio Free Europe Uzbek Service*, September 23, 2016, <http://www.ozodlik.org/a/28009246.html>; "Rossiia: Astrahanskije Uzbekistansy trebuiut nakazat' odnogo iz liderov Kongressa Uzbekov," *Fergananeews.com*, September 19, 2016, <http://www.fergananeews.com/news/25348>.

61 Matushevich, "Understanding Migrant Mobilization."

62 Zaybelina, "Between Exploitation and Expulsion"; Urinboyev, "Arbeitsmigration und Schattenwirtschaft."

63 Abashin, "Migration from Central Asia"; Urinboyev, "Migration and Transnational Informality."

The existence of such informal infrastructure allows migrants to establish some form of integration in an otherwise restrictive socio-legal environment, for example by devising specific survival strategies, creating intra-group solidarity, distributing information about jobs, and building up a network for spreading livelihood risks and dealing with emergency situations (e.g., medical treatment, repatriation of a deceased individual to the home country, etc.). These networks—which have their own infrastructure of trust, security, and mutual aid—constitute an important social safety net for migrants.⁶⁴ Some commentators refer to such migrant networks by monikers such as “Uzbekskii Peterburg,”⁶⁵ “Kyrgyztown,”⁶⁶ and “Moskvabad.”⁶⁷

Due to prevalent xenophobic attitudes and the repressive political environment, these networks are hidden from the public eye and based on a low-profile social order. Another factor contributing to this tendency is corrupt police officers, who view migrants as a source of *kormushka* (feeding-trough). Given that the majority of migrants have semi-legal status and work in the shadow economy without formal employment contracts, Russian police officers can easily find reasons to extort money from migrants. Even if migrants possess all the documents required by the law, they are often asked for bribes when stopped by the police on the street or metro.⁶⁸ Due to these experiences, migrants try to stay away from public places as much as they can. They do not gather in public to socialize, instead carrying out their daily interactions in the virtual world, through smartphones and social media apps.⁶⁹ In sum, the distinctive feature of the Russian migration regime is the presence of a hidden world of migrants that is based on its own economy,

virtual platform, legal order, and welfare infrastructure.

Uzbek Labor Migrants in Russia

Labor migration from Uzbekistan to Russia began in the mid-2000s.⁷⁰ According to February 2017 statistics presented by the Russian news agency RBC, there are around 1.51 million Uzbek citizens present on the territory of the Russian Federation.⁷¹ The majority of Uzbek migrants are young, low-skilled men who originate from rural areas or small towns. These migrants’ main goal is to earn money for wedding expenses and/or building a house.⁷² Most of them are from the densely populated Ferghana Valley, where the unemployment rate is high.⁷³ Uzbek migrants mainly work in construction, agriculture, retail trade, and services, as well as in industry and transport.⁷⁴ Due to high accommodation costs and precarious working conditions, migrants rarely bring their family members to Russia, but usually send their earnings home to provide for their families’ daily needs and other expenses (building a new house, buying a car, life-cycle rituals, medical treatment, education, etc.). Hence, for the majority of Uzbek migrants, resettlement or integration into Russian society is not a primary goal. They arrive in Russia in the spring to do temporary seasonal work and then return home in autumn.⁷⁵ Even those migrants who spend most of their time in Russia and rarely visit home regard their situation as “temporary” and maintain close ties with their family and *mahalla* (local community), assuming that they will eventually return to their homeland.⁷⁶

64 Matushevich, “Understanding Migrant Mobilization”; Rustamjon Urinboyev and Abel Polese, “Informality Currencies: A Tale of Misha, His *Brigada* and Informal Practices among Uzbek Labour Migrants in Russia,” *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe* 24, no. 3 (2016): 191–206, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0965156X.2016.1261215>.

65 Andrey Yakimov, “Uzbekskii Peterburg” (lecture given at the European University in Saint Petersburg, December 22, 2015).

66 Evgeni Varshaver, Anna Rocheva, Evgeny Kochkin, and Ekaterina Kuldina, “Kirgizskie migranty v Moskve: rezultaty kolichestvennogo issledovaniia integratsionnykh traektorii,” Social Science Research Network, <http://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2425312>.

67 “Moskva allaqachon Moskva-obodga aylanib bo’ldi,” *BBC Uzbek*, March 20, 2012, http://www.bbc.co.uk/uzbek/maxsus_loyiha/2012/03/120320_cy_muslim_russia_migrants_nationalists.shtml.

68 Reeves, “Clean Fake”; Round and Kuznetsova, “Necropolitics and the Migrant.”

69 Urinboyev, “Establishing ‘Uzbek Mahalla.’”

70 Abashin, “Central Asian Migration.”

71 Vladimir Dergachev and Yevgeniya Kuznetsova, “Vpervye s 2013 goda v Rossii otmechen prirost migratsii,” *RBC*, March 16, 2017, <http://www.rbc.ru/politics/16/03/2017/58ca55a39a794772eb8b702e>.

72 Abashin, “Migration from Central Asia.”

73 Laruelle, “Central Asian Labor Migrants.”

74 Chikadze and Brednikova, “Migrants from Uzbekistan in Russia.”

75 Victor Agadjanian and Natalya Zotova, “Sexual and Reproductive Risks of Central Asian Female Migrants in the Context of the HIV Epidemic,” 2013, http://agadjanian.org/uploads/3/0/8/5/3085008/agadjanianzotova_report.pdf.

76 Abashin, “Migration from Central Asia.”

Even though many Uzbek migrants come to Russia as temporary workers and do not aim to settle there permanently, they actively engage in transnational activities and place-making. Anyone walking on the streets of Moscow quickly notices that there are hundreds of Uzbek cafes and *choyxonas*, and would probably assume that these sites provide a platform for Uzbek migrants to engage in transnational activities. However, these cafes merely serve as eating-places and migrants meet there only occasionally, for example during holidays (*Eid*, *Navruz*) and for important social events (such as birthdays). This is largely connected to the repressive socio-legal environment that compels migrants to stay out of the public gaze.

Despite these challenges, rapid improvements in communication technologies (e.g., smartphones and social media) have enabled Uzbek migrants to create permanent, telephone-based transnational identities, communities, and activities in Moscow, which usually include migrants who hail from the same *mahalla*, village, or town in Uzbekistan. The existence of such telephone-based transnational communities and interactions helps migrants cope with the challenges of *musofirchilik* (being alien) and avoiding or maneuvering around structural constraints and the lack of a social safety net. Hence, Uzbek migrants' transnationalism is not merely an economic activity or cultural practice, an explanation that we find in the mainstream literature on migrant transnationalism, but is both a coping strategy and a mode of resistance to the repressive political and socio-legal environment.

These processes will be investigated using an ethnographic study of the everyday life and experiences of Uzbek migrants in Moscow and their families and communities in Shabboda village in rural Ferghana. The two empirical case studies will be presented in the following sections.

Shabboda Village

Shabboda, where I conducted fieldwork, is a village (*qishloq*) in the Ferghana Valley and has a population of more than 18,000 people. Administratively, Shabboda village comprises 28 *mahallas* (neighborhood communities). In turn, each *mahalla* con-

tains 150 to 300 *oilas* (immediate families), which are gathered around 20 to 30 *urug's* (extended families/kinship groups). This indicates that there are three interlinked social organizations within the village—*mahalla*, *urug'*, and *oila*—which are involved in a relationship of mutual dependence, neighborliness, and reciprocity. Village residents engage in a number of activities to make a living: cucumber and grape production, raising livestock for sale as beef, informal trade, construction work, daily manual labor (*mardikorchilik*), fruit-picking, and brokerage. Nevertheless, remittances sent from Russia still constitute the main source of income for many households. During “migration season,” the majority of inhabitants are elderly people, women, and children.

Most village residents have sons or close relatives working in Russia. Daily conversations in Shabboda mainly revolve around the adventures of village migrants in Moscow, the amount of remittances, deportations, and entry bans. Most villagers have smartphones with internet access, which enables them to exchange daily news with their co-villagers in Moscow. Absent migrants are “present” in the village through social media (Telegram Messenger, IMO, Viber, Odnoklassniki, and Facebook) and regular phone calls. Odnoklassniki is the most popular social media site among villagers.⁷⁷

While observing everyday life, I felt that there was always someone leaving for Moscow, someone waiting there to receive them, and someone returning to the village to attend a wedding or funeral. Thus, Shabboda has become a truly “translocal village,” in that everyday material, family, and social exchanges directly connect it to Moscow. In the words of villagers, Shabboda is a “Moscow village,” as the majority of villagers work in Moscow due to the existence of village networks there. Several villagers work as middlemen in Moscow's construction sector, serving as gatekeepers for villagers seeking access to the labor market. Young men who prefer to stay in the village are usually seen as lazy and abnormal by villagers, while those who migrate to Russia and regularly send money home acquire higher social status. Hence, migration has become a widespread livelihood strategy, a norm for young and able-bodied men in Shabboda village. The share

77 cf. Chikadze and Brednikova, “Migrants from Uzbekistan in Russia.”

of the village's women migrating to Russia is also increasing. Everyday *mahalla* life and social relations in Shabboda village are thus being transformed due to migratory processes.

The state is virtually "absent" from village life due to its inability to secure people's basic needs. During the Soviet era, when there were job opportunities and fairly good social welfare services at home, villagers felt less need for community-based welfare and mutual aid practices. Today, however, since the state can no longer provide a social safety net, villagers increasingly rely on mutual aid practices within their family, kin, and *mahalla* networks. These practices serve as a shock-absorbing institution for many villagers, enabling them to secure their basic needs and gain access to public goods, services, and social protection unavailable from the state. Typically, such mutual aid practices include monetary and labor exchanges, rotating savings and credit initiatives, non-compensated labor during life-cycle rituals, housing construction, and contributions to charity. The term *hashar* is used to encompass such mutual aid practices. Villagers actively engage in mutual aid activities, since these practices not only enable them to meet their needs but also provide space for participation in everyday life and social interactions. *Guzar* (village meeting space), *masjid* (mosque), *choyxona* (teahouse), *gaps* (regular get-togethers), and life-cycle events (e.g., weddings and funerals) are the main sites where these activities are discussed and arranged.

These mutual aid practices create a strong moral and affective bond among village residents both "here" (Shabboda) and "there" (Moscow). Villagers regularly attend most social events and have a relationship of mutual dependence. Money is not everything in Shabboda; respect, prestige, and reputation are equally important. The fact that villagers meet one another on a daily basis and regularly interact at social events acts as a guarantee that social pressure and sanctions can be applied to an individual, his/her family, or the entire extended family if the individual is not acting fairly and helping other members of the community. Villagers who ignore or fail to comply with social norms face social sanctions, such as gossip, ridicule, loss of respect and reputation, humiliation, and even exclusion from life-cycle rituals, driving many villagers to comply with social norms. As such, give-and-take rituals constitute an integral part of everyday life and social relations in Shabboda.

Extension of Shabboda Village to Moscow

Village-level social norms, identities, reciprocal relations, and social sanctions continue to shape Shabboda residents' lives even when they move to Moscow. While talking with Shabboda migrants, it became evident that their decisions to migrate to Moscow were based not only on economic considerations, but also on kinship relations between migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants. To villagers, going to Moscow means joining *mahalla* and village acquaintances there. Once they have arrived at Moscow's Domodedovo or Vnukovo airport, they are quickly picked up by their fellow villagers. Hence, villagers imagine their future migrant life as integrated with village and *mahalla* networks that already extend to Moscow.

Although most Shabboda migrants do not share common accommodations and they often work in different places in Moscow, they maintain daily contact with each other. Almost all Shabboda migrants have smartphones; they regularly use social media apps like Viber, IMO, Telegram, and Odnoklassniki to stay in touch with one another in Moscow, as well as to check the latest news, view photos of Russian and Uzbek girls, and make video calls to their families and village networks in Ferghana. New technologies allow them to remain in touch with their families and engage in a quasi-real-time exchange of information between the village and migrants in Moscow. Owing to these everyday technologies of transnationalism, news of events in Moscow quickly travels to migrants' sending village and becomes the subject of daily discussion. Hence, smartphones allow migrants to remain part of the daily life of Shabboda village. Families and *mahallas* at home also take part in migrants' everyday life in Moscow by sharing *mahalla* news and giving advice on important matters.

The state is "absent" not only in Shabboda, where villagers use *mahalla*-driven solidarity to create alternative public goods and services, but also in Moscow, where solidarity and support from *mahalla* networks make up for the total lack of state-provided security. The Shabboda migrants with whom I spoke were totally unaware of the existence of Uzbek diaspora organizations or migrant rights organizations that could provide some form of support. They also received little or no support from the Embassy of Uzbekistan in Moscow when they experienced problems with dishonest employers or corrupt police officers. As most of my interviewees worked in the shadow economy,

they were reluctant to approach Russian state institutions because doing so would only invite punishment by the state. Even migrants' terminology clearly reflects their precarious livelihood in Russia. Shabboda migrants rarely used the word "migrant" to refer to their status in Russia. Instead, they used the term *musofir*, which provides a more contextual definition of what it means to be a migrant worker in Russia. Unlike the more neutral "migrant worker," *musofir* refers to a person who works in a foreign country and experiences risks, hardships, and challenges on a daily basis. As one of my respondents summed up, "We are not living in Moscow, but we are struggling to survive here" (*Biz bu yerda yashamayapmiz, vizhivat qilishga harakat qilyapmiz*).

Given the total lack of security, Shabboda migrants reproduce most of their village-level mutual aid activities in Moscow. Smartphones and social media apps serve as a platform for carrying out such activities. Shabboda migrants quickly inform each other about what is going on and mobilize resources if someone gets sick, is "caught" by the police, needs to send something home, or desperately needs money. These telephone-based translocal interactions are crucial to the survival of migrants and serve as an alternative social safety net, as illustrated in the following quotation:

We usually stay away from public places because there are hundreds of police officers on the streets, seeking to extort money from us [migrants]. Instead, we use smartphones and social media to solve problems and socialize with our co-villagers (*hamqishloqlar*) in Moscow, as well as to maintain daily contact with our families, *mahalla*, and village friends in Shabboda. It is Moscow and things are unpredictable here; we rely on our village connections when we get into trouble. We are all *musofir* here, so we cannot turn our back when our co-villagers are in trouble. But in order to reach your co-villagers, you must always have a telephone with you and memorize their phone numbers. For example, let's assume that you are a migrant worker and you are caught by a police officer and brought to the police station. Normally, police officers keep you in the cell for a few hours and check your documents very carefully, which is usually done to further scare migrants. After finishing the check-up, police officers give you two options: (1) you can pay a bribe immediately and go home or (2) if you have no money, police officers allow you to make a phone call to your friends so that they can bring money and release you. The second scenario is more common, and you need to call your co-villagers for help. Therefore, you must have

a telephone with you at all times. Sometimes police officers allow you to use their mobile phone to contact your co-villagers, but not all police officers are nice. If you don't have a phone with you and are caught by police, there is a high risk that police officers will transfer your case to the court for deportation (Abduvali, 38, male, construction worker from Shabboda).

The repatriation of the deceased from Russia to Uzbekistan is another example of a telephone-based translocal practice among villagers. Shabboda migrants, like other Central Asian migrants, experience difficult living and working conditions in Moscow, including discrimination, hazardous working conditions, and physical violence. They are aware that the threat of death is always present in their daily life in Moscow. As one of the Shabboda migrants said, "Death can be the fate of any *musofir* in Russia, as we are working in a *bespredel* (limitless, lawless) country where anything can happen." When someone is killed in a work-related accident, dies of a disease, or passes away following a neo-Nazi skinhead attack, this news spreads swiftly among villagers because migrants immediately contact their *mahalla* networks via smartphones and social media. Aware of their own precarious livelihoods, migrants voluntarily contribute to repatriation expenses. There is no standard contribution amount, and migrants determine how much to contribute based on their financial situation and income level. Shabboda migrants see their contribution to the body repatriation process as a form of insurance in case of their own death, as shown in the following remark:

I always make a contribution to body repatriation because I know my co-villagers would do the same favor for me were I to suddenly die from a work accident or disease. Body repatriation is a *hasher*—a collective *mahalla* project where everyone is expected to contribute. If you are greedy and don't contribute, there is a high likelihood that your body will not be taken care of if you die. Nobody wants his body to remain in Russia; we all want to be buried in our homeland (Nodir, 26, male, migrant worker from Shabboda).

Accordingly, smartphones and social media serve as the everyday technologies of translocal place-making, reproducing and maintaining village-level identities, social norms, and relations across distance. Other studies have also shown that mobile phones do not "fracture" localities but actually extend and repro-

duce them in migrant-receiving societies.⁷⁸ However, the literature on ICT and transnationalism has a tendency to focus on the role of ICT in facilitating the flow of information between sending communities and host countries. Smartphones and social media not only facilitate everyday information exchange between Moscow and Shabboda, but also serve as a means for extending village-level social control and norms to Moscow.

One episode I witnessed is illustrative of how Shabboda norms and practices are extended to Moscow. On the afternoon of July 2014, Zaur and I were in the car heading toward a construction site in Balashikha, a small city in Podmoskovye (Moscow province) where the majority of Shabboda migrants work. Unlike his co-villagers who work in the construction sector, Zaur works as a grocery store clerk in Moscow city, a status that has prompted his co-villagers to dub him *Russkii* (Russian): he receives a higher salary and is not obliged to do *chornaia rabota* (black work, or manual labor). As Zaur is considered to be more successful and better connected than other migrants, people from Shabboda village often contact him with requests. As we neared the construction site, Zaur received a phone call from Uzbekistan. He usually picks up calls if they come from Uzbekistan, so he answered immediately. It was Zaur's neighbor, Ozoda, who had an urgent request. From their phone conversation I learned that Ozoda's husband, Ulugbek, who had been working on a greenhouse farm in Vologda, had recently had an appendectomy and was on a train to Moscow. Ozoda was very worried about her husband, as he was physically unable to work and had no money to purchase a train ticket back to Uzbekistan. It was obvious that Ozoda was asking Zaur to help her husband return home. After wrapping up the conversation, Zaur said that we needed to return to Moscow city and meet Ulugbek at the railway station when he arrived from Vologda. On our way to the station, I asked Zaur to tell me more about the phone conversation, and he provided the following account:

Ulugbek and I come from the same *mahalla*. He is in a critical situation now, as he has neither good health nor the money to return to Uzbekistan. There is no train from Vologda to Tashkent for the next 10 days, so he must go to Moscow first and then take another train to Tashkent.

Actually, Ulugbek could have taken a direct train from Vologda to Tashkent if he stayed there 10 more days. He knew that he would be taken care of by his *mahalla* network if he came to Moscow. That's why he is coming to Moscow. Ulugbek is very clever. He didn't contact me directly. Instead he contacted me through his wife since he knew that I wouldn't refuse if someone contacted me directly from Ferghana. Of course, I have no choice but to cover Ulugbek's expenses out of pocket. Firstly, I am driving from Balashikha to Kazan railway station and burning gasoline. If you took a taxi, you would spend at least 3,000 rubles for this trip. Secondly, Ulugbek wants to return home as soon as possible, but train tickets to Uzbekistan are usually sold out. One needs to buy a ticket at least three days before traveling. This means I have to bribe the train *provodnik* (conductor) and arrange a place [without a valid ticket] for him. In addition, there are many thieves and racketeers in Kazan railway station who extort money from migrants. I have connections there and I can make sure that Ulugbek boards the train safely and reaches home without any problems. Thirdly, Ulugbek does not have any money to pay for train expenses. This means I have to bribe the *provodnik* with my own money, and I know that Ulugbek will not return this money to me. This would be treated as my *mahalladoshlik* obligation. But I hope he will appreciate my help and tell our *mahalla* about my *odamgarchilik* (good deeds). This is enough for me. You see how much trouble and expenses I have and the time I lose just to save face in the *mahalla*. If I refuse to help Ulugbek and other acquaintances, *mahalla* people will spread gossip about me, saying that I have no *odamgarchilik*. Of course, I am in Moscow now and could just ignore the gossip, but I have to consider my family members' situation, as they are the ones who bear the consequences of my decision.

We arrived at the Kazan railway station at 4 pm. Ulugbek's train arrived one hour later. Events unfolded exactly as Zaur had described. After meeting Ulugbek at the station, we all headed toward a small fast food cafe where migrants can get fake work permits and residence registrations. There we met an Uzbek woman who was well connected with train *provodniks*. Zaur paid her 7,500 rubles and she guided us toward the station and quickly arranged a special seat for Ulugbek on a Moscow-Tashkent train. After a short conversation with the conductor, she assured us that Ulugbek was in safe hands and would be in Uzbekistan in five days. Zaur gave Ulugbek an

78 Raul Pertierra, Eduardo F. Ugarte, Alicia Pingol, Joel Hernandez, and Nikos Lexis Dacanay, *Txt-Ing Selves: Cellphones and Philippine Modernity* (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 2002); Vertovec, "Cheap Calls"; McKay, "Translocal Circulation"; Nakamura, *Cybertypes*.

additional 1,000 rubles and told him that he could use it for his food expenses during the long trip. We shook hands with Ulugbek and watched as the train departed for Uzbekistan.

Zaur's fear of social sanctions is not unfounded. The story of Misha is a good example of the power of gossip. Misha is an early migrant from Shabboda village who has brought around 200 of his co-villagers and acquaintances to Moscow. He arrived in 2002, when labor migration was still a new phenomenon in the village. He currently works as a *posrednik* (middleman) in the construction sector, connecting migrant workers with Russian employers. Misha is fluent in Russian and Uzbek and is trusted by Russian middlemen, who approach him with many job offers (*zakazy*). Misha's main role is to find skilled migrant construction workers, take full responsibility for the quality of the construction work, and address migrants' daily concerns and legal problems.

Misha usually selects co-villagers for his construction brigade. Coming from the same village not only forges a social bond, but also creates social responsibility in the mind of workers. The families of Misha and the workers live in the same village and interact daily, such that non-compliance with the agreed obligations on either side would trigger a chain reaction, with the workers' families putting direct pressure on the middleman's family in the village or vice versa. There is no written agreement between Misha and his co-villagers, as they share a common village origin and their families know one another. Misha receives payment from Russian middlemen and then distributes the money to his workers, taking a *dolia* (share) of 10-15 percent of each worker's salary.

At the time of fieldwork (January-December 2014), Misha's *brigada* consisted of 12 migrant workers, and their main job was installing new windows in mid-rise and high-rise buildings. Almost all *brigada* members had smartphones and regularly used Odnoklassniki and Telegram Messenger to stay in touch with their families and village networks at home. On average, the *brigada* worked 10-12 hours per day, without taking any days off. They endured harsh conditions, working on the 17th floor despite the freezing cold weather (the outdoor temperature was -25°C). In return, Misha took care of his co-villagers and treated them nicely. He might have done small favors for them, such as buying cigarettes or sending money home on someone's behalf, even if Misha had to advance the sum from his own pocket.

Hence, the *brigada* members are at the center of a complex matrix of relationships. In Moscow, they operate under Misha, respect his authority, and call him elder brother, regardless of their age difference. While they have little choice but to trust that he will deliver their salaries, take care of them if they face difficulties, and help them with documents, this trust is based on the understanding that, given their family connections, it would be too costly for him to cheat them. Any monetary advantage would bring only short-term benefits and would be countered by retaliation at the village level.

In April 2014, tensions within the *brigada* emerged. The team had completed half of a window installation job in Moscow but had not been paid since January. Misha took a clear stand, insisting that he, too, was a victim of circumstances and blaming the Russian middleman and the construction firm's representative. As the *brigada* was in daily contact with their families, the problems in Moscow quickly traveled to Shabboda. Relatives of Misha's workers started putting pressure on Misha's family, spreading gossip at *guzar*, *choyxona*, and weddings. This fostered rumors in the village about Misha's exploitative behavior and emboldened many fellow villagers to confront him through his family. Misha, in the villagers' view, was supposed to secure the *brigada*'s salary irrespective of the circumstances. After all, they trusted him and worked hard during the cold winter. This was based on an understanding that a person must never assume the role of *posrednik* if he cannot keep his word. Tempers flared and some villagers went so far as to accuse Misha of human trafficking. He was held responsible for the *brigada*'s undocumented status and the possibility that, if caught, they would be banned from re-entering Russia for five years. Misha's family was under siege, facing daily barbs on the village streets. Misha's father was put in a particularly difficult position, as he could no longer attend *guzar*, *choyxona*, and other social events. Eventually, village pressure forced Misha to make a decision and prioritize the well-being of his family over his personal situation. He borrowed money to pay the *brigada*'s salaries. Thus, the extension of village-level affective mechanisms of guilt, shame, and gossip across borders proved to be an enforcement mechanism that determined the outcome of a dispute.

As Misha's story shows, Shabboda migrants, despite being physically located in Moscow, continue to be influenced by the collective expectations and

norms of their village and *mahalla*. On the other hand, villagers are “socially located” in Russia due to their increased engagement in migrants’ everyday lives and socioeconomic relations. As Shabboda migrants work under the conditions of shadow economy and weak rule of law, they increasingly rely on their translocal social capital and practices to regulate contractual relations and obligations in the informal labor market.

Some Concluding Remarks on Uzbek Migrants’ Legal Transnationalism and Telephone-Based Translocal Community

In this chapter, I have argued that much of the literature on transnational migration is based on case studies of immigrant communities living in Western democracies, whereas there has been little investigation of these issues in the Russian context. In view of the socio-political and cultural differences between Western and post-Soviet societies, I suggested that migrant transnationalism is not same everywhere and may have different meanings, forms, and functions depending on socio-political context, legal environment, economic system, and cultural factors.

Another purpose of the chapter was to examine the impact of migrant transnationalism on social change in migrant-sending societies. One important finding of my study is that rural communities in Uzbekistan are undergoing significant changes due to migratory processes. Not only are Uzbeks moving to Russia, but their village-level identities, social relations, and norms are also becoming nomadic. As my findings indicate, migration is strengthening Uzbeks’ traditional modes of organizing their lives, as village and *mahalla* legal orders (e.g., trust, obligation, shame, and neighborliness) have been extended across borders and have considerable impact on the lives of migrants in Russia. These village-level norms and practices serve to regulate Shabboda migrants’ contractual relations in Moscow’s informal labor market. Such legal transnationalism creates strong moral bonds that serve as the main social safety net for Uzbek migrants, whose rights and needs are protected neither by the Russian nor the Uzbek government.

Through my ethnographic study of Shabboda village and its telephone-based translocal form in Moscow, I explored the ways in which the home village is maintained in Moscow through smartphones and social media. Rapid improvements in information and communication technologies have enabled Shabboda migrants to stay in touch with their home village, as well as create a telephone-based translocal community in Moscow. Village-level identities, solidarity, reciprocity, and social sanctions are reproduced and maintained across distance and have a significant impact on the livelihood strategies of Uzbek migrants and their families at home in Shabboda. Although most Shabboda migrants in Moscow do not share accommodation and meet infrequently due to the punitive socio-legal environment, they are actively engaged in translocal place-making via smartphones and social media. I call this virtual space “telephone-based translocal community.”

In this sense, the findings of the chapter come close to Appadurai’s theory of the production of locality, where he defines locality as an essentially relational and contextual set of relationships rather than something necessarily based in particular physical spaces.⁷⁹ Although Shabboda migrants’ telephone-based translocal communities do not have any material or physical form, their daily practices are very clearly linked to a physical place and the maintenance of village-level social norms and relations: their daily actions and decisions are determined by the norms of their home village. Migrants’ telephone-based translocal community is oriented toward the physical village—that is, toward Shabboda.

By emphasizing the role of socio-political context and regime type, I have attempted to move the migrant transnationalism literature beyond Western-centric perspectives. This study contributes new insights to the migrant transnationalism literature, showing that migrants who operate in an illiberal political context that suppresses any overt form of transnationalism and cultural diversity tend to keep a low profile in social spaces and increasingly rely on smartphones and social media to engage in transnational practices. Hence, migrant transnationalism is not just about economic activities or cultural practices, but is both a coping strategy and hidden resistance to the repressive political and socio-legal environment in which migrants find themselves.

79 Appadurai, “The Production of Locality.”