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# **‘NOTHING HAS CHANGED, IT JUST TURNED ILLEGAL’: DISCOURSES FOR THE JUSTIFICATION OF ILLEGAL TRADE AND IMMIGRATION IN THE MOLDOVAN REPUBLIC**

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This article envisages the movements of goods and people from the point of view of their real and perceived legal status. It explores the multifaceted reasons and complex arguments used to support legally condemnable activities such as illegal trade and illegal migration. I focus on a Moldovan village situated on the border with Ukraine and present the villagers’ discourses for justifying these illegal activities in the context of the severe economic shortage and lack of employment opportunities in the area. The main reasons invoked for justifying continued involvement in economic transactions that became illegal when the USSR collapsed are economic rationality and the tradition of trade between the ex-Soviet republics. As far as labour migration is concerned, discourses for justifying illegal migration are largely absent; the findings of the study indicate that it is not the illegality of labour migration that concerns potential migrants, but only its feasibility and resulting benefits. However, when it comes to the moral dimension of the (illegal) activities in which migrants engage, discourses of justification are produced – not only for officials or the anthropologist, but also for fellow villagers. They need to be persuaded that the standards of morality within the village are distinct from the standards of morality outside the village and that the movement of people and goods should not fall under the jurisdiction of the former.

In the first part of this article I will discuss the economic, political and social circumstances that have led to labour migration and cross-frontier trade in the Republic of Moldova since 1991 and consider the various migration destinations and legal status available to Moldovans. In the second part of the article I will seek to interpret the discourses generated by migrants and their families to justify illegal migration and trade to the community (and the anthropologist).

## **1. Why and how do Moldovans migrate?**

The National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova estimates that around 0.5 million of the republic’s 4.35 million citizens are working abroad. They represent as much as 35% of the total active population, which is put at 1.35 million (Anuarul Statistic 2003). Independent mass media make references to one million labour

migrants, more than half the active population of the republic and 25% of the total population. It has been estimated that the income sent back to Moldova by migrant labourers solely through Western Union money transfers is already three times the level of the state budget. The difference between official state figures and the figures published by independent media regarding the number of migrants is not only attributable to the different political positions that they seek to advance. Most trade and migration is illegal and thus escapes the control of the state. Although precise statistics on the scale of this phenomenon are lacking, migration is considered to be the most important and visible feature of social life in the country and it is the hottest topic of daily debate.

### *The causes of migration*

The social and economic changes that affected the newly born Republic of Moldova after 1991 were common to most ex-Soviet republics. Union structures were dismantled following the disintegration of the USSR and the newly emerging countries had to build democratic institutions from scratch in an economic and political environment heavily influenced by the Soviet legacy. Certain political and historical circumstances – namely economic dependence on Russia due to Transnistria’s breakaway and patterns of employment during the socialist period – aggravated the consequences of the collapse of the USSR in Moldova, resulting in massive unemployment and disproportionate poverty given the county’s natural and geographical assets.

The predecessor of the Republic of Moldova, the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR), came about at the end of the Second World War from the unification of two territories: the Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (better known by the name of Transnistria, the left bank of the Dniestr river), a republic created in 1924 and functioning within the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, and a much larger territory, commonly known as Bessarabia (the right bank of the Dniestr river), which was part of Romania before WWII. The Bessarabian region, newly incorporated into the USSR, underwent extensive purges of the cultural and economic elites in the 1940s and remained distrusted throughout the socialist period. During this

time political elites were recruited from the Transnistrian part of the republic and all the main industry was built there. The right bank was used largely for agricultural production and light industry (agro-industry and textiles). In general, the Moldovan SSR was tasked with producing cereals and wine for the USSR economy. In June 1990, following a national resurrection movement claiming language rights for the titular nation in the republic, the Moldovans (Romanians), the republic declared its sovereignty within the USSR (Fruntaşu 2003). In response to the Roumanophone movement, the Russophone left bank of the Dniestr declared its secession from the right bank in September 1990 and formed the Dniestrian Moldovan Republic (Transnistria), a political entity which to this day is still not recognised internationally. Although officially part of the Republic of Moldova (independent since August 1991), Transnistria has its own government, currency, political structures (Troebst 2003; Troebst 2004) and, most notably, does not share its economic assets with Moldova. A war between the two banks of the river in 1992 accentuated the disintegration of the economy. The Republic of Moldova has few industrial structures, no sources of energy and gas, and after fifteen years of independence it is still economically dependent on the Russian Federation (which provides these energy resources).

Meanwhile, several USSR enterprises situated on the territory of Moldova were withdrawn at the beginning of the 1990s when the Soviet Union collapsed. The remaining enterprises went through restructuring as in all former socialist states. The result is that today only 12% of the employed population works in industry, with as much as 43% employed in agriculture and 45% in the tertiary sector (Anuarul Statistic 2003). On further analysis of these figures according to the age of the employed population, their ethnic belonging and rural/urban residence, certain patterns of employment emerge that explain the current exodus of the workforce.

In the MSSR collective farms, *kolkhozy*, were formed in 1949 and the entire adult rural population (except for some specialists) was taken to work in the fields. By the 1970s agriculture was mechanised and there was no need to bring up younger generations on the farms. The young rural population from the right bank of the Dniestr was drawn into light industry. Following the restructuring of industry after 1991, it was the younger generation that was left unemployed. In 1992 decollectivisation began (a process that ended in 1999) and land was redistributed among those who were or had been active in the *kolkhoz*, i.e. the older generations. Younger generations were left without town jobs and

without other means of subsistence. Those with a higher education generally moved to the capital city Chisinau, home to 20% of the republic's total population, where they started small businesses or began to work in the tertiary sector. Many small businesses involve cross-border trade between Moldova and the neighbouring countries, especially within the CSI. It is estimated that 70% of national GDP derives from export and import activities at the borders. Businesses that would generate jobs and income are more difficult to start in the rural milieu, where information, connections and entrepreneurial *savoir faire* are lacking. Peasants sell their produce in the towns on an individual basis at an insignificant profit and few consider crossing frontiers with their products because of the high cost of bribing the border police.<sup>iii</sup> New small farms have been set up in villages, pooling the land of several owners. Yet they are few in number and have not been encouraged by the government (led by the Party of Communists since February 2001), which prefers to maintain larger *kolkhoz*-type farm structures. Not surprisingly, independent farmers and small collective farms are led by men with anti-communist leanings; they make an ideological statement with their involvement in independent farming and their refusal to go to work in Russia.

For the rural population (representing 61% of the total Moldovan population) with no expertise in independent farming and no ideological position to uphold, the only source of work and income appears to be abroad. This would explain why men and women aged 18 to 45-50, with some work experience in factories, can imagine trying labour migration to various destinations that reportedly offer earnings prospects.

#### ***Migrant destinations and the question of legality***

The destination for migration is primarily linked to a migrant's ability to reach it and only secondarily to the attraction that it exercises on a migrant. Migration towards the West is therefore preferable to migration towards the East, but since the former is more difficult the number of East-ward migrants greatly exceeds the number of West-ward migrants. The length of stay in the host country is also directly proportional to the difficulty of reaching it: migrants do not venture to return to Moldova if they are unsure of their ability to return to the host country afterwards. Consequently, the life of the families left behind takes on a different pace depending on whether or not the members engaged in migration return home on a regular basis.

The first destination for work is Russia (the cities of Moscow and Saint Petersburg), where the monthly wage can be as high as 200-250 dollars.

Since the Republic of Moldova is a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the weak successor to the USSR, its citizens had the right to circulate freely in ex-Soviet space in 2003-2004. However, in another legacy of the politics of control of the Soviet Union, foreign citizens are required to register within three days of arrival. Registration costs one hundred dollars for a three-month stay in Russia and does not give the right to work. Given the average monthly wage in Moldova of fifty dollars (a wage that few have the opportunity to earn), not many Moldovan citizens are willing to pay the registration fee. Consequently, after spending three days in Russia most Moldovans stay on illegally and almost all of them work illegally. Work in Russia is facilitated by their knowledge of Russian, a state language during the Soviet era, and by the USSR integration policy that familiarised Moldovans with Russia.<sup>iv</sup> The feeling of still belonging to the USSR continues to be nurtured in Moldova through material culture, e.g. by keeping the former Soviet passports and bringing various newspapers and magazines back from Moscow. It is also fostered by the Russian minority that denies the changes that took place after 1989 by refusing to learn and speak the state language or to identify with the Moldovan state. Furthermore, the nostalgia for *bolshevita*<sup>v</sup> led many citizens to vote for the return of the Communist Party with its pro-USSR programme in the 2001 elections.<sup>vi</sup> However, few have experience of actually travelling in Russia before they need to seek work abroad. Moldovan men are easily spotted as foreigners in large Russian metropolises, suggesting that their former Soviet identity does not help to disguise their contemporary appearance as the 'foreigner'. Often the police catch them and fine them, i.e. they extract money from them in exchange for not denouncing their illegal residence status in Russia.<sup>vii</sup> Staying in Russia is risky – their illegal status confines workers to their place of employment (where they also live) and prevents them from walking on the street during the day.<sup>viii</sup> Travelling freely back and forth between Russia and Moldova is possible due to the ID card (no record is kept of border crossings) and the low (CIS-protected<sup>ix</sup>) travel prices. This enables rural inhabitants to leave quite spontaneously for Russia when there is less work to do in their households and they lack cash. Relatively few labour migrants go to Russia for periods longer than a few months in a row because immigrants aged 18 to 50 have children at home and households to keep. Work opportunities in Russia may also not be continuous.

Work in Russia is not entirely disruptive for family life since migrating members are able to return on a regular basis. It is also less disruptive for community life because the connection between

villagers is kept up when several villagers work in the same Russian town and communicate news from home to each other or their families. However, no reconstitution of the community abroad is possible due to the illegal status that restricts Moldovans to their workplaces (those working in construction tend to live on the building site; those who take care of older people or children live with the host families) and because the size of the cities in which they work obliges them to live miles apart.

The second and most sought-after destination is of course Western Europe. This is because the earnings are higher, ranging from 800 to 1000 euros per month. Western Europe is the destination for longer-term migration because of the difficulty of access and hence it requires careful planning. Schengen visas are almost inaccessible to potential labour migrants, who are easily spotted by the European embassies in Chisinau and refused visas. The solution often lies in paying for extremely expensive visas, costing around two thousand euros, which some travel agencies organise illegally.<sup>x</sup> Italy is the Western European country with the largest Moldovan population, with the most popular employment there being caring for the elderly (especially among female migrants). Such jobs finally seem to have been accepted by Italian officials, because after 2-3 years some Moldovans are able to obtain papers enabling them to travel back and forth to Moldova. In addition to the appealing similarity of the Italian and Romanian languages, Italy is a common destination because of the channels opened by the first immigrants and certainly also because of a more indulgent attitude on the part of the *carabinieri*. For those who do not succeed in legalising their status, temporary returns are not foreseen and a definitive return is dictated simply by eventual deportation from the Western state. In the case of Western European destinations family networks function best, while for Russian destinations neighbourhood ties seem to suffice for spreading information about job opportunities and ways of coping with the border guards and local police.

Labour migration to Western Europe is facilitated in the western part of the Republic of Moldova by the fact that many Moldovans can travel with Romanian passports.<sup>xi</sup> Romanian legislation allows former citizens of Romania and their descendents to regain Romanian citizenship. Until 2002 a residence requirement on the territory of Romania made it difficult for Moldovans living further away from the Moldovan/Romanian border to regain Romanian citizenship. Obtaining Romanian passports has become more difficult over the years as Romania has had to come into line with European

Union regulations in preparation for its EU integration, yet this has also made their acquisition more tempting (Marin 2006). Economic disparities have appeared between regions: villages close to the Romanian border are richer than those close to the Ukrainian frontier due to the availability of work in the West as opposed to opportunities in the East (tall new houses are material proof of this). Romanian passports permit travel twice a year for three months at a time within countries that have signed the Schengen Agreement, albeit without the right to work. The constraint of having to return every three months for a three-month period is easily circumvented by bribing the border police to change the return date – a bribe my Romanian informants put at one hundred euros, a reasonable amount to spend when working within the European Union. For Romanian passport holders, travelling to the West becomes as spontaneous and need-oriented as travelling to Russia for Moldovan passport holders.<sup>xiii</sup> Money brought back to the Republic of Moldova is mainly used for building houses. When new needs arise, such as for decorating a room or bathroom, one member of the family leaves again to work until the necessary amount of money has been earned. As one middle-aged woman complained, this process never stops because new needs or new ambitions always arise. Yet as a younger male migrant explained to me, while he was still young enough to be active he could not retire and live on what he had earned because he was certain that sometime in the future he would again experience a lack, possibly at a stage in his life when he would not be able to get work so easily. What pushes villagers to migrate, therefore, are not just needs and ambitions, but also certain ideas about life and work.

Despite the advantages of working in the West, the long-term absence is more disruptive for family life and in many cases several years of absence cause the destruction of the family. Often, those working in the West do not go back to their home village, but upon return settle in Chisinau. Many migrate permanently, establishing new families abroad or migrating with their entire nuclear families. Children of permanently migrating families are often taken care of by grandparents until they reach school age, before following their parents abroad.

The migration destination has the capacity to fashion a certain identity and civic attitude, despite the weak link existing between the host country and the migrant due to her/his illegal status. Consequently, newspapers often present migrant labour in Western Europe as able to generate a European identity for Moldovans, notwithstanding whether the migrants travel on Moldovan or Romanian passports (i.e. more or less legally). Such a

European identity manifests itself when they are back in Moldova through the desire for integration into the European Union, voting for pro-European parties and against the Communists and increased participation in public life. This sympathy for the West is borne of practical considerations: Western European countries offer better living and working conditions than Moldova or Russia. Lack of access to information about living standards in the European Union prompts many to regard conditions in Russia as the best there could be (inasmuch as they are the best that they have witnessed or heard about) and hence cooperation with Russia is viewed as the most desirable political position. Travelling and working in Western Europe opens up fresh perspectives and renders other identifications attractive. Migrants to the West return to Moldova with different notions of public life (for instance, with new expectations regarding the protective role of the state, the freedom of mass media) and with visions of desirable futures that differ from those of migrants to the East (Heintz 2007).

## **2. Discourses of justification for illegal and/or immoral actions**

In 2003/2004 I conducted eight months of fieldwork in Satu Vechi, a rural community of some 3,000 inhabitants situated on the Moldovan/Ukrainian border. In August 2004 I tried to measure the scale of the migration phenomenon based on a sample of 75 households drawn from the same neighbourhood. The survey revealed that 22 households (30%) had at least one migrant labourer away working at the time of my interview, a total of 30 workers out of almost 300 inhabitants (10%). Of these, 26 migrant workers were working in Russia, one in Turkey, one in the Czech Republic, two in Italy (one was there temporarily on a Romanian passport, the other had not returned for the past three years because his status there was illegal). If the population included in the sample between the ages of 18 and 45 is regarded as capable of working (many have medical problems for which they receive pensions), almost one third had gone to work abroad. Relatively speaking, this is a village considered to have been impacted less by migration than others, and it would be impossible to extrapolate or estimate the extent of the national migration phenomenon from this sample. At the local level, though, the number of emigrants significantly influences village life in that it imposes unusual family arrangements: children have to be brought up by aunts and uncles or great-aunts and -uncles, siblings are divided between several households, grandparents are separated while one grandparent takes residence in the children's house to look after the grandchildren while the other continues taking care of the farm etc.

It is hardly any wonder, then, that labour migration is a topic of lively interest and discussion in the village. Most conversations turn around those who work abroad, when they will return to pay a visit, whether the (nuclear) family can still hold together when the husband/father or wife/mother is away, what jobs could be found and how much they bring in, including many anecdotes linked to the illegal nature of their employment. While politics is almost taboo in the village, most people still being afraid to openly criticise the government, nobody hesitates to talk about the tricks employed to get around the border police or the local Russian or far-away Italian police. However, migrants avoid being precise about the type of jobs they do abroad and the conditions in which they live, unless specifically asked to do so. In general, they present themselves as hard workers, living in better conditions and with greater dignity than their family left behind at home – except for occasional accounts of being on the run.<sup>xiii</sup>

I will discuss below, firstly, the (lack of) discourses used to justify the illegal aspects of migration and, secondly, the strategies for justifying immoral activities.

#### ***The lack of justification provided for illegal activities***

Direct discourses for justifying illegal migration are lacking; people do not believe that there is anything to justify in front of a fellow villager or anthropologist because they do not consider that there is anything wrong with what they are doing. What are the reasons for this absence?

The first reason for this lack of a need for justification is simply the scale of immigration, which reassures both migrants and their families that what they are doing is 'normal'.<sup>xiv</sup> We have seen the large (estimated) figures for the scale of migration. It should be borne in mind that during the Soviet period just what was politically dangerous was never known exactly, but by not standing out from the crowd and by doing the same things as everyone else one could stay on the safe side.<sup>xv</sup> In the village labour migration is 'normal': it is travelling far away to find a job if none is available closer to home.

The second reason is a lack of responsibility in the face of abstract laws governing migration and labour. As most interviewees put it, why was a Moldovan allowed to work in Russia until 1991 but not now? In their eyes, this is just a matter of politics – of which they are the victims. Faced with this perceived injustice, the potential migrant chooses not to shoulder any responsibility. It is easy to make comparisons with the Soviet period and conclude that it cannot be fundamentally wrong to work in Russia. The same reasoning applies to work in Western

Europe if a Moldovan compares himself with a Latvian or an Estonian, similarly former Soviet citizens. As people who consider themselves hard-working, Moldovans do not feel guilty about the illegality of their work and their sole concern is with not being caught, since this costs them money. This lack of concern was obvious to me when people I scarcely knew but who had learnt that I was a European Union citizen did not hesitate to tell me about their illegal work in the EU and their ways of tricking the police there, without fearing that I would have a negative opinion about this. They would also openly declare their desire to obtain a Romanian passport so as to travel more easily to their destination. In Romania the intelligentsia used to condemn Romanian illegal workers for endangering their possibility to circulate freely in Europe through their disrespect of travel conditions. Consequently, labour migrants from Romania show a greater awareness of the illegality of their work and are more careful in their discourse, at least in front of strangers. In my previous work in Romania in 1999/2000 and again in 2003/2004, I heard many discourses of justification for illegal trade and immigration from Romanians (Heintz 2006: 156). They were a response to the accusations of the independent press and the government, which continuously criticised these illegal actions for compromising Romania's prospects of European integration.<sup>xvi</sup> The independent press in Moldova, on the other hand, displays sympathy towards labour migrants and uses their departure to reproach the government's lack of efficiency in implementing economic change. The 'blame the victim' position is not popular.

The third reason for the absence of justifications has to do with the fact that migration is seen as the last solution, one which is embraced out of despair rather than rational reasoning. A young divorced woman, who works in Saint Petersburg in order to save money for building a house, told me that she would like to be able to go to Italy, despite the danger of being caught and deported and not allowed to travel abroad for a number of years. She explained that if she worked there for two years and earned as much as she could in Russia in ten years, she would not need to travel abroad any more and could do without a passport. The important thing for her is to get enough money to build a house. In 2003 newspapers were full of scandalised reports concerning young Moldovan women who, after they were caught and imprisoned while working illegally in Italy, declared to Moldovan journalists that they preferred their life in detention to their life in Moldova. (This could again be taken as a strong criticism of the policies of the government in power.)

Single or divorced women as well as those who have experienced domestic violence are especially willing to take the risk of migrating to Italy or Turkey because the life they leave behind and their status in the rural community are not attractive. Rural communities remain traditional in their way of judging broken families and condemn single women, despite the increased number of divorces and second marriages among the younger generation (many due precisely to labour migration). Returning home, these women do not resettle in the village but generally seek refuge in towns.

All these reasons 'naturalise' the illegality of migration, which becomes acceptable and fails to trigger the shame associated with the fact of being caught by the police or sent to prison that is usually felt in traditional Moldovan society. Justifications become unnecessary as the Moldovan unemployed are presented as victims of historical circumstances, not particularly bound to the legal frame of any state since no state provides them with the expected social or employment security – an idea of entitlement that is a typical socialist legacy (Heintz 2006: 93).

#### ***Justifications of "immoral" activities***

While the illegality of work abroad is not judged by locals, there are ample discussions and comments within the community about what types of jobs young women hold in Southern European countries (a question less often formulated for those who work in Russia). Publicly, these concerns are expressed in collective paternalistic terms (along the lines of 'why are our beautiful girls obliged to go to Italy?') and they are often rhetorically linked to demographic rather than moral anxieties. There is plenty of first-hand evidence from the village that many female villagers have engaged in prostitution abroad, a condemnable activity by local standards. If no need is felt to justify illegal trade and immigration (at least the lack of justifications would suggest this is the case), there is secrecy and a need for justification in private circles with respect to what would be regarded in the village as 'immoral' activities. Are migrants involved in activities disapproved of as 'immoral' rejected by the community, or are there justifications for their actions powerful enough to enable them to gain acceptance from the community?

Having becoming involved in such activities abroad, many young women – fearing rejection from the community – do not dare to return to the village but settle further away in towns. Their families, however, remain in the village and have to justify their daughters' behaviour and also explain why they maintain relationships with them. One of my closest informants recounted how her daughter (who has

now gone to Russia) had been trapped and forced into prostitution in Turkey a few years before and explained how she had invented (or the daughter had invented for her) a story in which the daughter had escaped with the aid of a benevolent Turk without prostituting herself. This story is quite telling of the shame that such an activity might entail. Similar stories of forcibly trafficked young women were used to explain how and why the daughters of the village ended up in prostitution. Most 'lost daughters' involved in prostitution were forgiven by their parents who accepted them back into their home, but their stories are not forgotten and I collected a few of them myself unsolicited from their parents. It might be that these parents (mothers) thought that I already knew their daughters' stories from somewhere else and they tried to avoid its negative reflections on their families by dissociating themselves from their daughters. They both condemned the daughters' actions and explained their reasons for forgiving them. Keeping one's reputation in the village is important, especially as one grows older.

The fact that all these women were presented as innocent victims may be challenged as being nothing more than a justification strategy. However, the village of Satu Vechi was special in that one of its residents was an efficient female trafficker who had helped women from several neighbouring villages to get work as prostitutes in Turkey for almost ten years. The female trafficker (in her late twenties at the time of the interview) prided herself on being the first woman to have left for Turkey ten years earlier and the one who had been able to facilitate the departure of other girls afterwards. She told me that her business was to arrange visas for young girls who wanted to work abroad, and hence she felt that many women owed her a great deal. Thus she had her own justification strategy, but could the villagers even accept the justification of a trafficker?

In the village the female trafficker was ironically said to have returned from Turkey because she was too old (she was 28) and nobody wanted her sexual offers any longer. Yet despite this irony and comments such as 'many mothers hate her' (as a close female informant expressed it), most families kept good relations with the trafficker and her family. The reason for this is that relations within and outside the village are considered distinct, as is the type of logic governing them. On the other hand, adultery that is uncovered in the village could lead to a break in relations. For instance, a case of adultery that occurred three or four years before my fieldtrip was recounted to me by five different individuals from different households despite my lack of close involvement with the families of the adulterous

couple, thus showing that collective memory acted as a gatekeeper for immoral behaviour in the village. 'Forgetting' to pay back borrowed money could also lead to a break-up in relations between households – but not the fact of being trafficked or the act of trafficking human beings. Discourses of justification tend to separate the realm of local moral laws from what happens abroad, suggesting that actions taking place abroad – which is defined as being not within the borders of the Republic of Moldova – are somehow exceptional and should not be judged according to local standards.

The case of the woman trafficker plainly shows that the strategy used for accepting migrants who had been involved in what is perceived as an immoral activity abroad (notably prostitution) is one of dissociation of the two worlds of home and abroad. This is done through discourses of justification that emphasise the exceptional character of life abroad and the lack of agency with which emigrants are endowed. The exercise of will is somehow seen as being impossible in circumstances that are unknown and unintelligible to villagers.

### Conclusion

In this article I reviewed some of the reasons for and conditions of labour migration from the Republic of Moldova in the light of laws regulating migration. It was shown that the issue of illegality is discussed not in moral terms but uniquely in terms of the constraints and risks it entails. While there is no need to justify to the community or the anthropologist why one migrates illegally, it remains important to justify how and why one engages abroad in 'immoral' activities such as prostitution. The strategy used in these discourses of justification is to present the conditions of migrants abroad as being so incommensurably different (and difficult) that local standards of morality could hardly apply. The morality of the village should be put to one side and local judgments should not be applied to villagers' actions abroad.

### Notes

<sup>iii</sup> In the frontier village where I have done fieldwork there is a tradition of growing vegetables to be sold in Ukraine, where prices are higher; people mainly complain about the new border regulations that prevent this trade from being as profitable as it used to be. Although they continue crossing to Ukraine for commercial sale of the produce in the town over the Dniestr, this tradition is gradually fading away.

<sup>iv</sup> Russia is not considered to be 'abroad' (*zagranitsa*

in Russian) because Russia and Moldova used to belong to the same state in the past and also because there are material objects that keep Russia in this category today: the 'passport for going abroad' is not needed for trips to Russia (an ID card suffices), and 0.5 million Moldovan inhabitants had old Soviet passports until the end of 2003, when the passport regime finally changed and Moldovan passports became compulsory for all Moldovan citizens.

<sup>v</sup> A play on words equating the Bolshevik life with a good life, *dolce vita*.

<sup>vi</sup> One middle-aged educated woman in the Moldovan village, who had never worked in Russia, once revised her USSR discourse of belonging by saying 'Here, in our country, in the USSR, sorry, Russia'.

<sup>vii</sup> One migrant woman and her family back home expressed their pride that she was never stopped by the police because she was elegant and 'looked like a Russian'.

<sup>viii</sup> The degrees of risk are discussed in the village before people make their choices. Moscow is said to be more dangerous than St. Petersburg, where the police check IDs more often.

<sup>ix</sup> An airfare of 60 euros was offered for Chisinau-Moscow-Chisinau in 2003, contrasting with 300 euros for Chisinau-Vienna-Chisinau (a shorter journey).

<sup>x</sup> Many travel agencies only obtain visas for Slovenia; the labour migrants are left at the frontier with Italy and have to cross the border on foot at night.

<sup>xi</sup> 300,000-500,000 Moldovan citizens are said to possess Romanian passports. The figures are not accurate because many of those who have regained Romanian passports are no longer Moldovan residents.

<sup>xii</sup> This is also similar to the behaviour of the rural population from Romania working in the West.

<sup>xiii</sup> If asked, one will recount how he spent a winter's night in a tree out of fear that a Russian policeman might take his money; others might tell how they have been tricked over payments; another woman will explain how she hides the money she has earned in the bus seat because she is thoroughly searched at the border, only to recover it days later from the driver.

<sup>xiv</sup> The word 'normal' is frequently used to mean 'the usual state of things' and often has a pejorative connotation.

<sup>xv</sup> In Soviet times, dissidents, those standing out of the crowd, were considered somehow abnormal (Yurchak 1997).



<sup>xvi</sup> We would note that this concern with illegality is linked to practical rather than moral judgements.

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