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CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

INFORMALITY AND UZBEK MIGRANT NETWORKS IN RUSSIA AND TURKEY

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INTRODUCTION

Walking through the streets of the Kumkapi neighbourhood in Istanbul, there are dozens of cafés and restaurants serving Uzbek food, numerous cargo companies that ship clothes to Uzbekistan, many clothing stores and stalls selling Uzbek fashions suitable, and even *nos* (Uzbek snuff) sold by a local Uzbek-speaking Turk. Historically one of the most ethnically diverse neighbourhoods in Istanbul, in the last decade, Kumpaki has become a hub for migrant workers from Uzbekistan. These large-scale migratory flows have been facilitated by the Turkey's visa-free regime for Uzbek citizens and existing shuttle-trade ties. Since 2013, migration has been magnified by the introduction of the so-called 'entry-ban' legislation in Russia: a draconian system of restrictions prohibiting re-entry to Russia for five or ten years following minor administrative offences. This legislation compelled many entry-banned Uzbek migrants to reorient their migration destination from Russia to Turkey. Unlike in Russia, where migrants suffer from police corruption and extremely high legalisation costs, Uzbek migrants in Istanbul do not have to pay bribes to Turkish police officers and can find work without any residence or work permit, due to the Turkish authorities' tacit acceptance of cheap and legally unprotected migrant labour. Thus, the Turkish migrant labour market seems like a good alternative to the ever-tightening Russian migration regime, allowing many entry-banned Uzbek migrants to continue to support their families.

Despite this comparatively liberal migration regime, however, many of the Uzbek migrants we encountered in Istanbul, especially those who had previously worked in Russia, were not happy with their migration experience in Turkey, and planned to return to Russia as soon as their entry ban had expired. The reasons for such negative comparisons were often linked to the informality, the modes of incorporation into the labour market, the role of social networks and the importance of having a shared sense of 'the rules of the game' under the conditions of informal employment. When comparing his migrant adventures in Russia and Turkey, Pulat (a pseudonym), the main hero of our chapter, drew a striking comparison between the two migration situations: one that goes a long way to explaining Uzbeks' often-stated preference for Russia: '*Turkda iymon bor, lekin insof yoq. Orisda iymon yoq, lekin insof bor*,' roughly translated as 'Turks have faith [in Islam] but no sense of justice, Russians

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have no faith [in Islam] but a sense of justice.' These remarks led us to rethink our pre-fieldwork assumption that Uzbeks would feel 'closer' to Turkey for a host of linguistic, cultural, religious, economic and legal reasons. The main puzzle which led us to write this chapter was an attempt to understand how and why, despite all the challenges associated with navigating the repressive legal landscape in Russia, for many Uzbek migrants we met in Istanbul, Moscow seemed a place of greater agency and opportunity than Istanbul. Pulat's fascinating comment about *iymon* and *insof* and how it maps on to Russians and Turks is the 'itch' that this chapter seeks to scratch.

We explore the Russian and Turkish migration regimes in terms of Uzbek migrants' patterns of residence, incorporation into the labour market, gendered experiences of migration, and experiences of agency and capacity to navigate an opaque legal regime. We draw on a multi-sited transnational ethnography of Uzbek migrant workers between Uzbekistan, Moscow and Istanbul that we conducted between 2014 and 2020, including six months of ethnographic fieldwork in Kumkapi between January 2019 and August 2020. During our fieldwork, we rented mattress space in shared apartments where migrants lived, we were present at migrants' workplaces at different times, we participated in migrants' daily lives, accompanying migrants on the streets, inviting them for lunch or dinner in cafés and 'hanging out' together in bars. In addition, we maintained regular contact with informants via smartphone-based social media applications, through which they shared various news items, videos, and photos, and spread gossip and rumours when someone acted unfairly toward others. This chapter centres on a single case study to illustrate, ethnographically and biographically, how Uzbek migrants navigate the corrupt legal system and shadow economy challenges, and how they produce various forms of informal governance and legal order to organise their precarious livelihoods. Through a focus on the life history of Pulat and his adventures in Moscow and Istanbul, our analysis reveals striking differences and similarities between the two cities in terms of migrant experience, moral assessment and legal adaptation. This comparison allows us to explore the interconnections between migrant agency, informality and the networks of trust and solidarity in hybrid political regimes.

RUSSIAN AND TURKISH MIGRATION REGIMES IN A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Russia and Turkey have traditionally been viewed as countries of emigration. However, in the last two decades, both Russia and Turkey have become key immigration hubs worldwide, due to their improved economic conditions and geopolitical developments among their neighbouring countries. After the United States, Germany and Saudi Arabia, Russia is the fourth largest recipient of migrants in the world, with 11.6 million foreign-born individuals residing on its territory (UN DESA 2019). Turkey is also one of the key destinations for migrants regionally, hosting 3.7 million foreign-born people, the majority of them (64.4 per cent) being refugees from the war-torn Syria (IOM 2019).

Russia is the primary destination for migrants from Uzbekistan. Higher salaries, a constant demand for cheap labour, a shrinking labour force and a visa-free regime

have attracted millions of migrant workers to Russia. Nearly 2.2 million Uzbek citizens were present on the territory of the Russian Federation in 2019 (RANEPA 2019). Unlike the Kyrgyz, another large migrant group from Central Asia, Uzbek migration to Russia is mostly male-dominated: men constitute up to 85 per cent of migrants (Rocheva and Varshaver 2017, p.92). While construction sites, housing and communal services, agriculture, transportation and similar areas where physical strength is required mostly employ men, female migrants can find jobs predominantly in trade (supermarkets, shops), catering (restaurants, hotels, food factories), domestic care and cleaning services.

Host to the largest number of refugees from neighbouring war-torn Syria, Turkey also receives large numbers of migrant workers from most of the post-Soviet republics. Uzbek shuttle traders appeared in Turkey as early as the 1990s. However, widespread migration started only in the 2000s and 2010s with economic improvement in Turkey and growing unemployment in Uzbekistan. The share of Uzbek migrants increased rapidly starting in the mid-2010s, due to the tightening of immigration laws (discussed further below) and economic stagnation in Russia. Unlike in Russia, the share of female migrants in the Turkish labour market is significant (44.6 per cent), due to high demand for a female labour force in sectors such as domestic care (taking care of children, the sick and elderly), cleaning and textiles and garments (Toksöz and Ulutaş 2012; UNDESA 2019; see also Saparova, this volume). Male migrants mainly work in construction, services (hotels, restaurants) and in textile and garment workshops.

The majority of Uzbek migrants find jobs in Istanbul, the country's largest city and the largest transit hub in the region. There are no clear figures on the number of Uzbeks in Turkey. However, remittances sent to Uzbekistan through official channels indicate the presence of a large number of Uzbeks in Turkey. In 2018, remittances from Russia (where there were more than 2 million Uzbek migrants) reached US$4 billion, while remittances from Turkey exceeded US$200 million (CBU 2019). Moreover, due to the existence of shuttle trade between Turkey and Uzbekistan, a large share of remittances to Uzbekistan are transferred informally through shuttle traders (i.e., transferred in person). This provides the basis for an estimate of more than 100,000 Uzbek migrants in Turkey.

Living as undocumented, and employment in the informal economy, are a way of life for many migrants in Russia and Turkey. For example, due to complicated and expensive legalisation procedures, as well as the corrupt legal system in Russia, many Central Asian migrants are compelled to find jobs in the shadow economy where they can survive without documents (see, e.g., Urinboyev 2020, pp.35–39).

In an attempt to fight undocumented migration, Russian authorities have intensified immigration controls and introduced a number of highly punitive measures for individuals found to be in violation of residence or employment regulations. Amongst these legal interventions, the entry ban law was the most severe sanction that was gradually brought into force in Russia in 2012 and 2013 (Kubal 2016). Migrants who committed two or more administrative offences, or who overstayed, were subsequently banned from entering Russia for three, five, or ten years, depending on the length of overstay. By February 2014, 600,000 migrants, mostly from Central Asia, had been issued entry bans; this figure reached 2 million people by mid-2016 (Kirillova 2016). These legislative interventions have had mixed effects. Some migrants learned

to sidestep restrictions by buying 'clean fake' immigration papers (Reeves 2013), while others limited their return trips home and concentrated instead on one long stay, during which they attempted to earn as much as possible. At the same time, a large number of entry-banned migrants returned home and had to choose other destinations for labour migration, such as Turkey or Kazakhstan, while awaiting the expiration of their ban. This led to the rise in the already increasing number of Central Asian, especially Uzbek, migrants in Turkey.

Migrants experience a similarly restrictive legal environment in Turkey. Unlike in Russia, it is not the employee, but the employer who applies for a work permit in Turkey. Since hiring a foreigner is more expensive and is associated with difficult bureaucratic procedures, employers often hire foreign workers informally. Therefore, a large proportion of migrant workers in Turkey resort to the informal economy where they can find employment without any documents (Toksoz et al. 2012). However, unlike Russia where foreigners who violate immigration laws face severe penalties, migrants in Turkey are able to work without documents, suffer less from police corruption and enjoy relatively unimpeded mobility in the cities due to relatively liberal immigration enforcement. Overstayers have two options when leaving Turkey: they can either choose to accept an entry ban for up to five years, or pay a fine (the amount depends on the length of overstay) at the border, and return after a couple of months. Owing to such a relatively liberal immigration regime, informality is part and parcel of the migrant labour market in Turkey.

Notwithstanding these differences, both Russia and Turkey share many common features in terms of non-democratic rule, the weak rule of law, a poor human rights record, limits on the activities of civil society, widespread corruption and large informal economies, which do not allow migrants to engage in legal claim-making and collective mobilisation. As a result, informal work, non-payment of wages, discrimination in the form of unequal pay for equal work and long working hours and exploitation are common working-life experiences for Uzbek migrants in both Russia and Turkey. These hardships are often accompanied by poor housing, a lack of access to public healthcare and exposure to general discrimination and xenophobia. However, these challenges and uncertainties stemming from undocumentedness and informal employment can partly be overcome by relying on migrant transnational networks and informal channels that provide alternative means of survival and redress in precarious migration contexts.

The network of shops, cafés and services catering to the Uzbek community in Kumkapi serve as vivid illustration of this phenomenon. Kumkapi is the most ethnically and culturally diverse quarter in the Fatih district of Istanbul. Historically considered a home to Armenian and Greek minorities, Kumkapi's ethnic composition began to change rapidly with the emigration of those minorities in 1950s and the settlement of internal migrants from various parts of Turkey (Biehl 2015). Thanks to the neighbouring shopping areas of Laleli, the Kumkapi quarter started to attract international migrants from Moldova to Pakistan and Syria to Senegal over subsequent decades. More recently, Kumkapi has become a predominantly Uzbek quarter (with African-dominant adjoining streets), where thousands of Uzbek migrant workers reside and work.[1] Kumkapi, in the words of many Uzbek migrants we encountered there, is an 'Uzbek *mahalla*', where there are hundreds of Uzbek migrants on the streets and almost everyone, even local Turks and Kurds, speak or understand the

Uzbek language. Beyond the plethora of cafés and restaurants serving Uzbek food, it is very easy for Uzbek (as well as other) migrants to find accommodation in Kumkapi, which usually involves sharing an apartment with up to 10–15 people. Uzbeks who live in other districts of Istanbul come to Kumkapi at the weekends to meet and socialise with their friends in Uzbek cafés. Therefore, many newly arrived migrants stay in shared apartments in Kumkapi and undergo their initial adaptation to the Turkish labour market in this neighbourhood. Moreover, Kumkapi neighbours with the shopping areas of Laleli, frequented by a large number of shuttle traders from Uzbekistan. In addition, the availability of cargo services in the area means that on their days off, Uzbek migrants working in other parts of Istanbul can shop in the neighbourhood and send their garments and remittances home directly from the Kumkapi area. The recent transformation of Kumkapi into an Uzbek enclave has led to the emergence of an informal adaptation and social control infrastructure through which it is possible to receive information about accommodation and jobs, meet new people and join different networks, learn about how to navigate the immigration rules, and gather information and rumours about Uzbek migrants living in Istanbul. Informal residence and employment were a way of life for our informants: more than 90 per cent of the Uzbek migrants we met here (and in other parts of Istanbul) during our fieldwork possessed neither a residence permit nor a work permit.

Unlike in Istanbul, there are no ethnic enclaves in Moscow; migrant communities are dispersed and live in different parts of the city.[2] This can largely be explained by the social mixing and the absence of spatial segregation in Moscow, inherited from the Soviet period, which allows migrants to find accommodation in any area of Moscow (Demintseva 2017). There are numerous Uzbek cafés in Moscow, but they are not tied to a specific locality and often relocate from one place to another. Migrants usually work long hours without any days off in different parts of the city, which leaves little or no time for physical meetings with their ethnic communities and networks. Another reason for the absence of ethnic enclaves is the economic and social stratification in Moscow. Unlike in Istanbul where migrant-oriented jobs are concentrated in specific districts and neighbourhoods (e.g., Bağcilar, Bayrampaşa, Fatih, Ümraniye, Zeytinburnu), in Moscow, jobs are not tied to a specific locality. Rather, Uzbeks' insertion into the Moscow labour market is much more dispersed. It is possible to spot Uzbeks in any district of Moscow. Corrupt and draconian policing practices also compel migrants to minimise their presence in public places. Even if migrants possess all of the documents required by the law, they are often asked for bribes when stopped by the police on the street or in the metro. Because of these experiences, Uzbek migrants do not organise in public places in Moscow and try to make themselves as invisible as possible.

Istanbul and Moscow thus represent two different forms of migrant incorporation and adaptation into the host society: the former based on an 'ethnic enclave' with its own spatial structure and border, and the latter constituted primarily in virtual space, with smartphones and social media serving as a means for place-making and networking. In the next section, these two different forms of Uzbek migrant incorporation will be illustrated through the example of Pulat, who worked in Moscow and Istanbul during 2014–19 and experienced many challenges during his initial migration periods. Thanks to his knowledge of the informal rules of survival and street life, and his ability to adjust to changing circumstances, Pulat could adapt to

the labour market, legal environment and host society. Between 2014 and 2020, we maintained regular contact with him and closely observed the developments in his life through field trips and smartphone-based communication. This difficult endeavour was possible, given that Pulat and the first author of this paper hail from the same region in Uzbekistan, which enabled us to build a trusting relationship and gain access to his daily life and routine of activities in Moscow and Istanbul. Observing his life afforded us the opportunity to collect his narratives relating to Uzbek migrant networks and their transnational practices, informality and the street world, and to observe situations in which he navigated immigration and labour laws and solved problems through informal rules and channels.

PULAT'S ADVENTURES IN MOSCOW AND ISTANBUL: INFORMALITY, AGENCY AND NAVIGATING CHALLENGES IN PRECARIOUS MIGRATION CONTEXTS

Twenty-eight-year-old Pulat is a migrant from the Fergana Valley of Uzbekistan. He is a sociable and street-smart individual. He arrived in Moscow in December 2013 shortly after finishing vocational college in rural Fergana. Before coming to Moscow, he had worked as a *kirakash* in his home village Shabboda (a pseudonym), a common, informal taxi-driving job in Uzbekistan that requires drivers to navigate the legal system, to negotiate power relations and to adjust to quickly changing circumstances. It was as an unofficial taxi driver that Pulat became street smart and developed the skills in navigating the legal restrictions that later helped him to adapt to the precarious conditions and uncertain legal environment in Russia.

In November 2013, a local scandal concerning the arrest of twelve individuals who were allegedly involved in religious extremism forced Pulat to dramatically alter his livelihood strategy. As Pulat worked as a taxi driver, these twelve individuals who had been arrested were his frequent customers, and Pulat often drove them to different places when they attended weekly religious events. It was highly likely that the Uzbek National Security Service (SNB) would also be interested in interrogating Pulat due to his regular contact with them. Not wanting to be interrogated (and possibly tortured) by the SNB, Pulat quickly made the decision to leave for Russia and to work there for some time until the scandal had blown over.

Pulat arrived in Moscow in December 2013. His decision to migrate to Moscow was primarily driven by the fact that many of his co-villagers worked there. Pulat estimated that there were at least 200 migrants from Shabboda village (out of a total population of 18,000 villagers) working in different places in Moscow city and Moscow province. The existence of such village-based networks in Moscow created a sense of social responsibility among villagers – a sense that they must care for one another during their time in Russia. Several villagers worked as intermediaries in Moscow's construction sector, serving as gatekeepers to villagers seeking access to the Russian migrant labour market. Based on these social norms and expectations, Pulat was confident that going to Moscow meant joining his village networks there. As expected, after his arrival at Moscow's Domodedovo airport, Pulat was picked up by a fellow villager and stayed with him in his accommodation for a few days.

It took only three days for Pulat to find a *koiko-mesto* (a mattress-sized sleeping space) in a shared apartment in the north of Moscow. However, his new *koiko*-mates were not co-villagers, but Uzbek migrants he had met for the first time in Moscow and who came from different regions in Uzbekistan.[3] Like many other Uzbek migrants, Pulat also regularly renewed his immigration documents at Moscow's Kazan railway station – the most popular 'legalisation' site among migrants, where it is possible to buy fake and 'clean fake' immigration documents, including a fake Russian passport. When stopped by Russian police officers, Pulat would typically remain calm, lying confidently that he had all of the required documents. When these strategies failed, he paid a 1,000–2,000 rouble bribe to the police to avoid legal sanctions and deportation. Fraud (*lohotron* in Russian) cases are common in Moscow, whereby employers cheat migrants and do not pay their salaries. To minimise these risks, and following the advice of his village networks, Pulat approached Ravshan, a co-villager and a work team leader (*brigadir*) at a construction site in Balashikha, a small town in Moscow province. Coming from the same village established both a social bond and a sense of social responsibility in the workers' minds. The families of both the *brigadir* and Pulat in Uzbekistan share a territory and interact daily to such a degree that non-payment of the agreed salary would trigger a chain reaction, with Pulat's family able to exert direct pressure on the *brigadir*'s family in the village, something that could not happen if the two men's families lived far from one another. This mechanism of informal social control has increased in the last five years, owing to the proliferation of smartphones and social media applications (e.g., WhatsApp, Telegram Messenger) in Uzbek villages (Urinboyev 2018). Kinship and common village origins were quite important in this regard, and enabled Pulat to adapt to his new environment and save enough money for the next steps in his 'migrant career' in Moscow.

As Pulat was street smart and ambitious, he did not want to remain in the construction sector for long. In May 2015, using his savings from the construction work in Moscow, Pulat purchased a Daewoo Nexia, a car made in Uzbekistan which enjoys wide popularity among Uzbek migrants in Russia. Owning a car meant that Pulat could work as a taxi driver in Moscow city, a job that he did before coming to Moscow. As a taxi driver, Pulat earned around 40,000 roubles (appr. US$750 in 2015) per month, and acquired a higher social status among his co-villagers, given that he earned more money and did not have to do *chernaya rabota* (low-status work, such as construction, agriculture, or janitorial services). Since working as a taxi driver involved frequent interactions and informal transactions with traffic police officers, Pulat often carried counterfeit money with him, and skilfully passed these notes (tucked inside his passport and driving licence) to police officers as a bribe when they stopped him in public places. Pulat knew that police would not have the time or the chance to check the authenticity of the money in a public space. Working as a taxi driver also allowed Pulat to make many acquaintances from the street world, among them Chechen and Dagestani protection racketeers who acted as *'qozi'* (informal street judges) in the shadow economy, providing contract enforcement and dispute resolution services for a fee (usually 20 per cent of the total sum of money recovered). The demand for the services of protection racketeers was particularly high in sectors such as construction, market trade and agriculture, where many migrants worked without any documents or a formal employment contract. Given

his good connections with protection racketeers, Pulat often helped his co-villagers when they experienced problems with getting paid for their work.

Pulat and his co-villagers existed at the centre of a complex network of intertwining relationships. Although the villagers did not share communal accommodation and worked in different places in Moscow, they maintained daily contact with one another through smartphone-based messaging apps. Villagers met in person only a few times per month when they visited the mosque near Moscow's Otradnoye metro for Friday prayers, when they celebrated someone's birthday, or when they visited different Moscow brothels to have sex with Uzbek migrant sex workers. Most contact was virtual, given that rapacious Russian police officers wandered all corners of Moscow in the hope of extorting money from migrants. Smartphones and social media were thus used as a means for reproducing village-level social relations and norms, enabling migrants to reproduce an informal social safety net in Moscow (see Figure 38.1). Villagers quickly informed each other and mobilised resources when someone fell ill, was caught by the police, needed to send something home, or desperately needed money. These forms of solidarity and mutual help were identical to the daily practices observed in Pulat's home village in Fergana, and were village based. Indeed, Uzbek solidarity and mutual help networks revolved more frequently around village-level identities and less on regional and ethnic identities. Elder migrants and 'fixers' like Pulat played a key role in such village-level mutual aid practices. One of the most important forms of solidarity enacted by these networks was the collecting of money in the case of repatriating a deceased co-villager from Russia to Uzbekistan. In a context of precarious and unregulated construction work, death, illness and job-related accidents were not uncommon. When someone died, news spread swiftly among villagers, as migrants immediately contacted their *mahalla* networks via smartphones and social media. There was no standard amount for contributions, and migrants determined how much to contribute based on their financial situation and income level. Because the threat of death was ever-present in migrants' lives, news of

Figure 38.1 Pulat and his co-villagers waiting for Chechen protection racketeers.

a death deeply affected everyone, and many migrants stepped forward to assist with the repatriation expenses.[4] In the absence of regular personal contact, smartphones and social media thus served as a means of establishing a 'digital *mahalla*' in Moscow, reproducing and maintaining village-level identities, social norms and relationships across distances.

Pulat's adventures in Moscow came to an end in 2018 following the death of Islom Karimov in 2016 and the election of Shavkat Mirziyoyev as the new president of Uzbekistan. One of the most visible changes in the new government's policies was the release of thousands of prisoners charged with religious extremism. The twelve individuals in Shabboda village, whose imprisonment in 2013 had forced Pulat to migrate to Russia, were also released. These changes meant that it was now safe for Pulat to return home. In August 2018, after nearly five years of *musofirchilik* (migranthood) in Russia, Pulat returned to his home village in Uzbekistan. Nevertheless, Pulat's euphoria and happiness only lasted three months, and he soon realised that many things had changed since he had left the village. It was no longer possible to make a decent living, due to economic decline and growing unemployment as many migrants were unable to return to Russia as a result of the entry-ban legislation, which created fierce competition for local jobs. Even informal taxi-driving had become unprofitable since many (former) migrants had invested their savings in purchasing cars, leading to a proliferation of taxi drivers in both rural and urban areas in Uzbekistan. At the same time, Pulat found it hard to reintegrate into village life, as he was accustomed to an urban lifestyle in which he could make many decisions without consulting his brothers and parents. The desire for a stable income and autonomy from his family members incited him to return to his migrant life. However, it was not possible for Pulat to return to Russia, due to the entry ban that he had received. As Pulat worked and lived in Russia without authentic immigration papers, he knew that he would get an entry ban when leaving the territory of Russia. As expected, at Vnukovo airport, as he was going through the passport control, he was informed that he had received a 10-year entry ban. He was not the only person in the village with an entry ban. Many other entry-banned villagers were changing their migration routes to Kazakhstan or Turkey, depending on their connections and preferences. Pulat too, joined these new migratory flows, and chose Istanbul as his new destination, since one of his classmates was already working there.

Pulat arrived in Istanbul in November 2018. Based on his Moscow experiences, Pulat was under the assumption that he would have to obtain fake immigration documents, deal with corrupt police officers and minimise his visibility in public places in order to avoid immigration raids. Much to his surprise, he found a completely new socio-legal environment in Istanbul. Unlike in Moscow, Pulat did not have to pay bribes to Turkish police, and he enjoyed relatively free mobility in the city, given the absence of frequent police and immigration checks. It is worth noting in this respect that while Russian police regularly use racial profiling (mostly of 'Asian-looking' people) when stopping passers-by for document checks, Uzbek migrants in Istanbul are typically able to 'pass' as a local. Even if Turkish police officers stop a migrant on the street, they are not interested in checking whether they have immigration documents, but rather whether the migrant is carrying any narcotics or weapons in their pocket or bag. Like many Uzbek migrants, Pulat also settled in Kumkapi, as one could easily find informal employment here.

Figure 38.2 Everyday life in Kumkapi.

Despite the liberal immigration environment and the existence of an Uzbek ethnic enclave in Kumkapi, Pulat found that he had less agency and navigational opportunities in Istanbul than he had had in Moscow (see Figure 38.2). This can be explained by two interlinked factors. First, many migrants in Istanbul are heavily dependent on various informal intermediaries (*shirkat*) to find a job. The *shirkat* can be a local Turk, Kurd, or a female Uzbek or Turkmen migrant with strong connections to Turkish employers. The shirkat receives 50 per cent of the migrant's first salary for finding them a job. The migrant him- or herself is not involved in these transactions; rather, the *shirkat* receives the payment directly from the employer. But this is not the end of story. It is in the interests of the *shirkat* that migrants remain in a precarious situation and lose their jobs frequently. This means that every time a migrant loses their job, they are forced to turn to a *shirkat* to find a new one. The *shirkat* thus maintains regular communication with employers, encouraging them to fire their worker if they do not like them. During his first six-month stay, Pulat was fired from his job three times; in his opinion, due to the *shirkats*' predatory practices. Even though Pulat was street smart and had considerable migration experience, his navigational skills did not help much in Istanbul. In Moscow, despite corrupt policing practices, widespread xenophobia and informal employment, Pulat had more agency and he could capitalise on his village networks and the informal institutions that offered alternative

means of adaptation and redress. Of course, *shirkat*-type intermediaries also existed in Moscow, but Pulat could seek redress from the Chechens if intermediaries tried to exploit him and his co-villagers. In Istanbul, such informal channels and village networks did not exist (or he could not reach out to them), making Pulat vulnerable to the *shirkats*' abusive practices.

Second, severe labour exploitation and non-payment of salaries was also common practice in Istanbul's labour market. Like many other migrants, Pulat was expected to work twelve hours a day, with little or no time off and with very low pay, around US$10 per day. Since Turkish employers hired migrants without any formal employment contract, the non-payment, delay, or partial payment of salaries was also a widespread phenomenon in migrants' daily lives. These exploitative practices were simply unacceptable for street-smart and experienced migrants like Pulat, who had never faced such challenges in the past. Unlike in Moscow where Pulat used various informal channels, village norms and transnational pressures to recover unpaid salaries, there was no informal enforcement mechanism that he could rely on when faced with such uncertainties in Istanbul. In addition, there was no chain migration from Pulat's village to Istanbul, which prevented Pulat from establishing the kind of village-level support network that existed in Moscow. He simply felt himself to be totally helpless in Istanbul, even though he lived in an 'Uzbek *mahalla*' in Kumkapi, where Uzbek migrant workers constituted the absolute majority locally. Because of his daily experiences of exploitation, Pulat was nostalgic for his Russian experiences and planned to return to Russia as soon as his entry ban had expired. He frequently referred to the existence of the street law, the informal institutions and kinship and village networks in Moscow that enabled him and many other Uzbek migrants to have more control over their working conditions, and to seek redress when faced with the uncertainties and risks of informal employment.

Pulat's case epitomises the experiences of male Uzbek migrants. Female Uzbek migrants, who constituted approximately 75 per cent of the Uzbek migrant population in Istanbul (according to the rough estimate of our informants), were better positioned in the Turkish labour market, due to the high demand for female migrants in labour-intensive and feminised sectors of the Turkish economy; these included domestic care, textiles and garments workshops, supermarkets, cleaning, and hotel and restaurant work. Due to the high demand and the highly gendered nature of the Turkish economy, female Uzbek migrants had more control over their working lives and could easily move from one job to another, while males had limited employment opportunities. As a result, Uzbek female migrants were able to develop strong networks and information channels in Istanbul (compare Saparova, this volume, for the situation of female Turkmen migrants).

These existing networks of Uzbek female migrants nonetheless provided some support to male migrants. Street-smart migrants like Pulat quickly tapped into existing female networks and received support from them when they needed help. There was a high demand for male partners among Uzbek female migrants who sought intimate relationships. In Moscow, Pulat had had to pay for sex with Uzbek migrant sex workers. In Istanbul, the situation was reversed: it was men who were scarce, and women constituted the vast majority of the Uzbek migrant population. As Pulat commented, many Uzbek women 'rented' him and provided him with free dinner and a one-night hotel stay and, in return, Pulat satisfied their sexual desire. In

Pulat's reckoning, this acceptance of female dominance marked a significant change in his life and worldview about gender hierarchies: the product of his precarious situation in the Turkish labour market.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter has explored the differences and similarities between Russian and Turkish migration regimes through a comparative, ethnographically and biographically based study of Uzbek migrants' daily experiences in Moscow and Istanbul. Pulat's biography and adventures in Moscow and Istanbul have revealed the interconnections between various structural and individual factors, and the importance of networks of trust and solidarity in conditions of precarious employment in the shadow economy. Although Pulat is just one among many Uzbeks who have experienced both Russian and Turkish migration contexts in recent years, his encounters can serve as a lens to understand migrant agency and experiences in hybrid political regimes.

Our study's findings indicate that Russia remains the preferred destination for Uzbeks, despite its repressive and corrupt immigration legal regime. Before starting fieldwork in Turkey, we had assumed that Uzbek migrants would prefer it to Russia, both because of shared religious and cultural traditions, and because of linguistic similarities that make learning Turkish much easier than mastering Russian for an ordinary Uzbek. However, this perceived 'easiness' of Turkey as a migrant destination did not necessarily reflect the reality. Indeed, Russia seemed more preferable, at least for those (male) migrants who had a chance to compare both countries. Pulat's comments about '*iymon*' and '*insof*' and the different modes of labour market incorporation, varying 'rules of the game' in the shadow economy and the lack or presence of networks of trust and solidarity clearly explain why migrants such as Pulat feel Moscow to be a place of greater agency and freedom than Istanbul.

The chapter has also provided intriguing insights into the gendered experiences of migration to Russia and Turkey, which deserve further comparative research. Our fieldwork suggests that many female Uzbek migrants feel relatively more empowered in Turkey, a Muslim-majority country with traditional gender hierarchies, than in Russia, where discourses of gender equality are more prominent. These findings point to the fact that migrant legal adaptation and agency in precarious migration contexts are heavily dependent on the existence of informal channels and practices that offer alternative means for organising migrant livelihoods. They also demonstrate the importance of a context-sensitive understanding of 'migrant agency': one that takes into account how patterns of migrant adaptation intersect not only with the broader socio-legal environment, labour market organisation and type of political regime, but also with existing social networks and gendered opportunities for navigating the legal landscape.

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NOTES

1 The first groups of Uzbeks to arrive in Turkey were those who fled the Soviet Union in the 1920s–1930s. They have moved to different parts of the country and already have integrated into society.
2 However, some areas of Moscow, which host industrial zones and fruit/vegetable markets such as Kapotnya (Cherkizon) or Food-city (thus 'migrant-friendly' districts), have a higher concentration of Central Asian migrants.
3 Due to high rental prices, it is common practice among migrants in Moscow to share an apartment with individuals that they have never met before.
4 Starting from 2018–2019, the government of Uzbekistan began to cover repatriation costs.

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