Introduction

Murat was born in Alma, a village in Kyrgyzstan, in 1985, and graduated from one of Kyrgyzstan's high schools in 2002. Since that year, he has been working in Moscow with his cousin. After some time in the Russian capital, he was able to convince other relatives and close friends that they should join him there. He helped them find employment and accommodation. Since 2007, Murat's relatives and friends have been together as a group in a Moscow that is, for them, legally uncertain, as Russian immigration law remains under constant review and amendment (Abashin 2020). Murat himself is married and has three children, but his wife and children live in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan.

For four years, from 2011 to 2015, Murat's family was with him in Moscow, but after a time he decided to send his children back to Bishkek, even though this meant that he would no longer be able to see his wife and children regularly. Even though he was seeking Russian citizenship for himself, he foresaw a future in which his family's life would be in Kyrgyzstan. There, he told me, they had already 'bought the house' (which, at this time, was still under construction) in Bishkek. At home, in Kyrgyzstan, his three children would be 'free' (*kenen*), able to feel comfortable and normal, and they could attend the best schools in Bishkek. There was more: he had observed how the children of his relatives were growing up in Russia, and he saw how it was making them forget their 'culture'. They did not know how to greet older people, or how to be hospitable, and were 'not able to read a Koran'. They were even tending to 'forget their seven fathers' in the Kyrgyz lineage system. He knew that others would argue that there are more opportunities for migrant children in Moscow, but Murat believed that 'a child who wants to study can study anywhere'. From 2015 until 2024, therefore, Murat commuted between southern and northern Kyrgyzstan and Russia, and he took long vacations in Bishkek (northern Kyrgyzstan) and the village of Alma (southern Kyrgyzstan), and then working intensively in Moscow.

This book is about people like Murat, his friends and relatives in Moscow and their families in Kyrgyzstan. It looks at how migrants keep their lineage networks active, and at how they access and activate funds, development projects, intergenerational support and housebuilding across space and time. Other social dynamics will also be considered, including those that leave certain people excluded and controlled by these networks. This is an outcome as important as those that lead to other people being included and cared for. In fact, as we will see, care and control go together and operate together. Kinship ties do not disappear in the context of migration. When people migrate, their local kinship dynamics travel with them and act to shape the broader socioeconomic processes of migratory behaviour. The demands of kinship and migration create and reinforce each other. This has been well known from migration studies everywhere since at least the 1990s (Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton 1992), and there is no reason why we should expect Kyrgyzstan to be any different. What is not yet so well known, however, are the dynamics of control and exclusion in kinship, and their role in migration. These dynamics have yet to be properly studied in migration studies, and this book will fill this gap in the literature.

Murat's story is a story of those dynamics of kinship and migration; it is, at one and the same time, a story of success and failure, of escape and entrapment. On the one hand, his salary has enabled him to support his parents, siblings, wife and children to remain in Kyrgyzstan, and not just in the family's village home in Alma; they also have a new homestead in Bishkek, at the opposite end of the country. As his success has grown, his active kinship networks have expanded. At the same time, his kin's demands for care have escalated, especially with respect to his ageing parents. This has driven him to borrow money from the expanded kin network, leaving him increasingly in debt – and in order to pay off this debt, he has had to take up working at several places 'unofficially', without his parents knowing. He had to hide his difficult working conditions from his parents, because otherwise (he believed) they would worry and be anxious.

When I met him, Murat was working in a warehouse that distributed imported seafood across Russia, earning the equivalent of US\$1,000 per month (100,000 som). After covering his personal expenses of around 30,000 som, he regularly sent 15,000–20,000 som to his mother for medical treatment, including 5,000-6,000 som for medicines, and 20,000 som to his wife. The remainder, about 14,000 som, he saved to complete the house he was building in Kyrgyzstan.

Murat has two siblings: a younger brother who lives with his parents and grandfather in the village of Alma, and a married sister who lives with her own family (her husband and their children) in Osh. Unfortunately, in 2021,

Murat's mother fell ill with a brain tumour. Later, it became clear that this tumour had already begun to develop the year before. The doctors insisted on waiting until the family members paid US$5,000 as an advance payment; only then would they start the surgery. This is how it always is with medical treatments, Murat explained to me. If one does not have the money, the surgery is not done.

The cost of the surgery and recuperation was not borne by Murat alone. Relatives of his mother and father contributed money equally. The head of their lineage group in Moscow – named as Almaz aka – offered some financial support, and Murat's sister and younger brother sold their jointly owned cattle so that they could make financial contributions, in addition to the physical and emotional support they provided for their mother. But Murat still had to borrow extra money from friends. Before he could repay these debts, Murat was forced to return to Kyrgyzstan to avoid Russia's military mobilization against Ukraine, which carried the threat of conscription into the Russian army. However, finding himself unable to find a job in Kyrgyzstan, Murat returned to Russia in 2024.

This book therefore closely examines the insurance networks cultivated among migrant workers and their translocal families. It considers the household economy as it exists in the context of migration, and alongside the hierarchical relations of the kinship structure (which mandate care for elderly people, intergenerational kin solidarity and a gendered division of responsibilities and support), as well as along lateral support networks involving siblings, same-generation 'cousins', kinfolk and friends.

Even when Murat presents his own story, he can only tell it as a partial success. The same is true of the insurance networks formed by Kyrgyz lineage communities in the near abroad.[1] Murat's lineage solidarity group, Bakir, was founded in Russia by young villagers from Alma who collected money to send home the body of a relative who died in Moscow (cargo 200, means transportation of deceased body). Sensing that they might have more such cases in the future, the 120 lineage members agreed to contribute 1,500 rubles (US$15) each year. Just as there are six lineages in the village of Alma, so there are six lineage communities in Moscow – with a total number of 1,000-1,200 members, not all of whom were born in Alma, but who can all claim lineage ties to the village. The role of these groups has expanded since their foundation, and the money they collect is also used for various development projects in the village (projects such as mosque construction, and those related to water issues and humanitarian aid). They are expected to send about one-tenth of the monies collected to the funds of their respective lineages in Alma. In addition, the Bakir lineage fund provides money for the birth of children within the lineage: this is usually 5,000 rubles, while for tragic emergencies and sicknesses, assistance in such

cases can rise to amounts of 10,000-15,000 rubles. Each lineage has its own rules and regulations, including those for leadership. Murat himself eventually became one of the leaders of the Bakir translocal lineage community, and its *kassir*, or money collector, in Moscow.

Cultural Intimacy: Dark and Bright Sides of Kinship

This book presents a novel argument concerning kinship in the countries of present-day post-Soviet Central Asia. In those countries, it argues, kinship matters because it can be mobilized in contexts of crisis. In situations of economic and social upheaval, such as the erosion of welfare systems, systemic financial collapse, outbreaks of COVID-19 or other emerging infectious diseases, and migration, kinship plays a *positive* role, one it enjoys when its networks of care, benefits and support gain crucial importance. This role is equally visible, and equally important, when the focus turns to house construction, religious aid or to community organization among members of diaspora communities that share a common origin in a particular village. Migrants still regard kinship ties, moral norms and village life as elements of a personal ideal for which they must strive – and in striving for this ideal, they contribute to the reproduction of their home village, and to the development of its infrastructure and charitable institutions. The migratory context also contributes to a strengthening of, and an enrichment of, translocal lineage networks.

This same kinship system that has such a positive role also has another darker and *negative* aspect, one to which this book also draws attention: the *dark side of kinship*. Migration is the first enemy of the ideal nuclear family. It condemns children to grow up without the love and care of one or both parents, it forces grandparents to wait for the remainder of their lives for their sons to return and it drives young married couples to divorce because of infidelity, jealousy and other misunderstandings (*kelishpestik*). Where pregnancies occur outside of wedlock, where people lead dual lives or practice translocal polygyny, and where temporary marriages become increasingly prevalent, these are all, also, equally condemned.

Migration does not, at least, destroy 'family' in an extended sense. Among the multiple stories this book tells, this is the most important one: even if migration destroys individual nuclear families in Kyrgyzstan, kinship networks expand to support members in difficult times. This thriving, expanding kinship system makes it hard to tell this tale as anything but a success story. In Kyrgyzstan, the de-territorialization of kinship has meant the territorialization of the moral economy of migration: all good things have become associated

with the village, and with 'home', and with 'culture'. As for bad things, they happen only outside the village, in Russia.

Kinship is often presented in an idealized form, as a space of solidarity and loyalty (Fortes 1969). This book tells the stories of how people of the village, both in the village and in Russia, conceptualize the dark and bright sides of kinship within the context of migration. People may sometimes draw a binary opposition between certain aspects of kinship, categorizing them strictly as bright or dark sides, but, conceptually, the bright side of kinship has darker aspects of its own – such as unequal expectations, unbalanced demands for support and obligatory kinship duties – while kinship's dark side can also have its liberating aspects, which challenge normative kinship structures. Some aspects of the dark side remain hidden, kept in secrecy, while the bright side is proudly displayed and even boasted about, due to its consistency with local norms and standards of morality.

Everyone in the village knows, however, that the members of kinship groups can be very hard on each other. Kyrgyz people, in presenting their culture to the outside world, are usually careful to suppress any hint of this 'dark side' of kinship, with its burdens, expectations, pressures, forms of exploitation, its practices of marginalization and exclusion, its occasional brutalities, its constructions of shame, its openness to corruption in the form of nepotism and all the similar acts and aspects of kinship that undermine civil society. In this careful suppression of unpleasant realities, they are no different from most other societies – most of the world, in fact – in being concerned to claim an honoured place in that world. The defensive mechanisms they generate serve to avoid revealing these 'culturally intimate' aspects of their everyday lives – aspects that would reflect negatively on them, and on the larger entity of the Kyrgyz people as a whole.

To understand better what is at stake in these processes, it is useful to recall Herzfeld's notion of cultural intimacy, which he defines as:

> the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality, the familiarity with the bases of power that may at one moment assure the disenfranchised a degree of creative irreverence and at the next moment reinforce the effectiveness of intimidation (2005: 3).

In the case of today's Kyrgyzstan, one of the main points I would like to make is that kinship has this 'dark' side (as does heritage, a similarity that is surely not coincidental, given that ideas of heritage are based on intra-family succession), and that it is hard both to investigate (for the anthropologist) and to deal with (for the insider) because of the operation of principles of shame, upgraded here to the defence of cultural intimacy. In this book, I show how

important these 'dark' aspects of kinship are for an understanding of the politics of relatedness in Kyrgyz society today. In so doing, I demonstrate the vital importance, at a more general or theoretical level, of probing these hidden dimensions of kinship to understand the violence that may lie behind the idealized picture of kinship as a source of solidarity, and which may, sometimes, even sustain that solidarity. This book, in other words, tells a story that is an important one for area studies and for anthropology. It is about connecting the 'dark side' of kinship to the early Soviet critique of the family to see whether it is still playing out in Kyrgyzstan through everyday life (and migration), or whether 'family' is really as stable and neutral as many – migration scholars and classical anthropologists included – have assumed that it is. In order to understand this part of the Kyrgyz kinship context, it is necessary to go back to the historical experience of the Soviet Union, with its particular conception of kinship, its Soviet morality, and the impact that the legacy of this experience has had on the migratory experiences of people in post-Soviet societies (Chapter 1).

Migration and migratory experiences are interwoven with suffering as well as with success. Kinship mediates and is mediated by both these 'dark' and 'bright' experiences; as with all objects taken up by anthropology, it is necessary to explore both sides (Robbins 2013; Ortner 2016). However, the dark sides of kinship and migration are particularly difficult to pierce in the Central Asian context. This is the dynamic of cultural intimacy – something that is seen as important to a collective identity (here, for Central Asian people, kinship) is protected from the critical gaze of outsiders, or even of those insiders – inquisitive anthropologists, for example – who are perceived as asking questions expected to come from outsiders.

Lineage as Translocal Currency

Alma is a small remote village located in the southern part of Kyrgyzstan. The young people of this village go to Russia in search of work. In Alma, there is a dearth of adequate water and land, but people still try to make their living by raising livestock in the mountains. There are no other industries in this area, mainly because it was here, when Kyrgyzstan was a republic of the Soviet Union, that people used to breed cattle. In those days, the regime used to provide additional compensation for villagers and cattle breeders, and the local economic situation was, as a result, better under Soviet rule than it is today. In Soviet times, migration was not just a matter of unskilled labour migration but rather a matter of mobilities related to education, trade and skilled labour migration (Sahadeo 2019). In this remote region of Kyrgyzstan, as in

so many other corners of the land, there were, and are, few employment opportunities for young people. Paid employment, today, comes only from the public sector (in, for example, the village administration, or the local school), or via self-employment in small shops or petty trade. Some of the village elderly receive pensions. Since the other villagers have no way to earn money in the village, but still find that cash-based expenses remain consistently present (see Light 2015), adult sons and daughters move out, so that they can earn money elsewhere.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Kyrgyzstan gained its independence. What had been internal (within the USSR) migration to Russia continued then, but in a new and changed context. Some students who were in Russia at the time decided to stay there and continue working after 1991. Gradually, they began to invite their family members and relatives, especially those from the village who could be considered 'siblings' (a brother is not necessarily a biological relative: 'brothers' or 'sisters' with whom one does not share biological relatedness can still be included in the category of 'siblings', and helped accordingly).

'In the beginning', as migrants now say of the 1990s, Kyrgyz citizens living in Russia were often arrested for violations of administrative regulations (registration problems, work allowance). It so happened that those arrested were, mainly, people from Alma. Those I spoke to said that the Russians used to ask them, 'Is there any other place [in Kyrgyzstan] than Alma-Grad?' For the Russians, the remote village seemed to be a large and mysterious 'city' (or -*grad*, to use the Russian suffix), much to the amusement of those who knew it well, and who had learned how to bribe Russian police.

Until about the middle of the 1990s, when Alma's villagers migrated, they primarily went to the Kyrgyz capital, Bishkek, or to northern regions of Kyrgyzstan such as Sokuluk and Kara-Balta. The withdrawal of ethnic Russians from Bishkek after independence produced new spaces for internal migration, and the north promised better access to land (Abashin 2020). Thus, for a few years after 1991, the patterns of labour migration looked very much as they had during the preceding decades of Soviet rule. It was only after 1995 that villagers started moving from Alma to Moscow, bypassing the national capital altogether. In the old Soviet centre, the villagers organized themselves into self-help care networks and solidarity groups. Since then, the size of these solidarity groups has increased, so that they are currently divided into six lineage groups. This parallels the division within the village, whose population is organized into six *uruu*, as lineages are called there: Zhal, Kolomto, Ongoi, Orun, Bakir and Mongol. A person who arrives in Moscow, and who comes from one of those original six village lineages, is expected to join that lineage's corresponding solidarity group.

At this point, it is important to note that people conceptualize migration as a transition from 'inside' to 'outside', because they make a distinction between migrants and 'stayers', the latter being those who stay in the village. Those who are 'outside' must work in harsh conditions far from home, and are more likely to face a difficult life, while those who remain 'inside', within the country, live closer to their village; they are less vulnerable to harsh working conditions and are safer.

Post-Soviet migration has, therefore, produced translocal Kyrgyz communities. In Kyrgyzstan, the local identity of a place, and the people who claim it, is based on ancestry, lineages, the pooling of collective funds (in Kyrgyz, *kassa*, or *yntymak*) and other elements of social organization. The social life of the village is centred on kinship, and kinship bonds are reckoned through patrilineal descent: 'villagers' need not necessarily live within the physical boundaries of the village. The Kyrgyz segmentary patrilineage system consists of lineages (the *uruu* referred to above) and sub-lineages, or *uruk*, which consist of approximately forty or fifty households. People place great emphasis on being able to trace their patrilineal ancestors back to around seven to ten generations, and this constitutes the proof of their membership in both *uruu* and *uruk*. In earlier times, persons who could not prove their *uruu* lineage membership were considered *kul*, or slaves (Shahrani 1979).

When Alma's emigrants in Russia reorganize themselves according to the rules and structures of *uruu* and *uruk*, they replicate the strong system of solidarity and mutual support that characterizes Kyrgyz lineages and villages. As a community in Russia, they are strong, cohesive and independent. They are also very much 'Kyrgyz', in a way that would be recognized as being like that of a 'local' village in Kyrgyzstan. In the context of migration, in other words, locality becomes translocal. As Freitag and von Oppen (2010: 8-9) argue, 'locality is produced socially and culturally often in the context of heightened mobility of different scale, and of transgression of boundaries, which were already noted to be central to translocal perspectives on localities'. To be 'translocal' is to be part of 'the sum of phenomena that result from a multitude of circulations and transfers'. This implies 'the outcome of concrete movements of people, goods, ideas and symbols which span spatial distances and cross boundaries, be they geographical, cultural or political' (2010: 5). To be in a 'translocal' position, therefore, is to be in a context that adds more local diversity to experiences 'from below', and permits the creation of 'local' distinctions and agency in times of transformation; this contrasts with the 'global' or the 'transnational', which deal more with modern political states. Translocal means 'a multitude of possible boundaries which might be transgressed, including but not limiting itself to political ones, thus recognising the inability of even modern states to assume, regulate and control movement, and to account for the agency of a multitude of different actors' (2010: 15).

In acting as a translocal anchor, the lineage acts as a form of portable social capital, forming an 'identity infrastructure' that functions across geographical distances while maintaining a symbolic continuity to it is members' village back home. In the contexts of migration with which this book deals, this is exemplified by Kyrgyz patrilineage networks, whose multiscalar boundary work acts through, rather than despite, local attachments, and transgresses political and cultural borders as it does so. This means the creation of 'nested localities' where village identities, such as those of migrants, become recognizable markers in, and of, diaspora communities. This process generates new social geometries that extend beyond the constraints of state-centric frameworks.

Lineage, as translocal currency, reveals how kinship systems serve as a multifaceted resource for migrants navigating new social landscapes; its provides belonging for migrant communities, permits a risk mitigation strategy through translocal mutual aid and constitutes a Kyrgyz ethnic marker in Russia (exemplified by the 'Kyrgyz way'). This translocality is both strategy and constraint; lineage networks enable mobility while demanding perpetual performance of locality. The Kyrgyz example demonstrates how 'being descended from a particular lineage' becomes a form of portable capital rather than a territorial cage.

In the new translocal context of Moscow, a convincing claim to membership in any one of Alma's lineages will almost instantaneously provide many migrants with strong and binding social connections, to which a new migrant hardly has to 'prove' that he or she belongs. However, belonging to the community brings its own stresses. The new migrant experiences aspects of membership that can include mutual control, discipline, misunderstanding and even mistrust. Belonging requires much emotional work. As for the leaders of the translocal lineage groups, they must endure additional stress, as they are responsible for mobilizing finances and organizing people. As I argue elsewhere, the kinship system can be stretched by social actors to establish various networks within the framework of that system – and there is always the possibility of redefining the boundaries within a large reservoir of kinsmen (Ismailbekova 2017: 88).

Kinship, Coping and Welfare Crisis

In light of the controversial and ongoing theoretical debates on the problem of limited state support, modernization and welfare theory in Europe, China, Vietnam and elsewhere (Goode 1970; Zhang 2001; Yan 2003; Thelen, Sikor and Cartwright 2008; Heady and Kohli 2010; Haliel 2015; Wang 2015), this book will bring the case of Central Asia into the kinship and welfare conversation. The situation in Central Asia is as unique in terms of its cultural and political history as it is in its intriguing kinship variations: conventionally, Central

Asia is described as a 'laboratory of social change' owing to its social, economic and political transformation throughout the twentieth century.

That transformation was driven by Soviet modernization, the distinctive feature of which was the absence of a capitalist market. In the Soviet Union, state welfare increased as the role of the market decreased. Within this framework, Soviet ideology, which coincided with a generalized paradigm of 'modernization', expected kinship ties to weaken as society 'advanced'.[2] According to this Soviet model, the advancement of society was expected to occur through the collectivization of property. In the Central Asian context especially, this meant that individuals should have shifted away from economic dependence on senior males and family property, to reliance on collectivized enterprises and the state. The expected consequence of such a trend, after some seventy years of Socialist policy, was supposed to be for younger generations to report quite weak senses of obligation to care for their parents. This pattern never emerged – and in the post-Soviet context, also, the rapid expansion of market logic has not produced, either, any weakening of kinship ties beyond the boundaries of the immediate nuclear family (Ismailbekova 2017).

In its attempt to transform society, the Soviet system seems to have unintentionally preserved the kinship relationships of Central Asia, despite considering them detrimental to modernization (Kandiyoti 2007). Kinship continued to provide essential social, emotional, and remained closely tied to the questions of property, landholding and inheritance, local politics, employment relationships, economic networks and even access to state resources (Ismailbekova 2017). This persistence of kinship reveals that the relationship between modernization and social transformation was more complex that Soviet ideology anticipated.

After 1991, the newly independent Central Asian countries discarded not only their Soviet-era social welfare systems, but also abandoned any public discussion of the social significance of welfare itself (Penkala-Gawecka 2017; Trevisani 2018; Torno 2022). To legitimize their new nation-building projects, the post-Soviet Central Asian states, including Kyrgyzstan, resorted to rhetoric about the institutionalization of 'traditional cultural patterns': this meant the use of kinship discourses and paradigms as the basis for a new identity politics that would distance their new regimes from the prior Soviet patterns (Jacquesson 2010). Social welfare supports were reduced, and a free-market economy was introduced. The ideological and institutional changes this entailed profoundly affected people's everyday practices, by creating new constraints and offering new opportunities. Across the region, collective farms were reorganized into small cooperatives or individual 'farms', even though most Central Asian rural dwellers did not then know (as they still do not know) how to use land in a sustainable and effective way, and they lacked knowledge of how to exist in a market economy and produce goods for both national and international

markets (Huskey 2008). At the same time as increasing economic hardship has reshaped the lives of ordinary people and their families in Central Asia, the very nature of the social support that individuals might need has changed – and changed dramatically. In the absence of state-provided welfare, the importance of kinship was enhanced.

In this context, kinship provided what Werner calls the 'security of mutual provision' (1998), something that is particularly true at times of political-economic transformation. On the domestic level, kinship provides members of the household with consistent mutual aid and emotional support (Bechtold 2017). In the public domain, kinship was reimagined as a metaphor for the nation: a moral and genealogical unit that legitimized new political and social hierarchies (Gullette 2010). Kinship thus operates simultaneously as a practical support mechanism and as a symbolic resource, shaping relationships of care, belonging, and authority. Kinship is also interwoven with the processes such as demographic development, migration, conflict, new social movements, welfare, financial crisis and debt.

The experiences of the post-Soviet countries clearly show that 'modernization' does not, in and of itself, destroy kinship entirely, and that this is the case whether that 'modernization' arrives in a Socialist manner or takes a neoliberal capitalist form. Neoliberal capitalist market-making has tended, globally, to lead to strengthened moral bonds and kinship ties, and a proliferation of cultural and religious identities, at least when welfare systems, social safety nets and professional identities have been weakened (Shever 2012; Schielke 2020). These dynamics suggest that kinship does not 'wither away'. Recognition of this fact, however, does not settle the issue; the matter of how kinship changes, and why, remains poorly understood – particularly in terms of the kinship's engagement with economic and social support beyond the nuclear unit. This is so, not only with respect to Central Asia, but across the world, where the importance of kinship's role in social welfare is paralleled only by the absence of a complete understanding of that role. Fortunately, the anthropology of kinship has provided a number of useful terms and concepts that we can deploy – if we are willing to use them, and if we wish to find an enhanced understanding of the connection between family, kinship and the creation of safety nets that shield individuals from the blows of the market. I turn to this point now.

Beyond the Welfare State: Kinship and Emerging Forms of Care

In many places, neoliberal retrenchment of the welfare state, rising household debt and widespread financialization are provoking new ways of understanding forms of care and caregiving, solidarity, informal favours and sociality (Da Roit

2007; Han 2011; James 2015; Brković 2017). With this book, I aim to bring the concept of kinship into a central place in this scholarly discussion, arguing that kinship is playing a crucial role in shaping emerging forms of care in the context of Kyrgyz migration. Kinship is mobilized in all those situations, and the significance of that mobilization will be one of the focal points of this book's argument. It will update, in other words, the traditional anthropological treatments of the role of kin ties in migratory contexts, an aspect of kinship that has often been overlooked by the discipline, with the exception of scholars such as Andrikopoulos and Duyvendak (2020), Andrikopoulos (2022), and Carsten (2020), who argue that the role of kinship ties in the context of migration is crucial, as they are modified and expanded in that context.

Such writers argue that kinship is not a fixed or unchanging social phenomenon, but rather one that is inherently flexible and resilient in response to changing socio-political contexts. In migratory contexts, this is evident as certain kinship ties are revitalized, new forms of relatedness emerge and other connections weaken. It is thanks to kinship that people can be mobile, but, at the same time, their mobility can lead to the reshaping of kinship as a domain. In this context, migrants use kinship creatively to navigate state systems and use as strategic resources.

Central Asia is not the only place in the world where this question is an urgent one. Everywhere, as intergenerational changes proceed, care, particularly, is becoming more and more residentially institutionalized, and provided through formal labour markets. This leads to the commodification of intimacy, and the gendering and racialization of care (Buch 2015: 285). Ideas of transparency, and sometimes meritocracy, further redefine reliance on kin networks as a form of nepotism. Kinship comes to be viewed as the source of nepotistic and socially destructive behaviours, or even as the political equivalent of incest, as Herzfeld puts it (2018: 41). But without kinship, how can those with limited financial means access the markets for care? Is there any way that reliance on kinship can be rendered legitimate?

In Italy, a lack of intergenerational solidarity within families, an abundance of cash resources and the low cost of commoditized care services resulted in the development of a market-driven for eldercare system (Da Roit 2007). Nuclear households replaced extended family structures, while a parallel movement of volunteers emerged, practicing 'ethical citizenship' by caring for non-kin elders (Muehlebach 2013). Care in Central Asia remains more kinship-based, but there is still present, at this stage, the same logic of the creation of care and other markets being supported by non-market forms of work. Similarly, in post-Socialist Bosnia and Herzegovina, access to welfare and social protection relies heavily on personal connections, clientelism, and patronage networks, which simultaneously enable access to state resources (Brkovic 2017: 5). In an

extended discussion of patronage, Herzfeld (2022) argues that patronage both fuels resistance to the state while also providing access to its benefits.

In this book, I join the ranks of the scholars cited above and others in exploring new ways of understanding care, caregiving and solidarity networks through kinship, particularly in light of the neoliberal retraction of the welfare state. I argue that in such places, where state welfare was absent, kinship provided people's major network of support – and this book provides a case where kinship reacquired that role in conditions of post-Socialist uncertainty. By systematically exploring the relationship between kinship and informal insurance during both the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, the book generates new anthropological understandings of kinship in the context of the welfare crisis, debt and migration in Central Asia – and beyond. Such an approach also raises broader analytical questions about what promotes or deters cooperation and mutual support along strong kinship lines, and about the stubborn persistence of kinship as a factor in modern transnational contexts.

Why Kinship Is a Core Issue in Anthropology

Kinship has long stood at the core of anthropology, with classic theories (e.g. Evans-Pritchard 1940; Schneider and Gough 1961; Fortes 1969; Goody 1973) examining patriarchal and matrifocal systems, descent and residence. More recently, kinship reemerged in the discipline – first reframed as 'relatedness' or 'new kinship' (e.g. Carsten 2000; Franklin and McKinnon 2001), and later reclaimed under its original name (e.g. Parkin 2009; Sahlins 2011a, 2011b; Alber and Thelen 2017; Finke 2023). This book situates kinship as a constitutive aspect of humanity and a matter of general human concern. Anthropological debates have variously interpreted kinship obligations as altruism based on need (Fortes 1969), as strategic investments in one's descendants (Becker 1991) or as moral values learned through culture (Schneider 1984). Each of these perspectives is sometimes true but, depending on the context, some perspectives matter more than others for Kyrgyz migrants, as I will demonstrate in the ethnographic chapters within the setting of their migration experiences (Chapters 4 and 5).

While some of the ideas of earlier anthropological studies of kinship are no longer considered useful; nevertheless, I want to retrieve at least a few of their concepts, especially their vision of lineages. Among few exceptions, one anthropological theorist, Herzfeld (2022), talks about lineage or clan segmentation in considerable detail in his *Subversive Archaism*. Finke (2023) also explores mutual support and cooperation within transnational kin networks among Qazaq pastoralists in Western Mongolia, highlighting these as key elements of survival strategies in the face of external pressures and a lack of trust.

In this book, I argue that the substance of the translocal lineage-based community is money, following the argument of Zharkevich (2019). In the Kyrgyz case, money, metaphorically speaking, became the solidarity's group's *kan* 'blood' (flow, movement, life). Money is also the indication of mutual aid, shared investment in charity and in establishing a market niche, and a cycle of debt and obligations. This pushes forward our understanding of what 'kinship' is (or is not), especially in contemporary Central Asia with its related crises of welfare, debt and migration. Sometimes, as in classic anthropological literature, kinship was spoken of as a system of rules, power, authority and control of resources. That perspective on kinship has endured. In it, kinship structures are not so much walls defending against outsiders as political and economic loci seeking to entice supporters.

Here, we can see an obvious parallel with Barth's conceptualization of ethnic boundaries (Barth 1969) in which ethnicity is, like kinship, about expanding support. Zharkevich's work reveals how the flow of remittances redefines the boundaries of transnational families, including or excluding members based on participation in these financial exchanges. This process of inclusion and exclusion through material flows echoes Barth's emphasis on the negotiation of ethnic boundaries, with remittances serving as a new criterion for group membership. This aligns with Barth's focus on the importance of shared cultural markers in maintaining group identity and flexibility of ethnic boundaries in response to changing social situations, with remittances functioning as a new form of shared resilient practice that binds transnational family and kinship members together.

Mobility has contributed to the generation of new capacities of kinship, by (among other things) broadening the range of possible kin-groups (Carsten 2020: 319); it has changed the specific constraints on the shape and nature of kinship terminological systems and it has reshaped the role of kin affiliations in people's sense of personhood and identity. People's networks become central here: following Marilyn Strathern's (1996) belief in the importance of practices for 'cutting the network', and for considering which 'nodes' in a networked system become central, I argue that people have to make choices and deploy strategies within structured network systems; they must take those structures in order to reproduce that structure.

Who Benefits? Migration and Development Narratives in Post-Soviet Central Asia

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union twenty-five years ago, Central Asians have been migrating to Russia, along with Turkey, Europe, East Asia,

the United States and the Gulf States, and their rates of migration have been the highest historically recorded out of Central Asia. Initially interpreted as a sign of national economic distress in the early post-Soviet years, Central Asian migration is now seen by international organizations as having positive (side) effects. As noted above, both the World Bank and the International Organization for Migration insist that remittances can contribute to development and to poverty reduction (World Bank 2019; IOM 2020). Viewed in the context of migration and its history, this would seem to be good news; in many other parts of the world, chain migration has proven ineffective for developing local and national economies (for example, see De Haas 2009; Glick Schiller and Faist 2010).

Yet, the good news of economic growth base on the remittances sent home by migrants has to be balanced by Central Asians against migration's remaining dangers, and balanced on a daily basis. Russia has been the primary destination for most migrants, reproducing earlier, Soviet-era forms of dependency, and weaving them into the new, post-Socialist configurations of these countries' economic and political systems. High rates of migration to Russia therefore pose, also, a source of constant threat to the economic stability of Central Asia. The economic and political dependence of Central Asian countries on Russia, due to migration, the convergence of trade networks and interstate security cooperation, means that the region's states and governments are vulnerable.

The Russian economy itself is, arguably, in rather dire straits at the moment, due to sanctions and geopolitical pressures. Migrants in Russia themselves often experience difficult working and living conditions, thanks to corrupt police, informal governance and xenophobia (Urinboyev 2021). Often, to secure jobs, housing and social services, they must attempt to circumvent a variety of otherwise cumbersome legal and economic procedures (Brednikova and Abashin 2020). Migrants may face harassment and persecution if they attempt to raise awareness of their difficult lives, especially with regard to police or other state law enforcement structures (Urinboyev 2021).

Kyrgyzstan remains one of the most economic migration-dependent countries in the world. It was no surprise, then, that this part of the world was struck particularly hard when borders closed and lockdowns were put in place under the pressure of COVID-19. During the pandemic, migrants from Kyrgyzstan and other Central Asian countries featured frequently in the international news (Russian news as well as other sources). As borders closed, thousands of migrants found themselves trapped on the Russia-Kazakhstan border. With many migrants unable to work during lockdowns, or unable to travel to Russia, remittances plummeted; these did rapidly recover when migration restarted, but their suspension entailed substantial economic stress.

Since early 2022, migration has been entangled with war. After Russia invaded Ukraine in February that year, Central Asian migrants have experienced tightened economic conditions caused by international sanctions. Many have lost their jobs with the closure of international companies, or because of pressure to give more jobs to 'Russians', and as construction sector tightened with the falling value of the rouble, jobs have been lost there too. Some, who had taken out Russian citizenship, have been conscripted into the Russian military (Nogoybayev 2022). Others have been approached by military recruiters with enticements of fast-tracked citizenship (Kudayarov 2022) or lucrative payments to serve (salaries of €1,500-2,000 per month have been promised) (Maishev 2022). Many, regardless of whether or not they held Russian citizenship, fled back to Central Asia before Russia tightened its borders. A few have even migrated to third countries, such as Turkey. Whichever choice a migrant makes, household budgets in Central Asia are affected – and so are the households themselves.

The Anthropology of Post-Soviet Migration

There is a growing anthropological literature on migration in the post-Soviet space that addresses transnational familyhood, and it focuses on transnational family networks that maintain family ties at a distance. The benefits of migration are indeed visible in Kyrgyzstan, where they are materialized in the form of homes, cars, livestock, business, children's education and a flourishing ritual economy (Isabaeva 2011; Reeves 2012; Rubinov 2014; Nasritdinov 2015; Sagynbekova 2017). This point of view neglects the hidden costs (e.g. the marriages forced to end in divorce, the children left behind, etc.) of this development, costs that are borne by families and that remain invisible to outsiders. There is a high cost to migration, a cost that impacts, in many cases, on family ties and the erosion of traditional community, neighbourhood and social networks. Reeves (2012: 112) has shown that Central Asian labour migration dynamics are embedded within local structures of economic, social and ethical values. Families are expected to not only uphold their community's values, but also to contribute to the community's upkeep and development, both monetarily and in kind. For me, it must be emphasized that the main motivation for migration is to increase family status, or to comply with the obligations that go along with getting married (Reeves 2012). However, it is necessary to also look at the internal tensions that are experienced by the families affected by migration, and to understand that these challenges occur within these families because of unique societal factors (Aitieva 2015).

In this context, it has become clear that the resolution to migrate is not just an economic or individual decision based on cost-benefit calculations, but is a family-oriented decision that is embedded in broader social, cultural and community projects (Rahmonova-Schwarz 2012; Aitieva 2015; Abashin 2015a; Reeves 2017a; 2017b; Cleuziou 2017; Borisova 2020). The focus has been on (long-distance) marriage and other kinship relations; what happens when these relations start to unravel, such as in cases of divorce, left behind children, and grandparents waiting for their children's return, has been largely ignored until now.

Migration: Institutional Context Matters

The New Institutional Economics (NIE) framework is helpful to anyone seeking a better understanding of Kyrgyz lineage-based networks; its application to those networks indicates that they are deeply *embedded* in historical and social structures, producing *institutional trajectories* that differ considerably from those neighbouring countries, such as Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The NIE views institutions as the rules of the game – both formal (laws, policies) and informal (norms, kinship, trust networks). Here we focus on *lineage-based kinship* as a distinct informal institution shaping migrant obligations and social behaviour. Lineage-based kinship institutions facilitate trust, enable enforcement of norms and coordinate exchanges, thereby reducing the costs and uncertainties associated with long-distance social and economic relationships (see Ostrom 2005; Finke 2023). At the same time, like all institutions, kinship is shaped by power dynamics, potential misincentives and path dependencies, which can constrain behaviour and influence how these networks function over time (cf. Finke 2023).

There are two prominent books that I engage with closely for this purpose: Urinboyev (2021) and Borisova (2024a). They both explore how the norms of informal institutions, such as kinship and community, mediate the deep connections between migrants and their kin and communities back home. In the context of Uzbekistan, Urinboyev's ethnographic work on Uzbek migrants in Russia highlights the role of *mahalla* as a localized, informal institutional structure that facilitates solidarity and support. Borisova's research on Tajikistan similarly conceptualizes migration as an ethical project, one where mobility intersects with moral personhood and the reproduction of communities left behind. However, the Kyrgyz context differs institutionally. Unlike Uzbeks and Tajiks, who rely on neighbourhood- or morality-based networks as informal institutional frameworks, Kyrgyz kinship is organized around lineage-based associations, marking a distinct institutional difference. These lineage structures reduce transaction costs by facilitating trust,

obligations and enforcement mechanisms across generations and geographies. By foregrounding kinship as a key institutional structure in the context of labour migration, this study demonstrates how Kyrgyz migrants' economic and social engagements are shaped by unique norms of lineage solidarity, producing distinct patterns of resource flow, caregiving and communal reproduction in sending villages. These factors are very much kinship-related factors; they depend on types of kin relationship, on the genealogical distance between kin, on the forms of help and cooperation that kin afford to one another in matters of marriage and status acquisition, and the degree to which they do so.

Migration Studies: Gender and Care Chain

Research on migration within the post-Soviet space thereby underscores and qualifies the findings of globally focused studies on transnational gendered migration, by examining more closely the impact of the Soviet era and post-Soviet changes on the lives of women. Across the globe, women have been brought from the periphery to the core of migration studies (Donato et al. 2006; Mahler and Pessar 2006). The new focus on female migrants has drawn attention to transnational care chains (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002), family caring arrangements (Baldassar and Merla 2014), and other practices that emerge, by creative means, in transnational social fields (Coe and Pauli 2020). Researchers who have focused on women who find themselves 'left behind' by their male family members have insisted that waiting is an active process (Archanbault 2010; Yarris 2014; Ibañez Tirado 2019; Zharkevich 2019). Women in such circumstances do not wait passively, vulnerable, and without the ability to be independent. On the contrary, they display economic autonomy and expand their social connections in the absence of menfolk. Alice Elliot, in her book The Outside (2021), argues against this view. She says that while women waiting for husbands are very busy, and that they remain dependent and demobilized in ways that they do not share with women who move with their husbands from village to city or abroad, male mobility reproduces pre-industrial household relations and in-law dependencies. Even the most sophisticated of migration studies portrays the social valuation of 'family' and 'kinship' as unbreakable – but is it?

The exclusion of the 'left-behind' has received a lot of criticism in migration literature. Critics argue that this exclusion entails ignoring the experiences of people who remain when others have migrated. For example, Toyota, Yeoh and Nguyen argue that left-behind families are forgotten. They call for new research frameworks to 'bring the left-behind back into the picture' and to better understand how migrants and the left-behind are 'mutually constituted in economic, social, and cultural domains' (2007: 158). According to

King et al. (2017), the experiences of parents who are ageing and those of their children who are migrating are interconnected. Older migrants, impacted by the migration of their adult children, must cope with various vulnerabilities stemming from their new situation. Despite this, they retain their own agency and play an active role in migration. Those who are left behind are, in contrast, viewed as passive and disempowered, pictured as immobile and dependent recipients of care. For example, this process plays a significant role in shaping the different forms of social interaction and community in Central Asia. According to Ibañez-Tirado (2019), the 'left-behinds' in rural Tajikistan position their village as a dynamic hub for the circulation of informal favours and caregiving. I agree with the critiques of this literature, and I concur with the view that 'left-behinds' are not passive care recipients but are, rather, persons 'in waiting', which is an active and creative process.

Across the transnational migration literature, marriages are assumed to remain intact, at least in most cases. Yet it is also recognized that divorced women may feel 'forced' to enter labour migration, if they are to avoid negative commentary and social pressure (Bloch 2017). Thus, there is an interplay between the mobility of one individual or social group, and its capacity to facilitate, shape or constrain the mobility of others (Reeves 2011). Women's roles and moral status vis-à-vis their families and communities are changed dramatically in conjunction with migration, yet there has been little attempt to take the evidence of this change and use it to confront the images of unbroken 'transnational family networks' and the rationally coherent 'family decisions' to pursue labour migration.

Migration studies have recently begun to address the roles that expectations, dreams and the desire to migrate play in the decision to migrate (Belloni 2019; Gaibazzi 2019; Schielke 2020; Elliot 2021). This shift requires greater attention to the emotional lives of migrants, including how emotions are expressed, withheld, or embodied in everyday practices. In this regard, Sampaio (2020: 282) observes that 'silence is often enacted as a care practice', something they observe among undocumented Brazilian migrants in the United States and their parents back home in Brazil. Ibañez-Tirado (2018) highlights another body of literature that explores the emotional, embodied and sensory dimensions of intimacy within close family relationships. Ibañez-Tirado argues that various forms of physical touch enable the cultivation of intimacy and a morally guided family life, aligning with broad concepts of the ideal Tajik and Muslim family. In my case study, I focus on the silencing of pain, the sensory dimensions of intimacy, and the suffering and social exclusion that accompany migration and abandonment. This requires consideration of the emotional lives of migrants. In the pages below, I will explore the relationship between migration and the bright and the dark sides of kinship. While much attention has been given to the emotional, supportive and enabling aspects of kin ties, less visible are the tensions, silences

and moral pressures that can accompany them. One reason for this obscurity is shame. Shame often veils the more painful or coercive dimensions of kinship, making them difficult to articulate or publicly acknowledge.

Shame Keeps Much of Kinship's Dark Side Hidden

Across the anthropological literature, there is a growing body of work that documents the experience of, and the effects of, living with shame – shame as a social and moral emotion that is deeply embedded in interpersonal relationships and cultural norms (McBrien 2021a). Suffering, the submersion of the self and self-sacrifice have been major focal points of this literature, as well as the remarkable 'endurance' shown by women who inhabit potentially constricting gender norms. While foundational research on the embodied dimensions of shame, the idea of female docility and gender was strong in Muslim communities (Abu-Lughod 1986; Mahmood 2005), especially the idea of female docility, and in Japanese society (Bestor 1989), a more recent focus on the interrelations between emotion and migration has emerged elsewhere (Yarris 2014). At a disciplinary level, research on shame among Central Asian migrants to Russia has the potential to enrich and reinvigorate cross-regional and inter-religious discussions in the anthropology of shame. My approach, therefore, begins where the more recent works have left off: within the perspective of shame, I propose to circumscribe the idioms of distress, pain, anxiety and suffering.

Some of the dark sides of migration are well known: for example, migrants consistently experience, in their destinations, discrimination, brutality and violence. Other sides are less well known. As Andrikopoulos and Duyvendak point out, 'inequality, fear, abuse, exclusion, and intimate violence, to name a few', are not only a part of migration, but are also 'ingrained in kinship practices' (2020: 310). In the Kyrgyz context, 'shame' keeps much of kinship's dark side hidden. Across Kyrgyzstan, shame – *uiat* – resonates as a deeply embodied concept that is linked to physical pain and other bodily effects (McBrien 2021a). Indeed, in commenting on their experiences, migrants often emphasize stress, depression and the necessity of endurance.

Feminist scholars have long argued that the home is not always safe and pleasant for all, because of domestic violence and abuse (Yanagisako and Delaney 1995). Kyrgyz individuals and their families hide 'weaknesses' or 'failures' under an umbrella of shame. Personal lives are hidden from view. Divorcees, especially, pose a threat to local morality and kinship relations, and may be forced to move far away from their former husband's family (and children), to avoid negative commentary and considerable social pressure. The divorced woman's story is easily 'forgotten' by those who stay. Similarly, polygamous marriages that are not happy may be hidden – with a male migrant having one family in

the migration destination and another in Kyrgyzstan. So strong are the expectations of kinship's bright sides that its dark sides may be blamed on sorcery (*bash ailantyp aldy*) (cf. Geschiere 2003). Thus, in the Kyrgyz context, the dark of kinship is embedded in shame, exclusion and discrimination.

Traditional Ethnography and Digital Ethnography

This book is based on long-term investigation and research carried out over three years in Moscow (summer 2021) and Kyrgyzstan (summer 2021, 2022, 2023). Until the war in Ukraine broke out, I was able to visit these places once a year. After the outbreak of the war, I found myself unable to travel to Moscow, or elsewhere in Russia, ruling out further research in that country. This left me unable to conduct further 'on the ground' research, a setback I compensated for by adopting digital ethnography methods, such as calling and meeting with my informants via WhatsApp, a social media tool.

Most of my ethnographic research was primarily conducted in the village of Alma in Kyrgyzstan. There, I was able to obtain rich data on various families, and on the networks they rely on for support. I was also able to look at the family members left behind, at the children of the migrants and those children's grandparents, and at their daily lives. I also visited the newly built houses of several families, and participated in many of the life events that were part of village life, especially the marriage ceremonies, births and funerals of migrants and their kinfolk. I also participated in activities related to mosque construction, community work in residential houses for the needy (they are unable to work outside the home due to health reasons), and athletic activities in sports stadiums. My anthropological perspective on these issues allowed me to focus on the micro-level of society where people live their daily lives in either the village or its diaspora, and where the structural effects of membership in a kinship network are most directly and immediately felt. I also collected local demographic data about the village. In the writing of this book, I have brought rich ethnographic documentation and quantitative data that have allowed me to show the village life of Alma from different perspectives: from those of co-operation among kin relations, intergenerational support, the emotional costs (to individuals) of migration, and the migration-related forms of development and charity. The cost of remittances stands over all these aspects of Alma life today. What do those remittances really cost those who make them? What are the light and dark sides of all this, the good and bad sides of the migration phenomenon? Could it be that what is dark for one person may be a bright promise of proper moral order for another?

As a Kyrgyz researcher studying kinship and lineages in Kyrgyzstan, my insider positionality significantly shaped my research and analysis in several ways.

The fact that I shared an ethnicity with my research participants (even though I do not come from the region where I conducted my research) facilitated easier access to their lives, and allowed me to quickly build trust with them. This was true in both Kyrgyzstan and Russia. My informants were open to some degree that they thought acceptable as I was Kyrgyz but at the same time I was from another region of Kyrgyzstan. I also have insider knowledge of Kyrgyz culture, language and social norms, which allows for more nuanced interpretation of data related to kinship and lineage systems, especially when it comes to the questions on a mother's children among a father's patrilineal community. At the same time, I faced challenges related to not being informed – those silent, invisible parts of people's lives that my informants did not consider necessary to share. For ethical reasons, I chose not to push them further. Yet, the desire to speak vividly about certain aspects of their lives, while omitting others entirely, lies at the heart of this book. It is key to making sense of the ambiguity and dualities that run throughout the book. But I was aware of both tension between inside and outside. This dual positioning can be advantageous, allowing you to leverage insider knowledge while maintaining some analytical distance.

The Structure of This Book

In Chapter 1, I focus on the dramatic changes that occurred in Kyrgyzstan as Soviet social welfare collapsed and the free-market economy was introduced, along with the redistribution of lands and livestock to private owners; these changes all altered the very nature of the social support that individuals might need. In the wake of welfare's absence, many Alma villagers started going to Russia in search of jobs and security. In the harsh environments of Russia, translocal lineages that combined kinship, cooperation and mutual support became newly imperative for Kyrgyz migrants, and I focus on these factors and their importance in this chapter. The role of translocal lineages is at the heart of this study.

Patrilineal relationships can coexist with many other different types of relationships – and all of them can suffer emotional damage as a result of migration, damage that arises from the abandonment of children, the 'leaving behind' of parents, and divorce. The voices of the damaged tend to be muted, however (on the concept of 'muted' see Ardener 2005). They are 'muted' not in the sense that they cannot verbalize (to an anthropologist or other researcher), but because they are required, usually, to articulate themselves in 'hegemonic' languages and 'dominant' idioms derived from nationalist ideologies. In this respect, in the context of migration, mutedness refers to types of kin relations other than the dominant ones (the strong patrilineal relations). This is the theme of Chapters 2 and 3, which illuminate the dark side of kinship.

These discussions that form the basis for this chapter revolve around the costs that migration imposes on families, family tensions, family breakdowns and social networks. Here I focus on the notion of concealment, of being muted, which is the intentional marking of some things as publicly knowable (e.g. migrants' wages or salaries) and others not. Kyrgyz migrant women who suffer make a display of not showing their suffering.

In Chapter 4, I focus on intergenerational support as it occurs in the building of houses in Alma. In the diverse literature on how social security returns to families, one key question remains open: who really helps each other, and why do they do so? Do we know, in particular, of types of kinship relationships other than genealogical ones? Instead of making a dichotomy between systems and types, it is important to look at the individual choices that matter, and the reproducible patterns they make. These reproducible patterns are structural, and they influence the choices people make, so it is important to understand them. This is still true everywhere in today's world – including in Kyrgyzstan and its diaspora.

During Ramadan, migrants distribute religious aid, which they have collected (and contributed to) for the construction of mosques; also, they support charity initiatives and collect money for those in need (such as widows, poor, elders, orphans, disabled children). Chapter 5 deals with this aid, and its role in how (at the individual level), young migrants relate their identity to the notion of the 'son of the lineage'. At the social level, this concept underpins the obligation to strongly support one's kinsfolk; at the religious level, it imposes a duty to help the needy by connecting their lives with the life to come (*akira*). This is how charity intersects with kinship as the best way of directly engaging with the village lineages. By participating in charity and other socially relevant active processes, migrants contribute to the making of their moral selves, as well as those of others, and also to the future visions and hopes that they and other migrants hold for their home.

Chapters 6 and 7 develop this point further; they are devoted to the villagers' 'imagining the future' of their village as a morally good, conservative and free place for the next generation. The project of the future and past is materialized in the present, when migrants contribute to the infrastructure of the village by, for example, building bridges, repairing schools, building memorials, building sports stadiums, constructing water pipes and providing street lighting.

This is a book about the dark and bright sides of kinship, and how they have emerged in the context of the turbulent social changes that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union and the independence of Kyrgyzstan. The economic crisis of those years drove the emergence of a large Kyrgyz diaspora in a number of countries, including, especially, Russia. The people who made up this diaspora suffered exploitation and endured racism, but they were able to assist their home communities in rebuilding and reconstruction. This work

had other, hidden costs, however. The bright side of kinship, which allowed for transnational networks of mutual aid based on extended kin relations, always went along with a dark side of kinship, which I suggest was inherent to those kinship-based networks. This dark side of kinship, which takes the form of acute pressures on particular members of those networks (especially women), has outcomes that may, in the long term, be less than optimal. In attempting to ensure social stability and the continuity of social and moral norms, it may subject individuals to forms of stress that threaten that continuity and undermine that stability. It is also something that may be inherent to the bright side of kinship. In fact, this book, argues, the dark and bright sides of kinship exist in a dialectical relationship in which they both contradict and constitute each other within the structures of translocal social life, when people both come together in support of their families and communities at home and in the diaspora, and when they find themselves driven to transgress social norms by the pressures and stresses of life in the difficult circumstances of the post-Soviet world.

Notes

1. In some other post-Soviet states, the term 'near abroad' (Russian *blizhnee zarubezhe*) refers to the independent republics that emerged after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.
2. Capitalist, neoliberal societies and states followed much the same logic. The state expropriates the language of kinship for its own purposes and does not want competition.