'I THOUGHT COMING TO RUSSIA WAS A CRIME': UNDOCUMENTED ECONOMIC MIGRANTS FROM GEORGIA IN THE ZONE OF LEGAL UNCERTAINTY

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Abstract: This article was written as part of an investigation of Georgian migration to Russia, primarily concentrated on 'ethnic' business in big cities. The author considers the question of how undocumented status and deportability affect the organisation of everyday life and the formation of the life strategies of recent economic migrants from Georgia, and also on their conditions of work and interrelations with their employers, in other words, what life in the zone of legal uncertainty is. This research question determines the formulation of the next: how migrants perceive their legal status, the level of legality in Russia, and Russia as a host country. The article also examines a natural aspect of undocumented status: the legalisation practices of Georgian economic migrants. The author comes to the conclusion that as a result of a combination of various legal incapacities Georgian economic migrants experience practically all the difficulties of 'imposed nonexistence': the transformation of ordinary practices, such as work or movement, into clandestine ones, limited by their physical and social mobility. Migrants perceive their position as exceptional from a legal point of view, and their undocumented status creates a sense of isolation and imposed invisibility. While life in Russia demands that migrants make efforts to maintain their invisibility to the Russian state, its presence is acutely manifested in many aspects of their everyday life.

Keywords: economic migrants, Georgia, restaurant business, legal uncertainty, undocumented status, deportability, legalisation, perception of the state.

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When I joined the project on migration in modern Russia with a 'Georgian' topic, I supposed that I would structure my research around the study of how migrants from Georgia over recent decades perceived the complicated and changeable relations between the state from which they had come, Georgia, and Russia, which for one reason or another they had migrated to. However, a chance encounter changed my plans. Once, as I was passing a Georgian café, one of the cooks, who had come out onto the pavement for a smoke, called to me. I answered in Georgian, and was immediately invited in for khachapuri and a glass of wine on the house. The confidential conversation that followed the invitation, which lasted until after closing time, revealed to me the problem of undocumented immigration from Georgia[1] and the difficult everyday life and complex emotional experience of people who

[1] By the time that I was preparing this article for publication, undocumented immigration from Georgia had become an exceptional or relict phenomenon, represented by those few migrants who had been unable either to return to Georgia or to obtain documents giving them leave to remain in Russia. Economic migrants from Georgia now arrive in Russia with an entry visa.

have come to work in Russia, a country which is at once hostile and very close to them, and where there has been a renewed love for Georgian cuisine in recent years.

The first decade of the present century saw a shift in anthropologists' attention from the study of 'illegal immigrants' as a category to the study of their 'illegality' or 'undocumented status' as a political status and sociopolitical fact [De Genova 2002; Coutin 2003; Ngai 2004; Peutz 2006]. These works concentrated on the 'illegality' of migrants as an instrument of constructing the nation, by which the state asserts its sovereignty and 'reloads' the watershed between the categories of 'citizens' and 'non-citizens'. The next analytical turn in research into 'illegal' migration was the focus on studying the effect of undocumented status and the threat of deportation (deportability) on the everyday life experience of migrants. Works written within this approach concentrate on the manifestations of 'illegality', primarily in three aspects: the specifics of migrants' experience of time, space (including mobility) and corporeality [Burman 2006; Willen 2007b; Reeves 2015]. Among the works on the experience of undocumented migrants is also Nathalie Peutz's short essay focusing on how people being deported perceive the legislation of the host country and the practices of its application [Peutz 2007].

As Sarah Willen writes, the interrelations between 'illegal' immigrants and the host country vary considerably in different migrational contexts, and these differences are determined not only by the migration regimes of different states, but also by the local hierarchies of ethnicity, citizenship, conditions of work and emotional components [Willen 2007a: 3].

Nevertheless, most research concentrating on the study of the everyday life and subjective experience of undocumented migrants examines them in the context of immigration to the USA and Western Europe. So little anthropological research has been done on post-Soviet material that one might talk of a lacuna in this respect. As a rare example one might point to the article by Madeleine Reeves that studies the 'ethnographic realia' of Kyrgyz economic migrants in Moscow and identifies the social, legal and emotional aspects of their liability to deportation through 'the objects and relationships through which it is constituted' [Reeves 2015: 124]. My research into undocumented economic migrants from Georgia in large Russian cities is intended to help to fill in the gap in research on post-Soviet material.

Regarding Georgian economic migrants I ask the question of how undocumented status and deportability affect the organisation of their everyday life, and also their conditions of work and inter-relations with the entrepreneurs who employ them, in other words,

what life in the zone of legal uncertainty is. I shall try to include the above aspects of migrants' experience of their undocumented status and the threat of deportation, namely their perception of time and space, and of their corporeality, and also their evaluation of the measure of legality in the host country. Within my chosen approach I ask the following questions. How is migrants' everyday life structured by the legislation regarding undocumented status? How is the state present in the everyday life of migrants? What is the emotional price to migrants of undocumented status and the feelings it entrains? What correlation is there between undocumented status and corporeality? What is the cost of legalisation to a migrant? What are the consequences for migrants' legal consciousness and lives of the corruption in the Russian state of which they are aware?

In answering these questions, I shall make use, among other things, of the concept of the 'invisibility' of undocumented migrants, worked on by, for example, Francisco Villegas, Steffen Köhn, Leo Chavez and others [Chavez 1992; Villegas 2010; Köhn 2016]. On the one hand, the invisibility of undocumented migrants bears an enforced, imposed character and is part of the social process of illegalisation, or construction of 'illegality' [Chavez 1992; De Genova 2005: 4, 227]. On the other, the invisibility (or, otherwise, 'visibility') of undocumented migrants may be strategic, and then it is understood as a method to which migrants have recourse in order not to be victims of the repressive forces to which they become subject as a result of the illegality constructed and imposed upon them [Villegas 2010: 161; Bjørneseth 2017].

The everyday life of undocumented migrants, determined by their legal status, sheds light on hidden aspects of the functioning of the state and the law in the sphere of everyday practices [De Genova 2002: 440]. I examine undocumented status as the fact of a lack of documents permitting residence in the host country, and deportability as the phenomenon that arises as a consequence of undocumented status when the constant threat of possible deportation produces particular social activities, practices and effects. As Deborah Boehm writes, the doubts and feelings of insecurity about their position described by undocumented migrants who live in fear of deportation sheds light on the presence of the state in the lives of every one of them. The stories and experience of migrants give a particular and very telling vision of the policies of the state and the work of its agents. Many of these are not obvious, and a focus on the everyday life of undocumented migrants renders the state's actions at least partially visible. Ethnographic research into the everyday life of undocumented migrants demonstrates the potential of state power in the everyday life of people [Boehm 2009: 347].

Considering the legal construction of migrants' 'illegality', Nickolas De Genova writes that the origin of 'illegal' status and its concomitant deportability must be sought in the law itself. I follow De Genova in understanding 'illegality' as a legal status which assumes certain social interrelations with the state. According to De Genova, 'illegality' is constructed by means of the laws on migration, in other words, it is a function of the law. In such an approach the subject of research on undocumented migrants concentrates on the illegality constructed by the legal process. I shall dwell on the consequences that this process has for the everyday life of economic migrants. When 'illegality' is examined as a sociopolitical condition, it is de-essentialised, which allows it to be seen as an ethnographical object and the critical gaze to be directed at the regimes created by the laws on immigration.

As the movements of populations have become ever wider and more intense over recent years, De Genova writes, so the diversity of migrations, determined by specific social and historical parameters, and the corresponding multiplicity of the portraits of migrant 'illegality' have been revealed to us. The aim of this article is to give an outline portrait of the 'illegality' formed as a result of the subjection of economic migration from Georgia to the action of the Russian state's laws on migration and other matters. In particular, I examine how the norms of the Russian migration regime structure the experience of Georgian undocumented economic migrants. By the migration regime I mean not only the set of legal norms, but also the diverse practices that construct the 'illegality' of Georgian citizens who have come to work in Russia [De Genova 2002: 420–426].

The approach to the 'illegality' of migrants stated above determines my choice of terminology to describe their legal position. In academic texts on migration, the choice of terms defining migrants as 'illegal' or 'undocumented' is not random, although one can quite often find examples of the use of this terminology without definition or any commentary whatsoever. This last evidently assumes a perception of these terms as established or purely technical [Plascencia 2009: 377]. As Plascencia points out, the term 'undocumented status' as applied to migrants appeared in opposition to the concept of 'illegality', as a neutral or even positive alternative to it [Ibid.: 378].

Here I shall adhere to the terminology and usage thereof proposed by De Genova: 'the term undocumented will be consistently deployed in place of the category "illegal" as well as other, less obnoxious but not less problematic proxies for it, such as "extra-legal", "unauthorized", "irregular", or "clandestine". Throughout the ensuing text, I deploy quotes in order to denaturalize the reification

of this distinction' [De Genova 2002: 420]. Plascencia goes further in his search for a terminology, considering that the choice between the two terms is primarily politically determined, while both terms maintain the perception of the migrant as responsible in principle for his / her 'illegal' or 'undocumented' status. In his opinion, such a view obscures the role of states (originating or receiving) in establishing the rules and practices that determine the movement of migrants [Plascencia 2009: 407]. Indeed, the term 'undocumented' does not focus attention on the state as the main actor that determines the migrant's status. However, in my opinion, neither does it denote the migrant as one who has deliberately chosen to break the law, specifically, the rules governing the entry into the country and residence there of citizens of other states. In both respects it is more neutral and gives no indication of the reasons for the condition that it describes, and therefore I see no reason not to use it.

This article is the result of field research within a joint project of the RSF, 'Transnational and Translocal Aspects of Migration in Modern Russia', concerned with migrations from the former Soviet republics to the cities of Russia. It was conducted within the framework of research into Georgian migration, concentrated primarily on Georgian 'ethnic' business in Russian cities, specifically the Georgian food business: cafés and bakeries.

At the time the research was conducted, cafés and restaurants were the 'liveliest' niche in which economic migrants from Georgia could be found. As a result of the economic crisis in Russia, the building trade and finishing work, where many Georgian migrants had been employed, had begun to attract fewer and fewer workers from Georgia. The Georgian restaurant business was, by contrast, evolving dynamically, and many recently arrived migrants were employed in this area, and their experience of constructing their everyday life is particularly interesting. A large provincial Russian city was chosen as a location for the research. Besides the obvious fact that it is in the big cities that one finds the greatest concentration of Georgian cafés and restaurants, such a choice of location was convenient in that it made it possible to correlate the research with other research being carried out within the joint project, and created the prospect of placing it within a wider context, since the study of undocumented economic migrants, like that of migration in general, is obviously skewed towards big cities.

Simple observation shows that the number of Georgian cafés in large Russian cities has been growing steadily over recent years. This is connected both with a relative warming in Russian-Georgian relations, and the simplification of the visa regime with Georgia, and with the sharp and rapid development of mass Russian tourism in

Georgia following the political détente [Akhmeteli 2015; 'Otnoshenie k stranam' s.d.]. The first reduced the possible fears connected with economic migration to Russia, and provided conditions for the appearance of a state-authorised means of entering the country, and the second favoured a growth in demand for Georgian cuisine, which had been popular with Russians even before.

The article sums up the results of the field research I conducted amongst recent economic migrants from Georgia in 2017–2018. Most of the field material concerns a large chain of businesses; a smaller amount relates to microenterprises. They were chosen by the snowball method, when the two contacts that I had had before beginning the research (one with an employee of a chain of cafés and restaurants, the other with the owner of a mini-bakery) gave me access one by one to the majority of my other contacts. For the most part I rely on material collected from employees of a well-known chain of Georgian cafés (to which I shall refer as 'the chain' for short), represented in the city by dozens of premises, including some operating in shopping centres. This is the only chain in the city with such a large number of premises, and perhaps the only one recognisable as a chain, and it is indeed very popular with the locals. The chain is developing quickly, and its cafés and restaurants are opening in ever more districts of the city. The people I talked to judge that most of its employees have come to Russia in the last five or six years. Among the microenterprises where I worked with the owners and employees, there are two mini-bakeries in a southern suburb belonging to two co-owners, and also a café with mixed Asian and Georgian cuisine. The workers from this group are also recently arrived migrants. Working with the employees of the cafés and mini-bakeries that do not belong to the chain gave me a basis for generalising my conclusions and allowed me to extend them to the general pool of economic migrants working in the Georgian food industry in the big city chosen for the research. However, more of the material used in the article relates to the case of the chain, which is explained by its great diversity, which is connected with the complex structure of the chain as an organisation.

The fieldwork was conducted both with the economic migrants in Russia and with members of their families in Georgia. It was a condition of the joint project that interviews should be conducted in parallel in Russia and Georgia, and it gave a better idea of the life of the migrants in the state they had come from, which conditioned their perception of their everyday life in Russia. In all, six interviews were conducted in Russia and seven in Georgia. However, the main source of information were the so-called ethnographic interviews, when the interviewer gets answers to his / her questions in the course of informal conversations, often with several participants. Important

data were obtained by participant observation of the work and social interaction of employees in the Georgian café. Interaction with one interlocutor in Georgia and one in Russia lasted for the whole of the project. The contact with the permanent interlocutor in Russia was highly intensive: there were conversations every week and thanks to the friendly relationship that was established they were confidential, which allowed one to get quite a profound idea of the everyday life of the people who were the subject of the research, and also, thanks to the length of the interaction (for two years), the dynamics of that everyday life.

The research design described is explained by the difficulties in access to the field. That results from the undocumented status of the respondents, which made it hard to establish new contacts and to discuss certain topics, if the interlocutors' trust was not assured by a reliable intermediary. With one exception, all the interviews were in Georgian. Among my interlocutors in Russia, the majority were male, while in Georgia the numbers of men and women were about the same. The respondents were aged from thirty to forty-nine. Part of the conversations was recorded, but most of them were set down from memory immediately afterwards.

A short account of economic migration from Georgia

In the post-Soviet period economic migrants from Georgia have actively adapted to new migration destinations, among which Greece is in the lead, with 80,000 migrants from Georgia recorded in 2017, followed by the USA with 30,000, Germany and Cyprus with 20,000 each, and Italy, Israel, Spain and Turkey with 10,000 [Hofmann 2015: 816; 'Origins and Destinations...' 2018].

However, the greatest number of people coming from Georgia is still registered in the former Soviet republics to which they used to go in Soviet times: Russia 450,000, Ukraine 70,000, Belarus up to 10,000. These figures are from the Pew Research Center in America ['Origins and Destinations...' 2018]. They are cumulative figures and reflect the overall number of people from Georgia living in a particular country. It is evident that the large number of them in Russia to a great extent reflects the number of migrants from the Soviet period and the first half of the post-Soviet era, before the breakdown in relations and the introduction of a visa regime between the two countries. As for the yearly flow of migrants, 55,600 Georgians went to Russia in 2017, of whom 30,000 did not return, so they may be regarded as officially recorded migrants ['Bolshinstvo gruzin...' 2018].

The overall outline of Georgian migration to Russia, taking into account its various waves, is interesting. One can speak of at least

three major post-Soviet waves of migration from Georgia: economic migrants of the 1990s and early 2000s, refugees from Abkhazia, and recent migrants arriving in 2006–2019 (2006 being the year of the Russo-Georgian 'spy scandal',[1] which may be considered the 'point of no return' in Russo-Georgian relations, see: [Tchaidze, Torosyan 2010: 8]).

The noticeable presence of migrants from the third wave may seem paradoxical. Taking into account the economic crisis in Russia, the tense political relations between the two states, difficulties with legalisation and the lower wages of migrants in the Russian Federation by comparison with those earned by migrants who have taken the new, 'post-Soviet' directions, one might have supposed that there would not be any further wave of economic migration from Georgia. However, it turns out that the Russian language and the existence and development of old links still make Russia an attractive destination for migration to Georgian citizens.

Petre Mamradze, a former member of the Georgian parliament, comments, in the course of his reflections on economic migration to Russia, on Georgian citizens' paradoxical choice of their direction of migration:

I have spoken to a lot of people and I know that they are going to people they know or to friends. Russia is a big country, and you can move about it freely in search of work and always find some. It is a country with a language that the older generation at least, people over thirty-five or forty, speak quite well. These are of course the factors that have brought about a curious situation: officially we are moving towards NATO and the European Union, but the overall vector amongst the people shows that the population is doing its best to move to Russia. [From my observations, an intention to move to Russia permanently, as an initial migration strategy, is uncharacteristic of Georgian citizens who identify as Georgian. — *E.Z.*] *There are frequently such queues at the former Russian embassy, which operates under the aegis of the Swiss embassy, that they block the traffic in the street* ['Grazhdane Gruzii...' 2015].

It is necessary to underline the particular nature of the legal conditions under which economic migrants from Georgia are present in Russia in comparison with those from other former Soviet

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1 The 'spy scandal' was a crisis in relations between Russia and Georgia in September and October 2006, as a result of the arrest by Georgian special forces of members of the Russian armed forces on suspicion of espionage, which led to sanctions being imposed in response by Russia. Russia advised its citizens against travel to Georgia, stopped issuing visas to Georgian citizens, cut off air, land, sea and postal communications, and put limitations on bank transfers, which was a direct blow to the thousands of Georgian citizens working in Russia. Georgian businessmen found themselves the targets of extraordinary police, tax and other inspections, which resulted in the closure of many Georgian-owned businesses [Savvidis 2009: 51].

republics (Ukraine, Belarus, Central Asia, Azerbaijan and Armenia). A significant number of the migrants from Georgia are in Russia without documents to authorise their presence. Unlike in the USA and the European Union, in Russian conditions undocumented status usually means an administrative infringement — overstaying [Reeves 2015: 122]. However, in the case of new migrants from Georgia 'illegality' is most often the result of undocumented entry into the country. According to information from the deputy head of the Federal Migration Service (FMS), there were ten to eleven million 'illegal' immigrants in Russia in 2006, the year when the mass deportation of Georgian citizens after the 'spy scandal' began. Up to one million of them were undocumented migrants from Georgia, and only about 1% of Georgian citizens were 'legally' present on Russian soil ['Gruziya prinimaet...' 2006]. At that time the amount of remittances made by Georgian citizens to their homeland from the Russian Federation amounted to 20% of the Georgian GDP ['Antigruzinskaya kampaniya v Rossii' s.d.]. Since 2000 Georgian citizens had needed a visa to enter Russia, and an invitation from a close relative was needed to get one. As a result, documented entry into Russia (with a visa) was perceived as practically impossible even before the deterioration in relations between Russia and Georgia in 2006. A woman living in Tbilisi, whose husband had been working in Russia since 2001, told me: 'There were difficulties with visas even before the conflict, for example I couldn't go to [the large Russian city where the research was conducted], that was a problem from the start' [AFM 2017]. In 2012 the head of the FMS announced that there were 9,000 Georgian citizens who had overstayed the ninety-day limit for being in Russia ['Bolee 9 tys...' 2012]. The undocumented status of migrants from Georgia was a result of the practical impossibility for Georgian citizens without close relatives in Russia to obtain a Russian visa.

It was only in 2015 that the Russian visa regime was simplified, and since then any Georgian citizen may obtain a private, business, humanitarian or work visa for various numbers of entries on the basis of an invitation, without any requirements of kinship. Nevertheless, as the field data show, many Georgian migrants entered Russia without a visa in 2016–2017: 'All the recent arrivals are without documents too. They've only started to get visas in the last few months' [AFM 2017]. In this way, up to 2018–2019 a large part of the economic migrants from Georgia were on Russian soil without any kind of documents giving them leave to remain. They were joined from 2015 by those who had exceeded the three-month limit for being in the country stipulated in the Russian visa and were also liable to deportation.

It became clear during the process of fieldwork that the majority of undocumented Georgian migrants had entered Russia via Belarus,

which does not require visas for Georgians. The migrants flew to Minsk and thence proceeded to their final destination with 'transporters' — in special taxis with whose owners they had an agreement in advance. Corrupt methods were used to cross the border of the Russian Federation. Accordingly, both entry and departure from Russia involved large expenses (a one-way journey, including the border crossing, cost about 80,000 roubles). In the autumn of 2018 this long-established means for economic migrants to travel between Georgia and Russia became more difficult, and as a result, undocumented migrants found themselves 'locked in' on Russian soil. Whereas previously, people coming back from Russia had been let through at Minsk Airport on payment of a small fine for exceeding their three-month stay in Belarus, or even without paying anything, in the autumn of 2018 there was a large increase in the fine. Moreover, the migrants were afraid that instead of being fined they would simply be deported. They understood the change in the situation thus: 'Of course the Belarusians know that there are not so many people staying in Belarus, that they go to Europe or more often to Russia. They have evidently decided to deport people so as to rid themselves of migrants, because once someone has been deported he won't come back' [AFM 2018]. As De Genova remarks, deportability is the deciding factor in the legal construction of migrant 'illegality', since at the same time some are deported in order that most may remain in the country and work [De Genova 2002: 439].

The challenges of undocumented status

According to the field data, all the employees at the chain who came to Petersburg in 2016–2017 crossed the Russian border and stayed in the country without documents allowing them to do so. Usually they did not know about the possibility or means of obtaining a Russian visa. The employees of the mini-bakeries where I worked had entered the country with a visa obtained for them by their employer, while the workers at the café with Georgian and Asiatic cuisine did not have documents allowing them to stay in Russia.

There is a shortage of qualified workers — cooks and bakers familiar with Georgian cuisine. Both the chain and the small businesses with which I worked recruited specialists from Georgia. Still, there is a large number of people working in the chain who did not at first have any qualifications. The owners of Georgian cafés and bakeries have their own special channels for finding workers from Georgia. Thus, one of the people working at a mini-bakery went to school with the owner. Among the employees of the chain there is a noticeable group who come from the same region of Western Georgia as its owner.

Migrants from Central Asia (I only encountered people who had come from Uzbekistan) are employed in the lower, unqualified positions. Speaking of one of his Uzbek employees, the bakery owner explained that 'Georgians are expensive,' meaning the effort required to help his compatriots: the expenses and difficulty of obtaining documents for them and the cost of bribes to the inspecting authorities. More and more people from Central Asia are learning Georgian cooking and working in Georgian cafés and restaurants as cooks and bakers.

A comparison of the conditions of employment of undocumented migrants in different Georgian cafés shows that they are more or less identical. The working day exceeds the eight-hour norm and often lasts more than twelve hours, from nine in the morning till ten at night. A good baker or cook's pay is about 2,000 roubles a day, its size depending on how much money the café makes. Many migrants in Georgian cafés work without any days off, or with only one, which is often given arbitrarily. Thus one migrant told me that he had had only one day off in the first seven months he had worked in Russia. This situation is connected with the difficulty of organising the work of shiftworkers. For example, so as to give some employees days off, others are put 'on the circuit', working in different cafés every day, often in distant parts of town, which makes their working day, long and intensive as it its, even harder. Days off and sick days are unpaid (asked about this, one of my interlocutors exclaimed 'Never mind pay, so long as they give you one! [i.e. a day off]' [AFM 2017]).

Workers who have been specially recruited from Georgia (many of whom have never been to Russia before and have a poor knowledge of Russian) are guaranteed a regular income and a place to live. The employer rents a flat for several of his / her employees together not far from their place of work. The tenants pay their own rent, or else it is automatically deducted from their wages. For example, it is the practice in the chain of cafés that when an employee's pay is less than $800 a month, the flat is paid for by the employer, but when it is more, (s)he pays for it himself / herself. (A place in a room costs about 6,000 roubles.) When flats are rented corporately, migrants often live two or three to a room.

An employer may bribe the local police to take no interest in undocumented residents in the district. The rent for such tenants is also higher than the average market rate.

Migrants connect the arrival in Russia and employment of members of their family with their having papers, as do their employers: 'They told me: "As soon as you've got your papers, bring your wife and we'll give her work in the same café as you"' [AFM 2017]. Overall, an economic migrant's lack of documents in Russia becomes

a serious obstacle to his / her being joined by his / her close family, either to work or for any other reason. Thus a young man living in Georgia whose mother is working in Russia without documents says:

You know, of course I want to go, and I certainly shall go there [to Russia], *of course I have family members there, but I don't want, you know, to up and go, and then have something happen to me. That is, if I go, I shall go with documents. My cousin has just got citizenship, he's in Voronezh. That is, if I should go now without documents, and they* [his mother, and his sister who lives with her in Russia] *were to have extra problems because of me, having to give money* [to someone] *else. If I go, I don't want to be a burden to them, I want to make what they're doing easier* [AFM 2017].

The owners of the chain think carefully about the correlation between documented and undocumented employees in each of their cafés. They try to keep a balance between the two categories, and they staff the more 'unprotected' cafés mostly or entirely with documented workers.

At a certain point, evidently because of an increase in the frequency of inspections by the FMS, the employers began to hold back half of their employees' wages so as to build up a deposit out of which they could buy a ticket home for an employee who had been caught in an inspection and deported. This practice was introduced after the owners of the chain had had to make emergency payments for their employees to return to their homeland with no chance of getting the money they had expended back.

At first, while the chain was still small, undocumented employees evidently were not much of a problem for their employers. As the chain grew and developed, this situation became harder to cope with, and at the same time it became possible to obtain visas. In the last six to eight months many of the new employees who are coming to work in the chain have at least short-term visas.

The working conditions of undocumented migrants from Georgia in the Georgian food industry described above demonstrate both their universality, and those features which are characteristic of the baking trade: migrants are recruited informally, they work about seventy hours a week with no days off (when the norm according to the labour laws in forty hours), their wages are lower than prescribed, their professional skills are not highly valued, and there is little guarantee that they will be paid [Kondakov 2016: 73–74]. As Guy Standing writes, undocumented migrants 'have no alternative to eking out an existence in the precariat' [Standing 2011: 94].

There are not many cases of deportation, but they are part of the immediate experience of Georgian migrants. The situation is like

the one described by Deborah Boehm: although there is no great probability of becoming one of the relatively few people to be deported, the facts of deportations are experienced in migrant communities, and everyone encounters the deportation of people they know, work with, are related to, etc. [Boehm 2009: 357].

Deportation is not something that can be regarded lightly or fatalistically, it is the experience of contact with the state in its harshest and most inexorable manifestation. The narratives of deportation are stories of events that inspire fear on account of the uncertainty that is implicit in the procedure from beginning to end, the impossibility of foretelling how it will happen and at what cost. It is the situation when all at once the migrant loses his / her long-cherished invisibility. A woman who had been working with her mother and sister at a market in Russia, deported five years ago and living near Kutaisi, recounts this event in her life like this:

Interlocutor: *When I was arrested, I was arrested by the 'immigration service', and taken to the police station, of course I was frightened and started to cry. Only my sister and my mother were there* [in Russia] *then, my daughter wasn't, this all happened five years ago, and I was crying, my son was ill, I had problems. 'What are you crying for?' he says, 'We're not going to kill you.' Then the judge. My mother had been bothering people here and there. And they let me go, took my fingerprints to see if I'd committed any crimes, and let me go. And there was a person mediating there, so that there was no way I could...* [not return], *I had to appear there without fail. They told me to bring my passport. And then they said, 'Leave, go to Minsk this very night and leave.' There was such a person, and they gave me my passport back, and everyone was surprised. 'How have they given you your passport back?' And I could have just up and gone. But I couldn't behave like that with that woman. She was an important woman there...*

Researcher: *A Georgian?*

I.: *No, she was Russian. <...> And she said to them, 'I am so-and-so, don't hold her, let her go.' And when that woman intervened and they let me go, they said to me, 'How do you know what the* sud [using the Russian word for 'court'] *will decide tomorrow.' I was afraid, they were all frightening me, and I really was afraid. So then I came, and said 'What will be, will be'* [in Russian]. *And when I came, they took me to the* nachalnik [Russian for 'boss'] *and there was a man and a woman there, that Russian woman came in with me, my mother couldn't come because she hadn't got any documents. And when they took me in there, I started telling them all my adventures. I didn't tell any lies. I told them that my child had fallen ill, they decided to operate on him, we were simply planning, we couldn't have the operation done on him because of the cost, it was a heart operation.*

And when I told them my situation, how it was that I'd come there to earn some money and look after my child, they both looked at me and started to cry, both the nachalnik *and her! They had tears in their eyes! One of them said to me, 'That's Saakashvili for you!'* [in Russian]. *They couldn't avoid imposing the official 2,000 rouble fine, but who* [cares about a little thing like that], *and they gave me a time limit of two weeks and I had to leave* [AFM 2017].

It is the FMS inspections that are regarded as the most dangerous at the café. If the police stop an immigrant without documents on the street, usually all they do is take all the money (s)he has on him / her. The will not deport him / her or confiscate his / her passport: 'On the street they usually just take everything you've got in your pockets and let you go, but it's the FMS people that come to the café, and they can deport you' [AFM 2017]. There have been cases when, after inspecting the café, agents of the FMS have deported a worker without the proper documents. An inspection of that sort is an event that seriously disrupts the work of the café: my interlocutor told me that once during an inspection his boss had told him to change his clothes and leave the café, and he had had to wander about the streets for several hours. For undocumented migrants the FMS is the harshest and most inexorable agent of the state that they encounter.

However, a deportation order does not necessarily mean that a worker will leave the country. After the decision of the court, the migration services do not check up on what has happened to the people to be deported. Some of them stay in Russia and carry on working, sometimes even where they were before, with an even more acute sensation of their undocumented status.

For undocumented migrants time is marked by the danger of / safety from police and FMS inspections. For police inspections non-working days are regarded as the most dangerous. 'Then the cops go hunting and check everyone. Everyone noticed long ago that they're more active than on working days' [AFM 2018]. Migrants anticipated the 2018 World Cup with particular anxiety, expecting tighter controls by the law enforcement agencies. (There was a rumour that the city 'was to be cleared of migrants' for the World Cup.)

Undocumented migrants do not use the underground and try to stay away from metro stations, because they are monitored by the police. In the morning and afternoon, they can use public transport above ground, but late in the evening, when they finish work, they go home by taxi. This is the safest way of moving about the city for undocumented migrants, since it takes them from door to door and allows them to reduce their visibility in public transport to a minimum.

In the case of economic migrants from Georgia, undocumented status is connected with corporeality. The migrants understand that police patrols are more likely to stop and check people who look 'Caucasian', and that their bodily characteristics make them more visible in public space. One of my interlocutors, who does not look like a 'typical person from the Caucasus', says that he is afraid to walk along the street with his Georgian colleagues and friends, because they are 'black' and he is more likely to be stopped in their company. This confirms Francisco Villegas's theory that the construction of 'illegality' requires a racial discourse. Particular bodies raise questions and suspicions about their (legal) status, while others do not, because they are normalised within the national stereotype of citizenship. These stereotypes have further consequences, because people who are marked as suspicious may also be included in parallel discourses, for example about criminality [Villegas 2010: 150]. In Russia migrants who look like 'people from the Caucasus' consequently figure in discourses on crime.

The migrants tell us that law enforcement agents are able to recognise specific bodily habits that betray undocumented status: 'An experienced policeman can see it by the way you walk, your manner, and identifies a person at once, he sees who hasn't got any documents' [AFM 2017]. Migrants suppose that their distinctive corporeality may be made less visible by mimicry, by changing the non-corporeal aspects of their appearance. One of my interlocutors discussed with me the possibility of changing something in his clothing to make him less noticeable to policemen on the street [AFM 2017].

An unusual means of acquiring partial 'legalisation' is connected with migrants' corporeality: Georgian migrants obtain forged Armenian passports.[1] This allows them to move about the city freely without spending money on bribing policemen, but it is useless if they are arrested, since the status of the forged passport can easily be determined at the police station. The corporeal factor manifests itself paradoxically in this practice: on the one hand, it is because of their distinctive appearance that Georgian migrants are liable to be stopped in the street, on the other, it allows them to count on success in using false documents that give them another nationality.

One of my interlocutors told me that he never carries his passport with him, because without it, if he is stopped by the police, he can tell them that he is a citizen of Belarus. In this way, claiming another nationality is a method of avoiding arrest when stopped in the street to which undocumented migrants have recourse. Migrants' corporeality is one of the important factors that prevents them from

[1] Since 2000 Russia and Armenia do not require visas for each other's citizens.

attaining their desired 'invisibility' in public places, but in particular cases it may be used strategically to preserve it. Techniques of invisibility also affect the choice of language to use in public places. In transport and other public places migrants may avoid speaking Georgian so as not to attract attention.

Georgian migrants have mutual aid practices that are conditioned by their undocumented position. For example, people who live together are concerned if one of their neighbours is arrested, and they warn each other if they have seen the police on their way home, etc.

Migrants try to rent places to live in the immediate vicinity of their workplace, so as to move about the city as little as possible. With no documents, it is problematic to rent accommodation independently (without their employer's involvement and protection). It is impossible for them to conceal their legal status, and they tell of occasions when neighbours have informed the law enforcement agencies about undocumented tenants:

In order to rent a flat I have to show my passport, and everyone will know that I haven't got any documents. You can see from the passport that I got as far as Belarus, but there are no further stamps in it. There are people who like to poke their nose into other people's business, and then <...>. *I've been told of neighbours who simply say 'Go and check up on him,' they don't even have to put it in writing* [AFM 2017].

When undocumented migrants' vulnerability becomes evident, it may become a convenient means of exerting pressure by people who have something to gain by it. One of the cafés in the chain, which was on the ground floor of a block of flats, was objected to by the residents. The neighbours informed the police that illegal immigrants were working there. It turned out that all the complaints had been written by the same family, and not only about the owners of the Georgian café, but also (on various pretexts) about other businesses occupying the ground floor of that building. My interlocutors assert that the complainants were blackmailing their owners with a view to extort money [AFM 2018]. The Georgian café put up a long resistance, but was finally forced to close.

Nevertheless, migrants try to establish neighbourly relations with those townsfolk whom they encounter at work or where they live, understanding that their undocumented status is not, or is not usually, a social stigma.

Because of the risks associated with moving about, the migrants do not know the city well. One of my interlocutors, who has lived in the city for nearly two years, has never been on the main street or seen any of the distinctive sights.

Strategies of legalisation

Whereas the anxiety that most migrants from the other former Soviet republics have about their legal position concerns the preservation of their 'legal' status, migrants from Georgia, who are threatened with deportation, are primarily concerned with obtaining it. Over time a migrant who plans to stay in Russia for a long time begins to look for ways to legalise his / her residence in the country. (Here and in what follows I mean by legalisation the acquisition by the migrant of some sort of documents that give or pretend to give him / her the right to remain on the territory of the Russian Federation.)

The information that reaches newly arrived migrants about the ways in which one or other 'legal' status in Russia may be obtained is contradictory and second-hand. New migrants often do not speak Russian well enough and cannot find their way around all the subtleties of Russian bureaucratic procedures: 'I just want to find out how to get a work visa. However much I ask, they all say different things. I should have a look at what the official FMS rules are. I need to understand how to get what documents in order to be in Russia legally' [AFM 2017]. The knowledge they rely on is mostly precedent, the experience of people they know, their colleagues and relatives, who have tried, successfully or unsuccessfully, one means of legalisation or another: 'There's one lad now who's fixing a fictitious marriage, he's just at the beginning of the procedure, and I'll be able to watch every stage, how it goes' [AFM 2017]. Migrants try to tell from other people's experience whether the intermediary who is being paid for his / her services in getting their documents will cheat them, or whether their colleague will achieve the result (s)he desires. Even entry into Russia is marked by uncertainty and a lack of clarity regarding the legal possibilities. Asked why he had not got a visa when he set off for Russia, though it was already possible, my interlocutor answered 'When I was going to Russia I didn't know anything, I did what they [meaning the employer who invited him] told me' [AFM 2018]. For migrants from Georgia the very possibility of going to Russia, considering the strained relations between the two countries in recent years and the complicated visa situation, seems, if not ruled out, then associated with great difficulties and most probably with breaking the law. When they get an invitation to work, they put their entire trust in those who have invited them and accept the conditions of entry which they offer them.

Informal services connected with obtaining Russian citizenship cost about 300,000 roubles, not counting the additional expenses arising from the necessity of leaving and entering the country. One of my interlocutors, who dreams of starting his own business in Russia, examined the possibility of buying Russian citizenship, but this

deferred the creation of his business indefinitely: 'The biggest problem is the sum needed to buy citizenship. If I am to pay, I shall need a very long time before I can save that money, and then I shall have to save up more to invest in the beginning of the business' [AFM 2017].

The most common means of long-term legalisation among migrants (getting a residence permit with the prospect of getting citizenship) is contracting a fictitious marriage. Another way to legalisation is the RVP (Russian *Razreshenie na vremennoe prozhivanie*, temporary leave to remain in Russia) lottery. Here too they have recourse to corrupt practices: instead of the person who has really won, the quota is promised to whoever has paid a mediator who has a corrupt agreement with the officials. A whole market of informal legal and corrupt services has grown up around the legalisation of undocumented migrants, and these, my interlocutors tell me, are even getting cheaper because of the evolution of demand and the growth in the number of alternative propositions.

Among Georgian migrants one may hear discussions of Putin's declaration about offering Russian citizenship to people from their country on a simplified model. A lack of accurate information leads to the dissemination of many versions which may be seriously considered by economic migrants as an easy and desirable potential way to legalisation.

Deportation is not necessarily an insurmountable obstacle to entering Russia again. For a long time, a common way out of the situation for people who had been deported was to get a passport in another name. However, as my interlocutors tell me, since it has become possible for Georgian citizens to enter the Schengen area without a visa, with all the frequent infringements of the limit on staying there that followed, changing one's name and getting a new passport in Georgia has become problematic.

Until recently the café owners who employ economic migrants promised them organised assistance if they were arrested by the police. They arranged corrupt schemes, which the migrants themselves could not often do because of their poor knowledge of the language or their lack of connections in the police. Although they had to reimburse their employer for the money spent on their release, this assistance was valuable to them. Since the end of 2017 employers have told their workers that they will no longer be able to rescue them from police stations, and urged them to get visas. And whereas the owner of the Georgian mini-bakeries immediately arranged private visas for the workers he invited, and then deducted the money spent from their pay, right up to last year the owners of the chain, when inviting fellow countrymen to come and work for them, only ever suggested that they should come via Belarus. In 2018

the owners of the chain began to invite new employees on a visa basis and selectively assist their old permanent employees in obtaining visas, including work visas.

The chain employs its own lawyers, who can suggest ways of solving particular problems with documents, including unofficial ones, but this makes the already expensive procedure of getting a visa even dearer. Moreover, they do not offer consultations on how to obtain documents by oneself: 'There is a woman, a lawyer, who obtains documents, but that costs much more than if you do it yourself through the official channels. Of course she won't teach you how to do that' [AFM 2017].

Migrants are constantly reworking their plans for legalisation, losing faith in one strategy and becoming enthusiastic about another: 'I haven't yet got it all straight in my head, what's the best thing to do, go to Minsk and pay [a fine], so as to enter the country normally with a visa afterwards, or wait' [AFM 2017].

Most economic migrants get three-month private visas rather than work visas (the latter are harder to obtain and cost more). The process of getting one entails leaving Russia and staying in Georgia for up to a month. Economic migrants cannot afford such an interruption of their work, so they use intermediaries who promise that the visa will be ready by a particular date. However, the intermediaries are not always honest, so that obtaining a Russian visa becomes not only an expensive process, but one complicated by the factor of uncertainty:

There's just been a phone call from those bakers who went to Tbilisi, it turns out, to get a three-month ordinary [private] *visa. They went a bit earlier, that is, there was no information yet that the visa was ready, in order to get a place in the queue at the embassy* [the Russian interests section at the Swiss Embassy in Georgia]. *They had paid money to the woman solicitor at* [name of the chain], *who of course makes money out of this. And now they've just rung and said that there's no visa!* [AFM 2018]

If they get a private visa, no matter for how long, migrants have to leave the country for a period of several weeks several times a year. As a result they risk losing their jobs, which are guaranteed only for the best highly qualified workers (so that labour competition arises amongst the migrants themselves). Therefore some employees examine the possibility of getting a work visa: 'I reckoned up how many working days I would lose going to and fro four times a year if I got an ordinary three-month visa, and how much I would spend on tickets. Besides, I would have to be constantly disturbing the people who would be dealing with my documents. In the end a work visa comes out cheaper' [AFM 2017]. One of my interlocutors speaks

of getting a private visa as a short-sighted tactic: 'They live for the moment — they don't want to be afraid now, and afterwards come what may' [AFM 2018]. At the same time, the chain might put employees who have legalised their residence status in Russia 'on the circuit', since, unlike the others, they can move about the city without fear. In this way legalising his / her residence in Russia may have negative consequences for a migrant, too.

Only relatively low-paid varieties of employment are accessible to an economic migrant without papers. The cost of legalisation is an economic migrant's first planned major expense after (s)he arrives in Russia, because of which (s)he has to defer the achievement of those goals for which (s)he came. Most migrants dream of their own business, but only very, very few can achieve this without documents. At the same time, the relatively small expenses arising from being stopped on the street by the police often make migrants doubt the usefulness of obtaining visas and legalisation. A fragment of a conversation illustrates this:

R.: *Wouldn't it have been good if you'd got your visa straight away and entered the country with a visa!*

I.: *In one way, yes, but on the other hand, considering that nothing has happened, it's not* [so] *bad. But something could always happen, at any minute* [AFM 2017].

Some migrants live for the day and are disinclined to make an effort towards legalisation, especially if they are not seriously banking on their future in Russia: 'The only people who aren't trying to get one are those who live like this: if the police stop me, well, they'll expel me, come what may' [AFM 2018]. However, most Georgian migrants are trying to find a way to legalise their residence in Russia.

The experience of undocumented status

The long and complicated history of political tension in Russian-Georgian relations places a particular stamp on how potential migrants see the prospect of working in Russia. People who live in Georgia on the whole know that for many years it was impossible to get a Russian visa without an invitation from close relatives, and that 'an ordinary person' had practically no chance of entering the country. Russia is an ambivalent space, at once hostile and close and comprehensible. Because of the embargo even foodstuffs produced in Georgia were for a long time illegal. In the Georgian mass media and in private discourse Russia figures exclusively as an aggressor which has occupied 20% of the country (the territory of Abkhazia and South Ossetia). For a long time economic migrants went to Russia without any documents permitting their presence there. It is

not surprising that many of those who planned to work in Russia, without up-to-date information about obtaining visas, continued to believe that it was impossible to enter the country with documents and relied on the means that the employers who invited them proposed. As one of my interlocutors said, 'I thought coming to Russia was a crime' [AFM 2018].

Economic migrants from Georgia regard their position as, from a legal point of view, exceptional. I had a telling discussion with a recently arrived undocumented worker from Georgia about the possibility of finding out from official sources the visa requirements for Georgian citizens currently in force.

I.: *We have a visa requirement, but we don't even have a consulate.*

R.: *That is, Georgia is the only post-Soviet country that has visa requirements* [with Russia]*?*

I.: *Yes. And also, I suppose, the Baltic states. But at least they have consulates* [AFM 2017].

The legal and administrative complexities connected with economic migration to Russia, and the special legal regime in operation for Georgian citizens can sometimes by perceived as ethnic discrimination against Georgians. A young man living in Tbilisi whose mother is living and working in Russia without documents describes it like this:

The worst thing is that nationality matters here. They have defined the Georgian by his mentality. I know a lot of Azeris, Armenians and Ossets who live in Georgia, and they travel there and back with no problem. I am in Georgia, you are my neighbour, but you live much better than I do. And why? Because of a piece of paper. They let you in. Why do they let you in, and not me, because you have a different ethnicity? They all work there, they have Russian documents. Besides, Russian is like their native language. But if you let me, a Georgian, be closer, and come, then I'll teach my child Russian too, he'll start to speak Russian, and there will be more unity [AFM 2017].

However, I only encountered that point of view in Georgia, but not among migrants working in Russia. More characteristic of Georgian economic migrants is a feeling of being stigmatised in Russia because of their Georgian ethnicity only in connection with the perceived association between Georgian origins and 'ethnic' criminal networks. Moreover, the economic migrants themselves share the opinion, widespread in Georgia, that many Georgians go abroad in order to engage in crime. As one of my interlocutors, who has lived in Russia since the early 2000s, said: 'People come here either to work or to steal' [AFM 2017]. The exceptional position of economic

migrants from Georgia becomes apparent to them in comparison with migrants from Central Asia, for example regarding the perceived comparative ease or difficulty of renting somewhere to live: 'For some reason they don't like Georgians, they're afraid of them, they don't trust them enough to rent to them. For some reason they're afraid of them. The trust people from Central Asia more. And I've seen how they live, ten people to a room, dirty, most of them' [AFM 2017].

I supposed at the beginning that this research could also be constructed around economic migrants' reflections on the topic of the relations between the two states, which have been marked in recent decades by political and even military conflicts. However, it turned out that this motif hardly ever came up in interviews. For example, migrants regard the difficulties they have in obtaining documents more as technical, and talking about them does not provoke any consideration of the problems of Russian-Georgian relations. If the subject does come up, then it seems that the positions of Georgian migrants (at least those of recent years) and the way they talk about it are no different from those characteristic of people living in Georgia whose lives are not directly connected with Russia. The significance of the political landscape in what migrants tell us is less important than their practical difficulties and the emotional load of their immediate subjective experience.

Migrants are conscious of the duality of their undocumented status: the fact that they are living and working in Russia, on the one hand, is not condemned by society, but, on the other, it is illegal [Reeves 2015: 121].

Undocumented migrants talk a lot about their legal status and the impossibility of making long-term plans. They live with the feeling that at any moment they could be arrested and deported, and all their plans for life destroyed in an instant.

Emotion is rarely explicitly present in stories of their encounters with the police; more often migrants recount their successes in passing by unnoticed by the police, or, if stopped, getting away with 'minor cuts and bruises', with laughter or even a certain passion. This is how, with laughter, a mother living near Kutaisi recounts how her son was arrested by the police.

I.: *Once he rang me: 'I'm risking it, taking a bus.' Then he rang again an hour and a half later. I told him, 'Ring me when you arrive.' He rings and says 'I'm sitting in a police car.'* [laughs]

R.: *Did he have to pay?*

I.: *Yes.*

R.: *Do they take a lot?*

I.: *He was lucky, and it also depends on who meets you and how. I've got a cousin there in* [a town in Russia], *a girl, and she brought her cousin, a lad the same age, with her. He was stopped and made to pay fifteen thousand. And my son — three thousand. It's a matter of luck. What sort of man stops you* [AFM 2017].

However, from time to time fear does come through in migrants' stories, and they start talking openly about their fear of being arrested and deported: fear is their constant companion in public places and keeps them away from them. Most often these emotions appear in stories about FMS inspections of the workplace. One of my interlocutors told me about how he had had to jump out of a window into the back yard and lie in a snowdrift for half an hour in freezing temperatures so as to hide from the FMS agents who had come to the café [AFM 2019]. They feel totally unprotected against the law enforcement agencies of the host country, subject to any kind of violence on their part, as my interlocutors said: 'They can do anything they like with me. I am like a dead leaf [not attached to anything, not wanted by anyone]' [AFM 2018].

The status of an undocumented migrant creates a feeling of invisibility, which a person experiences particularly acutely during the first year that (s)he lives and works in the country. This feeling changes as the migrant becomes accustomed to the new space and the environment of the host society: my interlocutor who had been deported said that he was sorry to leave, not even the people he had got used to, but the city [AFM 2018].

The impossibility of free movement about the city, the unavailability of leisure, the everyday routine, the absence of any change of place or impressions, and the need to maintain an imposed invisibility produce a feeling of constraint and personal captivity. 'I'm like a dog on a leash,' says one of my interlocutors about himself [AFM 2018]. The most pronounced motif in the emotions experienced by undocumented migrants is the sense of invisibility, of imposed non-existence, most acutely manifested in the public spaces of the city. One of my interlocutors said this about the town where he had come to work: 'Yes, I can see that it's a beautiful city, I can see the architecture, but I don't like it here. It is as if I don't exist for the people in the streets' [AFM 2017]. Imposed invisibility to the host community makes undocumented migrants value moments of positive interaction with its representatives, for example customers at the cafés where the migrants work. A workplace like a café with 'ethnic' cuisine, even though it is not safe because of FMS inspections, is the city space where the presence of undocumented migrants has its greatest social legitimacy, where they play the part of hospitable hosts offering 'their' cuisine to the local residents, and in that role

they emerge at least partially from the regime of invisibility to the host society.

Although they are conditionally invisible to the state, Georgian migrants are always acutely aware of its presence, manifested in the constant threat of inspections by the police or FMS and in the unpredictable process of crossing the Russian border. It is in their interest to keep abreast of the news of what is going on inside Russia, both from Russian and Georgian news outlets, and feel that their life and future depend on Russian political and economic realities.

Georgian migrants working in the cafés and restaurants of the big city reflect on the topic of economic migration and its economic consequences for both countries. For example, one of my interlocutors considered how the money that he sent to Georgia would not stay in Georgia, but would go to Turkey and to Turks, that is, his family mainly spent it in Turkish shops. Economic migrants may have two ways of assessing their role in the Russian economy. On the one hand, they say that all their income in Russia is sent to Georgia: 'I'm living here as a parasite [on the Russian state], everything I earn I send to Georgia' [AFM 2018]. On the other hand, the migrants who work in the food business reflect that Georgian cafés work with local raw materials, for local customers, pay taxes in Russia, and, therefore, are contributing to the Russian economy.

The manifold informal schemes that undocumented Georgian migrants in Russia are forced to have recourse to give them an impression that the Russian state is deeply corrupt, and in this respect evidently inferior to Georgia. The corruption that Georgian economic migrants see in Russia is, in their opinion, uncharacteristic of modern Georgia. 'Corruption here works from the bottom up: the policeman gives a bribe to his boss, he gives one to his, and so on' [AFM 2018]. This forms a bitterly cynical attitude both to the law and to their own 'illegal' position: 'I am a lawbreaker. The police doesn't work here. If it did, I wouldn't be here' [AFM 2018]. As Susan Bibler Coutin writes, although the law makes 'legal' status an essential precondition for receiving certain rights and services, it simultaneously creates the mechanisms whereby shadow practices are organised and regulated [Coutin 2003: 12]. While the official information about how to obtain documents or RVP quotas for working migrants is hard to understand and confused, they feel much more confident about the functioning of the many informal schemes for solving these questions. Paradoxically, this gives undocumented migrants the sense that they can be in command of the situation, and that any question is soluble with a certain effort, using connections and money.

Russia is a land of great opportunities for Georgian migrants, a place where you can open your own business, where there are unoccupied niches in the labour market. As one of my interlocutors told me with enthusiasm, 'the market is flooded in Georgia, but here there are so many opportunities!' [AFM 2018]. The Russian state, despite the high level of corruption of which the migrants are aware, is seen by them as very strong, conducting a confident foreign policy and unquestionably more economically successful than the Georgia from which they have come, and therefore an attractive place to work and realise their ambitions.

Conclusion

The host country places the economic migrants from Georgia who work in the cafés and restaurants of a big Russian city in a place of legal uncertainty and imposed invisibility, thanks to their undocumented status. The Georgian migrants have direct experience of practically all the difficulties of 'imposed non-existence' defined by De Genova: enforced concealment, invisibility, the transformation of ordinary practices such as work or transport into secret ones, and limitations on their social and physical mobility [De Genova 2002: 427].

Undocumented status places its stamp on the most important aspects of economic migrants' everyday life: their perception of time and space and ways of living, their ability to decide for themselves questions of living accommodation, and their ability to defend their labour rights. Migrants devise and use many tactics for attaining invisibility, adapting to the rhythms of the city and the specifics of urban space. It may be said that the need to avoid certain places in the city or parts of its infrastructure, or the assessment of certain days of the week or times of day from the point of view of danger or safety are the starting point for the migrants' perception of the big city.

The price of uncertainty for migrants is quite high. Undocumented status, and in particular liability to deportation, make long-term planning impossible and determine the migrants' relation to the category of the future. On the one hand, they make plans which suppose their being in Russia, and on the other they understand that the road they have mapped out may break off at any moment. This turns the migrants' already complex and multifarious life plans into an equation with many unknowns. Undocumented status deprives them of the opportunity of seeing their nearest and dearest face to face, and even inviting a relative to come and work is often connected with the acquisition of 'legal' status by the person to whom (s)he is supposed to come.

Undocumented status inevitably makes the migrants' position precarious by substantially reducing the range of jobs available to them and condemning them to unregulated labour. The need to stay in the zone of invisibility makes undocumented migrants dependant on their employer, who becomes a buffer between them and the state. This concerns both protection from inspection agencies (the FMS, the police) and acting as an intermediary in renting living accommodation and sometimes in obtaining documents. While they feel that they are breaking the law of the land, migrants understand that from a social point of view their undocumented status is by no means always a basis for stigmatising them. It is clear to them, however, that when other people in the city (such as their neighbours) find out that they have no documents authorising them to remain in the country, they obtain leverage over them, because they could inform the police or the FMS of this.

Undocumented status acquires corporeal connotations and is connected with other characteristics for discrimination — in the case of Georgian economic migrants, criminality. On the one hand, the migrants' corporeality is a factor that makes it difficult for them to maintain their invisibility, and therefore further limits their access to public places, on the other, it can also be used strategically by the migrants.

Undocumented status produces in migrants a sense of imposed non-existence and isolation from the host community, experienced most acutely in public places. Migrants' everyday life is also limited by their undocumented status, and because of this it is routine, monotonous, and lacking in ordinary leisure, and makes them feel constrained, as if they do not belong to themselves. 'Ethnic' cafés and restaurants become virtually the only public places where, thanks to the social legitimacy of their presence, migrants can emerge from the zone of invisibility and manifest their existence at least partially. However, the feeling of fear and vulnerability (another emotion which undocumented migrants do not so much talk about as let slip) is no less strong in this space, and, on the contrary, may become particularly acute.

Because of the lack of information and the difficulties connected with obtaining visas and RVP quotas, the economic migrants' legalisation practices plunge them into the shadow world of informal agreements and schemes. Access to the bureaucratic information that would allow an accurate assessment of the prospects for legalisation is to a great extent impeded because of the burden of undocumented status, which makes any foray out of the 'zone of invisibility' dangerous. At the same time legalisation itself, in those forms in which it is available to migrants, has

ambiguous consequences for their work in Russia and is not always an advantageous strategy. Nevertheless, legalisation not only allows the economic migrant access to new opportunities, but it is also a way of escape from the constant fear of arrest and deportation, which is no less important. Thus migrants' everyday life is imbued with a constant effort to maintain invisibility to the state in the form of inspecting agencies, and simultaneously the desire to receive from the state the right to a visible presence within its borders.

The perceived corruption of the Russian state produces disillusion and scepticism about the rule of law in Russia. At the same time, since they can find their way around informal means of solving legal questions better than the official bureaucratic procedures, migrants come to feel that they have a grip on the situation and that almost any problem can be solved. Undocumented status has a monetary price: the need to pay, and pay over the odds, for things that are cheaper or free for those who have 'legal' status.

Economic migrants from Georgia perceive their situation as exceptional in a legal sense, and their undocumented status impels them into the grey zone of invisibility. At the same time they are forced to construct this zone for themselves: most of their life in Russia assumes an effort to maintain their invisibility, primarily to the Russian state. At the same time the factor of the state's presence and state monitoring is acutely manifested in almost every aspect of their everyday life.

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Abbreviations

AFM 2017, AFM 2018, AFM 2019 — author's field material from 2017, 2018 and 2019

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