

INTRODUCTION



Let everyone know!

If you meet sad eyes in Thessaloniki,
Be aware: these eyes belong to a Georgian,
She/He walks in the streets sad and tired,
And with those sad eyes looking for another
Georgian . . .

—Mzagho Osishvili-Tkheldidze

These are the first lines of the poem “Let everyone know!” written by a Georgian migrant care worker in Thessaloniki. The poem reflects upon hidden hardships inherent in the migration experiences of Georgians in Thessaloniki in particular, and Greece in general. In the shadows of the Greek economy and society, these migrants struggle to sustain their families back in Georgia. From the very beginning of my field research on Georgian migrant women in Thessaloniki, I was made aware that “no one comes to Greece for pleasure (*siamovneba*).” This statement made by Marina,¹ whom I interviewed in Thessaloniki in September 2015, was made on behalf of tens of thousands of the Georgian migrant women who had arrived in Greece since the beginning of the 1990s.

Just like other migrant groups, Georgians come to Greece in order to work hard and earn money. This should not exclude activities involving pleasure per se, but the life circumstances of migrant women make “pleasure” a very scarce, but valuable, commodity. While looking for job opportunities in

Greece, women from Georgia accept the dire conditions of domestic work that puts them in a vulnerable position. A crucial aspect of this vulnerability is the “informality” of their labor and their uncertain political status,² which almost every migrant woman working in a domestic domain in Greece experiences during the initial years of her stay (Xypolytas et al. 2017: 95).³

Compared with other European countries, Greece has one of the most fragmented and restrictive migration policies (Skleparis 2017: 2). While ignoring the presence of tens of thousands of migrants in the late 1990s, immigration was conceptualized only around the topic of security (Skleparis 2017: 2). Although its migration policies have been reformed several times since the 1990s, immigration laws have still lagged far behind the reality—failing to acknowledge the presence of thousands of undocumented migrants. Nor have present laws succeeded in overcoming or significantly reducing the growing numbers of such migrants (Psimmenos 2017b: 51). Moreover, despite economic growth and women’s increased labor activities, the Greek welfare system has remained rudimentary (Ziomas et al. 2018: 8); care and nurturing activities have only partially been institutionalized and remain the role of women. When Greek women started to enter the domestic labor market in the 1980s, the “traditional family model” was reproduced with the help of migrant women, initially from the Philippines and, from the 1990s onward, from post-socialist countries in high numbers (Lyberaki 2008: 24).

Domestic work takes place in the realm of the employer’s household, where migrant women endure the deprivation of basic labor rights (Lazarescu and Kouzas 2017: 77). They are subjected to the regulation and control of their employer, which often leads to exploitation (Psimmenos 2017b: 59). These structural constraints are not confined to Greece; migrant domestic workers face similar challenges in other parts of Europe, and around the globe.⁴ Despite their essential contributions, these women remain invisible or hidden in households, with their labor lacking both social and political recognition (Kontos 2012; Ryburn 2018).

Caring for households, whether through bodily care, cooking, cleaning, or other forms, demands emotional engagement (Lutz 2011). However, the emotional work is often not reciprocated, either financially or in terms of recognition from employers themselves (Anderson 2005). Having left their own family for somebody else’s, women have to come to terms with the vacuum of care that they have left at home, and the fact that live-in care employment deprives them of the right to start or maintain their family life (Tappert and Dobner 2015: 295). Migrant women enable wealthier countries’ families to sustain a traditional family model, allowing their women to participate in the labor force. The demand in the “Global North” creates a “care drain” (Hochschild 2002: 17) from peripheral economies such as Georgia. As

Arlie Hochschild (2002: 26) puts it, “love and care become the ‘new gold.’” The “care deficit” (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002: 8) in migrant women’s home countries is the other side of the same coin.

The following question occurred to me again and again while reading the literature on domestic work and exploring the life of Georgian migrant women in Greece: why are women willing to enter into a relation of palpable structural imbalance that demands more than one can give, and offers so little in return? Relations within the informal domestic domain are asymmetric (Kordasiewicz 2017); all people involved in such relations struggle for recognition and power in one way or another. When looking at migrant care work globally, many characteristics and difficulties resemble each other, as they emerge from sources like structural inequality (gender, ethnicity, class) and neoliberalism’s demand for cheap labor, to which migrant care work is only one response.

Within these global dynamics, Georgian women have established a migration chain. This is a historical novelty for the country of Georgia, where women had not previously been the primary “movers.” The process of how they have established a migration channel gives a much wider insight into changes in Georgia’s social and economic organization, and hence of the post-Soviet “transition” process itself.

Greece emerged as the primary destination for Georgian migrant women at the beginning of the 2000s. Apart from the high demand for caregivers, Greece appeared culturally familiar due to a shared adherence to the Orthodox Church and deep historical ties reaching back to ancient times. However, most importantly, from the 1980s onward, the Greek government offered ethnic Greeks (Pontians) living in Georgia (and in other states of the former Soviet Union) prospects of access to Greek citizenship, resulting in new, unforeseen linkages between the two countries. Following ethnic Greeks from Georgia, who arrived en masse from the early 1990s, Georgian women started to arrive in the mid to late 1990s, all “with a bag full of problems,” as Marina—whom I cited at the beginning of this introduction—remembered.

By unpacking this “bag,” I aimed to understand why they had undertaken the heavy burden of migration, as Georgian men, including some of their husbands, were migrating in high numbers to Russia during the 1990s. The political situation changed in the early 2000s with the intensification of conflicts between Georgia and Russia, resulting in the short Russian-Georgian War of 2008 and subsequent barriers for migrants on their way to Russia. While there were already many Georgian migrant women in Greece at the end of the 1990s, their numbers increased from the beginning of the new century and grew steadily until 2009, at which point the financial and economic crisis and recession deeply impacted the economic resources of the Greek middle class. Looking back at three post-socialist decades, in which

women decided to migrate during various periods, it is worth exploring the driving forces behind their migration projects. How have the motives and drivers for migration changed during these decades?

Facing the “Big Crisis”

Throughout the past three decades, in which the stream of migration has continued, Georgia underwent enormous changes. In early 1991, the Georgian state gained independence and in the same year the Soviet Union fell apart. This resulted in the implementation of a market economy and “liberal democracy,” as well as the institutionalization of the Orthodox Church as a national authority. This period marked by a multitude of changes was accompanied by a crisis that pervaded all spheres of life. This crisis was related to the experience of loss (Pine 1998: 120; Dudwick et al. 2003: 23). Multiple losses (Dudwick et al. 2003: 23) and uncertainties shaped the reality of the 1990s in many parts of the former socialist realm (Pine and Bridger 1998). For Georgians, the biggest physical loss occurred during civil wars in the Georgian autonomous republics of Abkhazia (1991–92) and South Ossetia (1991–92), where, within a few months, thousands of people died and approximately 250,000 ethnic Georgians were displaced (Jones 2013: 97). With independence, most people throughout the former socialist realm lost the economic basis for their survival, as jobs vanished, salaries stopped being paid, and poverty became a reality for the majority of the population. For Georgians, who had enjoyed some of the highest standards of living during Soviet times (Gachechiladze 1995; Scott 2016: 12), due to a thriving “shadow economy” and the prosperous growth of highly demanded agricultural products (Shelley 2007: 1), the loss of “wealth” not only caused financial hardship but also damaged people’s social status (Dudwick 2003: 218).

Although women in post-socialist countries had been more affected by unemployment (Buckley 1997: 4–5; Dudwick 2003: 252), they coped much better with poverty and the loss of employment, adapting quickly to the changing labor market (Dudwick 2003: 252). This also meant the appropriation of different spheres of the informal market, such as petty trade and street markets (Curro 2012: 123), in spite of the tightening grip of neo-traditionalist gender ideology, underpinned by the newly empowered church (Nogaideli 2012: 28). As Erin Hofmann (2012: 33–34) has disclosed, the revival of religious ideas contributed to the reinforcement of patriarchal norms that, in turn, discouraged women from migrating.

Thus, women found themselves in a contradictory situation. The “patriarchal” norms guiding politics and the labor market in Georgia grounded women’s subordinate (marginal) position in these domains, implying that

women either worked in the informal labor market or stayed in low-paid employment, earning much less than men and participating in political life only to a very limited extent (Sabedashvili 2007: 17–19). Despite these constraints, many women (willingly or unwillingly) took over or contributed to ensuring the livelihood of their families, while still submitting to patriarchy on the surface (Dudwick 2003: 252). Poverty and the harsh economic circumstances legitimated women’s search for a livelihood and occupation beyond their national borders. Consequently, in the early 2000s, Georgian women became almost as active in migration as men (Hofmann 2012: 73). By the mid-2000s, thousands of Georgian women had moved abroad, primarily to Greece and Turkey (Badurashvili 2012: 1–2), as well as to Israel and Western Europe (Tchaidze and Torosyan 2009: 14). This shift cannot be explained solely by the fact that Russia had introduced a new visa regime for Georgian citizens, but by the interaction of many different factors (Buckley and Hofmann 2013: 524).

Untangling the Configuration of Migration

The largely peaceful Rose Revolution of 2003 brought the end of the Shevardnadze regime in Georgia. The new president, Mikheil Saakashvili, had enforced radical neoliberalism and restructured the political and socio-economic order. In 2008, the short Georgian-Russian war erupted, resulting in a diplomatic crisis the two countries. Four years later, the end of Saakashvili’s regime was marked by an initially pro-liberal party “Georgian Dream—Democratic Georgia” (*kartuli otsneba—demokrat’iuli sakartvelo*) coming to power which turned into a conservative and authoritarian party. Radical changes were taking place in the country, but what happened to the tens of thousands of women enduring all these years in Greece?

When turning our attention to Georgian migrant women in Greece, it seems that their lives did not change significantly during the past almost three decades. Greek migration law has established only a slight enhancement for legalizing their status, and the women were trapped in the service and informal domestic sectors. However, they stayed and migration continued. It is only possible to explain why they took on such burdens, and how they endured in a situation so marked by insecurities, by looking at different factors, including how political, economic, and social dynamics intersect with the individual life path of the migrant.⁵ Thus my aim was to identify the interplay of those factors—including “invisible” or subjective conditions—in relation to those that potentially “encourage” mobility (networks, global flow of care) and those that constrain women’s movement (gender ideology, the migration regime).

With the experiences of Georgian women in Greece being almost unexplored in the scholarly literature, I set out to analyze how they balanced and transformed their livelihoods while being migrants in crisis-ridden Greece. I thereby identified the impact of migration on various realms of the migrant women's lifeworld. The term "lifeworld" (*Lebenswelt*), introduced by Edmund Husserl, founder of the philosophical school of phenomenology, refers to the immediately or directly experienced subjectivity of everyday life. The phenomenological approach has significantly influenced social anthropological thinking "about the ways in which humans are always relationally intertwined—with one another, with various entities that make up their worlds, and with their worlds as such" (Zigon and Throop [2021] 2023: 2). The close description of everyday life in migration illuminates the creation of a lifeworld in which the individual biography and socio-political structures intersect (Grønseth 2013a: 2).

Adopting this perspective, I aimed to explore and describe the subjective meaning women attached to their migrant experiences. This includes how the creation of their new life in Thessaloniki intertwines with their continuous engagement with and memories of their home realm in Georgia. However, to write and speak about different lifeworlds is somehow artificial, as life spans between various geographic and socio-political localities—one is the familiar and the other the initially unknown. I learned that starting migration implies making new lives in which physical presence moves into another locality for an unknown length of time. This shift implies a cut in the chronology of life, as women felt they had left a life back in Georgia. Therefore, women in their narratives always draw a line between their different lifeworlds—the past, which continues as the home, and the immediate, which is shaped by the migration condition.

Migrant women also convinced me that their "new" lifeworld cannot be understood without their "old" lifeworld in Georgia. Women's life trajectories and biographies are highly relevant when analyzing their engagement and practices in migration, as their stories have often been ignored in studies of migrant domestic workers (Psimmenos 2017a: 6). Anne Grønseth (2013a) has called for an anthropological perspective that explores "migrant bodies as they live their lives in the borderlands—between places, times, moralities, identities and life-worlds"—that is, to look at the whole spectrum of migrants' lives (ibid.: 20). Inspired by this approach, I captured the interplay of women's lifeworlds in order to understand how they mutually define each other. Women's engagements and their life between the two different countries, although not visible at first glance, constitutes the being "in between." This is especially true for the first part of migration and particularly applies to Georgian migrant women, who, on moving to Greece, often had to leave behind their children and spouses. Their employment in Greek households,

and their low salaries, would not allow them to finance housing and life necessities for the whole family in Greece. Moreover, the situation of migrant care workers in Greece worsened with the onset of the Greek economic and financial crisis (Anagnostou and Gemi 2015: 32). Most decisively, however, all migrant women face difficult and costly legalization procedures in Greece, and they experience months or years of illegality and undocumented work in the informal domestic domain. So, while becoming a migrant, Georgian women, just like other migrant care workers in Greece, have to cope with vulnerability (Anagnostou and Gemi 2015: 9–10). Migrants' vulnerability also results from the segmentation of the labor market (Aysa-Lastra and Cachón 2015: 12). In the case of Greece, since the 1980s, but especially since the 1990s, domestic work was assigned to low-status immigrant workers (Psimmenos 2017b: 49).

Entering into migration, the women face both new political economic conditions (crisis, illegality, the migrant labor market) and social orders (the migrant community, gender ideology). Describing how these middle- and older-aged migrant women react and respond to these conditions not only sheds new light on care work, care (motherhood and *p'at'ronoba* or protection), women's friendship, and investments, but also highlights how these elements are interconnected. The ways in which these women articulate their motivations and rationalize their actions provide a window into a broader cultural landscape—one shaped by a Soviet educated generation finding its path through a changing society, negotiating meaning and purpose through their everyday practices. Furthermore, in analyzing women's reactions in the different lifeworlds, the Georgian notions such *up'at'ronoba* (unprotected, alone), *p'at'ronoba* (protection, care), *dedoba* (motherhood), and *p'at'ivistsema* (recognition, respect) provide a deeper understanding of the emic perception of these reactions. Beyond their lexical meanings, these notions reveal socio-cultural norms, values, and power relations that hold different validity for migrant women than for migrant men. Thus, in their application, they are gender specific. For this reason, I looked at how gender expressions (doing gender) intersect with other similarly significant socio-cultural realities, such as ethnicity, economic power, age, and migration regimes.

“Soviet” Women in Migration

According to Erin Hofmann (2012: 160), gender ideology in Georgia contributed to the widespread assumption that Europe is a suitable destination for women, due to the availability of jobs in the domestic domain. Consequently, with the growing numbers of women migrating to Europe,

care migration became embedded in normative gender approaches and, thus, it became increasingly socially acceptable (*ibid.*). This shift occurred despite significant social barriers, including the revitalization of the Orthodox Church, which sustained a patriarchal society in which women had to display their domesticity and men the role as provider.

Maia Barkaia and Alisse Waterston (2018), in their edited volume *Gender in Georgia*, argue that the gender gap, and both historical and current gender dynamics, must be understood in relation to metropole–periphery and Soviet–post-Soviet tensions, as well as geopolitical conflicts between the East and the West. The West is mostly identified as modern, while the East is seen as traditional (Waterstone 2018: 7–8). In the same volume, Elisabeth Dunn notes: “Women’s bodies, labour, emotions, and sexualities have become the grounds for a geopolitical conflict expressed in terms of morality and values” (Dunn 2018: 223).

While describing how migrant women have coped with these post-socialist tensions, I highlight some of the often-ignored aspects of social and political dynamics, aiming alongside the edited volume mentioned above to “reclaim[s] a history that is in the process of being written” (Waterston 2018: 9). By illuminating women’s longstanding migration to Greece, and embedding it into their national histories, this book intends to contribute to this undertaking. Several insightful accounts in the field of Georgian women’s migration have already been written (Zurabishvili and Zurabishvili 2010; Hofmann 2012; Buckley and Hofmann 2013; Ferry 2013, 2015; Curro 2014; Zurabishvili et al. 2018). All these scholars shed light on very different aspects of women’s migration, from a gendered choice of destination (Hofmann 2012; Buckley and Hofmann 2013) and mother–child relationships (Ferry 2013, 2015), to gendered practices of hospitality in migration (Curro 2014) and the economic and social impact of female migration (Zurabishvili et al. 2018). Yet, while mostly focusing on returning migrants, they have all drawn on gender norms in relation to migration, which evoked social changes that, to a certain extent, are performed by migrants themselves. In contrast to most of the above-mentioned accounts, the present book is primarily based on research conducted in Greece. Against the backdrop of the life of Georgian migrant women in the destination country being understudied (Zurabishvili et al. 2018), I observed that the women build a lifeworld with their own created norms—a life that differs entirely from the daily reality they have left behind in Georgia.

The Greek labor market and migration regime are gender specific, just as are migrant women’s responses to it, when looking at the number of remittances, their investments, and daily practices in migration. Gender as a social construct is a process embedded in historical narratives, institutions,

ideologies, and politics (Pessar and Mahler 2003), and thus is constantly perpetuated through gestures and language (*ibid.*). Analyzing the vocabulary migrant women use to describe their social conditions, both in and before migration, discloses the impact of gender ideologies, norms, and images for their personal migration project. During our interviews, most women referred to the term *up'at'rono* (without protection), signifying their adherence to the ideal cultural scenario in which women are under the patronage of a congruent *p'at'roni* (father, husband, or social network and welfare state in the wider sense) in spite of age or social status (Nogaideli 2012: 48–49). This is a hierarchical system in which a man obtains the position of a patron, but what happens when a woman becomes the patron?

The focus of my research was on women of mostly middle age (40–55) and older (55–70). Having been raised and educated in Soviet Georgia, these women described themselves as members of the last “Soviet” generations that ideologically and practically took over responsibility for the younger generations in post-socialist Georgia.

While lifestyles and family structures are changing due to globalization, migration, and shifting political regimes, “mothering—more than any other aspect of gender—has been subject to essentialist interpretations: seen as natural, universal and unchanging” (Glenn 1994: 3). However, once care practice becomes transnational, it produces “contradictory constructions of gender” (Parreñas 2005a: 96). By employing an analytical lens on motherhood, not as a biological but as a social construct, in which the historically developed cultural perception of care is essential, I show how the role of motherhood is being negotiated, reshaped, and conserved in migration. Being a migrant mother impacts women’s lifestyles in migration and the capacities it enables them to develop. To analyze migrant women’s capacities, I chose the concept of agency over empowerment and resistance, because “agentive acts may also involve complicity with, accommodation to, or reinforcement of the status quo—sometimes all at the same time” (Ahearn 2000: 13).⁶ Agency still means resisting opposition, even if this does not necessarily involve an anti-structural action. Focusing on agency allows us to analyze how marginalized groups (e.g., migrant women) exert their agency in situations of power inequality.⁷ Yet migration, as a dynamic process, introduces new structures and presents challenges distinct from those previously encountered. Consequently, their agency must be interpreted in light of the shifting socio-economic conditions that unfold throughout the migration journey. As the anthropological perspective on agency remains close to the culture and language of the social fields studied, I have identified agency in the narratives of Georgian migrant women with the notion of desires (*survili*). Following Ahearn (2000) and Sehlikoglu (2018), who both argued for concentrating on personhood and desires while exploring agency,

I identified agency as the capacity to act and pursue desires against different forms of obstacles.

Dealing with Uncertainty

In my informants' narratives, the big crisis (*didi k'rizisi*) is connected with painful memories of times when food was lacking, electricity was only intermittently available, and husbands were paralyzed by circumstance or sickness and struggling to earn money wherever they could. Certainly, migrant women faced different conditions; some had been overwhelmed by tragedies, while others had been spared from bigger misfortunes. Yet, what applied to all of my informants was "a lost sense of stability and predictability that had previously allowed them to plan their future" (Dudwick et al. 2003: 23). What had come along with this deep loss was an uncertainty (ibid.) that was engraved in women's stories, and therefore always present while they were building their lifeworlds in Greece.

But how did the women's migration develop and change when the post-socialist "transition"—the time of uncertainty (Pine and Bridger 1998; Burawoy and Verdery 1999)—was ostensibly "over?" After the Rose Revolution of 2003 and the subsequent era under the presidency of Mikheil Saakashvili, the new neoliberal path and extensive reforms slowly enhanced living conditions in Georgia. Saakashvili announced the end of "transition" (Frederiksen 2013: 9) and invested strongly in the modernization of the urban centers of Tbilisi and Batumi. Nevertheless, women increasingly migrated to Greece until 2009 (Maroufop 2017: 43), when the Greek economic and financial crisis began. One explanation for this sustained increase in migration is that Georgian women who considered migrating during Saakashvili's period faced fewer social barriers than their predecessors, making them more willing to migrate (Buckley and Hofmann 2013). Another explanation can be drawn from Gugushvili's study, which revealed that despite economic growth within this era, poverty in Georgia had only slightly decreased (2017: 11). Furthermore, the new divisions and inequalities that were created under Saakashvili led to a prolonged sense of uncertainty expressed by women. This uncertainty persisted among those who remained in Greece, despite economic improvements in their family households in Georgia, regardless of when they left their home country.⁸ In the social sciences, it is widely understood that insecurity gives rise to uncertainty (Whyte 2009; Cooper and Pratten 2015; Ryburn 2018). Although that understanding is very true and important for the present study, this perspective is only one layer of uncertainty.

While unraveling the motives of women's decisions and investments between two lifeworlds, the uncertainties that transpire are also situated

“between order and chaos, between continuity and change, between harmony and conflict” (von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann 2007: 25). Thus, the concept of uncertainty describes the moment of being “in between” that can relate to the outside condition and an inner state of mind. Migrant women are trapped, often for a long time, in a situation of being “in between,” or in the process of “becoming” (Ryburn 2018: 4), in which uncertainty dominates the circumstance of being “betwixt.” Throughout the present book, I also explore this sense of uncertainty to illustrate what migrant women make out of the process of being in between different temporalities, conditions, lifeworlds, and gender roles.

Making a New Social Life

Most of my informants were leaving their home country and their families behind for the first time. While crossing the border illegally, or formally as a “tourist,” they had to depend on a social network. In fact, all of my informants had someone—a relative, a close friend, or a neighbor—to whom they initially traveled. This underscores what Hofmann (2012: 149) had outlined, namely that the availability of a network decides the destination for Georgian women wishing to migrate. For my informants, it was most often only one person—a female friend or a relative of Georgian or Soviet Pontian (ethnic Greek) origin⁹—with whom they organized their migration project. Due to the extensive repatriation of Georgian Pontians to Greece from the early 1990s, which guided the subsequent migration flow from Georgia (Marouf 2017: 40), Greece became a hub for post-Soviet Georgians of various ethnic backgrounds and legal statuses.

Given the initially unknown nature of Thessaloniki as a destination, women created new lifeworlds in which friendship plays a crucial role, and trust and mistrust are partially negotiated anew. As for the latter aspect, migration provides a profound ground for a study of mistrust. For a long time, mistrust has been seen only as the void left by vanishing trust (Carey 2017; Mühlfried 2018). In the same sense, mistrust, particularly in migration studies, has been treated as a negative attitude that amplifies segregation and isolation (White and Ryan 2008: 1489; Uslaner 2012: 35ff; Sturgis et al. 2014: 1287–88; Kindler et al. 2015: 16–17). However, as I will demonstrate, mistrust leads to more than this. Especially under the hitherto unknown and often very difficult conditions of migration, mistrust becomes an active way of dealing with social norms, uncertainties, and exploitation. While describing different modes of mistrust, my research contributes to recent anthropological accounts questioning the dichotomy of trust as a positive achievement and mistrust as an undesirable and harmful effect (Humphrey

2018; Carey 2017; Mühlfried 2018, 2019). In analyzing different modes of mistrust, alongside women's mental states, material resources, and their social surroundings, friendship comes to the fore as an important concept for elaboration.

For a long time, friendship has remained in the shadow of anthropology's other major topic—kinship (Beer and Gardner 2015; Pitt-Rivers 2016). In recent years, however, friendship (at least male friendship) appears to have gained more prominence, despite analytic boundaries that emerged from difficulties in defining it. Since friendship varies across time and cultural space, and is a “voluntary” and thus a processual relationship, it can be seen in terms of “active, ongoing and necessarily reciprocal work” (Bunnell et al. 2012: 493). While going through an experimental phase with friendship relations, migrant women end up establishing various levels of friendship within their new lifeworld. For some migrant women, friendship—more than any other institution—in its deep nature “transcend[ed] the divisions imposed by such collective mechanisms of inclusion and identity as kinship ties, settlement membership, or ethnic affiliation” (Santos-Granero 2007: 13). Migrant women, arriving in Greece with their unique personalities and backstories, as well as “a bag full of problems,” established friendship relations in accordance with their vulnerability and changing desires in migration.

As Marina said above, “no one comes for Greece for pleasure.” They come for labor. Being in need of money, women use their networks to search for better-paid employment all over the world. The demand for care services in Greek households has created jobs for those middle-aged and older women who are part of the last actively working generation that were educated and worked in Soviet Georgia. Like thousands of other women from post-socialist countries, Georgian women have become migrant care workers, and often the main breadwinners of their families (Lundkvist-Houndoumadi 2010). A huge body of literature, predominantly from anthropology and mostly dealing with the flow of female Ukrainian migrants to Europe (Solari 2010; Tolstokorova 2010; Fedyuk 2011; Kindler 2011), guided me in approaching the multi-dimensional perspectives on care work.

Care work is close to all of us, as the need for care is essential to every human being. Dealing with care as an ethnographer is challenging, as it touches upon his or her morality, values, and gender-related imaginaries about care. Moreover, for the ethnographic eye, the act of caring does not always correspond with the informant's narrative about care. Yet through analyzing these discrepancies, I was able to identify the strategies, attitudes, and emotions involved in the care work. Indeed, migrant women's care is embedded in the cultural patterns of the Greek domestic domain and the social understanding of its commodification. Care work has been established along these lines, and the gendered, supposedly “low-skilled” niche within

the Greek labor market (Xypolytas 2016: 34) is “performed for a wage that is always lower than that paid for ‘productive’ labor” (Lutz 2013: 1). Georgian women are very conscious of the exploitative character of their labor, and their vulnerable, disadvantageous position as migrant care workers in Greece. Trying to find ways of dealing with these circumstances, the women praised the opportunity to earn money and to thus care for their households back in Georgia.

Describing the various caring relations in which migrant women have been involved, I contextualized and explained the cultural notions of the terms used. Against viewing care work as a continuity of motherhood care, or of women’s “natural” caring duty, migrant women, especially those of age, ascribed their work also to *shroma* (a Soviet-influenced word for hard labor), and consequently described themselves as *mshromelebi* (laborers).

From the 1980s onward, the Greek domestic sector created different forms of care jobs in the unregulated domestic domain. However, with the onset of the Greek economic and financial crisis in 2009, most migrant women had no other opportunity than to work in twenty-four-hour caring arrangements. This meant caring for the elderly, the disabled, and the sick in their homes, cleaning houses from top to bottom, and caring for children, as well as doing other housekeeping tasks. Despite the low salaries and the precarity of their working conditions, Georgian migrant women managed to provide support and, most importantly, send remittances to Georgia, often in much larger amounts than their male counterparts (OECD/CRRC-Georgia 2017: 85; Zurabishvili and Zurabishvili 2013: 156). How was this circumstance possible? This question led me to look at women’s notions of labor and recognition in relation to their employment and their kinship ties.

While anthropology deals with recognition, so far there has been no theoretical framework for the “anthropology of recognition” (Girke 2018). This circumstance has encouraged me to look at related disciplines, such as philosophy and sociology, in which recognition is approached as a “vital human need” (Taylor 1992: 26). To be recognized is a fundamental need, and it is regulated by and pursued through rights, politics, and social norms in various ways in different cultures. The struggle for recognition is the struggle for recognizing one’s identity. It is a process which happens grounded on reciprocity and, therefore, is very much at the core of anthropological studies (Busacchi 2015: 1). Analyzing recognition from an anthropological perspective means investigating social practices such as, in this case, as I have learned, those which lead toward gaining recognition in the cultural sense of the Georgian notion of *p’at’ivistsema* (respect).

Approaching the Notion of Migration

Migration is widely understood as a social process (Brettell 2009), yet it is often “misunderstood as something that challenges the cultural fabric of a society and disrupts social and economic life” (Cohen and Sirkeci 2011: xi). This misunderstanding is embedded in the term “migration,” which reflects the perspectives of the receiving state’s migration regimes (Baas 2017: 51). Based on the institutional and ideological principles of the receiving state, these regimes decide upon the inclusion and exclusion of newcomers (Rosenhek 2000: 52). Labeling individuals as “migrants” confines our understanding of human mobility to the narrow framework of national migration policies, which are inherently unequal and ideological. Migration regimes also often lag behind the already multi-ethnic reality of the state, as had been very much the case in Greece. This leads to migrants in Greece being regarded as a potential “threat to both the social cohesion and the cultural homogeneity of the nation” (Pratsinakis 2013: 25). Consequently, until recently, Greek citizenship was granted only to those who could claim Greek descent, including Pontians (ethnic Greeks) arriving from the former Soviet Union and later from Albania (Cavounidis 2018: 20–21). However, as Pratsinakis (2013) has shown in his exploration of Greeks from the former Soviet Union, inclusion and exclusion are influenced not only by migration regimes and citizenship entitlements, but also by access to the “native” labor market, residential areas, and interactions with the local society (ibid.: 79ff).

Thus, the inclusion of newly arrived people very much depends on the national labor market, which decides their status and integration into society. As newly arrived people often become trapped in low-prestige work, the notion of “migrant” implies the laborer works in a low-wage branch of the economy and will stay only temporarily (Baas 2017), much like the outdated German term “Gastarbeiter.” In order to employ a different view of people who move, and in order to distance from the perspective of methodological nationalism that perceives the nation state as the primary unit of analysis (Glick Schiller and Wimmer 2002; Vertovec 1999), Basch et al. (1994) have called for a transnational approach based on the assumption that “many immigrants today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural and political borders” (ibid.: 8). The “transnational” multi-layered relations of people who move enables them, the immigrants, to live in transnational worlds with multiple identities (Brettell 2018: 13). Within an increasingly globalized and interlinked world, people who move already have transnational lifestyles in mind (Baas 2017: 58). Yet people do not have equal opportunities and privileges related to engaging in a transnational life. Social anthropologists have highlighted various barriers that people face while crossing borders—namely

those arising from “social class, gender, age, lifestyle, ethnicity, nationality, and disability” (Salazar 2018: 157).

In a globalized world, mobility in one form or another seems to confront everyone. As Noel Salazar (2018: 153) has noted, the “lifeworld is in flux, with not only people, but also cultures, objects, capital, businesses . . . circulating across (and even beyond) the planet.” Considering both the myriad ways in which people are involved in geographic movement, and the “asymmetries” rooted in culture, such as political and economic conditions (Baas 2017: 52), Cohen and Sirkeci (2011) have called for greater use of the term “mobility.” It underscores “the changing, floating, fluid nature of this phenomenon and captures the regular as well as the irregular moves of people on the ground regardless of time and destination” (ibid.: 7).

In order to understand people’s mobile life trajectories, it is important to look at social ties and practices that are not confined “to a fixed territory but are parts of multiple spatial networks and temporal linkages” (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2012: 186). Mobility is embedded within the cultural politics and histories of societies (Salazar 2018: 162); in almost every society, groups of people have periodically been on the move (Cohen and Sirkeci 2011: 23; Salazar 2018: 153), and their movements—creating a “culture of migration” (Cohen and Sirkeci 2011: 22)—have shaped the history of these societies. The lens of mobility, just like transnationalism, trains the eye for global and multiple processes of “translocal” and transnational movements. Nevertheless, Caroline Brettell (2018) and other scholars (Glick-Schiller and Salazar 2012: 185–86 as cited in Brettell 2018: 14) have been critical of incorporating too many different forms of mobility under one umbrella, since differences in mobility patterns are highly relevant, just as are their causes and impacts (Brettell 2018: 15–16).

Keeping these debates in mind, and taking the political implications of the term into account, I define Georgian women who move to Greece as “migrant” women. I do so because they themselves employ the terms *emigrant’i* (Georgian emigrant), *migrant’i* (Georgian migrant), and *metanástiç* (Greek migrant) to delineate their social position and political status in Greece. These terms signify the experience of becoming the “others” in Greece, underlining that “mobility has become a key difference—and [an] otherness-producing machine” (Salazar 2018: 163). Still, the terms migrant women use to describe themselves depend on the context being narrated. When discussing their arrival in Thessaloniki, and discussing themselves in relation to their co-nationals in Greece, they distance themselves from the Greek or outside perspective. Rather, they describe themselves through the lens of their own cultural context by using the Georgian terms *chamosuli* or *akhali chamosuli* (arriving, just arrived; visiting [town etc.]; having come down). These terminologies suggest that the

arrived (*chamovida*) soul (*suli*) is in the initial stages of adapting to a new cultural environment.

Throughout the present book, I relate all the terms Georgian women used. In the broader usage of the term “migrant,” I refer to a person who is in a process of “migration.” In this sense, I understand migration as a social process (Brettell 2009) of building lifeworlds within a new geographic space that is determined by political (migration regime), economic (labor market), social (exclusion, racism), and personal (biographies, personalities) conditions, and entails the idea of returning. The emphasis is not on categories or types of migration, such as “labor migration” or “seasonal migration,” nor solely the act of movement per se, but on how the new lifeworlds are built and how they intersect with the lifeworld in Georgia, and vice versa.

Structure of the Book

The seven chapters that follow illuminate what constitutes migration for the last Soviet-educated generation of women from Georgia as they become migrant care workers in Greece. Through an ethnographic lens, the chapters examine the everyday strategies these women employ to cope with uncertainty, care responsibilities, and overlapping crises — the post-socialist transition in Georgia and the financial and economic crisis in Greece.

In the first chapter, I disclose the feelings of uncertainty that pervade different spheres of migrant women’s lives. Against this background, I juxtapose the various investments made by Georgian women that emerge as sources of certainty. After giving a brief overview of historical developments and network-mediated migration trends from Georgia after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, I examine the socio-political situation of migrant women in Greece. I further discuss remittances, and especially gifting practices, as strategies adopted by women to cope with living conditions in migration, translocal gender norms, and moral obligations.

The second chapter deals with migrant women’s perception of their womanhood in relation to Soviet and post-Soviet Georgian discourses on motherhood. It explores how migrant women have coped—and still struggle—with the “crisis” in Georgia that often includes “failing” fatherhood and a loss of protection for women and children. While describing women’s ambivalent position as the worker mother in migration, I show how migrant women carry the responsibilities for the young generation in the sense of *p’at’ronoba* (protection and care) despite gendered and political boundaries.

Labor, in the sense of domestic or care work, is the subject of Chapter 3. Looking at the condition of migrant care work in Greece, and the new circumstances that are attributed to the Greek crisis, I uncover various strategies

used by Georgian migrant women to cope with their vulnerable position. This chapter discusses the intensification of various relations in care work employment, ranging from mutual dependency to exploitation. In contrast to this development, the second part of the chapter highlights women's strategies of gaining privacy within the confines of domestic work and beyond.

The emphasis on private spaces in migration carries over into Chapter 4, where I describe women's relationships with their new social and material environment in Thessaloniki. By examining the daily life of domestic work, and the routes migrant women undertake in Thessaloniki, the chapter explores the visible and invisible spaces and places occupied by migrant women. Against restrictions by status, gender, social norms, and domestic work, the chapter outlines how migrant women establish very different private spaces in Thessaloniki, in which friendship between women plays a key role.

Chapter 5 investigates various modes of mistrust. While engaging in multi-stranded social relations across the duration of migration, mistrust becomes an unwelcome but persistent guest. Since mistrust pervades different spheres of a migrant woman's life, it is often directed at the most sensitive issues, namely the relatives and children left behind in Georgia. The chapter discloses how mistrust also protects and navigates women through difficult phases of their migration and thus enables transformative moments.

Chapter 6 examines the migrant women's perceptions of the self while becoming migrants. Illuminating crucial aspects of the migrant self, such as feelings of belonging, class, the practicing of nostalgia, and their conceptions of labor, I reveal how women maintain their sense of self-respect against marginalization between their lifeworlds. Building on this, I examine the concept of recognition in relation to women's engagements in migration. Considering the marginal position they occupy, I disclose the struggle for recognition as a quest for acknowledgment of their achievements and daily endeavors.

In the final chapter, I describe how migrant women carry heavy responsibilities for the young generation in the sense of *p'at'ronoba* (care), despite gendered and political marginalization. While transforming the state of liminality, or being in between lifeworlds, I disclose women's turning points in migration, which meant returning to Georgia or acting to change conditions in migration. In both pathways, women face vulnerability and precarity, despite the investments and care (in the cultural sense of *p'at'ronoba*) they have provided to their children. I aim to unpack desires (*survili*) that have changed and guided women from the beginning to the end of migration, which I analyze through the lens of agency.

Approaching the Field

As happens for anthropologists, they enter a new field with only a scribbled name or phone number in their hands. Through unforeseen encounters, a “broker” is found, a person who is willing to introduce the anthropologist to a wider network and support him or her in any eventuality. Thus anthropologists, like migrants, are often guided by an initial contact who helps them in establishing a network and finding accommodation. Particular places for conducting field research are often chosen through such influences. When I first arrived in Athens for a pilot study in May 2014, the metropolis made me wonder where to find Georgian migrant women. Fortunately, I was hosted by Lela, an impressive Georgian woman who, with her warmth, openness, and directness, gave me a first haunting idea about the life of Georgian women in Greece. With only the phone number of a woman called Anano in hand, I took a train to Thessaloniki.¹⁰ The next day, Anano agreed to meet me at the “Panagia Dexia” church in the center of Thessaloniki. She was waiting for me with Vano, a Georgian migrant man, who was sitting on his green Town Mate scooter. They asked me to walk along the “Egnatia,” the main historical road of Thessaloniki, until we finally arrived at a small bistro. It was also a grocery store being rented out by Vano, where Anano occasionally worked. Over an afternoon spent in this bistro, I witnessed how migrants—both males and females from “post-Soviet” states—met in this place for very different purposes. Being introduced as a researcher from Germany to all those who stopped by, I faced interest and curiosity and was informed about the specificities and advantages of this historical town, Thessaloniki.

In 2014, the “Greek” crisis had left its mark, not only on people’s life circumstances, but also on the city’s landscape, with ghostly empty stores on every street. The friendly, welcoming atmosphere of Thessaloniki was still felt, particularly by the “Soviet Pontian” clients from Georgia, who had been living in Thessaloniki for more than two decades, and who treasured the “invisible” but perceptible multi-ethnic spirit of the city. Located in the northern part of Greece, for several historical and political reasons Thessaloniki has become a primarily temporary destination—though sometimes turning into a permanent one—for migrants from Southern and Central Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, the Balkans, and the Caucasus, among others. Particularly during the massive inflow of refugees mostly from Syria in 2014–16, Thessaloniki became a crossing point for migrants heading to Northern and Western Europe. While thousands of people passed along the Balkan route through Thessaloniki, it remained the final destination for most migrants from the Balkans and the Caucasus.

Being introduced into this multi-faceted city by Anano and Vano, who as cultural brokers supported and guided me, I felt welcomed to start my

research in this particular destination. Although Thessaloniki is much smaller than Athens, with only 350,000 residents,¹¹ the relative size of the population of Georgians in Thessaloniki is comparable. Giving precise numbers of Georgian migrants in Greece is a challenging task, as many migrants live without legal permits. According to the Hellenic Statistical Authority (El. Stat.), in 2015, around seventeen thousand Georgians were the holders of a residence permit in Greece (Maroufopoulou 2017: 43). The same source suggests that a comparable number of Georgian migrants were without valid permits (*ibid.*). A slightly smaller number, around fourteen thousand migrants, were reported by the National Statistics Office of Georgia (GeoStat), with more than eleven thousand of them being women (Migration Profile of Georgia 2017: 14). The Georgian consulate in Thessaloniki provided me with the unofficial estimate that, apart from the eleven thousand migrants who had registered at the consulate in 2015, approximately twenty to thirty thousand more Georgians were staying in Thessaloniki and its surroundings; a slightly higher number had been estimated for Athens. The years of the “Greek” crisis substantially impacted the number of Georgian migrants in Greece. Between 2006 and 2009, when the rate of Georgian migrants staying in Greece had been at its highest, there were about seventy to eighty thousand in Thessaloniki and its wider surroundings, according to the consulate in Thessaloniki.¹² The majority were Georgian women working in the care and domestic domains. Even if the number of Georgians declined between 2014 and 2015 (Triandafyllidou and Mantanika 2016: 12), at the time of my research they still made up the fourth largest group of foreigners in Greece, after Albanians, Bulgarians, and Romanians (*ibid.*: 13).

Fieldwork and Methodology

Almost one year after my first visit to Greece, I traveled to Thessaloniki again, this time together with my newborn child and my partner, where I conducted the first part of my fieldwork from February 2015 until October 2015. For practically the whole time, I was living in the center of Thessaloniki, in one of the multi-ethnic neighborhoods where many Georgians and Soviet Pontians live. I rented an apartment from a Georgian migrant woman, who received the flat in return for the long years of care work she had provided for a Greek pensioner. I got to know some of my Georgian informants in my neighborhood: in shops close by, and cafes, or just in the street where we lived. These “initial” informants introduced me to other women, who lived in the houses and apartments of the people they cared for. I met others in Vano’s store, which unfortunately was much less frequently visited by migrants than the year before, due to the impact of the crisis and economic recession that

also hit migrants (Anagnostou and Gemi 2015). Still, Vano's store remained open most of the time and was always open to me, so I could use it as a space to discuss the questions and particularities that came up during my stay in Thessaloniki. Looking for a Greek teacher, visiting Greek taverns, or the coffee places of Greek friends, there were other occasions when I met or became directly introduced to "Georgian" women, who in several cases turned out to be Armenian, Ukrainian, or Bulgarian. Thus, searching for "Georgian" women was always an adventure. Even if the search was unsuccessful, it still taught me a lot about the "Greek" perception of a Georgian migrant woman.

Apart from interviewing Georgian and Georgian Pontian women, I conducted interviews in the Georgian consulate, with Georgian Pontian lawyers, with representatives of migrant organizations, and with Georgian schoolteachers and Greek employers. While most interviews were held in Georgian with my women informants, I communicated either in Russian or Georgian with "Soviet" Pontians in Thessaloniki—depending on their preference. While I was eager to learn some Greek, my knowledge was not enough to interview in the language. The interviews with my Greek informants were therefore held in English or with a translator.

All of my informants were fully informed about the objectives of the research, the social anthropological methodologies employed, and the intended use of the qualitative data. They were also assured of complete anonymity and confidentiality throughout the research. I obtained oral consent from each informant for their interviews to be reproduced in this book. Furthermore, all collected data have been carefully managed and safeguarded to ensure the protection and well-being of my informants at all times.¹³

Generally, the people I met in Thessaloniki had been open and willing to talk, despite the fact that the year 2015 had been a very hard time in crisis-ridden Greece. The only difficulty I faced was finding free time, which migrant women often did not have in great quantities. Thus, whenever possible, I visited them at their place of work or at home; I accompanied them to the post office, to coffee places, to church, and to go shopping. As I became integrated into the lives of several of my informants, they invited me and my baby to birthdays in restaurants, to *supras* (banquets) in their homes back in Georgia, and to "Georgian" events taking place in Thessaloniki. Throughout the book, I refer to many conversations with migrant women that occurred during these activities and events and the time spent together.

Nevertheless, the deeper interviews with migrant women and their relatives, that sometimes lasted for hours, provide the groundwork for this ethnographic study.¹⁴ Beyond the conversations that I sometimes recorded or gathered in the form of spontaneous field notes, I also had appointments with each of my informants alone, where I listened and recorded their personal life stories and worldviews. I conducted interviews with more than fifty women, with more

than thirty of whom I recorded more than one interview. I also interviewed male migrants in Greece, ten husbands of migrant women in Georgia, and several mothers and children of migrant women, who had stayed behind in Georgia. Looking at the profiles of my informants, most of them were educated in Soviet Georgia (and some in Russia or Ukraine), and more than half of them had gained work experience during the Soviet era. The majority of my female interviewees had lived in Greece for more than three years, were mothers, and many of them were already grandmothers. Most of the “childless” interviewees were responsible for “mothering” a child of their kin group.

Since the interview is essential for “collecting data about various aspects of irregularity, grey economic activities, and the autonomy and agency of mobile people” (Fedyuk and Zentai 2018: 172), in each chapter these interviews form the basis for analysis and conceptualization. Initially, I had prepared semi-structured interviews, which in the first phase of my fieldwork mostly ended up being in-depth, open interviews or narratives. Since I dealt with vulnerable women and their mainly unexplored lifeworlds in Greece, I did not interrupt the flow of the narration, enabling me as a researcher to perceive unknown and unforeseen details of women’s lives. Listening to women’s lives and to their migration experience was an emotional situation, as all migrant women had gone through difficult stages in their lives. Still, they were always very pleased and eager to tell their stories. I refer to the interview to emphasize the methodological practice of speaking with participants in a semi-structured way, while the story or narrative is the form through which women expressed and made sense of their experiences. As Michael Jackson (2002: 17) aptly noted: “for what matters is how stories enable us to regain some purchase over the events that confound us, humble us, and leave us helpless, salvaging a sense that we have some say in the way our lives unfold.” In the narratives, women gain a voice and trace the stages of their lives in line with their morality and political perspective on history. Mattingly, in his key interpretation of narratives, argues that narratives evoke our imagination, specifically “our imaginative ability to identify with characters and their plights” (Mattingly 2007: 421). While acknowledging the imaginative engagement that Mattingly emphasizes, I align with Jarrett Zigon’s interpretation of narratives as “articulations of the embodied struggle to morally exist with oneself and others in the social world” (2012: 205). This articulation can be seen also as “ideal representations or conceptions of moral subjectivity” (Zigon 2012: 206). Particularly in the initial recorded narrative, many experiences and perspectives were explained in a similar way, as women framed their stories in adjustment to gendered expectations, norms, and national discourses on female migration.

Understanding narrations also as a moral “representation,” and situating them into a historical and socio-political context, was important, as was interviewing migrant women for a second and third time. Moreover, while

undertaking participant observation—one of the main tools in anthropological fieldwork—the acts and conversations between migrant women and their social surroundings could also reveal divergence from the narrative. Reflecting on ethnographic fieldwork, Martin Frederiksen rightly argued that spending time in the field “reveals situations, aspects, and processes that may otherwise go unnoticed” (2013: 180). Yet often these findings and insights emerge in retrospect, once back home and exploring the entirety of the ethnographic material (Marcus and Cushman 1982: 58).

Inspired by the idea of a multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995), I went to Georgia for the second part of my fieldwork, from June to September 2016. As many of my informants had departed from Tbilisi, I spent the months in Tbilisi, but also in some villages in the Kakheti and Samegrelo regions, where I met several migrant women returning from Thessaloniki, or who had come to visit their relatives in Georgia. During my field research in Georgia, I was also introduced to the husbands of migrant women and their children, several of whom I also interviewed. As my time in Thessaloniki had disclosed that, for migrants, “Georgia” always remained present, I felt it was important to discover links between the various “sides” or lifeworlds in which migrant women interact. To discover such links, George Marcus (1995) suggested following “the people,” “the thing,” or “the metaphor” (etc.), which enables one to grasp the cultural process of migration beyond national confines. Since Marcus (1995) introduced the methodology of “extending” or widening the “sites” decades ago, it has become quite commonplace in ethnographic field research. Particularly when the research concerns migration, the idea of linking a “local” site to a broader set of globalized relations discloses multiple effects that spatial shift or movement has on the moving subjects, as well as the social and material surroundings. In a broader sense, this also relates to national economics, policies, and so on. As argued by Kathryn Henne (2017: 104): “The principles underpinning multi-sited ethnography reflect its theoretical subscription to global connectivity.” In research debates, multi-sited ethnography has also awakened worries concerning a dilution of ethnographic practice, a loss of ethnographic focus, and a loss of expertise in relation to a precise cultural area, to name only some points (Coleman and von Hellerman 2011; Hannerz 2003). Based on my research experience, I can only underscore Ingie Hovland’s (2011: 104) argument that multi-sited ethnography enables the researcher to understand transnational practice. As she puts it:

multi-sited ethnography is most amenable to ethnographic interpretations of flows of ideas when the connections between the sites are not seen as pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, which fit neatly together, but rather are viewed as aspects of an incomplete whole that the researcher gradually gains deeper—and more partial—insights into.

Through the multi-sited ethnographic lens, I traced the various flows emanating from Georgian migrant women, examining also the extent to which—and in what forms—these flows enter the lives of those who remain in Georgia. By following women within these flows, I was able to understand their perceptions of mobility and their attachment to place.

Although the post-modern spatial turn in anthropology has very much shaped the understanding of place as space—with its “ethnoscapes” (Appadurai 1996), “deterritorialization” of space (Papastergiadis 2000), and “transnational spaces” (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003)—places still do play an important role for people who move (Lems 2018; Stephan-Emmerich and Schröder 2018). Drawing on Heidegger’s notion of “Dasein,” which according to Annika Lems would be rightly translated as “being-here,” it “underscores the intimate relationship between being and place” (Lems 2018: 21). Thus, as places remain meaningful and interrelated with people’s identity, particularly those who move (Stephan-Emmerich 2018: 299), I discovered Thessaloniki as a space where migrant women are in the process of place-making, building a new lifeworld where they always relate to the “other” lifeworld, in which the place they used to call “home” shaped their lives in migration.

Limitations

Before scrutinizing the limits of my research, I would like to elaborate on its potential advantages. When I arrived in Thessaloniki for the second time, my newborn baby accompanied me. In my memories, Thessaloniki was already a very kind city. Yet, while “living” in Thessaloniki and exploring my “field” together with a baby, I faced an openness and kindness I had never experienced in other European cities. Although my baby liked to express her discomfort, she “opened” the doors to many houses and the hearts of people in Thessaloniki. Becoming a mother had certainly changed my own perspective, and shaped my approach toward migrant mothers. However, doing fieldwork with a baby imposed certain limitations. After I returned from my fieldwork, I listened to many of my recordings and realized that I had to interrupt several of my interviewees when my daughter needed my attention.

I entered my ethnographic field as an “outsider.” Being a German citizen with a Polish background, and having no kinship ties either in Greece or Georgia, I was not part of any of the migrant women’s immediate contexts. Most migrant women knew Greek and had experienced many years of care and domestic work in Greek households; they were keen to introduce me to Greek culture. The circumstance that I had become a mother, and knew Georgia and its language—thus enabling women to speak with me

in Georgian—created a sense of closeness or intimacy against the “foreign” Greek surroundings. Although we shared a gender identity, I was not an insider, in the sense of sharing an ethnic identity or culture, which often presupposes mutual understanding and trust. However, insider status also bears risks, as things might remain unspoken when they are taken for granted (Suwankhong and Liangputtong 2015: 4). To me, as an outsider, my informants tried to make their situation and current lifeworlds comprehensible. Moreover, my somewhat distant position enabled me to speak about critical and sometimes stigmatized topics such as love, sexuality, and mistrust.

Another potentially sensitive issue was “illegality,” toward which migrant women had various approaches and attitudes. While some, because of their undocumented status, feared walking in the city, others moved freely everywhere, as I will show in more detail in the following chapters. Nonetheless, during the course of my fieldwork, I realized that legality and illegality was not a topic they wanted to broach or discuss. During the writing process, the question arose around how to speak and which words to use to describe women’s legal status. The migrant women mostly used the term *uk’anonod* (illegal) for their illicit entrance to Greece, and the word *usabuto*, which literally means being “without documents”—similar to the French notion of *sans papier*—for their undocumented stay. They also used the word *legaluri* (legal) to describe their documented status, once they obtained one. Although the terms illegal, undocumented, irregular, and illicit have various implications, they all mean residing in a country without official permission, as defined by the receiving nation state. As a clear way forward, I stick to the women’s vocabulary and use the terms “undocumented” (*usabuto*) and “legal” (*legaluri*, *k’anonieri*) throughout the book.

The question of whether to “appear” on Facebook, a social media platform used widely among the women I encountered, remained difficult for the purpose of my study until the end of my research. Dalsgaard (2016) has called for the ethnographic use of Facebook, because much of social life takes place online and anthropologists would actually have the tools to critically study it. Although I agree with him, and although all of my informants asked me to register and open a Facebook profile, I did not. I feared that I would not fulfill their expectations in terms of spending time, posting, and writing on the platform. Nevertheless, with some of my informants I stayed in touch by phone, through text messages and Skype. Even without having my own Facebook account, however, I spent plenty of time with migrant women and men, reading and looking at their Facebook accounts and discussing what was posted.

Another limitation concerns the time elapsed before this book was published. Ethnographers usually aim to capture current social dynamics, but by the time their work is released, these dynamics may have shifted, and

migrants may have altered their paths. Nonetheless, many Georgian women continue to work under challenging conditions in Greece. However, the visa liberalization in 2017 and the implementation of several new migration laws for migrant domestic workers have impacted the social lives of Georgian migrant women, and as I learned from my informants, living conditions have improved (at least a bit) in Greece. Unfortunately, the developments that have occurred since 2017 are beyond the scope of this study.

Notes

1. All the names of my informants have been changed in order to protect their privacy.
2. The term “informality” is here defined as that part of the labor market that is not taxed or regulated by the state. In Greece, the majority of care workers or domestic workers are employed in the “informal” domestic sector. This means that migrant women, who are employed informally, lack access to officially defined social protection schemes, such as healthcare and childcare facilities (Anagnostou and Gemi 2015: 21).
3. Activities in the domestic domain cannot be neatly differentiated. Often, “caring” also demands cooking, cleaning, and other forms of housekeeping-related “domestic work,” which also contribute to “the daily living conditions that make basic human health and well-being possible” (Zimmermann 2006, cited in Lutz 2013: 1). As caring is involved in all activities within the private household, in most accounts the notion of care work prevails over domestic work. In this book, I will use both terms. Depending on what I want to emphasize—labor in a domestic realm, or labor with and for people—I prefer to use the term domestic work for the former activities, and care work for the latter.
4. Such as, to take examples from the literature, in Southeast Asia (Parreñas 2005a), the Middle East (Fernandez and De Regt 2014a), Europe (Cvajner 2019; Triandafyllidou 2016; Lutz 2011; Kindler 2011), the USA (Liebert 2010), and South America (Ryburn 2018).
5. Migration always emerges out of a configuration of political, social, economic, and individual factors. To identify the scope and relevance of these factors is the major challenge when endeavoring to untangle migration. Moreover, the “interplay” of these factors looks different from the “outside” (depending also on the angle) and the “inside.” Nonetheless, it has become a major consensus in migration studies that neither the economy nor cultural practices alone can provide all the answers to understand patterns of migration (Cohen and Sirkeci 2011: iv). Thus, when considering factors engendering the migration of Georgian women to Greece, the political, economic, and social dynamics—both in terms of the home country and of the receiving one—play a significant role.
6. The notion of agency, shaped fifty years ago by thinkers such as Anthony Giddens, Pierre Bourdieu, and Marshall Sahlins, intends to describe the dialectic relation between social action and structure in a mutually constitutive manner (Ahearn 2000: 12). Meanwhile, a debate on the notion of agency and its transferability in other cultural contexts is ongoing.
7. While there are various interpretations of the term “marginality,” it is commonly understood as a condition in which communities are situated on the periphery of societal structures, typically in relation to power, resources, and social recognition (Varghese and Kumar 2022: 24). Beyond its economic meaning, marginality “refers to the relative position of communities within geographic, political, social, or cultural spaces” (ibid.). It

- is often described in opposition to the “central” (Varghese and Kumar 2022: 24)—a distinction that is not always easy to define—with individuals or groups experiencing exclusion based on factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or socio-economic status.
8. I conducted my field research in 2015, just two years before Georgian citizens were granted visa-free entry to the EU. With this decisive change, new dynamics of female migration occurred—the third wave of migration. These “new” dynamics took place after I had finished my field research and are therefore not discussed in the present study.
 9. When I spoke with ethnic Greeks from former Soviet republics, who identified themselves as such, they called themselves *berdzeni* (“Greek” in the Georgian language), or *pont’oeli* (“Pontian” in the Georgian language), or *grek* and *grechanka* (“Greek” in the Russian language). I call the group of ethnic Greeks who arrived from former Soviet republics, acquired a special status in Greece, and were strongly attached to their Soviet past (or at least those that were born in one of the former Soviet republics) “Soviet” Pontians. In this, I follow Eftihia Voutira (2004) who, in her study of ethnic Greeks from the former USSR, employed the term “Soviet” Greeks in order to distinguish them from other ethnic Greeks who arrived in Greece from Turkey in the twentieth century. Most of the Soviet Pontians in Greece emigrated from Georgia (Pratsinakis 2013: 64); therefore, depending on the context, I also refer to them as “Georgian Pontians.”
 10. Due to Thessaloniki’s multi-ethnic past, the city has various names: “Thessalonica,” “Salonica,” “Selanik,” “Solun” (Hatziprokopiou 2012: 195), each with several variations of spelling (Mazower 2004: 17–18). In the Georgian language, the city is called *salonik’i*. My informants usually used both the Georgian and the current Greek term *Thessaloniki* when talking about it.
 11. This number concerns the historical center of Thessaloniki. Greater Thessaloniki accounts for almost one million inhabitants (Sideri 2014: 91).
 12. Due to the different legal status of Georgian migrants residing in Greece, the numbers vary in different accounts. According to the National Statistical Service of Greece, in 2009, 33,870 Georgians were residing in Greece (based on a SOPEMI report in Triandafyllidou and Kokkali 2010). Maroufouf and Nikolova (2010) reported a much higher number for 2008, estimating that up to 80,000 Georgians were living in Greece on different legal grounds (in Triandafyllidou and Kokkali 2010: 14). Other reports estimated that some 150,000 Georgian migrants, or even more, live in Greece (ERGEM 2014: 64).
 13. In my research I followed the *Ethical Guidelines for Good Research Practice* (2021) of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK (ASA): <https://www.theasa.org/ethics.shtml>.
 14. Apart from the predominantly academic literature of anthropology and many related disciplines (sociology, migration and gender studies, philosophy, history), I also refer to surveys, migration reports, and statistics that relate to the Georgian population in Greece, women’s legal status, and their remittances. For the interpretation of my empirical data, I have also used poems written by several of my informants, as well as Georgian and Greek newspaper articles and movies.