In June 2002 I first met Bella at the minibus lot, where she was hoping to locate her next employer for a domestic position. Bella heard about my research from other migrants and was eager to be interviewed and recount how she had been coming to Turkey off and on since 1996, most recently keeping house for two different families in “Smyrna [Izmir], Homer’s homeland,” as she described it. Like many of the women gathered at the minibus lot that day, Bella lamented missing the ceremony marking the end of school (posledniy zvonok) back in Moldova. Her eldest son was graduating from high school and would soon depart for Romania to take up a scholarship to study computer science, while her eight-year-old son was staying with his uncle, waiting for his mother and father to return from their months away as labor migrants. Bella insisted, “I would never have come here to be treated like a slave [rab], but I have to make a living!” Toward the end of our conversation, Bella said, “Make sure to get this down. I want to meet with Greenpeace and ask them who they think they are defending. What about us? Who will defend us [post-Soviet migrants]?” Just then Bella was approached about a possible job, and she quickly wrote down her phone number and address in Moldova and urged me to visit her so I could “really learn” what drove people to seek work in Turkey. The following summer I took Bella up on her invitation and traveled to southern Moldova, to the region of Gagauzia.

Arriving by air in the capital city of Chișinău one is struck by the expanse of rolling hills and clean air. Just over an hour’s flight from Istanbul, relatively quiet and green Chișinău feels like another world. This impression solidifies as one
takes the road south toward Gagauzia, and it quickly changes from a multilane highway into two lanes, then eventually into a gravel road; as vehicles slow down, the rolling hills come into focus. In the spring planting season, extending from mid-April to mid-May, driving this north-south road you see people busy working the land, hurrying to get seedlings of cabbage, tomatoes, or eggplants into the ground before Pentecost, one of the important Russian Orthodox holidays that continues to punctuate annual calendars for many people across the FSU. On summer days one might catch sight of a stork nesting on a telephone pole, or a person bicycling along with a horse being led behind.

The country of Moldova, and the southern region of Gagauzia in particular, serves as a vivid example of the plight of relatively poor and recently impoverished regions in an era of global capitalism, where sovereign states are unable to create conditions for large sections of their population to achieve basic standards of living, and entire national economies come to depend on remittances sent from abroad (Basch et al. 1994; Hugo 2003; Ghențea and Gudumac 2004; Lucas 2005). In late Soviet times Moldova thrived on Soviet subsidies and on its own agricultural production of grains, sunflower oil, fruits and vegetables, and especially wine, with state farms as the site of this production employing a little over a third of the population; in 1993 Moldova had nearly a thousand collectively owned farms (Fedor 1995). Moreover, for decades Moldova had been a vacation destination for those from northern urban centers in Russia who sought rest, relaxation, and a ready supply of fruits, vegetables, and wine. By the early 2000s, as in nearby Romania (Verdery 2003), agricultural production in the region had fallen into disarray, with the collectively operated farms largely dismantled and 82 percent of agricultural land privately allocated (FAO 2001). Along with the return to farming for subsistence, remittances from abroad have become essential for most households, as reflected in the high level of labor migration. Of the population of about 3.6 million people in 2010, as much as one quarter of working age adults was estimated to be absent from the country as labor migrants, and this trend has continued (National Bureau of Statistics 2016).

In contrast to the media portrayal of Moldova as the “poorest country” in Europe, focused largely on the issue of “trafficking” or children “left behind” (e.g., Metaxa 2006; Coomes 2011), here I turn to how people experienced the dramatic shift from being the pride of the Soviet Union, as the agricultural site of plenty, to the poster child for what went wrong with structural readjustment policies in the former Soviet Union. In the early 2000s this historically marginal region of Gagauzia continued to be shaped by a lack of local opportunities but also by growing aspirations for a different life widely perceived to be possible via migration. Like some other locations of intense outmigration (Chu 2010), this community was also becoming strongly oriented around the idea of mobility as
synonymous with realizing dreams, especially for young people. This chapter traces the implications gender, generation, and emerging class distinctions have for households as women and men are inserted into new transnational circuits of flexible, marginalized labor. Through this microcosm of one place closely linked to a circuit of mobility to Istanbul, the broader issues compelling migrants like Bella to leave Moldova are amplified, while the implications of this massive outmigration for home communities and for the reworkings of intimate economies within households in the region come into focus.

Transnational Moldova: A Portrait of Gagauzia

Outmigration from Moldova is especially stark at the southern end of Moldova, in Gagauzia, with one in every three families experiencing the absence of at least one household member (Subbotina 2007, 136). One day in 2004 as he stood gesturing out over former state farmland, Andrei, the brother-in-law of Zina, the former movie projectionist and medical orderly I met in Istanbul, shared his reflections on the massive outmigration from the regional center of Vulcănești. As a former agronomist in one of the largest collective farms (kolkhozy) in southern Moldova in the late Soviet era, Andrei unequivocally declared that the dismantling of collectively run agriculture had a devastating effect in the region. As he explained, beginning in 1945 there were seven kolkhozes in Vulcănești, one of the three largest towns in the southern Gagauz region. In 1953 the seven collective farms were amalgamated into four, and in 1957 into two, Victory Collective (Kolkhoz Pobeda) and Karl Marx Collective (Kolkhoz imeni Karla Marksa). In the early 1990s these two were joined in an effort to streamline costs, but in 1996 the remaining collective farm was privatized, with everyone employed there receiving a parcel of land. Andrei sighed and reflected that people were much worse off than when collective farms were thriving. Andrei would most certainly agree with Katherine Verdery, who writes about neighboring Romania that with the end of socialism, “the myth of property rights created great joyful expectations which the realities of risk bearing ownership would crush” (2004, 157).

In southern Moldova, people widely considered it a right to own a piece of land, but few people had the means to cultivate more than a small parcel. They lacked capital for purchasing a tractor or other machinery, not to mention expenses for seeds, fertilizer, or transporting their crop to market. Some people sold their land, but others simply rented much of their land back to a man who continued to manage the unallocated collective farm property; in return people received some of the crop production—mostly sunflower oil. In recent years people like Andrei have also spent a significant portion of their time working
at least a small household parcel, something many households had not done to such a degree since before the Second World War. In 2011 it was common for households to combine small-scale agricultural production with short and long-term labor migration.8

At the intersection of contemporary Romania and Ukraine, the area of southern Moldova known as Gagauzia has had a wide-ranging history of governance inflected by the formation, downfall, and reformation of empires in the region over the past seven hundred years. For more than five hundred years, from the late fourteenth century until the late nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire stretched into the region of what is present-day Moldova. Starting in the mid-eighteenth century, but most intensively in the mid-nineteenth century, as Gagauz fled Ottoman military power and sought refuge in the Russian Empire (Moshkov 1904; Ianyshhev-Voloshin 1993, 37; King 2000, 211), they began to settle in what became known as Bessarabia, an historical region roughly contiguous with contemporary Moldova and a small part of Ukraine (located between the Prut and Dniester rivers). With the Russian defeat of the Ottomans in the Russo-Ottoman War (1877–1878), the Ottomans definitively lost control over vast territories, and Russia annexed southern Bessarabia (Reynolds 2011, 14).9
Subsequently Moldavia, and later Romania, vied for control of the region and between the two world wars a Union of Bessarabia under Romania was formed, although it was only recognized by a handful of countries, and notably not by the USSR. In 1940 the USSR annexed a region that included much of Bessarabia, as well as some adjoining areas, and named this new region the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic (Moldovan SSR). This history is particularly important in light of the strong allegiances Gagauz tend to have to Russia as the successor state to the Soviet Union.

**FIGURE 12.** Map of Moldova. Created by Jayme Taylor.
While the population of southern Moldova is diverse, including ethnic Bulgarians, Moldovans, Russians, and Ukrainians, the titular ethnic group is the Gagauz, who are Turkic-speaking and historically Christians.\textsuperscript{10} By the early 2000s many Gagauz identified as Russian Orthodox, although growing numbers of people were increasingly drawn to Evangelical faiths (King 2000; Subbotina 2005, 22–23). Gagauz I met were fluent in Russian, but rarely in Moldovan, and those over about thirty spoke Gagauz, a language people described as close to “classical” Turkish, something they frequently mentioned as giving them an advantage in navigating the informal labor market in Turkey.\textsuperscript{11}

Despite this advantage, overall the Gagauz have a long history of marginalization stretching back at least two centuries. With little access to schooling for most of the nineteenth century, and no systemic schooling in place in their communities for the first half of the twentieth century (Demirdirek 2008, 238), Gagauz had much to gain with the advent of Soviet power in Bessarabia after the Second World War.\textsuperscript{12} With the establishment of the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic (1941), as a recognized minority, the Gagauz could aspire to benefit from Soviet-style affirmative action, including preferential access to higher education and some guarantees for representation within local- and republic-level governing bodies. As for many other minorities in the Soviet Union (Bloch and Kendall 2004; Bloch 2003a), from the late 1960s to the 1980s the Soviet state fostered a Gagauz intellectual class and also provided symbolic support for cultural revitalization, including in the form of Gagauz language supplements in local newspapers and the establishment of two museums dedicated to Gagauz history and culture (Demirdirek 2008, 240; see also Cash 2011). However, by the 1980s Gagauz activists voiced concern about a lack of more substantial commitments to developing Gagauz culture and language as vehicles for national consciousness, a challenge that became especially pressing with the rise of Moldovan nationalism.

With the turn toward Moldovan sovereignty in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Gagauz lost many benefits they had as a recognized minority and instead, like other minorities in Moldova, often became the target of nationalist sentiment. In August 1989, in the culmination of a Moldovan nationalist movement, a Moldovan language law was enacted that would impose sanctions on those who did not speak the state language, a situation Gagauz found intolerable (Demirdirek 2008, 236). Then in 1991, following the example of the breakaway republic of Transnistria, Gagauz voted almost unanimously for independence from Moldova, with some calling for Gagauzia to be recognized as a sixteenth Soviet republic, and others for Gagauzia to be recognized as an independent state (King 2000; Svanberg 2011, 161; Şenyuva 2012).\textsuperscript{13} In response, citizen militias consisting of ethnic Moldovans gathered to storm Gagauzia and a violent confrontation was narrowly averted.
Although the crisis was eventually resolved, with Gagauz autonomy officially recognized on December 23, 1994, and the Gagauz remaining citizens of Moldova, the moderate local autonomy promised the Gagauz has only partially emerged (King 2000, 218–22; Demirdirek 2008; Plešinger 2014).\textsuperscript{14} Realizing autonomy has been challenging, in part, because the Gagauz are concentrated in noncontiguous parcels of land situated in one of the most rural regions of the country. Moreover, the area has suffered from particularly harsh realities of unemployment, susceptibility to unpredictable crop yields, and massive outmigration that some Gagauz equate with making them a neocolony of Moldova.

In 2015 the Gagauz were by far the majority population in this southern region, accounting for 82 percent of the population of over 155,000 people calling Gagauzia home. There are also sizable numbers of people who identify with Bulgarian heritage, Moldovans (or those who identify with Romanian heritage), and people who are ethnically Ukrainian or Russian.\textsuperscript{15} Over the past fifty years these ethnic communities have closely interacted, sometimes intermarrying and working side by side in the collective farming enterprises, local administration, and town institutions such as the hospital or schools. Irrespective of ethnic background, residents of this peripheral area of Moldova have all experienced marginalization as their region is no longer under the aegis of Soviet social policy, and their country has been (re)inserted into a global economy.

This is not the first time people in this part of the country have relied on outmigration to get by. In the late nineteenth century even relatively well-off families were known to send their children for apprenticeships in Germany to learn trades such as blacksmithing. Then during the interwar period of the 1920s and 1930s, when southern Moldova was on the periphery of the Romanian state, more than half the men were absent for portions of the year working on farms across the region, as well as in cities of Romania, where they worked as servants in the highly stratified society (Guboglo 2006, 379–80). In the decades after the Second World War, as part of the USSR, southern Moldova was also defined by seasonal outmigration. At that time men and women looked to the expanding agricultural spheres of Soviet Kazakhstan and the industrializing regions of Ukraine and Russia, as well as Latvia and Lithuania, where they often found work in the expanding forest industry (Subbotina 2005, 9–10). Between 1979 and 1989 the number of Gagauz in Russia more than doubled, while the number of people identifying as Gagauz in Lithuania increased more than sixfold. By the early 1990s, Gagauz were increasingly leaving their communities in southern Moldova and neighboring regions of Ukraine not for seasonal migration but for years on end (Subbotina 2005, 6). By the early 2000s tens of thousands of Gagauz had settled long-term in Russia and other states of the FSU, and thousands more
worked as undocumented migrants in Turkey, as well as further afield, as they sought out ways to send remittances home.16

Like Bella, who stood at the microbus lot in Istanbul and urged me to visit her hometown of Vulcănești, people spoke passionately with me about the ways their lives have been affected by labor migration. They often pointed to health implications and the suffering of children and family members, but they also spoke about the range of ways they have developed for negotiating the border in pursuit of income that is critical to supporting their households, many of which survived on less than $45 a month in 2005.17 Economically speaking, labor migration is a rational decision. For instance, in 2003 post-migration households increased their incomes four to thirteen times of their pre-migration levels, with the poorest households seeing the greatest benefits from migration (Ghențeanu and Gudumac 2004, 49).18

In addition to the economic logic of these border crossings, however, they have implications for social relationships both within households, and between those who stay and those who go. As Julie Chu (2010) shows for a community in southern China defined by massive outmigration, when more than half of a community aims to depart, for those who remain the very fabric of daily life changes, from the content of casual conversation to gendered social expectations in households to the realm of what are reasonable dreams for the future.19 Out-migration of men and women from these communities radically reshapes intimate ties, from transforming how status is negotiated to recalibrating aspirations to reworking the very meaning of intimacy and nurturing of children.

It is widely assumed that women are the primary group leaving Moldova, and that their absence therefore creates a crisis of nurturing and overall family well-being (Keough 2015). However, it is striking that for years nearly twice as many Moldovan men have engaged in labor migration as women.20 Popular discourses and media coverage of Moldova have tended to skim over men’s migration and instead to focus on women’s labor migration as a crisis, specifically one defined by the trafficking in women.21 In a departure from the often sensationalist treatment of women’s mobility out of the region, here I consider how outmigration shapes structures of power in home communities, how frameworks of intimacy have shifted as a result of outmigration, and how transnational mobility fosters aspirations for a different future.

A View from Vulcănești

Approaching the town of Vulcănești from the north, as far as the eye can see there are lush green fields of sunflowers, alfalfa, and wheat, with fields defined by long, low lines of grapevines popping up now and then. Occasional clusters of carefully
tended wood-frame houses surrounded by green fences catch the eye, and after some distance down the road an apparently deserted three-story kolkhoz building appears and almost as quickly disappears as the bus ascends and then makes its way down a gentle hill, then briefly stops when a passenger calls out to be let off. At the crest of the last hill before the town center, the bus turns into the depot and Vulcănești appears below, with a gravel crossroads leading from the central road. On one axis the town center is demarcated at one end by a bus station located across the street from the relatively new Evangelical church, and at the other end by the town museum, library, town hall, and a Voxtel outlet (one of the two mobile phone companies in the country in 2004). The two blocks between these ends are lined with several cafes with plastic chairs set out on the sidewalk, an Internet gaming salon where young boys sit glued to computer screens most days during the summer and after school, a stationery store, a secondhand clothing outlet (the “gumanitarka”) run by the Baptist church since the mid-1990s, a post office, a bank, a newspaper kiosk, and small grocery stores, one of which also houses a currency exchange.

Along the opposite axis of the town, in one direction there is a two-story commercial building mostly organized into small, one-room stores that sell women’s clothing shuttled from Turkey, as well as a Seventh-Day Adventist church, a dimly lit Internet salon, the “House of Culture”—a sort of community center—and several small grocery stores. In the other direction there is a bank, a bakery, a drugstore, the town clinic, and a set of market stalls that were formally used by the kolkhoz to sell its products but in 2004 were rented out. On a Saturday afternoon when the market is full of vendors selling flour from Kazakhstan or “Amerika” (the United States), whole grains, dried apricots, sunflower oil, Moldovan wines, local eggs, DVDs of Bollywood films, and various items of clothing imported from Turkey, the town seems bustling. Even then, however, the town feels like a hamlet of no more than a few thousand people, not the official number of nearly seventeen thousand residents.

During the months I spent in Vulcănești, each day I would walk the half-mile or so from the house where I was staying to the town center. By late fall the route would be blanketed with snow, and in spring the muddy roads and sidewalks required one to step gingerly, but by late May the way was dry and dusty and easily traversed on foot. The traffic—a few decrepit cars, a horse-drawn cart, or a rare Land Rover—was light, except on the weekend market days. Along the route bright yellow pipes were suspended in the air, stretching from block to block and house to house, carrying gas used for heating and kitchen stoves when households could afford this. Most of the houses along this route were wooden, with their large yards/garden areas surrounded by six-foot-high, mostly green, wooden fences; many had a bench positioned just outside the gate. Older women

frequently rested on these benches enjoying the interaction with passersby that this afforded. Walking along the street I learned that grandchildren were coming to stay for the summer, or that children had been off working for years on end without being able to make it home for a visit from Russia or Turkey or, less often, America. Other days I would meet a neighbor returning from her shift at the bakery, and she would insist on giving me fresh rolls. Sometimes she took the opportunity to share news, like about her sister’s brief visit from Turkey, timed to deliver much needed money to a relative just released from jail.

Walking a bit farther out of the town center, evidence of the many transnational connections became even more apparent. Smart-looking tin roofs glistened in the sun on the newest houses, made of large and fortress-like brick construction standing out among the many older wood-frame houses, with nearly each one sporting some sort of home renovation, from fresh paint to entire additions. Bricks piled beside driveways and a few dish antennas also reminded passersby of the steady flow of remittances coming into the town, a phenomenon common to communities of outmigration worldwide (see Chu 2010). The prospect of remittances and their actual flow punctuated daily interactions, one of several ways radical mobility was remaking lives in the town.

Absence and Mobility

In the spring of 2007 I was in Vulcănești just after Easter. One Sunday evening my hosts, Zina’s sister Eva and her husband, Andrei, invited me to join them to visit with Andrei’s sister on the other side of town. To get there, we walked the two miles or so, since the two sons in the family who kept the ramshackle car running were in Russia; one had married there and settled in Siberia, and the other had found undocumented work in a restaurant in Moscow. As we walked, a small tremor shook the earth, reminding me of Gagauzia’s location in an area prone to regular, minor earthquakes; my hosts barely noticed the event. The holiday meal, featuring our hosts’ homemade baked red peppers stuffed with ground meat and accompanied by the locally produced Isabella red wine that I had brought, was enjoyed by all. As nearly always in this town, talk turned to the members of the family away earning money; in this case Andrei’s sister’s husband was away in Russia for six months, working on a construction brigade, and the older daughter was in Turkey, cleaning houses. Andrei’s sister gestured to her newly renovated living room and noted that her husband’s work over the past six months had paid for the recent home improvements. They were now saving to pay for their younger daughter to attend college, and accumulating the necessary money would be difficult.

The theme of absence and mobility out of this community loomed large in daily conversations. Many households had at least one adult member away
working for a minimum of several months of the year, and usually longer, in Italy, Spain, Portugal, Ukraine, and, mostly, Russia or Turkey. It was also not uncommon for the children and grandchildren of a household to have immigrated permanently to Russia and less commonly to another country. Turkey was widely invoked when people spoke of their mothers, sisters, aunts, and other female relatives and friends working abroad. High-school students, especially girls, often looked to Turkey as a place they could most easily establish their independence, and young people with newly minted undergraduate degrees, but few professional opportunities in Moldova, debated whether to seek prospects for work in Istanbul. Zina’s daughter, who had immigrated to Russia with her husband, told me that of the twenty students in her graduating class, just five (two girls and three boys) remained in Moldova studying and working. The fifteen other students (nine girls and six boys), all worked outside Moldova; aside from Zina’s daughter and one other young man in Russia and one young man in Romania, the others were all in Turkey. Likewise, nearly all the middle-aged women I came to know in Vulcănești had either spent time in Turkey working, mostly as domestics in Turkish households and in restaurants, or spoke wistfully of not being able to seek work abroad for a variety of reasons.

GENDER, LABOR, GENERATION

Women occupying prominent positions in town, such as the directors of local high schools, the head of the Vital Statistics Office, and the town museum director, all spoke of looking for work abroad. In 2004, when I first met Elena Maximovna, the director of the Vulcănești local history museum, she recounted that she earned less than $20 a month and had worked in her job for twenty-five years. Like many others, she explained that she would have liked to leave for work in Turkey, but she was held back by her passion for her work at the museum, like the curation of an exhibit based on oral histories with veterans of the Second World War that she was then preparing. Still, at times when Elena Maximovna was unable to financially help out her son, a student at the local technical college, she seriously thought about leaving for Turkey. She often considered securing work there and then seeking out something for her husband, who would also like to go, but in the end her “favorite work” (liubimaia rabota) kept her in the museum.

Generally, women in less prominent positions or those who were unemployed found it easier to become migrants, although frequently they faced resistant husbands and children. One woman who had spent several years working as a domestic in Istanbul told me that her husband in Vulcănești “did not permit” (ne razreshaet) her to go to Turkey; he argued that he made enough building houses for the newly prosperous households in town that she did not need to work at all. Another woman who recounted working for eight years for a wealthy Turkish
man, overseeing his frequent parties on his personal yacht, also said her husband would not allow her to return to Turkey and preferred that she spend her energies as a housewife. In this case, the woman also explained that her mother was too busy professionally to care for her granddaughter, and it was out of the question for her husband to be in charge of caring for their child. Women who had sometimes spent a decade or more working in Turkey often described how in returning to Vulcănești they were chafing under their husbands’ desires for them to stay home and be housewives.

This politics of gendered labor in households was closely interwoven with elements of class distinction, as illustrated by the case of Rosa. She had worked as a librarian and her husband formally occupied a prominent position in the collective farm administration. In 2003 Rosa left for Turkey to work in a restaurant. She returned home six months later, as soon as she had earned enough to pay her son’s university tuition, and after her husband begged her not to leave him alone any longer. In 2010 Rosa again left to work as a labor migrant, this time as a domestic in Moscow. Her close friends were surprised that they were not part of a festive sendoff for Rosa, the common event organized by friends and family when someone decides to spend months away as a labor migrant. Rosa’s friends learned about her departure much later and suspected that Rosa was hoping to hide the fact that she needed to seek work as a domestic; from their perspective, she sought to maintain the modicum of distinction she and her husband had enjoyed, with a solid, well-maintained house and a son who had recently migrated permanently to the United States, having won the “Green Card Lottery.”

In addition to the widespread labor migration into Turkey and Russia, irregular migration to Western Europe was sometimes discussed. This option was not very common, and it was reportedly pursued more by men than women. As one man explained in 2007:

There are all kinds of ways to get to Poland’s border with Germany and simply swim across the river where there are no border guards. Or you could try the method a friend of mine used where he paid $100 to a border guard who let him into a neutral zone near Yugoslavia, and he went through a bathroom where he exited into Europe. It used to cost $40–$50 to get a person to ferry you into Europe, but now it is $150–$200. This is a lot of money, and people are afraid; there could be maniacs working as middlemen; it is better to try legal migration.

For the most part, migrants sought to cross borders into Russia, Turkey, or Ukraine, where they could cross legally, even if once there, they might overstay their visas. Although the prospects of earning larger salaries in West European countries appealed to some, until well into the 2000s traveling there legally was
virtually impossible for rural migrants; they usually lacked the thousands of dollars that countries like Italy demanded be placed in escrow as insurance that people would return home at the end of any contract. In contrast, since the early 1990s entry into Turkey had been simply a matter of receiving a tourist visa on arrival, and entry to Russia merely required a valid passport. Those of Romanian heritage, like one of the high-school principals I interviewed, could easily enter Romania on a visitor’s pass, recognized at the border for short-term journeys, or even obtain a Romanian passport. Likewise, until spring 2014 and the Russian military intervention in Ukraine, southern Moldovans with a car who were seeking to save on staples made daytrips to Bolhrad, Ukraine, just over the other nearby border.\(^{25}\)

Although Turkey was the most prominent destination discussed by potential women migrants, Russia and sometimes Romania were also important destinations, depending on ethnic background and educational accomplishment or professional spheres. For instance, those with Romanian ethnic origins reflected on the possibilities of finding work in Romania, and many had applied for Romanian citizenship. In 2006 the Romanian government announced that all residents of Moldova who lived in the Moldavian territory from 1918 to 1940, when the area was part of Romania, as well as their immediate relatives, would be eligible for citizenship. By 2010, 120,000 of the nearly 3.6 million Moldovans had Romanian passports, with 800,000 applications pending (Bidder 2010; Dimulescu and Avram 2011).\(^{26}\) Likewise, when Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007, those Moldovans who could claim Bulgarian ethnic background were eligible to apply for Bulgarian citizenship, although there were fewer such people than could apply for Romanian citizenship.\(^{27}\)

Just because someone applied for and received Romanian (or Bulgarian) citizenship did not mean they were immigrating. For instance, in 2004 the director of the Vulcănești Romanian lycée, a high school created with the establishment of an independent Moldova, told me that although she would soon get Romanian citizenship, she would go to Romania only if she failed to get the school to increase her pay. For people without professional training, or for young people, immigrating to Romania was considered an option only if they were academically inclined. Even then, like Bella’s son, whose mother first suggested I travel from Istanbul to Gagauzia, local high-school students wishing to study in Romania could realize this dream only if they qualified for a Romanian government scholarship. Even as a recent addition to the EU, Romania’s economy was not growing significantly, and unskilled employment was notoriously difficult to secure; Russia and Turkey were often more viable options for those without academic or professional prospects.

Since the mid-1990s Turkey has been the most accessible destination for those seeking to become labor migrants, although by 2010 there was a shift toward Russia as a preferred destination, as it revised policies regarding temporary migrants and
began streamlining processes for becoming a permanent resident (Bloch 2014). In particular, young men I met in Vîlcânești who had worked in Turkey began to look to Russia as a place where they might have a future. Like Turkey, Russia also provided academic scholarships, especially to Gagauz, and it was common for those young people who won scholarships to remain in Russia after their studies. In contrast to Turkey, young families were also drawn to Russia, since both men and women easily located employment, especially in Moscow’s expanding service sectors and construction. A lingua franca of Russian, greater opportunities to permanently settle, and sometimes historical or family ties, make Russia desirable as a destination. However, by 2015 Turkey was again appealing to migrants as a viable option (Chernozub 2015). The falling price of oil, and the concomitant economic crisis and sanctions imposed by the United States and Western Europe in retaliation for Russia’s military intervention in Ukraine, had led to significant job losses, making it difficult for migrants to find and maintain work in Russia. For some Moldovans, there were also other destinations enabled by religious affiliation.

RELIGION AND MOBILITY

In the first decade of the 2000s the Evangelical church in Vîlcânești occupied a key place in how people envisioned mobility and provided one of the three primary routes—along with labor migration and marriage migration—constantly featured in daily discourse. Religiously motivated migration was significant as Moldova became increasingly drawn into transnational networks of Evangelical religions (see also Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2008), but also as new religious movements have promised to link people to modernity and a “morally empowering” way forward (Pelkmans 2009, 8). These Christian transnational networks have a long history in the region dating back to as early as the mid-1800s when present-day Moldova and bordering Ukraine were sites of rapidly expanding religious movements (Camfield 1990, 693–94; Hardwick 1993). At that time Evangelical beliefs were brought to the region by German colonists, who encountered the already existing Molokans and Dukhobors, as well as other “Spiritual Christians.” Spiritual Christians shared a rejection of outward observances of ritual, embracing instead the direct revelation of God, and emphasizing the equality of all humans as part of a vision of a more just society. Along with the expansion of Spiritual Christianity, by the second half of the nineteenth century the Baptist church was firmly established in the area and increasingly drew converts (Hardwick 1993, 32), with some sources estimating 100,000 Baptists and 250,000 total evangelical Christians by the time of the Russian Revolution (Swatsky 1981, 29; Hardwick 1993, 33).

In 2010 nearly 97 percent of the population of Moldova identified as Orthodox—either Moldovan Orthodox (allied with the Russian Orthodox
Church, 86 percent) or Bessarabian Orthodox (allied with the Romanian Orthodox Church, 11 percent). A growing number of people also sought to identify with other religious communities, including Old Believers (Old Rite Russian Orthodox), Roman Catholics, Baptists, Pentecostals, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Seventh-Day Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Baha’is, Jews, Molokans, Falun Gong, and Muslims (US Department of State 2010, 2012b). As elsewhere in the world, the Evangelical movement is especially gaining adherents in Moldova, and as of 2012 the Union of Evangelical Christian Baptists of Moldova had 482 churches, with nearly 20,000 confirmed congregants (Baptist World Alliance 2011; EBF 2012), or double what it was just twenty years earlier.29 Moldovan-based Evangelical missionaries also have a broad transnational influence, with representatives “planting churches” from Chukotka, Russia, to Dushanbe, Tajikistan, to Turkey (Sprinchana 2011).

The growth of the Evangelical church in Vulcănești, and Moldova broadly, has largely relied on resources provided by the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the largest Protestant group in North America. To a lesser extent the European Baptist Federation (EBF) is also a force in the expansion of Evangelical churches in Moldova (Sprinchana 2011; EBF 2012). The SBC connection—along with a
longer-term history dating from the late 1970s, when the United States began granting asylum to those from the Soviet Union who were identified as suffering religious persecution—has created avenues for migration to the United States via family class migration and church-sponsored migration. In Vulcănești, one of the most visible ties to the United States was through Evangelical churches in Sacramento, California. Members of Sacramento congregations have visited Vulcănești each summer since the early 1990s, thereby maintaining an active missionizing role and, as several younger people told me, bringing gifts, teaching English, and espousing humanitarian values; aside from support for the local church, they also established a secondhand clothing store, which Zina’s sister Eva and others I met called the gumanitarka.30 Believers from Vulcănești migrated to cities other than Sacramento as well, but the Sacramento link was one I heard about frequently as I waited in line to purchase eggs, or when I chatted with one of the elderly women sitting on a bench outside her house, or when I spoke with an older woman about her desire to spend more than the month each year she was permitted on a tourist visa to see her grandchildren in the United States. Relatives of those who had immigrated spoke of these migrations in dreamy terms, reflecting on how fast people settled into their new lives, sponsored by Baptist communities that enabled them to buy homes and find work.

When people became “born again” (priniali veru), this was a cause for much discussion. At the market or during tea at the Vital Statistics Office, or on bus rides from the Chișinau airport south to Gagauzia, people would exchange news about who had converted. It was common for people to reflect on whether conversions were genuine or simply orchestrated with emigration in mind. Several times when I found myself in discussion with recent converts, they took the opportunity to ask for advice about emigrating to Canada, a topic that highlighted a sharp ideological divide in the community. When I happened to mention the conversations with converts to my host, Andrei, the former kolkhoz agronomist, he vehemently said: “I would never beg to go to Canada! How can they simply ‘find’ God as a route to migration! It is all a sham!” However, the converts I met seemed sincere about their newfound faith; the fact that it was linked to a key path to migration may or may not have deepened their sense of commitment to the Evangelical Church.

MARRIAGE MIGRATION AND THE INTERNET

As the third predominant means of migration that defined daily life in Vulcănești, marriage migration was the least visible. I knew from some of the labor migrants I met in Istanbul that they had first considered marriage migration before turning to labor migration, and when I stayed with Bella briefly in Vulcănești in 2003, I learned that one of her neighbors was considering marriage migration to Russia, an
arrangement being made through an acquaintance. More often I heard about transnational marriage migration from young women I met at the Vulcănești MoldTel office, located next to the post office and diagonally across from the gumanitarka. Young women I met were regularly paying to use the computers so they could access international marriage websites in their search for foreign marriage prospects.
One twenty-four-year-old woman, Lena, whom I met while we were waiting in line to pay for our Internet time, told me she had known great hardship in recent years. While Lena was in university, her father was struck down by a drunk driver. After graduating, she sought happiness in marriage but ended up divorcing and moving back in with her mother. Lena told me, “I’ve known what it means to be hungry, what it means to not even have a piece of bread; I wouldn’t wish that even on my worst enemies.” With her degree in accounting Lena was able to make sure they had food at home, but she also wanted to find a “soulmate,” so she spent months corresponding with different men, including one from Canada and one from Italy. Ultimately, none of them seemed serious enough for her, so she was thinking about other options for marriage and was considering approaching a marriage agency, a strategy common in urban centers across the former Soviet Union (Luehrmann 2004; Patico 2010). Although Lena was raised as a Baptist, she had no immediate plans to emigrate. She was also adamant that it was impossible for her to become a labor migrant, since it would require her to leave her mother alone in Moldova. But she concluded, “If the right man were to come along . . . ,” she would consider leaving Moldova with her mother to start a family, in a form of migration that is apparently not uncommon for marriages secured between North American men and post-Soviet women (Johnson 2007).

Young women I met sometimes explored the three types of migration—labor, religious, and marriage—simultaneously, but more often young women, just out of high school or recently having completed a university degree, tried out the labor and marriage migration options serially, turning to labor migration if marriage migration did not seem realistic. Religious migration was most often an option for younger families, who were sponsored to become members of a Baptist Church community in the United States. These various possibilities for migration were frequently the subject of heated conversations, with anger directed at the workings of capitalism in the region and how the end of the Soviet Union had made it necessary for people to seek lives abroad.

**Capitalism, “Slavery,” and “Dirty Work”**

Donna Hughes, one of the primary proponents of an abolitionist stance in regard to sex work in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, writes, “There can be no true democracy in any country if half the population can be viewed as potential commodities to be recruited, bought, sold and enslaved” (2000, 650). Activist scholars like Hughes ardently campaign against sex work, or what they often elide with “sex trafficking,” but people I met in southern Moldova were mostly concerned with the everyday oppressions of capitalist
work relations. They invoked slavery-like conditions when they assessed the options for employment in their town and greater region of Gagauzia and when they reflected on how their families felt driven to become transnational labor migrants. Capitalism as a coercive force loomed large, even for those with more social and economic capital than others.

Almost daily, acquaintances in Vulcănești reflected on how their labor was no longer valued in the ways it had been in a socialist era. Migrants home for brief visits frequently commented that their roles in a Turkish or Russian service economy situated them in a rigid social hierarchy, while the same processes were evident in the emergent capitalist economy in Moldova. They spoke of being treated no better than “slaves” (raby), or “dogs” (sobaki). Such refrains entered into lamentations about how the past had been so much better; for instance, when Zina’s sister Eva flipped through her photo album and pointed to images of people taking part in an International Workers’ Day (May 1) parade, she sighed, saying, “We were proud to be Soviet and our work mattered; not like now.” Frequently women and men contrasted their situations with their lives during the Soviet era when menial labor would not have been grounds for them to be considered subhuman. In the Soviet period, as the shuttle traders I came to know reflected, such disdain was reserved for those engaged in trade or in accumulating capital for personal gain.

Strikingly, the narratives of especially older Vulkaneshtians I met, were dominated by themes of anger about low wages and poor working conditions, and anxiety about changing household configurations and the increasingly difficult return trips between southern Moldova and Turkey and Russia. Since the mid-1990s the only possibility for steady paid labor in Gagauzia was in one of the three wine bottling plants (vinzavody) that, like nearly all former state-run factories and even public utilities, had been transferred to private ownership in recent years. In 2005 all three of the plants were at least in part foreign-owned, with one entirely Russian-owned, one a joint American-Moldovan venture, and one a Russian-Moldovan venture.31

Despite the lack of other options in Vulcănești, people were not keen to take up jobs at these wine bottling plants, even though they paid better than most other options in town. The work required long hours, sometimes as much as sixteen to eighteen-hour shifts, and garnered just 700 lei per month, less than $50 in 2004. The plants initially hired “young” people because managers believed they would not make demands, based on their lack of work experience in the socialist system of labor relations. Until 2003 the companies only employed people younger than thirty-five, but with the lack of applicants in 2004 they extended the maximum age to forty-five. As Eva quipped, “When you get hired there they write up two pieces of paper, one formalizing your employment and the other preparing for your termination.” The revolving door Eva referred to shows how
workers felt not only poorly paid but also entirely expendable. Understandably, entry-level jobs at the bottling plants appealed to few townspeople, except as a desperate measure. In conversation they especially referred to these jobs as akin to “slavery” (rabstvo).

In the Kaloglo household, Eva and her husband, Andrei, forbade their teenage son, who was anxious to earn spending money, to work in the bottling plants; they insisted the work was dehumanizing and that their son’s labor was worth more than $50/month. Like many others, Eva assessed the growth of the wine plants and the expansion of capitalist processes generally. She described Gagauzia as a “colony” (koloniia) for Moldova, bitterly saying: “The Moldovan government basically sold off the electric utilities to the Spanish without any fair return for the Gagauz region, and the government has also happily sold off the wine bottling plants to private interests. The workers get paid poorly and they work like dogs. And look at the profits for the company! . . . Moldova uses Gagauzia as its colony—it is cheap labor for the capitalists. We are like slaves! Who needs capitalism? We were happy in Soviet times.”

Others who worked for some time at the wine bottling plant were no more happy with the employment. Again the phrase “we are like slaves” (my kak raby) was frequently invoked. One young woman, Yana, told me that as a computer programmer working at one of the wine plants she was often there for twelve hours, but not infrequently for more than twenty-four hours nonstop. She said: “They treat us like slaves, making us work as much as they want without any overtime. After all, there are no jobs here in Vulcănești. They can simply fire you and hire another batch of workers.”

In applying age discrimination in their hiring practices, in one sense the wine bottling plants had assessed the situation correctly; younger people were more willing to take on jobs that did not guarantee them any rights and had few benefits, and like Yana, they were more pliable, acquiescing to long hours of work without overtime so as to keep their jobs. Although social scientists are increasingly documenting the effects of outmigration on communities left behind (e.g., Gamburd 2000; Chu 2010; Åkesson 2011), there has been little work on how a shift toward employment in global service economies shapes aspirations of youth. In the case of southern Moldova, this is one of the striking aspects of the hypermobility in the region. One of my consultants noted how the ten-year-old granddaughter she was raising thought of Turkey as her ideal destination for when she finished high school. In 2005 her mother had been in Istanbul for eight years, sending home remittances that kept her daughter fashionably dressed, well fed, and attending the local music school. As one school principal told me, a whole generation was being raised with the understanding that the most dependable way for them to attain a modicum of material comfort was to become labor
migrants; after all 30 percent of students had both parents working abroad. For young people in southern Moldova mobility came to be a sign closely linked to aspirations for material well-being, rather than one linked to the ambivalence that global capitalism invoked for their parents’ generation.

**Generational and Gender Aspirations**

Like Mary Beth Mills (1999), who identifies important ways in which the rural to urban migrations in Thailand are shaped by cultural logics of young women supporting elders, I see important ways that southern Moldovan migration patterns for young people fit with shifting intimate household economies. In tracing those economies, or linkages between rural spaces and urban ones, Mills shows how realms as disparate as affect and filial piety can be allied with material realms of capital accumulation, or at least aspirations for this, as young women pursue their dreams. Likewise, in the town of Vulcăneşti, while growing up has become synonymous with seeking possibilities abroad, young women, in particular, are also closely tied to a sense of obligation to, but also responsibility for, their natal families. In a shift from past household practices, young women’s earnings, in this case as migrants, are a key component of household economic well-being. Young women balanced this knowledge with a desire for independence and mobility.

Several of the eight young women (ages nineteen to twenty-nine) I became acquainted with in 2004 had close family or relatives in Turkey who had offered to arrange work for them. Once they saved or borrowed the money required to process a passport and cover transportation (about $50 in 2004), it was simple to make the trip, either by minibus via Romania and Bulgaria, if they had a Romanian passport, or by ferry via Ukraine. However, the young people I met in Vulcăneşti were also considering other foreign employment. One young woman, Mila, explained how her brother had found work in Ukraine at a Turkish-run factory producing canned goods; one of Mila’s sisters was planning to join her brother, and Mila was also considering this, but only as a last resort. She wanted to go to Istanbul.

Young women were not unaware of the hardship of being an undocumented worker in Istanbul. Several spoke of how their mothers had worked for periods of time in Istanbul but returned when they became ill, were worn out by the long hours and poor pay, or family members could no longer manage without them. Mila told me that her mother had been in Istanbul for one year cleaning houses but returned because Mila’s father could not manage the seven children on his own. Mila explained that her mother had been anxious to return to Vulcăneşti since her husband was a hard drinker. However, there were few opportunities for supporting the household in Vulcăneşti.
Like Mila, many young women spoke with excitement about the prospect of traveling abroad, and mostly to Istanbul, a major metropolitan center with job opportunities of a less manual sort than those available at home or in nearby and accessible Ukraine. Mila, for instance, reflected on how one of her sisters was already employed in Istanbul as a nanny and could easily make arrangements for her as well. Mila hoped that option worked out because she considered the work in Ukraine at the canning factory to be “dirty” (гризная). Some young people resorted to local agricultural labor or work in the wine bottling plants, but most agreed working abroad was preferable. The socialist discourses of older people who lamented the loss of systems of social value that rewarded manual labor, and labor linked to social productivity and recognition (see Keough 2015), were notably absent among young people.

In weighing her options, Yana, the computer programmer working at the wine bottling plant was also anxious to leave Gagauzia. In the summer of 2004 she was considering marrying a young man she had met over the Internet who had emigrated from Moldova to Israel; Yana’s parents were wary of this option and did not want Yana to go so far away. Yana had corresponded with her prospective husband for over a year, but she was not too keen on his proposal; she was unsure what her employment options would be in Israel, and she did not want to waste her recently earned university degree and be dependent on someone, especially in a foreign land. Another possibility was to join her friend in Istanbul in a job as a shop assistant. In reflecting on her life in Vulcănești Yana explained: “It is not really life here to just go to work every day for twelve or more hours; there are no young people here [to meet up with]. My friends in Turkey keep calling and asking me to go there. They have apartments and jobs and could find me work too.” Still, Yana was torn about leaving for Turkey. She knew that most employment options in Istanbul would be in sales, entertainment, or as domestic help; it was unlikely she would be able to work in her area of expertise. Moreover, if she were to take a position in Istanbul, or leave for Israel, she would have to leave her parents’ household in Vulcănești and consider how to maintain support for them while pursuing her own dreams.

Intimate Economies of Households: “Working the Land” and “Apartment Dwelling”

Young people like Yana aspired to leave southern Moldova, but they were, none-theless, integrally connected to households. Young women, and less often young men, sent remittances home on a regular basis. Parents and other relatives often looked after grandchildren and sometimes anxiously awaited finances that could cover essential food and utilities. In other cases, such as the account of the Kaloglo
household that follows, women left children with sisters or other relatives and sent earnings home. Reflecting on the intimate economies of two specific households highlights how transnational mobility forges new understandings of status, generational obligations, and gender ideals.  

The Kaloglo Household

In many ways the Kaloglo household is a typical one, in that since the late 1990s household members have been labor migrants to Russia and Turkey, and the household continues to rely on labor migration for remittances. It is also typical of households allying with a Gagauz community (rather than an ethnic Moldovan one) in terms of its multigenerational connection to household production based on agriculture, and its bilingualism in Russian and Gagauz, with no one in the household fluent in Moldovan.

Like many families identifying as Gagauz, the Kaloglos have extended family ties linking them to their household plots owned over several generations. This is evident even in the built structures belonging to Gagauz-identified families. Most houses dating from the mid-twentieth century or earlier were built with a smaller dwelling typically located across from the main house; this was where the youngest son and his family would live, and eventually where the older male head of household and his wife would live once a youngest son inherited the responsibility of running the farm (Kuroglo 1980). Such an arrangement has historically allowed for a built-in multigenerational working of subsistence plots, and this often extends into the present.

In 2004 the extended household of the Kaloglos consisted of: Eva and Andrei, the former kolkhoz agronomist; their teenage son, Viktor; their older son who had received a scholarship to study in Russia; Zina, who was mostly in Istanbul; and Zina’s two grown children, who were studying in Chişinau and sometimes visited. Also, Zina and Eva’s elderly mother did not live with them, but she frequented the household in what amounted to a virtual extended family arrangement, with many common meals and household labor divided among the three adults and the son, Viktor. The Kaloglos were intensively running a small-scale farm—raising chickens and geese, as well as growing a wide range of vegetables and fruits and producing their own wine—all of which provided for their own household consumption. However, this type of household economy was relatively new for them. Until the early 1990s, the Kaloglos had supported their extended household based on salaries received from Andrei’s administrative work in the kolkhoz, Eva’s and Zina’s work at the local hospital, and Zina and Eva’s parents’ pensions.

With the tailspin in the local economy in the early to mid-1990s, and the dissolution of the state farm system as landholdings were widely privatized,
the Kaloglo household was forced to reconfigure. In 1996, when paychecks barely covered even expenses for food, Zina’s husband was a labor migrant on a construction site in Moscow and had been working there for two years. Zina described how at first they thought her husband had simply disappeared, but later it was confirmed that he had been discovered dead at his worksite in Russia. Soon after hearing of her husband’s death, Zina closed up her house, left her work as a medical orderly and occasional movie projectionist, and departed for Istanbul, leaving her ten-year-old and twelve-year-old children in the care of her sister, Eva. In Istanbul Zina quickly located what she considered to be a lucrative position as a shop assistant. This enabled her to earn money for raising her children and to visit home at least once per year for several weeks. Zina was able to send regular remittances via the minibuses traveling from Istanbul, as well as periodically transporting money herself, and these funds went toward the children’s education, some upkeep of her house, utility bills for her house and Eva’s, and basic household necessities.

The extended Kaloglo household weathered the late 1990s and up until 2004 by relying on Zina’s remittances and on their small-scale farm, as well as on income from Eva’s job as a nurse and from Andrei’s itinerant construction jobs in Russia. From 1997 to 2000 Andrei traveled for months at a time to work as part of a Gagauz construction team outside Moscow; nearly the entire $10,000 he was able to earn went toward sending his older son to university. Despite pooling household incomes and remittances, times were difficult in 2004. In their frequent telephone calls and during Zina’s visits, conversations often vacillated between the desperate need for money and the price one had to pay for earning it. Repeatedly Eva told me, “I’m tired of being poor.” Zina consistently sent money from Turkey, but she also told her sister Eva how Turkey was dehumanizing; she insisted that she did not want her children to be exposed to that life in a foreign, uninviting land, a _chuzhbina_, as she called it. As Eva said: “Making 200 lei [about $20/month, the average pay for people in Vulcănești in 2004] is also dehumanizing. Why not make some money and see something of the world?”

Over the years Eva often told me she was anxious to go to Turkey herself, but there were “big politics” (_bol'shaia politika_) preventing her from making the trip. She suspected that her husband and son resisted her seeking work in Turkey because she did the brunt of the work around the house: “Of course, they are happy that I cook, clean, feed the animals, tend the gardens, et cetera.” Eva complained that while she never left the house except to go to her work at the hospital, the men in the family were far more mobile and had ample free time to spend drinking with friends or go fishing. Like the Sri Lankan women Gamburg (2000) writes about, these Moldovan women seemed keenly aware of the irony that they could stay home and perform domestic work without pay or
migrate and do the same work for a wage. However, unlike the Sri Lankan women in Gamburd’s study, few middle-aged women I met thought of the domestic labor in which they engaged as “biological destiny” or “sacred calling” (Gamburd 2000, 195) performed for family. Instead, women I met in southern Moldova saw demands for their domestic labor as a recent shift from a time when they were able to dedicate themselves more fully to their professions, without the necessity of also maintaining homesteads where they had to grow food and raise chickens and geese to feed their families. Although younger women typically pointed to migration as a means to adventure, older women like Eva sometimes reflected that migration was appealing both for the possibility to “see the world” and for the chance to earn a wage for domestic/household labor she had to do anyway.

Nevertheless, Eva repeatedly told me how proud her family was to live their lives na zemle, or working the land, something that connected them to long family histories of farming. Both Eva and Andrei’s families had farmed to one degree or another, and they saw themselves as drawing on this traditional subsistence knowledge; in fact, in a pattern of ultimogeniture common among Gagauz, as the youngest son Andrei had inherited his father’s assets and a plot of land. Even as members of the kolkhoz, Andrei’s family had kept a hundred sheep as part of its private farmstead, and Andrei’s father was well regarded as a shepherd. Eva’s natal family also worked its own household land, even while her father was a manager on the kolkhoz. Eva reflected that she could never imagine herself living in an apartment (na etazakh); she would not know how to use her time.

In 2004 when I first became acquainted with the Kaloglo household they were struggling to pay basic bills, but over the years migration was critical in contributing to their relative prosperity. By 2011 Eva and Andrei’s combined income was still barely $120 a month, more than half of which they spent on utilities, but they were also substantially supported by their sons, who had settled in Russia with their families. With the regular remittances the Kaloglos received they had renovated a part of their house, insulating the walls, installing running water, and repairing an aging roof, as well as updating furnishings; they marveled that their sons’ remittances had paid for all the work on their home. Furthermore, as the younger son proudly told me, he had purchased a good-quality used car for his father. Remittances also made it possible for the Kaloglos to invest much less of their own labor in maintaining their house and caring for their small farm. In 2011 they were able to hire itinerant laborers from a nearby village to beat rugs, plow and weed the garden, and help with harvests.

Over the course of the early 2000s Zina’s situation also changed, so she was no longer economically integral to the Kaloglo household but still maintained close ties. By 2010 Zina’s two children had completed their studies and established their own families and Zina did not feel compelled to remain in Istanbul. For
many reasons Zina also did not feel drawn to returning to Vulcănești. In 2010
her mother died and Zina’s children lived in Chișinău and Moscow, so only Zina’s
sister, Eva, and Eva’s husband, Andrei, remained in Vulcănești. After fifteen years
of living in Istanbul, Zina was used to living in the city, and when she was ready
to leave Turkey, she decided to move to Moscow to live with her daughter and
son-in-law and help care for her granddaughter. Still, transnational networks
of care and intimacy remained important, and Zina’s granddaughter frequently
spent her three-month-long summer vacation living with her great-aunt Eva and
great-uncle Andrei.

While the Kaloglo household portrait reflects how migration has played a
critical role in the lives of families in southern Moldova since the 1990s, turning
to a household with fewer forms of capital further highlights the differential ways
mobility is shaping the region, including at the intimate level of the household.

The Milshniaga Household

When I arrived in Vulcănești with my infant daughter and stepmother and stayed
with Bella in the summer of 2003, we went across the street to meet Bella’s friend
Nelli. Nelli was in her small yard in the midst of weeding vegetables, surrounded
by her peonies about to burst open and grapevines growing up and around the
windows of her apartment. She ushered us into her home on the ground floor
of the concrete apartment building and offered us tea, cookies, bread and butter,
fried eggs, and slices of sausage. In this first conversation and in many subsequent
ones over the years, Nelli narrated aspects of her life and introduced me to her
wide network of friends, as well as to her own close family members.

Unlike the Kaloglos, the Milshniagas had not lived in southern Moldova for
generations. Nelli had arrived with her husband in the 1970s from a town to
the north, whose inhabitants, like herself, predominantly identified as ethnically
Moldovan. In her youth Nelli worked a range of jobs, but never pursued post-
secondary education, despite her keen sense of critical reflection and intellectual
curiosity. In the late Soviet era Nelli had worked in a state-run cafeteria, as a bus
conductor, and as a seamstress. Her husband, an ethnic Bulgarian, left her when
her two children were young, so she had raised them on her own, without nearby
family; her own natal family was several hours away, and more distant relatives
lived about an hour away to the west, across the border in Romania.

As it had for most people who had migrated to Vulcănești to take up jobs in
the late Soviet years, the local government had allocated Nelli an apartment in
the five-story cement apartment blocks located a ten-minute walk beyond the
center of town. These apartment dwellers were sometimes spoken of as living
na etazhakh, in contrast to living na zemle, as many longer-term residents of
Vulcăneşti did. The apartment blocks were largely inhabited by those who had either moved to the area within the last generation or had moved away from the household production of their parents and extended family. After the end of the Soviet Union, those who had not had access to higher education, or even to plots of land for maintaining subsistence agriculture, found that their work in low-level, often menial positions in state-run organizations, like schools or the local hospital, was no longer sufficient for supporting their households. Nelli’s household was, like many in these apartment blocks, dependent on remittances from abroad, with only a few subsistence foods, like potatoes and cabbage, being grown in a small kitchen garden beside the apartment building.

It had not always been like this. In raising her two children, Nelli had worked long hours and thought about how her daughter, with an exquisite voice and a flair for performing, could ultimately excel in the music or entertainment sphere. She dreamed of her son becoming part of the managerial staff in the kolkhoz. When the Soviet Union ended in the early 1990s, Nelli lost her job and briefly shuttled goods—such as Lenin memorabilia and cognac—to a border town in Romania, located just twenty minutes away by car. Nelli’s daughter, Niki, was just completing high school. She hoped to enroll in a music institute, but the timing was bad; the institute in Chişinău turned her away, saying that those from Gagauzia, which at the time had sought to secede from Moldova, were not welcome there. Niki returned home, found work in a beauty salon, soon after married her high-school sweetheart, and then gave birth to a daughter. Just a few years later Niki decided to leave her turbulent marriage and have her mother stay with the child while she traveled to Turkey in search of work.

Just after the end of the Soviet Union, Nelli herself had spent nearly two years cleaning houses in Turkey. Nelli’s poor health ultimately meant that she had to return to Moldova. In the early 1990s she could find few work opportunities, so it was a relief when her daughter, and soon afterward her son, found a sales position in Istanbul. When I met them in 2004, Nelli struggled to provide for herself and her granddaughter, but the monies Nelli’s son and daughter sent from Turkey made it possible to purchase food and clothing and pay for utilities, as well as pay the extra fees required for Nelli’s granddaughter to attend music school. Every few years Nelli and her granddaughter had been able to travel to Turkey and enjoy time visiting with Niki, and Niki made an annual trip home, sometimes also coming home for important ritual events. For instance, in 2004 Nelli excitedly showed me home videos of Niki accompanied by her boyfriend, Ali, attending a friend’s wedding in Vulcăneşti. Nelli was hopeful that her daughter’s long-term boyfriend might eventually become her son-in-law.

By 2011 Nelli was less optimistic about her family’s prospects. Niki had broken up with her boyfriend and returned for an extended stay with Nelli while she
considered what she would do next. Nelli’s granddaughter was finishing high school and aspired to study at a music conservatory in Chișinău, but there was little hope of finding the means to pay for this. Despite material circumstances, Nelli continued to manage on a small pension and intermittent remittances from her son, who had returned to Turkey. In the summer of 2011 times were especially tough, with Nelli’s son sending the majority of his earnings to support a young daughter being raised by his ex-wife. Still, Nelli and Niki decided to repaint their bedroom a light violet and remodel with a full set of furniture, a purchase they made for $1,000 across the border in Romania.

Nelli and Niki had begun to make use of the easily obtainable Romanian “short stay” visas and travel regularly to Romania for trade, and by 2013 their Romanian passports allowed them to stay for longer in Romania and beyond. This also meant that they were again in frequent touch with relatives in Galați, just on the other side of the border, although those kin were in similar straits, with most young people away as labor migrants and few household resources (Weber 2014). Most often Nelli and Niki transported vegetables, like potatoes from Romania, and resold these out of their garage space across from the apartment block, but sometimes they also took special orders for car parts or tires. As Nelli explained with resignation, this was little different from what they were doing to survive in the early 1990s, only now there was no demand for cognac or Lenin memorabilia in Romania, so they were only moving goods from Romania into Moldova. Nelli reflected that while they were able to make relatively large sums through the shuttle trade in the early 1990s, now the profit margins were much smaller; after paying for gas and any customs duties or bribes, on most trips they were lucky to break even.

In many ways the Kaloglo and Milshniaga households differ in terms of their ability to thrive in a neocapitalist Moldova. However, since the end of the Soviet Union they have both relied on labor migration. In both households men set out for Russia to work on construction, and in both, women went to Istanbul to work as domestic laborers or shop assistants. Remittances sent home went toward paying utilities, buying groceries, and paying for education. Still, the portraits of these two households reflect the degree to which household circumstances prior to the end of the Soviet Union shape the options today. Everyone suffered when the stable, Soviet system came apart, but those with greater social capital—such as an education or strong ties to structures of power and ongoing social services (e.g., the kolkhoz administration and the town hospital)—and economic capital (land) were better able to support their families. Furthermore, those households that could rely on more than one or two sources of income fared better. People like Eva and Andrei were well positioned in times of crisis to rely on their land holdings and long-term knowledge of animal husbandry, as well as formal
paychecks, even if they were meager. In addition, they were able to pool resources with Eva’s sister, Zina, and with a member of an older generation (Eva and Zina’s mother) so as to aggregate available capital, eventually supporting their sons enough that they were able to carry on providing significantly for the household.

In contrast, people like Nelli faced the challenge of raising a family without nearby kin. With the end of the Soviet Union, Nelli’s household also lacked critical landholdings and knowhow for farming, as well as a specialized education—the social capital that could have insured a stable, if poorly paid, job and better pension. There is a wide spectrum of material well-being for households, even when they share a reliance on labor migration.

Remittances, Distinction, and Burning Books

Recent scholarship on remittance economies in Eurasia has reflected on some of the implications of the transnational flow of labor and finances for whole communities (see Reeves 2014). However, relatively little work has focused on the meanings attributed to the relational aspect of remittance economies, or who is sending money or goods and to whom. As Åkesson (2011) shows in her research among Cape Verdeans, remittances are inherently bound up in kinship ties; it matters immensely the degree to which kin ties are maintained, disregarded, or thwarted, and by whom. Furthermore, remittance relationships are linked to shifting systems of value among those who stay behind and benefit directly from remittances. As Wanner (2005) argues for Ukraine, the infusion of cash-based forms of exchange in Moldova has redefined social obligations and challenged systems of value.

In discussing remittance arrangements, some residents pondered what they saw as related dependencies and growing consumer desires. Some asked what motivation people could have to make a living locally if they could depend on funds coming from abroad. Those able to provide for most of their household needs by working their land tended to be especially critical of those living in apartments, but also of others not working the land. As one subsistence farmer who was also working in the town health care system commented: “They are just living off their children’s remittances; they do not work and they don’t plant anything. They buy everything, even potatoes!”

It was not uncommon for those households taking care of migrants’ young children to rely heavily on remittances. For instance, in 2004 one woman I met recounted, as she bounced my toddler daughter on her knee, how she cared for her five-year-old grandchild and received remittances from her daughter, and less frequently from her son-in-law. The son-in-law had not seen his daughter since
she was five months old, and the daughter had not seen the child since she was eight months old. The woman explained that she was struggling on the remittances she received to heat and light her home, as well as keep her grandchild fed and clothed. She no longer worked in a job receiving a paycheck and said she could not find time to tend a garden.

Such women were subject to quiet but strong disapproval by those working their land and continuing to work in wage labor positions. The view that receiving remittances can lead to a lack of initiative in households is not unique to Moldova (see Åkesson 2011, 254). However, the ways people reflected on the transformation of social relations is specific to the postsocialist setting of southern Moldova, where reworkings of class, ethnic and national belonging, and gender ideals come together in specific ways. During my research judgments about people being unwilling to work hard were often wrapped up in the ways people in Vulcănești variously framed modernity through a socialist lens of trud, or labor—the sense of something having value for being produced through one’s efforts (Wanner 2005). In valorizing work that required what they saw as genuine labor, some older people in Vulcănești implicitly judged those who were able to survive primarily on remittances. As Leyla Keough has noted elsewhere in southern Moldova, distinction is attained through manual labor and by working the land, even if labor migration is crucial for households (2015, 146).

In my research I found a class dynamic wherein those who were landless and living in apartment blocks were especially criticized by those working the land, including for their patterns of consumption. The apartment dwellers’ strategies for improving their lives focused more on their ability to cross borders for economic opportunity and less on symbolic capital garnered during the Soviet era or, in more recent years, on education. As Wanner (2005) found in Ukraine, in a post-Soviet era conspicuous consumption in the form of major renovations, clothes, jewelry, used cars, or furniture is often a form of distinction that contrasts with that still relied on by landholding households. In general, the landholding households calibrated distinction in regard to education and professional stature, while deemphasizing the importance of consumer goods and a set of social relations defined by money. However, as in neighboring Ukraine, and as the household portraits above suggest, these boundaries between forms of distinction have been increasingly blurred. This situation is illustrated by the following account.

One day in 2011 I accompanied Andrei to pick up some money Zina sent from Istanbul via a minibus service doubling as an unofficial money transfer company. I was reminded of how access to social and economic capital tends to shape the ways households use remittances, but also how they experience transactions around remittances. Andrei was not sure where exactly to pick up the money, and he was a little sheepish about asking for directions, since this made
it public knowledge that he was receiving a remittance. We had to ask at several shops before we found the money transfer company that had set up temporarily around the back of a building. In the awkwardness of receiving a money transfer, Andrei asked if he could have “the parcel” that had arrived in his name. The clerk answered, “Do you really think we would have the actual money sent in a parcel?” The clerk then asked Andrei to sign his name before she counted out the US dollars. Andrei confided that he usually picked up money directly from an acquaintance carrying it for Zina, and he was a bit embarrassed by having to deal with a company to do the transaction. Dealing so directly with money in a public setting detracted from the distinction Andrei still had as someone who had occupied a prominent position within the collective farm system. Having to sign for the money and attest to receiving it from a sister-in-law made this awkward transaction more visible, and so even more difficult.

Another instance in the Kaloglo household underscored how questions of distinction, household gender roles, and shifting systems of value collided as labor migration resulted in remittances in various forms. In 2007, when I arrived at the Kaloglo household, a washing machine still in its cardboard box was in the middle of the hallway. When I asked about the machine, Eva scoffed and told me, “Zina sent it from Istanbul to show off.” Andrei grumbled that they did not want the unnecessary washing machine and would get rid of it. Given the long hours each week that most people spend washing clothes by hand, I was surprised by their comments and gathered that the washing machine embodied several issues for the Kaloglos. First, the lavish expense of a washing machine reflected Zina’s ability to afford such a gift, and this uncomfortably highlighted new relations of power within the household. Second, it mattered that it was a widowed sister-in-law who was giving this to a family that had raised her two children. Zina proudly told me the machine was meant as a sincere sign of her appreciation for her sister and brother-in-law’s support in raising her children, but the Kaloglo household saw it as a sort of crass expression of Zina’s economic achievements, and one that marked them as morally implicated in the questionable pursuit of conspicuous consumption (see Wanner 2005). Even more than this, however, it mattered who sent remittances and for what purpose. It was fine when Zina sent money specifically to support her children in the care of the Kaloglo household, but her primary status as a sister-in-law in the Kaloglo household made it awkward for her to give what was seen as a major luxury item after the children had established their own households. The lavish gift highlighted the fundamental reorganization of economic power even while local gender hierarchies continued to position men as household heads.

While remittances are tied to shifts in how distinction plays out for households, neocapitalism in the region also changed hierarchies of value more broadly. In the
past, access to formal learning, and especially to higher education, was an important form of distinction across the FSU. Formal education set kolkhoz agronomists apart from kolkhoz workers, nurses apart from orderlies, and teachers apart from those working as illicit entrepreneurs. As Jennifer Patico (2008) traces elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, in southern Moldova the hierarchy of value that placed knowledge gained through formal training at the pinnacle of achievement had eroded by the early 2000s, and money and the ability to be financially stable became primary. However, those raised in a different era retained some sense of another system of value, where a widespread, deep veneration of formal learning and books defined public culture, even in rural areas.

In a striking illustration of the generational differences between those raised under socialism and those coming of age in a neocapitalist era, Eva recounted a story about her younger son who, partly due to financial constraints, had not been able to continue on for postsecondary education. In the late 1990s the family had been struggling to pay for utilities and had discussed burning old furniture in their cook stove instead of paying for gas to heat their home. Eva recalled coming home to find her teenage son burning books as a fuel source. Eva exclaimed: “Can you imagine, burning books! And in this house where books and ideas have meant so much to us! Young people just do not have the appreciation we have for learning and education!” The end of the Soviet Union has meant radical reworkings of a wide range of cultural values and ideas about distinction, yet another way that the retraction of the state is felt at the intimate level of the household.

**Gendered Border Crossings: Health Care, Passports, and Names**

One could see southern Moldovan households as fixtures on the social landscape, while the women moving across national boundaries are creating new types of connections, even as they shuttle back to these ongoing household units. Unlike Claude Lévi-Strauss’s (1969) idea of women as a unit of exchange linking different groups and perpetuating these groups’ internal arrangements and hierarchies, here I see women as actively forging new types of power as they take part in remaking the intimate economies of households. This was especially evident in discussions with migrants about the common practice that numerous women had engaged in until 2004 of outmaneuvering customs and border control officers.

Throughout the 1990s and into the early 2000s women could make relatively frequent sojourns home from Istanbul with few restrictions, except for paying $30–$50 for the bus via Bulgaria and Romania back to Gagauzia. Customs and passport control points usually required migrants to pay modest fees for
overstaying their one-month tourist visas, but a small bribe or good fortune in encountering a sympathetic border official often meant minimal problems, and women were not too concerned about being deported since they could get new passports reissued and return easily. Women repeatedly told me that they were in demand in those years; they had no problem locating work again in Istanbul if they lost a position after a visit home.

Women recounted how in their first years of coming to Turkey they did not hesitate to travel home for major life cycle events, such as christenings and weddings. In some cases, the need for medical care brought migrants home when they could not afford necessary health care in Turkey. Beginning in the early 2000s medical care in the town hospital in Vulcănești was increasingly provided on a fee-for-service basis, and while it was considered costly by local standards, migrants returning home from Istanbul or Moscow considered it relatively affordable. Staff at the hospital noted that women migrants tended to return to Vulcănești when they needed abortions or other gynecological care.

In addition to negotiating the border to access reproductive health care, women’s border-crossing strategies included those around being deported. On deportation from Turkey they would receive a prominent “deport” stamp in their passports, and this would make it impossible for women to return to Turkey, at least on that passport. However, throughout the 1990s and into the early 2000s, deported women frequently had passports reissued in Moldova with different names. They did this by establishing new official identities through mechanisms of divorce and marriage.

From the early 1990s to the early 2000s the Vulcănești region saw the number of divorces more than double, even as the population of Moldova dropped. This occurred at a time of severe outmigration and a wide range of social and economic stresses for households, so it is improbable that the increase in divorces was simply a matter of women seeking to reissue passports. Still, given what I heard from women like Zina and Bella, this is very likely one of the significant factors. Like several other women, Zina told me that she had her passport reissued four times with four different surnames after each subsequent marriage (or divorce) in Moldova: the first time she married in the late Soviet Union and had children with her husband, whose surname she took; then in the late 1990s she married two separate acquaintances, paying $50 each time, once reestablishing her maiden name, and once taking her new “husband’s” surname; and the last time she married, she took her mother’s maiden name as her surname.

These practices point to the ways Moldovan women literally (re)crafted their sense of self, or at least their official identities, as a mechanism for border crossing. In (re)Naming themselves, women renegotiated their mobility. As Rubie Watson (1986) has written about historical naming practices in rural China,
multiple names conferred status on men, and throughout life men gained additional names as they moved through their life cycles. In contrast, rural Chinese women remained “unnamed,” often with only nicknames at birth, and not gaining new names as they moved through life; in a society that placed great value on male status embodied in names, rural Chinese women’s “nameless” state was indicative of their lack of significant status. In contrast, Moldovan women have had a fundamental freedom to take on new names and to wield forms of power associated with the ability to be mobile. Moreover, like the men Watson describes, Moldovan women’s life stages were often marked by new surnames and linked to the coming-of-age experience of labor migration.

Moldovan men’s and women’s ability to take on new names, and therefore to have passports reissued, also varies in a culturally specific way. Women can simply take on a new name as a result of registering a marriage. Men in Moldova can on marriage technically take on a new legal surname as well, but this is a less normative change in identity than it is for a woman to change her surname upon marriage or divorce. During my research women tended to adopt the surname of their spouse on marriage, and as in many locations in the former Soviet Union, divorce was relatively easy to process, with little stigma associated with it.

By 2004, with the onset of new security measures—including biometric passports and databases tracing the histories of passports held by an individual, and requirements that on deportation migrants had to remain out of the country for the corresponding amount of time they had overstayed their visas in Turkey—women no longer employed the practice of serial marriages in Moldova to negotiate the border. This again changed mobility patterns; with migrants unable to depend on being able to return to Turkey once they had left, many migrants I met chose to remain in Turkey for years on end without returning home. These strategies are part of the story of how intimate practices have been shaped by new mobilities in the region as women and men have sought ways to maneuver within the constraints of growing precarity that came to define their lives with the end of the Soviet Union.

Since the late 1990s people in Gagauzia, like the Kaloglos and Milshniagas, have become a source of flexible, marginalized labor both for local forms of neocapitalism, such as the wine bottling plants, and for centers of global capitalism, like Istanbul, Turkey. As middle-aged women such as Zina, Nelli, and Eva navigated their limited options for households based in Moldova, they looked to prospects for labor migration for themselves but also for younger household members. Younger women like Lena, Yana, Mila, and Niki sometimes looked to transnational marriage, religious communities, and, on occasion, to educational opportunities as forms of mobility, but labor migration is an option that cuts across
generations and defines intimate economies of households, as well as intimate practices around marriage, irrespective of social status. Mobility itself becomes a way of negotiating distinction and status within households and between households, as well as being key in how intimate economies of care, aspiration, and distinction get realized. The next chapter turns from the intimate economies of households in Moldova to consider the transnational circuits of intimacy that migrant women engage as they negotiate intimate relationships with men in Istanbul.