

Treading on the fine line between self-sacrifice and immorality: Narratives of emigrated Georgian women¹

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Introduction

Women's migration has been increasingly attracting the attention of researchers who often focus on the female migrants in the destination countries. However, parallel to the growing phenomenon of transnational migration² and the subsequent importance of the ties between migrants and their country of origin, attention has also been drawn to the family members that migrants leave behind them. These ties are of particular interest in the cases of female migration, since the new transnational family formations often challenge the traditional gendered divisions of labor and responsibility. In order to understand the altered roles and practices of female migrants, it is just as important to look at the family members that they have left behind, as it is to look at the migrants themselves.

In this article I will examine some of the altered gender roles and practices within Georgian transnational families where the women, often mothers, have emigrated. I will illuminate the gendered changes by examining the narratives of migration that are formed by the women as well as by the ones left behind. Narratives should be seen as social processes by which meaning is produced; they are not products of autonomous individuals or expressions of subjective points of view (Jackson, 2002). On the contrary, narratives reveal the complex interplay between the storyteller and the surroundings. According to Jackson (2002), narratives can either reinforce or degrade the boundaries that normally divide seemingly finite social worlds from the infinite variety of possible human experience. Narratives can thus both validate and question these boundaries.

The migration narratives that we will look into are indicative of the underlying gender images. Sometimes, the narratives can be

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² Transnationalism as a concept was first introduced in 1992 by Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc. The subsequent more narrow concept of transnational migration aimed at describing the process by which immigrants forge and sustain simultaneous multi stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc, 1995). Several analytical frameworks have since been proposed, e.g. 'transnational social spaces' (Faist, 2000), and 'transnational social fields' (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004).

expressions of the existing gendered structures and at other times they can be contradicting those very same structures; processes both of continuity and of change are reflected in the narratives. In addition to expressing existing ideologies and subsequent rationalizations, narratives can thus be also a tool of agency, a strategy to challenge and change hitherto expectations. The narratives formed around Georgian women's migration reveal the conflicts that exist between the traditional gendered expectations from these women and their actual practices. Narratives of condemnation and admiration of the emigrated women exist alongside each other. The women's own narratives often constitute ways of avoiding the condemnation by trying to adapt the gendered expectations to their altered practices. The way the emigrated women describe their emigration is often a process by which they seek to justify their choices.

The empirical data that form the foundation for the present study were collected during my four-month long anthropological fieldwork in Georgia in the fall of 2008 (Lundkvist-Houndoumadi, 2008, 2009). The fieldwork was conducted primarily in Tbilisi and the villages of the Tianeti region amongst families of emigrated women. Furthermore, a series of interviews amongst Georgian women, who had immigrated to Greece were conducted in Athens in the spring and summer of 2008. An analysis of migration processes based on qualitative data, such as in depth interviews, participant observation, collection of diaries and other texts, can contribute significantly to the studies of migration, which often assume a more structuralist perspective. By looking at the narratives we can get an insight to the ways that migration is experienced, a necessary supplement to our accumulating knowledge, if we are to understand more fully how the migration processes are continuously reshaped and how they influence the people involved.

Georgian female migration in a post soviet reality

More than a fifth of Georgia's population has emigrated since the 90s (CRRC [Caucasus Research Resource Centres], 2007). Migration has developed into a widespread option; so common, especially within certain rural areas where employment opportunities are almost nonexistent, that it has somehow become normalized and even normative. Following Georgia's independence in 1992 the collapse of industry, communal farms and social institutions has caused mass unemployment and has profoundly altered people's everyday lives. The estimation of the unemployment rate in 2007 was between 35-40 percent³ (UNDP, 2008). Consequently, many families in the countryside have returned to subsistence farming as a survival strategy. Alternatively, many are moving to the cities seeking a job while a lot more take the step to migrate abroad.

³ In this statistic subsistence farmers are also regarded as unemployed, which is in line with most people's perceptions, as subsistence farming, cannot replace a lost job.

The emigration from Georgia is characterized by the high number of women who are now believed to constitute nearly half of the labour migrant population (CRRC, 2007). Women are increasingly represented especially concerning immigration to Europe and Israel; in Greece and Germany women make up 70 percent of the Georgian immigrants (CRRC, 2007). This feminization of migration is connected to the increasing demand in the wealthier countries for domestic workers, who traditionally are expected to be female. Lutz (2002) describes the phenomenon of domestic work migration as constituting 'global care chains' and Parrenas (2005) similarly talks about the 'global economy of care', where 'care resources' are being extracted from poor countries and transferred to the rich.

In many analyses of how the collapse of the Soviet Union has affected men and women differently, the focus has been on the feminization of poverty – due to women's higher unemployment rates, lower wages and the retraction of the state provisions – and women's retreat to the subsistence production – due to political, social and economic pressures (see: Buckley, 1997; Lazreg, 2000; Pine 2001). In post socialist states, it is particularly women who have been negatively affected by the changes in the labour market and the fundamentally altered state policies (Rai et al. 1992; Gal and Kligman, 2000; Iskhaniyan, 2003). Women were the first to lose their jobs on the grounds of a breadwinner mentality, which assumes that the man is the main income earner. In addition, women had few possibilities to start a new business due to structural constraints; e.g. lack of collateral, inability to secure loans, lack of connections etc. (Pine, 2001).

The feminization of poverty is closely linked to the feminization of migration (see: Sassen, 2000). In Georgia, women's emigration is a process that challenges the aforementioned general trends of feminization of poverty and retreat to the domestic sphere. Migration has altered the gendered effects of the socioeconomic changes in post soviet Georgia by giving women new opportunities; such as income possibilities, economic and symbolic capital⁴ as well as increased freedom. Contrary to the trend of women's retreat to the domestic production, emigration is a process that points to a very different response to the altered post Soviet conditions in Georgia. Emigration is a move away from the domestic sphere of the household and the family.

Women's emigration affects the families in the country of origin in very different ways compared to male emigration. A number of studies (e.g. Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997; Fouron

⁴ 'Symbolic capital, a transformed and thereby disguised form of physical 'economic' capital, produces its proper effect inasmuch, ... as it conceals the fact that it originated in 'material' forms of capital which are also, in the last analysis the source of its effects' (Bourdieu, 1977:183).

and Gilck Schiller, 2001; Gambourd, 2002; Parrenas, 2005; Haidinger, 2008) have focused on how women's transnational migration has led to the contestation of traditional gender roles. In Georgia the man is expected to be the main breadwinner, who finances and sustains the family. The woman is perceived as the person responsible for the children and the household, regardless of whether she is working in waged labour or not⁵. The changing practices brought about by women's increased emigration challenge many of these traditional gendered divisions of labour and responsibilities; women become breadwinners and transnational mothers, whereas men lose their role as family providers. Women's contribution to the household is no longer hidden in the domestic sphere of subsistence production, but on the contrary becomes very visible and tangible in the form of remittances and other material support. By having the main say on what the remittances should be spent on, or what kind of material objects should be sent home, the migrated women gain an increased influence in the decision making process in their family. Consequently, the hitherto perceptions of gender roles become more nuanced in the everyday life as they are affected by the changing living conditions brought about by unemployment, poverty, emigration, new transnational family arrangements, altered gender practices, western influences etc.

Female *habitus*; women as 'better migrants than men'

In the interviews conducted, it was generally reported by both men and women, migrants and non migrants that females are better migrants than males because they can earn and send home more money. According to the Caucasus Research Resource Centres 100 percent of the female emigrants from Georgia send monthly remittances to the family. Regarding male immigrants the numbers are: 36 percent send monthly remittances, 45 percent send money home with a 2-3 month's interval and 19 percent with a 4-6 month's interval (CRRC, 2007:102). Both women and men were in everyday discussions often attributed certain qualities as being natural to them. Thus, while women were considered frugal, men were seen mainly as spenders. Women, it was claimed, prioritize their family's needs over their own needs or amusement. It was generally thought that women are less critical of the job they get and would be willing to sacrifice much of their personal well being in order to earn money for the family. A woman in Tbilisi discussing immigrant women's better ability to save money said:

⁵ During socialism the state enforced certain gender roles via legislation in order to obtain the restructuring of the traditional family and thus facilitate the participation of both men and women in the public sphere of work. However, as Verdery argues, the structures of power and the division of labour in the socialist family remained highly gendered (1994:233). Women did enter the labour force but they retained their household obligations. Men were to be co-breadwinners alongside women, but the expectation to be primary earners persisted. Therefore, the emigrated women are today not criticized for their role as workers but for becoming the primary breadwinners in the family.

Especially those women who are from [rural] regions, they don't smoke, they don't drink... and Georgian men, as you know, like to both smoke and drink a lot, and cigarettes are expensive there [abroad]. And men they like to go out, well women also like to, but they don't spend money on it.

Furthermore, most immigrant women are domestic workers and live at the families where they work, saving money on food and accommodation. A couple from the Tianeti region told me that it was clear to see that the families where the mother was away had more money than the families where the father had emigrated. They mentioned a family, where the mother had been away for 12 years, first in Israel and then in Greece and had managed to buy an apartment and a car for each of her three children!

An older woman, a widow, from a village in the Tianeti region, recalled the reasons for her own decision to emigrate. Even though it made more sense that her adult son should have migrated, she believed that she was stronger than him; 'what if he got into trouble or drugs or...?' Furthermore, she knew that he would not be willing to take up certain jobs, whereas she knew that she would accept any job. She proudly recounted how, despite the alien environment and very difficult circumstances of not knowing anyone or anyplace, she actually managed to get a job in just two weeks after her arrival in Athens. Following her return to Georgia due to poor health, both of her two sons left with their wives, leaving her in charge of four grandchildren. Her one son, who had left with his wife for Greece, was living in Ireland in the past six months, where he believed he could earn more money than in Athens. Nevertheless, 'he still hasn't found a job and his wife sends him money and parcels from Athens'. The mother thought he should have stayed in Athens, where he had a job, even though he was making only 35 euro a day, as at least he had an income. 'But he wanted more... and you can see where he has ended up now. If he doesn't get a job soon, he might try to go to Canada...' She was frustrated by her son's decisions that had resulted in him not earning anything, and instead being sustained in Ireland by his wife working in Athens, while their four year old daughter in Georgia should have been the one to be supported. It all just validated her opinion that women were more pragmatic and able to make the best of a situation.

Despite the acknowledgement that women may earn more money, most people still believe that when one considers the children and the family unity, it is best when the father, rather than the mother, is the one who emigrates. As a consequence, a dilemma arises between what is economically most profitable and what is considered morally acceptable and emotionally best for the family. A telling example of this dilemma is

told by the following woman as she recounted the story of her uncle who was an immigrant in the US:

He used to live a very merry life here, he likes to smoke, and he likes to drink a lot, he likes women... He is an oriental man [laughs] we call it Asiatic here. His wife wanted to go, but he didn't allow it. And... they don't have a house. Can you imagine, he went in 2001, and he couldn't manage to buy a flat, one room in Tbilisi... He doesn't like the idea of sending women away and he always comments 'oh, he sent his wife abroad and what is he doing if he is a man!' and so on and so on. But he missed the chance to buy a flat, by not sending his wife, but I understand him. He is still in the US, and I think he won't buy a flat... This is really unfortunate, because he already spent so many years, it would be somehow ok, if he at least bought a house!

The men who do immigrate are well aware of the fact that their wives would have earned more, but they still do not want to send them away, trying to preserve the traditional gender roles and keep up with what is morally acceptable. Nevertheless, a growing number of women are emigrating.

Women's ability to be better migrants in terms of being able to earn, and mainly save, more money, is actually in accordance with their traditional gender roles. Women are expected to care/service the family; their needs being secondary to the well being of the family, and especially their children's. Their role as mother and wife entails a self-sacrificing aspect, which is often presented by the women themselves, when they describe their emigration and the reasons behind it.

These attributes of being frugal, flexible, submissive, pragmatic, self sacrificing etc. that are ascribed to women by both men and women should be seen in the same light as the gender roles upon which these attitudes are founded; namely their socially constructed character. The fact that female migrants are considered, and probably are, more reliable providers than men, should be seen in the light of their female habitus. According to Bourdieu (2002), the habitus⁶ and the existing practices condition people's responses to the changes occurring in society. The economic realities might thus change drastically but the way of reacting, formed by the habitus, does not. Women enact the female attributes as they form the means to obtain symbolic capital within the society, and be perceived as 'good women'. Thus, the fact

⁶ '...the habitus could be considered as a subjective but not individual system of internalized structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class and constituting the precondition of all objectification and apperception...' (Bourdieu, 1977:86).

that female emigrants tend to put family needs before their own can be seen as a manifestation of the particular female habitus.

However, while women may be more reliable and effective breadwinners as migrants, at the same time they are considered more prone, than men, to fall into the trappings of 'western mentality'; namely the 'desire for freedom and power'. Many stories were told, both by women and men, about women, who became corrupted by their newly acquired role as breadwinners. Upon their return, those women were not willing to give up the power they had obtained, thus going against the traditional gender practices and hierarchies within the family. These narratives of women's corruptibility reflect underlying gender images.

A teacher recounted the story of a woman who had been working in the US. She had earned a lot of money and had managed to buy an apartment and set up a business; 'she liked the power and could not get used to not having it, when she came back'. The belief that the one earning the money is also the one, who has the primary power within the family, can alter the pre-existing family hierarchies. The story of the woman who emigrates, gets used to being the one earning the money and the decision power this entails, was always told in negative tones. A young woman from Tianeti, who herself had been an emigrant for some years, but was then back in her village working as a teacher, explained some women's behaviour and at the same time her concept of a European woman as follows:

Georgia is between Asia and Europe. But when people saw the European style of life, just have freedom, no responsibilities, no caring, no nothing, they liked this European style. That is why they got married [abroad], they got freedom, freedom from families from husbands, I don't know why... they need freedom from families, responsibilities, obligations. Not all are like that, but some...

An older woman added to the discussion on how many young women change, 'now that she is sending money and the relatives behind live with that help, she starts looking at them from above...' It is thought that this newly acquired power makes some of the emigrated women to somehow betray their 'Asiatic mentality' and their proper roles towards their family, often causing the split of the family. It is to this perceived danger for corruptibility of emigrant women that we now turn our attention to.

Narratives of 'good' and 'bad' female migrants

'She doesn't know what love is. She is a bad woman' Ketik said, and then turning to the small boy named Gio besides her, she continued 'your

grandmother Mzia is stupid!’ These judgments were often uttered by Ketí about Mzia, who was a middle aged emigrated woman. Mzia had been living for 15 years now in Athens, she had found a Greek man there, and she had no plans of returning either to Tbilisi or to her ex-husband. She had left for Greece, when her son was about 13 years old. When he reached 22 years of age, he also moved to Athens with his wife, both as illegal immigrants, leaving their then three months old child, Gio, behind. The care of little Gio, Mzia’s grandchild, was now shared between his aunt Ketí in Tbilisi and his maternal grandmother in the village.

Ketí accused grandmother Mzia for being the reason, why little Gio’s parents had left for abroad. If she had supported them sufficiently from Greece and had been sending more money to them, they would never have been forced to emigrate themselves and thus leave their small child. ‘All these years and she hasn’t even bought a room, not an apartment, just a room, for little Gio! She is not thinking at all about his future’.

The story of Mzia, which I was told on several occasions, is illustrative of the emigrated woman, who breaks all the rules that safeguard that an emigrant remains ‘a good woman’. When a woman migrates, leaving her country and her family, often her husband and children, then the traditional gender roles and many of the norms, of how a family should be, are challenged. Therefore, certain criteria are indirectly put up dictating the migrant’s conduct in order to prevent family splitting and ensure that she remains ‘good’ despite unfavourable circumstances. When people talk about migration, and more or less judge emigrants’ behaviour, some of the most prevalent issues raised revolve around the presence of tangible evidence of their migration’s success and their loyalty to the family back in Georgia.

The main reasons for emigrating are economic and therefore the main goal is to send as many remittances as possible back to the family. If the results of the migration are not convertible into house renovations, new apartments, education, a car or other material goods, the migration appears to have been futile. Many families spend large sums of money for the emigrant to be able to leave in the first place. An illegal emigration to Greece costs approximately 4.000 euro. Families often have to sell some of their few valuable assets, like for example cows, while other families are forced to obtain loans. Hence emigration is a big investment, often involving more members of the family, who contribute to facilitating the emigration.

In contrast to the absent benefits from Mzia’s emigration referred to earlier, when successful emigration stories are mentioned, people recount the apartments and cars that the migrant in question has managed to finance. At best, the migrant’s children need to be secured

in terms of education, housing and perhaps a car, before the migrant can return. One couple working in Athens had within half a year managed to send enough money to finance a funeral (a rather expensive affair), renovate a big part of their house in the village, and buy a washing machine, a refrigerator, a television and a computer. All these things were visible manifestations of a migration that was successful, despite the difficulties experienced by the couple's two young children and the grandmother that were left alone in the village. Another, even more important criterion of a good emigration is the loyalty towards the family at home; a criterion that is differentially applied to male and to female emigrants. Loyalty towards the family is to a large extent defined against the background of perceptions regarding the Georgian family as 'holy' and the woman's role within it as guardian of its morals. Goddard (2008) refers to the prevalence of certain gender narratives shaped by a growing public concern for the potential or actual loss of morality by women, who have become detached from their social context due to migration. These 'moral panics' and 'public anxieties', produced by changes in women's gender practices, are largely focused on sexuality and women, as well as on the vulnerability and corruptibility of women (Goddard, 2008). Yuval-Davis (1997:46) argues that women often are the markers of communal, ethnic or national identity; 'women, in their 'proper' behaviour, their 'proper' clothing, embody the line which signifies the collectivity's boundaries'.

'Many women find men in Greece for the sake of money' a woman said and continued with a condemning voice to recount the story of a woman that left her husband and children in Georgia and settled down in Greece with her new husband; 'however, there are both good women and bad women' she added. She had herself many female family members abroad, whose choice to emigrate she defended; they all had the intention of going back to their families and some also had their husbands with them, which by far was the preferred scenario. The same woman's brother, Data, had been working in Russia for the past seven years. From there he supported his wife and children, who lived in their village Tianeti. Once, while visiting Data's wife we looked through albums of family photos where many were of the husband in Russia, some with a small boy, who she told me was her husband's son in Russia. When I later talked of the pictures to Data's sister, she told me that she did not like it at all that her brother had another family in Russia; 'his wife knows everything about it, but what can she do?' she added.

When a married man finds another woman abroad, despite the criticism, it is most often accepted by the family, since he does not neglect his commitments, and his wife and children continue to receive money from him. Nora Dudwick (1997) in her article on women in independent Armenia refers to this phenomenon of the 'second family'.

The opposite scenario would be unthinkable. For an emigrated man it is socially more acceptable to be unfaithful, or start a new family while keeping his connections to his previous one. For a married woman, finding a new man equals a break with the family. The traditional gender roles define different responsibilities for the man and the woman towards their family. The man is able to retain his breadwinner role from abroad, even when he has a new family. Since women often are portrayed as the moral guardians of the family, their breaking of the family unity, and thus its values, is incompatible with preserving their relations to it.

Furthermore, women migrants have to carry what Ozyegin and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2008) call a 'courtesy stigma', which is a stigma obtained due to their affiliation with certain groups – in this case the group of migrated women, many of which are working as prostitutes. The criticizing and condemning attitudes towards emigrated women, especially the ones who left alone without their husbands, were not often voiced, especially not in the areas, where most families had members abroad. Nevertheless, suspicions about those women's moral standing were present, if just below the surface. In her study of emigration from Armenia, Iskhanian (2002) discusses female migrants' narratives and points at conclusions similar to mine; she describes how the migrated women emphasize the difference between their 'clean' work and the 'dirty' work of prostitutes.

It was often seen that people felt a need to defend emigrated women from suspicions or condemnations:

There they get money, they get the money honestly. There are a few exceptions ... but most people work honestly and earn the money they deserve. In the beginning they were being criticized, but it is so widespread now. Still, there are some who criticize.

A man, whom I talked with many times, had never voiced any negative comments about emigrated women, until one evening when his wife read a poem written by a Georgian woman in Greece. The poem was written as a traditional lullaby for the woman's children in Georgia. In the middle of the reading, the man erupted with anger about those women 'who should be home with their children!' If anyone should leave home, it should be the men he said. 'These women are bad women, they find other men there...' He went on to describe how during a trip to Turkey he had encountered so many Georgian women who were prostitutes; he had felt ashamed of being a Georgian. However, opinions like that were not voiced often; so many had emigrated family members themselves, which meant that a critique could fall back on them.

The abovementioned narratives of 'good' and 'bad' women reflect the female gender images. Proper women have to be loyal to their family and ensure they do all they can for the family members 'left behind' by placing their own needs and well being as secondary to theirs. They are expected to be frugal and send home as many remittances as possible. They have to be resistant to their perceived tendencies towards corruptibility that earning money and separation from the family can cause. Migrated women thus have to make a conscious effort to defend their moral standing and thus remain 'good' women in the eyes of themselves and of the left behind family members in Georgia.

Narratives of self-sacrificing heroines

I want to leave this to my children as a memory. I sacrificed everything and everyone for them. I had a hard life, white nights, and eyes full of tears, unknown environment, unknown people and an unknown language; a feeling of missing, a difficult feeling of missing; everything for you my little and beautiful family. My lovely husband I wanted to take some of the hard work off your shoulders, I only left for your well being. I was not there when my father died, and many other dear people to me. It is not easy to read this book, you readers think before you start reading. There is a big felt pain of one Georgian mother, who together with thousands of other Georgian mothers and grandmothers are struggling abroad with iron shoes and spoiled nerves to save their families; and we are considered by others as the ones who left for abroad to become wealthy. Why did our generation have to carry such a heavy cross? I have had this question since the day I came here. But I have not forgotten the most important thing: this is the Georgian woman's kerchief [perceived as a traditional female symbol], that will remain the same for centuries.

(Translated fragment from Georgian of the introduction to an unpublished book of poems written by Mzia Dzanelidze on the background of her experiences as an emigrant in Athens; she has been working in Greece since 2001)

This excerpt illustrates beautifully many of the self perceptions of the emigrated women. It is a very hard life they are leading, separated from their families; they feel their emigration to be a life of self-sacrifice for their children's better future. These women are fulfilling their responsibility towards their families, it is the 'Georgian woman's kerchief' – her fate; her duty towards her family. Despite these women's sacrifice for their families, they were sometimes accused of going abroad 'to become wealthy' in the negative sense, i.e. that their motivation was greediness and not love for the family.

Another female emigrant in Greece, editor of the Georgian diaspora newspaper in Athens, refers to the emigrant women as the 'descendants of Queen Tamar'. Queen Tamar is one of the most popular national figures; she reigned in the 11th century when she managed to consolidate her empire. She is seen as a model of a queen warrior and a holy woman. By making a clear link between this legendary woman and the emigrated women, the editor wishes to show the migrants' brave, virtuous and patriotic character. Similarly, a young woman, whose mother emigrated in the mid 90s to the US and managed to provide a very good education for her two children, also portrays the women that emigrated as heroines:

A lot of women, not men, left Georgia at the time. Georgia was standing with money they were sending here, because there was no budget, terrible governing system, everyone was taking money in his pocket, no electricity, no nothing, cold, no education, no entertainment, nothing. No jobs. And these women they are the heroines of Georgia, real heroines, because Georgia survived thanks to them.

The heroic nature of these women is closely linked to their self-sacrificing character. The same woman was reflecting on what her mother had told her when she emigrated:

It is such a pity, because my mother is a very clever woman, very clever, she had a very nice job here, she did a lot of nice things, but she told me 'there is no time for ambition for me, I can't do anything else, I have to work for you'.

The daughter was very well aware of the fact that her mother had sacrificed her own ambition for the sake of her children. A 24 year old migrated mother, working in Greece, talked about the hard life and the psychological problems she had due to her separation from the family. She felt, however, that she had to stay abroad for the sake of her daughter in Georgia; 'I work here for my daughter to live there. I am thinking of my child, for me [she made a despondent move] ... not that I am old, but...' In spite of her being quite young herself, she felt that it was necessary to put her own future aside and concentrate on her daughter's life.

The image of the self-sacrificing woman is not new and was present also during the socialist period. The hardships of combining the provisioning of a family in a shortage economy with household labour, childcare and waged labour fell most heavily on the women. Studies done on gender roles in the socialist period from the 70s to the 90s showed how women generally saw themselves as courageously and unselfishly coping with these very difficult demands. Through their struggle they gained gratification and moral superiority, which also

meant a certain power in the household (Gal and Kligman, 2000). The gender relations during that period were characterized by the notions of the female 'brave victim' and the male 'big child' (Marody and Giza-Poleszcuk, 2000). The identity of the woman as a 'brave victim' was both given to women by others and shaped by the women themselves. The female 'brave victim' was defined in contrast to the image of her husband, the socialist man, who might have been better paid, dominant at work, but who acted as the 'big child' in the family; 'disorganized, needy, dependent, demanding to be taken care of and humoured, as he occasionally acted out with aggression, alcoholism, womanizing or absenteeism' (Gal and Kligman, 2000:53).

The victimization of women and the feeling of self-sacrifice are still prevalent amongst many emigrated women. The image of the male 'big child' is also present, when, as discussed earlier, women regard themselves as better emigrants than men. At the same time emigrated women's victimization and feeling of self-sacrifice also provides enhanced self-esteem and gratification. Norbert Cyrus (2008) has similarly shown, in his study of female Polish household workers in Berlin, how migration can enhance a sense of achievement in life.

The narratives of self-sacrificing heroines are used as justification tools for the migration, which otherwise easily can place the migrant in a critical light. By focusing on the self-sacrificing aspect the women place their migration and their breadwinning role in alignment with the traditional gender expectations of caring for/servicing the family. These migration narratives justify the altered practices by focusing on the aspects that still are in accordance with the hitherto female habitus. Such justification narratives may eventually lead to altered gender roles.

Narratives of transnational mothers

The physical distance and the new breadwinning role assumed by migrant women challenged the traditional expectations placed on mothers, namely those of nurturing their children in proximity by providing care and love, not money. The contradicting expectations of transnational mothers nurtured by them, their children and society, surfaced in moral dilemmas of how to reconcile the notion of the sacred motherhood with earning money abroad. Women needed to redefine the meanings of motherhood in order to justify their actions; this was primarily done via different ways of putting their emigration and transnational mothering into discourse. Redefining motherhood was a continuous process, where the understandings of what good mothering entails were partly reshaped and partly retained unchanged.

Motherhood as an ideology has often been romanticized as a labour of love, taking place in the private sphere and being unrelated to the

public sphere of political economy and employment. As pointed out by Nakano Glenn, Chang and Rennie Forcey (1994) this perception reinforces the conception of motherhood as endlessly self-sacrificing and founded on altruism. The perception of motherhood as unrelated to the public sphere is in contrast to much actual practice; especially in post socialist countries, where the caretaking of children had been socialized and relegated to the public state sector. This process was, however, reversed in the post socialist years. In the present case of Georgian emigrants, even though transnational mothering entails breadwinning that is practiced outside the private sphere, the notions of altruism and self sacrifice, as the defining characteristic of mothers' emigration, are still present in the discourses surrounding emigrated women.

While mothers in Georgia are expected to do all they can to secure a better quality of life and a better future for the children, they are often criticized for leaving their children and thus betraying one of their main obligations of caring and nurturing them. Parrenas (2005:124), who has conducted research amongst children of emigrated parents in the Philippines, concludes similarly that 'children recognize the economic contributions of their mothers, but they do not accept this form of care, which clearly steps outside of gender boundaries, as a rightful form of mothering or a kind of mothering that frees mothers of the responsibility of nurturing their children in proximity'. In Georgia the emigrated woman's role as a mother was not being redefined as solely that of a 'good provider'.

Children, emigrated mothers and the relatives at home were all contributing to the maintenance of a notion of mothering as a caregiving and nurturing practice. Descriptions of the material improvements in the lives of children with emigrated mothers were always accompanied by descriptions of the negative emotional repercussions. In addition to the children's own expressions of their difficult life without their mother's presence and 'warmth', adults had many stories to recount about how these children 'ended up in the streets'. A woman recounted the following story of an emigrated mother:

She sends money for all the expenses and for education; the financial situation improved. But the relations between them [mother and children] are somehow spoiled. Because the children are at that [young] age, when they get money they don't want to listen to their father ... So I don't approve of these women leaving... because the children do whatever they want to do, they don't listen to anyone.

The children with emigrated parents were often described as spoiled or disobedient and many stories were told of children, who misuse the

money that is sent by their mothers squandering it on drugs and expensive items, seen as immoral consumption aiming at the immediate present rather than being invested in their future.

Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila in their pioneering essay from 1997 argued that meanings of motherhood within the practices of transnational mothering are rearranged in order to accommodate for the spatial and temporal separations. Their research among Latina immigrant women in Los Angeles showed that the emigrated mothers may not replace caregiving with breadwinning definitions of motherhood, but instead expand their definition of motherhood to encompass breadwinning. These women believe that the best way to fulfil their traditional caregiving responsibility is through income earning in the US, while their children remain back home. Hence, while the migrated women preserve the definitions of motherhood as entailing caring for the family, they alter the means of fulfilling these motherly obligations. Similarly, the Georgian mothers feel the need to emigrate in order to fulfil their obligations of caring for the family.

Other narratives focused on the emotional repercussions of mothers' emigration on children; 'I think that when small kids are left behind, the most evident thing is that they are a bit nervous ...and they are building walls around them, as if they are closing the ways to other people and they are getting more reserved'; 'these children who don't feel the mother's warmth will not grow up to be whole people, they will be incomplete. These children with their mothers away seem to have more complexes'. Stories of the negative effects of transnational mothering are in reality criticizing transnational motherhood because children who are only supported materially and from a distance will be 'incomplete' lacking in morality and feelings. Nevertheless, very few people explicitly condemned the emigration of mothers or challenged the motivations behind the emigration. Only once did I hear someone, a man, say that 'these women [who emigrate] don't love their children... they ought to have stayed with them if they loved them'.

However, proper mothering can also entail an obligation to emigrate, if that is the way to ensure the children's future; one woman who could not do it disapproved of her behaviour admitting she was 'bad', while another felt the community pressure to emigrate:

In the summer I went to Germany to visit my daughter, and I decided to stay abroad and work, because the teacher's salary is too low and I also have another daughter... I had a three months visa, but I could not stay more than a week. And because I had a visa I could easily return... after two weeks. I could not do it, even though I don't have small children back home. I cannot live elsewhere, it would have been good to be abroad for about three years and to somehow support my

children financially, but I could not. And I am not grateful to myself and I am bad.

They [people] tell me that I have raised my sons, and they are all good boys, raised properly, but now they are old enough and they need my money. They tell me I should leave and work, to give them economic support now.

Even though breadwinning for the children, via emigration, has come to be perceived by many as an accepted and even expected part of mothering, it seems as if the line separating, what is conceived as justly or unjustly founded emigration, is quite thin.

When I look in my soul I am ashamed with a Georgian feeling because I rushed after the devil's papers and lost a lot of treasures

(Passage from a poem written by Mzia Dzanelidze, an emigrant mother living in Greece; translated from Georgian).

The above poem excerpt illustrates the inner conflict of an emigrated mother. As she expressed in an interview, she sacrificed everything for her children, but at the same time she was ashamed of having left for the sake of earning money – 'the devil's papers'. The negative connotations that surround money are linked to the ambiguity of the moral evaluation of money; earning money could easily be associated with greediness. At the same time, money is the only way to actually secure a better future for the children. When money is referred to as 'the devil's papers' it is not money in itself that is evil, but the broader sphere of transaction that is built around individualistic goals of self gain (cf. Parry and Bloch, 1989). However, if the gains are convincingly converted to the practices within the long-term sphere of the family's reproduction, the morality is somehow restored.

A typical story of a mother's emigration that also constitutes an indirect moral evaluation:

When she left, her child was in the fifth grade. When the mother came back the child was already graduating from school, six years had passed. When she came back I went to see her, and I witnessed a situation where mother and child were talking; and the child was saying: 'why did you leave, why leave me?' and the mother replied: 'I bought you a leather [jacket], I bought you shoes, I bought you an apartment in Tbilisi, I secured a life for you'. The child replied: 'I did not need anything; all I needed was a mother'.

This story clearly links the material gains to the emotional losses, highlights the moral dilemma and condemns the morality of money earning. It seems as if in discourse people used one set of values that

condemned money earning and these were the values and morality that they wanted to be identified with, while in practice they acted differently due to circumstances perceived as extraordinary. In order to understand the reconciliation of these opposing issues - the necessity for money and the moral condemnation of leaving the family - I will perceive them as two separate spheres of transactions, where the one legitimizes the other.

Parry and Bloch (1989) divide the transactional systems in two spheres; the sphere of the long-term social cosmic order and the sphere of short-term transactions concerned with the arena of individual competition. They argue that with the exception of the capitalist societies, where these two orders have been radically separated, the economy is most often seen as being embedded in society and the collective goals are normally accorded primacy over those of the individual. Despite the moral evaluation in favour of the collective goals secured within the long-term sphere, all systems make some ideological space within which individual acquisition is a legitimate and even commendable goal; these activities are, however, consigned to a separate sphere, which is subordinated to the sphere of activity concerned with the cycle of the long-term reproduction. Parry and Bloch (1989) argue that what is consistently found in different societies is a series of procedures by which goods, which derive from the short-term cycle, are converted into the long-term transactional order; this possibility of conversion is what conditions the positive moral evaluation of the activities within the short-term order.

In this light, the emigration of mothers is related to both transactional spheres. Earning money abroad and pursuing material gains is part of the short-term transactions that at first sight are morally condemned. However, the motivation and outcomes of emigration are the well being of the children and the securing of the family, goals that lie within the cycle of the long-term reproduction and preservation of the cosmic order. Hence, by converting the emigration activities into prerequisites for the family reproduction, they become morally accepted, or even praised, by the women themselves and by others in society. Iskhanian (2002:2) in her study on Armenian female emigrants similarly argues that by discussing migration 'in the narrative trope of sacred motherhood [...] the women seek to justify and make sense of their 'non-traditional' behaviour'. The ways that emigration is put into discourse by these mothers constitute strategies for overcoming the contradicting expectations of them and legitimizing leaving their children behind.

Concluding remarks

The phenomenon of women's emigration has become more and more acceptable as a necessary income strategy. The changing socio-political

situation in post Soviet Georgia – lack of public welfare, unemployment, poverty – have made women look for alternative ways for fulfilling their gendered obligations. To care for their children they needed to work abroad and were thus separated from their children for several years. However, condemnation still existed in the form of stories told about the ‘bad’ emigrated women. Besides the seldom accusation of being prostitutes, ‘bad women’ were the ones, who had found other men abroad, who did not support adequately their families, who were driven by greediness instead of love for the family, who were corrupted by the money they earned and who misused their subsequent power; generally the ones who betrayed their proper roles as caretakers and moral guardians of the family and were therefore responsible for their children becoming ‘incomplete’ and ‘ending up on the streets’.

Therefore, emigrated women needed continuously to legitimize, via their narratives, their emigration and their subsequent altered roles, i.e. that of the transnational mother or that of the female breadwinner. The negative impact on the children and the marital relations as well as the general betrayal of the traditional female obligations of caring for the family in proximity were weighed against the material gains and the better future secured for the children. The motivation behind the emigration was the defining criterion of how maternal emigration was perceived by the women themselves and society. The lines separating sacrifice from greediness, moral from immoral behavior and altruistic from selfish motives were quite fine.

Women highlighted in their narratives their emigration as a necessity for the collective good and the family’s well being. Migration narratives were in these cases tools of agency, as they were means of adapting the new practices to the existing gendered expectations and structures. Women’s emigration from Georgia constitutes a catalyst in the process of the gendered changes that are taking place with the subsequent restructuring of families strongly contesting the hitherto distribution of labour and responsibility. When the hitherto gender habitus appears to be challenged by the new realities, the characteristics of habitus become more evident. Incongruence between habitus and realities provoke critical revisions and change perceptions (Bourdieu, 2002). Many of the narratives as recounted by the migrated women mitigated the incongruence between hitherto gender habitus and the altered practices brought about by the new economic, social and political realities. The narratives focused on the characteristics of female habitus that persisted despite the migration. In this way, the altered practices were justified while at the same time giving new meanings to what female gender roles ought to entail.

On the level of everyday life the altered gendered practices are very visible affecting the distribution of responsibilities and roles within the transnational family. On a level of discourse, however, the gendered

changes are less visible as they take on a different tempo and degree; the alterations of the gendered expectations are of a much more gradual nature. The degree to which changing practices and changing discourses will affect the gender ideologies is yet to be seen. Traditional ideologies seem to be much more persistent than practices, which fluctuate more easily according to altering realities. Some of the traditional gender images in Georgia for example persisted throughout the communist period despite the many policy changes in the society's division of labor and the official ideologies on gender equality.

Nevertheless, the narratives of migration reveal a process of gradual redefinition of the gendered expectations. Even though the absence of a female migrant from her children was never fully acceptable, her breadwinning role was valued and added to her motherly tasks. Rather than replacing the hitherto gendered expectations, new practices seem to be incorporated, thus partly changing the gendered perceptions. Practices that are considered as exceptions and are condemned might become normalized and integrated in people's habitus. According to Bourdieu, the mismatches between habitus and structures can at times trigger critical revisions and conversions, but "the crisis does not necessarily provoke the awakening of consciousness" (2002:184, *my italics*).

The migrant women have an important role in this process of redefinition, where they are trying to adapt the existing gendered expectations to the changed practices. Due to their valued new role as primary supporters of the family, the women gain increased influence over the migration discourses and narratives and thus over the gradually altering forms of gender roles.

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